

Mass Media and the Tolerance of Middle-Class Immigrant Indian Women in the United States: Implications for their Adjustment Process

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the role of American and Indian mass media in defining the boundaries of a subjective tolerance for middle-class immigrant Indian women wherein they are required to mainstream only 'acceptable' behavior while adhering to the role of being a 'traditional' wife/daughter in the private domain. In other words, 'tolerance' has multiple connotations for these women: (a) Being tolerated by the Indian community (both in the diaspora and at 'home') while re-defining and exploring identities beyond that of wife, mother and daughter; and (b) Being tolerated by the mainstream American community while finding ways to retain certain religio-cultural public characteristics and ways of life that are important to them.*

In-depth interviews with ten middle-class immigrant Indian women in the Detroit metropolitan area are used to explore the following questions: Are middle-class immigrant Indian women being 'tolerated' by American society due to their use of personal space, e.g., ethnic media, to experience familiar, 'traditional' environments? Are immigrant Indian women being 'tolerated' by the diasporic community because of their subscription to 'traditional' norms in interpersonal relationships?

The paper concludes that inclusion and the sense of linkage to the homeland comes at the cost of being an obedient and sacrificing mother and wife. On the other hand, inclusion and the sense of connection to the hostland comes at the cost of being an independent worker who is able to juggle multiple responsibilities on her own. The net result is an overall sense of exclusion that is both perpetuated and assuaged by American and ethnic mass media within a continuous circle. Hence, as suggested by theory, middle-class immigrant Indian women support a bi-cultural identity and the presence of American and ethnic mass media reiterates the need for this bi-culturalism, thereby promoting a subjective brand of toleration.

Introduction

The immigrant journey of learning to operate in the host milieu is marked by contradictions as new arrivals strive to take on 'acceptable' roles and behaviors in their adopted country while at the same time preserving their traditions and culture (Mortland, 2001). The result is an increasing privatization of activities and behavior that pertains to tradition and culture since, for the most part, only the benign symbols of culture are mainstreamed as stereotypical representations of 'tradition' (Ryneanson, 2001). To what extent do mass media (defined herein to include television, telephone, newspaper, radio and the Internet) assist both patterns of adjustment: Privatization of tradition and culture and public mainstreaming of non-threatening symbols of cultural representation? In particular, how do American and ethnic media,¹ which are increasingly accessible to diasporic communities, determine the criteria via which immigrant women are tolerated? This paper limits its examination of this issue to middle-class Asian Indian women in the United States.

This paper presents a narrative on the role of American media in promoting a brand of tolerance that sustains the public cultural representation of Asian Indians via the 'model minority' myth wherein immigrant women are either directly or indirectly implicated in ensuring the economic success of their families and communities. This public image is sometimes in stark contrast to the 'traditional' stereotyping of the Indian Woman, subscribed to and unfailingly perpetuated by ethnic media, wherein women are implicated as protectors of culture (Natarajan, 1994). Are middle-class immigrant Indian women being 'tolerated' by American society due to their use of personal space, e.g., ethnic media, to experience familiar, 'traditional' environments? Are immigrant Indian women being 'tolerated' by the diasporic community because of their subscription to 'traditional' norms in interpersonal relationships? As such, the paper explores the role of American and ethnic (i.e., Indian) mass media in possibly perpetuating a brand of subjective tolerance, i.e., the ability to mainstream only acceptable and stereotypical representations of 'otherness,' of middle-class Indian immigrants in the U.S.

¹ Ethnic media include radio (e.g., local community channels), newspapers (e.g., *India Abroad* which is a North American newspaper for the Indian diaspora), the Internet (e.g., news websites, local community links for services by ethnic service providers), television (e.g., satellite services such as Dish that allow real-time access to Indian channels catering to the diaspora).

The narrative presented herein is based on in-depth interviews with ten middle-class immigrant Indian women in the Detroit metropolitan area.² These women immigrated to the United States within the arranged marriage system in the past decade and had at least a bachelor's degree. The snowball sampling technique was used to obtain the sample group. It is understood that using the snowballing technique does not yield a representative sample (Press, 1991). However, such sampling is useful in cases such as these, where the population is difficult to reach and is distributed non-randomly (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). It also allows for sample selection based on specific criteria, e.g., immigrant status. Furthermore, this research is not intended to be representative of immigrant Indian women, but to explore their access and use of ethnic and American mass media and its consequences, if any, in (re)negotiating their identities in the diaspora.

The interviews were conducted while maintaining ethical standards of informed consent, full disclosure and being true to oneself about preconceived notions (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). My positioning, as a middle-class immigrant Indian woman, posed both opportunities and challenges during the data collection. It not only allowed me access to my sample, but it also assisted in making participants feel comfortable talking with me because they felt a sort of kinship. On the other hand, it may have left certain issues unsaid insofar as the participants may have assumed my understanding of them by default, e.g., their replies of "...you know..." around the issue of ensuring a "peaceful family life" when probed by me.³

It should be noted that this paper refrains from categorizing the immigrant experience as acculturative. Adjustment differs from acculturation insofar as in the case of some individuals, it allows for the possibility that no acculturation takes place (Espin, 1999). The increasing possibility of this derives from the impact of mass media in allowing for the creation of private spaces that virtually simulate the home country environment thereby giving impetus to a (re)socialization and identity (re)negotiation process that is impacted not only by the physical environment, but the virtual environment as well (Appadurai, 1996).

The paper begins by providing a theoretical background on the immigrant Indian experience, with particular reference to gendered issues. It then moves into the narrative portion and creates links between media access and use and the re-

² A total of 15 women were interviewed. The first three interviews were for the purposes of pre-testing. Two had to be dropped from the sample owing to violation of one or more controls: education and period of immigration.

³ In keeping with the promise of confidentiality made to the participants, the paper does not include the names of any respondents. Those quotations without citations indicate the use of a verbatim participant response.

negotiation of identities by middle-class Indian women. The conclusion is presented at the end of the paper.

The Feminized Immigrant Experience

Asian Indians began immigrating to the United States in considerable numbers only after the Immigration Act of 1965, when racial restrictions were lifted. The 1990 census shows that there was a 110.6 percent increase in the Asian Indian population of the United States from 387,223 in 1980 to 815,447 in 1990 (Rayaprol 1997: 15). The 2000 census reported that 1.9 million Asian Indians reside in the U.S. According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS),⁴ Indians were the second largest immigrant group in America in 2001.⁵

Traditionally, Indians have been labeled a 'model minority.' This stereotype refers to certain immigrant communities, including Asian Indians, who have achieved economic success without defining a political identity that addresses the socio-economic problems either within their communities (e.g., domestic violence) or those arising from interaction with mainstream society (e.g., racism). The public acceptance of the Asian Indian community – as indicated by the relatively low levels of residential and professional discrimination (Smith & Edmonston, 1997) – appears to be based on their ability to mainstream their public lifestyles in maintaining the dominant standards of economic success. This model community stereotype, however, is reserved only for well-educated, middle-class Indians. Working-class Indians are unable to achieve the level of financial security that affords middle-class Indians insularity from open exclusion. As such, working-class Indians are portrayed in a negative light as non-English speaking 'dot' people who drive taxis and own party stores and motels. Hence, tolerance appears as a function of socioeconomic status, i.e., it is reserved for professional, well-educated Indian women and men.

According to the INS, of all immigrants in 1998, 72 percent came under the Family Sponsored laws, otherwise known as the family reunification law. Of those who were family-sponsored, 65 percent were spouses and children. A large percentage of female spouses (39 percent) gain entrance as newly married spouses (Assar, 1999: 85). Despite their large numbers, there is no policy in place

⁴ As of March 1, 2003, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) became the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The INS's key functions have been divided into three departments within the DHS: Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS), Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (BICE), and Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (BCBP).

⁵ Refer to: <http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/aboutus/statistics/IMM2001.pdf>

that addresses the specific needs of immigrant women independent of their families⁶ (Espin, 1999, Kelson & DeLaet, 1999). On the contrary, the family reunification law is aimed at a hands-off policy that places responsibility for the “settlement process...on family networks” (Reitz, 1998: 104).

However, regardless of their unique cultural contexts, all immigrant women are exposed to the American world via mass media. The extent of exposure to ethnic media such as radio is a function of the ethnic population, e.g., only areas with large concentrations are able to produce and sustain ethnic radio programs. However, with the increasing popularity of satellite television and the Internet, ethnic media are becoming central to the immigrant experience.

Indian immigrants are the most spatially dispersed immigrant group in the United States (Kurien, 1999). The dispersion of Indian immigrants within the United States and across the world has fostered the growth of their ethnic media, mostly the Internet and television. Indians increasingly rely on these “mediascapes” to recreate familiar environments outside the home country, e.g., listening to live or recorded public prayers from temples in India on the Internet (Appadurai, 1996). Hence, public spaces are re-created and re-imagined within safer, private environs in the diaspora thereby blurring the boundary between “electronic space” and “ethnic space.” (Vale & Dobrow, 1998: 91) This inter-linkage between private, electronic and ethnic space has tremendous implications on the process of adjustment for immigrants, in particular female immigrants for whom the private sphere holds greater significance.⁷

The reliance on media by Indian immigrant women is of particular interest because they increasingly rely on ethnic mass media to re-create familiar environments and to pass along ‘traditional’ family values and traditions to their children (Grewal, 2003). Given that arranged marriages⁸ continue to be the norm, these immigrant women, for the first time in their lives, learn to live with a

⁶ Some policy changes have been instituted to allow women access to emergency services. For instance, the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which was reauthorized in 2000, includes “protection for battered undocumented women and children” (Fix and Zimmermann, 1997: 255).

⁷ Even though the restriction of women within the private space – household and religion – has been present since time immemorial, as such, Indian women have identified the household as the primary site of oppression ever since the beginning of feminist literature, around the 6th century BC (Tharu and Lalita, 1991). This subordination has been formalized and institutionally enforced by the Indian patriarchal structures since British colonial rule in 1757 when the definite public-private divide of the West (Church-State) was transferred to Britain’s colonized territories, including India (Carroll, 1989).

⁸ Arranged marriage refers to the social practice wherein families, rather than the partners themselves, decide a marital alliance. Consequently, the husband and wife are practically strangers at the time of the marriage.

strange man “without the support system provided by the other female members of her family” (Dasgupta, 1989: 140). Even though many immigrant Indian women are better able to negotiate egalitarian gender relations and achieve economic independence (Rayaprol, 1997), for those who are unable to rely on interpersonal ties to understand the host milieu, mass media are a significant socializing force. In fact, media access and use is worthy of investigation because of its significant socialization role in the globalized society (Meyerowitz, 1985, Bandura, 1994).

Gumpert and Drucker (1998: 88) note that mass media serve “immigrants in two major ways: to *connect* members to the immigrant community with each other and to *link* individuals to their homeland” [emphasis added]. In the case of Indian ethnic media, they propagate the “crucial link between the unity of the family and the unity of the nation” (Mankekar, 1993: 478) by relying on “formulaic ingredients” that place women as “the good homemaker, the heroine, the obedient daughter, wife and mother” (Balakrishnan, 1994: 39). Such Indian patriarchal notions of women’s responsibility “for maintaining [an] Indian home in the diaspora by remaining true to her Indian womanhood” are in contrast to the depictions of women on American media where they are heralded as ‘Superwomen’ insofar as they are able to seamlessly juggle the responsibilities of their professions and families without sacrificing their sexuality and flawless physical appearance (Macdonald, 1995). Both are essentialist and simplistic portrayals, which, nonetheless, might be impacting immigrant women’s adjustment given the socialization role of mass media.

With respect to the adjustment of middle-class Indian immigrant women, some suggest that it has resulted in the creation of bi-cultural identities such that in the public they are “more openly assertive and display more initiative and independence than is characteristic in an Indian setting, while [in the ‘private sphere’] still retaining much of the... involvement in hierarchical relationships in the Indian family and groups” (Roland, 1997: 155). These women uphold the model minority and Superwoman stereotypes by entering the public sphere of paid employment while simultaneously ensuring the preservation of Indian culture and tradition in the private sphere. Hence, the adjustment process has contradictory meaning systems for a middle-class immigrant Indian woman as she is held “responsible not only for her family’s honor but also for the honor of the ‘model minority community’ in a foreign society” (Abraham, 2000: 24). What meaning, then, does ‘tolerance’ hold for this constituency of middle-class immigrant Indian women who are required to develop a bi-cultural identity in order to be ‘included’ – by way of the model community stereotype – in American society and – by way of adhering to as carriers of tradition and

‘protectors’ of private spaces – in the diasporic Indian society? Hence, ‘tolerance’ has multiple connotations for this constituency: (a) Being tolerated by the Indian community (both in the diaspora and at ‘home’) while re-defining and exploring identities beyond that of wife, mother and daughter; and (b) Being tolerated by the mainstream American community while finding ways to retain certain religious-cultural public characteristics and ways of life important to them.

Mass Mediated Diasporic Reality of Middle-Class Indian Women

Of the women who participated in this research, with the exception of one who was also the most recent immigrant, although not the youngest, all were mothers. The overall profile of the interview subjects is fairly homogenous: they all come from Northern India⁹ and are in the age group of 28-32 years. Out of the sample of ten subjects, five were currently working outside the home. The women worked in diverse fields such as computer engineering, teaching and the insurance industry. Of those women who were currently not working, with the exception of one, all had worked outside the home in the past. Their singular reason for giving up their careers was to take care of their children because they are not all comfortable with the idea of sending them to day care centers – the average age of the children was eight. The one woman who has never worked, a 29-year-old mother of two whose husband is a software engineer, does involve herself in volunteer activities at a local hospital.

American Mass Media

There is a tendency among the women interviewed to rely on media to make inferences and form attitudes about the acceptable roles and behavior of women in America. The first stereotype of American women emerged when stay-at-home women were asked why they would like to get a job. Their answers expressed their desire to fit in, to “be in touch with things” and to do what “all American women do,” i.e., have jobs. Another stereotype that emerged is of American women being self-centered and, consequently, not very good mothers. For instance, one 32-year-old stay-at-home mother of two children felt that “maintaining their figures” is a primary concern for American women which makes them focus on themselves and rely on daycare centers for the upbringing of their children. This points to the tendency of immigrant women, who may not have extensive inter-personal networks with Americans, to rely on mass media to form attitudes and opinions. This is in keeping with the media theory of

⁹ This is an important control since there are regional variations in India, especially between North and South, which can lead to significantly different attitudes on gender roles and behaviors.

dependency, which postulates that the less information a person has to begin with about a given issue (in this case American society), the greater their dependence on mass media communication (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1986).

Regardless of job status, all participants are being socialized by American mass media since it is relied on to better understand the host environment. The Internet, television and newspaper appear most useful in this regard. Participants mentioned using the Internet to “access everything” from “recipes” and “stocks” to doing a “job search” and “looking for day care.” The newspaper is used to find jobs, cars, real estate, and about local events to take their children to. Even as a number of participants expressed displeasure at not being able to access more international news, they appreciated some of the local focus insofar as it allowed them to “know what is going on” in their localities. As such, American mass media is a fountain of information for these immigrant women as they learn to operate within a new milieu. It is used for a variety of purposes as mentioned earlier. In addition to newspapers and the Internet, radio is used to find out about traffic and weather, and television to “learn about new products” and handle specific personal issues including parenting and depression. Hence, American media is a valuable source for coping with their new experiences.

At an individual level, American mass media poses a contradiction to the idealized images of the Indian woman presented in the ethnic media which place women, via ‘formulaic ingredients,’ within the framework of the mother and wife. As mentioned, American mass media introduce other dimensions for immigrant Indian women insofar as they paint a picture of women as superhuman. The shift in images, as articulated by a 30-year-old software consultant, “provokes a thought process that might not have happened otherwise” for immigrant Indian women and brings about “a new way of thinking” for them.

At the societal level, American mass media serve to cement the desire of immigrants to protect their children and families from the influence of ‘Americanization.’ The presence of American mass media appears to not only bring about “a new way of thinking” for middle-class immigrant Indian women in the sample, but also to assist them in making decisions as they learn “about new products” and how to make ‘appropriate’ parenting decisions. In particular, a 33-year-old mother of two who has gone from working as a cashier at a grocery store to becoming a programmer analyst, mentioned her reliance on television for making parenting decisions because “here when children grow up you make a lot of adjustments...When I see [how TV parents handle their children, I feel that maybe] I’m being too rigid.” It is helping her come to terms with the fact that “you have to deal with them very differently from how our parents dealt with us because of the difference in the environment.”

American mass media, then, work both at the individual and societal levels. However, they appear to have a much greater impact on altering certain individual behaviors: desire or actuality of gaining employment, making independent household decisions, and dealing with personal issues, e.g. parenting and depression. A 36-year-old woman who has been teaching in the U.S. for close to a decade shared her experience: “This one time I was really depressed and then I watched this show on TV which talked about the power of prayer and just like that, my depression was gone.” However, mass media have little impact at the societal level where culture and tradition continue to enjoy a stronghold, as manifest in the desire of immigrant women – whether they are new mothers or mothers of 10-year-olds, whether they are stay-at-home wives or professional mothers – to be good mothers and have “a peaceful family life.”

The role of American mass media, then, is double-edged: even as it connects the women to American society, it creates anxieties about being an ‘other’ in a world that is dominated by native-born women. In the latter role, American media do perpetuate a sense of exclusion from the mainstream among immigrant Indian women. This provides an added attraction to ethnic media for these women.

Ethnic Mass Media

Most women who did not have a subscription to Indian satellite television expressed the desire to subscribe in order to, as expressed by a 32-year-old mother of two children aged 8 and 1, “teach my kids who we are” such that they are imbued with the “same moral values that my parents gave me.” As such, private spaces are being used to (re)create such public environments as the extended family. The popular Indian cinema, accessed in the diaspora via satellite television and videos/DVDs, is an important vehicle for keeping the private spaces free of “contamination by dominant Western values” (Bhattacharjee, 1992: 38). This suggests that the project of linking ‘tradition’ with its depiction in popular culture, e.g., television, has the intended effect insofar as ethnic media are relied on by immigrant women to perpetuate socio-cultural values (Mankekar, 1999). As such, there is a desire amongst middle-class immigrant Indian women to ensure that their children grow up with ‘Indian’ morals and values so they, according to a 33-year-old programmer analyst and mother of two, “learn that dating a new guy or a new girl every day is not going to resolve their problems.” In order to ingrain these Indian values, the women turn to ethnic mass media, mostly Indian satellite television, to make them understand “how we are.” In addition, ethnic media, in particular, television serials and Hindi movies,

reinforce 'Indian' values of womanhood and help them feel less anxious about being 'different.'

Ethnic mass media, from the weekend Indian programs on radio to Indian satellite TV and the Internet, assist in creating a pseudo-environment for these women that seals some of the anxieties about being an Indian woman in America and assists in relaying and retaining traditional identities and culture. Such anxieties arise from American media's framing of native-born women as "playing golf," having time alone with husbands and "maintaining figures" – a lifestyle some felt is contradictory to their reality insofar as they "have" to sit at home and "make *rotis* [pita bread]."

In addition to television, the Internet is also used to maintain a virtual connection with "back home." Respondents use the Internet to get daily news feeds. A stay-at-home mother mentioned using it to "chat with my sister in India... catch up on Hindi movie gossip." Another 29-year-old mother working in the insurance industry said she used "Net-to-Phone"¹⁰ for [making] international [telephone] calls." On the other hand, the weekend Hindi programs on the radio are used not so much to create virtual links with India, but instead to reinforce a distinct Asian Indian community identity in the United States. Most respondents mentioned listening to these programs in order to "know more about community activities," showing of Hindi movies and plays, ethnic and travel services. Media, then, are important not just in the adjustment process of Indian women, but also in ensuring against "total assimilation into an alien culture" (Ramanujam, 1997: 147). Hence, Indian satellite TV and the Internet appeared as popular sources for blending electronic, ethnic and private spaces.

Ethnic media, then, sustain the need for self-sacrifice, simplicity, honesty and filial duty as a pre-requisite for tolerance (Natarajan, 1994). The traditional stereotypical Indian Woman becomes the natural and effective "antidote to the corrupting effect" of Western modernization that encourages women to step outside the home and question patriarchal oppression (Nabar, 1995: 44). Movie titles remind these women that their 'hearts' remain 'Indian' even though they have left their homeland.¹¹ This, of course, primes associations between being Indian and traditional.

While exposure to American mass media furthers the desire to gain employment, there is a continuing desire and need to be good, Indian mothers as

¹⁰ Net-to-Phone is the provision of a service by certain Web sites whereby people can connect to these sites by making a domestic phone call. These Web sites then make a telephonic connection to India for those logged on at very low rates. Hence, people in America can talk to people in India at a price comparable to that of a domestic telephone call.

¹¹ Refer to recent movie titles such as '*Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*' (*After All The Heart Remains Indian*), '*Aa Abh Laut Chale*' (*Come, Let's Go Back*).

depicted and celebrated by ethnic media. In other words, the public persona of the model minority, i.e., working Superwoman, co-resides with the private persona of being an Indian Woman. While the latter is sustained by ethnic media, the former appears as "Indian immigrant women, through [American] media, are exposed to the trend existing in the American society for women to have a right and even an obligation to participate in the labor force" (Dasgupta, 1989: 146).

In fact, of those women who are not employed outside the home, all expressed a desire to either be employed or go to school – this was true for both those who had worked previously and were currently unemployed and the one participant who had never worked outside the home. Their reasons for wanting to get a job were to be financially independent and, as mentioned earlier, the need to feel more a part of American society. One respondent, a 32-year-old mother with a Bachelor's degree, explicitly stated that her desire to get a job was not only to feel more adjusted, but also because it would allow her to be a better mother: "...raise my children right by blending over here by doing a job, [taking] care of the house and [raising] my kids right." Of the four employed women in the sample with children,¹² three have chosen jobs and careers that allow them "flexibility" and are "convenient" in terms of balancing family and work even though it is not "what I want to be doing." They mentioned how they would rather have different careers in business administration or, as a 28 year old mother of a seven-month-old daughter who has worked in various jobs including being a clerical assistant mentioned, "something in computers...but this job is very flexible so I like it [because of] that." The one person – a 31-year-old mother of two children and a computer engineer – who "always wanted to do a job like this one" regrets her career choice because of its demands on her time and wished that she had "done something in education so I could have some more time with [the] kids." As such, ethnic and American media together socialize immigrant women regarding the criterion for their toleration in diasporic and host societies, respectively. This (re)socialization reinforces the need to mainstream only 'acceptable' roles, i.e., working outside the home, in the public persona while reserving the 'traditional' roles, i.e., passing along family-centric cultural norms, for the private.

However, the public-private divide may also be blurring. For instance, a 32-year-old stay-at-home mother of two who used to work as an office assistant at a bank mentioned that she would like to begin working again and was thinking of starting an "online business from home." Hence, emerging communication technologies are promising spaces for immigrant women to explore ways to

¹² The fifth subject who had a job outside the home does not have any children. She was also the most satisfied with her career choice and her current job.

challenge traditional public-private distinctions and take on secondary roles even as they continue to engage in primary identification as wife and mother. Mass media, then, allow for catering to multiple criteria for toleration insofar as they support their dual desires to be 'good' mothers/wives and financially independent individuals.

Tolerance or Mass Mediated Interactions?

Overall, there appears to be a pattern such that American mass media is relied on to make individual-level changes and decisions while ethnic mass media compose the source that sustains family-level and societal priorities and behavior. The results indicate, as suggested by theory, that the participants are more comfortable mainstreaming only acceptable public behavior and using the private to negotiate the dualities of immigrant life. The following trends emerged regarding middle-class immigrant Indian women's renegotiation of identities when examined through a mass mediated lens:

1. American mass media are used to change individual behavior and attitudes. This is particularly obvious in the areas of employment, parenting and self-help.
2. Ethnic mass media are used to retain 'traditional,' societal behavior and attitudes. This is particularly obvious in the areas of sexuality, religion and importance of family.

This paper, then, articulates the role of American and ethnic mass media in sustaining a bi-cultural identity of middle-class Indian immigrant women by providing them with conflicting criteria for toleration. Even as American mass media urges immigrant Indian women to explore new opportunities and create spaces for self-determination, they feed the larger diasporic fear of assimilation such that there is a need to 'protect' the private spheres from being 'Americanized.' American media are a source of socialization, entertainment and information about practical (e.g., daily events) and personal (e.g., parenting) issues. Hence, American media expose immigrant Indian women to their new host environment even as ethnic media are relied on to retain and relay Indian culture and ways of being.

The role of mass media is undeniable as private, electronic and ethnic spaces merge to support the existence of a complex set of prioritizations that are aimed at continuously addressing conflicts inherent in the media messages. In other words, inclusion and the sense of *linkage* to the homeland come at the cost of being an obedient and sacrificing mother and wife. On the other hand, inclusion and the sense of *connection* to the hostland come at the cost of being an

independent worker who is able to juggle multiple responsibilities on her own. The net result is an overall sense of exclusion that is both perpetuated and assuaged by American and ethnic mass media within a continuous circle. Hence, as suggested by theory, middle-class immigrant Indian women support a bi-cultural identity and the presence of American and ethnic mass media reiterates the need for this bi-culturalism, thereby promoting a subjective brand of toleration.

The meaning system of 'tolerance' for middle-class immigrant Indian women is a complex web of public and private behavioral expectations, needs and desires into which some insight is afforded when examining their interaction with American and ethnic mass media. With respect to the specific role of mass media, this paper suggests that mass media are reflectors of identity choices rather than determinants. They pull both ways: to make immigrant women feel included and excluded. This, then, raises other questions such as: tolerance and inclusion by whom and for what purpose? Do immigrant women want to feel included in ethnic communities more than host communities or not? To what extent can inclusion in popular cultural representations result in a sense of belonging? Answers to such questions might assist in more nuanced understandings about the adjustment process of immigrants as observed through the lens of mass media.

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