RACIAL INCORPORATION OF ASIAN INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

By

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RACIAL INCORPORATION OF ASIAN INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Abstract

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Previous immigrant literature has shown that Asian Indians migrating to the United States after the 1965 immigration laws reform had high level of education, which helped them to achieve high occupational positions. They gained entry into the most affluent segments of the U.S. society and a nomination as a model minority. However, none of the existing literature, whether in communication or other disciplines, examined the racial incorporation of this community. In recent years, scholars suggested that the landscape of racial/ethnic categories is shifting, primarily due to the increasing numbers of immigrants threatening the future dominance of the white majority. Therefore, to remain dominant, the white majority is expanding its racial boundaries, thereby transforming/appropriating non-black minorities into the majority group status. To understand the identity construction of the Asian Indian immigrants in the United States, this study uses the framework of racial incorporation and intercultural translation to analyze how immigrant identities are incorporated in a manner that racial advantage is propagated through temporal, cultural, and situated processes of absorption within the dominant racial formations.

Twenty-eight Asian Indian immigrants were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured, open-ended and in-depth. The interviews were taped totaling approximately 45 hours

of interview and 320 single spaced pages of transcription. The transcripts were analyzed through discourse analysis.

The findings demonstrate that the Asian Indian participants strategically constructed their identity to claim closeness to whites and differentiated themselves from non- whites in order to create a superior subject position in the U.S. structured racial formation. Further, it demonstrated that the participants aligned themselves with whiteness in their perceptions of other non- white groups.

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INTRODUCTION

The critical intercultural communication research on identity provides a useful framework for studying how immigrants position themselves in their new homes. As Rushdie (1991) wrote, migrants root themselves in memories and define themselves by their otherness. They are people "in whose deepest selves strange fusion occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves" (p. 124). This merging of the past and present together with the reality of the culture in-between forms new identities. Hall (2002) argues that migrant identities oscillate between tradition and translation. Thus, identity becomes decentered, dislocated, and fragmented. Mendoza et al's (2002) critical framework for identity provides conceptual tools for addressing discontinuity, fragmentation, rupture, and dislocation in the immigrant identity construction. The notion of immigrant incorporation as translation (Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2009) provides an additional framework for understanding how immigrants develop a racial identity in the process of transition.

In a Hearing on Comprehensive Immigration Reform in the US Congress in 2007, a Congressman spoke about the characteristic that is required in an immigrant who aspires to be identified as an American.

> "*What do we want to ask of immigrants who want to become Americans? We should prefer those who come here to invest themselves in this country as well as in their own ambitions. We should prefer those who invest in learning our language, culture, and politics. And we should expect that they will not only be law abiding, but culture abiding-that is, they will respect and honor the cultural elements of American society, as well as expect that their cultural views will be respected*" (Renshon, 2007, Hearing on Comprehensive Immigration Reform).

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The 2007 Congressional Comprehensive Immigration Reform Hearings was highly publicized in the media. As the excerpt illustrates, the topic of immigration and adaptation is often accompanied by racism and prejudice that challenge the loyalty and legitimacy of non-European cultures within the American society. Historical as well as contemporary trends of anti-immigrant sentiments spun by conservative pundits insist on immigrant groups to adopt purely American (i.e., European American) cultural values and ideals. Conflicts between pressures toward assimilation and ideals of American pluralism have produced various adaptive strategies among immigrant groups. However, such adaptations always occur in the U.S. within categories of culture and race structured in dominance (Ong, 1996). The manner in which Jewish or Irish immigrants "fit in" and assimilated is often very different from adaptive strategies of West Indian, Mexican or Asian immigrants (Roediger, 2001).

Asian Indian immigrants are immediately confronted with certain social inequalities surrounding the intersections of race and gender that were different from those experienced by many European immigrant groups (Saran, 1985; Hegde, 1998). The evolving narratives concerning immigration and assimilation in the United States centered on complex relationships between race and the socio-economic structure. Dasgupta (2006) noted that Asian Indians have outperformed all other minority and majority groups in most measures of socioeconomic achievement. According to the 2000, U.S. Census Asian Indians have the highest median income of any national origin group. The 2000 census data also revealed that the high levels of education have enabled Asian Indians to become a productive segment of the American population. Dasgupta (2006) further pointed out that while the Asian Indian population is less than one per cent in the United States, the economic contribution of the community is to the extent of almost 17 percent. Asian Indians are considered particularly in the fields of medicine and technology as

the epitome of the model minority. This representation as a model minority has great implication for Asian Indian immigrant identity construction. According to Goldberg (2006), new narratives of a racial/cultural self do not simply replace the old ones, but the existing meanings are blended with the new ones that produce distinctive variations. To understand this unique identity formation it is important to analyze the transformations and integration through which this new identity is constructed within a racial hierarchy. The model minority image raises important questions about how Asian Indian immigrants are racially incorporated and how they incorporate themselves within the racial fabric in the United States.

Literature Review

Identity

Critical approaches in intercultural communication conceptualize identity as a historical, contextual, and power-laden construction. Collier was the first scholar to challenge positivist approaches to identity. She first argued for an interpretive approach to identity (Collier & Thomas, 1989). She made a distinction between the ascribed self (or the social definitions and perceptions of "who I am") and the avowed self (one's self perception). Then she argued for a critical approach and pointed out that postmodern and cultural studies of identity concentrate on structural factors such as race, class, and gender which outlay the social interactional episodes of identity construction (Collier, 1998).

Collier's (Collier & Thomas, 1989) interpretive approach to identity was followed by studies that took a critical perspective on identity (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Hegde, 1998). Critical scholars studied identity at the communicative site of both structural constraints (race, class, gender) and racial categorizations and new identity construction by marginalized groups (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Hegde, 1998). Nakayama and Krizek (1995) analyzed how

individuals and groups construct identity, exercise power, and give meanings to their everyday life by placing themselves in certain positions which are privileged relative to others. Hegde (1998) pointed out that identity is constructed and deconstructed in a person's "consciousness and communicative experience" (p. 35) through the construction of his or her own narrative of life and the external representations they face in the communicative practices of everyday life. These studies show that identities are constructed at the intersection of multiple forces.

Mendoza et al. (2002) presented the first critical framework for understanding how identity is constructed in communication. The authors conceptualized identity as processes of "production, naturalization, and normalization" (p. 316). The authors argue that this conceptualization shifts the understanding of identity from fixed and reified notions of identity as a "thing" to processes of identity production, that is, identification. Identity then becomes fluid as it is constructed through identification that involves joining of dissimilar, non-obligatory, and often ambiguous elements together to create a facade of unity, continuity, and permanence. As a result, the identity that is constructed is contingent on the successful joining up among the disparate elements. For example, elements can include social or economic status and for immigrants the racial meanings through which, immigrant identity is constructed. Identification occurs as various elements are articulated within a temporary and shifting formation. Identity results, always temporarily, from situated communicative acts. Mendoza et al. (2002) illustrate through their case studies the processes of construction of ethnic identity. They state that through communication ethnic identity is repeatedly constructed and synchronized to make it appear "authentic, natural, and continuous" (p. 318). Thus, ethnic identity is constructed through specific discourses and practices that have been structurally established as normal, and that limit and control the definition of ethnicity irrespective of individual acts.

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This conception of identity is informed by Stuart Hall's work on identity as "moveable" (1992, p. 277). He pointed out that due to the changes in late-modernity identity cannot be conceptualized as fixed or permanent. Hall argued that identity is dynamic, "formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us" (Hall, 1992, p. 277). Hall (1987) also pointed out that identity is formed and transformed constantly in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems that surrounds us. He further specified that a subject, who is treated or acted upon, assumes different identities at different times that are sometimes contradictory in nature. A subject is constructed either through a person's own life narrative or as a position in a discourse. According to Hall, this creates a continuous shift in identity. Postmodern concept posits that identity lacks rigidness and permanence so it becomes more vital to study this constantly changing nature of identity, specifically the aspects, and the constructs that prompt this shift. Identity thus emerges as fixed only momentarily and then is fluid in the next instance. This moves the conceptualization of identity from rigid and permanent to fluid or moveable identity.

Subsequent research on identity in intercultural communication illustrated the importance of identity construction in terms of personal and communal relationships. The studies mainly problematized the identity construction of large groups, and described the social and communicative consequences of self and other ascribed identities (Lee, 2004; Witteborn, 2007). Lee (2004) pointed out that collective identity emerges due to the shared experiences of assimilation, race, and discrimination. Witteborn (2007) showed in her interpretive study that group identity constructed by self or others exclusively as ethnic, national, or cultural imposes static identities that might not be meaningful to people. This is because the group identity ascribes the otherness more prominently. Witteborn referred to identity as a "heuristic concept"

(p. 571) that involves a procedure to arrive at a certain logical solution that is not necessarily backed by proof in order to enable a researcher to capture a variety of identities that people ascribe to themselves. Witteborn suggested these identities could be understood by concentrating on how identities are constructed and maintained in social interaction, and how group identities emerge and change in particular locales. She also pointed out that emergence of collective identity is situated and can depend on the audience and the setting that changes in salience with respect to sociopolitical and historical contexts. Collective identity is constructed by self or others in part through labels. Cultural and racial labels have a great degree of significance in identity construction. Labels may reflect racism and a propensity for classification and thus labeling is an exercise of power (Orbe and Drummond, 2009). The inherent power of labeling directs this study to examine the labels that are preferred by the immigrants from India to describe themselves and others.

Critical communication research on race and immigrant identity is relevant to this study that seeks to further advance our understanding of identity as contingent, fragmented, ruptured, deconstructed, and fluid. I discuss the research on immigrant identity next.

Immigrant Identity

Kim (1996) proposed the main early positivist approach to immigrant assimilation and identity formation. She stated that in the process of assimilation there is a link between the naturally demanding intercultural communication and the transformation of identity. The process, as Kim stated, "involves continual reinventing of an inner self beyond the boundaries of the original cultural identity" (p. 356). "As the old 'person' breaks up, new cultural knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral elements are assimilated into an enactment of growth--an emergent 'new' person at a higher level of integration" (p. 357). Kim's social scientific approach helps in

viewing identity as a dynamic and evolving process, but both her ideas of sovereign individual and the idea of linear patterns of identity exchange fail to address the politics of in-between that characterizes the immigrant transitions. The initial theory of immigrant assimilation, "the classic model of assimilation" (Brown & Bean, 2006) certainly had a degree of validity pertaining to earlier European immigrants, but theorists found many shortcomings of this model when applied to non-white immigrant groups. Due to these shortcomings, Kim's approach did not generate many studies.

The first studies from the critical standpoint by Hegde (1998) and Flores (2003) addressed the in-between politics of race and nation. These politics create a center power position for the dominant group who uses racial categorization to construct the immigrants as the others. These studies examine the dominant power relations as the dialogic site of both structural constraints like race, gender and racial categorizations through which identities are constructed by marginalized groups. Hegde and Flores both highlight the process of the emergence of the marginalized identity as constituted through an immigrant's subject construction and communicative experiences. Both scholars lay out the interconnections among race, nation, and immigration in the process of identity construction in relation to historical, social, and political context and power dynamics. In later study of immigrant/diasporic group identity construction, Durham (2004) showed that immigrants considered themselves as outsiders in the new land, and constructed their identity around their traditional culture. Young adolescent Asian Indian immigrants, who grappled with the issues of different culture, exercised an imaginative agency in carving out a space of identity. They feel that this constructed identity neither helps them identify with their original homeland nor with the host nation. Identity negotiation becomes the politics of in-betweenness of cultural meanings and race because of the hegemonic structures

that systematically marginalize certain type of difference. The construction of identity by the migrants becomes an act of negotiation between public and private, fragmentation and coherence, past and present and self and other (Hegde, 1998). Wide spread human movement and migrations have common threads of discontinuity, fragmentation, rupture, and dislocation. Hall (2002) argued that diasporic/migrant identity becomes a "moveable feast" (2002, p. 277) that is formed, and transformed continuously in relation to the ways migrants are represented or addressed in the system that surrounds them.

Recent studies of immigrant identity show the interplay of both the power of the internal communal political structures as well as the external discrimination by the mainstream. Shi (2008) showed that immigrant communities help build ethnic solidarity by instilling mistrust of the larger society. The study showed how mainstream identity construction aides in exploitation of the immigrant women. The construction of Chinese immigrant identity as lacking English and professional training results in external discrimination against them. The ethnic elites help create a mistrust against the dominant society in immigrants by highlighting this discrimination and employing (and exploiting) group members in ethnic owned businesses as a sign of solidarity. Thus, the Chinese women were conditioned to see other ethnic/racial groups in prejudicial terms. McKinnon (2008) showed that immigrant incorporation is dependent on race through which dominant political discourses create racial meanings. These racial meanings are effectively expressive in policies and legislation regarding immigrants and refugees and in institutional practices to construct refugee subjects (McKinnon, 2008). In her study of refugee settlement, McKinnon showed how the dominant conception of political subjectivity or bias made the refugees conscious of race. The refugees are coded as similar to African Americans or Black Americans. However, the prejudicial attitudes by the dominant group in the United States signify

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that the men are not quite light enough to be U.S. American. Skin color is not only as a marker of "otherness" in the United States but it also connotes "an other otherness, or refugeeness" (McKinnon, 2008, p. 407). This attribute of displacement further disturbs the process of resettlement in the United States as the refugees come across experiences where their racial identity had the potential to influence their status as refugees. The refugees continually and strategically constructed their identity and belonging for refugee communities. These two studies show that cultural and racial meanings are intricately connected in the construction of identity of the immigrant groups.

Halualani (2008) pointed out that many communication studies addressed the shifts in the communication practices among migrant groups. The literature focused on the similarities and differences in the communication practices of certain migrant groups in the new lands and their homeland practices (Hegde, 1998; Flores, 2003; Durham, 2004). According to Halualani, another line of intercultural research has provided insight into processes of adaptation and adjustment among migrants in host countries, especially with regard to language and psychological factors (Shi, 2008; McKinnon, 2008). She pointed out that migration and adaptation were considered new, modern, and external with respect to the immigrants' homeland culture. Halualani (2008) found that groups understood immigration as a traditional act of culture as opposed to an aspiration for assimilation and adaptation. She argued that cultural groups, specifically the Tongans and Hawaiians, do not just cast away their traditional cultural practices after migrating to new places and assimilate into the new host culture to assimilate in the new country. These groups instead renew and restructure traditional cultural practices to fit the new situation, new social conditions, and the new place. The Tongans have incorporated globalization, diasporic movement, labor position in capitalist structures into their cultural practices. Their cultural

traditions and domestic obligations have been reconstructed around their transnational families, and the transnational exchange of capital and labor. As a result, the boundaries between the traditional and the modern become blurred and continuous and the Tongans continue to live by mixing an original homeland and a new one. In case of the Hawaiians' Halualani pointed out that the group has moved from the sites of colonialism to industrial nations, where they continually restructure their culture in new conditions while remaining linked to a historical memory. The author further added, "diasporic groups dynamically reconstitute their understandings of cultural tradition, authenticity, and identity in line with their diasporic contexts and experiences" (2008, p. 4). Halualani thus argued that as the national identity in the U.S. is changing continuously the immigrants who settle in the United States might not experience gradual adaptation because they construct complex and shifting identities that amalgamate cultural structures at home with new conditions in different contexts.

The immigrant identity literature shows that identity is constructed by aligning individuals' subjective feelings with their objective places in the social and cultural worlds (Hall, 2002). This fluid identity, constructed and deconstructed is contingent on structural factors such as race. Race is prominent in the communication practices that categorize the dominant and the other (Durham, 2004; Flores, 2003; Hegde, 1998; McKinnon, 2008; Shi, 2008). The immigrant identity studies point to race as a key issue in identity construction. The next section will elaborate on understanding of race as a communication concept.

Race

Race is an integral part of identity construction for and by immigrants. It is about perception of different people-hood. Critical studies scholars Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1995) have theorized race as both a structural formation and a lived social identity. The

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meanings of race are defined in the society by both collective action and personal practices. Racial categories are formed, reformed, and destroyed and constructed by social, economic, and political forces. Crucial to this process is the treatment of race as central to social relations. According to them race should be understood "as an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" (Omi and Winant, 1995, p. 11). The social meanings of race and interpretation of racial differences is thus central to the understanding of why some should be free while others enslaved, or why some have rights and the others do not, why some are more American than others or why some immigrants are more adaptable than others.

The first study in communication conceptualized race as an identity marker and group category as opposed to a socio-political construct (Hecht, Collier and Ribeau, 1993). Critical intercultural communication scholars moved to study race as both an identity category and an ideological construction of meaning (Flores, 1996; Flores and Moon, 2002). Martin and Nakayama (1999) suggested that various contradictory privileges and disadvantages in the form of political and social position or status are expressed and managed in intercultural communication. It is through these struggles that various communication meanings are articulated in the racial formation. In the critical perspective, race is constructed and articulated by the privileged and the advantaged group to invisibly position certain cultural groups over others in a racial hierarchy (Flores and Moon, 2002). Halualani et al. (2006) extended the critical understanding of race by focusing their study on the structural-personal dialectic of diversity and race constructions by individuals from various ethnic/racial backgrounds. The study showed that individuals communicate and understand diversity as both raced and raceless and power inequalities are considered as apparently as non existing, which makes all racial/ethnic groups

equal. The authors introduce the concept of racial pivoting where individuals both circuitously pull away from and move toward race to suit their individual experiences. This indicates that race is rendered important as well as unimportant and is used as a signifier based on the individuals need. Specifically the authors pointed to the importance of uncovering how individuals themselves may construct their own definitions and sense-makings of race in response and in defiance to external/structural categories. The concept of signifier means race has no fixed meaning, but assumes different meaning under different context. The authors predict that such sense-makings may shed light on how the controversial signifier of race may be vital in identity constructions (even when these significations are created against race) and individuals' perceptions of other ethnic/racial groups.

Halualani et al.'s (2006) work builds upon social philosopher Goldberg's (2005) conception that race is important in the construction of identity. He argued that the distinctions between the dominant identity and the 'others' identity are constructed through race. Goldberg further pointed to the argument by Dalal (2002) that racism is a process through which differences are naturalized and legitimated, and in turn, groups are marked and included or excluded. Goldberg thus asserted that racism continues to dominate how one's identity is constructed and ones social, economic, political, legal, and cultural experiences are shaped.

The above literature review indicates that in order to understand immigrant identity construction it is crucial to understand how the signifier of race works in the process of identity construction. Critical communication scholars have shown that race and racial categorization is created by the advantaged group in their communicative practices (Martin and Nakayama, 1999; Flores and Moon, 2002). As Halualani et al. (2006) study indicated, race can be manipulated to be invisible or visible in the negotiation of one's own identity or identities of other groups. This

creates the discourse of racelessness whereby the dominant group indicates themselves as raceless or without any race to claim privilege. For this reason, it is necessary to understand whiteness, which is the dominant racial ideology in the United States. As a dominant ideology, whiteness defines the terms of inclusion and exclusion of immigrants. Thus, the next section will focus in more depth on the studies of whiteness.

Whiteness

In communication, whiteness studies have largely focused on media representations, with a few studies examining whiteness in educational practices. Richard Dyer's (1988) work has been foundational to understanding whiteness. He argued that whiteness maintains its power by keeping itself invisible as a racial identity. This assumption informs most critical studies that explain the power and hegemony of white racial supremacy by its invisibility and hence universality. Dyer's argument that whiteness secures and obfuscates its racial power by representing itself as universal and racially invisible have prompted investigations in communication of the discursive strategies that maintain whiteness in power (Nakayama and Krizek 1995; Steyn, 2004).

Nakayama and Krizek (1995) were the first communication scholars to argue for the need to study whiteness whose invisible character "continues to influence identity of those both within and without its domain"(p. 303). The study showed that whiteness is rhetorically constituted through discursive strategies that the whites in the United States use to deflect attention from and maintain their central position. The subsequent literature examined how whiteness is communicated, spread, and maintained. Nakayama and Krizek's study thus asserted that theories of race and racial representation overlook how whiteness secures a position of centrality and normalcy from which deviance, otherness, and exoticism are defined as means of containment

and control of those who are not white. Steyn (2004) problematized Nakayama and Krizek's conclusions by demonstrating that whiteness works from a particularized position through her analysis of the strategies used by white Afrikaners to reestablish their whiteness in political, economic, and social life in South Africa.

A significant issue in the study of whiteness has been its claim to invisibility. Frankenberg (2001) pointed out that scholarly critics of whiteness including herself, often categorized whiteness as an unmarked category. She stated that the more she scrutinized whiteness as an unmarked category the more she saw its claim to invisibility as a "delusion" (p. 73). She further specified that whiteness prevails in a continuous and deliberate state of "marking and cloaking" (p. 74). Watts (2005) described whiteness as hyper-visible in the process of constructing race and gendered subject. He demonstrated that when characterized as poor white trash, whiteness is darkened following the logic of socio-economic mobility. However, whiteness can be whitened by its daring passing over the race/class boundary. He argued that the white trash initiates a rite of passage through real and figurative violence against the "black villains" (p. 187). Watts argued that the category of whiteness is mutable, and instead of depending on racial invisibility as a strategy, whiteness becomes hyper-conscious and moves between visibility and invisibility.

Through critical and interpretative analysis of focus group discourses, Collier (2005) revealed that racial categorization was utilized to reify the dominant white power in South Africa. Through her analysis she showed that through explicit confrontation and by applying agency 'blacks' were categorized by the dominant white group as underachievers in gaining socio economic status. As a result, 'whites' were justified in continuing racial categorization and enjoying their class privilege. Collier's study pointed to the economic measurability as a signifier

of acceptance into the social and political system of the dominant group. It showed that macro contexts of history and the political climate have implications for the negotiation of racial identity. In addition, accepted and imposed status levels and social hierarchies become evident in the process of identity construction and perception. She argued that whiteness becomes more concrete in South Africa by constructing immigrant identity dependent on historical factors, dominant ideologies, institutional practices, and social norms. Thus, the study showed whiteness works by expanding its racial boundaries by incorporating minority groups in the white dominant group.

Other communication studies of race, and particularly whiteness focused on examining the educational practices (Warren, 2001; Endres & Gould, 2009). Warren (2001) studied whiteness as a social communicative accomplishment through a performative establishment of identity associated and maintained by repetitions of meaningful constructions. He took into account both the subjective and ideological study of whiteness by situating the material body as a product of reiterative acts. The study showed that whiteness and social privileges of whiteness are made more concrete and normalized in public performances. Endres & Gould (2009) pointed to the reaffirmation of white privilege. The authors argued that invisibility should not be considered as a standard fact as whiteness is invisible to white people due to their persistent efforts. As a result, the authors claim the act of making whiteness visible will not decenter or disempower whiteness. Wiegman (1999) had already argued that scholars needed to address how distinctiveness invests whiteness with power. According to Wiegman, making whiteness visible from being invisible does not necessarily subvert it. "In assigning the power of white racial supremacy to its invisibility and hence universality, Dyer and others underplay the contradictory formation of white racial power that has enabled its historical elasticity and contemporary

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transformations" (1999, p. 117/118). Wiegman (1999) specified there is a need for whiteness studies that should focus on the consideration how various formulations of whiteness are situated within contemporary formations of identity, politics, and knowledge. It is evident from the above literature that most studies in communication addressed whiteness as normalized and invisible. Thus, the cultural specificity of whiteness has been disregarded and whiteness was presented as a culture less formation. Thus, we still do not understand the complexity that how whiteness might be filled with different cultural meanings.

The normalization and invisibility of whiteness were the emergent characteristics in the construction of racial hierarchy in the United States. Roediger (2001) showed that European immigrants, specifically Irish, Hungarian, Polish, and Italian were not considered white when they first arrived in the United States. Their position in the workplace and their claim to citizenship were provisionally formed through various forced ways. Roediger argued that the process of assimilation for the new immigrants was a process of whitening as well as Americanizing, as the assimilation proceeded through incorporation of specifically white American ways. Roediger argued that the new European immigrants did not only assimilate into American ways, but they specifically incorporated white American ways in the process of merging within the black and white framework. Through the study of the European immigrants, the author theorized that whiteness was constructed by assimilating the non-yet-white ethnics as white. Roediger referred to this process of assimilation as "becoming white" (Roediger, 2001, p. 328).

A recent communication study of immigrant identity focused on how immigrants are incorporated into whiteness. Drzewiecka & Steyn (2009) proposed a framework of translation for understanding racial incorporation of immigrants. They theorized immigrant identity

formation as translation between the cultural and political expressions of different racial regionalisms. Racial regionalism, as Goldberg (2006) explains, pertains to how the meanings of race are shaped and deployed differently in specific geopolitical contexts. The translation framework proposed by the authors facilitates understanding of "how meanings, messages, and knowledge flow, connect, and inflect each other across semiotic borders creating a strategic reservoir of discourses for communication of plausible and self-respecting identity claims" (Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2009, p. 211). As the authors specified, the immigrants in a new land incorporate and adapt meanings, messages, and knowledge from the racially dominant host. However, at the same time, they integrate their own meanings and knowledge to construct new strategies for communication through which they claim their belonging. Through such theorization, the authors argued that immigrant identities are incorporated in a manner that racial advantage is propagated through sequential, cultural, and situated processes of co-option and assimilation within dominant racial formations. Drzewiecka & Steyn (2009) utilized insights about operations of whiteness as strategic rhetoric. Using discourse theory, they address the interweaving of different strands of discourses that constitute identities of immigrants. These constructions occur as the immigrants continue to invoke meanings from their prior location to position themselves advantageously in the new discursive field. However, the translations were strategically incomplete to enable claims to exoneration from apartheid. The authors placed the notion of translation within discourse theory to theorize how various discourses of past cultural-racial-political meanings are linked. The authors proposed translation to theorize how immigrant identities are incorporated in a manner that racial advantage is propagated through temporal, cultural, and situated processes of assimilation and absorption within dominant racial formations.

Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1996) did important work on how Asian immigrant groups negotiate their racial and cultural boundaries. She examined the process of "ideological whitening or blackening" (p. 737) of immigrants enabled through institutional practices that differently receive and socialize immigrants depending on their gender, position within racial hierarchies, and class and consumption. Ong contrasted Asian groups from different class background and showed that despite their racialization as Asian Americans, these immigrant groups were variously socialized and positioned to manipulate state institutions, religious organizations, civilian groups, and market forces inscribing them as citizens of differential worth. The author cites the example of the formation of two new Asian groups that represent different modalities of precarious belonging. The first group is the ideologically blackened subjects, those who manipulate state structures in order to get better access to resources. The other group has the characteristics of an ultramodern instrumentality that is caught between whitening social practices and capitalism. Ong states that this interweaving of the ideologies of race, culture, nation, and capitalism "shapes a range of ethnicized citizenship in different fields of power" (p. 751). The study pointed out that many immigrants coming to the United States in the 19th century were subject to severe discrimination and prejudice. However, as the author argued some immigrants were incorporated racially through deliberate political and cultural and social practices and policies. This strategic racial incorporation of certain immigrants into the dominant host further promoted the binary created in the society. Ong's (1996) study highlights the ideological racial incorporation of Asian immigrants in the United States. The Drzewiecka & Steyn (2009) addressed the racial incorporation of white Polish immigrants in South Africa. Though the subjects and the locations in the two studies were different, both studies have implications for theorizing racial incorporation of immigrants. The studies demonstrate the way

in which whiteness moves across contexts and incorporates immigrants, but only on terms and in ways that help to maintain the dominant position of whiteness in the receiving country.

The whiteness studies revealed that whiteness maintains its centrality of power through various socio-cultural-political strategies. To further advance, the understanding of racial incorporation the next section will discuss the literature on the Asian Indian immigrants in the United States.

Asian Indian Immigrants

The Asian Indian population in the United States has not been adequately studied in intercultural communication. Only a few studies have examined the particular nuances and lived experiences of Asian immigrants in the United States (Hegde, 1998; Shah, 1999; Somani, 2010). Hegde's (1998) study highlighted the prejudicial construction of immigrant women's identity that often blurred the boundaries of racism and sexism. Through the analysis of immigrant narratives, Hegde found that identity is constructed relationally through a process of social interchange. She argued that identities of Asian Indian women were constituted at the intersection of multiple forces. According to Hegde, the construction of continually being the 'other' displaces and defers the immigrants' sense of coherence about self. Shah (1999) studied immigrant identity construction in media discourses. The study showed that discourses surrounding Asian Indian immigrants between 1906 and 1923 not only enumerated various negative qualities, but also associated these qualities with being non-white. Conversely, whiteness was defined as being associated with a number of desirable qualities. The study pointed to the discursive strategies through which identity is imposed on the immigrants. Somani (2010) showed that by preparing to adapt to a new society, the highly educated and professional Asian Indians were making an effort to acculturate and learn how to act more "American" (p. 78). In fact, they used American

television, to help them integrate in the workplace. The study emphasized the role of popular media but failed to recognize the structural constraints and the power positioning that constituted the process of identity construction.

The above three studies were similar as well as different in many aspect. Hegde (1998) and Somani (2010) both studied immigrant narratives from different angles. Hegde focused on how Asian women negotiated their identity in the context of being perceived as an other. Somani focused on adaptation as cultural learning and adjustment to gain acceptance. Both studies focused on Asian Indian immigrants who immigrated to the United States after the new 1960 immigration laws were introduced. Shah (1999) examined media discourses about early Asian Indian immigrants in the early part of the 20th century who were mainly agricultural workers by profession. The press constructed an ambiguous position for Asian Indians with respect to their eligibility for citizenship. Hegde's (1998) study has most significant implications for the current project. Hegde argued that Asian Indian immigrant women's identity should be studied by considering how both race and gender simultaneously act at any given moment. The interview analysis showed that the women adapted to the U.S. culture to incorporate into the white American society to escape the racial discrimination. Somani (2010) showed that immigrants were aware that to be accepted in the new country they should learn the U.S. culture however, she skirted the question of whiteness. Shah's (1999) study was based on a different category of Asian Indians who immigrated in the early era of Asian Indian immigration. Shah argued that news media's depiction of interaction among minority groups have suggested different levels of "inferiority" (p. 252) are assigned to each racial minority. Representations of even a single racial minority group along other distinctions such as caste and political orientations created even finer distinctions in racial hierarchy and more opportunity for social control. However, the implication

of his study was that positive representation and racial incorporation of one racial minority group over others creates differences in the racial hierarchy. This aspect is the focus of this proposed project. Furthermore, scholarship on Asian Indian immigrants outside of communication has important implications for understanding how Asian Indian immigrants are racially incorporated.

Majority of scholarly studies of Asian Indians in various social science fields identified three periods of Asian Indian immigration. The first was the pre-Indian independence period, the second the post Indian independence period and finally the post September 11, 2001 period. The studies showed the different assimilation and identity negotiation processes with the dominant group (Gordon, 1964; Gonzales, 1986; Fernandez, 1998; Dasgupta, 2006) and among the other Asian Indian immigrant groups that immigrated during various different periods (Saran & Eames, 1985).

An ethnographic study of Asian Indians in New York by Parmatma Saran and Philip J. Leonhard-Spark (1985) highlighted the process of the construction of identity by the immigrants who came after the 1960 immigration laws. The immigrants who came to the United States from India after the 1960 reforms do not represent a cross section of the nation's people. They were people who were among the most talented and easily acculturated of all immigrants in the long immigration history of United States (Saran, 1985). He points out that its members have moved rapidly into the mainstream of American economic life. Highly educated and well placed occupationally they enjoyed an affluence that parallels that of their American middle class counterparts. They participated in a complex social life founded on the one hand at home and the other hand at work and on community ties. Saran argued that while the factor of economic prosperity point in the direction of rapid assimilation, there is also indication of other factors that fosters the maintenance of cultural identity. Asian Indians tend to be very conscious of their

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ethnic heritage (Nandi, 1980). Nandi stated that as these immigrants came from a deeply religious culture, they formed very tightly organized ethnic networks. Various ethnic organizations were built around points of commonality like language, place of origin, religion, music, etc. The ethnic group became the context within which the immigrants were most comfortable and could engage in known lines of interaction and affirm their past.

Approximately 2 million Asian Indians live in the United States (Abraham, 2002). Until the 1990s, this community was viewed almost uniformly as a model minority, whose members adhered to the valued principles of economic success in the public sphere while retaining strong cultural values in the private sphere (Abraham, 2002). Not only did the dominant group in the United States refer to Asian Indians as a model minority, but also segments within the Asian Indian community identified and represented themselves as such. For many members of the community, who had immigrated to the United States as professionals in the 1960s, the model-minority image was to be promoted and sustained (Saran, 1985). As Saran pointed out it was perceived as good for business and as a way for Asian Indians to distance themselves from other, lower-status minorities with whom they did not want to identify, in fear that such identification would decrease the status of their own ethnic group in the U.S social hierarchy. Mainstream and community leaders portrayed the Asian Indian community as a monolithic whole that believed in strong family ties, was well educated and economically successful, and has achieved a fine balance between upholding the cherished values of Asian Indian culture while at the same time adopting the principles of modern American capitalism (Dasgupta, 2006). Dasgupta pointed out that as the number of Asian Indians immigrants increased, so did their political and social agendas that soon began to refocus on the racial categorization and notions of "whiteness." In the 1970 census, Asian Indians were classified as "white." Ironically, in spite of their categorization

as 'whites' Asian Indian immigrants continued to encounter high levels of racial discrimination (Dasgupta, 2006). The American Indian Association (AIA) went into action in the mid 1970's and began to pressure congress to re-categorize Asian Indians along with other Asian ethnicities under the racialized category of Asian-American (Saran, 1985; Dasgupta, 2006).

In the 1990s, the immigration of sponsored relatives of Asian Indian U.S residents changed the demographic composition of the Asian Indian community. It brought considerable variation along such dimensions as education, occupation, class, and gender experiences and on such axes as language, religion, region of origin, and class (Dasgupta, 2006). Thus in the 1990s, the image of ethnic homogeneity in the Asian Indian American community was internally at least replaced by a class and region based heterogeneity (Abraham, 2002).

In recent years, scholars have suggested that once again the landscape of racial/ethnic categories is shifting, primarily due to the increasing numbers of immigrants threatening the future dominance of the White majority (Roediger, 2005). Predicting an increasingly dichotomized racial hierarchy—based on the Black/non-Black distinction, Yancey (2003) suggested that to remain dominant the White majority is expanding its racial boundaries, thereby transforming and appropriating non-black minorities into the majority group status. Yancey predicts that Asian Americans, "will soon merge into the dominant culture. For all practical purposes, they will become 'white' just like the southern/eastern Europeans before them" (p. 126). Drawing from a review of various assimilation models, Yancey predicted the gradual assimilation of non-Black minorities through four assimilation processes. New immigrant groups first achieve structural (economic, status, residential) assimilation, then marital assimilation, then identificational (when they share attitudes of dominant group), and then full civic assimilation (Yancey, 2003). He also suggested that Asian Americans tend to hold anti-Black and anti-Latino

sentiments similar to those of Whites, and the political views of Asian and White Americans tend to converge. As Yancey pointed out it is clear that that discrimination and prejudice still occur against Asian Americans and, although each group faces different obstacles (closeness to native land, and physiological differences from White majority), at the same time Asian Americans are assimilating to the white majority.

This project will examine how Asian Indian immigrants incorporate themselves and are incorporated into the racial structures of domination and subordination. The project adopts a critical intercultural communication framework on identity (Mendoza et al., 2002) and racial immigrant incorporation as translation (Drzewiecka & Stayn, 2009). Further, the project will build up and expand insights from works on race and communication (Halualani et al, 2006; McKinnon, 2008; Shi, 2008). Based on the literature review, two research questions are proposed to further extend the understanding of Asian Indian immigrant identity construction:

RQ1: How do Asian Indian immigrants construct their racial identity in relationship to white and non-white groups?

RQ 2: Do Asian Indian immigrants align themselves with whiteness in their perceptions of other groups in the United States? If so, how?

Outline of the Thesis

This chapter built the theoretical framework for the study of how Asian Indian immigrants are racially incorporated and how they position themselves in relations to whites and the main minority groups in the United States. The chapter grounded the framework in an overview of the communication literature on identity, immigrant identity, race, whiteness, and Asian Indian immigrants. The next chapter provides a detailed account of the methodological approach that informs this work. Chapter 2 specifies how the data were collected and analyzed

and discuss the researcher as a self-reflexive human instrument. Chapters 3 and 4 analyze how the Asian Indian participants' position themselves in relation to white and non-white groups in the United States. Chapters 3 focuses on how participants articulated their alignment with and belonging on white terms. The chapter argues that advantageous material terms of entry facilitated Asian Indian immigrants interactions and incorporation within the structures of whiteness producing a "near white" identity category. The participants constructed United States. as a white country and India as a U.S. ally to gain proximity to whiteness. However, Asian Indians remain the other who is increasingly perceived as a threat. Chapter 4 analyzes how the participants positioned themselves in relation to the non-white groups in the United States. The participants differentiated themselves from blacks by erasing them from the US citizenship and representing them as uneducated. The participants also constructed their identity by presenting Latinos as uneducated and as receiving unfair affirmative action advantage. Last, the chapter analyzes how the participants differentiated themselves from other Asian ethnic groups. Finally, Chapter 5 reflects on complexities of the thematic categories described in Chapters 3 and 4.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

I will first explain the general methodological approach I adopted in this study. Then, I will detail the specific data collection method. Finally, the discourse theory data analysis procedures, and issues of trustworthiness will also be explained.

Methods

Qualitative research is inductive, emergent, and very little of it can be controlled in the strict sense (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). The process of the study is cyclical in nature as researchers may go through the same steps many times until a perceptive interpretation has been accomplished. Qualitative research methods are particularly well suited for examination of subjective constructions, negotiated meanings, and first hand experiences of social phenomena.

The qualitative research methods were most appropriate for this project because it address people's subjective constructions for their own experiences and selves in relations to others. Further, qualitative methodology enabled me to use my tacit knowledge developed from my personal experiences as an Asian Indian immigrant. Lofland and Lofland (1995) explained that a researcher's personal experience can inspire interest in a research topic, as well as aid the researcher's efforts to gain access to the population they wish to study, and most importantly help in the process of information interpretation. The nature of my research inquiry was tremendously influenced by my personal experiences of immigration to the United States and the process of identity construction in the new environment. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue that the researcher should "learn when to watch, when to listen, when to go with the action, when to reflect, when to intervene tactically (and tactfully)" (p. 143). I believe my personal insights into the areas of identity construction guided me in this project to act tactically and tactfully and helped the participants feel more open and willing to discuss issues that they would not have

discussed with may not have discussed with a non-Asian Indian. However, I was also careful to bracket off my experiences to give full attention to what the participants said. I wrote out my own answers to the interview questions so that I became aware of my personal perceptions and biases and could bracket them off. This helped me to avoid imposing my views on the interviewees.

Participants

I conducted interviews with 28 Asian Indian immigrants, 15 men, and 13 women. The interviewees comprised of individuals who were all born in India and immigrated to the United States to acquire higher education or employment, or accompanied their spouse who immigrated for the above mentioned reasons.

In order to recruit participants, I contacted the Asian Indian organization known as The Palouse Indian Family Association. The members of the organization were made aware of this study through announcements on their organization's website. The initial response was not encouraging from this association. Therefore, I searched the university's website to find people with Asian Indian last names. I emailed each one of them individually to introduce my study and myself. A few individuals responded and agreed to be interviewed. I then used the snowball sampling method to recruit participants recommended by those whom I already interviewed. These interviews occurred either in the participants' homes or at a location convenient for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Eight of the interviews took place in the privacy of the participants' homes, while thirteen took place on the university campus at the participants' lab or faculty lounges. The rest of the seven interviews were done at the participants' offices. Lofland and Lofland (1995) advise that a known researcher should determine how to act or present themselves in such a manner as to keep the flow of information going. I implemented the notion

of "acceptable incompetence" (Lofland and Lofland, 1995, p. 56) as a strategy. This strategy enabled me to be accepted by the participants as a non-threatening learner. All the interviews were digitally recorded with permission from the participants, and transcribe immediately thereafter, which resulted in approximately 45 hours of interview and 320 single-spaced pages of transcription.

Data Collection

The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of 22 broad questions and over 40 questions that acted as probes to elicit deeper information. Lofland and Lofland (1995) described this type of interview as a "guided conversation" (p. 18) that seeks to acquire from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis. Unlike structured interviews, it focuses on getting the informants experience of a particular topic or situation and seeks to find "what kind of things exist in the first place" (Lofland and Lofland, 1995, p. 18). In this study, the interview guide consisted of several pre-determined and open-ended questions. As Berg explained, "These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed the freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardized questions" (Berg, 2001, p. 70). The open-ended questions as described by Lofland and Lofland (1995) allowed for the flexibility needed for rich data collection. The questions were accompanied by follow up questions or prompts that turned the interviews into conversation style dialogue. I felt that maneuvering back and forth between the semi-structured interview questions and the conversation style dialogue (initiated by the probes) helped participants to feel more at ease with the overall process. Ultimately, this comfort in my opinion allowed for richer data collection. The interviews ranged from an hour to about an hour and half and two hours.

I drafted the initial questions based on the research questions I posed after reviewing the previous communication literature on immigrant identity construction. I then proceeded to test these questions with some Asian Indian friends and their family members. After pre-testing the questions, I revised the semi-structured interview schedule. I added several open ended questions to allow for the flexibility needed for rich data collection as described by Berg (2001). Once the interviews began, I continually attempted to recognize common themes while constantly making notes of interesting points emerging from the data. As the interviews progressed, I also went back and made certain adjustments to the interview protocol as data emerged to better capture needed information (see Appendix A).

I began each interview by asking participants about their experiences after they immigrated to the United States. This was done in order to establish the participant's relationship with the dominant group in the United States. As the interviews progressed, I asked questions about the participant's thoughts, experiences, and attitudes towards racial groups in the United States. The final section of the interview focused on participants' experiences and feelings towards other Asian ethnic minorities and minority groups in the United States (like the Blacks and Latinos).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through the "grounded theory" procedures. As Strauss & Corbin explain, "A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other" (p. 23). Silverman (2010) further explained how the grounded theory approach to qualitative interviewing provided an

open-ended in depth exploration of an aspect of life with which the interviewee is familiar. I began the analysis by identifying initial key concepts and themes that emerged from open coding. During open coding, I went through the interview transcripts and marked the lines or chunks of text that suggested a category. The categories that emerged through this process were named and attributes were ascribed to them. After the initial stage of open coding, I applied axial coding to integrate the categories. Axial coding helped to make connections between categories and resulted in the creation of either new categories or themes that span over many categories. Finally, the process of dimensionalization helped in identifying the properties of the categories. Following the procedures of grounded theory approach, after the category set was saturated, I started the construction of interpretive claims.

Along with the grounded theory approach, the analysis was guided by Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse (Gee, 2011; Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Discourse theory, is one of the theories and methods used to analyze key political issues. Laclau and Mouffe's research on discourse theory is rooted in the development of poststructuralist, Marxist, post-analytical and psychoanalytical theory. Discourse theory is particularly suitable as a theory because it addresses the "issues of identity formation, the production of novel ideologies, the logics of social movements, and the structuring of societies by a plurality of social imaginaries" (Howarth et. al., 2000, p. 2). Further, it assumes that all social phenomena are discursive that is their meanings depend upon a socially constructed system of rules and significant differences (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Discourse theory as a method helps to understand how different discursive meanings are articulated. One of the key concepts guiding the analysis of this study is the logics of equivalence and difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). The logic of equivalence works by creating equivalent identities, which

weakens and abolishes the internal differences as it merges various identities into two antagonistic camps. The logic of difference expands the given system of differences by disassociating the present chains of equivalence from each other and "incorporating the disarticulated elements that displaces the polarizing antagonism" (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 11; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). From the perspective of discourse theory identities are contingent and are viewed as points of temporary attachments, which are constructed through discursive practices. This are in turn used to configure relations with other identities to mark differences and are the discursive resources that are used by individuals to position themselves most advantageously (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

In the first stage of analysis, I identified passages where the participants' emphasized colorblindness, as progressive. Particularly, the examples where they drew connections between racism in other countries (like Europe) and racism in United States. However, a major step forward was realizing that these claims representing the U.S. as progressive actually served the interests of whiteness and indicated the participants' alignment with whiteness. I then analyzed the interview transcripts and notes by carefully and critically reading them and identifying the common points, which fixed the emergent themes. Further, I compared particular themes within each interview, to find common themes, the deviant cases, and/or inconsistencies, and then compared the themes across interviews in an attempt to understand the logics and dynamics of the collective discourses of Indian identity. I worked to understand complexities and the underlying assumptions. The analysis produced themes, which gave a unique insight into the Asian Indian racial incorporation.

Self Reflexivity

Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of the human instrument. Self-reflexivity

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is key to the effective use of the human instrument in data collection and critical data analysis. I will now discuss relevant elements of my biography and their importance to this project.

I am a Bengali woman, born and raised in Calcutta, (a bustling cosmopolitan city in eastern part of India) in a middle class, educated family. Both my parents are college graduates, and are quite established in their chosen careers. A good education from a reputed school and college has always been a priority for my parents. My privileged middle class background came with various advantages, namely I was educated in a private, non-religious, non-race based English school where English was the medium of instruction. Besides education, I have had an easy access to other privileged aspects of social life.

My entry into the United States was through my husband's advanced educational credentials, which immediately placed me at a privileged position in the U.S. structural hierarchy, and consequently my inclusion into the white structured society was easy. However, after I immigrated to the United States, my first close friends here were a black couple who helped us through the initial period of adjustment.

Sensitivity to skin color has its roots in the caste system and the degree to which it has insinuated itself into the Hindu culture. While growing up in India, I always had the privilege of my skin color, as I was considered a light-skinned person, which literally is perceived as white among the majority of Indians. Interestingly when I was immigrating to North America, many of my friends and relatives had suggested that my advantageous skin color would help me to blend into the American society. It was only after immigrating to the United States that I realized that all Indians were phenotypically perceived as browns. In my 7 years in the United States occasionally I have been referred to as "brown" by both my white skinned and colored acquaintances and friends. These experiences helped me to understand that my skin color (which

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was advantageous in India) was the main factor that instantly positioned me as an "other" in the U.S. racial structural hierarchy.

As a privileged Indian immigrant woman, I decided that it would be a challenge to analyze the conflicting discourses regarding the issue of race and domination. This project enabled me to question, and confront my racial/ethnic identity, which was never part of my salient identity in India. I must confess that my initial reaction to the race and ethnic identity in the United Sates was that of confusion. I found it difficult to comprehend how ethnicity could be equated with race. But, the more I delved into the literature and confronted my social status and identity in the U.S. context, the more I realized the similarities between these social constructs and their functions within specific social contexts. Moreover, the awareness of power inequality through my interaction with my friends of color and my experiences as immigrant in the United States helped me understand the grain of race and whiteness in social discourses. This consciousness helped me analyze the subject positions in which Asian Indian immigrants are placed and place themselves in their racial incorporation in the United States.

Confidentiality and Management of Risks

Before any of the research began, a detailed proposal was submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, The Institutional Review Board. In the proposal, I outlined how disciplinary ethical standards would be maintained while constantly accounting for any real or perceived risk to human participants. I outlined the nature of my study as well the potential benefit and minimal risks posed to the Asian Indian immigrants. There was no potential for risk in the study and the potential benefit for the participants was a better understanding of the pertinent issues of acculturation surrounding immigrant Asian Indians. Each participant was given a consent form to read and sign before any of the interviews took place. Furthermore, all real names and other

identifying information was removed from all transcript data and kept in a secure separate location. I assigned fictitious Asian Indian names to participants for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality in reported findings.

CHAPTER 3

NARRATIVE OF INDIANNESS IN RELATION TO WHITES

This chapter analyzes how Asian Indian immigrant participants aligned themselves with whiteness and claimed belonging in the United States. The analysis is guided by and builds upon the concepts of racial incorporation and intercultural translation (Drzewiecka and Steyn, 2009; Goldberg, 2005; Roediger, 2005). The study of the interview dataset resulted in the emergence of five major sub- themes that was used by the participants in their racial incorporation in the United States. In the first sub-theme, the participants describe their "Entry into white structures." I examine how the conditions of entry to the United States positioned the participants to be racially incorporated within whiteness. Second, sub- theme illustrates "Blending culture with whiteness." I analyze participants' stories of cultural adaptation in the United States and discuss how they learned white culture and implemented cultural blending as they travel between cultures (Clifford, 1988). Next, sub- theme talks about "Adopting the dominant discourse of self." I consider the participants' accounts that describe the emergence of the model minority conception. I demonstrate how they feel that their terms of entry contributed to the formation of a positive cultural identity of the group. Further, I explore the participants' narratives of how they started realizing that the model minority has started to be perceived as a threat by the dominant whites. The fourth sub- theme talks about participants' perception that, "United States is a white country." I analyze how the participants simultaneously conceptualized United States as the country of whites and denied race and racism in United States and thereby aligned with whiteness. Finally, in this chapter I study "India as an U.S. ally" sub- theme. I describe how the participants construct India as U.S. ally to claim alignment with whiteness as they racially incorporated themselves into the U.S. structural hierarchy. It is pertinent to mention here that

these thematic categories are not to be understood as rigid compartments into which the racial incorporation of Asian Indians can be seamlessly ordered. Instead, these categories are meant to serve as dominant motifs that emerged during the process of analysis. Further, these themes/ sub-themes are far from being mutually exclusive, and are conflated and work in tandem to essentialize the process of racial incorporation and immigrant identity translation.

Shah (1999) indicated that the early immigrants from India were denied entry and citizenship on the grounds that they were not white. Dasgupta (2006) demonstrated that even though the 1965 immigration reform eliminated race based exclusions, citizenship became contingent on income, fluency in English, educational background, and possession of exceptional skills. Additionally, Dasgupta (2006) argued that immigrants who failed to fit into the notion of "citizenship as requiring a contribution" (p. 55) image were excluded. Further, she stated that the image of a "contributing citizen" (p. 55) had a harmful effect as it undermined the needs for anti-poverty and antidiscrimination programs established for some immigrants and minorities in the United States. Given these symbolic and material conditions constraining the meanings of "citizen" and "immigrant," I examine how the participants positioned themselves within the racial hierarchy in the United States. This chapter focuses on how the participants positioned themselves on white terms. The first section examines the sub- theme of participants' entry into white structures through material terms on which they further base their claims to belonging.

Entry into white structures

One of the most dominant and repetitive sub- themes that arose from the analysis of the interview transcripts was the description of how participants entered into the U.S. structured society. The terms of entry for the participants who arrived after 1965 were shaped by their educational credentials, visas, green cards, socio-economic position in India and the need for

educated professionals in the United States. Portes and Rumbaut (1996) pointed out that the preference category of the U.S. visa allocation system after the 1965 immigration law reform was reserved for "members of the professions of exceptional ability and their spouses and children" (p. 18). Eight of the participants involved in this study came to the United States immediately after the new immigration laws came into effect in 1965. They came as part of a wave of Asian Indian immigrants with advanced educational background and privileged socio-economic position in India, which differentiated it from the agricultural labor immigrants who came before the immigration ban of 1924 (Dasgupta, 2006). Some of them came as permanent residents with green cards either to enhance their academic qualification or to work as highly skilled professionals. Other participants who came on specialized visas or student visas between 1965- 2000, also stated that they got their residency hassle free. Portes and Rumbaut (1996) explained that the immigrants who came in after 1965 were labeled "brain drain" (p. 18) in their countries of origin, however they were beneficial to the United States as they brought in high knowledge and skills with them. Further, the authors argued that due to their advantaged terms of entry these immigrants were not destined to the bottom layers of the American labor market. Based on their advantageous terms of entry they were incorporated into an infrastructure that automatically placed them at higher strata, while at the same time excluded the immigrants or other minorities who were in (or came to join) the bottom layers of the labor market.

The participants who entered the United States through the academic world indicated that their educational background helped them to be easily accepted in the university community. Singh (2006) showed that even though the 1924 immigration ban barred Asian Indians from citizenship, United States still welcomed qualified Indian students seeking admission to American universities. Ramesh, who came in as a student in 1969 explained, *"For people like me*

who came as students to the University it was not difficult as the professors knew Indians were

good students, that's why they recruited them." Ramesh here claimed that the American

universities were aware of the qualities of the Asian Indian students. He indicated that he was

aware that Asian Indian students had a good image based on the previous exposure to members

of his ethnic group. Consequently, Ramesh positioned himself into this image as a student

aligning with the expectations of the dominant group. Ramesh hereby illustrated Gee's (2011)

argument that identities produced by individuals involve the construction of a context-based

identity to match the perception of the people in power. Similarly, another participant, Rajah,

who came as a student in 1967 stated,

> *"I came to Berkley in 1967. There was a handful of Indian student in the university and*
>
> *we were all there as we were the best. You can imagine its Berkley after all. So it was not*
>
> *a problem at all....There I mean you worked and socialized with only white people, as*
>
> *they were the only ones there other than the few Asians. So you have the whites as*
>
> *friends. You will find also that more people like me, married white women, because you*
>
> *know those were the women you met. You socialize that way."*

Rajah's entry was based on his exceptional academic credentials, which not only helped him in

his American academic life, but it also granted him social inclusion in the white dominated

academic circles. When I asked him about socialization with non-whites, he stated that there was

none. His contacts were limited to whites in his educational setting and that prompted his

alignment with whiteness while normalizing exclusion of the people of color. Rajah normalized

the structured exclusion of people of color in the society and thereby easily aligned with

whiteness. Another participant, Dinesh, who came in the 80s, entered into the United States on a

student visa and attended an all white elite school, stated,

"I came to an elite school, they (students) were all white Americans from Oklahoma, some from Alabama, immigrants cannot afford to go there...I was the only student in the all white university on a Graduate Assistantship that covered all tuition and living expenses for the entire program."

The elite school was apparently too expensive for immigrants and non-white Americans, and Dinesh was the only non-white student who received assistantship due to his academic achievement. Dinesh, Rajah, and Ramesh were all representatives of the post-1960s immigrants whose high educational qualification granted them entry into the United States and inclusion in whiteness.

However, even though Dinesh's academic background granted him entry as a student in a Business school in a large Southern university, he described his initial isolation.

" *I came in a business school and in the whole business school there were just two Indians, if you were in a large engineering school you would not feel all these at all. That was a different era, that was pre globalization, so yeah all those things questioning identity suddenly you started feeling: I am so different, I am not good enough. You know I am, I consider myself as a social communicative guy and suddenly I came to realize it's really not good enough. I think for most of us academics was the least of the problem. That's the easiest part but the feeling of isolation, the feeling of, even though the programs like MBA are very social programs. I think it's a very difficult transition initially........"*

Dinesh described his initial transition as difficult. He specified that in his initial days he felt he was the inferior "other" in his interactions with the dominant group in the United States. Further, Dinesh explained that his difficulties stemmed from the absence of Asian Indians in the business

school as opposed to engineering and sciences where newer immigrants transitioned more smoothly. Additionally, Dinesh mentioned that in the initial period he faced questions like, *"You are neither a white, nor a Christian, why are you here?" or "When are you going back?"* Yet, when I asked Dinesh how he dealt with the comment, he asserted that, *"It's not a representative experience but it is an experience that will help you in your writing. Because I know talking about things on the margin is always fun than what happens on the average."* Although Dinesh downplayed the example of discrimination as an outlier, his explanation indicated that it was formative for him. He further stated that, *"Now I think that was the process of adaptation immigrants have to go through."* Even though he had talked about his adaptation as a struggle, his acceptance of these questions as normal and part of the adaptation process indicated his incorporation within whiteness whereby those who are not white have to see themselves through whiteness.

The participants discussed above entered the United States as students. All the participants indicated that their advanced educational background not only granted them entry into the United States but also determined their inclusion into the white American society. The participant who entered an area where there were no Asian Indians (e.g., Business school as a student) had a comparatively difficult initial transition. However, in spite of the accounts of the struggles of adaptation the participant's normalization of negative experiences indicated his incorporation into whiteness.

Professional immigrants were another group of Asian Indians who came in after the 1965 immigration law reform. One of the participants, Amar, indicated that he came in as a reserved category of professionals with exceptional abilities. Likewise, Neel who was a scientist in the Indian Institute of Chemical Biology (a medical research institute) came to the United States

through programs reserved for exceptional professionals that were promoted by the American government. Both the participants had privileged entry as they came in as professionals with exceptional skills. Portes and Rumbaut (1996) had stated that in the late 60s and early 70s there was a dearth of professionals in certain fields, e.g., medical and engineering. The two participants' exceptional professional skills learned in India enabled their entry and belonging to the United States. Similarly, Aloke, who came in as an electrical engineer illustrated how the material terms of entry enabled inclusion early on after his arrival to the United States,

> *"I came here in 1969; I came to the East coast, Pittsburg. After I came, a contact helped me find a house; initially my contact invited me to stay at their house. Then a white guy let me in as a house boarder. So I was mixing with them, their children, their children were my age group. So I was really enjoying that and as far as the academic world was concerned I was always getting lots of help from the white community."*

Aloke's initial experience was smooth and easy. He received help finding accommodations, boarded at a white person's house, and mixed with whites socially. White academics he met were helpful and open. His advanced educational background afforded him not only professional access but also social inclusion by white academics.

Dutta (1980) had argued that the Asian Indian immigrants' "alien" and "nonwhite, nonblack" appearance and their nonnative dialect of English made them stand out. He further pointed out that many professionals who came in during that time were underemployed, underpaid, and had hit the glass ceiling, and their lack of professional networks hindered their easy acceptance. Even though participants like Aloke described their adaptation as smooth, a few other participants who came as professionals expressed negative feelings to what they described as assimilation and success. Some of the participants who came here as professionals during

1960s described their initial period of adjustment as more challenging because Asian Indians capability as professionals was unknown to the dominant society as there were no other Asian Indians in their professions. In order to be accepted into the American society they had to adapt themselves accordingly. Joy highlighted the struggles of the professional Asian Indian immigrants entering the non-academic professional environment. He stated,

> *"For us who came as professionals it was a bit difficult to enter the US professional market because Indians were not in the professional market before the large migration of Indians. So there were questions, were we good? So initially for several years we had to struggle to establish that yeah, we are professionally good."*

Joy came to the United States as a highly qualified professional to look for jobs after the immigration laws changed in 1965. He admitted that during his initial job search and then later after he got his job he had to prove himself to the dominant group. His constant struggle to keep his job and his fear of failure, which would mean that he would have to go back to the bureaucratic system in India, motivated him to follow American ways. He struggled to establish an identity for Asian Indians as adept professionals in the United States. However, Joy indicated that after his *initial* struggle, he fit as a professional into the developing perception of Indians as successful.

These accounts indicate some participants struggled to enter the U.S. job market as they struggled with adjustment due to exclusion, whereas others found entering the job market and adjusting to the job environment easier. Portes and Rumbaut (1996) pointed out that the immigrants who came after 1965 immigration law reform, did not come to escape poverty, instead they came to improve their career. Therefore, in most cases the professionals never accepted menial jobs in the United States. In line with Portes and Rumbaut's (1996) findings, the

participants' stories showed that the participants' advantageous material positioning put them in contact with whites in environments that excluded other people of color and enabled their alignment with whiteness.

Apart from educational and professional background, the presence of the established Asian Indian community facilitated the participants' transition to the United States. This applies specifically to the participants who came in during 80s and 90s. Previous literature have stated that the early post- 1965 immigrants who had established themselves successfully in the U.S. society often acted as temporary way stations for new arrivals from India during 80s or 90s (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Saran, 1985). Jeet who immigrated in the 1990s explained that, *"I came into a place that had a very big Indian community. So, to me immigration was like moving from one part of India to another."* To Jeet immigration was an encounter with familiarity of Asian Indians who had established a stable socio-economic position in the United States since the 1960s. Jeet's description of immigration as a move to a familiar place, another part of India, indicated his easy entry. Similarly, Anish, who came in late 90s, described his entry as smooth entry and stated that he never faced questions about where he was from. He explained, *"I have a typical Indian face. By the time I came, people knew who we were. Some of them thought I was actually born in New Jersey, second-generation Indian maybe."* This excerpt also showed that compared to the people who came in the 60s, presence of Asian Indians became a common occurrence in the 90s. New immigrants, like Jeet and Anish, rarely had to face any questions regarding identity. This is because the new immigrants' entry and inclusion was through the established material positions secured by the immigrants in the 60s. Both Jeet and Anish narrated similar stories of entry. They admitted that they came in as students under Asian Indian advisers. Further, the adviser who had a reputable position in academia and U.S. society introduced them

to the dominant white group in academics and in their social sphere, which consisted mainly of whites. The stories demonstrate that their entry and inclusion in the dominant white society was through established privileged socio economic position of earlier Asian Indian immigrants and that secured participants' belonging.

Portes and Rumbaut (1996) stated that academics, professionals, and technicians never migrate due to unemployment back in their homeland because they all belong to the higher educational section and are probably among the best in their respective areas. As a result of this, the participants who came in after 1965 all had a privileged material entry. Many participants' accounts indicated that the gap between the available salaries and work conditions in India and United States prompted them to come to this country. In the participants' stories, certain belonging is secured through their privileged background. They told stories of being accepted, and these stories also revealed that they accepted and normalized exclusion of other minorities. This section showed that the Asian Indian participants were incorporated into a racialized structure that placed them in alignment with whiteness while excluding other racial minorities and immigrant groups who were in disadvantaged material positions. The next section will demonstrate that participants' cultural adaptation and cultural hybridity where structured in whiteness.

Blending culture with whiteness

Immigrants are in a constant dilemma as they move between cultures (Clifford, 1988). Their identity is negotiated every moment in their daily life through their numerous communicative interactions. As they adapt themselves in the new surrounding, they learn and practice the new culture. However, as Hegde (2002) argued, immigrants are not simply transplanted, instead they are translated as they simultaneously cohabit the space of two cultures.

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This section will highlight another emergent sub- theme of blending culture with whiteness that shows how the Asian Indian participants learned the white culture as they adapted themselves and in this process transformed both cultures to create a fusion or hybridity. Many participants who immigrated in the 90s explained that they had to adapt to the American society to maintain the positive perception of the community. Rita who immigrated in the early 90s described her experiences as follows,

> *"You have to take out lot of your thinking process, how you act, and all that you have to do according to your surroundings you have to adopt....... I love my culture but I am always open to everything like for example I am open to food, music."*

Rita explained that she felt she had to adapt and change to fit into the new country. It was important for her not to stand out, *"When I am in public, say interacting with a Caucasian, I try to adapt their ways to fit in, because I don't want to stand out."* There is tension in her account between adapting under duress, on the one hand, and a claim to openness and free will to learn the new culture. Rita wanted to blend into the dominant society by adapting the white American cultural ways. She narrated,

> *"For example we people eat with hands but I don't want to eat with my hands when I go to a Caucasians house, so I try to accept their rules and all when I am in their house I follow them..... Also language is another thing, like I prefer to speak in English when I am in public because I don't want to talk loudly in my own language with them around me."*

In describing her adaptation, Rita referenced the Caucasians and Caucasian culture and indicated that this was the culture she was interacting with and learning. She was not learning the

ethnically varied American culture. Rita normalized the adaptation of white culture as learning American cultural ways. She further described her endeavors as successful. Rita stated,

> *"Now sometimes I get these comments from other people that they did not understand what the other Indians they had met previously said, but they do understand what I say. I mean my accent and all. I think I am understandable and by now I have lot of Caucasian friends too."*

Rita felt she was successful in her adaptation. Rita emphasized her acceptance further by stating that now she has many Caucasian friends. Similarly, other participants indicated other ways in which they learned white culture in order to incorporate into the dominant U.S. society. Dinesh indicated that he also adopted American cultural ways in order to fit into the American culture. When I asked him what he meant by American culture he specified,

> *"I came to Texas, in a business school; you could only find white Americans there, so you had to adapt yourself to their culture."* He described the process as,*" I would say, in common sense Indian thinking versus common sense western thinking, I would say I very much tuned myself to the western way of thinking."*

Dinesh learned specifically white American culture and modified his Indian thought process to *"western way of thinking."* Roediger (2001) had argued that the process of incorporation for the new immigrants from Europe (Irish, Hungarian, Polish immigrants who were not considered white initially) proceeded through incorporation of specifically white American ways. Roediger showed that through this process of incorporation the European immigrants successfully claimed whiteness. The above excerpt implied similar process, where Dinesh adopted white American ways to incorporate into the American society. The difference here is that the Asian Indian immigrants' have not yet been able to claim whiteness successfully. However, Roediger (2005)

have also suggested that due to the increasing numbers of immigrants the future dominance of the white majority is threatened. As a result, there would be a shift in the landscape of racial/ethnic categories. Therefore, in light of Roediger's hypothesis, the participants' claim to belonging on white terms and alignment with whiteness creates a possibility of enlarging and securing the white category. Dinesh stated that as he adopted American ways of thinking, he felt that his life as an immigrant became easier.

> *"I think this is a wonderful country, I am a fan of the West. So I think I have made most of my changes in my mind, whether it is for better or for worse, I don't know, but most of the changes are in the head. And that I would say has made my adaptation easy."*

Dinesh embraced the West and the changes that happened in his head. Rita and Dinesh's stories are similar in many ways. First, both Dinesh and Rita initially came to a predominantly white area. Second, even though Dinesh came as a student and Rita as a dependent, they tried to enter the workforce in fields (Business School and Childcare) where Asian Indians had insignificant presence. Therefore, they had to struggle initially to adapt to the mainstream. Previous literature on non- white immigrants had described similar struggles (Flores, 2003; Hegde, 1998; McKinnon, 2008; Shi, 2008). However, the above excerpts demonstrated that the participants perceived the supremacy of whites as normal. As a result, the participants adapted whitening social practices (cultural aspects like language, mannerism, food, music and racial aspects like incorporating dominant perceptions) to align with whiteness.

Saran (1985) argued that the dominant group conceptualized Asian Indians as "a monolithic whole" (p. 82). One of the characteristics that were attributed to this conception was that they believed in strong family ties, they were well educated and economically successful, and that they have achieved a fine balance between upholding the cherished values of Asian

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Indian culture while at the same time adopted the principles of modern American ways. Many participants' stories indicated that they strived to be both American and Indian as they were incorporated, and incorporated themselves into the new society. The participants admitted that they preserved their Indian identity by following ethnic social norms, rituals, and language that helped them to remain connected to the land of their birth. Many participants also acknowledged that they frequently went back to India in order to teach their children the Indian culture. This supported Portes and Rumbaut's (1996) findings that immigrants maintained and strengthened their ties to India through their periodic visits back home. Further, Hegde (2002) argued that Asian Indians who grapple with the concept of culture in the new context concurrently inhabit the space of two cultures. In this pursuit, they transform both cultures and create a hybrid space. The following excerpts indicate how the participants tried to fuse the two cultures in their cultural adaptation. Ram described his constructed Asian Indian immigrant identity as a blend of new meanings and messages with his traditional cultural meanings and values.

> *"The way we live today we believe that there are lots of good things in the Indian culture and there are lots of good things in the local culture. So rather than adapting everything what is local, even though what we think or believe good may be biased from that point of view, but we take what is good in the local culture and what we feel is good from our background culture from India."*

The excerpt implies the creation of a unique identity. In order to establish the uniqueness of this identity he specified adoption of local culture (only what he perceived as good). Again, he embraced this new identity by indicating that he maintained only the good aspects of his traditional culture. Therefore, as Hegde (2002) had found, Ram collapsed cultural worlds in his pursuit to adapt to new norms while simultaneously adhering to older ways. Stories from other

participants also indicated a production of an identity that selectively blended both cultures. Siva described this blending in terms of the practices adopted,

> *"We try to preserve both cultures, we preserve Indian culture in terms of food of course, say if we have American food for breakfast, we cook Indian food for dinner, we do that always. Then the way we interact at home in terms of language the way we communicate at home, it may be English but mixed with words of our say Hindi. Sometimes, we have say TV channels that show South Asian programming and we watch Indian programs but we as a family do watch super bowls etc too."*

Siva described the newly constructed identity through the process of syncretic blending of culture. The excerpt demonstrated that the participant used food, language, and television shows to maintain their cultural integrity as well as to establish relations with the dominant group members. Siva's excerpt supported Hegde's (2002) argument that immigrants have a propensity to portray and "bracket their lives in cultural binaries such as east/west, tradition/modernity, American/Indian" (p. 263). The excerpt further supported Hegde's (2002) argument that as the Asian Indian immigrants were constantly aware of being the cultural "other," they felt the need for establishing a symbolic anchor around their homeland. Therefore, the above accounts showed the aspect of cultural fusion that the participants implemented in the process of cultural adaptation. Likewise, other participants like Usha narrated similar stories of blending. She stated that aside from her Asian Indian friends, her friend circle consisted of predominantly white Americans. She narrated her interactions with white American friends as follows:

> *"We also like to participate in festivals, we like our American friends to participate in the Indian festivals but we also participate in the festivals that's going on at the moment in the community. You know we always have people come over to our house during Indian*

festivals. I always made sure that I had a pasta or macaroni but I served traditional

Indian food along with it, something that represented my culture so that my local friends

here know how we celebrate our festivals, what we eat, what we wear."

Usha's response demonstrated how particular cultural customs were transported to the new land, blended with new meanings, and carried out in different context. However, the excerpt does not describe a creation of a simple hybrid identity. The excerpt instead demonstrated that the participant was not only holding onto her traditional Indian identity but was consciously blending Indian culture with white American culture to facilitate her cultural adaptation. The Asian Indian participant strategically presented to her white American friends that she was not only adopting American culture but was also holding on to her Indian culture. Saran (1985) stated that for many members of the community, who had immigrated to the United States in the 1960s, the model-minority image was to be promoted and sustained. He further pointed out that it was perceived as a way for Asian Indians to distance themselves from other, lower-status minorities with whom they did not want to identify "for fear that such identification would decrease the status of their own ethnic group in the U.S. social hierarchy" (Saran, 1985, p. 56). Therefore, in alliance with this conception, the excerpt implies Usha tactically attempted to maintain the prevalent dominant conception regarding the Asian Indian community (about how efficiently they maintain both culture) in order to promote and sustain the existing model-minority image.

This section highlighted the process of blending of culture with whiteness adapted by the participants in the United States. Although there are significant differences between the participants (for example participants who entered the United States as academicians or professionals in engineering and sciences or participants who came into other fields), this section

demonstrated that the participants learned white cultural ways and treated white Americans as a cultural reference group. Even though the participants were interested in holding onto their Indian identity, they also wanted to learn about American culture in order to claim their belonging in the United States. This demonstrates that the participants' newly negotiated identity was a result of strategic selection and blending of the old and new culture. The next section will detail on that conception i.e. how the participants adopted the dominant discourse of self.

Adopting the dominant discourse of self

The previous section demonstrated that the Asian Indian participants not only benefited from the prevailing positive perception of the group but also consciously promoted the image. This section will talk about another prominent sub- theme that emerged from the interviews that will show how the participants are positioned and how they position themselves in the white discourse. Consequently, the analysis will show that the participants' accepted and adopted the dominant definition of self. Further, the sub- theme talks about participants' realization of a change in the dominant perception and thereby the emergence of the conception of model minority as threatening minority.

Model minority identity

This sub- section will lay out the concept of model minority and explain how the positive cultural identity helped in the incorporation of the participants. There are various aspects of the model minority conception. In most common sense it signifies members of an ethnic community who despite marginalization in the United States have acquired success that is typically measured in terms of income, education, and related factors such as low crime rate and high family stability (Ono and Osajima, 2005; Saran and Leonhard-Spark, 1985). However, the concept is used not only to portray hard working and educated minority but also it is often used

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in racially divisive ways that differentiate the successful minority group from the other minority groups that are relatively not successful (Ono and Osajima, 2005). This section will highlight how the different aspects of model minority help the Asian Indian participants' in their racial incorporation.

Abraham (2002) indicated that the uniqueness of the Asian Indian immigrants in the 1960 was that they adhered to the valued principles of economic success in the public sphere while retaining strong cultural values in the private sphere. Therefore, owing to these characteristics, in the late 60s, the dominant society started conceptualizing the Asian Indian community as "model minority" (Dasgupta, 2006). Further, Saran (1985) contended that the Asian Indian immigrants promoted and sustained this conception, as it was perceived as good for maintaining the status of their own ethnic group in the U.S. social hierarchy. Many participants of this study who came during the 90s indicated that they were aware of the image of ideal immigrant and they admitted that this conception became an important aspect of Indianness in the United States. Most participants emphasized that they rarely or never encountered negative treatment or negative opinions about Indians but instead said, "*I did not have any bad experience, they knew we were good."* Another participant explained, *"No, I was easily accepted because they knew we are educated people and all the people who came here were professionally good."* It should be noted here that in the early 1900s the agricultural labor immigrants from India were barred from U.S. citizenship (Shah, 1999). However, starting in 1960s, through the structured terms of entry of educated and professional immigrants a positive cultural identity slowly developed (Saran, 1985). Joy listed the characteristics that were used to construct the positive image of Asian Indians among whites,

"Asian Indians, the whites here think, are very well qualified people, they (Asian Indians)

are intelligent people, and they (Asian Indians) are cultured people so the whites have

very good feeling about the Asian Indians. People in this country have respect for them."

This participant attributed positive perceptions of his group to their educational and cultural

background. Further, Joy was aware of being positioned in positive terms as a member of the

group. The participant's description reflected the aspects of model minority possessed by the

Asian Indian group. Additionally, Swamy stated, *"Like in the store sometimes when I am in the*

malls I have people who come and ask me okay you are from India, are you a computer

engineer? And that has happened a number of times." As evident in the excerpt, Swamy was

perceived to be highly skilled based on his phenotype. The above excerpts indicate that the

participants were aware of being ascribed a positive identity as Asian Indians based on their

advantageous educational and professional background.

Rita stated that the positive image of the community had positive consequences. Rita

described the benefit as,

"I felt people know that Indians are very hard worker, they are pretty serious about their

work, not that I heard that comment but I know that, for that I got lot of responsibility at

my work place because I will do it properly not half-heartedly."

Rita constructed a privileged position for her group based on the existing positive perception of

the Asian Indians. She suggested a superior identity of the Asian Indians based on the positive

dominant perception of her ethnic group. However, at the same time the phrase *"I will do it*

properly, not half-heartedly" implied the invisible inferior 'other' compared to whom Rita

claimed superiority. Rita constructs Asian Indians as hardworking and thus fitting into an "other"

approved by whiteness.

Abraham (2002) stated that along with the immigration of sponsored relatives, there were other factors that contributed to this upsurge of Asian Indian immigration in the 1990s, such as globalization, open market policies, and the tremendous growth of the software industry (Khadria, 2002). According to the 2000 U.S. census, the overall growth rate for Indians from 1990 to 2000 was 105.87 percent. Abraham (2002) stated that many immigrants who immigrated in the 1990s came into the preexisting enclaves of Asian Indians. This made the transition to a new country and cultural adaptation easier as in most cases they learned the local culture and the traits of cultural adaptation from their own compatriots. Jeet described the adaptation of the recent immigrants to this country, through his own experience.

> *"Not a very big culture shock because of the reason that we had a very big Indian community in the school that I went to......... So initially, I interacted mostly with them. Then slowly more and more I started interacting with the white American students here. That was also good, as they knew who we are. The image of model immigrant made it easier. So it was a gradual transition for me."*

Jeet stated that the preexisting Asian Indian enclaves acted as cushions for the newcomers. Supporting Abraham's (2002) argument, Jeet's indicated that the preexisting community protected the recent immigrants against the burdens of adjustment to a new cultural setting. The excerpt further suggested that because of the existence of positive perceptions of the Asian Indians, the transition for those who came in during the 90s was easier. This is because in most cases white Americans already knew who Asian Indians were and accepted them with positive attitudes. This is further reflected in Jeet's statement that the Asian Indians had a "gradual" transition because of the groups' established privileged positionality. Therefore, this shows the

preestablished positionality of the Asian Indians helped in the cultural adaptation of recent immigrants.

The positive identity not only made immigration and adaptation easier for Asian Indians, Ramesh stated that the positive cultural identity indicated higher placement in racial hierarchy. He stated,

> *"Hierarchywise, definitely we are placed close to the whites now. Definitely we are placed close to the whites, because of our education, because the country where we came from, they have seen we are educated people, we are professional people, so we are definitely close to the whites."*

Ramesh constructed a picture of a privileged nation whose highly regarded emigrants represent only the upper socio-economic class accepted in the U.S. on material terms. The participant claimed a superior relationship with respect to the other racial groups in the United States through this 'privileged nation' image. The advanced educational background and employment in highly paid jobs were defined by the participant as characteristic of being from India. The image of a privileged nation of origin enabled the participant not only to claim cultural but also racial inclusion as they claimed themselves as "close" to whites and thus above other racial groups in the United States. The above stories indicate how the participants claimed the model minority image as a basis of their incorporated identity. The participants not only claimed success based on their income, education etc., which represented the material success aspect of the minority model concept. The excerpts also indicated that the participants promoted racial differentiation by claiming differences from the other minority groups that are not as successful as they are, thereby sustaining the model minority image.

Most of the participants in this study indicated that they felt they were ascribed a positive cultural identity. The participants embraced these ascriptions and adhered to those definitions of success. In effect, they aligned with whiteness in creating and maintaining differences from other non-white groups. This is because they felt these terms enabled them to consider themselves close to whites, if not on par with whites. However, the participants also expressed a different meaning of the model minority image that was shaping their identity in the United States. The next section analyzes the emerging meaning of model minority as a threat.

A threatening minority

The previous sub- section indicated that the participant felt that they were ascribed a positive cultural group identity. This sub- section focuses on the responses that indicated that the participants were detecting a perception of Asian Indian immigrants as a threat. Suvro, who is an academic, explained that white Americans view Asian Indians as competition.

> *"Whites view us as coming in taking up their jobs...So it is more of a perception of threat or an actual threat it is debatable. It depends on the other guys professional background. Just as an example, if the person is a musician, and there is not many musicians who immigrate from India. Then they wouldn't have that kind of threat. But if in a certain profession there are lots of professionals from India, for instance, I hear from my IT friends that lot of white Americans work there, in that case they have a severe perception of threat. That would be threat of kind of loss of job or something."*

Although expert technical skills and education were claimed to be the basis of an avowed positive identity and inclusion, this participant was aware that they were also perceived as a threat to white Americans. The material terms that secured the entry of Asian Indian immigrants to the United States were becoming the basis for their exclusion. The perception of being a threat

indicated the contingency of the model minority identity. Asian Indians were becoming too successful and threatening the hierarchy where they might be "close" but nevertheless should be "below" whites. The participants' educational and economic prosperity helped them rise upwardly in the socio economic status, which was upsetting to the whites. Tarun, who is also an academic, described the changing identity of Asian Indian immigrants as the result of their socio-economic progress.

> *"The only change that has happened in this country because of the large migration of the Asian Indians is, I think the whites are now scared. Because when Indians came in small numbers, they were not worried, because their jobs were safe, they were comfortable that the Indians will not surpass over them. But, now I think that somehow they are scared that we are going ahead. Asian Indians are doing very well in academics and they are coming into the U.S. political life also, which not many immigrants have made it. Yeah they are definitely scared than they were before."*

Tarun was referring to the changing economic situation. The economic downturn and job insecurity and competition from increasing numbers of Asian Indian immigrants turned the Asian Indians into a threat. Tarun's statement that, "*they are scared that we are going ahead. Asian Indians are doing very well in academics and they are coming into the U.S. political life,*" placed Tarun as well as his community members in positions on par with whites, if not above. While the phrase, "*not many immigrants have made it*" presented other immigrants as 'the inferior others' and identified the Asian Indian group as more successful who have "made it." However, the success was now being turned against Asian Indians who were viewed as competitors. Therefore, the implied change in the dominant group perception is from the 'Indian other' or 'inferior' to 'model' to that of 'threat.'

The above examples demonstrate that the participants have become aware of being perceived as a threat. While the Asian Indian participants capitalized on their privileged terms of entry and won placement close to whites (even if not as whites) in the U.S. social racial structure, their success was turning against them and they were now becoming aware of being seen as a threat and excluded in new ways. One of the participant described what he felt was the reason for the change in perception, *"I can see the situation changing slowly because of the economic hardships, some of the whites are doing bad and immigrants from India are doing well. I feel certain amount of jealousy emerging."* The excerpt indicates similar conception as Flores, (2003) who argued that immigrant populations, which are "invited" during the time of economic need, are targeted for exclusion during economic downturns. The excerpts further imply that inclusion of immigrants is conditional on their contribution to the economy. This claim is supported by Dasgupta's (2006) conception of "contributing citizen" where the eligibility for inclusion and citizenship was dependent on the contribution to the economy. However, Yancey (2003) argued that to remain dominant the white majority is expanding its racial boundaries, thereby transforming/appropriating certain non-black minorities into the majority group status. Yancey's hypothesis is challenged here by the participants' awareness of being perceived as a threat to white domination. This section examined how the ascription of threat repositioned Asian Indian immigrants as an 'other' and distanced them from whiteness. The following section will consider the sub- theme where the participants conceptualize "United States is a white country" and attempt to align with whiteness through their translation of the denial of race in India to the discourse of the denial of race in the United States.

United States is a white country

The analysis of the Asian Indian participants' narratives up to this point demonstrated that

in their description of adaptation and claims of entry and belonging they often indicated alignment with whiteness already as part of their racial incorporation. This section will show the sub- theme, where participants conceptualized United States is a white country and then aligned with the white ideology of United States as devoid of racism in the construction of their identity. Many participants indicated that they had conceived the United States as the country of whites only. For example, Shyama proclaimed that she came to the United States with the pre-conceived notion that apparently America consisted of only white people. Similar to Shyama, most participants indicated that their visions of America did not include black people, who they perceived as criminals and thus threatening. They admitted that they were aware of the racial dynamics and the history of discrimination against blacks. However, they claimed that they witnessed little to no bias in their own experience in this country, which compelled them to believe that race was a thing of the past. Participants made such comments as *"there is the history of oppression, but times have changed," "Now, there are no race or ethnicity related discrimination."* Such statements also implied that the participants believed that American society now promoted diversity and thus demonstrated their alignment with and acceptance of whiteness and a claim to belonging in terms of raceless whiteness. The concept of raceless whiteness, according to Goldberg (2006), refers to the white dominant public discourse that concurrently denies race in order to promote the colorblind policies, and safeguards ethno-racial homogenization of the state.

The denial of race concept indicates that even though there are immigrants and minorities from different ethnic and racial groups in the United States, there is no discrimination or marginalization based on race and ethnicity, and race is not a significant concept. Many

participants denied race and/or racism as they narrated different stories about their experiences. Rita described her experience in the United States as,

> *"I have traveled to different parts of the world; I can definitely tell that this is way better than England. US, they are more welcoming and accommodating towards people from different country, different race, different looking than what I felt over there. There I had experiences that are; kind of negative but here I never had any strong experience that I can tell you that yeah that was due to race. I feel that if people from different countries they have to settle somewhere, US is the best place to settle compared to Europe."*

Rita explained that Americans are welcoming to people of different races and the United States is the best place to settle for immigrants. She constructed the United States as nonracist as compared to the United Kingdom and other European countries. Therefore, Rita's denial of race in the American context indicated her alignment with the dominant ideology "that erases race and denies minority oppression" (Halualani et al., 2006, p. 79).

Similarly, other participants denied negative experiences when they were asked, *"What was your initial experience with the dominant group in the US?"* Aloke described his experience with the dominant society when he first came in the 60s as, *"I did not have any bad experience, not now, not during my initial days and I think we should stop being hyper sensitive."* Aloke denied any bad experiences and claimed the question itself indicated *"hypersensitivity."* It must be noted here that in the Indian context explicit references to race have been conspicuously absent from the official Indian national identity narratives ever since independence in 1947. Chatterjee (1993a) argued that race as a social category was politically denied and suppressed from public perception, because of the connection between colonialism and racism. Aloke's denial of the significance of race in the Indian context was translated into the discourse erasing

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race in the United States. At the beginning of the interview, Aloke had advised me,

"Communication scholars like you should write something new, instead of the old story of race and discrimination. Why don't you talk about how the whites have helped the Indians to adjust to the new land?" He believed that racial discrimination is outdated in the United States. The dominant narrative in India claims that racism existed only during colonial eras before independence from British colonialism was won. Along this narrative thread, Aloke talked about the positive reception by whites, which to him indicated absence of racism and the opposite to the history of colonial experience. Further, his emphasis on "hypersensitivity" indicated his investment in and protection of the white denial of the significance of race. His comments indicated that he was racially incorporated within the white dominant view that denied racism and race. His racial incorporation in the United States was a product of translation from the Indian discourses of race to the American race denial.

Asha came to the United States in late 60s to join her engineer professional husband. Her master's degree from India helped her enter the U.S. workforce and she was hired as a librarian at a university. She said that she was the only person of color and indicated that, "*Yeah because of my skin color, I did sometimes feel out of place.......I wished I was American or something or white. Otherwise, I am fine*." Asha described her phenotypic difference as a barrier to her inclusion, however her statement, *"Otherwise, I am fine,"* indicated she accepted her racial exclusion. When I asked her if she had ever experienced discrimination, she said, *"not yet."* Even though she said that she felt out of place because of her skin color, she denied the conditions that made her feel out of place. She naturalized her desire to be "American or white" and thus accepted structural racial exclusion.

The above excerpts indicated that the participants conceptualized United States as a White country, denied race, and discrimination and indicated easy entry and acceptance in the United States. The stories of conception of the United States as white only country indicated that the participants have accepted and naturalized white domination. Further, the interviews demonstrated that the Asian Indian participants' were incorporated into whiteness as they accepted the white denial of race and racism. The alignment with whiteness fortified their claim to inclusion based on privileged economic position. The denial of race indicated both racelessness and raceless whiteness in the United States. Further, it also showed that the participants' perception of race in the US context was anchored in the denial of race in India. This anchoring indicates that the participants' preexisting conceptions are integrated with the new meanings of the discourse of racelessness in the United States. Consequently, the participants' narrative of racelessness aligned them with the dominant white discourse of racelessness. This section demonstrated how the participants preexisting beliefs and perception helped them align with whiteness. The next section will identify the sub- theme that constructed India as an U.S. ally that further aligned the participants with whiteness.

India as an U.S. ally

Even though the post-1965 immigrants entered the United States on privileged terms, Portes and Rumbaut (1996) indicated that the immigrants still faced the stigmatization as immigrants from the poor third world nation. However, the participants' felt that the large-scale immigration of specialized professional Asian Indians in 1990s (Khadria, 2002) along with globalization helped to erode the stigma to some extent. They also described other factors that helped reinforce the positive perception of the Asian Indian immigrants. This section will analyze the sub- theme where the participants constructed different meanings through which they

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positioned India as an U.S. ally. The conception of India as an U.S. ally superficially implies the developing positive relation between the two nations; however, the underlying implications show how the participants translate themselves into whiteness in their racial incorporation in the United States, through this conception.

Many participants in this study pointed out different factors through which the perception of India in the United States changed. Amol observed,

"There is a big 180 degree swing from India as a country where children are starving prevalent in the 70s, to present day India as an economic giant, where everybody is a computer gig. Multiple factors were in operation. First of all, during the 90s after the fall of the communist Soviet Union, India used to be politically allied with Soviet Union. But after the fall, India emerged as a democratic force within South Asia where it was surrounded by other countries, which did not have democracy. India also started doing better economically with the opening up of the markets. The twin factor of economic dynamism and democratic politics change the image of India during the last 15/20 years. Again, India is a country, which is not associated with terrorism, India doesn't produce terrorist. India has Muslims but, those Muslims are peaceful Muslims. Plus India is now viewed as an ally of United State in the fight against terrorism. So, I would classify economic dynamism, political scenario, and this emergence of the Islamic terrorism as the other so far as America in concerned, and in these entire scenarios India is viewed as an ally."

Amol constructed his belonging through the change in perception of India. He felt the dominant group in the United States assigned superior identity to the Asian Indians in the present day and attributed the change to various dissimilar and disjoined factors. First, he stated that after the fall

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of Soviet Union, India was no longer considered as an ally to the Soviet Union. Consequently, the United States no longer perceived India as an anti-nation. Second, he identified India as a democratic nation and therefore different from the other non- democratic Asian countries. Further, Amol highlighted India's upward economic mobility. Amol also constructed India as an ally in the war on terrorism, which suggested the image of a privileged nation that did not "produce terrorist." Amol's tactful construction of India as an anti terrorist nation differentiated India from the other surrounding Islamic countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, which are perceived predominantly negatively by the dominant group in the United States. Through this privileged nation image, Amol attempted to secure the terms of inclusion and advantageous positioning of Asian Indian immigrants in comparison to immigrants from other countries. Additionally, he asserted that, "*India has Muslims but those Muslims are peaceful Muslims,"* which indicated a construction of a superior identity compared to other Islamic countries because although a significant population of India follows Islam, it is home to only peaceful Muslims, who are safe for Americans. The excerpt not only constructed India as an antiterrorist nation but also indicated that the Muslims, who are considered uncivil by Americans (Goldberg, 2005) have been civilized and educated enough that they have now become peaceful. Amol did not challenge the predominant American construction of Muslims as threatening extremists but instead invoked India's exceptionalism. The Asian Indian participant's construction of India as an U.S. ally in the fight against terrorism and Islam indicated alignment with whiteness. Consequently, as Goldberg (2005) argued, the construction suggested a globalization of racial Americanization. This construction demonstrated the participant's alignment with whiteness and an attempt to win a higher position in the U.S. structural hierarchy.

Other participants also indicated alignment with U.S. American whiteness with respect to Islamic terrorism. For the early immigrants, like Ramesh and Joy, their emphasis on their Indianness was still evident through their assertions of their own 'otherness'. For example, even though Ramesh admitted that his adaptation was comparatively easy (illustrated in his description of entry into white structure above), more than 40 years later he asserted that he did not visualize himself as an American but as an Indian with U.S. citizenship. He indicated this by citing his grievances against the United States for not implementing more severe restrictions on Pakistan for its on-going involvement with Islamic terrorism.

> *"Well I know the U.S needs to do something in Pakistan just like they did in Afghanistan ...and I know, there are people there causing problems. These people out there needs to be stopped otherwise we will see more attacks like the one in Mumbai."*

Even after 40 years in the United States, Ramesh still followed South East Asian politics and actively felt it. It must be noted here that after 200 year of colonialism, when the British decided to leave India, under the Indian Independence Act of 1947 they partitioned the British India into the two new independent dominions, India (with predominantly Hindu population) and Pakistan (where most of the population was Muslim) (Ganguly, 2001; Jalal, 1985). Ganguly (2001) stated that since their emergence as two independent states the two countries have gone to war four times. Therefore, even though 65 years have passed since the partition and despite several efforts at reconciliation, the two sides are still locked in an unending conflict. Therefore, in light of the history of India, it can be concluded that Ramesh translated his Indian communal perception where Hindu faith followers despised the Muslims to the discourse of anti Islam and nurtured negative feelings towards Muslims in the United States. Thereby, his descriptions of Pakistan and Afghanistan in the excerpt implied alignment with whiteness in the fight against Islamic

terrorism. As Goldberg (2005) stated, the dominant group in the United States now promotes race neutrality with limited racial profiling, where profiling is implemented only for the purpose of national security. Ramesh's statement implied similar sentiments of profiling, where he urged for action against the Islamic states to stop potential tragic attacks.

Balibar (1991) argued that there had been tremendous changes after World War II in the conception of racism, as there has been a significant shift from biology to culture in racial articulation. In other words, there had been a shift in the focal point of racism from physical characteristics to factors such as social customs, manners, and behavior, religious and moral beliefs and practices. The above excerpts indicated that the relations between India and the United States blossomed primarily over common concerns regarding growing Islamic extremism. In their perception of Islam/Islamic terrorism, the participants suggested alignment and propagation of the U.S. dominant ideology underpinned by racism. Further, the participants' stories suggested their acceptance of "ethnoracial rationalization as civilizational superiority" (Goldberg, 2005, p. 98), the acceptance of which, as Goldberg stated, created "U.S. - friendly puppets" (p. 99).

The participants' discursive positioning in relation to whites had several implications regarding the acceptance, inclusion, belonging, and positionality of the Asian Indian participants. Through the advantaged entry and positioning, the participants created a unique narrative of Asian Indians that identified their group as close to the dominant whites. This chapter addressed how the participants constructed their identity and racially incorporated themselves within whiteness. The next chapter will focus on the relationships of the Asian Indian participants with different minorities and other immigrant groups, in the United States. Many participants pointed out that the socio-economic environment in the country now favored minorities like Blacks and

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Latinos. Considering this grudge against the Black and Latino community, it becomes necessary

to look at how the participants positioned themselves in relation to other immigrant groups as

well as against Blacks and Latinos.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVES OF ASIAN INDIANS IN RELATION TO NON-WHITE GROUPS

This chapter analyzes how Asian Indian participants aligned themselves with whiteness in their perceptions of other non- white groups in the United States. The analysis identified three themes. They are Indian identity in relation to blacks, Indian identity in relation to Latinos, and Indian identity in relation to other Asian ethnic groups. In the first theme, "Indian identity in relation to Blacks," I examine how the participants position themselves in relation to blacks in the U.S. socio- economic structure. I discuss how they conceptualized that there are "No blacks in the United States." Next, they conceptualize "Blacks have no education," consequently they are perceived as inferior in comparison to the highly educated Asian Indian participants. In the last sub- theme of this section "Blacks and the modern U.S. society" the participants align with whiteness in their perception of blacks as unsuccessful, despite the many opportunities provided to blacks by the generous whites. Then in the next major theme "Indian identity in relation to Latinos," I analyze how the participants position themselves with respect to the Latinos. In the first sub- theme, 'Latino vs. Asian Indians," I demonstrate how the participants use their advantageous terms of entry to position themselves at a level higher than the Latinos in the U.S. structural hierarchy. Then in the next sub- theme, "Narrative of Latino advantage," I show the participants grudge against the Latino community as they enjoy reserved privileges as minorities. Finally, in the last major theme, "Indian identity in relation to other Asian ethnic groups," I explore the Asian Indian participants' identity construction in relation to the other ethnic groups in Asia. In the first sub- theme, "Indian identity vs. group identity," I talk about how they separate themselves out from their Asian group identity and create a unique Asian Indian identity. Further, in the next sub- theme, "Indian vs. other ethnic groups in Asia," I find how they

transport the growing economic competition in Asia to the U.S. context, in order to create a superior positionality.

The previous chapter showed that the Asian Indian participants had privileged terms of entry, which placed them in an advantageous position in the U.S. socio- economic structure. Through these advantageous positionality and economic success, the participants claimed closeness to whites. Further, the previous chapter also showed that in the process of adaptation the participants aligned with whiteness. This chapter will show how the participants align with whiteness in their talk about non- white groups. The next two sections will elaborate more on the relation between the Asian Indian participants and the other minority groups in the United States.

Indian identity in relation to Blacks

This section highlights the theme of how the Asian Indian participants' constructed their identity in relation to blacks. When the participants were asked about their interactions with other racial groups in the United States, most of them admitted that they had very little to no interactions with blacks. Some participants' account indicated that they accepted and normalized the structured nature of the society, where acquaintances with blacks are do not occur in the daily basis. Other participants who first came to areas where there was a significant black population described their initial shock at seeing so many blacks in America. The following sub- section examines the sub- theme of how the participants positioned themselves through their perceptions of blacks in the United States.

No blacks in America

One of the prominent sub- themes in this section is the presumptions of no blacks in the United States. The participants stated that their racial conception was constructed through their

pre-existing perception of United States in India as a white country. They also indicated that they did not see blacks as American citizens due to their history of slavery and economic failure.

Shyama immigrated to this country in early 70s to join her husband, who was a doctoral scholar at that time. She herself had a master's degree when she arrived. She remembered being shocked after arriving to Chicago.

> *"When I came here first in Chicago, I was taken aback to see so many blacks there. In India, we have the pre-conceived notion of America as a country that consists mainly of whites. Also Indians come to this country with the pre-conceived notion of the blacks that they are all criminals. So if you have the notion that the whole group is primarily criminal then you are bound to have a knee jerk reaction at their very presence."*

Shyama described her negative reactions to seeing many blacks dictated by stereotypes of blacks as criminals in India. She expected the United States to be mostly white and was surprised to even see blacks. Shyama explained that she acquired her racial conception of America through media representations. She stated, *"My perception about this country was in a rosy form."* She attributed her "rosy" perception to the Hollywood movies that represented America as a country consisting of posh modern cities where whites (no blacks) live in nice houses, drive nice cars, and live their problem free life devoid of poverty. When blacks were shown, they were represented in a negative light (as poor and criminals), which coupled with the circulating stereotypes of blacks in India reinforced her fear of blacks. Consequently, she instantly "othered" blacks in this country. Similarly, other participants also talked about being predisposed to avoid and fear blacks based on stereotypes of blacks circulating in India. Another participant Sikha said that when she first moved to Alabama in late 70s, she was both upset and scared to see so many blacks. She mentioned that her husband got his doctoral degree in Minnesota, which was a

white area except for few immigrants from Asia. Therefore, when her husband got a job in Alabama and they moved there, she admitted that the first thought that crossed her mind was, *"How can this be a part of America!"* Therefore, both Shyama and Sikha's account shows that the prevalent popular discourse in India that "othered" the criminal blacks in the United States.

Later at another point in the interview, when Shyama was asked if her perceptions of blacks have changed over time, she avoided the question. However, she admitted that during her 30 years of stay in the United States she had made many American friends all of whom were white, except one, who was a black colleague. She added,

> *"I have very close relationship with my American friends, I hang out with them, share everything with them. Yes, they are all whites. The black guy is lot younger than me so that way socialization with him on that level is a little bit difficult because he is way younger than me. "*

Shyama's closeness with white American friends described the racial terms of her social and cultural belonging. Shyama was structurally placed in a position to work with and socialize with whites only and she could conveniently justify not socializing with the one African American because of his younger age. Shyama's avoidance of the question regarding her current perceptions of blacks and her account of her American friends raises many questions. Why did she avoid the question? Is it because there has been no change in her perception, or that it has deepened over time? Her emphasis on white American friends indicated she perceived the exclusion of blacks from professional circles as normal. Her preconception that there are no blacks in America was confirmed by the racial structure, which precluded developing acquaintance with blacks. Further, although she mentioned one black person, he was not a friend but a colleague and their acquaintance did not change her perceptions of the group as a whole

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showing her unchanged negative perception regarding blacks. In this one case, she had no choice, as he was a colleague with perhaps equal education and skills. However, she clearly stated that there was no socialization due to the difference in age. She used the age difference as an excuse to claim innocence for "othering" blacks and this excuse would cover up any question regarding racial differences.

Another aspect that reflected the denial of the presence of blacks was that most of the participants admitted that they used the label American to refer to only the white Caucasian people in the United States. In the interviews, when clarifying the racial background of the group they referred to as American, most of them emphasized that "Americans" stand for "*the people who were born here, the white Caucasians."* When inquired about blacks of this country most of the assertive replies were, *"if you see the history of the country, the blacks came here as slaves."* Therefore avowing the line of white Americanness, the participants admitted that the immigrants from Europe had a dominant subject position in the United States because they were not forcibly brought over the country as slaves. They erased blacks from American citizenship and culture because they came as slaves and, in the participants' minds, were not of this country. One of the participants, Sumit, who immigrated in the 90s, indicated that because of the predominantly impoverished material positions of blacks, they are not considered good enough to use the label 'American.'

> *"Well historically, as much as we strive to not to think of it that way but it comes down to me that most of these people are white American. Even though African Americans are also part of the American demographics but when people think about American they usually have a hard time integrating people in the demographics consisting of the two communities I named. There is a reason for this as in the beginning the blacks came here*

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as slaves then after the emancipation they were mainly with the croppers in the South,

then with the industrial revolution they left the firms immigrated in mass to the city. "

Sumit observed that white Americans have not integrated with black Americans and therefore he stated the Indians have a hard time integrating people of the two demographics. He used this observation to support the idea that blacks are not equal American citizens and that 'proper' Americans are white. This rationalization indicated his alignment with whiteness. By aligning himself with whiteness, Sumit was racially Americanized (Goldberg, 2005), that is, incorporated within white perceptions and ideals. Further, Goldberg argued that choices and preferences are racially structured in the American society and "standards are represented mainly as white" (Goldberg, 2005, p. 98). Therefore, Sumit incorporated white ideology to secure his own position within the socio-economic sphere. The excerpt additionally indicated that Sumit embraced the white ideology of 'limited racial profiling' (Goldberg, 2005, p. 96) because of blacks socio-economic history. The above excerpts indicate that because of blacks' history of slavery and their lack of economic success the participants obliterated blacks from U.S. citizenship, and thereby aligned with dominant white perception. However, interestingly participants like Sumit also stated, *"Because as an immigrant one of the most important thing is to adopt and acclimatize to the local ideology, otherwise I would be isolating myself from the society, which is not good."* This statement suggested that Summit positions himself as an outsider in the American black and white binary system. This is because as Summit suggested he is compelled as an immigrant (an outsider) to follow the structured preferences and choices in the U.S. society (Goldberg, 2005), in order to enter and claim belonging in the American society. Therefore, through this suggestion, he placed himself outside of the frame of social antagonism of black and white.

The excerpts in this sub- section suggest the presence of the narrative that there are no blacks in America, among the participants. Analysis of the excerpts showed that the participants had a pre-conceived notion of America, where they indicate absence of blacks. Further, the participants did not abandon this preconception after immigrating to the United States, instead they build on it to accept and normalize the racially structured society. Along with this, they aligned with whites as they excluded blacks from U.S. culture and citizenship by pushing blacks to the outer margins of the society. The next sub-section will indicate that the process of out casting blacks further continues through the participants' advantageous educational and socio-economic background.

Most blacks have no education

The previous chapter showed that the participants' terms of entry were contingent on their educational background, their socio- economic position in India. This sub- section shows that the participants positioned themselves in a superior position in relationship to blacks by invoking their educational background and socio economic status. Further, the participants not only use their terms of entry to indicate difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), they also used their cultural background and family structure as tropes through, which they claimed their superior positioning.

One of the questions I asked was, "How do you think the blacks perceive the Asian Indians in the U.S?" Most of the participants indicated that they were superior in relations to blacks. Amol described his encounters with blacks as follows,

> *"Blacks I have encountered know very little about India. The only thing they know about*
> *is Mahatma Gandhi was the leader of Indian Independence movement and Martin Luther*
> *King Jr. was a big admirer of Mahatma Gandhi. So, they make that connection, quite a*

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few blacks have asked me about this, again these are the few educated black. Other than that most of the Blacks have barely high school education so they don't know much about India, so they know too little to have any kind of stereotypes."

The excerpt constructed blacks as ignorant about India. Amol used phrases like "*few educated blacks," "barely high school education" and "know too little"* to indicate inferiority of blacks. Although educated blacks know a little about Mahatma Gandhi, most blacks are uneducated and they do not know much about India. Interestingly, at another point in the interview, Amol stated that white Americans had significant knowledge about India and Indians, which made them superior with respect to the blacks.

"White Americans know much more now about Indians than they did 30 years ago. But even then they knew that India is a multicultural country with multiple languages, variations in the physical features."

Amol viewed white Americans as knowledgeable about India, more knowledgeable than before. White Americans know Indians; this knowledge is reassuring to him and positions him closer to white Americans than black Americans who are ignorant. He stated that he had to explain basic facts to the few educated blacks he met, but whites knew basic facts about India. He is a familiar 'other' to them.

Further, in the previous excerpt, Amol's use of phrases like *"know very little" or "few educated blacks" or "have barely high school education"* in reference to blacks indicating that he constructed himself as superior with respect to blacks. Concurrently, the assertion and emphasis of the whites' depth of knowledge suggested a justification for white superiority with respect to blacks. When Amol was questioned about his opinion regarding the lack of education (of

blacks), he defended his stand by misrepresenting the Asian Indian family structure and cultural background. He explained that,

> *"In India right from childhood, everybody is taught that you need to succeed in life academically professionally and the kids knew as long as you work hard and succeed you have the parental backup system. That is what is lacking in the African American families I feel, specially the US African American population. Most lack the family support system and then culturally they are way too different."*

Amol not only criticized the lack of *"family support system"* but also constructed a deceitful narrative of India where every child has a family to help them become successful in life. This narrative presents the small advantaged section of the Indian society as representing Indian culture and family structure. By contrast, blacks are presented as inferior in family structure and attitudes towards education and success in life. This difference in the cultural background and family structure of the two groups acted as the foundation on which the Asian Indian participant claimed his groups' superior subject position. Similarly, another participant, Sumit, constructed similar Asian Indian narrative and elaborated that,

> *"Most of the Asian Indians, they have strong family structure, there is a father, mother, so that is one factor. Within the black community, the black family most of the families are broken families mostly single mother family. That is one factor plus some cultural factors are there. I mean the Asian Indian culture emphasize on gaining knowledge..."*

Sumit unfavorably compared the Asian Indian immigrant community and its whole families and the black community and its "broken" families. Asian Indian immigrants with their high educational background and socio-economic status were a privileged group in the United States. Saran (1985) argued that the uniqueness of the Asian Indian community in the United States was

that they believed in strong family ties. Abraham (2002) had also noted that the members of the Asian Indian immigrant community retained strong cultural values in the private sphere. The excerpt therefore supported the arguments present in the existing literature, by stating the presence of both strong family ties as well as strong cultural value retention. The excerpt however indicated alignment with whiteness because it invoked the white discourse about black family degradation, which constructs blacks as an inherently inferior cultural underclass. Blacks are the 'other' of whites, and the participants are incorporated within whiteness, as they start perceiving blacks as the 'other' of Asian Indian immigrants.

Amol and Sumit both referenced culture and family structure as causes for Asian Indian immigrants' success in academic and professional life. Moreover, both used an already advantaged group to indicate superior positioning with respect to African American families. However, in the interview Amol skillfully ignored the obvious follow up question, *"What happened to the children from the socio-economically backward families in India?"* Additionally, Amol defended white family structure in the United States and said that, *"The family structure among the whites overall are not as bad as the blacks."* Therefore, he positioned Asian Indians as closer in cultural values to the dominant whites in America and distant from the black minority.

This sub-section described how the participants used their terms of entry to position themselves advantageously in the U.S. racial/structural hierarchy. Additionally, the participants constructed Asian Indians as highly educated, culturally advantaged and socio- economically successful. Finally, the participants used all these qualifications to "other" blacks and in the process aligned with whiteness. Consequently, these factors helped the participants to claim

closeness to whites. The next sub-section will indicate how the Asian Indian participants continue their alignment with whites in order to claim closeness to whites.

Blacks and the modern U.S. society

The previous sub- section showed that the participants' claimed inclusion through their advantageous educational, and socio- economic background, as they felt they had met the white judgment criteria of success (Goldberg, 2005). Goldberg pointed out that even after the civil rights movement "homogenized apartness" (Goldberg, 2005, p. 98) was still presumed as normal and excellence were judged through the lens of structured whiteness. This sub-section will demonstrate how that the participants align with whiteness by promoting the concept of racelessness and holding blacks responsible for their failure despite the abundance of opportunity provided to them. This alignment continues as the participants' descriptions matched Goldberg's (2005) hypothesis that whites are seen as the real victims of anti racist movements. Interestingly, the participants spoke about blacks through a discourse of racelessness, while representing themselves as the victims of race based quotas and affirmative action.

In response to the question of blacks' subject positions in the society, the participants had different opinions. Joy who immigrated in the late 60s, and had witnessed the Hippie and the civil rights movement, claimed that there is a huge change in the conditions of black minorities after the movements. He stated,

> *"Times have changed. There are many areas you would see blacks well placed. The problem is blacks, even though they get numerous chances they do not utilize the opportunity to the fullest and then blame it on discrimination."*

Joy claimed that the racial structure has equalized since the 60s and afforded blacks many opportunities. He stated that blacks themselves do not adequately utilize the opportunities

provided to them and continue to blame race and racial discrimination for their lack of success. It is apparent from Joy's statements that he aligned with dominant white ideology that considers race as obsolete, on one hand, and, on the other hand is racist as it blames blacks for their lack of success. Joy further explained that the dramatic change the society has undergone has provided equal rights to everyone.

> *"For instance the blacks before the civil rights movement, it's not that early, just 50 years back, the blacks did not have any voting rights, now the blacks have equal rights, voting rights, and now we have a black president which is unthinkable in America."*

Joy listed the changes in the society that have led to the perception that racism has been abolished. His emphasis on the advantages given to blacks gave an indication that blacks have achieved more than what they deserve. This interpretation spells out alignment with the white dominant group. Further, the phrase "*we have a black president which is unthinkable in America"* suggested the zenith of black community's achievement, which is still unthinkable. This is because, as Parameswaran (2009) indicated, the notion of black president contradicted the prevalent version of blackness and its historical containment within marginal structures of class in the United States that was present in India. Therefore, anchored in this dominant black discourse, Joy felt black president signified progress in the U.S. society from racism to racelessness.

Following the same line of reasoning Rita asserted that the American society is an epitome of colorblindness. She elaborated, *"I don't think it goes according to the race only here, in that case all white people will only be on the top. We have Barrack Obama, African American president, so I don't think that is the case in US."* Rita spoke through a narrative of racelessness that translated her identity to white identity. The translation maintained white innocence as the

participant blamed blacks for their lack of success. This implied that Rita aligned with the ideology of "libertarian motto" that implied a "surplus of possibility and opportunity" (Goldberg, 2005, p. 96). This alignment is evident in Rita's statements that suggested abundance of opportunities exemplified by President Obama's success.

The excerpts show that the participants' constructed their subject positions through racelessness. They claimed that as immigrants to this country they also had to undergo various struggles and overcame numerous hurdles to adaptation. However, it is also evident that they altered structured meanings (of race) to match their own experiences, needs, and their recollections of the past. In this way, they created situated meanings through which they recounted and reconstituted their struggles with diversity and race. Therefore, the participants' narrative of a diverse society and their negative feelings towards affirmative action policies in the United States indicated pivoting away from race (Halualani et al., 2006).

Finally, Ramesh who witnessed the civil rights movement indicated his opinion about the affirmative action policy as follows,

> "*I understand the relevance of affirmative action, adopting them may have been necessary at one time but now I think affirmative action should be mainly reframed, mostly in terms of income and geographical area rather than ethnicity. Because if you design the policy on ethnic lines there are poor whites, they don't get an advantage based on that......... So I think they need to redesign the whole program making it truly color blind but focusing it on income and geographical area.*"

This excerpt indicates Ramesh's alignment with whiteness. He suggested concerns for the whites who are the victims of the excessive affirmative action. As Goldberg (2005) suggested in his model of racial Americanization, Ramesh projected whites as the real victims of anti- racist

excess and sympathized with the "street wary and weary white-people" (Goldberg, 2005, p. 98). In his earlier statements about whites he had emphasized his Indianness, differentiated himself culturally from the white Americans, and thus demonstrated difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) from whites. However, through his adoption of the dominant language of white superiority, he demonstrated closeness (equivalence) (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) to whites in the process of translation. This reduced the differences with the dominant whites as it positioned the Indian self within the black and white binary system. Hence, his identity has been translated into the dominant white narrative of racial privilege that is used by the dominant group in the United States. However, the translation was not complete, as he had simultaneously established Asian Indians as different from whites. This provided means for the Asian Indians to maintain innocence along the lines of social antagonism of black and white. The above excerpts indicated that the participants accepted and promoted the racelessness discourse, they also blamed blacks for their failure, as they did not utilize the plethora of opportunities effectively. Further, the participants pivoted between race and racelessness as they simultaneously indicated racelessness and represented themselves as the victims of racial advantage provided to blacks. Finally, the participants' translation to whiteness was incomplete as they concurrently claimed closeness to whites on the grounds of both the groups (Whites and Asian Indians) being victims of anti racism policies, and differentiate themselves from whites culturally.

This section showed that the participants aligned with whiteness in their perception of blacks in the United States. First, the participants indicated that based on their pre-existing perception they conceptualized that there were no blacks in America. They further denied blacks citizenship based on blacks' history of slavery and impoverished material position. Second, the excerpts indicated that using the advantageous educational background and material position the

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participants constructed a superior positionality in relation to blacks. Finally, the analysis showed that in the pivoting between race and racelessness the participants translated themselves to whiteness. The next section will address the translation of Asian Indian identities in relation to Latinos.

Indian identity in relation to Latinos

In this section, I analyze another prominent theme that is how the Asian Indian participants perceive the Latinos. Similar, to blacks I discuss how the participants claim a superior positionality in relation to Latinos based on their advantageous background and material position. Then I demonstrate their racial pivoting as they move between claims of racelessness and racism. I found that in their pivoting the participants aligned with whiteness as they cite their grudges against race based preferential policies reserved for Latinos.

Latinos vs. Asian Indians

In this sub-section, the participants weave a superior identity using their privileged educational background and material positions. Further, the analysis shows that the participants claim inclusion based on the legality of their entry compared to the illegal entry of the Latinos. Many participants admitted that they had encountered situations where they were misidentified as Latinos. However, majority of them also emphatically asserted that most of this misidentification was by the Latinos themselves. Similar to the narratives about blacks, stories about Latinos attributed the mistakes of misidentification as the Latinos' lack of knowledge. This is illustrated by Amol's statement, *"Hispanics they also do not have much idea about India, the only thing they identify Indians as strange group of people who look like them."* Amol established a difference from the group of people who resemble Asian Indians. Amol implied

that he is not comfortable with the phenotypic similarity and constructed a superior identity of the Asian Indian group by attributing ignorance to Latinos.

Ramesh who has been in the United States for more than 40 years admitted that during the initial days after his immigration, there were fewer numbers of Latinos as compared to today, even in places like California. He pointed out that in his academic environment in Berkley the number was even lower as in those days it was unusual for a Latino to be in academia. Latinos were concentrated in jobs that required physical labor. He stated,

> *"The Hispanics come as working class and some of them of course without legal documents. So among the minority groups the African Americans and the Hispanics kids are not doing well, socio economically they are not doing well. Of course, you know what social position you have that gives you the status as well as your reputation. So you see it doesn't mean that everybody in India is smart but definitely the people they see here are..."*

Ramesh differentiated Hispanics (Latinos) and African Americans from immigrants from India on the economic basis. Although he conceded that not all the sections in the Indian society are privileged; however, the immigrant population is an advantaged group in comparison to Latino immigrants. Ramesh claimed the inclusion of Asian Indians through their privileged material positions. Although he admitted that, "not everybody in India is smart," nevertheless immigrants from India belonged to educated upper socio economic class, while the Latino immigrants were working class. The superior material position of the Asian Indians was the basis of his claim to their inclusion and exclusion of the Latinos.

Joy also talked about illegal and legal immigration. A hint of grudge regarding the illegal immigrants' kids' admission to school had underlain his statements.

"There are many illegal Mexican immigrants in this country and their children, although they are illegal, they go to school here. In this country, anybody who goes to school will go to higher class automatically. So some of them who are brilliant, go up, but most of them are stuck in the system..... People from India who come to the States they try to take care of their children in a different way, as they know education is very important in life. Mexican parents, the class I am talking about, their parents are illiterate. So they cannot guide their children. As a result they don't know anything better than their parents and ultimately they become one of them too."

Joy described Asian Indians as superior to illegal Mexican immigrants who in spite of having access to the schools in the United States do not support their children. Joy described the American educational system as generous because it educates illegal immigrants' kids. Since the success rate of educated Latinos is again low, it must be due to the lack of the value placed on education by immigrants who are themselves to blame for their lower economic positions and lack of success. This account constructed a superior identity of the Asian Indians based on the successful child rearing and demonstrated translation of their identity into the dominant white discourse that sees itself as generous towards minorities.

The above excerpts indicate that the participants utilized their educational background and material position to claim difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) from the minority group, who incidentally has phenotypic resemblance. Further, the participants use the privileged Asian Indian immigrant group as normal and compare the immigrants from Mexico and other Latin Americans countries to them. Through this comparison, they demonstrate that the Asian Indians who are phenotypically similar to Latinos have become successful in the United States, whereas

Latinos have failed. The next sub-section will talk about the advantages that the participants claims Latinos in the United States enjoy.

Narrative of Latino advantage

An important aspect present in most of the participants' excerpts was the issue of legal versus illegal immigration. Participants clearly constructed racial divisions and placed themselves within them in spite of their claims of racelessness. Some participants evoked their Indianness to indicate their struggle as immigrants and simultaneously claimed superiority from other minority groups in the United States.

Many participants in this study pointed out that the socio-economic environment in the country now favored minorities like Blacks and Latinos, which made the situation worse for the Asian Indian immigrants (who are also non- white minority).One participant described the worsened situation as, *"I think Blacks or Hispanics may get better preference in terms of jobs now. Of course, it depends on the qualification level. But they have all these opportunities for Blacks and Hispanics that's why they do get more preference than Indians."* The excerpt clearly showed a grudge against Black and Latino (Hispanic) community who supposedly enjoy the preferential treatment. Similarly, another participant indicated similar sentiment. Further, the bitterness is even more because there are no preferences for Indians even though they have proved themselves academically or professionally. Similarly, other participants indicated such sentiments. Rita came in the 90s to join her computer professional husband. She entered the U.S. job market as a pre-school teacher in an area that had predominantly Latino candidates. She had gone through numerous adjustment processes in her job, to make her way up in the system, and that has left her with severe resentment against the Latino minority group in the United States. She represented her grudge as,

*"Hispanics, they get preference if there is a post and all the things behind it is to promote them and to narrow the gap of past racial inequalities. I think, you know, everybody should get equal chance and equal opportunity. You see Indians have also come far away from their country, we are also not technically white, but we don't get any preference.......
Yeah we are not getting any special treatment but these people are getting treatment based on history. Yeah I feel (laughs) they (dominant white Americans) should do some immigrant quota or something like that for jobs because Asian Indians people after coming here have to fight to make their living in this country."*

Rita in the excerpt differentiated her group from all other racial groups (that included the whites as well as the Latinos). On one hand, she claimed equivalence (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) with the Latino minorities to indicate the need for an immigrant quota to promote the Asian Indians who are not white but, on the other hand, she opposed the system that provides special preference to Latinos but not Asian Indians. She further stated that Asian Indians are racially disadvantaged because they are not white. Rita's use of the word "technically" is significant here, as she invoked race through it but did not refer to any actual discrimination. She drew similarity between Asian Indians and Latinos only on the basis that both came from a different country. She thus misrecognized the nature of disadvantaged position Latinos occupy, and suggested that the Latinos should not be given preferences based on the history of racism. Interestingly, at another point during the interview, she admitted having some negative experiences during her few years in San Diego, California,

"But I had some negative experience. When I moved to San Diego in California, we were pretty much mistaken as Mexican or Hispanic people over there. So that time I went through few racial problems. You know, there are some examples like in the grocery

store they (whites) used to treat us as Mexican. So I had problem with both sides, as there were lot of Hispanics. With the white people because they (white) thought we were Mexicans, and the Mexicans thought we were getting all those jobs and they are not getting these jobs because we are here."

Rita differentiated her cultural group and indicated that as an immigrant minority her group also had to struggle for acceptance, belonging, and inclusion in the U.S. society. She thereby suggested similarity with other minority groups that face white prejudice. However, she used her racial experiences to ignore her relative privilege, *"Mexicans thought we were getting all those jobs...."* in relation to other minority groups. The excerpt showed that Rita struggled against the "model minority" image ascribed to Asian Indians. She indicated that she did not have any advantage over the Latinos and opposed the widely held belief that Asian Indians are preferentially treated. Therefore, in the previous two excerpts her repeated invoking of race, racism, and undue quotas indicated her pivoting between race and racelessness.

Aurovindo also referred to the Latino advantage in his account of Indianness. He referred to the superior Asian identity and the legality of their immigration to demonstrate the difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) that separates the immigrants from India and Mexico. He proclaimed:

"*People from Mexico they just cross the border and come here illegally. People who want to come legally here as visitor or student or for employment from Asian countries they are denied visa, so I am surprised. I really think that the policies must change that they should have policies for enhancing or I should rather say welcoming the legal or people who take the legal route. And I would say nobody who comes through the legal route should be denied.*"

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Aurovindo connected and identified with all the Asian immigrants here to claim their superiority, and created a Latino 'other'. He based his claim of superiority on the legal entry of the highly educated segment of the population from India and other Asian countries. He stated that their legal entry should automatically position them advantageously in the U.S. hierarchy. He vented his grudge against Asian immigrants' visa denials. He asserted that Asian immigrants come either as visitors or as student or professional. Therefore, based on their terms of entry he suggested that Asians should not be denied visas, instead they should be given visas and also should be treated better than other immigrants. This is more so because the Mexicans come in the United States illegally as they have the advantage of crossing the border. Consequently, he translated himself into the white ideology of segregation of illegal Latinos as 'others' because of their illegality of entry.

This section indicated that the participants positioned themselves against the Latino 'other' through claims of self-inclusion, racial pivoting, and alignment with whiteness. Through these dynamic processes, the participants' identities are translated into whiteness and are incorporated racially in the United States. The next section will analyze the process of translation through other Asian immigrants.

Indian identity in relation to other Asian ethnic groups

This chapter analyzes how the Asian Indian participants perceive the non- white groups in the United States. The previous two sections analyzed the participants' perception of Blacks and Latinos. This section demonstrates another dominant theme that is how the participants position themselves in relation to other Asian ethnic groups in the United States. First, I found that the participants loathed their Asian group label and preferred their own unique label and identity. Then I show that in spite of the similarity in terms of entry and socio- economic

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success, the participants try to differentiate themselves from other Asian groups in order to established more closeness to whites than the other groups.

Indian Identity vs. Group Identity

The past trend in the United States has been to represent all immigrants from Asia under the common group identity of "Asian." Many participants stated that the dominant group in the United States identified them as Asian. All the participants expressed dislike of the common group denominator "Asian" and resented the Asian label, which they felt mostly represented East Asians in the United States. Further, the participants in their resentment towards the group identity invented various logics through which they not only differentiated themselves from other Asian groups but also claimed closeness to whites. The subsequent accounts describe the reasons why the participants loathed the group identity. Abani stated the following reasons as his objection against being clustered with the East Asian.

> *"I consider myself Caucasian just like all South Asians do. The world is made up of three races and the South Asians, they fall under the Caucasian race, and if you are from East Asia, you would fall under the oriental race. Asia is composed of different ethnic groups like Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and each is a different ethnic group so it is meaningless to categorize them as one. If you consider race, somebody well versed with history would know Indians belong to the Aryan racial category so it is meaningless to categorize with any other racial group in Asia."*

Abani claimed "Caucasian" and Aryan lineage as Asian Indian immigrants arriving to the United States in the early 1900 had done. Abani's construction of his racial identity demonstrated that such self-categorization continues. However, in the United States, the label Caucasians is used only to represent white Europeans and Asian Indians are perceived to be brown. Even though

Indians considered themselves Aryan, and thus synonymous with Caucasians, they were not accepted as "white" because of their phenotypic difference (Shah, 1999). The new group of Asian Indian immigrants who came after the 1965 immigration had a better material standing in comparison to the agricultural labor immigrants of the early 1900s. However, despite the difference in material position most of the interview participants replicated the early immigrants' racial beliefs and stated that people from India belong *"to the Aryan racial category."* Abani grounded his claims to whiteness and equality with European Caucasians both in the historical racial Indian narrative and in better material position, which he hinted made them better Aryans that the early agricultural labor immigrants. Additionally, Abani's reference to the people from East Asia as "oriental" indicated that he created a difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) from them.

The interviews revealed that the label Asian was assigned to the participants in their daily interactions with dominant whites. However, as many participants indicated, whites used the Asian label to signify immigrants from China and Japan. Dasgupta (2006) pointed out that Asian Indian immigrants' who came after 1965 were quickly absorbed into the "Asian" construct. However, the immigrants felt that in this ascribed label there was a presence of "a racially ambiguous identity that was amenable to be represented as nonblack, though also definitely not white" (Dasgupta, 2006, p. 47). Therefore, because of this ambiguity they started seeking out inclusion and belonging by claiming equivalence (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) to the dominant white racial group and differentiating (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) from all other racial groups in the United States.

The following excerpts indicate that in order to claim closeness to the dominant whites, the participants constructed a unique/superior identity of India to differentiate themselves from

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other Asians. One of the participants, Rishi, negated any commonality even with the other South Asians on the ground of the geographical prominence of India.

> "In case of commonality with other Asians, I would say no, people from other parts of Asia are so different feature wise; there cannot be any confusion there. In South Asia, India is such a prominent figure in South Asia's map that nobody mistook me as coming from any other South Asian country. It usually happens the other way round. A person from Bangladesh or Pakistan is misidentified as Indian instead."

Rishi rejected a possibility of a collective group identity on the ground of phenotypical differences (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) between Asian Indians and other East Asians. However, when considering other South Asians Rishi indicated that the phenotypical identification becomes irrelevant due to the geographic prominence of India. Therefore, the participant strategically used the logic of difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) both times to construct a context based different and superior Indian identity. Other participants also resented the common Asian group identity. Joy explained why he preferred his Asian Indian identity.

> "East Asian culture, if you see their history, they were kind of closed societies. Those societies did not have any history of massive immigration like India; we had a history of big immigration all throughout history. But the East Asian countries did not have that, so that explains why they like to keep to themselves........You cannot break into their door, there is an invisible wall. You cannot penetrate that wall. So in case of identity after my Indian identity, I would identify more with American Caucasians than other Asians."

The excerpt showed that Joy established a difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) between India and East Asian countries. He constructed India as open to immigrants and East Asian countries as closeted and surrounded by an invisible wall. His construction positioned East Asian

countries, as India's 'other.' Most importantly, through this difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) he implied closeness to the dominant white group. Therefore, he suggested his preference for an American Caucasian group identity rather than the Asian group identity. Further, another participant, Jeet, claimed closeness to whites in comparison to other Asian groups due to the following reason,

> *"What makes Indians unique is that with 200 years of British Raj they are well versed with the language and well aware how to deal with the whites. So they get along pretty well with the white majority population here."*

Jeet described colonialism as a favorable acquisition of knowledge about whites and English language. The colonial exposure to British whites and their ways is represented as a resource and a base for amicable relations with white Americans. However, when I reminded Jeet of colonialism in other parts of Asia, he ignored the question. This further indicated that in his attempt to claim cultural alliance with the dominant white group, he positioned India apart from other Asian countries that share the colonial history. He distorted the colonial experience as beneficial to rationalize alliance with whiteness and difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) from other Asians. The above excerpts have shown that the participants use different categories like racial, phenotypical, geographical, political, colonialism to construct their difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) from other Asian groups. And through these differences, they claim their inclusion into the dominant racial formation. Additionally, Rita pointed out that the only commonality that was evident among the different Asian ethnic groups was as follows,

> *"I figured that Oriental people, they like to associate with their own group all the time. I never had a very good relation with them but not a very bad relation also. But I am a parent too and I have my kids' friends who are East Asians. When I talk to them, our goal*

is kind of the same. Because you know Asian parents care about education more, that's what we think but also there are some Caucasian parents who think about their kids education too."

Rita used the label "Oriental" to establish distance from East Asians. Although she shared educational goals for her children with them, "they" are perceived to be insular. Said (1978) had argued that according to the western ideology the label 'orient' had a negative connotation. Said (1978) had demonstrated how the West re-imagined the East within a dominant paradigm of 'otherness'. Therefore, Rita's use of the label indicated her incorporation within the western belief system, where she designated the East Asians as Oriental 'others' but excluded her group from that identification. She stated that the only commonality she felt with the "oriental" parents was their future goals for their kids. However, she discounted any significance of this similarity as she referred to Caucasian parents with the same goals.

When I asked the participants, "Do you think your identity has changed in the U.S over time?" most of them supplied ambiguous answers. They admitted that they still considered themselves Indian but they preferred being identified as American because of their citizenship status. Some indicated they preferred the label "Asian Indian American" as it represented their true identification, which is American of Asian Indian origin. In one case, when I asked a participant about her American friends, she challenged the question by saying, *"You know I object to your question because you said, do you have American friends? I am an American."* The excerpt implied that she hated being represented as "other" and preferred to be labeled as American. Therefore, all the excerpts here showed that the Asian Indian immigrants who were ascribed the Asian label by the dominant group in the United States preferred to discard that identity label. Instead, they preferred a unique label of Asian Indian or simply American based

on their citizenship. The next sub-section will further indicate how they strive to be placed closer to the whites over the other Asians.

Indian vs. Other ethnic groups in Asia

The participants' account described that they detested their group identity and constructed a unique identity by claiming difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) from other Asian groups. However, even though the participants described the non-Indian ethnic groups as 'other', their accounts indicated that there was a stiff competition between the Asian ethnic groups regarding the position of their group in the American socio-economic structural hierarchy. During his more than 40 years of stay in the United States, Ramesh had witnessed mass immigration of Asians and its impact on the current socio-economic situation of this country. He described it as,

> *"Of course nowadays the main confrontation is between the Asian Indians and Chinese. There is competition with the Chinese, in schools and colleges most of the so-called whites, they have given up. They do not want to compete with the Indians anymore, they have accepted that Indians are good students and like that but the main competition is with the Chinese. You go to the universities, you will find in most of the research areas there are Indians and Chinese. Of course, there are still many many whites but the confrontation is there between the Indians and Chinese. Not much with the Filipino not much with the other Asian people, the main competition is with the Chinese."*

Ramesh here indicated the superiority of Asians in the education settings where whites have given up and the two Asian ethnic groups are competing with each other. Although there are whites in Universities, they do not count as competition. The Chinese and the Asian Indians compete for the next position in the U.S. structural hierarchy. Suvro further elaborated on the pursuit for position and power,

"In Asia the emerging economic powers are India and China and to some extent South Korea. So, even back in Asia all these countries are aware about each other that each one of them is hard working and I think the perception here is also the same. All of them know that they have to put more effort and energy or hard work in order to excel in the competition with each other......... You know you can never be sure of the outcome of a rat race, unless the race is won. As a whole, Indians have done very well as a group, but which group comes out as the winner is a thing every group is waiting to know."

Suvro desired to achieve the highest socio-economic standing as an Indian. With respect to the competition between China and India, it should be noted that in 1962 India and China went to war over the disputed Himalayan border and other issues (Maxwell, 2003). Ever since the 1962 war, both sides have been extremely cautious and suspicious of each other and there has been no resolution to the border issue in spite of numerous rounds of negotiations (Holslag, 2010). Further, Holslag (2010) argued that the economic aspirations of both the countries in the present day were leading to more competition, and this has a negative effect in Asian politics and diplomacy. Therefore, considering the history of the relationship between the two countries, Suvro hinted that the presence of ethnic groups with similar intentions presented a threat to the success of his ethnic group. He establishes a superior self (India) identity over the subordinate other (China, Korea) countries as indication of India's progress on Western terms. In those terms, superiority in Asia implies a higher structural position in the U.S. social hierarchy, which consequently places Asian Indians closer to the whites.

The above description indicated that the participants already had a privileged positionality due to their advantageous material positions. However, for the majority of immigrants (including immigrants from India, China, and Korea) who came after 1965 the terms

of entry were contingent of their advanced educational and privileged material position. Therefore, in order not to be engulfed by the Asian group identity and to win the race of gaining a position close to whites the participants strived to differentiate themselves from other Asian ethnic groups.

This section explicated how the participants used tropes like democracy, diversity, open society, mass immigration (evident in the participants narrative of group identity vs. Indian identity) in order to differentiate from other Asian groups in the United States. According to a report from the Pew Research Center, the Asian population in the United States (with heritage in all countries within the geographic Asian continent) is expected to be more than triple by 2050 and whites will account for 47% of the population, down from the 2005 figure of 67% in the United States (Passel and Cohn, 2008). Roediger (2005) hypothesized that the landscape of racial/ethnic categories is shifting, primarily due to the increasing numbers of immigrants threatening the future dominance of the white majority. Further, Yancey (2003) argued that to remain dominant the white majority is expanding its racial boundaries, thereby transforming and appropriating non-black minorities into the majority group status. He predicted that Asian Americans, "will soon merge into the dominant culture" (p. 126). Therefore, in light of all these possibilities, the participants' stated differences (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) with all other immigrant groups and alignment with whiteness can be perceived as attempts to continue the upward rise in the U.S. structural hierarchy.

This chapter focused on the analysis of the narratives of the Asian Indian immigrants. These analyses lead to the clustering of four broad thematic categories pertaining to the Asian Indian immigrants' incorporation into the U.S. society and their narratives with respect to different racial groups. Interconnections among the categories and the interactivity was implied,

however the composite impact of these narratives will be explored in depth in the next chapter. The discussion chapter will explain how these categories interact, combine, contradict, and overlap with each other. The chapter will draw out the complexities of the categories when viewed as a whole and explicate contributions to the theory of racial incorporation.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This thesis reveals how the Asian Indian participants who immigrated to the United States after 1965 constructed their identity by blending their traditional cultural and racial meanings with the cultural and racial meanings of their current racially structured position. The analysis showed that as they constructed their identity, they maintained and reified the white dominance and the subordination of other minority groups and other immigrant groups in the United States. In addition, the study also revealed that the participants strategically translated and then both employed and denied racial categorization of self and other groups. Furthermore, the study demonstrated how the participants created their differential subject positions and claimed their inclusion and belonging in/near whiteness.

Two research questions were addressed in the study:

> *RQ1: How do Asian Indian immigrants construct their racial identity in relationship to white and non-white group?*
>
> *RQ 2: Do Asian Indian immigrants align themselves with whiteness in their perceptions of other groups in the United States. If so, how?*

Discourse analysis of interviews with 28 participants yielded four major thematic categories through which Asian Indian immigrant identities were racially incorporated. These categories were: a) Narratives of Asian Indians with respect to Whites; b) Indian identity in relation to Blacks; c) Indian identity in relation to Latinos; and d) Indian identity in relation to other Asian ethnic groups. The first theme portrays how Asian Indian immigrant participants' constructed their identity in relation to whites. Several sub- themes were found under this first major theme. The first sub-theme, "Entry into white structure," shows how advantaged material-

symbolic conditions of entry to the United States positioned the participants to be racially incorporated within whiteness. The second sub- theme, "Blending culture with whiteness," shows how participants learned white culture and implemented cultural blending as they travelled between cultures (Clifford, 1988). The next, sub- theme, "Adopting the dominant discourse of self," describes how immigrants took on the "model minority" as part of their identity and how they have become aware that they were now perceived as "a threatening minority." The fourth sub- theme, "United States is a white country," analyzes how the participants simultaneously conceptualized America as the country of whites and denied race and racism in the United States in their alignment with whiteness. The final sub- theme, "India as an U.S. ally," describes the participants' construction of India as the U.S. ally through which they claimed alignment with whiteness as they racially incorporated themselves into the U.S. structural hierarchy. The second major theme, "Indian identity in relation to Blacks," shows how the participants position themselves in relation to blacks in the U.S. socio- economic structure. This theme consists of three subthemes. The first sub- theme demonstrates the participants' conception that there are "No blacks in the United States." The next sub- theme shows that the participants thought that "Most blacks have no education" and therefore represented them as inferior to the highly educated Asian Indian participants. Finally, in the last sub- theme, "Blacks and the modern U.S. society," the participants' align with whiteness in their perception of blacks as unsuccessful, despite the many opportunities provided to blacks by the generous whites. The third major theme, "Indian identity in relation to Latinos," analyzes how the participants positioned themselves with respect to the Latinos. The first of the two sub- themes, 'Latino vs. Asian Indians," demonstrates that the participants used their advantageous terms of entry to position themselves at a level higher than the Latinos in the U.S. structural hierarchy. The second

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sub- theme, "Narrative of Latino advantage," exhibits participants' grudge against the Latino community as they enjoy privileges as minorities. Finally, the last major theme, "Indian identity in relation to other Asian ethnic groups," explores the Asian Indian participants' identity construction in relation to the other ethnic groups in Asia. The first sub- theme, "Indian identity vs. group identity," shows that the participants separated themselves out from the composite Asian group identity and created a unique Asian Indian identity. Further, the second sub- theme, "Indian vs. other ethnic groups in Asia," exhibits that the participants translated the growing economic competition in Asia to the U.S. context, in order to create a superior positionality. These themes answered Research Question # 1 by demonstrating that the Asian Indian participants strategically constructed their identity to claim closeness to whites and differentiated themselves from non- whites in order to create a superior subject position in the U.S. structured formation. These themes also show, in answer to Research Question # 2, that the participants aligned themselves with whiteness in their perceptions of other non- white groups in the United States. I will more fully discuss the answers to the research questions and their implications below.

The analysis of Asian Indian participants' identity construction in the United States revealed important insights about racial incorporation and intercultural translation. First, the analysis demonstrated that in their initial days after immigration the Asian Indian participants had to struggle to establish themselves in the new place. Even though they were preferentially admitted based on the U.S. immigration policies as highly qualified academicians or professionals, their non-white phenotypic difference forced those participants who arrived early after 1965 to struggle for a positive image. Once the Asian Indian model-minority image was established, the participants who arrived later strove hard to promote and sustain it. In this

process of claiming inclusion and belonging into the mainstream American society, the Asian Indians distanced themselves from other lower-status minorities. As Saran (1985) indicated, the narratives in this study also showed that the Asian Indian participants did not want to identify with other minorities for fear that such identification would decrease the status of their own ethnic group in the U.S. racial hierarchy. The participants strategically claimed their inclusion and exclusion from other immigrants and minorities to distinguish themselves from other minorities in the United States. The participants used their academic and economic success to build their privileged position in the United States. Consequently, I argue that there is a shift in the Asian Indian immigrant discourse in the United States from that of assimilation or marginalization to a discourse of privilege. The terms of entry and privileged socio- economic positionality reduced or abolished the stigmatization at least from the perspective of the Asian Indian participants, which is highlighted by their claims that they never faced discrimination in the United States. Most importantly, the participants claimed that this positionality placed them close to whites and at a superior position than the non- white groups in the United States. This answers the first research question (RQ1), as it showed that the Asian Indian participants strategically constructed their identity to claim closeness to whites and differentiated themselves from non- whites in order to create a superior subject position in the U.S. structured formation.

Further, the study demonstrated that the participants selectively used the trope of racelessness to deny their privileged positionality and, simultaneously, used "race" to indicate their disadvantaged positions as immigrants. Therefore, through this racial pivoting and racelessness claims the participants' aligned themselves with the dominant racial discourse (Halualani et al., 2006). Consequently, I argue that in their perception of the other minorities in the United States, the participants perpetuated the dominant white ideology. Additionally,

through the rejection of the affirmative action policies the participants reaffirmed the notion that whites are the real victims of anti-racism and political correctness. The study showed that the participants claimed closeness to whites on the grounds that both groups (Whites and Asian Indians) were victims of antiracist policies. This answers the second research question (RQ2) as the study showed that the participants aligned themselves with whiteness in their perceptions of other non- white groups in the United States. I argue that this study extends the framework of racial incorporation and intercultural translation (Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2009; Goldberg, 2005; Roediger, 2005) by demonstrating how immigrants place themselves, and are placed in the antagonistic relationship between the dominant power holders and the marginalized groups within the United States. I further argue that this becomes an important implication not only for immigrant studies but also for the study of whiteness.

Racial Incorporation of immigrants

This study contributes to the further development of the racial incorporation framework (Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2009; Goldberg, 2005; Roediger, 2001) by demonstrating how the Asian Indian participants were racially incorporated in relation to white and non- white groups. The study highlights intercultural translation and the symbolic-material dynamics in immigrants' incorporation into racial structures of domination. Drzewiecka & Steyn (2012) proposed the concept of racial incorporation to explain how immigrants' alignment with the dominant group perpetuates discrimination and exploitation. The participants in this study claimed advantageous position in the U.S. structural hierarchy based on their privileged terms of entry. Gee (2011) suggested that individuals create situated meanings in a given context based on their understanding of that context and past experiences. Based on Gee's conception these situated communicative acts are means by which immigrants negotiate identities in the dynamics of any

given social environment or situation. The participants strategically negotiated their identity to claim closeness and inclusion to whiteness as well as to differentiate themselves from other non-white groups.

Intercultural translation

The framework of translation helped to address how the participants created new meanings in the new contexts of their host country. The concept of translation explains how meanings, messages, and knowledge from one cultural/racial context are transformed and integrated to another cultural/racial context to form new sets of meanings (Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2009). This study showed that the participants racial incorporation involved translation where cultural and racial meanings were not just replaced in transitions from one cultural-racial context to another but instead were contextually altered or connected and then knit together with their preexisting ideas and beliefs. For example, many participants indicated their positive reception by whites and therefore denied any race based discrimination in the United States. It should be noted here that the dominant conception in India is that racism existed only during colonial eras before India won independence from British colonialism. Therefore, based on their preexisting conception (which was rooted in their racial beliefs in India) coupled with their positive reception by whites, many participants indicated there was no racism in the United States as their experience was opposite to the history of colonial experience. They translated the denial or race in India into the white discourses denying race and racism in the United States.

In their alignment with whiteness, the participants' did not replace previous cultural or racial identities, neither did they just add new meanings on to the existing meanings. Rather, they modified them by integrating preexisting identity, as they oscillated between inclusion and exclusion in their travels between cultures (Clifford, 1988). Stuart Hall (1992) argued that this

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oscillation gave new meanings to cultural identities, as they became fluid in nature. Intercultural communication scholars Hegde (1998) and Flores (2003) proposed that identities are fluid and multiple, but their conceptions were focused on the process of adaptation and assimilation. Drzewiecka & Steyn's (2009) proposed the concept of translation to theorize how certain forms of fluidities become fixed in ways that support structures of racial domination and subordination. For example, the analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that the participants perceived themselves as close to whites as they claimed inclusion on advantageous terms and "othered" the other minority and immigrant groups as inferior, thereby to enhance white power structures. In these claims of inclusion and exclusion the narratives demonstrated the participants' blending of the two different cultural-racial-political distinct meanings, that is racism in the United States and class difference in India, which though distinct yet had related cultural, political, and historical elements. It is necessary to mention here that India is a high status based society and there are tremendous disparities between classes (Chatterjee, 1993a). Predominantly in urban middle and upper classes areas, peoples' socioeconomic and educational status puts them in "respectable positions" and provides them with relatively easy access to education, and jobs. The analysis revealed that the participants blended their existing meanings of class difference with the context of racism in the United States in the process of translation. However, even though there is ambiguity as to whether racism and class difference are similar in India, Chatterjee (1993a) argued that it is necessary to recognize that race had a significant role in the formation of India as a nation even though dominant racial discourse in India considered it to pertain to differences based on skin pigmentation.

The translation framework also helped to explain how the Asian Indian participants used strategic discursive maneuvers to identify with whites. Drzewiecka & Steyn (2009) argued that

translation is a strategic and political act as it involves "manipulation and maneuvering through the discursive field to secure advantage" (p. 213). The analysis of interviews revealed how the participants claimed equivalence (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) to whiteness, secured incorporation through increased claims of inclusion, and suppressed any inconvenient but significant meanings. For example, some participants emphasized their susceptibility as immigrants, discounted the advantageous conditions of their emigration, and attempted to dismiss black and Latino struggles for equality, thereby removing probable conclusions of advantageous inclusion over others. Therefore, translation framework helped to explain the conception of Asian Indian participants' strategic exclusion of 'others.'

This study examined how Asian Indian immigrants translated themselves through whites, blacks, Latinos and other Asian groups. Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000) pointed out the importance of the construction of identity with respect to "other." They further stated that the notion of political frontiers and antagonism highlighted in discourses helps to understand the role "others" play in the construction of identities. Asian Indian participants translated themselves as perpetuators of white ideology through blacks and Latino minorities in the United States. These minorities helped the participants to establish differences (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) with them, and in turn claim equivalence with whites. Through this process, the participants incorporated themselves into whiteness and the "others" helped them in asserting their subject position in the structured formation. The "othering" was further reflected in dissatisfaction with their group identity and rejection of their Asian identity label. In the process of establishing their uniqueness, the immigrants differentiated and "othered" the different ethnic groups in Asia, who were other to the whites. The participants' responses in this study demonstrated that their incorporation involved the struggles along and within the racial antagonisms in the United States. As Howarth

and Stavrakakis (2000) argued, antagonisms occur "because social agents are unable to attain fully their identity" (p. 10). The participants who were constantly negotiating their immigrant identity as "other" of the whites incorporated themselves in proximity to whiteness through their constructions of minorities and other immigrants (the 'other' of whites) as the 'other' of Asian Indian immigrants. For example, the Asian Indian participants claimed exclusion of other groups in terms of the legalities of immigration to the United States (highlighting the illegality of other immigrants). Further, they voiced their grudge against the U.S. stance over terrorism control in South East Asia (where India is an U.S. ally in anti-Islam war), and in terms of socio- economic position of other minorities (where the blacks and Latinos were less educated and unsuccessful socio- economically) in their narratives. In all these cases, presence of certain specific statements indicated an establishment of a chair of equivalence (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) with whiteness and simultaneously a chain of difference from the other non- white groups. To sum up, the translation framework explains nuances in translation of identities from one cultural-racial-political context to another.

Material-symbolic dynamics

This study sought to understand how immigrants incorporate themselves and are incorporated racially within structures of racist domination and subordination. The current study showed that both symbolic and material elements placed Asian Indian participants within a structured difference in relation to white and non-white groups. The analysis revealed the ways in which they aligned themselves with whites in ways that perpetuated discrimination and exploitation. For example, the participants used material and symbolic elements to create advantageous positions for identification. The identities were not simply culturally constructed, rather were created within material structures that made the meanings of their identity possible.

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The advantageous material positions not only helped to shape participants' subject positions, their narratives suggested that their positionality was further strengthened through claims of material differences with other groups. Drzewiecka & Steyn (2012) had argued that the material and the symbolic terms becomes part of the social structure, therefore, these positions become necessary for immigrants, who are in need to establish their subject positions in the host country (Goldberg, 2005). It therefore becomes critical to understand how new cultural meanings are created through certain material resources that are structured through racial differences. The analysis in this study exposed how participants struggled over their immigrant situation and in the process of incorporation constructed new identity through a combination of cultural meanings and material elements. It also helped to understand how participants' claims to belonging concealed the claims to privilege and prospects of exploitation.

The study demonstrated that Asian Indian participants' identities were formed through racially structured conditions of admission to the United States, where immigrants with high education and upper socio-economic status were granted admission. These terms of entry positioned participants to construct their identities in ways that helped them to secure their position in racial structures of the host country. While phenotypical differences precluded them from equivalence (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) to whiteness, their admittance and inclusion on material and symbolic terms provided them with a sense of professional (as academics and high skilled professionals) and cultural belonging. With time, the participants felt this sense of belonging superseded their non-white immigrant stigmatization. Their privileged terms of entry enabled them to claim equivalence to whiteness and difference from black and other colored minorities. And vice versa, through these claims of difference from these other groups, the Asian Indian participants asserted their belonging, affirmation, and privilege. As this sub-section

showed, the concept of incorporation used in this study helped to expose the various strategies and manners used by the Asian Indian participants to acquire economically and socially advantageous positions in the U.S. structural hierarchy.

Racial Pivoting

The study found that the participants' racial incorporation also involved racial pivoting and ideological whitening. This study illustrated the ways in which individuals perform the structural formations of race in random and ambiguous ways (Halualani et al, 2006). The participants used race strategically to enact different racial subject positions. Stuart Hall's (1980) conception of race as a floating signifier helps to explain how race is both situated and dynamic. The analysis demonstrated that race was meaningfully encoded on a cultural basis indicating shifting needs, identify positions, and experiences. Study participants denied race to secure power by aligning with dominant ideologies of racelessness/color-blindness whereas they also used race to indicate their disadvantages as non-white immigrants. In some instances, both uses occurred simultaneously. This supported Halualani et al.'s (2006) arguments that race moves across a spectrum from being problematic to privileged. The authors also demonstrated that diversity and race were used purposefully in different ways "for specific situated power relations and political needs and moments" at the level of personal and structural formations (Halualani et. al., 2006, p. 89). This was also evident in the Asian Indian participants' narrative where they indicated their negative feelings towards affirmative action policies for racial minorities in the United States. At the same time, the participants meticulously articulated the narrative of racelessness that augmented white power structure. Therefore, race proved to be simultaneously problematic and useful across the continuum of advantaged and marginalized positions claimed strategically by the participants. The analysis demonstrates that a racelessness discourse is used

to establish and maintain racial privilege and to weaken claims of racism. Racial pivoting, as Halualani et al. (2006) described it, helped to associate with a position of privilege as individuals separated from race and its effects.

The analysis demonstrated that immigrants' identity in the United States involves positioning within discourses about race that offer the greatest advantage. It showed that the Asian Indians turned away from race in order to dismiss claims of preferential and privileged treatment, but invoked racism to complain about other racial minority groups. They thus pivoted between race and racelessness.

Contribution of the study

Goldberg (2005) and Roediger (2005) argued that European immigrants to the United States were racially Americanized and became "white" by being placed and absorbed in the black and white binary. Drzewiecka & Steyn (2009) showed that the Polish immigrants' identity that was marginalized in the European context was whitened in South Africa. The authors argued that the Polish immigrants' privileged skin pigmentation aided the process of transition between the two different cultural and social contexts. In contrast to Drzewiecka & Steyn's (2009) work, this study is based in the U.S. context and focused on immigrants whose racial identity had been historically whitened and then darkened. This study therefore extends the concepts of racial incorporation and intercultural translation (Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2009) by showing that the Asian Indian participants' ambiguous phenotypic racialization combined with their advantageous material positions helped to incorporate them into racial structures of domination. Further, it demonstrated how Asian Indian immigrants incorporated themselves and were incorporated in a manner that extended white racial advantage.

This study's perspective departed from the existing literature on Asian Indians (Barringer and Kassebaum, 1989; Fernandez, 1998; Hegde, 1998; Saran, 1985; Somani, 2010). While previous studies focused on cultural adjustment, or stages of adaptation, they did not illuminate how Asian Indian immigrants position themselves and are positioned within racial structures. In a recent ethnography on Asian Indian immigrants, Hickey (2006) focused on how the high influx of Asian Indian immigrant created a visible change in the cultural landscape of a predominantly white mid western region. Somani (2010) highlighted the identity construction by the immigrants as the process of cultural adaptation where the immigrant cohort acculturated into the dominant group culture by learning how to act more "American" (p. 78). While these studies showed cultural changes in both immigrants and their environment, the current study addresses how immigrants are positioned and position themselves in racial terms. .

The findings of this thesis different from studies that demonstrated marginalization of the Asian Indians in comparison to whites' with respect to level of income (Barringer and Kassebaum, 1989; Fernandez, 1998). These studies were focused on individuals who were employed in the lower ranks of the corporate sectors, who faced the glass ceiling, which barred the participants from rising to managerial positions. However, the participants of these studies were mainly bachelor degree holders, thereby different from the material- symbolically advanced masters or doctorate degree holder participants of this study.

This study's findings also differ from Hegde (1998) who examined post-1965 Asian Indian immigrant identity as the site of both structural constraints and racial categorizations imposed by the dominant group. She indicated that the new identity constructed by the Asian Indian immigrant women became representative of the identity of marginalized immigrant group. The major difference between the two studies is that Hegde's (1998) study participants were all

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women, and secondly they were either second-generation Asian Indian graduate students or homemaker, or professionals like secretaries in organizations and managers in fast food joints. . There can be many reasons for the difference in the findings of the two studies. It is possible that since Hegde's (1998) study, which was conducted almost 15 years ago and found a discourse of marginalization, the positionality of Asian Indian immigrants has shifted. Another possibility is that the different samples and the participants' different material positions produced different identity discourses.

This thesis shows that the participants constituted their identity through engagements with oppressive systems by their alignment with dominant whites. In their racial incorporation, the participants indicated the generosity of whites who provide plethora of opportunities to minorities, whereas blamed the minorities for their lack of success. Therefore, this study demonstrates a shift in the Asian Indian discourse, a change from that of assimilation or marginalization to a discourse of privilege.

Future Research

Abraham (2002) noted that the recent immigration of sponsored relatives of Asian Indian U.S. residents have changed the demographic composition of the Asian Indian community. It brought considerable variation along such dimensions as education, occupation, class, and gender experiences. Therefore, in order for immigration scholars to accurately capture the lived experiences of this unique immigrant group, extensive in depth research is needed that would account for the diversity and variations within the Asian Indian immigrant community. This study to some extent focused on the importance of dimensions such as education, occupation, and socio-economic class, in immigrants' racial incorporation. Additionally, comparative

analyses of occupational class, education, and socio-economic activism may further provide insights into the complexities of Asian Indians in contemporary America.

Previous immigration studies showed negative historical trends that have often accompanied economic downturn in America (Flores, 2003). The findings of this study demonstrated that while the Asian Indian participants capitalized on their privileged terms of entry and won placement close to whites (even if not as whites) in the U.S. social racial structure, their success was turning against them and they were now becoming conscious of being seen as a threat and excluded in new ways. Therefore, in light of this finding I argue that it is necessary to investigate how Asian Indian immigrants are perceived and represented and how the economic recession shapes these perceptions.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. When did you first come to the U.S.?

   ➢ Ask them about how they came to the US. did they experience any problems with immigrating?

   ➢ Green Card, citizenship? Was it at any point difficult?

2. What were your initial impressions?

   ➢ Specifically about the common people here?

3. When people ask you who you are, how do you identify yourself?

   ➢ Who asks you?

   ➢ What does it mean to you?

   ➢ Do you see any commonality with other Asians?

4. According to you what are the Asian Indian cultural ways of living?

5. How do you define yourself ethnically/racially?

   ➢ Does it differ in India or in the US?

   ➢ What the terms "race" or "ethnicity" mean to you?

   ➢ Do you think that Americans perceive Asian Indians as a racial group? Or as an ethnic group?

   ➢ What does that mean to you?

6. Do other's views influence how you identify?

   ➢ How?

7. Do you feel that the way that you personally identify racially/ethnically is different from the way your racial/ethnic identity is perceived by others?

- ➢ How so?

- ➢ How do you think others perceive you?

- ➢ In terms of what labels but also in terms of characteristics people assign to you, any assumptions, stereotypes, etc.

- ➢ What views about Asian Indians did you encountered?

- ➢ In what situations?

- ➢ Do different groups of Americans perceive you/Asian Indian people differently? If not sure, then ask, whites? blacks?

- ➢ Both personally in your experience, but also on a more general level, i.e., do blacks perceive Asian Indians differently than whites? Also, do other immigrant groups perceive Asian Indian immigrants differently? Not maybe your personal experience, but what do you think?

8. When did you become aware of your ethnic/racial identity?

- ➢ Was there any particular event that contributed to this event?

  - o Examples, incidents, stories etc.

9. Have you ever experienced discrimination?

- ➢ If so, from which racial/ethnic group? Please explain?

10. How has this influenced your feelings about your ethnic group?

- ➢ Do you think that it has always changed in the same way?

11. Does race matter in the US?

- ➢ Why? /Why not?

- ➢ How? How do you know?

- ➢ When did you first learn it?

➢ What did you learn?

➢ Can you think about specific moments when they learned the difference between blacks and whites?

➢ What about the Hispanics/Latinos?

12. How is the racial structure hierarchy in India?

13. Is there a conflict between different racial groups in the U.S.?

➢ What about?

➢ Do blacks and whites have the same views on racial relations in the US?

➢ What are the relations between Asian Indians and blacks?

➢ How do you know this?

14. Do you see differences in the material position of various racial groups in the US?

➢ Why are there such differences?

➢ Why do you think certain groups have a higher material standing then other groups?

➢ Why some groups have better education and others do not. (Only if they say that some groups have better education).

15. What they think about Affirmative action policy here?

➢ What do they think about the policy in the US? Should there be affirmative action? There is an equivalent policy in India, what do you think about that in India?

16. Has your ethnic/racial identity changed in the U.S. over time?

17. Do you think of yourself as becoming American?

➢ What does it mean to you?

18. Do you have American friends?

➢ Who are they?

➢ What are their backgrounds?

19. What types of images and characteristics come to mind when you think of other ethnic groups?

20. Have there been times where you feel that you have benefitted from your ethnic identity?

21. How much of a sense of unity do you feel with other Asian racial/ethnic groups?