MEMOIRS OF *BHARITYA NARIS* (INDIAN WOMEN): GENDER, WORK AND FAMILY IN TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

By

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To the memory of my grandmothers Alamelu Ammal Subramaniam and Jovita Philomena Anna-Maria Cordeiro, whose strength and grace inspire me.
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Having arrived in the United States five years ago as an immigrant, the successful completion of this dissertation represents the culmination of my personal ambitions, as well as the commencement of my migrant destiny. This undertaking would have been impossible without the array of family, friends, and mentors who mark my life, and have helped in shaping my accomplishments. It is this group of people that I acknowledge with my deepest thanks.

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Employing the engendering migration perspective, this dissertation examines the migration and settlement of Tamil (an Indian regional group) professional women in Atlanta. Specifically, it asks three inter-related questions: (1) How do first-generation Tamil professional women negotiate with gender in their migration to and settlement in the United States, (2) How are their professional lives circumscribed by their intersectional social location as upper-caste/class, immigrant women of color, and mothers in the United States, (3) What are the gendered work-family negotiations in their households. Drawing on an 8 month ethnography and 33 multi-part in-depth interviews (each approximately 4-5 hours in duration) with 33 married, Tamil women professionals, my research theorizes the dialectical relationship between gender organizing all aspects of Tamil women’s migration and settlement, while being reconfigured through it, within a transnational context that accounts for the mutuality of agency and structure in shaping their destinies. In the process, it demonstrates the interconnections between the gendered realms of migration, work, and family.

Accordingly, I argue that Tamil women’s migration is structured by their social location in India such that they accommodatively reconfigure emphasized Tamil femininity by bargaining with power hierarchies (parents and spouses) within their gendered households and communities,
to undertake migration in the pursuit of their personal ambitions to be professionals, and familial ones to improve their quality of life. In the United States, through their gendered approach to settlement and engagement in professional work, they reconstitute transported emphasized Tamil femininity, by constructing and performing *integrated femininity*. I theorize that integrated femininity expands the boundaries of emphasized Tamil femininity through the incorporation of their professional identities into their core of femininity, such that it is distinct from and yet connected to the socially designated identities of wife and mother. Hence integrated femininity has three faces – professional, wife, and mother, each manifesting with increasing or decreasing prominence at different stages in their lives. Integrated femininity is then performed by Tamil women in their households such that they construct *new Tamil/Indian family forms* characterized by husbands’ increased (although not always equitable) involvement in household labor, equitable decision making, and wives’ retention of cooking and cultural socialization as a mechanism of maintaining the Indian character of their families as a bastion of resistance against their assimilation into white, upper-middle/upper-class America. This dissertation contributes to sociological scholarship in the areas of migration and work, gender and family and the South Asian diaspora in the United States.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The migrant experience does not end with the first point of settlement. It is handed down through the generations, consciously or unconsciously making its contribution to the way in which those in the diaspora negotiate their existence through scites in which they, and their cultures, are in the minority. Being in the diaspora means living in a cross-cultural context, one in which change, fusion and expansion are inevitable. Those aware of the complexities of this recognize the need to redefine their identity and the necessity to discover a medium through which to articulate their progress.

---- Yasmin Hussain, Writing Diaspora

Leading scholars in migration have long argued that the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which repealed exclusionary national quotas on migration from Southern and Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia; has transformed the racial and demographic bricolage of the United States – as migrants from these origins embody greater diversity along class, ethnic, gender, religious, and professional lines than their earlier European counterparts (Massey et al. 1993; Rumbaut 1997; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Sotelo 2000). Asian Indians (hereafter identified as Indians) are perhaps the best exemplars of this new reality.

The Act of 1965 is a watershed moment in Indian emigration, as besides accelerating the pace of migration, it also heralded the arrival of a new cadre of Indian immigrants - educated, skilled professionals, and/ or family members migrating under family reunification clauses of the Act (Chandrasekhar 1982; Lal 1999; Madhavan 1985; Puwar and Raghuram 2003; Segal 2002). At the time of writing this dissertation, the U.S. Bureau of the Census has characterized Indians as the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, and the fourth largest immigrant group after the Mexican, Chinese, and Filipino communities (Reeves and Bennett 2004; Terrazas 2008). The bulk of this growth has occurred between the decades of 1980-2000 which witnessed the burgeoning of Indians from approximately 450,000 in 1990 to the 1.5 million strong community at the time of the 2000 census (Gibson and Lennon 1999; Logan 2001; Terrazas...
2008). As an ethnic group, Indians have long been associated with stellar adaptation outcomes—measured along lines of English proficiency, participation in the labor force at professional and managerial levels, educational accomplishments, family income levels, home ownership, and two (married) parent families often resulting in the label “model minority” being associated with them (Reeves and Bennett 2004; Takaki 1998).

Feminist migration scholars (such as DeLaet 1999; George 2005; Gramsmuck and Pessar 1991; Kibria 1993; Menjivar 2000; Sotelo 1994) have been vociferously arguing for the incorporation (not mere “addition” or “acknowledgment”) of women’s experiences into body of migration scholarship, thereby challenging its gender neutral stance. This call to recognize migration as gendered is especially timely as today, women constitute “the majority of U.S. immigrations from Asia, Central and South America, the Caribbean and Europe.” (DeLaet 1999; Pessar 1999:580-581; Piper 2005). Inspired by this body of feminist qualitative migration scholarship, this project is centered on representing Indian women’s lives as they navigate the migration and settlement process, and thereby address their significant under-representation in the narrative of Indian migration and success in the United States.

Accordingly, this project has been conceptualized within the engendering migration perspective that extends an intersectional, structural, and transnational lens on migration and settlement. Rather than merely presenting our achievements and successes as an immigrant group, I attempt to critically examine women’s lives as they decide upon emigration; integrate into the American labor market as professionals, and construct their families in an immigrant context. Broadly then, my research is an examination of the migration, work, and family lives of Tamil (an Indian regional group) women in the United States.

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1 As I will explain later in the dissertation, my research questions are centered on the experiences of one Indian regional group – Tamils – rather than those of all Indian women as a composite whole. However, due to a dearth of
Making the Personal Political: Research Based on Everyday Life

I have traveled abroad alone before. But leaving home to come to the United States five years ago will always be a definitive moment in my life – one that esistentially separates the woman I have become from the girl I left behind. Although I was 24 years old, I had never lived away from my parents and had no idea what awaited me in America. As most immigrants reminisce, we leave often naively, wearing rose-tinted glasses, and with no real conception of what to expect at our destination. Nonetheless, leaving home was a heady feeling – I was leaving to follow my dream!

Deciding to come abroad was not a hard, nor conflict laden decision for me to make. My privileged, liberal, and westernized family background facilitated not merely my decision to leave, but my ease in informing my parents of it, and their agreeing to it without a murmur of dissent. As so many before me, I came as a single woman with the goal of pursuing my doctoral studies in America. At that time, I do not believe I considered myself a “migrant” or the process of leaving “emigration.” Most of us do not. I was merely leaving the nest to follow the next stage in my life. It was only as I immersed myself in school, and began to carve out a life for myself in the United States, that “immigrant” became a label that defined me. And perhaps critical to identifying as an immigrant was the process of constructing America as home, and India as the place where my family is – the home of my heart, but a place I intermittently visit.

America becoming home - I can physically and emotionally pin-point when and how this happened and it was not immediate. On August 4, 2004, I arrived at the university town where I would spend the next five years of my life. I remember being disoriented as my plane landed, and I gathered my bags; as the enormity of what I had embarked upon suddenly made itself

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scholarship on particular Indian groups in the United States, extrapolations have been made from scholarship on Indians as a whole.
apparent. I was coming to the gradual realization that I knew no one here, that for all my westernized upbringing, America was still unfamiliar territory; and that I had to reach out to and depend upon virtual strangers to find my sense of balance here. Moreover, for the first time in my life – everything, as they say in America “was on me!” I had to make friends (without relying on the web of family and kin ties that surround us), had to adjust to school and to American society (without my parents guiding the way), and perhaps most important to me, I had to build a meaningful life for myself.

In hindsight now, I recognize that the process of settling into life here was not half as difficult as it seemed while I was living it. As some of my Tamil participants attest to in this dissertation, coming to the United States as a student provides perhaps the best and most facile method of adaptation. At school, I was automatically enveloped by a well-oiled administrative machinery geared toward foreign students – organized to meet our every need – from being picked up at the airport, completing immigration formalities, establishing bank accounts and identification cards, registering for school, to building social networks. Thus, before I realized it, I had addressed and navigated the practicalities of life in the United States.

However, settlement is more than mere practicalities. It is a personal and emotional experience which all of us as immigrants go through. For me, this involved the challenge of using skills and resources I had brought to construct a life in America, very different from the one I had in India - a life of my own distanced from those of my parents by both geography and experience. And the learning curve was enormous, and rapid! I learned to navigate an education system different from the one I was familiar with and to excel within it, and to socialize with Americans, and began to pick up quirky “Americanisms” so essential to being understood here. More importantly, my learning also involved the intricacies of everyday life – cooking, cleaning,
chores, shopping, driving, banking; all while going to school and working—things my privileged background in India had sheltered me from. In narrating my experience, I am cognizant that having migrated from Mumbai (a metropolis in India) and from a globalized, connected India where I had watched *Friends, NYPD Blue, Everybody Loves Raymond*, and *Oprah*, I did not experience a huge culture shock, as some of my participants did. Nonetheless, I was in a new country and society, and it was initially bewildering, lonely and emotionally difficult; and learning and adjusting had to be accomplished before it could feel like home.

Making friends and building social networks was essential to this process. My roommates – all of us Indian women from Mumbai who migrated at the same time – became my first support system. We looked out for each other, exchanged information, learned skills together, and talked often to ease the loneliness and homesickness. While this helped, the most crucial element for me lay in making friends with Americans through school – who introduced me to the American way of life, and who became the anchors of my settlement experience. It was at this point, when I had a support system, and was getting familiar with my life here - at about eight months since I first arrived - that America became home. A home that was not automatically created for me, but one I worked to construct.

I have now been in America for five years and have begun to identify as an immigrant. Partly because this is my reality. But critically too, the label provides me a source of identity in a context – where no matter the liberalism of my university town – I am aware of being different. I stand out because of my skin color, choice of apparel, and accent. And while I have not experienced overt discrimination, its more covert version has manifested in my life in repeated questioning about my citizenship (“where are you from?”), and the puzzled yet admiring comments about my facility with English (“You speak English REALLY WELL! How come?”)
which simultaneously irritates and amuses me. As my participants concur, we come to this country in the full knowledge that we are leaving “our” country (where we are citizens with commensurate rights and privileges) for one in which we are a racial minority. And as Indians, I believe, especially those of us who are American educated, linguistically proficient, and middle-class, we encounter no significant racial discrimination. But we are different and each of us has to choose our own path in responding to this difference. For me, the path lay in never denying my ethnicity and cultural origins, but also in not allowing them to prevent my successful adaptation to this country. For the near future at least, this is my home, and I have to not only to treat it as such, but make it such. Identifying as a Tamil-Goan immigrant woman is thus my path and perhaps the best window to uncovering my experience.

There is a purpose to this narration of my experience at the start of the dissertation. Interrogating my life through a critical lens, uncovers the exigencies of my everyday experience, in turn renders my “personal political”. My life thus serves as the origin of this project – providing inspiration, insight, and a wealth of anecdotal understanding into Indian (and specifically Tamil) migration and settlement experience in the United States from a gendered perspective. In particular it directs me to sensitizing concepts which in turn shape my research questions. Concepts such as migration as a negotiated process, the role of family and social networks in both migration and settlement, the context of reception as mediating settlement particularly access to work, gender, race, and class in determining outcomes and responses; and the effect of migration on one’s sense of self. This act however is not an unfamiliar one, but one encouraged by feminist methodologists in the service of grounding research in a material base – in the multiple, interconnected realities that shape our existence as women, and our responses to the same (DeVault 1999; Fonow and Cook 1991b; Reinharz and Davidman 1992; Smith 1987).
While I do not deny the very personal motivation for this project, the exercise serves the purpose of sensitizing me to the invisible web of relationships, structures, and contexts that undergird the everyday lives of Tamil migrant women, and to the techniques of making the routine/invisible, visible through the research process (DeVault 1999; Smith 1987). Thus in the words of Dorothy Smith (1987:47), this project makes the everyday worlds of Tamil migrant women “problematic,” investigating the connections between their interwoven personal, familial, and professional lives and the social structures that organize society. In so doing, I move beyond a mere accounting of their experiences to theorizing the same within the context of their particular transnational social location.

**Background and Statement of Research**

In developing this research project, I have deviated from the conventional tradition of examining the experiences of Indians as a composite whole. Acknowledging and responding to our inherent heterogeneity along class/caste, regional, linguistic, religious, and geographical lines; I have chosen to attend to the lives of women in one Indian regional group – the Tamils. Focusing on the specific rather than the general offers me a window into documenting and theorizing the multiplicity of experiences that constitute the greater Indian narrative, and which is often lost in the telling. Accordingly, by centering this project on only the Tamils (and Tamil Brahmin in particular), I represent Tamil women’s unique migration, work, and family experiences, structured by their history, social location, and agency. In this section, I provide a background to the research questions by acquainting readers with a brief historical narrative of Tamils and their migratory movements around the globe.\(^2\)

\(^2\) In this section, I present a solely factual perspective on Tamil Brahmin history and migration. To avoid repetition, I have deliberately excluded a nuanced gendered analysis of the same, which will follow in later chapters.
According to Veluppillai (2000) Tamils can be defined as those having Tamil as their mother tongue. The Tamil language is a member of the Dravidian/South Indian family of languages and in addition with the other Dravidian languages, is spoken in the four southern Indian states namely – Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh on the east coast of India and Karnataka and Kerala on the west coast. (Refer to Figure 1-1 and 1-2 at the end of this chapter for cartographical representation of India, and of the state of Tamil Nadu in South-Eastern India). As with other Indian groups, Tamils are internally stratified along caste, class, gender, place of origin (depending on the states listed above), religion, and more contemporarily place of residence in India (rural/urban, Southern/Northern India). This not only distinguishes Tamils from other Indian groups, but also emphasizes the diversity within the Tamil experience (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Guilmoto 1993). Thus in documenting their history and migratory movements, I only address the specificities of the Tamil Brahmin experience – the focus of this project - as structured by these “axes of domination” (Collins 2000:228).

Tamil Brahmins, who occupy the upper echelons of the caste hierarchy in Southern India, have historically been the priestly, educated, landowning caste who enjoyed the wealth and social privileges accruing to being located at the apex of the caste hierarchy. Over time however (with pardon for condensing thousands of years of history), as a caste they were subjected to vagaries of history and witnessed the gradual loss of their lands resulting in their transition to more administrative and professional roles (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Subrahmanian 1989).

3 Historically Dravidian languages of Tamil, Kannada, Malyalam, Telugu have been spoken in all of the four above mentioned states. However, in post-independence India, there was a move to linguistically re-organize states resulting in the passage of the States Reorganization Act of 1956 which radically transformed state boundaries within the Indian republic and continues to do so today. The state of Tamil Nadu was re-named in 1969, off the old British designed Madras Presidency (which consisted of the four states mentioned above) to include the Tamil speaking districts of the Presidency. In this same moment, the states of Kerala (Malyalam speaking), Andhra Pradesh (Telugu Speaking) and Karnataka (Kannada speaking) were carved out along with a number of other linguistically based Indian states (Hardgrave 1993).
The bulk of this transformation occurred during British colonialism in India which created a dual Tamil experience – the Brahmin and the non-Brahmin one – particularly around the issue of migration.

British imperial policies encouraged a large non-Brahmin diaspora, through the indentured labor and *kangani* systems,⁴ to work the plantation economies of the British empire across the Caribbean, Southern and Eastern Africa, South-East Asia, and the Pacific Islands. The same policies saw the Brahmins being integrated into the British colonial governing in a way that laid the foundation for their professional international migration following Indian independence (Guilmoto 1993; Lal 1999; Madhavan 1985; Segal 2002; Sivasupramaniam 2000). The British whose strategy for consolidating India lay in incorporating the ruling elite into their structure, capitalized on the educated and upper-caste status of Brahmins to integrate them into the colonial bureaucracy (Thapar 2003). In this colonial period, there was a large migration of Tamil Brahmins from villages to cities in the South to avail of British (English) education and commensurate government jobs (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Subrahmanian 1989). As Subrahmanian (1989) recounts, “Tamil Brahmins occupied the most lucrative posts in the British government offices and administrative boards… [and there was] no branch of public administration that they did not make themselves indispensable [in]” (p. 119). Thus for Tamil Brahmins, British colonialism marked their transformation into an urbanized, English speaking community, and their transition as Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) title their article, “from landlords to software engineers” (p. 170).

In independent India, the education and human capital that Tamil Brahmins had accumulated over generations – their “inherited privilege” (Feagin 2000:175), and their

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⁴ Indentured Labor system refers to laborers bound by a contract from which withdrawal was almost impossible. *Kangani* system was similar except that it was independent/voluntary labor recruitment through contractors.
urbanization – were crucial to their presence in professional work. Tamil Brahmins dominate professions such as accounting, banking, science, engineering, medicine, law, administration, management, and computing. Furthermore, genealogies reveal that in most families there is some history of government employment either in government owned enterprises or in direct service in central or local government machineries (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Subrahmanian 1989). Thus, similar to the colonial era, professional work became the instigator of Tamil Brahmin migratory movement not merely to cities, but now from Southern to Northern India either following transferable jobs or in search of better economic opportunities available to professionals in cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, and Calcutta.

Another critical variable – and one often cited by my participants - in this emigration out of the South, and which in turn influenced their desire to leave India for a foreign country was their reduced opportunities (due to their high caste status) to access higher educational facilities and jobs in the South due to affirmative action oriented toward the non-Brahmin castes (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008). In the larger picture of international migration, this political and economic climate in India coincided with the liberalizing of immigration legislation in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. A migration stream of professionals emerged and increased in the 1950s and 1960s among Tamil Brahmins that continues contemporaneously (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Madhavan 1985; Massey et al. 1993; Sivasupramaniam 2000). The United States in particular became a favored migrant destination due to the demand for

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5 The Brahmins are a minority all over India. In Tamil speaking South India, however, they are an even smaller minority. Independent India accorded a 22.5% reservation in state supported educational institutions and government employment for Scheduled Castes (15%) and Scheduled Tribes (7.5%) for a period of 10 years. Subsequent governments kept extending this time frame. This by itself, caused some resentment but not serious lack of opportunity for the upper-castes. However, in August 1990, the government led by Prime Minister V.P. Singh, announced a further 27% reservation for Other Backward Castes (OBCs), bringing the total reservation to 49.5%. This sharply and seriously reduced educational and employment opportunities for upper-castes, and resulted in rioutous protests all over India that continue intermittently even today (Thapar 2003)
skilled labor within the professions espoused by Tamil Brahmins and its renowned educational facilities which attracted graduate students dissatisfied with the limited educational opportunities available in India (Khandelwal 2002; Lal 1999; Segal 2002).

The exclusion of women from this migration narrative is reflective of the gendered nature of Tamil Brahmin migration during colonial and post-colonial contexts. Due to conservative gender ideologies imbedded in Tamil Brahmin communities and families, women were rarely recognized as “active agents” (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008:184) in migration. Thus while “men decided [italics my own] to move for education or work…the majority of Tamil Brahmin women moved only at the behest of their husbands or other male kin, and not on their own” (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008:184). This however does not imply that women do not migrate. Rather, until the 1990s when gender normative expectations relaxed and women began to enter the Indian labor force in large numbers; Tamil Brahmin women migrated largely within familial (moving with spouse and children) and/or marital contexts (moving to marry).

It is against this backdrop of Tamil Brahmin migration and the almost complete invisibility of women within it that I develop my research questions. Employing the engendering migration perspective which recognizes the specificities of an intersectional social location, and the transnational contexts that define us as immigrants, I examine the gendered migration and settlement of married, first-generation Tamil Brahmin professional women in the United States; and their consequent negotiation of gender relations in their families. Specifically, I ask three interrelated questions:

- How do first-generation Tamil professional women negotiate with gender in their migration and settlement in the United States?

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6 Although not mentioned in the research question, the underlying assumption in examining professional migrant lives is that this group embodies an upper middle class/upper class status both in India and the United States. A fuller analysis of the caste-class interplay will be presented in Chapter 4.
• How are their professional lives structured by their intersectional social locations as upper-class/caste, immigrant women of color, and mothers in the United States?
• What are the gendered work-family negotiations in their households?

Drawing upon an 8 month ethnography among the Tamil community in Atlanta GA, and 33 in-depth interviews (each approximately 4-5 hours in duration) with Tamil professional women, I generate new insights about how Tamil women undertake migration, and construct work and family lives in the United States. I argue that the gendered migration and settlement of Tamil women occurs within a transnational field shaped by their social location both in India and the United States; and by their oppositional agency in shaping their lives. Accordingly, extending the concept of emphasized femininity, I argue that Tamil women construct *integrated femininity* characterized by the interweaving of their professional and familial identities into a single entity, each manifesting with increasing or decreasing prominence at different points in their lives. Simply stated, migration, work, and family are not distinct unconnected entities for Tamil women, but intersecting arenas through which they are constituted as women (Mohanty 2002).

This research contributes to the sociology of migration and work; sociology of gender, family, and South Asians in three key ways. First, I privilege Tamil women’s voices within a migration discourse that has under represented them. Additionally, by being attentive to the particularities of their caste/class, religious and geographic location I extend the migration and work scholarship to uncovering the experiences of Asian, middle class professionals who have either been understudied or represented in largely statistical terms. In so doing, I challenge the homogenization of Indians in the extant scholarship on South Asians in the United States. Second, by demonstrating the interconnected nature of work and family life among Tamils, I advance the scholarship on race-ethnic families and their work-family arrangements which have heretofore been concentrated largely around African-American, and Latina/o families. Finally,
by theorizing integrated femininity in a transnational context, I extend the gender scholarship by furthering our understanding of the Indian female experience in the United States.

**Theoretical Sensitivity**

In the proceeding pages, I will provide a brief overview of some of the theoretical perspectives that guide this research. Consistent with the tenets of constructivist grounded theory, of research being informed (though not directed) by extant scholarship, this project has been conceptualized within the framework of the engendering migration perspective. However, constructivist grounded theory methodology also cautions researchers to be sensitive to concepts emerging from the data thereby facilitating the construction of theory grounded in the everyday social world, systematically obtained and analyzed through the social research process (Charmaz 2006). Consequently, responding to ideas emergent from conversations with Tamil women, I further clarify the gendered nature of their migration using the conceptual lenses of gender as a social structure, emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity, and doing gender. It is important to recognize that these ideas are not mutually exclusive, but have been chosen to inform my work precisely because they smoothly integrate with one another.

**Engendering Migration Perspective**

The engendering migration perspective is an interdisciplinary theoretical development that emerged in the 1980s out of feminist critiques of the macro and micro migration theories of the 1950s-1970s (Massey et al. 1993). The key criticism leveled against the latter was its failure to adequately theorize the migration of women as distinct from those of their male counterparts largely due to the assumption that women’s experiences can be subsumed under those of men (Pessar 1999; Thadani and Todaro 1984; Weinberg 1992). Thus if women were researched they were either conceptualized as “passive followers of male migrants” (Morokvasic 1984:897), or their research was marginalized within the academy (Donato et al. 2006; Sinke 2006).
Contrastingly, engendering migration argues that migration and settlement experiences of women are qualitatively unique from those of men; and have to be acknowledged as such and incorporated into core of migration scholarship (DeLaet 1999; Donato et al. 2006; Piper 2005). This however does not imply a cultural or essentialist basis for the difference predicated on biological sex differences. Rather, it identifies a structural basis wherein women and men are differently positioned within intersecting “social and political relations of rule” (Mohanty 2002:3) and the simultaneity of gender, race/ethnic, national, and sexual status construct difference between women and men and amongst them (Collins 2000; Pessar 1999; Zinn and Dill 1996). Examining migration within this perspective involves three key components – conceptualizing gender as a constituent element of migration; according agency to migrant women in structuring their lives; and adopting a transnational focus on migration.

Central to the idea of gender as a constituent element or the organizing principle of migration, is its conceptualization as a structure that “permeates a variety of practices, identities, and institutions…” (Sotelo 2000:117); and as relational such that “maleness and femaleness are defined in relationship to each other…” (Donato et al. 2006:6). Therefore as these theorists note, gender in its application to migration is no longer confined to only women’s lives or to the private sphere but structures the entire process of migration such that the process itself is gendered. Gender thus is “a constitutive feature of the social, economic, and cultural constellations that structure migration” (Sotelo 1999:566). Simply stated, gender (in interaction with other axes of domination) shapes the individual and historico-political and national contexts

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7 It is important to note that as a theoretical framework, engendering migration has undergone stages of development commensurate with the waves of the feminist movement in the United States. Accordingly, its earliest articulations were influenced by its liberal feminist roots where women were included using the “add and stir” approach and migration was conceived as an inherently liberatory experience for third-world women. The version that informs my work is its most recent theorizing drawing heavily upon not only the changing racial topography of the United States, but also the growing visibility of feminisms of color and racial consciousness both in the sociology academy and in the larger society (Sotelo 1999, 2000)
creating unequal power dynamics contributing to the differential experiences of women and men in migration, settlement and transmigration (Cheng 1999; Donato et al. 2006; Mohanty 2002; Pessar 1999).

Gender not only structures the migration process, but that in turn migration reconfigures gender relations within families, communities, and workplaces (Parrado and Flippen 2005; Sotelo 1999). Key areas within which this is examined which have implications for this project are patriarchal familial relationships (defined in terms of household division of labor and decision making power) and racialized gender discrimination within the workplace and larger American society. These then become the arenas where immigrant women exercise agency in shaping their lives as a response to their unique structural location as an immigrant community of color (Collins 2000; Mohanty 2002; Pessar 1999; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Sotelo 1994). In the particular context of families, engendering migration contends that there is no linear progression from patriarchy to parity, but rather that migration facilitates a process of negotiating with patriarchy by immigrant women such that it is simultaneously reinforced and challenged (Pessar 1999). In response to the operation of racism, classism, and sexism in the workplace, immigrant women engage in transgressive politics oriented toward transforming their lives, communities and work contexts (Louie 2001; Mohanty 2002; Shah 1997b). Reconfiguring gender in a migrant context is a thus a dynamic, agentic process in which “some elements brought from communities of origin are discarded, others are modified, [while] others are reinforced” (Parrado and Filipen 2005:606).

The third key element of this perspective is the adoption of a transnational focus on migration which contends that migrants are defined by and located within multiple national, social, and geographical contexts which include (but are not limited to) their countries of origin.
and settlement (Donato et al. 2006; Kivisto 2001; Schiller et al. 1992; Sotelo 2000). Gender is negotiated through this transnational social space through two arenas that are of particular relevance to my project – the international division of labor, and transnational community formation. Problematizing the international division of labor as gendered and racialized (especially through structural adjustment programs, export oriented production, and importing of cheap labor); engendering migration argues that third-world immigrant women constitute a “feminized and racialized labor force” (Pessar 1999:581) that serves the capitalist enterprise (Chang 2000; Cheng 1999; Mohanty 2002; Pessar and Mahler 2003). This is particularly so in the case of low-skilled women workers who are employed in female intensive service industries in their countries of origin and the United States, and skilled professionals in female-dominated professions such as nursing, elder care, and education. Additionally, engendering migration theorizes transnational communities and ties that bind immigrant women and men such that they cannot be conceptualized only in terms of their settlement here, but also in terms of maintaining connections with their countries of origin and constructing a social imaginary by drawing upon and reconfiguration transported cultural/religious, familial, and gender traditions (George 2005; Mahler 1999; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Sotelo 2000).

In extending this framework to the particular case of Tamil women’s migration and settlement in the United States, I argue that Tamil Brahmin middle-class gender ideologies, norms, and expectations as produced and performed in the historical temporal period extending from the 1950s-early 1990s in India, constrained Tamil women’s desire, ability, and method of leaving. As my participants will note in later chapters their successful migration and settlement in the United States involved gender negotiations within their families and communities such that despite their status as followers in migration, they were actively engaged in migration
decisions, often choosing when and how to come abroad and taking primary responsibility for preparing for and settling their families in the United States. As migrants they respond to the structural exigencies of their lives in the United States choosing to construct and perform their gendered identities as professionals, wives, and mothers with reference to a transported social imaginary.

**Gender as a Social Structure**

Considering that gender embeds the entire process of migration, as well as social institutions within which Tamil women construct, perform, and negotiate gender identities and ideologies, the conceptual lens of gender as a social structure undergirds my research questions and findings. In attempting to define the operation of gender as a social structure Ridgeway and Correll (2004) note:

…gender is not primarily an identity or role that is taught in childhood and enacted in family relations. Instead, gender is an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference. (P. 510)

Stated alternatively, “gender is a socially constructed stratification system….which is the very foundation on which inequality rests” (Lorber 1993; Risman 2004:430-431). With particular reference to this project, I have attempted to identify the key tenets of conceptualizing gender as a structure facilitating the location of gender as the integral component to the migration and settlement of Tamil women. These are – the interconnected triumvirate dimensions of gender; gender as an element of social location; and gender, power, and agency.

**Interconnected triumvirate dimensions of gender structure**

The conceptual lens of gender as a structure bridges macro (institutional) and micro (individual/identity) explanations of gender. It is an integrated understanding of gender centered on the **interconnectedness of the three dimensions** within which it operates – the individual, the
interactional/cultural; and the institutional (Kimmel 2004; Ridegeway and Correll 2004; Risman 2004). The *individual dimension* refers to the development of gendered identities (femininities and masculinities) through the internalizing of gender standards and definitions through socialization, and the location of individuals within gendered institutions. However this process is not fixed or permanent but involves the interplay between gendered individuals and gendered institutions such that gender identities are plural and situational. Simply stated, “we become gendered selves in a gendered society…where to be a man or woman varies in different institutional contexts which demand and produce different forms of masculinity and femininity” (Kimmel 2004:16,97; Risman 2004).

Gender identities are however constructed and performed in interaction such that we construct our ideas of what it means to be women and men in relation to the other gender, and with reference to hegemonic cultural beliefs (behaviors, traits, expectations) about women and men prevalent in a society. This constitutes the *interactional/cultural dimension* of gender as a structure (Kimmel 2004; Lorber 1993; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Ridgeway and Correll (2004:511) argue that cultural beliefs about gender are one of the pillars on which the gender structure rests as these beliefs constitute the “cultural rules or schemas for enacting gender” appropriately especially within public arenas (as will be detailed in the following section on “doing gender”). In most societies, these cultural beliefs involve an ideology of masculine superiority relational to feminine subordination accompanied by the valuation of masculine lives and experiences (Johnson 1997). Women and men are thus constructed as different and then believed and performed to be such. Critical to this is the invisibility in the operation of these beliefs such that they are often believed to be of biological origin and are concomitantly incorporated into our behaviors and identities without deliberate cognizance. Thus as Risman
(2004:433) states, the “nonreflexive habituated action…. [the] interactional expectations that each of us meet in every social encounter,” constitutes the interactional/cultural dimension of gender.

Far from being a singular social institution, gender operates within all social institutions which in turn are complexly related to each other (Connell 1987; Kimmel 2004). This refers to the institutional dimension of gender. The implications of this are two fold. The first as stated earlier, is the reciprocal relationship between gendered individuals and gendered institutions such that the latter are arenas – what Ridgeway and Correll (2004:511) call “social relational contexts” – where gender identities are constructed, and where in turn individuals shape gendered through their gendered performances (Kimmel 2004). The second, is that gendering of social institutions systemically organize privilege and disadvantage such that women and men differentially positioned within gendered social institutions have variant access to the same thereby reproducing gender inequality (Kimmel 2004; Lorber 1993; Risman 2004).

Gender as an element of social location

Theorizing gender as a structure places it on par with other social structures thereby recognizing its intersectional nature – the idea that gender does not operate in isolation but in conjunction with other social structures (such as race/ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationality) (Collins 2000; Risman 2004; Zinn and Dill 1996). Together, these operate as structures of domination within particular historical time periods positioning individuals and groups differently within a society’s opportunity structures. This constitutes their social or structural location – what Collins (2000:228) calls “matrix of domination,” which in turn organizes their access to privilege, opportunities and disadvantage systemically rather than culturally (Amott and Matthaei 1996; Andersen and Collins 2007; Collins 2000).

Integral to the operation of gender in simultaneity with other structures of domination is the inability to single out gender as it operates through the interconnected dimensions mentioned
above. Gender is thus not a fixed, universal given, but it is dynamic over different cultural and institutional contexts. Concomitantly, then there is no single articulation of femininity or masculinity but rather multiple articulations of the same defined in relation to an individual or group’s social location. Thus for instance, in the particular case of Tamil women, their femininity is a Tamil Brahmin middle-class urban articulation of gender within the temporal period of 1950s-1990s India.

**Gender, power and agency**

Critical to the structural nature of gender is the recognition that “gender is a power relation” (Kimmel 2004:99), implying that the operation of gender is accompanied by hierarchy, inequality and domination. Arguing that domination constructs gender difference, theorists’ predicate the power inherent to the gender structure on the multiple articulations of gender relative to one’s social location as described above. Multiple articulations of femininity and masculinity are not all created equal, but are hierarchically organized relative to one another in hegemonic and subordinate positions within gendered institutions (Connell 1987; Kimmel 2004; Lorber 1993). This in turn constructs the gendered behaviors, and expectations; and the differential access to opportunities and disadvantage outlined earlier particular to one’s social location. Therefore as a structure, gender organizes power relations not only between women and men, but also among them – i.e. the power of some women or men over other women or men (Connell 1987; Kimmel 2004; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 2004). Power is therefore not culturally based or the property of an individual, but structural – inherent to the matrix of domination (Collins 2000; hooks 1984; Kimmel 2004; Risman 2004; Zinn and Dill 1996).

There is however a recursive relationship between gendered individuals and the operation of the gender power structure. Although the latter constrains individual choice and action, as a structure (and component of the matrix of domination that defines us) gender is responsive to the
“transformative power of human action” (Risman 2004:432) such that even those in the most powerless of locations, exercise dynamic oppositional agency to create viable lives for themselves by resisting, reinforcing, or transforming the structures that constrain them (Collins 2004; hooks 1984; Mohanty 2002; Zinn and Dill 1996). This is evinced in every interconnected dimension that defines gender as a structure – at the individual level where our gender identities are a product of both the coercion of gendered institutions and our choice; at the interactional/cultural level when we choose to do gender either through appropriate or transgressive acts; or at the institutional level in our decisions to transform or retain the status-quo.

Adumbrating this conceptual lens of gender a social structure serves to reiterate its operation within the migration and settlement process that are the key elements of this project as described earlier. It also serves to sensitize me to the gendered nature of other two institutions that define this project – that of work (labor market) and family. With reference to the labor market, I am particularly concerned with its stratified nature and with the positioning of immigrant women of color within it. I take an intersectional perspective on labor market stratification that draws upon antecedent theorizing about the sexual division of labor in families as constructing gender (and class) stratification at work such that women (read: women as an undifferentiated group) are conceptualized as secondary workers – an “industrial reserve army” (Kemp 1994:97). Developing on this idea, I argue that multiple intersecting structures of domination (and not merely gender and class) construct labor market stratification predicated upon an international division of labor that is gendered and racialized creating different occupational outcomes and experiences for my participants as immigrant women of color, than for their citizen counterparts (Amott and Matthaei 1996; Mohanty 2002). Furthermore, in
addition to this material basis of stratification, there is also an ideological component to labor market stratification evinced in the construction of jobs in terms of racial, and gender parameters such that jobs become race and gender typed which have implications for immigrant women’s work (Browne and Misra 2003; Mohanty 2002). Consequently, as I will elaborate upon in the following chapter when I review the literature, and in the empirical chapters that outline Tamil women’s professional lives, immigrant women are deliberately recruited to perform jobs that are raced and gendered as those suitable to be performed by immigrants and/or women of color.

In the context of the gendered nature of families, I focus in particular on gender based hierarchies of power within families, and the gender division of household labor. Underlying my project, is the assumption that families are socially constructed (not mere biological arrangements) – “a product of specific historical, social, and material conditions...” (Zinn 2007:18) – i.e. shaped by a matrix of domination of which gender is one component (Coltrane and Adams 2008; Ferguson 2007; Gubrium and Holstein 1990). As an organizing principle of families, gender operates as a power hierarchy within families shaping gender roles and expectations of women and men within families commensurate with their age and position within the family structure. In turn women and men’s appropriate or transgressive performance of gender within families with reference to these expectations renders it a site for doing gender and for the reproduction of gender hierarchies (Coltrane and Adams 2008; Ferguson 2007). This is particularly manifested in a gender division of household labor, which despite contemporary transformation continues to disadvantage women who perform the bulk of household labor. Consequently, for women in particular, the public (labor market) and private (family life) realms are interconnected rather than separate, as gender expectations and roles of the one influence women’s performance in the other and vice-versa. Thus as I will outline in later chapters, for
Tamil women migration to the United States is negotiated within gender ideologies of their Brahmin, middle-class families which traditionally constrains women’s independent migratory movements. Furthermore, their professional lives in the United States are circumscribed not only by their positioning as immigrants and/or women of color as described above, but also by their familial roles and self-expectations as mothers often leading to self-placed limitations on their professional ambitions. Importantly, these professional and familial arrangements while gendered, are negotiated in an immigrant context resulting in the construction of what I call new *Tamil/Indian family forms* – different from their families in India.

In the following two subsections, I discuss the final two conceptual lenses that inform my work - emphasized femininity and masculinity which refers to the culturally determined gender identities of individuals; and doing gender which highlights the performative aspects of gender. As a reminder, these conceptualizations of gender are components of the gender structure (individual; and interactional/cultural components respectively), but have been highlighted here as the intricacies of how femininity is constructed and performed emerges as the agentic response of Tamil women to the structural realities of their professional and familial lives in the United States.

**Emphasized Femininity and Hegemonic Masculinity**

Conceptually, emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity refer to the earlier mentioned idea of the plurality of gender articulations across diverse social locations and its organization into hierarchies of hegemony and subordination. Simply put, emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity embody the hegemonic cultural beliefs about gender in a society/culture which influence the development of gendered selves, and gender appropriate performances within gendered institutions (Connell 1987; Kimmel 2004; Ridegeway and Correll 2004).
Arguing that gender is an ever changing fluid assemblage of meanings and behaviors, Connell (1987) develops the idea of hegemonic masculinity to refer to the one articulation of masculinity that is ascendant over other articulations and thus held as the ideal for all men to accomplish. Hegemonic masculinity is thus the dominant form of masculinity in a particular society/culture constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities and to women (Connell 1987). Its operation in a society is dependent on the large measure of consensus this ideological construct receives from all men largely due to the power associated with it, centered on being recognized as “real men” if they embody this masculinity; and on its institutionalization of men’s dominance over women (Connell 1987; Kimmel 2005). Thus in sum, hegemonic masculinity is an ideal version of masculinity which becomes a standard that few men embody, but against which all men who do not/cannot perform it (subordinated masculinities) are judged and thus can be emasculated by other men (Kimmel 2005). Its very real implications for men center on the social and material privileges of belonging to the ascendant group centered on having access to not only the status associated with it, but also being free of the threat of emasculation. Thus, in the particular context of the dominant culture in American society, the “masculinity that defines white, middle-class, early middle-aged heterosexual men…” (Kimmel 2005:30) is the hegemonic version of masculinity which sets the standards for other men, and against which they are measured and often found to be lacking.

Relational to hegemonic masculinity is the idea of emphasized femininity. Theorizing that while multiple versions of femininity might exist, there is no hegemonic version of it similar to masculinity⁸, Connell (1987) develops the idea of emphasized femininity to refer to the “one

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⁸ Connell’s (1987) argument of the lack of a hegemonic version of femininity is that all constructions of femininity whether compliant, resistant, or a combination of these involve the overall subordination of women to men, without the possibility of domination that is integral to hegemonic masculinity.
form [of femininity that] is defined around compliance with [the] subordination [of women to men] and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men” (p. 183). Thus unlike masculinity which is performed for other men, Connell (1987) contends that emphasized femininity is performed by women especially for men and not for other women and in this process services the patriarchal structure of society. Central to its operation is the prevention of other models of femininity gaining cultural articulation. Thus with particular reference to American society, although there is no singular definition of emphasized femininity, emphasized femininity is an articulation centered on compliance, nurturance, and empathy as womanly virtues especially linked to the private realms of the home and the bedroom (Connell 1987).

While developed in the context of western gender constructs, I employ this concept to be attentive to the articulation of femininity and masculinity that is particular to the Tamil Brahmin (middle-class, urban) community of 1950-1990s India which shape the gender identities of my participants. As my participants will narrate in later chapters, Tamil Brahmin men embody hegemonic masculinity centered broadly on being breadwinners and providers of their families. However caste, class, and regional group further define this masculinity as oriented around achieving a high level of educational and professional accomplishments (within the professions deemed desirable by this community), being relatively disengaged in the private sphere except in decision making; and undertaking migration to achieve social and economic mobility lacking in India. Contrastingly, emphasized femininity is centered on the chasteness of Tamil women revered in religious and media representations of women; and on the almost exclusive relegation of women to the private sphere (posed as the opposite of the public domain of work) in the form of the devoted wife and mother. Thus, although women might work, their professional identities do not define Tamil Brahmin emphasized femininity but rather the former is merely perceived to
be an extension of their private roles (Lakshmi 1984; Lannoy 1974; Subrahmanian 1989; Thiruchandran 1997). It is against this articulation of emphasized femininity that I develop the idea of integrated femininity in the particular case of Tamil Brahmin migrant women to demonstrate both the retention of transported Tamil gender standards, and their reworking through the process of migration.

**Doing Gender**

As a conceptual lens, doing gender highlights the interconnections between the construction of feminine and masculine identities as described above and performance of these identities within gendered institutions. Two key elements are associated with this conceptual lens which has implications for my project. First is the role of interaction – the idea that the social construction of gender (such as the construction of emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity) occurs in interaction as does its performance. As West and Zimmerman (1987) note:

> Gender is a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction...[the] local management of conduct in relation to normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities for particular sex categories. (P. 134-135)

Accordingly gender is not merely an aspect of what one is (one’s identity) but also what one does recurrently in interaction – an accomplishment or a performance that far from being fixed and determined biologically is fine tuned to the situation at hand. Consequently gender is “itself constituted through interaction and at the same time structures interaction” (West and Zimmerman 1987:131).

The second element of this lens is accountability – the idea that gender performances are subject to judgment by others. Doing gender involves not merely performing it, but doing it appropriately i.e. producing “configurations of behavior that would be seen by others as normative gender standards” (West and Zimmerman 1987:134) predicated upon one’s social
location. Judgment about appropriateness or inappropriateness of gender performances are rendered in interaction such that both the context within which one does gender and the performance itself are referenced in passing judgment (West and Zimmerman 1987).

The conceptual lens of doing gender is the final piece in the theoretical framework that both guides the project, as well as emerges from the data. Interwoven with earlier discussed ideas of gender as an organizing element of migration; of its operation as a structure; and its ideological arrangement as emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity influencing gendered selves; doing gender highlights the mechanism by which gender imbues the entire process of migration and settlement centered, in the case of this project, particularly on work and family. The mechanism is performance in interaction such that the gender structure (including gender norms, ideologies, and expectations) not only constrains the performance, but also that individuals can transform their performance thereby reorganizing the gender structure.

Accordingly, this conceptual lens enables me to recognize the gendered navigations in migration and settlement especially the larger role assumed by Tamil women in the settlement of their families as a mechanism of performing appropriate gender centered on motherhood obligations. Furthermore, this lens offers sensitizing ideas to theorize the construction of integrated femininity by Tamil women as occurring in their interaction with each other, and with their spouses (in addition to their structural location).

As emergent from the extension of the engendering migration perspective to Tamil professional women I argue that integrated femininity is emblematic of the reconfiguration of gender through the migration process as it involves Tamil women extending the boundaries of emphasized Tamil femininity described above to incorporate their professional and familial identities into the core of their feminine identity in the United States. Stated simply, being
professionals, wives, and mothers define them as women in contrast to the narrower version of Tamil femininity centered solely on the latter two identities. This is then performed by them in the arenas of work and family evinced largely in self-directed accommodations within each arena as per the demands of the other. However, these performances and the resultant choices that women make have to be referenced in the context of their compatriot Tamil women – their friends and colleagues in the same position as them - who render them accountable for appropriate or transgressive gender performances.

In summary, in this chapter I have provided a background acquainting readers with the Tamils and with Tamil Brahmin migration in particular. Against this background I outlined the research questions guiding this project centered on the broad area of examining the gendered migration and settlement of first-generation, married Tamil professional women. Finally I have identified the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this project namely the en-gendering migration perspective; gender as a social structure; emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity; and doing gender. I have also attempted to sketch their framing of the research questions and of the ideas emergent from the data.

**Overview of Dissertation**

The dissertation is organized into six additional chapters following this introductory one.

Chapter 2 is a presentation of the bodies of scholarship that inform this project. I draw upon three interconnected bodies of literature – gender and migration; labor market incorporation and gendered work experiences; and work-family arrangements in dual income families, to begin to understand Tamil women’s unique gendered experiences. While referencing this work, I however contend that all of them have systematically neglected the lives of South Asians and/or women and/or women of color, thereby not only outlining this work, but also providing my critique of, and thus contribution to it. Chapter 3 is a review of the methodology guiding this
project. In this chapter, I make an argument for the applicability of feminist methodology to this project centered primarily on its features of being grounded in feminist and critical theorizing, being committed to excavating women’s voices while recognizing our diversity and difference, and by incorporating empowerment and self-reflexive praxis into its design. Further, I introduce the research project in terms of the selection of Atlanta as the research site, the recruitment process and consequent sample, the choice of feminist active interviewing supplemented by feminist ethnography, and constructivist grounded theory as my data collection and analysis methods respectively; and my encounters with the research process as a feminist researcher particularly on the issues of power, emotion and reflexivity.

Chapter 4 outlines my findings about Tamil women’s migration and settlement being gendered such that gender not only organizes these processes, but is also reconstituted by it. Tamil women bargain with emphasized Tamil femininity constructs to strategize their migration to the United States as occurring through three main streams – as independent women, as married, dependent wives, and as green-card migrants. Upon arrival in the United States, a further negotiation with gender ensues such that although Tamil women assume the larger responsibility for settling their families, they simultaneously create spaces for themselves to resist the limitations of emphasized Tamil femininity by integrating their professional ambitions into the settlement process thereby reconstituting emphasized femininity into integrated femininity. Chapter 5 describes Tamil women’s professional lives and identities in the United States. In this chapter I argue that despite their difficulties in accessing the American labor market, and being channeled into low-paying, feminized jobs immediately upon settlement, Tamil women successfully enter the realm of professional work in the United States. In turn, their engagement with professional work is the critical mediator of their transformation of
emphasized Tamil femininity into integrated femininity wherein they incorporate their professional identities, into the core of the femininity, on par with their socially designated identities as wives and mothers. Thus for them, being women implies being integrated women who are at once professionals, wives, and mothers, with each of these faces manifesting together, but with increasing and decreasing prominence at different stages in their life course.

Chapter 6 examines Tamil women’s performance of integrated femininity within their households by analyzing their household labor and decision making arrangements. In this chapter I contend that referencing their social location as immigrants in the United States, Tamil women organize their professional lives as essential not only to themselves as individuals, but also to the economic well-being of their families in the United States. Accordingly, they are successful in bargaining with family patriarchy evinced in their husbands’ increased (although not always equitable) involvement in the domestic sphere, and their enjoyment of an equal partnership status in all aspects of familial and financial decision making. To this effect, their families begin to resemble their white, upper-middle/upper-class American counterparts. However to counter this threat of assimilation into American society, and thereby retain the distinctive Tamil/Indian character of their families, Tamil women retain cooking and cultural socialization of their children as a bastion of femininity performance which in turn allows them to maintain and transmit Tamil ethnicity to their children. Thus, the above features coalesce into the construction of new Tamil/Indian family forms in the United States that are distinctive from their counterparts in India, and serve as a bulwark against Americanization. Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation, and is a presentation of theoretical model emergent from this dissertation centered on the gendered migration and settlement of Tamil women occurring at the intersection of social location, integrated femininity and new Tamil/Indian families. Specifically, I theorize
the dialectical relationship between gender organizing all aspects of Tamil women’s migration and settlement, while being reconfigured through it, within a transnational context that accounts for the mutuality of agency and structure in shaping their destinies. In the process, it demonstrates the interconnections between the gendered realms of migration, work, and family. I end with a brief account of the implications and limitations of this work, and identify areas for future research.
Figure 1-1. Political Map of India. [Reprinted from Government of India National Portal http://maps.gov.in/]
Figure 1-2. Cross Section of the State of Tamil Nadu. [Reprinted from Government of India National Portal, http://india.gov.in/knowindia/st_tamilnadu.php]
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Indian Society, whatever the religious background, seems to foster and develop in women rather than men vitality and resilience under circumstances of life which might be judged extremely circumscribed by Western standards.
---Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree*

The aim of this project is to examine the gendered migration and settlement of first-generation Tamil professional women by privileging their voices and narratives in a discourse that has traditionally underrepresented them. Within this broader framework this project is centered particularly on positioning immigrant Tamil women within the interwoven gendered institutions of migration, work, and family in an attempt to uncover their gender transactions within them. Considering this, I reference three main interconnected bodies of scholarship – gender and migration; labor market incorporation and gendered work experiences; work-family arrangements in dual income families - against which I develop my research questions and contextualize the findings emergent from them. This chapter therefore presents a review of this literature.

At the start, it is important for me to mention three caveats underlying this chapter. First, the dearth of research on specific Indian regional groups necessitates drawing upon literature on the migration of Indians as a composite whole. In so doing, in this chapter I use Indian and Tamil interchangeably. Second, to examine the interconnections between migration, work, and family life which tend to be underplayed in the Indian scholarship, I extrapolate from the research on working-class Latina and Asian women’s migration to the United States developed in this vein. Further, to better understand work-family arrangements in dual income families, particularly the division of household labor and decision making I also borrow from the scholarship on white, middle-class American families as these areas continue to be under theorized in Indian scholarship. Third, given the relational nature of gender, it behooves me to be produce a
balanced narrative that accounts for both women and men’s experience. However, given that the focus of this project is Tamil women, while I do cover men’s perspectives, at key points in the narrative, I privilege immigrant women’s lives. Therefore, I will first outline the scholarship on gender and migration emphasizing how labor migration is gendered. Next, I turn to exploring the labor market incorporation of immigrants demonstrating how this process is racialized and gendered and thus connected to their gendered experiences in the workplace. Finally, I discuss the work-family arrangements in dual income families focusing in particular on patterns of household division of labor both within middle class and immigrant families.

**Gender and Migration**

Migration in the particular instance of Tamils consists of two inter-related processes – migration and settlement. In this section I review the literature on the gendering of migration from India to the United States, and the gendered settlement of Tamil women and men.

**Gendered Migration**

In recognizing migration as gendered, I adopt an integrated framework that positions Indian professional migration, particularly that of women at the nexus economic and legal/political historical contexts in India and the United States; the social contexts especially framed by gendered households (used interchangeably with families) and social networks; and the exercise of migrant agency. Labor migration to a developed country like the United States from developing countries in the third-world such as India has to be framed within a world system that incorporates these countries into the capitalist global economy structured by the process of globalization (Wallerstein 1974). Simply stated, globalization has to be conceptualized as the transnational flow of goods, services, monies, and people across borders that are simultaneously rendered porous and impermeable both by economic and legal/political agreements between countries (Sadowski-Smith 2002). Migration is thus seen as a consequence
of economic globalization, occurring due to the dislocations that inevitably occur in the process of capitalist development (Massey et al. 1993; Wallerstein 1974). Feminist migration theorists, building on this idea to incorporate the gendered nature of migration, argue that this is predicated upon the construction of an international division of labor between first and third-world countries that is gendered and racialized – differentially affecting people by virtue of their gender, class, and nationality (Cheng 1999; Mies 1986; Mohanty 2002).

Integral to this process are two economic structures – structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and export oriented production zones developed in third-world countries.1 The transnationalization of American capital into third-world economies is accompanied by their re-structuring through SAPs which require local governments to, among other things, liberalize imports, open markets to foreign investments, privatize state enterprises, and reduce expenditure on social programs. An outgrowth of SAPs is the reduced effectiveness of agriculture as a source of livelihood and forced eviction from lands by both the state and multi-national corporations. Additionally, export oriented production zones are established in urban areas of third-world countries to capitalize on the availability of “cheap” labor to produce commercial goods for export to the United States (Chang 2000; Cheng 1999; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Mies 1986; Mohanty 2002; Morokvasic 1984).

While agreeing with the general concensus that this economic model has in recent years accelerated the economic growth in third-world countries (due to increased revenue from exports), I contend that it is predicated on a racialized, gendered, and sexualized imagery of a

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1 It is important to be cognizant here that this international division of labor has existed since colonialism, and that although its manifestations may vary in different temporal contexts, its underlying structure is often retained. Thus in the particular case of Indian emigration (as I will explain below) in referencing these 20th/21st century manifestations of globalization, I am aware that its antecedent versions in colonial India were similarly organized (although not named as SAPs) shaping migration during that period. Further, the subsequent post-independence migration of the 1960s-1990s occurs not so much due to capitalist penetration into India, but due to our adoption of a centralized economy in response to the prevalent capitalist, global economic model.
third-world workforce (especially its women) being docile, passive, cheap and non-unionized differentially impacting third-world women and men thereby shaping their migration (Chang 2000; Cheng 1999; Mies 1986; Mohanty 2002; Morokvasic 1984). This is further mediated by class such that poor women, who lose access to their land as a source of livelihood, migrate to cities and in turn comprise the bulk of the workforce within the export oriented production zones. The other option available to these women is migrating to the United States in search of employment (Chang 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Glenn 2007). Contrastingly, middle/upper-class third-world women “benefit” from globalization through expanded job opportunities in the growing private sector and multi-national corporations, opportunities for professional education, and increased possibility for legal migration for work and/or education to United States because of their more internationalized education and skills, and improved economic situations (George 2005; Iredale 2001; Shah 1998).

Simultaneous with the transformation in the economies of the third-world is that in the structure of American economy (aided also by improved technology especially information technology). As manufacturing production has moved to the third-world seeking a cheaper workforce, the American labor market has become bifurcated between the high level professional occupations on one end, and the low paying largely feminized service industries at the other (Glenn 2007; Hagan 2004; Mies 1986; Mohanty 2002; Morokvasic 1984; Pessar 1999; Piper 2005; Sassen 1988). A shortage of labor at both ends of the American labor market creates the demand for both working class low-skilled and middle-class skilled immigrants (and women in particular) in the United States. This demand for immigrant labor is further exacerbated by the erosion of the welfare state (evinced particularly in child-care/maternity support; elder care, and health care support) in the United States, and the simultaneous increase in American women’s
labor force participation (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Glenn 2007; Sotelo 1994). Immigrant labor is thus used to address this shortage without necessarily increasing the monetary value associated with this labor. Thus labor migration from the third-world to the United States is not merely economic, but gendered economic migration such that the bulk of migration streams have been men and/or women depending on the demand for their labor in America.

As a third-world economy, India was inducted into the capitalist global economy and the consequent international division of labor through the colonial process wherein the British Empire racialized Indians as a cheap, docile labor force resulting in the wide spread forced and voluntary migration during the British Raj (Chandrasekhar 1982; Lal 1999; Madhavan 1985; Segal 2002). Furthermore, this period also witnessed the massive extraction of raw materials through the commercialization of agriculture in India oriented toward exports to support the industrial revolution in Britain – the earliest version of the SAPs, and export production zones of 20th century globalization (Thapar 2003). Consequently, India emerged from colonialism as a relatively pauperized economy resulting in the decision to adopt a centralized, mixed economic model, heavy on industrialization and agricultural growth which research indicates contributed to the relatively slow economic growth for the first forty years since independence (Segal 2002).

For educated, middle-class Tamil professionals, this was evinced in serious unemployment and underemployment, inadequate work facilities and limited opportunities for career advancement, significant wage differentials between India the United States, a poorer standard of living in India, and the corruption inherent in a highly centralized economy (Khadria 2006; Khandelwal 2002; Madhavan 1985; Rangaswamy 2000). These in turn constituted the economic “push” factors that contextualized their emigration from India to other developed countries.
Originating in the early 1970s and continuing to the present, the United States emerged as the favored destination for skilled Indian professionals. Of all the professional, high-skilled immigrants admitted to the United States from all countries, Indians made up 19.5% between the years 1971-1980 and 13.4% between 1981-1990 (Chakravartty 2000). This type of emigration was being deliberately solicited by the United States, which at that time was experiencing the economic transformation which resulted in the present bifurcated labor market structure.

Accordingly, in an attempt to expand its professional/managerial base and to address the “labor vacuum” (Hagan 1998:59) in this sector, the United States was soliciting in particular scientists, engineers, teachers, health professionals, architects, and computer professionals (Khadria 2001, 2006; Khandelwal 2002; Madhavan 1985; Segal 2002). This created the economic “demand” which Tamil skilled professionals (for whom the above professions were a popular choice) sought to supply through their immigration to the United States.

The movement of people to the United States whether solicited or unsolicited is not free-flowing but is mediated by American immigration policy which constitutes the legal/political context that is the next link in this narrative. Historically American immigration legislation has embodied the contradictory impulses to both welcome and exclude immigrants simultaneously rendering the United States a nation of immigrants and a gate keeping one (Hagan 2004; Lee 2006). In making this statement, I argue that American immigration policy is shaped by a complex intersection of economic interests, foreign policy, racial/ethnic, gender, and national ideologies and stereotypes such that policy is designed with an idealized version of the desired immigrant which is correspondingly echoed in policy restrictions and permissions (Lee 2006; Sadowski-Smith 2002). In terms of labor migration, this has resulted in certain immigrant groups
being deliberately recruited and channelized to perform labor deemed suitable for them thereby
gendering and racializing both the migration process, and the work they perform.

There is no denying that legal professional migrants are perhaps the most privileged cadre
of emigrants within this contradictory American immigration policy. This however does not
preclude them from being gendered and racialized through the immigration process. The
migration of Indian professions between 1960s-1990s, while organized by the economic
transformations in both India and the United States, occurred due to the legal parameters laid out
in the Immigration and Nationality Acts of 1965 and 1990 (Iredale 2001; Khadria 2006; Segal
2002). To fill labor needs, these legislations were designed to deliberately recruit skilled workers
by establishing a preference for family reunification and professional emigrants through its
provisions resulting in the majority (over 80%) of new emigrants hailing from Latin America and
Asia (Chakravartty 2000; Chandrasekhar 1982; Hagan 2004; Khadria 2001, 2006; Khandelwal
2002). Further, gender ideologies embedded in the legislations often idealized the professional
migrant to be a man, and the family reunification migrant as a (married) woman. Consequently,
men are constructed to be the primary migrants and women the secondary migrants or followers
which have significant effects on their subsequent labor market incorporation (discussed later)
not the least because men were deemed to be the breadwinners/professionals in their families,
and women the home-makers, and part-time professionals. Being defined largely in the context
of their families by immigration policy, and the corresponding restrictions on their employment
under family reunification migration impedes Indian women’s successful accessing of
professional jobs, and justifies their lower salaries compared to their American and male
counterparts (Espiritu 1999; Mohanty 2002; Morokvasic 1984; Pedraza 1991; Pessar 1999; Shah
1998).
In developing this narrative, I contribute to the extant scholarship on Indian skilled migration to the United States (particularly between 1960 and 1990) by arguing that although it was economically motivated and legally mediated, this migration was gendered not only in terms of the gender composition of the migration streams, but also in women and men’s experiences with labor market incorporation as I will discuss later. Skilled migration during this period tended to be male dominated, with women accompanying their spouses after the former had established themselves in the United States (Iredale 2001; Madhavan 1985; Rangaswamy 2000; Segal 2002). I contend, contrasting with the existing literature which merely narrates this trend, that this is not mere happenstance, but occurs in a context where professionals are being recruited for professions which have been traditionally male-dominated both in the United States and India thereby constructing men as the ideal immigrant to perform these jobs. Women dominated skilled migration streams in only those instances when their labor was deliberately recruited to perform feminized professions such as nursing and teaching (George 2005; Iredale 2001). This further interacts with traditional gender ideologies within the Tamil Brahmin community which construct hegemonic masculinity as predicated on men’s professional, economic success and breadwinning; and emphasized femininity on women being educated, but embracing their domestic responsibilities. Accordingly, although Tamil women and men were educated in these professions, male migration was more socially approved than its female counterpart resulting men migrating autonomously and women within largely married and/or familial contexts.

While there is no doubt that Indian professional migration to the United States is shaped by macro-structural economic and legal/political forces, individual women and men exercise a choice about migrating. Thus a significant element in gendering migration is the recognition that
the process of migration is negotiated by individual women and men through the gendered hierarchies and ideologies in their households (used interchangeably here with families), and in social networks. Gendered households and gendered social networks thus signify the social and agentic aspects of migration. As discussed in the previous chapter, households/families are a non-unitary gendered institution organized along hierarchies of gender and generation (Ferguson 2007; Pessar 1999; Zinn 2007). Accordingly resources and power are not equally distributed within them such that women and men, and generations in families have differential and varying access to them. In turn this structuring of households is crucial to determining all aspects of the migration process ranging from the decision to emigrate, the method of migration, and a determination of the key emigrant (George 2005; Gramsmuck and Pessar 1991; Pessar 1999; Sotelo 1994; Toro-Morn 1995).

Considering the hierarchical nature of Indian families and the differential positioning of women and men within them particularly in terms of access to decision making power, this social and agentic aspect of migration is significantly under-theorized in Indian migration scholarship (Bhardwaj and Madhusudana 1990; Khandelwal 2002; Lessinger 1995; Rangaswamy 2000). Rather, the economic parameters of emigration (as discussed above) dominate the research. Should the role of households be mentioned, they are theorized as self-directing entities that rationally decide about immigration such that the “decision [to emigrate is] taken to minimize risks to family income or to overcome capital constraints on family production activities” (Massey et al. 1993:436). In this project (as I will demonstrate through my findings presented later), I challenge this narrow conceptualization of the role of households in migration. I argue that in mediating the migration process through the agentic actions of its members, households have to be contextualized within the macro structural economic, legal/political forces
described above, and which indeed could create the desire to emigrate. However as (Sotelo 1994) notes:

...immigration is not the outcome of households strategizing or adapting to macrostructural economic pressures, but of the exercise of the multiple interests and hierarchies of power that come to life within households. (P. 187)

Simply stated, although a valid rationale for migration, it is not sufficient to merely argue that households weigh the economic costs and benefits of migration in determining who migrates and how. More precisely, gender relations shape this process by determining how the opportunities and constraints imposed by macro structural realities translate into different migration patterns for women and men.

Existentially, Indians are tightly interconnected with their families such that the self is not an individualized unit, but one embedded in family and community with varying consequences for women and men especially in the arena of migration (George 2005; Khandelwal 2002). For men the construction of hegemonic Tamil masculinity described above provides them the resources (social approval, masculine privilege) to negotiate independent migration either to work or educate themselves, thereby improving their own and their family’s prospects. For women, the location of their “autonomy…within at set if relationships and obligations,” (George 2005:40) is often predicated upon their femininity being defined within the domestic realm constraining their independent international migration especially in the temporal context of the 1960s-1990s before gender ideologies relaxed to facilitate their independent migration.²

² It is important to be reminded here, that predicated on emphasized Tamil femininity constructs, Tamil women have to some extent always engaged in internal migration connected with marriage. Within the patrilineal system that defines their family structure, women leave natal homes to join married households, often moving to locations other than their home towns. This form of migration is acceptable for women. Further, as some of my participants will attest to, internal migration for higher education was also a possibility for some women as long as they were located within the controlled environment of college/school dorms or within the purview of extended family. Less appropriate was their independent international migration for professional or educational purposes especially until 1990s.
Consequently, women have to negotiate not only with gender ideologies that constrain them, but also with generational (parents) and marital (husbands) power structures to initiate and undertake migration. Extrapolating from scholarship on Puerto Rican immigrant women, I contend that class status is integral to this negotiation process as it shapes their personal expectations from migration (Toro-Morn 1995). As middle-class, educated women Tamil women often desire to migrate to seek professional growth in the United States and a correspondingly improved quality of life for their families, especially their children. To achieve this end, some women choose to marry abroad thereby migrating through the method legitimized for them, while achieving their personal goals. Others negotiate with husbands such that they participate in the decision to leave, determine their settlement destination, and organize the migration and settlement process. And yet others who desire to migrate independently and not in a marital context bargain heavily with parents by constructing themselves as George (2005) uncovered in the particular instance of Keralite (another Indian regional group) nurses, as assets to their families rather than burdens. 3

While families mediate the process, the ability for Tamil women and men to leave is foreshadowed by the presence of migrant social networks4 spanning India and the United States which are a product of their migration history, and which in turn serve to perpetuate migration. Migrant networks are “sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-

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3 The notion of women as burdens had to be understood in the context of the patrilineal kinship system in India (more rigidly practiced by some Indian groups than among others) where women are constructed as visitors in their natal homes, and belonging in their marital ones. In this view, any expenses made on behalf of a woman (education, dowry) is construed as being burdensome as the long term benefits of the same will be accrued by her marital family (Das Gupta et al. 2004)

4 As Hagan (1998) notes, migrant social networks operate in all stages of the migration process including process of emigration, initial settlement, labor market incorporation, job advancement, and organizing family life in the United States. Accordingly, at different points in this literature review, I reiterate the importance of social networks. It is important to recognize that although this might appear repetitive, I identify the particular role that social networks have in mediating each stage of the migration and settlement process.
migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin” (Massey et al. 1993:448). These social networks operate in different stages of the migration process mediating the decision to migrate, the direction and persistence of migration flows and settlement patterns through the circulation of information about the intricacies and legalities of migration, availability of jobs, quality of life, and places to settle in the United States (Hagan 1998; Menjívar 2000; Pessar and Mahler 2003).

While both Tamil women and men rely on these networks to undertake migration, the gendered nature of these networks becomes apparent. Given that men have traditionally been primary migrants, their personal and kin migrant networks are much stronger in assisting their leaving India and settling in the United States, and tend to be male-dominated. As wives, although women have access to these networks their masculine nature often renders them inadequate in addressing the unique issues connected to women’s migration and settlement (for instance issues connected to being dependent wives in a foreign country, traveling alone for the first time, and establishing family life). Immigrant Tamil women thus have to construct and rely on more female-dominated networks made up of girlfriends, other wives, and women family members in the United States (Gramsmuck and Pessar 1991; Hagan 1998; Kibria 1993; Menjívar 2000; Sotelo 1994). In contrast to their working class counterparts, as middle-class professionals, Tamil women and men also rely on the existence of professional networks between India and the United States to organize their migration. These networks are a crucial source of professional socialization and transnational advice about organizing migration to capitalize on available jobs without experiencing significant downward economic mobility. Researching transnational nursing networks between India and the United States, George (2005) uncovers their role in advising potential migrants to specialize in an area of nursing that is recognized in the United
States; providing information about nursing licensure exams in the United States so that migrants could begin preparatory work in India; and aiding them in organizing the documents required for migration and in finding employment upon arrival.

**Gendered Settlement**

Gender mediates not only the process of emigrating, but also that of settlement in the United States. It is important to note at this point that extant Indian scholarship on settlement emphasizes cultural, religious and identity based adaptation centered largely on mate-selection, dating, sexuality, parenting and marriage (such as Khandelwal 2002; Kurien 1999; Rayaprol 1997). Understudied are the intricacies of how families are settled and reconstituted in the United States, how work and family life are negotiated, and how these processes are gendered. By extrapolating from scholarship on other immigrant groups, I contribute to the literature by arguing that settlement is gendered such that Tamil women assume the bulk of responsibility in organizing and undertaking it. In doing so, I contend that they are simultaneously doing emphasized Tamil femininity centered on fulfilling domestic obligations, while reconfiguring patriarchal gender relations through settlement activities (George 2005; Kibria 1993; Sotelo 1994). This is particularly evinced in their construction of immigrant families as sites of adaptation and retention of transported Indian standards especially visible in the division of household labor and decision making which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Gendered settlement involves three key aspects. The first involves Tamil women’s roles as mothers and wives. Research indicates that women who migrate with their entire families or following their spouses choose to concentrate on the successful adaptation of their children, and on the construction of family life in the United States prior to seeking employment. Accordingly, attempting to settle families in a foreign country necessitates their interaction with American bureaucracies (social security, utilities, banks) and institutions (schools, hospitals, day care,
extra-curricular communities) almost immediately upon entry into the United States. In turn this connects their households to the larger American society, expanding their social networks and thereby facilitating their adjustment to the American way of life (Gramsmuck and Pessar 1991; Kibria 1993; Menjívar 2000; Sotelo 1994).

Second is Tamil women’s developing and utilizing of gendered social networks - i.e. women’s networks - to mediate the settlement process. These networks are often informal and based on relationships of reciprocity and exchange, on the expectation that Indians/Tamils will extend support to one another (George 2005; Hagan 1998; Hellerman 2006; Menjívar 2000; Parrado and Flippen 2005). Unlike men’s networks which tend to be organized around work, women’s networks are largely oriented to their families facilitating the exchange of material resources such as child-care, parenting assistance, food, money in addition to mediating their above mentioned interaction with American institutions (Hagan 1998; Menjívar 2000). Perhaps more importantly is the role of these networks in mediating Tamil women’s personal adaptation to the United States. Women’s networks are critical to Tamil immigrant women’s psychological and physical well-being in a new country by providing them with an orientation to living in the United States, social support to stave off initial loneliness and isolation, and assistance in reconfiguring traditional family forms in the United States (such as, in the case of my participants, negotiating a more equitable division of household labor) (Kibria 1993; Parrado and Flippen 2005; Sotelo 1994; Zentgraf 2002). Additionally, skills are learned, and gender specific information is transmitted through women’s networks - information connected to women’s reproductive health, adapting Indian cooking to America, becoming new parents, and caring for infants and children in the absence of extended family support – easing the settlement process.
The final aspect of gendered settlement is Tamil women’s role in community formation in
a migrant context. Tamil women are integral to the creation and consolidation of a culturally
distinct Tamil community through their informal and organizational activities (Sotelo 1994).
Similar to the gendered nature of social networks, women’s community work is distinct from
that of men. Unlike their male counterparts, women do not constitute community as distinctive to
them, but rather in consortium with their children and husbands. This community is formed in
the private sphere through women’s interactions with each other’s families, and in the public
sphere through their participation in cultural and local associations, and religious organizations
(Sotelo 1994). In so doing, Tamil women maintain transnational linkages with India, thereby
obtaining emotional and material support, and retaining and/or socializing their children into
Tamil cultural prescriptions (George 2005; Kurien 1999; Mahler 1999; Rayaprol 1997).

**Labor Market Incorporation and Gendered Work Experiences**

In addition to reconstituting family life in the United States, a key element of settlement
involves Tamil migrants (and women in particular) successful labor market incorporation - i.e.
their ability to access jobs in the American labor market - and their subsequent experiences in the
workplace which will be elaborated upon in this section. Deviating from the Indian scholarship
which recounts Indian travails at work, I take an intersectional, critical perspective on the
American labor market, and position Tamils as an immigrant community of color within it.

**Labor Market Incorporation**

Following from the macro-structural economic, legal/political and social contexts that
shape Tamil immigration to the United States in search of better professional opportunities and
quality of life; their labor market incorporation is mediated by the structures of opportunity they
The structures of opportunity particularly relevant to the labor market incorporation of Tamil migrants include the racialized American labor market and their transported human capital; their method of entry into the United States and the type of professions they espouse; and finally the availability to social networks integral to finding jobs in the United States.

Upon entry into the United States, and attempting to find work, I contend in agreement with other feminist scholars that Tamil women and men encounter a racialized labor market that initially slots all immigrants irrespective of class and education to performing relatively low-paid work (George 2005; Khandelwal 2002; Louie 2001; Mohanty 2002; Morokvasic 1984; Pedraza 1991). This is predicated upon two things – structural barriers to the immediate professional incorporation and the ideological construction of immigrant work. Despite their solicited status, Indian professional migrants encounter structural barriers to their successful labor market incorporation predicated on issues of deskilling (non-transfer of skills) and disqualification of their Indian education (non-recognition of Indian professional degrees) which prevents them from accessing professional jobs immediately upon migration (Iredale 2001; Khandelwal 2002; Piper 2005; Rangaswamy 2000; Shah 1998). This non-recognition of their transported human capital is further exacerbated by their lack of American work experience crucial to getting their first job. Accordingly, skilled professionals have to often re-qualify themselves in the United States either by retaking licensure exams (nursing, medical, accounting, legal licensing exams), or attending university. In the interim, the only jobs they are able to access are relatively low-paying, de-skilled work into which all new immigrants get slotted due to the ideological
construction this work as appropriate for immigrants (George 2005; Iredale 2001; Khandelwal 2002; Mohanty 2002; Rangaswamy 2000).

Ideologically, jobs which disproportionately employ immigrants are defined in terms of race, gender and sexual ideologies such that “very definition of work draws upon and reconstructs notions of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality” (Mohanty 2002:144), having particular repercussions for migrant women’s labor. Reiterating my earlier mentioned comment about American legal policies envisioning a desired type of migrant, these ideologies are employed by the American state to define immigrant women solely in terms of their domestic and familial roles ignoring their roles as professionals; which is often a western characterization of third-world women. Accordingly, they are classified as secondary or temporary workers for whom wage employment is not a priority but one that supplements their mothering roles which is then used to justify their lower wages compared to men (constructed as primary bread winners) (Amott and Matthaei 1996; Cheng 1999; Louie 2001; Mohanty 2002; Shah 1997b). Further, their work is constructed as a “natural extension” (Mohanty 2002:158) of their domestic roles, performed solely in the service of their families and thus often classified as a leisure activity rendering their labor invisible, and vulnerable to exploitation (Espiritu 1999; Morokvasic 1984; Pedraza 1991).

These “controlling images” (Collins 2000:69) are then used to “attract groups of workers who are more suited for the jobs” (Mohanty 2002:153). Consequently, while all immigrants may be initially attracted to perform de-skilled work as they are deemed less suitable and qualified to perform more skilled labor; Indian women in particular as immigrants, and women of color, get channeled into jobs labeled unskilled and requiring tolerance for routine and tedious work. They are not only stereotyped as being appropriate for these jobs as third-world women, but these
ideologies are used to justify their lower wages compared to their citizen counterparts. It is important to recognize however, that class status mediates this process with working-class Indian women being slotted into jobs such as home-based garment work, and ethnic economy work within which they spend most of their career as transitioning to professional work is difficult (Hossfeld 1994; Khandelwal 2002; Segura 1994; Zinn and Dill 1994). Contrastingly, middle-class, professionally educated women tend to work in feminized jobs (ex: nursing/teaching aids, volunteer physicians etc) within their professions until such time that they re-qualify and transition to professional labor (George 2005; Rangaswamy 2000; Shah 1998).

Navigating this racialized labor market so as to eventually access professional work is especially dependent on the second factor that comprises their structures of opportunity namely Tamil women and men’s method of entry into the United States and type of profession. Emigrants entering the United States via the academic route – i.e. seeking graduate/professional degrees in the United States – have the greatest ease in accessing work because they gain American qualifications and are integrated into their professions through their participation in American universities (Iredale 2001; Khadria 2001, 2006). In direct contrast, those migrating under family reunification (the majority of whom are married women) experience greatest difficulty in accessing work as some research indicates that women in this position choose to concentrate on establishing family life in the United States prior to seeking employment (Khandelwal 2002; Piper 2005). Accordingly, they lose out on time in the labor force and their skills deteriorate affecting their job prospects. Thus, labor market incorporation becomes a distinctively gendered process with married women having greatest difficulty in accessing work and consequently being engaged in relatively low paying, feminized work for some part of their careers.
With regard to type of professions, Tamils in internationalized professions such as information technology and engineering, have the greatest ease in accessing professional work immediately upon migration compared to those in professions with national standards (law, medicine, accounting, and nursing) as the former are not limited by restrictive licensure requirements (Iredale 2001; Khadria 2001). Needless to say, ease or difficulty in accessing labor market is crucially dependent on the economic conditions at the time of migration (recession or boom time) as this directly affects immigrants’ ability to find work. As a nation, the United States has a historical tendency to construct a fallacious connection between immigration and economic recession, demonizing migrants as job stealers, resulting in either their forced deportation through restrictive immigration legislation (ex: Bracero program in the context of legal Mexican agricultural workers; H1 A program in the context of nurses) or their increased difficulty in finding work compared to their citizen counterparts (Chang 2000). Thus in the particular instance of professional migrants (as I will demonstrate through my findings), their entry into a depressed economy (and accompanying restrictive legal/political climate to immigration) directly mediates their duration in low paying work and ability to successfully transition and advance into professional work.

The final element that defines the structures of opportunity within which Tamil women and men are located include their migrant social networks. Although as immigrants they might be deemed appropriate to perform certain types of work immediately upon migration, they still have to access and find these jobs. Social networks are integral to this process. Extrapolating from scholarship on Latina and Asian migration, I argue that Tamil women and men rely on both kin and professional gendered networks to find their initial gendered work. These networks often structure the organization of the work process such that co-ethnics within these networks are
responsible for recruiting new immigrants by notifying them of available job opportunities, connecting them with hiring personnel at these jobs, socializing them into American work standards; assisting then with contract negotiations (such as pay, work hours, and benefits if provided), and importantly in impressing on new immigrants the importance of seeking any employment (including low-paying ones) as a stepping stone to establishing themselves economically in the United States (Hagan 1998, 2004; Mahler 1999; Menjívar 2000; Sotelo 1994). Further, these networks also provide support and encouragement in navigating the psychological detritus in downward economic mobility after having enjoyed a middle/upper-class status in India – a particularly difficult experience for men as it calls their masculinity, predicated on being successful breadwinners, into question (George 2005; Kibria 1993).

The efficacy of migrant networks in influencing all aspects of the migration and settlement process as discussed to date is however predicated on their strength and vitality dependent on the class status of the migrants utilizing them. Accordingly, as middle-class professionals, Tamil migrant networks are much stronger than their working-class counterparts because their members are not living a precarious existence (poverty, working intermittently in low-skilled jobs, and living in poorly equipped neighborhoods) and so the material and non-material reciprocity and exchange within these networks are not strained, or stretched thin facilitating their successful labor market incorporation and settlement in the United States (George 2005; Hellerman 2006; Kibria 1993; Menjívar 2000; Sotelo 1994).  

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5 It is noteworthy to mention here, that although I have established the efficacy of migrant social networks in this narrative, conflict and exploitation are also inherent to them centered around issues such as exaggeration of available employment opportunities in the United States as a motivation for migration; being recruited to perform the lowest-wage jobs within the work process; encountering competition with other co-ethnics in the networks for material resources, and fraying of networks due to overdrawing of resources and unequal reciprocity (especially among working class migrants) (Hagan 1998; Kibria 1993; Menjívar 2000; Sotelo 1994).
Gendered Work Experiences

Labor market incorporation (ability to access jobs) is just one side of the coin that determines the gendered work lives of Tamil professional women. The other is their experiences within professional work organizations (used interchangeably with workplaces), the content of this section. Considering that work organizations are located within a gendered and racialized labor market, they are neither gender-race neutral nor spaces of comprehensive egalitarian. Rather through the “local, ongoing practical activities of organizing work … [and] in the daily activities of working” (Acker 2006:441-442) work organizations create and reproduce social and economic inequality. This is connected to the imbedding of work organizations by inequality regimes – organized on the bases of race, class and gender - which are “interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and racial inequalities within particular organizations” (Acker 2006:443). While inequality within work organizations include an array of issues, in this narrative and with reference to Tamil professional women (as immigrant women of color), I emphasize the inequities particularly connected to the masculine (white) work culture inherent to the workplaces of male-dominated professions which Tamil women espouse (such as medicine, architecture, business, certain forms of academia and civil/construction/mechanical engineering); and the glass ceiling that they encounter as women/of color encounter.

Organization culture refers to “a system of shared meanings, values, beliefs, practices, group norms of the members to produce behavioral norms with regard to the working conditions of the organization” (Ismail 2007:55). Organizational culture is gendered such that a masculine (white) culture characterizes the workplaces of male-dominated professions; in turn shaping

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6 In this sub-section of the narrative, I focus exclusively on Tamil women’s gendered work experiences within the realm of only professional labor.
women and men’s work lives and professional outcomes (Acker 2006; Cabrera 2007; Maier 1999; Reskin and Padavic 1994). There is a dialectical relationship between the greater proportion of men within these organizations contributing to its masculine nature, and the raced, classed, and sexualized ideological arrangements which organize work around the image of an ideal worker or employee who is a white man – a “disembodied, universal worker…who has no external influences which impinge on the job” (Acker 1990:139,149). This unencumbered worker is one who while married (and heterosexual) has no significant responsibilities for children or family demands other than earning a living and thus is totally dedicated to work both able and desirous of working long hours, and prioritizing work over familial demands. The underlying assumption in this construction is that this unencumbered worker is supported by women family members (a wife) whose primary responsibility is managing the demands of family life, rendering them less desirable employees due to their inability to be solely dedicated to work (Acker 1990, 2006).

This masculine work culture is tangibly experienced by women in terms of deficits in participation in social networks and informal interactions in the workplace. Informal networks in the workplace are a crucial resource by which employees gain skills, acquire legitimacy, and climb promotional ladders (Elliott and Smith 2004). Due to their informal nature, the creation and maintenance of these networks is largely predicated upon informal interactions and socializing in the workplace. Considering that a masculine work culture is dominated by white men who occupy hierarchical positions of power, women and/or women of color are often devalued by discounting their professional opinions, ignoring them in meetings, and excluding them from socializing activities (such as drinks after work, dinners etc) (Acker 2006; Elliott and Smith 2004). As a result, women and/or women of color’s access to professional networks are
severely limited in turn affecting their professional advancement. In the particular instance of Indian women professionals, some research indicates their encountering of a glass ceiling which limits their professional mobility (Khandelwal 2002; Le 2009; Shah 1998).

A glass ceiling exists when “artificial barriers impede the advancement of women and minorities…to top positions in firms” (Elliott and Smith 2004; Ismail 2007; Maume 2004:250; Powell 1999; Reskin and Padavic 1994). Integral to the glass ceiling is the operation of gendered and racialized hierarchies especially at the top of work organizations such that these positions are almost always occupied by white men in the United States, and although women and people of color are close enough to top positions, they rarely reach them (Maume 2004). Consequently, in the particular instance of women in professional work, Cabrera (2007), Ismail (2007), and Maume (2004) note that despite major transformations in the segregated nature of work organizations, the share of women in top management positions remains very low and infinitesimal in the case of women of color such as my participants.

Several factors operating together construct the glass ceiling which disadvantages Indian professional women. The first is homosocial reproduction which is more popularly known as the “old boys network” (Elliott and Smith 2004; Kanter 1977; Le 2009). Recognizing that a premium is placed on discretion and trust among workers by virtue of the nature of higher positions of power (uncertain, interdependent, need for accurate communication) within organizations; Kanter (1977) observes a preference for social homogeneity in organizational advancement. Stated simply race and gender groups ascriptively similar with supervisors have greater potential to advance up workplace power hierarchies. Considering that white men (“old boys”) have historically dominated positions of power within work organizations, they also benefit most from this inherited privilege in achieving professional advancement within their
workplaces. Disadvantaged are women and people of color who experience difficulty in breaking into these positions, and the few who are successful do not have power commensurate with their white, male counterparts. In the process, the social characteristics of organizational power are reproduced over successive generations creating the glass ceiling (Elliott and Smith 2004; Kanter 1977; Maume 2004).

The second factor which constructs the glass ceiling is the role of social networks at work. In addition to being excluded from men’s networks, as women of color Indian professional women also experience exclusion within job related networks (Cabrera 2007; McGuire 2002). This implies that although they are integrated into professional networks, they are differentially positioned within them such that network members are less likely to invest in women than (white) men largely due to the ideological and cultural constructions discussed above (Elliott and Smith 2004; McGuire 2002). Thus women (especially women of color) receive significantly less mentoring, work-related help, on-the-job training, visible job assignments that facilitate career mobility, and favorable job evaluations than their (white) male counterparts directly affecting their advancement within work organizations (Cabrera 2007; Kanter 1977; Le 2009; Maier 1999; Maume 2004; McGuire 2002; Powell 1999).

The final factor which shapes the glass ceiling for women is the barriers they encounter within the workplace as mothers. Unlike men, women’s career trajectories are rarely linear but decidedly non-linear, disjointed and interrupted as they exhibit a high degree of mobility between employment and non employment over their life course to meet the demands of family life. This occurs both due to structural reasons such as the lack of comprehensive policy initiatives and corresponding workplace support for maternity and family needs; and due to the personal preferences of mothers to remain home with children and with elderly parents at
different points in their life course (Cabrera 2007; Hochschild 1989, 1997; Hynes and Clarkberg 2005; Reskin and Padavic 1994). Accordingly, some women choose to opt out of work altogether while others continue to work but choose an alternative career path which allows them flexible or reduced work hours but simultaneously serves to slow or block their advancement called “mommy track” (Cabrera 2007:218; Hochschild 1997; Schwartz 1989). Either way, women are concomitantly stereotyped by employers as unstable workers, riskier to promote to higher levels of management than their male counterparts. Moreover, their interrupted or alternative career trajectories can also be detrimental to their ability to access networks, develop mentoring relationships, and retain professional skills resulting in the glass ceiling to their advancement prospects.

In discussing the masculine organizational culture and the glass ceiling effect, I am cognizant that some women have successfully advanced to positions of power within organizations. This success is often predicated on women “out-credentialling” (Elliott and Smith 2004:369) their white-male counterparts to compensate for their relative lack of network assistance and inherited privilege, and on having to work long (if not longer) hours compared to their male counterparts to demonstrate their commitment to the organization (as opposed to that to their families) thereby rendering them “competent” for higher management (Acker 2006; Elliott and Smith 2004; Maume 2004; Schwartz 1989). Nonetheless, the group with the highest odds of breaking the glass ceiling is white women with women of color experiencing the opposite despite doing all of the above (Elliott and Smith 2004; Maume 2004).

**Work-Family Arrangements in Dual Income Families**

In reviewing the literature in this section, I focus primarily on the division of domestic/household labor (chores and child care) and decision making which are of key interest in this project. Drawing upon essentialist ideas, the realm of family life has historically been
constructed as a feminized space – an arena where women are expected to organize and perform the intricacies of family life, though not always possessing the financial or decision making power to be considered “heads” of households. Correspondingly, women’s work within families is constructed as natural - performed due to their nurturing instincts and their love for their families – thereby characterizing it as unproductive labor requiring no wages and women, the ideal persons to perform it (Amott and Matthaie 1996; Eisenstein 1978; Kemp 1994; Shelton and John 1996). Domestic labor refers to “unpaid work done to maintain family members and/or a home,” (Shelton and John 1996:300) and comprises both visible and invisible aspects embodied in three major components – housework (chores), support (emotional) work, and child care (Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1989; Kemp 1994; Rubin 2006). Critical to understanding housework arrangements within dual income families is the sense that it is a contested terrain, constantly negotiated between spouses given their social location (class, race, migrant status) and their work demands. Thus, getting housework done involves “cooperation, negotiation, conflict among household members, usually requiring some consensus but also generating potential resentment and disagreements among those who live together” (Bianchi et al. 2000:192; Doucet 2001). However, regardless of this process, I argue that there is a persistence of an unequal gendered division of household labor such that women continue to perform the bulk of it despite their increased labor force participation.

In making this claim I do not deny that the late 20th and 21st century has witnessed the emergence of the “New American Man” (Hochschild 1989:xxvi) who is a loving, involved father, considerate husband and breadwinner, and whose proportion of household labor has been increasing, thereby transforming the organization of domestic work from its antecedents. Simultaneously working women have reduced their performance of household labor – a steep
decline from 30 hours/week in 1965 to 17.5 hours/week in 1995. Nonetheless, men’s increases are not commensurate with women’s declines as men were starting from such a low level, that their contributions have yet to approach those of women thereby resulting in women continuing to shoulder the bulk of this labor (Bianchi et al. 2000; Brines 1994; Coleman 1991; Coltrane 2000; Gerson 1985; Hochschild 1997; Shelton and John 1996). Further, men’s performance of household labor continues to be classified as “helping” (Coltrane 2000:1209) thereby retaining the ideological construction of this labor as feminized and of women as its chief performers. Thus, “housework is the aspect of family life that is most resistant to changes in women’s economic and labor force participation” (Blumberg 1991:9) since women continue to be responsible for approximately 75% of it resulting in a “stalled revolution” (Brines 1994:652) in working women’s lives (Hochschild 1989; Kemp 1994).

I attribute this stalled revolution directly to the operation of gender as a structure within the labor force and in families. The masculine workplace with its idealization of an unencumbered man dedicated to work often to the exclusion of family life, as integral to achieving and performing hegemonic masculinity creates the time constraints for men which are rationally used to justify their limited participation at home (Kimmel 2005). Further, men’s continuous labor force participation (as opposed to women’s interrupted trajectory), and corresponding higher earning and advancing power equips them with greater economic resources to negotiate for reduced involvement in domestic work (Bianchi et al. 2000; Brines 1994; Chafetz 1991; Coltrane 2000; Kamo 1988; Kroska 2004; Rubin 2006; Shelton and John 1996).

More importantly, and perhaps of greater relevance to my project than the above explanations is the “symbolic enactment of gender relations” (Bianchi et al. 2000:194) through the performance of housework. Underlying this argument is the recognition that housework is
not gender neutral, but that its performance by women and men defines and expresses gender relations within households understood in the context of gender ideology and doing gender (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane 2000; Kamo 1988; Kroska 2004). Gender ideologies about housework as women’s work are in a state of flux with a growing awareness that men at least ought to participate in the tasks of daily life, resulting in them being varyingly espoused by women and men in their traditional, transitional, or egalitarian/liberal forms. Depending on their socialization and agentic responses, women and men reference these ideologies to determine their performance of housework. Accordingly, the division of household labor becomes inequitably organized disadvantaging women when there is an incongruity in spousal gender ideologies especially with partners being located at opposite ends (traditional-egalitarian) of this spectrum (Coltrane 2000; Gerson 1985; Hochschild 1989; Kamo 1988; Kroska 2004; Rexroat and Shehan 1984; Rubin 2006).

In addition to gender ideology, housework is an arena where women and men affirm and reproduce gendered selves in the amount and type of housework they perform. Thus through their disparate household labor performance, both women and men are choosing to doing appropriate femininity and masculinity that is predicated upon women feeling obligated/expected to perform this work, and men assuming that it is primarily the responsibility of women. Key to doing gender through domestic work is the recognition that it is being performed for an audience that is observing and judging its appropriateness (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane 2000; Kamo 1988; Kroska 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). This often consists of the wider social relations within which families are located (community, larger society, extended family) and where men flirt with social disapproval for performing the lion’s share of household labor and women run the risk of being vilified as “bad” mothers for reneging on their expected roles by
cutting back dramatically (some cut backs are expected given their involvement in professional work) on their household responsibilities.

Not only is the organization of domestic labor unequally gendered, but so is the nature of the chores that comprise domestic work. Women continue to perform the bulk of “core” domestic work that is immediate and daily, centered for the most part on the unpleasant or traditionally feminine tasks such as cooking, cleaning, groceries, and laundry, integral to the maintenance of homes and families (Bianchi et al. 2000; Brines 1994; Coleman 1991; Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1989; Kemp 1994; Kroska 2004; Rubin 2006). Additionally, women are responsible for the emotional life of families, and also assume the managerial role by performing the coordinative (scheduling), supervisory and monitoring work that is instrumental for the smooth proceeding of family life (Coltrane 2000; Doucet 2001; Hochschild 1989; Kemp 1994; Rubin 2006). This is particularly evinced in child care where women are largely responsible for organizing and performing the routines of child care (such as bathing and feeding children, and aiding them with school work) while men spend more time in fun activities with children (playing, baby-sitting, extra-curricular activities) (Coleman 1991; Doucet 2001; Hochschild 1989).

Thus, despite their increased involvement in domestic labor, men contribute little to the performance of “core” household labor, limiting themselves to the “auxiliary” masculine chores such as household repairs and maintenance work, grocery shopping, upkeep of cars and garage, and moving lawns – all of which can be periodically performed offering men greater control and discretion over when they perform household labor. By contrast, financial decision making often remains the bastion of male control with men being the power behind financial decisions, and women executing them (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coleman 1991; Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1989;
Rubin 2006). Consequently working married women (with children) report larger leisure
deficiencies and greater stress in balancing work and family compared to their male counterparts

As is perhaps evident by this point, this scholarship has been developed largely in the
context of white, middle-class, American dual income families with subtle undertones of family
life being oppressive to women due to its patriarchal nature that results in marriage, work, and
children increasing women’s household labor demands. Further, implicit in this scholarship is the
sense that American women’s balancing of work and family is a recent phenomenon emergent
from their increased labor force participation since the 1960s, often completely ignoring the
history of interconnected work and family life among women of color and working class women.
Accordingly, I reference this scholarship as it is relevant to Tamil professional women’s work-
family arrangements considering their shared class and professional status with their white
counterparts. However, to extend it to the particular instance of Tamil professional women and
thereby be attentive to our ethnic diversity and the interplay of migration and transported gender
standards in determining family life I borrow from the literature on work-family arrangements
among working class Latina and Asian migrants which I will briefly outline here.

Liberal feminists have long assumed that migration to and employment in the United
States would empower tradition bound third-world women migrants to negotiate for more
equitable family arrangements in terms of division of household labor and their participation in
decision making (Mohanty 2002; Pessar 1999; Sotelo 1994; Wolf 1991). Interrogating this claim,
I argue that while married, Indian women are successful in bargaining to some extent with the
patriarchal character of their families in the context of their migration and professional labor in
the United States, there is no linear progression from patriarchy to parity but rather a
contradictory one where gains in one area may be accompanied by strains in another (George 2005; Lim 1997; Morokvasic 1984; Parrado and Flippen 2005; Pessar 1999; Sotelo 1999). The arenas of family life which witness the largest gains by women are their increased household decision making power and control over budgeting. This increased power of women within their families is predicated upon the necessity of their professional labor in the United States, and their commensurate contribution to the family income both of which are acknowledged by their partners. Accordingly, immigrant women increasingly participate in economic decisions within their families; feel an increased right to spend money (both on luxury and necessity based items) without seeking their husbands’ approval and to maintain extended kin ties through their own remittances. Additionally, gains are also manifested in terms of women’s increased psychological resources – i.e. a substantial increase in their personal self-expression and self-confidence through their participation in paid labor outside the home (George 2005; Lim 1997; Mahler 1999; Pessar 1984, 1999; Zentgraf 2002).

As important as these bargains are, they occur within structural constraints such that Indian women choose not to radically challenge or transform traditional family forms and gender relations within them (Kandiyoti 1988; Kibria 1993; Morokvasic 1984; Zentgraf 2002). This is particularly evinced in their choice not to substantially alter the division of household labor in their families toward more egalitarian arrangements choosing rather to continue to perform the bulk of it themselves (George 2005; Khandelwal 2002; Rangaswamy 2000; Segal 1998; Shah 1998). There is no doubt that this facilitates both women and men’s appropriate gender performances as previously discussed. However this is further complicated by their race/ethnic, immigrant and class status wherein for working class women in particular, the exploitative nature of their labor, and the threat of emasculation their husbands’ experience in encountering
economic downward mobility upon migration often results in them locating their femininity within the familial realm – as mandated by transported Indian emphasized femininity - thereby taking pride in performing the bulk of household labor (Amott and Matthaei 1996; Gramsmuck and Pessar 1991; Menjívar 2000; Pessar 1984, 1999; Sotelo 1994). By contrast, their middle/upper-class, professional counterparts attempt to compensate for transgressing the boundaries of emphasized femininity by retaining household labor as their responsibility; or continue to perform this labor in anticipation of the day when they return to being full-time home-makers (as some were in India) when their paid labor enables their families to achieve a class status in the United States commensurate with the one they left behind in India (Espiritu 1999; Toro-Morn 1995). 7

Additionally, Indian women’s patriarchal bargains have also to be contextualized within the structural location of their families as immigrant families of color, vulnerable to the vagaries of a racialized, gendered American society, and to the threat posed to traditional Indian family life from what is perceived to be the “individualistic and unregulated American family practices” (Espiritu 1999; George 2005; Khandelwal 2002; Kurien 1999; Pessar 1999:590; Rangaswamy 2000; Segal 2002; Sotelo 1994; Kibria 1993; Lim 1997). Accordingly, in direct contradiction to their white, middle-class counterparts’ notions of families as oppressing women, Indian women emphasize the supportive nature of families in an alien world. Correspondingly, they exercise agency by choosing to construct their families as “bastions of resistance” (Sotelo 1999:568) to their structural vulnerabilities, by undertaking limited transformations of family life, while retaining its traditional gendered character which can be easily identifiable as authentically

7 It is relevant to note that in making this claim I am aware that some are able to negotiate for an egalitarian division of household labor and decision making within their families on the basis of the professional labor and spousal support of the same. However, given the rarity of this occurrence (evinced in the small number of egalitarian households in the extant scholarship among both Americans and immigrants, and seconded in my findings), I do not elaborate upon this arrangement here, but in the following empirical chapters.
Indian. Thus Indian women walk an “ideological tight rope struggling to use their new resources to their advantage but [not such that it] threatens the traditional family system” (Kibria 1993:8-9).

**Summary**

In this chapter I presented a review of the literature that informs my work referencing three interconnected bodies of scholarship – gender and migration; labor market incorporation and gendered work experiences; and work-family arrangements in dual income families.

In outlining the gender and migration research, I argue that migration and settlement occurs at the nexus of macro and micro forces and that racialized, and sexualized gender constructs and imagery embeds the entire process. Thus Tamil labor migration from India to the United States occurs within the economic parameters of a gendered international division of labor between US and India and accompanying economic restructuring in both countries inherent to globalization. Further the push and pull forces created by this process are mediated by American immigration policy designed with around an idealized migrant worker creating subsequent impediments to women and men’s labor market incorporation.

However, gendered migration is not merely economic or legal, but socially mediated through the gendered nature of households and social networks such that women in particular have to bargain with power structures, and gender ideologies to undertake migration. Finally, gender relations are reconfigured through the settlement process wherein women assume the bulk of responsibility in settling their families. Gendered settlement is centered on Tamil women’s increased interaction with American bureaucracies and institutions upon migration; their employment of women’s networks to facilitate their family’s and their personal adaptation to the United States; and finally the lead role women play in constructing community thereby retaining the transnational connections linking their families with India.
In reviewing the labor market incorporation and gendered work experiences scholarship I contend that Tamils encounter a racialized, gendered American labor market upon migration such that their ability to access professional work is mediated by the structures of opportunity in their context of reception. These include the economic and political climate that shapes the availability of jobs, Tamil women’s transported human capital, and the social capital available to them in the form of migrant social networks which are integral to finding work. Framed by these factors, I argue that as immigrants, Tamil women irrespective of class get channeled into relatively low-paying, feminized, work prior to making the successful transition to professional work. Critically, this process is gendered such that married wives have greater difficulties in accessing professional work compared to their male counterparts, not merely because of the legal status, but also their familial demands.

Tamil women also have to navigate being immigrant women of color within the largely male and white dominated organizational culture of professional workplaces. Considering that the latter continue to prize the unencumbered worker (assumed to be male) as the ideal employee, Tamil women are disadvantaged within these workplaces evinced in their limited access to informal professional networks, limited opportunities for professional growth – which operate as a glass ceiling to their upward professional mobility. Further as mothers, they experience interrupted (rather than the linear trajectories of their male counterparts) career trajectories, characterized by their various efforts to have both a family and a career within an labor market structure that does not recognize familial demands on employees.

In outlining the scholarship on work-family arrangements in dual-income families, I argue that there is a persistence of an unequal gendered division of household labor such that women continue to perform the bulk of it despite their increased labor force participation. Further,
although American men’s participation in household labor has substantially increased over the past two decades, these are not commensurate with women’s especially considering that ideologically the domestic sphere is still classified as a feminine arena, and thus chores women’s responsibility with men’s involvement being perceived as helping. Therefore for both women and men, there is a symbolic enactment of gender relations through the performance of housework such that each is doing appropriate femininity and masculinity through their respective bulk and limited involvement in the same.

For immigrant women this is further complicated by the transnational operation of traditional gender ideologies and their racialization within American society. Accordingly, I argue that especially in the context of their labor in the United States, they are successful in bargaining with the above described patriarchal character of their families to some extent (especially evinced in their increased decision making power and psychological resources). However, in articulating these transformations in their families, Tamil women also choose not to substantially alter the division of household labor in their families toward more egalitarian arrangements as a mechanism of retaining its traditional gendered character as a bastion of resistance against Americanization. In the next chapter, I present the methodological framework organizing this project.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

We must not study Asian Americans primarily in terms of statistics and what was done to them. They are entitled to be viewed as subject – as men and women with minds, wills, and voices. By “voices” we mean their own words and stories as told in their oral histories, conversations, speeches, soliloquies and songs, as well as in their own writings….Their voices contain particular expressions and phrases with their own meanings and nuances, the cuttings from the cloth of languages.

---Ronald Takaki, Strangers From A Different Shore

The central analytic component of this project is the everyday lives of Tamil women centered particularly on their gendered negotiations within the realms of migration, work and family. Considering this and my aim of giving women voice through the research process, feminist methodology is most appropriate for this project. A feminist approach to research equips me with the theoretical and methodological tools not only to render visible the intricacies of the everyday lives of Tamil women, but also to interrogate my role as a researcher by being attentive to power hierarchies embedded within the research process, and to be reflexive about the dialectical relationship between my personal biography and social location and the research process. Accordingly, this chapter discusses the methodological perspective guiding this project and the corresponding methods of recruitment, sampling, data collection, and analysis organizing the research. I begin by discussing feminist methodology as the framework guiding the selection of methods for this project. Next, I provide details about the research project by identifying the research site, and outlining the recruitment, sample, data collection, and analysis processes. I conclude with an explanation of my feminist encounters with the research process by examining issues of power, emotion and reflexivity.

Feminist Methodology

It is important at the start to distinguish between feminist methodology and feminist methods as both are integral components of operationalizing this project. Feminist methodology
refers to a way of “theorizing about research practice” (DeVault 1996:31). It frames the research process within the epistemological parameters of feminist theory such that it is grounded firmly in the experiences of women (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Drawing upon a methodological stance, feminist methods by contrast, denote the “techniques and procedures for exploring social reality and producing evidence” (Fonow and Cook 1991a; Maynard 1994; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:11). As employed in this project, feminist methodology has three key goals. First, it seeks to shift the focus from men’s concerns to reveal the locations and perspectives of all women thereby providing a fuller and more accurate account of society by including them. Second, it seeks to minimize harm and control in the research process and thereby ameliorate the oppression of women through research. Third, it attempts to integrate activism and social change into the research process such that it is beneficial to women (DeVault 1999; Smith 1987).

Feminist methodology has several key features which make it especially appropriate to researching Tamil women’s migration, work, and family lives in their own voices. The first feature as briefly stated earlier, is the grounding of feminist methodology in feminist theorizing and other critical theories which recognize the nature of unjust gendered relations and practices (Maynard 1994; Mies 1991; Naples 2003; Reinharz and Davidman 1992). This makes it particularly applicable to my project considering the feminist underpinnings – particularly the ideas of intersecting structures of domination, and the mutuality of structure and agency - of the theoretical lenses that frame the research questions. In turn, this theoretical orientation of feminist methodology enables me as a researcher, to interrogate and thus render political areas which are typically assumed to be personal such as the gendered navigations of Tamil women within their families as they attempt migration, and a balance between their professional and familial lives. Thus, aided by a feminist methodology, I attempt to make the linkages between
theory, research and experience thereby facilitating a mutual understanding upon which collective action can be taken (Gorelick 1996; Kelly, Burton, and Regan 1994; Mies 1991).

The second feature of feminist methodology and perhaps of key importance in defining this project is its emphasis to excavating women’s voices by challenging their marginality and invisibility in traditional social science research and theorizing largely emanating from its positivist orientation and androcentric bias (Acker, Barry, and Esseveld 1991; Cook and Fonow 1990; DeVault 1999; Harding 1987; Smith 1987; Weskott 1990; Wolf 1996). In the case of my research this marginalization is immediately apparent in the extant skilled migration, and Indian scholarship. To this effect, by employing feminist methodological principles, I attempt to redefine women such that they are the focus of my inquiry and that their perspectives are privileged from their standpoint. Accordingly, I critically examine social life and the activities of both Tamil women and men as gendered rather than gender neutral (Cook and Fonow 1990; Harding 1987; Naples 2003; Smith 1987). To achieve this, feminist methodology encourages designing research that is meaningful to women’s lives and beginning from the lived experiences or everyday experiences of women in creating knowledge.

As briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter, rendering women’s everyday worlds as problematic grounds the research in a material base, sensitizing researchers to the particular social location and standpoint of the women being researched thereby enabling both to make connections between lived experience and the social structures that organize society (Collins 2000; DeVault 1990; Reinharz and Davidman 1992; Smith 1987). Mies (1991) perhaps best sums this method of research based on everyday life when she notes:

…experience is not a personal or individual thing alone, but rather denotes the sum of processes which individuals or groups have gone through in the production of their lives; it denotes their reality, their history. Thus [starting from lived experiences] involves taking
Thus, by beginning with Tamil women’s experiences with migration, and their daily negotiations within the gendered worlds of work and family, I attempt to develop a standpoint of Tamil women recognizing that this does not signify a universal “Indian Woman’s” experience but rather “creates a space for an absent subject and absent experience to be filled with the presence of actual women speaking of the actualities of their daily world” (Smith 1987:107).

Following from this, is the third feature of feminist methodology centered on its recognition of diversity and difference. Considering that women’s lives are inherently diverse and different resulting in no single articulation of feminist theory, correspondingly feminist methodologies caution against the privileging of an authentic women’s voice or a single true story. Rather, there exist multiple narratives of different women, uniquely informed by their location within intersections of multiple social structures and forces (Collins 2000; Garcia 1997; Gottfried 1996; Mohanty 2002; Weisser and Fleischner 1994). Therefore the goal of feminist research such as my project is not to create a generalized narrative of the Indian/Tamil (women’s) migration experience, but rather the feminist alternative to it. This involves the construction of partial perspective – a narrative of only Tamil Brahmin women - that accepts and accounts for “multiple views and narratives of the world and the attempt to look for connections between these narratives to hold them together” (DeVault 1999:51; Smith 1987). To achieve this, I use a multiplicity of research methods as encouraged by feminist methodology rather than a single prescribed method. This not only facilitates creativity, but also ensures inclusivity by preventing the marginalization of divergent voices which is often a product of a singular research method (DeVault 1990; Gottfried 1996; Maynard 1994; Reinharz and Davidman 1992).
In direct contradiction to traditional social science research which privileges the researcher’s knowledge over that of participants, is the fourth feature of feminist methodology – its attention to empowerment of research participants centered on their agency (Collins 2000; Mohanty 2002). I attempt to build empowerment into my methodology by adopting a dialogical research method, according Tamil women subject status in the research process thereby enabling them to talk back, reflect from their standpoints and experiences, and by being self-reflexive about my power as a researcher (DeVault 1999; Gottfried 1996; Harding 1987; Maynard 1994; Mies 1991; Naples 2003; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). In so doing, my hope is for the research process to be empowering to them not in terms of public organizing, but at the more personal level of “understanding how their everyday worlds, trials and troubles, were and are generated by the larger structure” (Acker et al. 1991:135) and their agentic responses to them. Therefore I use my project as a means of consciousness raising and of developing culturally relevant knowledge.

The fifth feature of feminist methodology is embodied in the idea of self-reflexive praxis which directly contradicts the objective stance of positivist social science which obscures the operation of power and hierarchy in the research process. Feminist methodology supports a subjective stance by researchers arguing that its elimination is impossible because as researchers, we are located and intimately connected in the world that is a part of our inquiry. Thus, self-reflexive praxis requires me to recognize the impact my historicity, personal experience, and shared ethnic, gender and migrant status with Tamil women, have on all aspects of the research process ranging from topic selection, theoretical and methodological underpinnings, to the interpretation of findings (Cook and Fonow 1990; DeVault 1999; Smith 1987). This is best articulated by Reinharz and Davidman (1992) who explain:
…utilizing the researcher’s personal experience is a distinguishing feature of feminist research. Personal experience typically is irrelevant in mainstream research, or is thought to contaminate a project’s objectivity. In feminist research by contrast, it is relevant and repairs the project’s pseudo-objectivity. (P. 258)

Further, as I will elaborate later in this chapter, it also requires me to be attentive to the unequal power relationships which are inherent to the research process even a feminist one and to recognize that while these differentials cannot be completely eliminated, I am obligated to continuously strive to ameliorate their effects to the extent possible. Thus as Deutsch (2004) contends, self-reflexive praxis is integral to:

...[the] researcher [being aware] of her or his own subjective experience in relation to that of her or his participants....It [self-reflexive praxis] recognizes the bidirectional nature of research. I am subject, object and researcher. To assert otherwise is to be disingenuous about the process of research, especially qualitative research. (P. 889)

In sum, my goal in this project is to construct a culturally relevant, gendered narrative of migration, work, and family for and with Tamil women rather than on them recognizing that it is merely one thread in a complex tapestry of variegated narratives. Feminist methodology and my accompanying choice of feminist methods of data collection and analysis are amenable to achieving this purpose as it facilitates the creation of:

...situated knowledges...that incorporate the diversity of women’s lived experiences...which are locatable in time and space and particular cultures, [and] are embodied in specific ways, and operate as social and collective points of view. (Gottfried 1996:13)

The Research Project

Framed within the feminist methodological principles above, in the following pages I will discuss the particularities of this research project centered on the selection of the research site, the sampling technique and the resultant sample for the project, and the data collection and analysis methods.
The research site for this project is the city of Atlanta, GA (Greater Atlanta Metropolitan Area). The choice of Atlanta is based on three key factors namely the rapid economic expansion of Atlanta since the 1990s; its emergence as a “major new immigrant gateway” (Odem 2008:106) city in the United States; and the presence of a large organized Tamil community in Atlanta. Although Atlanta cannot be characterized as a global financial city, its economy has been one fastest growing in the country since the 1990s driven by a rapidly expanding entrepreneurial job base, the service, financial and information technology related industries, and by construction, transportation and public utilities. This economic expansion of Atlanta has resulted in the emergence of a bifurcated local labor market evinced in the explosion of white-collar, high-tech and managerial employment on one end, and a growing demand for unskilled labor on the other (Adelman, Tsao, and Tolnay 2006; Hartshorn and Ihlanfeldt 2000; Odem 2008; Sjoquist 2000). Accordingly, as Odem (2008) notes metro Atlanta is quickly emerging as the business, financial and transportation hub of the Southeastern United States.

This economic expansion of Atlanta has been accompanied by a commensurate increase in the city’s population (4.1 million in 2000) (Hartshorn and Ihlanfeldt 2000; Odem 2008). To a large extent this demographic expansion of Atlanta has occurred due to in-migration of residents from other parts of the country and abroad due to growing economic opportunities. This is immediately apparent in the dramatic increase in metro Atlanta’s foreign born population from 2% of the metro area population in 1980 to almost 4% in 1990, to almost 10% in 2000 to almost 13% in 2005 (Adelman et al. 2006; Odem 2008). Consequently, as part of the recent trend of Southern bound migration (as opposed to the historical Northward migration), Atlanta has quickly emerged as a major new immigrant destination city (Odem 2008). This demographic expansion of Atlanta has been dominated by Latina/o and Asian population groups significantly
transforming the historical black-white racial/ethnic landscape of Atlanta to a more diverse one (Adelman et al. 2006; Hartshorn and Ihlanfeldt 2000; Sjoquist 2000).

Among the Asian groups in Atlanta, the U.S. Bureau of Census (2000) estimates that Indians are a rapidly growing population numbering almost 40,381 in the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) which comprises about 80% of the total Indian population in the state of Georgia. Over my 8 months in the research site, it became quickly apparent to me that Indians in Atlanta are diverse – organized along regional, class, linguistic, religious lines – and well organized with religious/community organizations, Indian ethnic stores and services, and restaurants being readily accessible. Although there is no statistical data available, there is a large Tamil concentration in Atlanta, which by my estimate is primarily professional, managerial or entrepreneurial based. Tamil presence in Atlanta is buttressed by the presence of a variety of formal and informal community and religious organizations and associations (hereafter designated as “community spaces”) which became important sites for recruitment of participants, and to observe the workings of the Tamil community. Of particular interest to this project are the religious spaces of the Hindu Temple of Atlanta at Riverdale (HTA), the Atlanta Tamil Church (ATC); the cultural spaces of the Greater Atlanta Tamil Sangam (cultural organization) (GATS), the Carnatic Music Association of Georgia (CAMAGA), and numerous informal language, dance, music and charity groups and organizations.

Considering these factors, I argue that over the past decade, while Atlanta has emerged as an important location for research, it continues to be understudied especially in documenting its transformed racial-ethnic landscape. The extant scholarship documenting this is primarily concentrated on Latina/o, Korean, Chinese and Vietnamese communities, their low-wage labor and/or ethnic economy; and the corresponding impacts on African-American outcomes. Less
researched (especially from a qualitative perspective) is professional/skilled migrant labor in Atlanta although it has been acknowledged as a pull factor in migration. Additionally, there is almost a complete absence of knowledge on South Asians (and Indians in particular) in Atlanta from both an economic and social perspective despite their growing concentration and organization in the area. Consequently, by researching Tamil professional women in Atlanta this project is designed to address these lacunae in and contribute to the scholarship by uncovering the nexus between migration, *professional* labor and family life while accounting for the diversity in Indian experience.

**Recruitment**

Participants for this project were recruited using a snowball sampling technique relying primarily on personal and professional connections within the Tamil community. Needless to say, the recruitment process was not automatic and problem free but rather a challenging, demanding process often requiring strategic decisions about methods of recruitment and language used, and management of my emotions and race/gender status. Recruitment of Tamil women to participate in this project occurred through two phases – the initial and involved/focused phase. The initial phase of recruitment refers to my first encounter with Tamils in Atlanta when I first began to implement this project four months prior to permanently relocating to Atlanta for the duration of fieldwork. Although recruiting participants was the principal goal of this phase, I was also concerned with gaining some familiarity with the Tamil community, building rapport with community members, and subsequently identifying and contacting key community gate-keepers.

Being Indian/Tamil and having previously researched Indians, I was already anticipating that the recruitment process would rely more heavily on my informal networks and personal connections within the community, than on formal recruitment strategies (such as
flyers/handouts etc) for which this initial phase was most crucial. Nonetheless, I began recruitment by identifying potential contact persons (mostly office bearers) within the formal spaces of the Atlanta Tamil community namely the Temple, the Church, and the Tamil Sangam, emailing them to introduce myself, the project and requesting their assistance. This however rarely yielded a response until I used a professional contact in Gainesville, FL as a reference when contacting Tamils. Through this introductory referral method, over four months I identified the first key gate-keepers. With their permission, these include (but are not limited to) the President of the Temple and his wife; the Pastor of the Church and his wife; Tamil and Telugu women active in cultural organizations and activities (such as dance/music instructors, members of CAMAGA and other groups); an ex-President of the Tamil Sangam and his wife; and an family friend of my parents. Prior to relocating to the research site, I visited Atlanta to initiate a more personal interaction with them thereby beginning to develop the informal networks integral to the project. It is my belief that this visit served its purpose as these gate-keepers were instrumental in introducing me to other Tamils, some of whom later agreed to participate in the project. Moreover, my visit to Atlanta also yielded additional Indian (not necessarily Tamil) community spaces - such as the Indian Mall/Global Mall on Jimmy Carter Boulevard, Indian grocery stores, the Chinmaya Mission Bal Vihar in Alpharetta – which lent themselves to recruiting.

The involved/focused phase of recruiting refers to the period commencing with my relocation to Atlanta when recruiting efforts began in earnest to construct the sample for the project. During this time I employed a variety of recruitment strategies – flyers, blanket emails (Appendix C), presence in community spaces and informal get-togethers – some in conjunction with each other, while testing, discarding and reworking others dependent on response. It became
quickly apparent to me (as I had anticipated) that flyers (posted at Global Mall, HTA, ATC, and grocery stores) and blanket emails on list serves (such as that of HTA or GATS) were not going to be successful largely due the sensitive nature of the topic, and also because Indians have rarely participated in projects like mine and so might be averse to being solicited to do so by a flyer/email as opposed to a referral. Accordingly, over time I discarded this strategy in favor of relying solely on personal referrals and contacts with Tamil women through my presence in the community. This was first mediated by invitations to attend informal festival gatherings (golu-Festival of Dolls at Navratri time) at the homes of Tamil women who subsequently either became participants and/or key referents in the research process.

Following this, I began to volunteer for some events (such as the Thanksgiving Lunch, November 2007) at the Temple; to regularly visit the Temple on Sunday mornings (and on festival days) to interact with Tamil parents who supervised their children’s Bal Vihar (Sunday School) at the Temple; to intermittently attend Tamil church services and gatherings (particularly Christmas and Easter); to visit the Alpharetta Bal Vihar; and to attended formal community based cultural events such as music recitals, fund-raising events, Navratri and Diwali shows. Being present in the community throughout the research process was instrumental to the successful recruitment of Tamil women largely due to the personal nature of my interaction with them which facilitated a candid exchange between us both about the demands of the research, and about my personal biography and background which was so crucial to the development of trust and rapport. However, on my part it was also accompanied by a great deal of apprehension about having to reach out to (essentially) strangers, market my project to them, and then solicit their participation while respecting their right to decline.
This phase also witnessed the reworking of the language I used to market the project to Tamil women. Even upon completion of the project, I did not have one final version of explaining my project to Tamil women. Rather, I devised a method whereby upon gauging a potential participants’ interest (often on the phone/email) which came with experience, I would either provide a detailed or quick overview of the project emphasizing my interest in focusing on women’s lives and on Tamils in particular, hoping that this would result in “that first interview” after which I could request their continued participation. Perhaps the most difficult for me was to develop the language to sell a multi-part/multi-session interview. Although not fixed by any means, I settled on disclosing up front at the first contact that I would need perhaps three to four hours of their time over an eight month period, and that I was completely flexible about the length and timing of the sessions – “a series of 1 hour/1½ hour interviews over 6-8 months” (Methods Fieldnotes 10/07-11/07). While the efficacy of this language is apparent considering the successful completion of the project, I am also cognizant that I lost numerous participants due to the structure of the interview and of my inability to always successfully market its length.

As I simultaneously continued recruitment and began data collection, I began to notice that Tamil women I contacted fell into four main categories in terms of their agreement to participate. These are (1) those who were excited and enthusiastic about the project, and more than willing to interview with me, and refer me to others often noting “I would love to do it…I think it’s really interesting and I want to know what you find out” (Methods Fieldnotes, 11/07); (2) those who were moderately interested but helpful which was a larger group, who I sensed often agreed to participate to be helpful to a fellow Indian doctoral student or because they knew and trusted my referent; (3) those who were undecided about participation largely due to their apprehensions about the research process – “I am not sure…I have never done an interview before…I don’t
know what to expect” (Methods fieldnotes, 11/07) – which were often couched in questions about privacy, confidentiality, and duration of the interview; (4) those who were disinterested in the project and thus denied to participate in it often stating a lack of time. Needless to say, recognizing and negotiating these diverse responses often on the phone/email contributed to the emotional turbulence in recruitment often leaving me frustrated and angry especially when despite my best efforts I was unable to convince the “undecided” or “disinterested,” creating worries about whether I could successfully achieve my desired sample size. As a feminist researcher, I had to continuously negotiate this instinctive emotional response with recognizing Tamil women’s subjectivity in choosing whether or not to participate without having to provide me an explanation.

**Sample**

Thus, the sample for the study includes 33 first-generation, married Tamil professional women living within the Greater Atlanta Metropolitan Area who migrated to the United States between 10-30 years ago. The time of migration is a criterion on which I deliberately sampled, to restrict the sample for this project to only the post-1965 to 1990 skilled women emigrants, who as I have already argued have been understudied in the scholarship, thereby enabling my research to contribute to the extant knowledge. Further, considering the transnational overtones of this project, and my inability to undertake field work in India, this time limitation also facilitates the recruiting of Tamil women who embody the connections between the pre-liberalized India of the 1960s-1990s and the commensurate construction of the United States as a favored emigration destination. The Tamil women who comprise the sample for this project, emigrated to the United States via three main migration streams – as single students seeking graduate or professional education in the United States (F1/J1 visa holders); as married wives in family stage migration joining spouses (engaged either in education or employment) already
settled in the United States (F2/J2/H4 visa holders); and as married women engaged in family unit migration when entire families migrate on green-cards.¹ Thus the majority of my participants entered the United States between the early 1970s to the mid 1990s, living and working in various cities prior to relocating to Atlanta. In age, they range from between 31-65 years illustrating this migration period, and the bulk comprise young families with toddlers to school going children, with a few families having high school and college bound and/or married children.

Echoing the economic growth witnessed by Atlanta as explained earlier, the majority of my participants are recent relocators to Atlanta, arriving in the city in the mid 1990s and as recently as early 2000, drawn not only by growing economic opportunities, but also by the India/Tamil cultural presence in Atlanta especially desired once they start their families. For a few, Atlanta is their first destination upon migration when they arrived here in the 1980s either to reunite with family members already settled in Atlanta, or to attend university in the city. It is however important to note here, that despite the lack of statistical evidentiary support, my conversations with community leaders and gatekeepers such as the President of the Hindu Temple of Atlanta indicate that the Tamil presence in the city is not a recent one, but has its origins in the 1960s when a significant number of physicians and entrepreneurs relocated to the city and laid the foundations for the temple. The economic boom-time of the 1990s continuing to the present has merely engendered the community’s exponential growth since then.

¹ As I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, the marital categories laid out above describe the majority migration trend. There are however those who differ from the prevalent trend such as some married women migrating for education and being accompanied by their families; a few single women migrating on green-cards to join parents already settled in the United States; and a few who emigrate on fiancée visas to expressly marry Indian-American permanent residents. For the most part, while I do account for these variations in my narrative, for ease in categorization I have incorporated these exceptions within the three main categories listed here.
Professionally, Tamil women are distributed across a variety of managerial and professional occupations are listed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006) – some of which include but are not limited to physicians, IT professionals (software and hardware engineers), academics, teachers, architects, entrepreneurs, accountants, scientists, management professionals (what I call “corporate America professionals”), realtors and librarians. Sampling Tamil women in a range of professions rather than in a single profession (as encouraged by the skilled migration and gendered work experiences scholarship) was deliberately undertaken to fulfill the goals of this project. My aim in this research is not to uncover the intricacies of women’s work and migration within a particular profession/occupational category, but rather to integrate the gendered worlds of migration, work, and family by examining Tamil women’s gender negotiations within them given their structural positioning in both Indian and American society.

Tamil women’s professional background, coupled with that of their spouses places them firmly in the upper-middle to upper-class socio-economic category in the United States with annual family incomes ranging between $140,000-$300,000 (only reporting a range is possible as not all participants disclosed family incomes). Additionally, I also gathered their socio-economic status on the basis of their residential neighborhoods. Over my time in Atlanta, as I had an opportunity to visit participants’ homes, I observed that the majority of the Tamil women I interviewed lived in the Northern suburbs of Atlanta in the following counties – Cobb, Dekalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett with only a small number residing in the South in Clayton county (Refer to see to Figure 3-1 at the end of the chapter, for map of Atlanta MSA including the counties forming the research site).

This northward suburbanization of immigrants, is a critical dynamic in the growth of the Atlanta MSA largely due to these counties representing major “job-residential hubs for the
region, with rapid job and population growth and high average household incomes” (Hartshorn and Ihlanfeldt 2000; Odem 2008:117). Accordingly, these counties also represented the most diverse in the city with the Indian population often ranking either third or fourth in size following whites, African-Americans and/or Latina/os in some cities of these counties such as Alpharetta, Decatur, Duluth, Marietta, Norcross, North-East Atlanta, and Roswell where the majority of my participants are located (http://www.city-data.com/city/Atlanta-Georgia.html). For the most part, Tamil women resided in mid-size or large single family homes in relatively affluent (which I subjectively judged by the size of houses and the make of cars) neighborhoods in these counties. My informal conversations with them indicated that these were largely professional, white-dominated neighborhoods where they were often one of the few families of color; and that their children most often attended private school outlining their socio-economic status for me although they might not state it formally. A very interesting point of note was that the large Indian/Tamil population within these counties/cities often served as the incentive to my participants to settle here thereby availing of an informal community and family support network evinced in their children playing together, in sharing car-pools to the same music/dance/language instructors, in their almost weekly socializing (as almost all my participants noted) over birthdays, dinners, get-togethers, and festivals (Community Structure Memo, 3/08).

Another important element of my sample is their caste background with all the Tamil women in the sample being Brahmin by virtue of the snowball sampling technique. I did not deliberately sample along a caste criterion, although I anticipated it emerging from the data. Nonetheless, until I began the recruitment process I had not discerned the continued role that caste plays in organizing their community life. I argue that it is not happenstance that I recruited only Brahmins. Rather, as Khandelwal (2002) notes Indian immigrant communities in the United
States get fragmented along caste/class, regional/linguistic, and religious lines as they grow and get populated. As I began to notice this dynamic in Atlanta, some participants confirmed it informally, noting that as the community has grown, and as they have started families, they have chosen to narrow their interactions to a few key families who were often Tamil Brahmins with whom they shared similar values, language, interests and hobbies, backgrounds in India and child raising and socializing philosophies creating a bond between them (Community Structure Memo, 3/08). In making this statement, I am not arguing that they do not interact with other Indians or members of other faiths/nationalities, but only that their closest bonds and connections are with Tamil Brahmins. Thus when I approached them for referrals for interviews, Tamil Brahmins topped their list. (Refer to Table 3-1, Sample Descriptives at the end of the chapter).

Data Collection

Data was gathered in keeping with the feminist methodological tenets guiding this project which encourages not only the use of multiple methods, but “using them in ways which are consistent with broad feminist goals and ideology” (Jayaratne and Stewart 1991:91). Thus, 33 semi-structured, multi-part interviews (each approximately 4-5 hours in duration) were conducted with Tamil professional women, and supplemented by an eight-month long ethnography in Tamil community sites in Atlanta, and in participant homes. Further, within this methodological framework, there is a mutuality of data collection and analysis procedures such that the logic of constructivist grounded theory which guides my analysis influenced my approach to interviewing and ethnography, in turn facilitating the constructing of an analytic model grounded in the data (Charmaz 2002, 2006).

I adopt a feminist approach to interviewing recognizing that the interview is “contextual and negotiated” (Charmaz 2006:27) – a setting where Tamil women and I are actively engaged in meaning-making work and the construction of knowledge rather than a mere reproduction of
past realities – which enables me to accord subject status to Tamil women in excavating their stories in their own words and perspectives (Charmaz 2002, 2006; DeVault 1990, 1999; Fontana and Frey 2003; Reinharz and Davidman 1992; Smith 1987). In doing this, I am careful to recognize that interviewing is not “woman talk” – i.e. women interviewing women – but a method by which both of us recognize the structural organization of Tamil women’s experiences thereby hinting to arenas of possible transformation (DeVault 1999; Kelly et al. 1994). Further, a feminist approach to interviewing makes me attentive to the power circulating through the interview process, behooving me as the researcher to abandon the stance of an “all-knowing, context free seeker of objectified knowledge whose gender guarantees access to women’s lives and knowledges” (DeVault 1990; Esterberg 2002; Fontana and Frey 2003; Olesen 2000:236). Finally, considering that feminist interviewing privileges the researcher and participant co-constructing knowledge, it bears out that the findings emergent from this project about Tamil women’s migration, work, and family does not embody an objectifyable truth, but a partial one – what Collins (2000:ix) calls “both/and approach to objectivity - generalizable to perhaps other Tamils (rather than all Indians), and valid in that right (Baber 2004; Cook and Fonow 1990; DeVault 1996, 1999; Olesen 2000; Smith 1987; Weskott 1990).

To ensure that my interviewing is feminist in its organization, I interchangeably employed three main interviewing techniques during the interview process – namely semi-structured interviewing, institutional ethnography, and active interviewing. Semi-structured interviewing (also called in-depth interviewing) is a technique which enables participants to openly discuss the topic at hand in their own words, facilitated by an open-ended interview questions (Bernard 2000; Esterberg 2002; Fontana and Frey 2003). I argue that this technique is particularly appropriate for my project as it promotes the collection of rich data with “thick description”
(Charmaz 2006:14) that is crucial to a successful constructivist grounded theory analysis. Further, this technique also offers me a combination of flexibility and control required for “increasing the analytic incisiveness of the resultant analysis” (Charmaz 2006:29). To this effect, I centered my interviews on a narrow range of interview topics to gather specific data about Tamil women’s family background in India, migration and settlement, work experiences in the United States as organized by their immigrant, gendered racial, and motherhood status; and work-family arrangements in terms of housework, child-care and decision making. The corresponding interview guide (Appendix A and B) consisted of open-ended questions within these topical areas, enabling me to simultaneously exercise some control over the interview while being flexible enough to follow participants’ leads, stories and unanticipated ideas (Charmaz 2002, 2006; DeVault 1990; Fontana and Frey 2003). The efficacy of this technique was made especially apparent to me, when upon completing several initial interviews I reworked the language of a couple of interview questions and discarded those which I realized were not relevant to this project. For instance, based on several initial interviews I reworked migration related questions to replace the word “migrate” with a variety of synecdoches such as “coming abroad,” “leaving India,” “coming to the United States,” following on participants’ claims that “migration was not on their minds when they left India” (Methods Fieldnotes, 10/23/07 following participant interview). By this it became clear to me that participants defined migration as the decision to permanently leave India, different from my interpretation of it as the process of emigrating which created confusion about how the questions should be answered necessitating changes in the guide.

The institutional ethnography technique as articulated by Dorothy Smith (1987) is a way of producing knowledge of women which helps the producer understand her social world from her
social location. It is important to note, that I do not attempt an institutional ethnography in this project, but rather draw upon its techniques to organize my interviewing as these lend themselves not only to the research of women, but also to subjectivity and reflexivity in the interview process. The key techniques I adopt are entering Tamil women’s worlds from their perspective by recognizing and valuing that they are “expert practitioners of their everyday world, knowledgeable in the most intimate ways of how it is put together, and of its routine, daily accomplishment” (Smith 1987:154; DeVault 1999). Thus, as a researcher, I assumed a “marginal location” (DeVault 1999:48) within the interview process adopting the stance of a “learner” interested not only in Tamil women’s stories, but in their interpretation of their lives without passing judgment (sociological or personal) on the same. Additionally, I also implemented the institutional ethnography technique of being reflexive about my personal biography by bringing it into the interview process to stimulate thought among participants (DeVault 1990, 1999; Smith 1987). For instance, as I will discuss later in this chapter, I often referenced my shared migrant status with Tamil women when questioning about their migration and settlement – “you know ‘we’ have certain expectations about the United States which might cause us to leave…this is what I thought, did you have a similar/different experience?” (Methods Fieldnotes, 10/07) – or provided verbal and/or non-verbal agreement cues when a narrated experience resonated as having also occurred with me.

The third technique I used to ensure a feminist orientation to my interviews is the active interview developed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), wherein “reality is constituted at the nexus of the hows and whats of experience by way of interpretive practice” (p.16). Building on the institutional ethnography ideas of women being expert practitioners of their lives, using this technique enabled me to assume the stance of a storyteller or narrator, asking questions to
differently position Tamil women thereby activating their diverse “repertories of experience and orientations…[and stocks of knowledge to] offer theoretically coherent descriptions, accounts, and explorations” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:29). This was a particularly useful technique in this project, as to successfully construct a coherent narrative of Tamil women’s migration, work, and family life within a gendered perspective, I not only had to position them within multiple gendered institutional realms, but also with different temporal (past-present) and spatial (India-United States; place of first residence in America-Atlanta) contexts. I interpreted this technique in my interviewing in three ways – why questions, playing devil’s advocate, and using silence. First, by always asking the question “why?” as a corollary to participants’ responses to enabled both of us to examine the narrated experience, and uncover its connection with other experiences and to structural bases. This method also allowed me to move Tamil women between the past and the present with relative ease during the interview thereby creating a cognizance that past is not ahistorical, but dynamically connected the present – what Holstein and Gubrium (1995) call “future/history-in-the-making” (p. 32).

Second, by using the “devil’s advocate” question to verbally and mentally position participants in different contexts to think through them. For instance, when discussing the challenges that being mothers posed to their work lives, I would often ask participants’ to assume their spouses’ roles – “OK, I’m going to play devil’s advocate for a minute…put yourself in your husband’s shoes…as a working dad, do you think he encounters similar/different challenges than you?” (Methods Fieldnotes, 11/07). This technique was very efficacious throughout my interviews in not only activating a different store of knowledge and getting participants to approach their responses from another perspective; but also (as many mentioned) to mentally prepare them for the forthcoming question, while subtly reinforcing the non-judgmental nature of
the interview allowing them to respond both hypothetically and realistically, and enabling me as a researcher to be critical but not criticize their lives and relationships. Third, was my use of silence as a probe often remaining quiet after asking a question, allowing participants’ time to think and respond without leading their answer (Bernard 2000; DeVault 1990). This method was especially efficacious in helping me to “listen” to participants, thereby identifying areas they were hesitant to talk about, felt they had no knowledge about, or just did not want to analyze critically; while allowing them to work through the immediate responses and identify underlying factors. Needless to say, this technique came with experience (upon my initial reflections about my excessive talking during the first few interviews), and over time I became adept at providing silences, but not extending them to the point that it inhibited the flow of the interview.

In addition to employing these interviewing techniques, I also had to contend with the logistics of a multi-part interview structure. Accordingly, over ever increasing numbers of interviews I developed a strategy for breaking up topics to fall into three coherent sessions. Roughly these sessions involved (1) family background, marriage, migration and settlement topics; (2) work life and some part of work-family topics; (3) completion of work-family topics and community related questions.² I learned to set goals for the materials I wished to complete in every session, and with practice learned to perfectly time sessions such that I successfully covered all questions with a section before I broke the interview. Undertaking multi-part interviews was also demanding on me as the researcher, because it required me to have replayed earlier interviews to prepare for the forthcoming ones, brief participants about earlier mentioned ideas while continuing with subsequent questions thereby retaining the coherence of the

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² It is important to note, that I did not force interviews to follow the above session schedule, but rather followed participant responses, using the schedule to confirm that I covered the requisite number of topics per session, and that all topics had been brought up during the interview.
interview; and more importantly to schedule the timing and location of the interview sessions. The latter proved especially challenging and served as a testimony to the complexity of Tamil women’s lives and their commitment to interviewing with me. Over my eight months in Atlanta, I interviewed Tamil women in diverse locations in the city such as their homes, their workplaces, restaurants, coffee shops, and cars while they were waiting on or chauffeuring children to various activities; the religious and cultural spaces in the community where they had congregated for an event during which they gave me some time; and at a variety of shopping malls across Atlanta where they met me during their lunch hours. As this unfolded, I gradually began to realize the importance of my residence in Atlanta as facilitating the interview process as opposed to visiting the city for interviews which I now believe would have been impossible.

It is important to recognize at this point that interviews are my primary source of data for this project, with ethnography at Tamil community sites and participants’ homes serving to merely substantiate them. Similar to interviewing, I approach ethnography from a feminist perspective with the aim of “emphasizing the experiential” (Stacey 1996:89) thereby documenting the lives of Tamil women, understanding their experiences from their own point of view, and recognizing that their behavior is an “expression of social contexts” (Reinharz and Davidman 1992:51). My ethnography was centered on seeking detailed knowledge of the multiple dimensions of life within the Tamil community and aiming to understand Tamil women’s taken-for-granted assumptions (Charmaz 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson 1997). To aid in the constructivist grounded theory analysis, I gave priority to the phenomenon or process under study rather than a detailed description of the setting (Charmaz 2006). This was an especially relevant component of my data collection methods, as my ethnographic observations sensitized me to certain analytic categories, trends, behaviors and patterns which I interpreted to
be gendered, and thus referenced during the interview soliciting participants’ interpretation of the same. For instance, a key pattern that emerged from my ethnography was the gendered nature of community work with women appearing to assume the bulk of responsibility in the cultural socialization of their children; in facilitating community congregation by organizing/preparing meals, and get-togethers. As these observations coalesced over time, I began to reference them when asking Tamil women whether one partner in their families assumed a larger role in creating community in Atlanta and who that was? The reasons for the same, and what that role entailed? Another area where ethnography was particularly useful was in observing the performance of chores in Tamil households when I had an opportunity to visit. Similar to the earlier instance, I would reference my observations during the interview using them to gain participants’ perspectives on why chores were divided such and their satisfaction with it.

Thus in sum, I employed data collection methods and techniques which enabled me to approach this project from a feminist methodological perspective. In so doing, I have been able to gather and analyze data without forcing categories, but by soliciting participants’ definitions of terms, perspectives and assumptions about events. Despite all my scholarly learning about feminist methodology, utilizing feminist methods involved a learning experience not merely in the logistics of the process, but more importantly in the staying faithful to essence of the method – namely privileging the subjectivity of Tamil women by not belittling or disregarding their explanations and interpretations of their life events even when I knew them to be sociologically invalid or personally disturbing.

Analysis

As has already been mentioned, the analysis procedures guiding this project follow the precepts of the constructivist grounded theory method which I argue is most aligned with a feminist methodological framework. However, although I employ this method, my goal in this
project is not to construct a grounded theory, but more modestly to develop a conceptual framework that explains the gendered negotiations of Tamil women within the interconnected realms of migration, work, and family. The constructivist approach to grounded theory analysis as articulated by Charmaz (2006), divergent from its more positivist origins (primarily in the work of Glaser and Strauss 1967) is especially applicable to this project as it assumes that neither data nor theory are discovered, but rather constructed from “the shared experiences of researcher and participants and [from] the researcher’s relationship with participants” (Charmaz 2002:675). Thus, data is context bound, and the emergent analysis is an interpretive portrayal of the world – actions and meanings constructed in a social context – and not an exact picture of it. To this effect, constructivist grounded theory analysis recognizes that the researchers are a part of what they study and not separate from it, as interpretations of the world occur in interaction referencing both the researcher and participants’ perspectives of the world (Charmaz 2000, 2006). Employing these principles of constructivist grounded theory enables me to privilege my participants as co-constructors of their narratives, be reflexive about my biography and training as influencing the analysis process while being attentive to the conceptual framework emerging from the data.

In its practical implementation in my analysis, I interpret Charmaz’s (2006) principles and ideas to suit the demands of my research. The proceeding discussion about my analysis is primarily concerned with the analytic procedures of coding, memoing, achieving theoretical saturation, and developing the conceptual framework. True to the constructivist tenets of the research not being a linear process, but of data collection and analysis proceeding concomitantly, I began an early coding process – what I call precursor coding which precedes initial coding – while I was interviewing and engaged in ethnography. Charmaz (2006) defines coding as
“naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data…[thereby] moving beyond concrete statements…to making analytic interpretations” (p. 43).

For me precursor coding, was a less systematic coding process that initial coding, during which I identified ideas and themes across interviews which later informed the creation of initial codes. To do this, I developed a method wherein as I reviewed interviews to prepare for subsequent ones, I identified key themes emergent from the interviews which I organized on a cheat-sheet appended to the notes for each interview. To manage the volume of emergent themes, I began to loosely categorize them in ways which continued to resonate at the higher levels of analysis undertaken later. For instance, as we began to discuss Tamil women’s professional lives, I noticed that participants began to talk of the benefits of their work listing ideas which I loosely categorized under financial, social, familial, and personal benefits of work. Similarly, as we discussed the challenges that being mothers posed to their professional lives, I organized emergent themes into loose categories such as work organization/motherhood, social expectations/motherhood, and personal choice/motherhood. Subsequently on my cheat sheet, I organized these categories into a coding tree titled “professional life” with one branch referring to the “benefits of work” organizing those categories below it; and another, referring to “motherhood and job barriers” below which I listed the latter mentioned categories.

For my analysis, precursor coding served essential purposes. First, it sensitized me to new areas of discussion emerging from the interviews, which although I had designed my interview guide to solicit, had no way to identifying prior to commencing data collection. Second, because of the organization of my interviews, I was simultaneously interviewing different women at different stages in the interview process. Precursor coding, served not only to make me very
familiar with each Tamil woman’s particular data, but also facilitated the beginning of the “constant comparative method” (Charmaz 2006:54) that is an essential component of grounded theory analysis. As I reviewed participants’ tapes, I began to notice similarities and differences both within and across cases which I noted on my cheat-sheet, often reconfirming some analytic questions with participants. A prime illustration of this is my realization of “social location of Tamil women” as the critical component of their migration, work and family narratives rather than “generation or cohort.” As I will discuss in the following empirical chapters, I believe that participants’ age or cohort of migration had no significant effect on their migration, work and family outcomes which were more determined by social location factors such as place of residence in India, gender socialization, parental expectations, and mother’s role.

Upon completion of data collection, transcription and leaving the research site, I began the formal process of analysis following the stages of initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding resulting in theoretical saturation, and conceptual framework building. At this stage, I further adapted the constructivist grounded theory method to the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software I am using namely Atlas-ti. My decision to use Atlas-ti was made considering that it aids the data management process through its various functions thereby rendering analysis a time and effort efficient process (Barry 1998; Dennis and Bower 2008; Hwang 2008). Following Charmaz’s (2000, 2006) directive that codes should stick close to the data and be kept active thereby preserving the processual nature of social life, I began the next stage of coding namely initial coding which involves mining the data for analytic ideas. This involved coding my interviews within Atlas-ti, line-by-line and/or paragraph-by-paragraph using

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3 It is important to recognize here that Atlas-ti merely organizes the analysis process and does not automatically generate it, nor is it confined to one particular research methodology. These decisions have to be made by the researcher who is engaged in the intellectual activity of analysis.
the gerund. By coding in this manner, I was attempting to understand participants’ standpoints by staying close to their language while simultaneously interpreting it when developing codes. Thus developing codes to apply to segments of data was not merely regurgitating participant comments, but rather drawing upon my stores of knowledge to create codes. I used two main techniques in initial coding namely invivo codes – which are codes of participants’ special terms – and open coding – which is my creation of a code based on my interpretation of the data (Charmaz 2000, 2006).

In Atlas-ti, this process translated into creating my own code list which by end of analysis comprised over 2000 gerund codes emergent from the data (for example: experiencing greater financial independence with work; expecting better standard of living in America; choosing shorter work hours, with motherhood etc). In developing these codes, I constantly asked myself what process was being discussed and how I could define it; who was involved in the process; what do participants profess to think or feel about the process; when/how does the process change; and what are the consequences of the process. Needless to say, this process, was long, time consuming and often difficult because of the depth of my data; taking me on an average approximately 2 ½ hours to code a single side of tape (especially when I was still developing the code list). At this stage, precursor coding became a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it had sensitized and familiarized me with emergent themes although I had not coded close to the data thereby illustrating the connections between codes and categories. But on the other, at its completion, I had already begun to think in terms of analytic categories and had to return to a lower level of analytic thinking to successfully code by actions and processes thereby avoiding the mistake of applying pre-existing categories to the data, or forcing data to fit constructed categories (Charmaz 2006).
To ensure that I was building a comprehensive code list, I devised a method whereby I would specifically pick and choose the order of the interviews I was coding. Drawing upon my familiarity with the data through precursor coding, I organized the initial coding order such that I began with interviews which were either the longest or where I remembered participants making the most insightful statements, and further stratified this along the diversity of professions and methods of migration. This strategy proved especially efficacious where upon successfully analyzing approximately 25 interviews in this manner, I achieved one level of theoretical saturation as no new codes emerged from the data, save individual participants’ unique biographical information which cannot be replicated.

Using Atlas-ti also implied that initial coding proceeded almost simultaneously with the next stage of coding as explained by Charmaz (2006) namely focused coding which involves using the most frequent initial codes to sift through large amounts of data. I interpreted focused coding to involve the creation of “code families” – or early analytic categories - an operation in Atlas-ti which is designed to occur at regular intervals (which I did after every five minutes of initial coding) during the coding process thereby aiding the management of a large volume of codes by requiring researchers to continuously interpret and categorize them while coding. Accordingly I created over 250 code families populated by the initial codes emergent from my data.

Further, Atlas-ti also facilitates a structured constant comparative method that I had commenced in a loose form in precursor coding, ensuring that it is a critical component of the analysis and is not ignored. Considering that Atlas-ti is designed with inter-linkages (hyperlinks) between codes, quotations, code families, and memos across all transcripts, I was very easily able to compare both codes and code families across similar and different cases (participants
with similar and different professions/method of migration/social location). It is important to recognize that Atlas-ti does not perform the comparison for researchers, but organizes the data systematically such that comparisons are visible, and can be graphically illustrated using the “network view.” Thus for instance, following on the initial codes illustrated above, I developed code families such as “personal benefits of work,” “expectations of America,” and “choosing family over job, mothers.” Precursor coding was instrumental in this process as it sensitized me to categories I had already constructed during that process. The difference however was that, in precursor coding because I did not code in a structured manner, I ran the risk of a number of my categories being a priori, thereby forcing data to fit categories. I corrected this in focused coding by ensuring that code families were grounded in the data, and were populated by codes emergent from the data and therefore more valid. This entire process required me to be very flexible in my thinking as I mentally moved between the findings of precursor coding, to returning to the data in initial coding by often forcing myself to disconnect mentally from earlier developed categories; to finally proceeding to a higher interpretive level in focused coding now drawing upon ideas developed at the precursor stage.

The final stage in coding that I undertook was theoretical coding culminating in theoretical saturation and analytic model building. Theoretical coding is a higher level of coding that follows focused coding specifying possible relationships between categories, thereby integrating them into a theory (Charmaz 2006). Accordingly, aided by Atlas-ti, I mapped the connections between code families both analytically and theoretically. Analytically, this involved reviewing the properties of code families to ensure that no new properties were emergent (across cases) and that I had “saturated [my] categories with data” (Charmaz 2006:98), thereby demonstrating how families were connected to each other and ensuring that I had achieved theoretical saturation.
Continuing this process, and informed by theoretical insights about migration, work, and family (outlined in the literature review), I constructed theoretical categories which embodied the connected code families. Thus for instance, a theoretical category which emerged at this stage was “social location” which includes code families such as father’s occupation, India; place of residence, India; girl child socialization; mother’s role; parental expectations; traditional Tamil gender standards. Again, precursor coding was important to this phase in the analysis too as some theoretical codes which were formalized during this phase borrowed from those developed during the former phase following my realization through the analysis process that these were indeed higher analytic categories rather than initial or focused codes. Especially illustrative of this is the theoretical code “motherhood and job barriers” which over the analysis emerged as a theoretical code comprising code families such as choosing family over job; work organization/motherhood; and challenges balancing work and family.

As I began to develop theoretical codes, I began the process of conceptual model building by categorizing and diagramming the theoretical codes illustrating the theoretical links between them suggestive of a coherent narrative. This stage of the analysis was done using Atlas-ti in conjunction with the “floor” method where I manually sorted out theoretical codes on the floor, testing and finalizing connections between them. This process revealed my analytic model wherein Tamil women’s social location in India primarily determined by their place of residence, girl-child socialization, emphasis on education and mother’s role influenced their expectations of the United States and their subsequent migration method and settlement outcomes such that these are gendered as women either assumed the bulk of responsibility for settling their families and/or were in dependent migrant statuses both of which affected their ability to access the American labor market. In turn, this is complicated by the social and personal expectations that imbue the
motherhood role and their lack family/domestic support in America, resulting in their limited career mobility compared to their spouses. However despite this, Tamil women self-identify as professional integrating this identity into their socially designated identities as wives and mothers – what I call *integrated femininity*—not in hegemonic or subordinate positions, but as interconnected dimensions of their femininity which manifest with increasing and decreasing prominence at different stages of their life.

Finally, it is important to note that memoing was an integral component of the entire analysis process as it facilitated the capturing of ideas thereby hinting at sensitizing concepts emergent from the analysis; encouraged me to critically examine the implicit and assumed meanings of codes, code families, and theoretical categories; and aided in the constant comparison method by enabling me to ask questions, and make provisional connections between ideas. As encouraged by Charmaz (2000, 2006), I did not confine myself to a single type of memo but rather wrote two types of memos. First, is what I call *cross referencing memos* which are brief and/or detailed descriptions of each code family, written in Atlas-ti. In *cross referencing memos*, I defined the code family describing the codes organized within it, and the analytic idea it embodied at times referencing theoretical insights. As more code families began to emerge from the data, I also began to articulate possible connections between code families (an early version of theoretical coding), jotting down questions, ideas, and reminders to cross reference them against each other across certain cases. For instance, one cross reference memo involved “professional work” wherein I wrote brief notes in each of the code families which I though comprised the theoretical code of professional work reminding myself to examine them as a group when undertaking theoretical coding. As a result of this, I am very familiar with my code
families, knowing almost all of them by name, as well as their interconnections with each other making theoretical coding and achieving theoretical saturation a relatively facile process.

The second type of memos I wrote are analytic memos where I articulate the connections between categories using theoretical ideas thereby resulting in the construction of the conceptual model described earlier. These memos were more formal than cross referencing memos, in that I titled them and wrote them up formally, rather than bulleted jottings while I was coding. Thus for instance, through cross referencing memos especially during focused coding, I began to notice the importance of Tamil women’s Indian social location organized around their caste/class status in India, father’s occupation and corresponding place of residence in India, familial emphasis on education, and their mother’s role. As I developed the theoretical code of social location, I wrote a corresponding memo (Social Location Memo, 12/08) defining social location and examining it as a critical element in the transnational context crucially shaping their decision to migrate, their self-identification as professional women, their consequent balancing of work and family life in the United States. Ideas from this memo inform the empirical write up in the proceeding chapters. Similarly, I wrote memos on the “gender nature of cooking,” “women’s role in community creation,” “gendered migration and settlement,” “immigrant professional work experiences,” “motherhood and job barriers,” and “integrated femininity.” Thus in sum, a constructivist grounded theory analysis enabled me to develop a conceptual model grounded in the lives of Tamil women, which I argue is representative of their perspectives while being critically informed and integrating my position into the analysis process.

A Part Yet Apart: Feminist Encounters in Researching Tamil Women

As I have argued throughout this chapter, a feminist methodological framework charges researchers to locate themselves within the research process, accounting for both the benefits and drawbacks of their positioning. In this final section of the chapter, I take a feminist approach to
reflexivity interrogating three main issues—power differentials in feminist research process; emotions in feminist research; and self-reflexive praxis critically examining my migrant, gendered-ethnic status—outlining the ethical dilemmas generated, and my attempts to privilege Tamil women’s subjectivity and agency in the research.

**Power Differentials in Feminist Research**

As briefly mentioned earlier, feminist methodology is centrally concerned about unequal power relations in research which results in the process being exploitative rather than emancipatory for women (Acker et al. 1991; Fonow and Cook 1991b; Gottfried 1996; Maynard 1994; Naples 2003). Thus throughout the research process, I was cognizant of three interrelated dimensions creating contributing to power differentials between Tamil women and me namely the power accruing to me as a researcher in soliciting participants and organizing the interview process; the potential for unequal exchange in the research process; and getting emotionally involved with participants and seeking their legitimizing of this project.

My first encounter with a power differential in my research was in staying within the duration of the interview stated at the time of recruitment and the signing of the informed consent documents. Based on my prior experience with qualitative research, I was cognizant that upon completion of the first interview, despite their enjoyment of the process, participants often feel a sense of compulsion and/or obligation to complete the interview even if it extends beyond the agreed upon length rather than terminating it. Thus, this can in essence dismantle the voluntary spirit of their participation, transforming it into coercion. Considering, this I made a concerted effort not to violate the agreed upon time limit by reworking the interview guide to
eliminate irrelevant questions\textsuperscript{4}, and strategically probe with depth or shallowness such that all the topics of interest were covered, albeit with some being briefly (rather than in detail) discussed. I also made visible efforts to privilege and value their time by always commencing an interview session by checking with participants about the time they allotted me that day, personally keeping a track of the time (rather than expecting them to do it), notifying them when we reached that limit for the day even if I had not completed the topics for that session, and re-checking with them whether their schedules would permit a brief extension. Finally, I made every effort to accommodate their busy schedules leaving the choice of venue for and time of the interview to Tamil women – a point I made especially clear during recruiting reassuring participants who were concerned about the length of the interview process. Accordingly, when scheduling interviews I was very flexible, choosing often to do multiple interviews, in different parts of Atlanta in a single day; to work through weekends, and holidays; and to work at odd times of the day including early mornings when participants worked out of home or late into the night following dinner and interviews with Tamil women after their work day. I believe that my flexibility was integral to successfully completing this project, as Tamil women often commented that that their initial agreement had been predicated upon it, and their continued participation on them being impressed by my commitment to it.

Another area that created concerns for power differentials was the unequal exchange that is inherent in the research process with markedly different levels of self-disclosure between researcher and participant (Reinharz and Davidman 1992). My response to this concern was to be very forthcoming with my personal biography including my inter-ethnic, inter-religious

\textsuperscript{4} Needless to say, this was achieved by trial and error, with the first interviews extending beyond the agreed upon time limit. I continued and completed these interviews only because of those participants’ good will and commitment to the project for which I am immensely grateful.
family background, and my personal and academic goals for the future often submitting to participant queries and questions and attentively accepting their advice about marriage, family life, and professional ambition.\(^5\) Although at times this level of disclosure was uncomfortable as it sometimes resulted in subtle critiques or negative commentary, I felt it was a necessary attempt to stabilize unequal disclosures during the interview. Additionally, I always attempted to respect participants’ right to disclose within their comfort limits, by reminding them of the voluntary nature of their responses (“you are free to decline to answer this question”) as a preface to questions I deemed were personal or intimate (largely questions about their marriage, their satisfaction with work-family arrangements; areas where they would like husbands to change etc).

Finally, power differentials also emanated from my emotional involvement with participants which is often an anticipated though uncontrolled aspect of qualitative research. As the research process became emotionally turbulent as I will discuss next, I became emotionally involved with some Tamil women with whom I shared my fears about recruiting a sufficient sample, my concerns about finding a job during a recession, and upon whom I relied to some extent for emotional support. For me this posed two ethical concerns the first being the subtle search for legitimation of my project underlying my emotional involvement with these Tamil women, upon whose realization I had to walk the fine line between valuing their friendship and being emotionally dependent on them (Patai 1994; Stacey 1996). The second dilemma this emotional connection posed was that the Tamil women I got emotionally involved with were the “enthusiastic and excited participants” who wanted to exercise their influence in ensuring other

\(^5\) It is important to note at this point, that due to the tight-knit nature of the Tamil community knowledge of my background had begun to circulate within the community such that potential participants had not only heard of me, but were also aware of my background referencing it during interviews against which they presented theirs.
Tamil women’s cooperation in the project. “You are one of us…and you are doing your dissertation on us…they [other Tamil women] should be interested and want to help you. I will get them to help you!” is a variation of the statements they made (Methods Fieldnotes, 10/28/07). Although these women did introduce me to other Tamil women, I chose not to take them up on their suggestions to personally speak with those who declined to participate as that would have reinforced my power in the process by disregarding Tamil women’s agency in declining to participate.

**Emotions in Feminist Research**

Feminist methodologists argue that integrating emotions into the research process is integral to eliminating the exploitative and neutral stance of nature of the research process, replacing it with an ethic of care and empathy for the women who are our participants thereby making research an emancipatory process (Collins 2000; Fonow and Cook 1991b; Wolf 1996). However, I argue that in making this claim they are not equally attentive to the researcher’s emotions in feminist qualitative work, as they are of participants. For me, this involved oscillating between depression and elation as I negotiated the ups and downs of the research process. Recruitment was an especially frustrating and emotionally laden process as creating the sample took time and often involved numerous conversations with potential participants only to be turned down. I was constantly fearful (almost until the end of data collection) that I would not recruit a sufficient number of Tamil women thereby negating the efficacy of my project. Further, recruitment was often accompanied by an apprehension and hesitancy in approaching Tamil women (both with and without a referral) to solicit their participation in the project mostly because I was cognizant of not belonging to the Tamil community in Atlanta, and of having to market a difficult data collection strategy to them. As a result, I often dreaded the recruitment
strategies of attending events, being present in community spaces, making multiple phone calls, leaving voice mails, and sending emails.

Although it proceeded smoothly, data collection carried an emotional toll especially until I had gained familiarity with the interview guide and the method of organizing interviews into sessions. I was often frustrated and angry at interviews (exacerbated when I had a particularly busy interview schedule) where I felt I was “pulling teeth” and regardless of my attempts to reword questions, I was receiving monosyllabic responses. I had to learn to manage these emotions as they encroached during the interview by recognizing that in verbalizing them I might be threatening participants’ subjectivity in responding in a manner they deem fit. Over time, I tuned myself to analyze the meaning of these emotions as hinting to areas participants’ were uncomfortable to discuss, wanted to narrate superficially, or terminate the interview. The emotional toll that accompanies data collection also comprises the doubts I had about the quality of data I was gathering, especially since interviews (all three sessions) might only be completed months after initiation. Although I was continuously reviewing tapes and interview material, until I began to see patterns emerge across interviews, doubts remained about the efficacy of the research project.

At this point, after approximately a year in Atlanta engaged in recruitment and data collection (in addition to my other personal and professional commitments), I began my formal analysis which lasted almost six months. As I have already described above, the process was rigorous, time consuming and difficult, at a time when I was physically and emotionally drained. The volume of my data sometimes overwhelmed me especially as I was coding line-by-line while developing my code list often resulting in procrastination and attempts to delay analysis. Similar to the data collection phase, during this stage I also attempted to use my emotions to the
benefit of the project. I used them as indicators to take breaks from coding, giving myself the
time and space needed for the data to resonate within me, facilitating critical thinking about
possible connections, themes, ideas, and models. I also took the time especially at this point to
talk to a variety of people interested in my project – from my family, close friends, mentors,
colleagues, transcriber – describing my emotional state which often culminated in analytic
conversations about what was going on in the data that was troubling me and why. Despite these
difficulties, qualitative research has its prizes which contributed to my intermittent sense of
elation which accompanied every single participant I successfully recruited, every interview
where Tamil women were articulate, able to discern the goal of the project, and excited about the
outcome; the emergence of codes, code families and theoretical codes which made sense and
represented the narratives of Tamil women; and the ebullience I experienced when my
conceptual model became apparent as emergent from my research. These instances although
much fewer than the depressive ones, served to reinforce my personal commitment to this
methodology.

Self-Reflexive Praxis

Finally, successfully implementing this project has necessitated me to be reflexive about
my historicity and location within the research process in that I am “not a spectator…an
invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but a real, historical individual with concrete, specific
desires and interests” (Fonow and Cook 1991b; Harding 1987:9; Mies 1991). This involved the
critical examination of my migrant, gendered-ethnic position throughout the research process.
Even prior to embarking on this project I was cognizant of being the “outsider within” (Collins
1986:14) the Tamil community in Atlanta in that although Tamil women and I share a migrant,
gendered-ethnic status, I do not belong to the Atlanta Tamil community. Thus, my ability to
successfully access the community, recruit and interview Tamil women was contingent on
building trust and rapport, while demonstrating my commitment to privileging their subjectivity and agency. To this effect, as I have briefly mentioned earlier, I adopted a “learner position” rather than that of an expert during the interview process which mentally positioned me to emphasize to Tamil women my goal of understanding and recording their lives in their own words which was efficacious in recruiting their participation.

However, in the case of some participants, this stance in interaction with my age (younger than most participants) and student status, engendered interactions where I was treated as a student and tested as a researcher. At one personal gathering when I first entered the community, a participant (at that time a potential participant) was antagonistic about my qualitative and multi-part interview structure, combatively (in my opinion) arguing with me in favor of a survey method although she acknowledged knowing little about qualitative methodologies.

Yes…I know you said qualitative methods…I don’t know what that means…but wouldn’t it be better for you…so that you can get more participants and not put people off to have a list of questions that they can just check off? I saw the email [another participant] sent out to all of us about your project… and when I saw 3-4 hours, I just hit the delete button…(Methods Fieldnotes, 10/15/07)

Throughout this debate, as I managed my emotions so as not to get defensive or show anger, I noticed that her tone was that of an academic mentor (considering her academic job), critiquing a student’s work while offering space for commentary and defense of the methodology. Further, relegating me to the role of a student was made especially apparent to me when upon the entry of more guests into the gathering, she asked in a demanding tone of voice for me to vacate the sofa on which I was sitting for the incoming guests, in favor of a low-slung stool next to her. While I made the move with alacrity, I realized that the new guest was another young woman, a couple of years older than me (and obviously a family friend) who was invited to sit on the couch, and engaged in the ensuing conversation as a friend, while I continued to be relegated to the student role being briefly incorporated into the conversation by questions about my research. Reflecting
on this incident after leaving the field, I realized that I was being tested about my research, and my professionalism about being tested, which I believe was crucial to Tamil women beginning to trust me. This was especially evinced when following this incident when I emailed this participant soliciting her involvement in the research process; she not only agreed but willingly scheduled the multiple-sessions and turned out to be one of my most articulate participants.

Another issue I had to be reflexive about during the research process was that of my “same-ness and difference” (Bhopal 2001:284) from my participants. By this I mean that while I shared a similar migrant, gender and ethnic status with my participants, I also differed from them in age, marital status (being single), and the fact that I am half-Tamil both of which presented opportunities and challenges during the research process. There is no denying that being Indian/Tamil aided me in this project in different ways. First, being Indian (especially Tamil) I was culturally proficient in knowledge and behavior, which as I came to realize over time, was an immediate ice-breaker, creating a bond between Tamil women and myself. This was evident in numerous things like my awareness of leaving my foot-ware at the entrance of the home thereby respecting their behavior codes; and my familiarity with how Indians elders are greeted and approach children in the homes they are visiting allowing me to step out of the researcher role and briefly interact with family members. It also resonated in my understanding of Tamil phraseology (although I do not speak the language fluently) allowing participants to slip into Tamil during the interview; and my familiarity with South Indian cuisine and eating with my fingers which I now recognize to be quite important to rapport building because, as mentioned by some participants, it eased their concerns about inviting me to stay for dinner as they realized they did not need to stand on formality (cook special food rather than the meal prepared for the
day) or alter their eating patterns. Needless to say, being invited to dinner forged the personal connections with resulted in subsequent referrals and sample building.

Second, as the research unfolded, I noticed that being Indian also aided the recruitment process as a number of Tamil women felt invested to support a fellow Tamil (Indian) doctoral student successfully complete her studies. This was made particularly apparent, not only in some Tamil women’s outrage when others declined to participate as already mentioned, but also when participants would make referrals to other Tamil women noting my Indian status, my flexible approach to interviewing, and the hope that the project would contribute to furthering knowledge on Tamils:

…A request to help out an Indian student for her research. Namita is pursuing her PhD and her research is about Tamil professional women. She needs to interview each one of you personally (generally 2 or 3 sessions). If you could spare her some time it would help her a great deal. Yes, I [Tamil woman sending the email] have completed my interview with her. It was fun and Namita is VERY flexible and will come whenever you have time. (even if that means you driving somewhere or taking a massage at a parlor). This study should be revealing when it is done. I wonder as Tamilians do we have experiences different from other migrant women? (Referral Email 4/29/08)

Of the four women who received this email, three interviewed with me, with the fourth declining because she did not match the sampling criteria, illustrating for me the efficacy of personal referrals and of my shared ethnicity and nationality with my participants.

Third, being a fellow immigrant created an empathy and sensitivity among Tamil women as I tackled the practicalities of visas, and visits to India during the research process. By the time I commenced the project, it had been approximately three years since I had last returned home. Accordingly, I had planned a month long absence from the research site when I returned to India. In terms of research timelines, I was engaged in involved/focused recruiting with growing results and had begun interviewing my first participants, which caused me considerable anxiety about leaving at that point. However, Tamil women were particularly supportive and empathetic of my
need to leave drawing upon their own experiences of leaving India and missing “home,” and their recognition of the monetary and scheduling difficulties in traveling home more often. As the date of my departure from Atlanta drew closer, Tamil women often advised me to leave behind all my worries about the research, and about school and just enjoy being with my family – eating all the foods I liked and being pampered (Methods Fieldnotes, 2/08). Sharing an immigrant status was also palpable during the interview, when Tamil women and I shared laughter, and memories of leaving India, our naïve expectations of the United States, and our ambivalence about returning to establish family life similar to the one here. I believe that this was mutually beneficial in that my biography equipped me with the authority to interpret and theorize participant experiences, while it reinforced a supportive environment for Tamil women to safely divulge their narratives free of judgment.

Fourth, my being a woman (in interaction with a Tamil migrant) was integral to the research not only did it enable me to enter gendered community spaces and access Tamil women, but was also the starting point of my research topic which appealed to Tamil women – namely excavating our voices in a narrative that has not represented us. Further, I believe that my gender status aided the level of disclosure especially about their work-family arrangements being an Indian American amalgam as Tamil women recognized that I understood their arrangements both sociologically and personally (by being Indian myself) (Bhopal 2001).

However as Reissman (1987) is quick to note, a shared migrant, gendered ethnic status is not sufficient to claiming insider status when researching women. Being young, single, and half-Tamil did contribute to my constant cognizance of being different, and in some cases being treated as such. An important indicator of this was a heated conversation I had with an older participant about “authentic” Indian/Tamil-ness and her argument of being concerned that
“today’s India” is more Americanized than her Indian origin children in the United States. By Americanized she was particularly referencing the growing independence of middle-class, urban Indian women (implicitly pointing to me) in laying out demands about marriage partners and married life (in a semi-arranged marriage set-up), in their growing consumerism, sexual freedom, and personal habits (smoking, drinking); and loss of familiarity with traditional Indian culture.

When I contested her argument, she interrupted me repeatedly asking:

- Do you speak Tamil? Do you speak Konkani (the language of my Goan ethnicity)? Do you know your history? Culture? No! That is what I am saying. Speaking Hindi isn’t enough [responding to my rebuttal that I spoke our national language]…that is not your mother tongue. My children, they know their culture, they have learned Indian history…the dance…they speak Tamil… (Participant Interview Notes)

I do not believe that my half-Tamil status contributed to my “different-ness” from the community, but rather this participants’ perception of post 1990s Indian women being different (read: lacking) from those of her generation and the from children raised by them. Gender thus served to be more divisive than unifying force in this instance.

Also important to mention here is as I began to be recognized in the Tamil Brahmin community, there was some curiosity about me which stimulated a few Tamil women to participate although they might not have believed the research to be scientifically worthy. This participant was a case in point, where upon completion of the interview, when I asked for her feedback, she critiqued the project and the methodology arguing:

- Well…if your not studying homemakers, then what is the point of it? What are you going to compare it to? And you have only…30 participants….that doesn’t indicate anything! There is no point to the study at all. I can’t comment on it. (Participant Interview Notes)

I remember leaving her residence being angry and frustrated with her and wondering why she participated if she saw no purpose to the project, especially since she had be dodging me for months by agreeing to interview, but never being available to schedule a date. As I reflected on the interview with her, I hypothesized that her participation was perhaps to “check me out”
especially as some of her closest friends had already interviewed with me, and given that my personal biography was circulating the tight-knit structure of the Tamil Brahmin community.

A final area of difference which created some issues during the interview process was my being a young, single woman. Considering that the majority of my participants are approximately ten years my senior, and balancing marriages, work, and family I received a lot of questions about marriage (when I planned to marry, whether I wanted an arranged marriage, whether I wanted to marry a Tamil or Goan etc), with some participants offering me advice not to delay the process for a variety of reasons. Accompanying this, was a sense among some participants that because I am single, I did not fully grasp the demands of work-family arrangements and marriage negotiations resulting in some of my questions being “too simplistic” – a variation of the comment “you can’t keep tabs in a marriage who is doing what…you do what you have to do…and although your questions make it appear that my husband doesn’t do a lot, I am happy with it.” Simultaneously, however I was very cognizant of my single status especially when questioning them about work-family arrangements responding to the above comment and to their narratives by being very cautious not to critique their arrangements but recognize that these emerge in marital interactions and that as an outsider I do not have the right to pass judgment or invalidate them. I was also quick to verbalize this especially when participants’ questioned me about arrangements in other participants’ homes, or asked for my comments about why women continue to perform the bulk of housework. In answering these questions, I made a sociologically informed argument, always emphasizing that my opinion is based on my biography and learning and thus no more valid, or invalid than theirs. In this manner, I was able to successfully navigate being different, while respecting participants’ subjectivities.
Engaging in feminist reflexivity throughout this research process helped me to recognize that as a migrant Tamil woman, I was a part and yet apart from the Tamil Brahmin community I am researching. Further, this made me especially attentive to issues of power, and emotionality inherent not only to the research process, but to my role as a researcher. It is not my contention that my project is power or exploitation free. Rather, I recognize that despite our best efforts feminist research can never be free of these issues but that as a researcher I constantly strive through my moral imperatives and corresponding practices as described here to ameliorate power differentials, and potential victimization possible in feminist research.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology that organized the data collection and analysis procedures for this project. I argue that the central analytical component of my work is excavating the everyday lives of Tamil professional migrant women. To this effect, I employ a feminist methodology centered on the following principles: linking theory, research, and experience such that that research is empowering; creating knowledge from women’s perspectives and their lived experiences; recognition of multiple narratives and voices in research; and engaging in self-reflexive praxis. In turn, through my research I accord subject status to my participants as co-constructors of this narrative, am attentive to my power as a researcher within the research process, and interrogate the dialectical relationship between my social location and personal biography as an immigrant Tamil-Goan woman and the research process.

The research site for this project is the Greater Atlanta Metropolitan area so chosen because it is rapidly emerging as a major new immigrant gateway and due the presence of a large, organized Tamil community. Further, this choice was also guided by the palpable dearth of scholarship on Indians in Atlanta especially considering that we are a rapidly burgeoning
presence in the city. Accordingly, data for this project was based on an 8 month long ethnography and 33 multi-part, in-depth interviews (each 4-5 hours in duration) with first-generation, married, Tamil women professionals. Data collection methods reflected the feminist methodological principles guiding the project in that I combined three key techniques – semi-structured interviewing, active interviewing, and institutional ethnography- in organizing my interviews; and emphasized the phenomenon or process in my ethnographic observations. Data was analyzed using a constructivist approach to grounded theory which I argue most closely resembles feminist principles in that it recognizes data as being context bound, constructed by the shared interpretation of participants and researcher. I close the chapter with a detailed account of my feminist engagement with the research process particularly emphasizing my efforts to ameliorate the exploitation inherent in any research process, to negotiate the emotional toll of qualitative research, and to navigate being a young, single, Tamil-Goan, immigrant woman in this project. The following chapter is an empirical presentation of my first important finding detailing the dialectical relationship between gender organizing migration and settlement and being reconfigured by it.
Figure 3-1. 28 County Metropolitan Statistical Area Map of Atlanta. Participants in this study reside predominantly in the following counties: Cobb, Clayton, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett. [Reprinted from Atlanta Regional Commission, http://www.atlantaregional.com/images/rs_28_county_MSA_091008.jpg].
Table 3-1. Sample Descriptives Table\(^6\) Please note: Dependent Wife Migrants (professional) are those who accompany spouses on work permits in the United States. Dependent Wife Migrants (students) are those who accompany spouses who are on student visas in the United States. Student Migrants are those Tamil women who emigrated (most often as single women) on student visas to the United States. Green-Card Migrants are those Tamil women (accompanied by their married families, except in three cases where they emigrated as part of their maternal families) who migrate on green-cards to the United States.

<table>
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<th>Occupation</th>
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<td>Generic Professional(^7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^6\) Please note that in light of preserving participants’ identities, additional details about place of residence in India prior to migration, current residence in Atlanta, or number of children has not been included in this table. I believe that this caution is necessitated considering the tight-knit nature of the Tamil community in Atlanta, such that divulging more personal demographic information will result in participants being able to identify each other.

\(^7\) Participants have been designated in this way to protect their identities. Given the relatively small sample size and the close-knit nature of the Tamil community, divulging further details about these participants’ professional lives would result in the participants being easily identifiable.
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CHAPTER 4
“ORANGE JUICE FROM TAPS, BERKELEY, AND HOLLYWOOD”: GENDERED MIGRATIONS AND DESTINIES

I mean I really thought it [America] was a wonderful land…I thought what you see in the movies is what it really is. Like people [said] “you open the faucet [in America]…it’s only juice that comes out!” But now I know that’s not true…it’s water that comes out…. [laughs]. --- Participant in this Study

This chapter outlines my first important finding of how gender structures Tamil women’s migration to and settlement in the United States in the context of their gendered location in India and subsequent negotiations with Tamil gender ideologies; thereby locating them in a migration narrative that has underplayed their voices. Informed by the engendering migration perspective, this chapter excavates the intricacies of gender (in interaction with other axes of difference) being a constituent element of Tamil women’s migration and settlement and of their agency in organizing this process such that their experiences are qualitatively distinct from their Tamil male counterparts. Importantly, this chapter finds that, far from operating in a vacuum, these gender navigations occur in institutional environments of gendered Tamil households and networks, fashioned by the historico-political and national arenas within which migration occurs.

I begin by outlining Tamil women’s social location in India which, I argue, shape the Tamil Brahmin articulation of femininity and masculinity. Next, I discuss the choice of the United States as a preferred as framed primarily by the social imagination that connects India and the United States. Third, I detail the strategizing of migration and settlement around three main methods espoused by Tamil women, each with its own gender navigation. Finally, I present the agentic and transnational components of their migration by examining Tamil women’s construction of social capital in mediating their own and their family’s settlement through the creation of women’s networks and their community work.
Social Location

As mentioned in earlier chapters, by locating gender as an essential component of migration, I theorize it as a structure interacting with other structures of domination positioning individuals differently within a society’s opportunity structures and thereby systemically organizing their access to privileges, resources, and disadvantage (Andersen and Collins 2007; Collins 2000; Mohanty 2002; Zinn and Dill 1996). This comprises the social location, which I argue is directly connected to an individual’s ability to migrate as explained by Pessar and Mahler (2003) who note that:

…persons position within interconnected power hierarchies created through historical, political, economic, geographic, and kinship-based and other socially stratifying factors…[which] provide differing access to and power over flows (of people and ideas) and interconnections between places. (P. 816)

I begin this chapter with Tamil women’s social location in India because my analysis reveals its centrality in Tamil women’s narrative about migration, work, and family as opposed to the more commonly cited “cohort effect.” Further, considering that my argument is predicated upon the understanding of multiple articulations of femininity and masculinity, my research reveals the construction of emphasized Tamil femininity and hegemonic Tamil masculinity unique to their social location. At the outset, it is important to be reminded that Tamil women who participated in this project self-identified as being upper-caste (Brahmin) and middle to upper-middle class Tamils in India. Following from this structural positioning, analysis indicates that their social location is defined by the imbrication of two additional key elements – the interconnection of their place of residence in India and their parents’ roles; and their consequent “blended socialization” with its accompanying gendered expectations of them as women.

The majority of Tamil women in this project grew up during the 1950s-1980s in India. For the Tamil Brahmin community, this period was marked by their rapid transformation into an
“urban and urbanized community” (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008:171) resulting from their abandonment of village and small town life in favor of professional employment in cities. Their tradition of being a literate community, accompanied by their emphasis on secular, English based education and participation in British administrative machinery during colonial rule strategically positioned them to make this transition (Subrahmanian 1989). This was echoed by a significant proportion of my participants, whose fathers were employed during this period in senior management positions in a variety of European owned private enterprises or worked for the Government, the Military, or Government owned enterprises such as the Indian Railways. Due to the transferable nature of their father’s work, and better economic opportunities in larger cities, a significant proportion of them grew up primarily in cities outside South India such as Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and other states such as Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Subrahmanian 1989). I argue that this residence outside the South is critical to their “blended socialization” and the concomitant construction of emphasized Tamil femininity and hegemonic Tamil masculinity by Tamil Brahmins.

For the parents of my participants, migration outside the South had exposed them to the diversity of India, broadening their exposure, and loosening, to some extent, the conservatism inherent to the Tamil Brahmin community in the South which had direct implications for their daughter’s socialization and femininity construction.

During my childhood years, my father worked in the Ministry of External Affairs. Because it was a central government job we spent three years in Dhaka [Bangladesh]. And that brought them into contact with other Indians from all over. We all lived together in one compound…sort of the Indian enclave in Dhaka and the children grew up together. And I think this exposed them to both to non-Tamil families and non-Brahmin families [where their interaction] in Chennai [Southern Indian city] might have been [only] within the Brahmin community (Janiki Parathasarathi, 44, Professor)

As Janiki explains, this encounter with diversity occurred largely due to the nature of their father’s employment. Being employed by the government or private enterprises often
necessitated Tamil families living in housing colonies along with Indians of different ethnicities, castes and classes which automatically widened their parents’ exposure beyond the Tamil Brahmin community. Also, the culture of some of these workplaces being decidedly British influenced, their parents, who absorbed a more cosmopolitan outlook resulting in the more westernized upbringing of my participants. Coupled with these influences, their physical location outside the South, the corresponding distance from community and family structures, and the more liberal gender standards among professionals in these cities resulted in Tamil parents often abandoning or diluting conservative Tamil Brahmin standards centered primarily on gender and religious ideologies. Thus, Janiki continues:

…the Dhaka year were very influential in their [her parents] outlook and significantly influenced how they raised the children. When they went to Dhaka my father stopped doing a lot [of] rituals which other Tamil Brahmin families continued to do. They had clearly moved out of sort of the more orthodox traditions of Chennai and the years there really allowed them to give the daughters a lot more freedom relative to the social customs that were more prevalent in Chennai during those years.

It is important to remark here, that although residence outside the South emerges as a critical influence in Tamil women’s gendering, a small proportion of my participants continued to live in the South until their migration to the United States with upbringings relatively similar to their Northern migrant counterparts. Analysis reveals the particularly essential role played by women family members in these cases.1 By women family members I refer primarily to bloodmothers or biological mothers, and othermothers such as aunts, cousins, and grandmothers who comprise the extended kin networks of Tamil women (Collins 2000). In identifying the role of women family members, I argue that they employ the power of motherhood to shape the gender identities and gendered expectations of their daughters distinct from the hegemonic

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1 By accounting for women family members here, I do not discount the role they play in the lives of Tamil women who grew up outside the South. However, in highlighting them here, I merely contend that lacking the structural liberalism and exposure that accompanies Northern migration, women’s roles assume a more significant purpose.
versions of the time. Lacking the structural liberalness and exposure accompanying northern migration, bloodmothers and othermothers of Tamil women drew upon their own personal biographies of early marriages, widowhood, being deprived of education and/or being educated in direct violation of the times, to challenge conservative gender standards by embracing more progressive gender ideas in the case of their daughters. These ideas encompass women family members’ perception of Tamil women being more than merely wives and mothers, and thus needing a means – education and/or a profession - to not only explore themselves, but also to be independent.

My father’s mother…She got married when she was 9 and then she had my father when she was 15 and then by 30 she was a widow. And then she took care of the whole family. She was the one who made us [my participant and her sister] go to college. She was saying… “ladies need their education, they have to support themselves.” (Ramya Venkatraman, 52, Entrepreneur)

For the younger women in my sample the role of bloodmothers and othermothers in mediating their blended socialization was also predicated upon the emergence of dual income families in the urban areas of India in the 1980s, witnessed by their women family members’ participation in the paid workforce. Labor force participation by Tamil mothers mirrored the effects of northern migration in that as Prema Devarajan, a 38 year old physician notes of her working mother, moving outside their home not only widened her mother’s exposure but also facilitated a transformation in marital gender expectations such that that “men [in dual income families] don’t expect their wives to cook and clean…and thus don’t stipulate those things on their daughters.”

Shaped by the interconnections of their place of residence when growing up in India and their parents’ roles Tamil women experienced what I call “blended socialization” – a combination of the progressive and conservative – within which they developed gendered identities as women and men drawing upon the constructs of emphasized femininity and
masculinity unique to this socialization. This blended socialization has to be understood within a historical period when the hegemonic gender standards within Tamil Brahmin families and community especially in the South involved more restrictive practices for women as compared to men. As Tamil women note of their counterparts in the South, corroborating existing scholarship, these included limiting women’s educational and professional opportunities in favor of marriage and motherhood; subjecting women’s behavior to community gossip as a means of social control; and monitoring and curtailing women’s free and independent movement outside the home as a mechanism of regulating women’s sexuality, chastity, and reputation (Bhattacharjee 1998; Lakshmi 1984; Lannoy 1974; Subrahmanian 1989; Thiruchandran 1997).

In contrast, my participants, growing up as girls in homes characterized by the increased broadmindedness of their parents, enjoyed greater freedoms in determining the personal expression of their gender identities through their behavior, dress, and movements even when this sometimes meant challenging parental authority as described by Kamala Vivek below.

[They were] culturally backward [in Chennai] in the sense, as far as women are concerned, they’re given a lot of protection and they’re not allowed to move with the men freely. [Whereas] we…my sisters and I could mix with people, doesn't matter if it's male or a female and we could go out to movies and out to clubs, which is not done a thing in Chennai at that time. The people were still conservative. (Avni Shankaran, 58, CPA)

...There was this need to grow my hair [as Tamil Brahmin tradition requires women to have long hair], and my mother resisted me getting a haircut [when they briefly moved to the South]. And to this day, my parents and I remember this discussion where I said, “I will cut my hair if I want to! It is MY hair, it is MY body, and you [indicating both her mother and Tamil society] have no right to tell me what to do!! [with emphasis]. (Kamala Vivek, 46, Scientist)

Further, referencing the prevalent patrilineal standards of differentially treating girls and boys in childhood and youth, Tamil women such as Manya and Shanta spoke of not being differentiated from their brothers in *childhood and youth* in terms of gender expectations both within and without the home.
...both my parents were very firm believers, it doesn’t matter whether it’s a girl or a boy, everybody had to do everything in terms of either chores at home...There’s no such thing as this is something designated only for boys and that for girls. We had to clean the bathrooms...like my brother [did the] cleaning and mopping. It’s not like thing like this is hers and this is yours, no. (Manya Ramalingam, 51, Scientist)

Just equally...we were brought up equally with our brothers. Even sports, we were all very good in sports... we [she and her sisters] were involved in running, we got so many awards in running and high jump, pole vault. My mother made sure we did everything the boys did. (Shanta Anand, 58, Teacher)

While Kamala’s comments about choosing her hairstyle, and Shanta’s about playing sports might appear to be relatively banal, I argue that these constitute arenas of transgressive gender performance and hence of women’s agency in developing gender identities. Behavior, dress and movements are often the visible components of gender display that attract cynosure, critique, and judgment, and thus a means of restricting and/or permitting women thereby constructing and reinforcing difference between them and men. By facilitating my participants’ freedoms in these areas, their parents were subtly challenging prevalent gender expectations of women being docile, submissive and the patrilineal tradition of being defined in relation to and secondary to men, rather than to themselves.

Perhaps the best indicator of the progressive nature of this blended socialization and of relaxation of Tamil gender conservatism is the emphasis my participants’ parents placed on higher education of women commensurate with the similarly prevalent trend among Tamil Brahmin men. By being highly educated, I mean that parents expected and encouraged Tamil women to educate themselves beyond mere high school and/or a bachelor’s degree to having graduate and professional qualifications.

...my parents are not just going to send us to any college and just get us married. That was just never their intention, because in those days that was still happening. Girls are merely getting a bachelor’s just so they have a degree, and right after that, they were getting married. But that was not something my parents, from a young age, they always said, “do more if you can, do the best you can.” (Vijaya Muruggan, 34, Engineer)
There is no denying that being Brahmin and middle to upper-middle class has an influence on this expectation, considering that Tamil parents are calling upon a “culture of education” inherent to their caste/class group. As previously discussed, Tamil Brahmins have a long tradition of being a literate community, resulting in families valuing education to the extent that not only are all members educated, but that there is a not-so-subtle pressure to excel in school. Further, parents equate “education with wealth” regarding it as the vehicle for upward social mobility since Tamil Brahmins lack traditional sources of wealth such as landholding, businesses etc. This makes education and commensurate professional employment the only means to achieve a middle to upper-middle class status.

I think it is in some sense the focus on learning English and the English education was particularly important to the Tamil Brahmin families. There was this unspoken culture, unspoken sort of expectation…that you tend to be valued much more by others only if you’re really smart and you’re really good at [school]. Brahmin families…the motivation or the emphasis on education and excelling in education was much higher as opposed to the Punjabi or the Marwari [other Indian regional groups] children. I think they [parents] clearly they saw [education] as a ticket for upward mobility. We [Brahmins] were not land owners…there was really no other source of wealth. [Thus] a lot of middle and low to middle income Brahmin families saw education as their ticket out…(Janiki Parthasarthy, 44, Professor)

However, I contend that in articulating the goal of higher education for their daughters, the parents of my participants were continuing their challenge of conservative normative gender standards. During the period when my participants came of age, this opportunity for girls to access higher education was yet atypical for Tamil Brahmins. Rather, the more prevalent gender expectation, as Vijaya notes earlier, was for women to study only until marriage, thereby automatically creating differential education standards for women and men. For parents, this atypical emphasis on their daughter’s education, as briefly accounted when discussing women family members, stems from their perception of education, by enhancing women’s independence and self-sufficiency, is a positive influence on the quality of women’s lives. Manya Ramalingam,
the 51 year old scientist who spoke earlier of the lack of gender differentiation in her family explains:

He [her father] felt that women, to a certain extent… should be at least if not very independent… they should still have that facilitation to be independent. They are two different things. He didn’t say that you have to be independent and get out of everything, but he still felt that I should have a situation that facilitates me to be independent if a need arises to be that.

For parents, education as “facilitating” women’s independence implied two things. On the one hand, it signified arming them with practical skills to be self-sufficient. To this effect, as Tamil women contend, their parents rarely equated education with professional work, but rather recognized that it carried the potential for women to have access to their own money, which, as Saraswati Vinayak, a 44 year old Corporate America Executive argues, enables them “not to be dependent on your spouse for your existence, but to [have] a path for yourself, [and] your own lifestyle.” On the other hand, independence also referred to independence of thought, action, and judgment which parents emphasized as being the crucial emotional and psychological skills emanating from education. Citing parental commentary of higher learning as inculcating critical, independent thinking and the ability to make educated decisions about their lives, Tamil women speak of the sense of pride and self-confidence experienced by them as educated women.

What is particularly interesting to remark in the progressiveness of parents’ emphasis on daughters being highly educated is that education is not constructed as an alternative to marriage (i.e. being single women engaged in careers). This is emphasized by the fact that parents do not equate education with professional work, or even with the need for women to be engaged in professional work, leaving the women themselves to make the choice. Arundhati Chandran, a 45 year old woman who is the President of her family owned business narrates her father’s reasoning of this:
But even then…particularly my father… it’s not as if he wanted [us] to be a professional. But he wanted us to get a degree to have just to, you know. I mean that [working] was not the priority because we… you always think that "OK, men go to work and women take care of the house sort of the deal." So it’s not ever drilled telling [us women] that "OK, you have to go work and you just be on your own feet. You got to make your own living…”

Contrastingly however, following Arundhati’s comment about “men going out to work,” professional work is deemed a necessity for men. Some Tamil women argue that this results in increased pressure on men to choose and succeed at demanding and profitable professions that can support families, offering, in effect, them a greater ease in choosing an educational track

I think I can say that you know my sister and I, we had less pressure on us…we were allowed to be a little flexible about what we chose [to study]… in terms of “you don’t have to do medicine or engineering.” I think it was forced on him [her brother]. As girls, you don’t feel as much pressure…or that it’s been predetermined that you [have] to succeed. Because [the understanding is that] you can always get married, and [that is] your way out. (Saraswati Vinayak, 44, Corporate America Executive)

I argue that this discrepancy between choice and requirement of professional work actually points to a more conservative construct of the blended socialization of Tamil women since, upon attaining adulthood, despite their educational qualifications, women encounter implicit assumptions that they will marry and be supported by men. Considering this, femininity is constructed to privilege women’s familial identities as wives and mothers, over their personal identities as professional thereby offering them not only the choice of whether or not to work, but also the admonitions of choosing professions that enable them to fulfill their maternal roles rather than interfering with them. Prema Devarajan, a physician explains this as occurring in her family:

…when you’re raising women, there is still that concern you know, “oh she’s a girl, she does not have to be in a big profession such that it’s consuming and all consuming” [and takes time from family]. They [parents] still do have some of those a little bit gender differences that they subconsciously express.

Thus, within this heteronormative framework women’s work (should they decide to work), is constructed only in the service of their families. Janiki Parthasarathy, the professor who spoke
earlier of the Brahmin tradition of education, continued her comments on women’s education using the euphemism of it serving as “an economic security blanket” offering married women a fall back option of working “should something happen [widowhood or divorce] post marriage” requiring women to support their families.

Thus in sum, I contend that blended socialization constructs emphasized Tamil femininity and hegemonic Tamil masculinity by “blending” prevalent conservative gender standards, and agentic progressive responses. Therefore emphasized Tamil femininity involves the superordination of familial identities over professional ones – i.e. of women being defined as wives and mothers who might work, but whose work is subordinate/secondary to their familial roles – thereby servicing patriarchy. For Tamil men by contrast, hegemonic masculinity is what Kimmel (2005) calls market place masculinity predicated not only on being providers of their families, often to the exclusion of their domestic roles, but also on succeeding economically and professionally at profitable professions thereby bolstering emphasized Tamil femininity (Connell 1987). These gender constructs, which in turn shape the gendered identities of Tamil women and their gender performances and navigations in the arenas of migration, work, and family life; are unique to the Tamil Brahmin social location defined by their caste/class, place of residence, and parental roles within the contexts of 1950s-1980s India. In turn, these identities and constructs are dynamic, constituting Tamil women as gendered beings while being transformed by them (Mohanty 2002). It is these gender standards and identities that organize the migration and settlement process as discussed next.

**Wonderful America Beckons! Choosing America as Migrant Destination**

As I conversed with Tamil women about their coming to the United States, an area of analysis that emerged from the interviews was how the United States came to be characterized by them as the destination of choice especially considering India’s colonial linkages with other
developed countries such as the United Kingdom. In this section, I provide a brief accounting of this process arguing that the “idea of America” is a function of the “social imagination” (Pessar and Mahler 2003:818) that traverses the transnational social space integrating India and the United States. By social imagination I to refer to the ideas, perceptions, imaginings, planning, and strategizing about the United States that people do prior to deciding upon and undertaking migration. Integral to this social imagination is the incorporation of India and the United States into a transnational social space – a “singular new social space” (Kivisto 2001:565) defined by migrant networks that circulate this space, constructing and maintaining this social imagination (Kivisto 2001; Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Schiller et al. 1992).

It is important to be reminded here, that the development of migrant networks, social imagination and transnational social space occurs within a historico-social, political and economic framework that create the push-pull dynamics for migration. Reiterating from my discussion in the literature review (Chapter 2), Tamil women conceptualize their desire to leave India in primarily economic terms citing their perceptions of limited economic opportunities, and mobility available to them in India. For them, this was further complicated by their upper-caste status in view of affirmative action policies favoring other caste groups in universities, and government jobs in the South. This, they believed, further restricted their range of options (detailed discussion of this will ensue in the following section). While research can challenge the veracity of these claims (hence my use of the word “perception”) what is germane to recognize is that while these economic factors might create the desire to leave India, they do not sufficiently explain the pull of the United States. It left me asking “…but why America? Can’t you have the same possibilities for economic mobility in another developed country?” What emerges from Tamil women’s narratives is the idea of the United States being a “land of opportunity” often
without them having personally determined this prior to emigrating, or having any understanding
of liberalizing American immigration and economic policy in the 1960s. Rather, information and
perceptions of the “wonderful America beckoning” are transmitted through migrant networks of
family members, colleagues, friends, and educators\(^2\) creating the expectation of America being
the ideal destination to achieve their academic, personal, and economic goals. Thus as Tamil
women note drawing upon the social imagination and the growing trend of Tamil Brahmin
emigration to the United States, “coming to the United States” (especially at the time when they
were contemplating emigration) quickly became a euphemism for “being successful” and thus a
symbol of stature with the Tamil community.

…I was influenced by what I saw [of the United States] being very desirable and many
people aspiring for the same thing. It kind of defined your success as…“OK, if you
managed to do it [come to the United States], then you are successful” (Saraswati Vinayak,
44, Corporate America Executive)

I further theorize that this social imagination is connected to their social location as
middle-to upper-middle class Brahmins not merely because it facilitates their integration into the
migrant social networks, but more because the abstractions about the United States while
universal in their appeal, are refracted through their social location and actualized by juxtaposing
them against the perception of the reality in India. Thus as Kamakshi Swaminathan, an IT
Professional argues below, the possibility to achieving the trappings of middle/upper-middle
class status and success – “cars, houses, and telephones” with relative ease in the United States
compared to their situation in India (as opposed to being uplifted out of poverty) is a perfect
illustration of the interaction of the social imagination and Tamil women’s social location in
resulting in the United States as their migrant destination.

\(^2\) Referring back to my discussion in the literature review, these networks that my participants rely on are those
which originated with earlier streams of Tamil Brahmin migration (especially male migration and/or women’s
married migration) to the United States.
roads, cars, the houses and the telephones...it’s all easily available here [United States]. I mean you really have to earn a lot to get all that stuff in India then [1960s-1990s].

Additionally, by virtue of their westernized upbringing and English education emphasis, Tamil women also spoke of experiencing a “sense of familiarity” with American culture through their exposure to it (albeit the Hollywood version as some confess) through English language media (books, television, visits to the American library) not widely available to all Indians at that time, creating a desire to explore America. Importantly, by virtue of their middle/upper-middle class status the desire to migrate, emanating from this social imagination, did not remain in the realm of desire but became a reality predicated upon their ability to capitalize on the educational and monetary advantages inherent to their social location (Pessar and Mahler 2003; Toro-Morn 1995).

Finally, my research also uncovers the critical role of gender in mediating this social imagination especially evinced in Tamil women expressing their perception of the United States being the embodiment of liberalism and independence, especially in gender standards, distinct from their more constrained circumstances at home. This sense of American liberalism was wrapped by Tamil women, around the ideas of “the West” and “Berkeley” and the “Kennedy’s” as described below:

I used to read a lot of books...and even then, I wanted to come West, and I suppose America is the essence of the West. Because I thought this [America] would be a good venue to support [my] freedom and enhance it. (Nandini Ramdas, 44, Entrepreneur)

The other thing was... we had grown up with the American culture, the music I listened to, the pop music, the icons, the movies we watched....So why didn’t I go to the U.K.? The U.K. didn’t have the same openness.... I was familiar with the notion of "Berkeley." I did want to go to Berkeley because it seemed like such a cool open kind of a place, you know, just liberal. I didn’t even know the word liberal, but I wanted to go there. (Kamala Vivek, 46, Scientist)

This idealization of gender liberalism and independence has to be understood within their temporal context in India. Although they were raised in progressive families, Tamil women
continued to be located within a conservative society that positioned them almost exclusively within a heteronormative framework. This was particularly apparent to some of the older Tamil women in my sample who spoke of the existence of few Tamil Brahmin working women role models when they came of age between the 1950s-late 1970s. Furthermore, with the attainment of adulthood by my participants, the confines of emphasized Tamil femininity began to be more apparent in their lives. Although they might have been working and/or nascently self-identifying as professional women, their families and community defined them in the marital context creating the gendered expectations for them to marry and establish families in a timely manner, subsuming their more professional ambitions to the socially designated ones. Juxtaposed against this, America offered them not only distance from these familial and community contexts, but also a society defined by individualism and freedom making it their desired migrant destination.

What is particularly interesting to note is that this gendering of the social imagination occurred with women who were both single and married at the time of migration. For single women, the appeal of the United States was in the opportunity it gave them through attendance in universities to live independent of parental authority and enjoy a modicum of financial independence accompanying funded graduate education. For married women, the United States offered distance from extended kin ties (such as in-laws), offering them possibilities to establish marriages and families free of “interference” and/or to continue and consolidate educational and professional ambitions restricted in India upon their marriage. Thus, my research uncovers the choice of the United States as the migrant destination of Tamil women, far from being happenstance, was circumscribed by a social imagination predicated upon the migrant networks spanning these countries, interacting with their social location defined by the caste/class and
gender statuses. Following from this, I move onto discussing Tamil women’s strategies for migrating and settling in the United States.

**Strategizing Migration and Settlement: A Gendered Perspective**

While choosing America as a migrant destination might be the first step in emigrating, my findings uncover that the process of immigration by Tamil women is much more than them merely acting upon their desires. As Donato et al. (2006) explain “decisions to migrate and made within a larger context of gendered interactions and expectations between individuals and within families and institutions” (p. 12). Accordingly, for Tamil women immigration and settlement involves navigations through their gendered households/families. In making this claim, I draw upon the earlier mentioned theoretical ideas of Indians being tightly enmeshed within a familial framework such that the non-unitary nature of their households organized along generation and gender lines, determines who migrates and the appropriate method of migration (George 2005; Gramsmuck and Pessar 1991; Khandelwal 2002; Pessar 1999; Rangaswamy 2000; Sotelo 1994).

Gender is integral to this process not only because it serves as a power hierarchy within Tamil families, but also because my participants’ families construct and reinforce standards of emphasized Tamil femininity and hegemonic Tamil masculinity with direct consequences for Tamil women’s migration. Stated briefly, these constructs support the independent migration of men, while constraining similar movements by women necessitating their “gender bargains” with these structures (Kandiyoti 1988). In this process as Sotelo (1994) contends when developing the gendered household model, Tamil women’s agency is an instrumental force in organizing their gendered migration. Further, Tamil households are integrated into Tamil migrant networks which are also integral to Tamil women’s strategizing about migration and settlement. Not only is the social imagination described above predicated upon these networks, but their existence and consolidation over a period of time stimulates migration among Tamil Brahmins such that it
becomes self-perpetuating. To this effect, the reciprocity and exchange inherent to these networks are essential to Tamil women’s ability to immigrate (George 2005; Massey et al. 1993; Menjívar 2000; Pessar 1999). My findings indicate that Tamil women who participated in this project negotiate with gender such that they strategize their emigration as occurring through three main methods, each with its unique gender navigations, corroborating similar findings by George (2005) and Sotelo (1994). These are (a) independent migration by single women; (b) family stage migration by married women; (c) family unit migration by entire families.3

**Independent Migration: Migrating Alone by Single Women**

I wanted to continue with my studies but I wasn’t considering continuing my studies or a career in India. That somehow was never on the table at that point in my life. Then I finished my bachelor’s. I applied for the IIMs [Indian Institute of Management] and then sort of looked around for things to do and there was no one knocking at my door. And the B.S. in chemistry didn’t seem entirely hirable. As I approached my M.S., my options then were after I finished my M.S., I could keep looking for a job, go back and try the IIMs again…but those were every competitive. And then there was the notion of going abroad. I just had to believe that if I got a Ph.D. in the U.S. that would count for a lot more than the other options [in India]. [And] it was very clear to me that action in the sciences, the advances…where the frontiers were being pushed back were in the United States and nowhere else. So at that time…in the 80s, this [America] was the place. (Kamala Vivek, 46, Scientist)

This migration strategy applies to those Tamil women who emigrated from India as single women with the purpose of pursuing higher education in the United States. As Kamala states above, higher education implied gaining graduate and post-graduate degrees largely in the sciences, engineering, computers and medicine, which at the time when my participants were migrating were considered the most prestigious and profitable occupations in India. It is important to recognize that this stream represents the minority of my participants (all of whom migrated between 1970 and 1980), but is one that has not been sufficient theorized by the extant Indian migration scholarship. For Tamil women strategizing their migration through this method

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3 In the proceeding pages, I will explain both migration and settlement experiences within each of their categories.
was shaped by two interconnected factors namely the structural conditions in India; and the presence of social networks spanning India and the United States.

Kamala’s reminiscings about “no one knocking at her door,” of things being “competitive” in India and of the “frontiers being pushed back in America” echo the sentiments of other Tamil women about the lack of challenging educational and job opportunities for them in 1970-1980s India, and of such facilities being prevalent in the United States. This was compounded by their Brahmin upper-caste status, which my participants believed, further limited their choices in the context of the affirmative action policies in the South that preferred other castes, thereby hampering their access to educational and job opportunities, heightening the already tough competition. As Tamil women note, the only way around the situation involved making large “donations” – a euphemism for bribes – and/or having family connections to be able to access these opportunities. Their middle-class families either did not have these “connections” or could not afford the “donations.” Put together, these forces served to make the United States an attractive location to establish successful careers. Thus, Kamala continues:

…to me as a Brahman girl at that time, with all these [caste] restrictions I really had very little faith that I would make it through entirely by merit, because it was a crowded space. And so I had to really super, super, smart [to make it]. And so I wasn’t sure…the odds were not very good.

Considering this, as I have already noted in previous chapters, by the time that Tamil women began to contemplate migration to the United States, a stream was beginning to emerge of Tamil Brahmin migration oriented toward higher education that as largely male dominated, and into which Tamil women were gradually integrating themselves (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Iredale 2001; Khadria 2001; Segal 2002). My research unMASKS the critical role played by higher educational facilities in India in this process. Kamala explains:

…you know the thing about being with IIT [Indian Institute of Technology where she got her M.S.] is [that] I was very much in an environment where everybody was applying to go
[to the United States]…my classmates, my friends…. I just knew that there were people around me, people of my age that were saying, “of course you have to apply to go abroad. You’re in IIT, how are you going to do anything in science if you stay in this country?” So the “how” [to migrate] was easy. The “how” came about because everybody in that time, in the 80s were going abroad. So that was very easy to do, everyone could tell me… “do the GREs, you take this, you study this, and you apply to these place, here’s what you write in your application, here’s how you get your letters of recommendation and everyone gets it.” So I did talk to my faculty in IIT. Many of them had been trained in the U.S. and they said, “yes, it’s a good thing for you to do a PhD here [in America]. You will do well.” In my group [at IIT], everyone went abroad.

Given the emphasis on graduate education in Tamil women’s families, they were located in an environment on university campuses in India which encouraged emigration to the United States for educational purposes. As Kamala notes, at these schools Tamil women encountered American trained faculty members who endorsed the renown of American educational facilities and of the benefits of having an American degree in establishing their careers. More important, however, was the friendship networks that Tamil women encountered in these schools which were oriented toward migration. These not only served to convince them of the need to emigrate to the United States, but also provided them the resources, and knowledge of “how” to undertake immigration ranging from preparing and appearing for American university entrance exams (such as the GREs or TOEFL), selecting universities, visiting American consulates in India and preparing to leave. Needless to say, a lot of these networks were male dominated (considering that at that time, these professions in India were male dominated), but served to benefit Tamil women with knowledge and resources as they were integrated into them at school.

In addition to friendship networks in migration, Tamil women’s emigration as students was also mediated by the presence of family migrant networks spanning India and the United States. Expanding Menjívar’s (2000) and Sotelo’s (1994) framework of the gendered resources and differential employment of migrant networks by women and men, I argue that the presence of these networks (which were often decidedly male) provided Tamil women a crucial resource in
navigating their emigration through the gender constructs embedded within their families. Family ties were often constructed as “a safety network” for women by their families, such that emigration by single women was supported should it occur within this framework - like Neelakshi Arunachalem describes below of being inspired by her uncle in America. It served to ensure that not only would single women migrate relatively close to family in the United States, but also that the latter would watch out for them and provide them emotional support and guidance.

My decision to come [to the United States] has a lot to do with my uncle. He was a professor at [an American University] and he always told me what I should be pursuing. So he guided me through the process [of emigrating as a student], introducing me to other professors, encouraging me to prepare for the GRE and all the tests. And that’s how I came to [the same American University where her uncle worked]. (Neelakshi Arunachalem, 42, Scientist)

It is within this framework of the structural conditions in India, and the presence of transnational migrant networks, that Tamil women undertake what I call “parental bargains” which allow them to negotiate with gender to migrate independently.

**Gendered negotiations in independent migration: Parental bargains**

While single Tamil women might have desired to emigrate to study, this was occurring at a time when coming to the United States as a single woman was what Kamala Vivek called a “radical idea.” As accounted for by Fuller and Narasimhan (2008), in the 1970s and 1980s, reflecting the gender expectations of middle to upper-middle class Brahmins, married migration was deemed most appropriate for women. Consequently, the few Tamil women who came abroad as students often noted that considering they were the first women in their families to migrate alone, they had to negotiate with family concerns of them falling prey to temptation as single women in the United States.
I think the biggest concern [for family] was of [her] being alone, faraway…[and prey] to a lot of temptations. And of course [family’s perceived] a husband is always protection…(Savitri Ramanan, 61, Physician)

However, for these Tamil women, migrating alone not only represented their desire to fulfill their professional ambitions but also to enjoy some level of personal autonomy they were lacking in India. Accordingly, their successful strategizing of emigration involved negotiating with gender structures and expectations of their households and communities in what I call “parental bargains.”

Take the case of Kamala Vivek, the 46 year old scientist, whose story I have been narrating in this section. As she voices below, she enters a bargain with her parents over their expectation that she should marry, and hers to come abroad to study – a bargain of “marriage or migration whichever comes first.” As part of this bargain she agrees to meet potential bridegrooms, while simultaneously applying for a doctoral program in the United States on the condition that she will pursue whichever arrangement reaches finality to her satisfaction first.

I finished my B.A., and I applied for a master’s at IIT [Indian Institute of Technology]. That was the time when the groom hunting began. I think there was a [social] pressure [to marry], and there was also that insecurity, “what if I don’t marry, what if no one wants to marry me”…. because you look around and people you know are getting married and having children, and you kind of know what’s expected. I wanted to get married, sooner or later, but it had to be on my terms.

But I was also applying to go abroad. So I sort of had this conversation with them [her parents]. I remember explicitly saying, "why don’t I make a deal with you. If you can find me a suitable groom before my first acceptance of a Ph.D. program comes through, I will marry that person. But if my first acceptance comes through and it’s a good place, then why don’t you let me go and do this." So they did it, and in return I would do the bridegroom thing in good faith. [laughs]. We sent the pictures [photographs of her] out; I met with a couple of eligible gentlemen…And because I am outspoken, when these conversations between perspective mother-in-laws and grooms came, we’d talk about my career and goals and I think, I don’t know, they must have gotten scared off, nothing happened. [laughs] . But my application came through and I was given a full scholarship to [an American University], it was an Ivy League [school] and I told my parents, "you know well here’s an Ivy League offer, they want me, they’re paying for me for 4 years, what are we going to do?” And so I came here.
Kamala’s bargain with her parents is predicated on the gendered expectation embodied in emphasized Tamil femininity that women will marry by a particular age, subsuming their personal educational and professional ambitions to fulfill this societal expectation thereby constraining their free independent movement. However, drawing upon her upbringing outside the South, the progressiveness of her parents, and her own agentic plans for her life, Kamala like other Tamil women negotiates with this gender ideology undertaking what I call “accommodative reconfiguring.”

In accommodative reconfiguring Tamil women do not eliminate or dismiss what they consider to be restrictive gender structures, but rather reconfigure them to accommodate their own personal ambitions and progressive ideas for their future. For Kamala, this implied organizing her parental bargain such that it was centered on “her terms.” On the one hand, this implied entertaining the idea of marriage and participating in “groom hunting,” on the condition that she would marry only if she met a partner supportive of “her career and goals,” and not to fulfill societal gender obligations. On the other hand, it involved throwing her personal ambition of coming abroad alone – a movement quite radical for the times – into the bargain on the condition that should admission to a prestigious school be imminent, satisfying not only her but her family as well, that would be the arrangement chosen over marriage. Kamala therefore negotiates with gender such that she does not challenge emphasized femininity constructs outright, but navigates them to privilege her personal identity and thereby facilitating her independent migration for higher education. For the other Tamil women who emigrated as single women, accommodative gender reconfiguring involved using the existence of women family members (such as an older sister, aunts, cousins etc) in the United States as leverage in parental
bargains to support their independent migration, arguing that this presence created a trend (albeit a small one) of women’s migration thereby challenging the radical nature of the idea.

What is important to recognize in Tamil single women’s gender negotiations in migration centered on parental bargains and accommodative reconfiguring is that reflects the idea of “connective autonomy” (George 2005:40) of Indians i.e. of experiencing autonomy only within a set of relationships and obligations. Accordingly, few Tamil women describe their familial and community contexts as being oppressive to them as women and to their personal ambitions. Further, they are constantly aware of parental responsibilities toward them as girls (as constructed by society) especially in ensuring their timely marriage, and of the dissonance not between these responsibilities and their own expectations, but in the timing of these. Thus their personal needs are tempered against their familial attachments and obligations and their desire to uphold these while staying true to their personal selves. Bargaining with gender to undertake independent migration in the form of accommodative reconfiguring is thus constructed as the most efficacious strategy. To this effect, it allows for the transformation of gender hierarchies and normative standards within their households, while providing Tamil women with a “win-win” situation for all parties involved in the bargain, who, in light of having their interests addressed, agree to accommodate. Having successfully undertaken independent migration, my research also reveals that these Tamil women have unique experiences with settlement emanating from their emigration strategy.

Navigating settlement as students and single women

Tamil women who migrated as students found it relatively easier in adjusting and settling into life in the United States compared with those who migrated through family stage or family unit migration. Needless to say, by virtue of their independent migration, these women are responsible more for their personal adaptation than that of their families which definitely
contributes to the ease. However, just as in my own case, narrated at the start of this dissertation, an even more critical resource in mediating this settlement is their entry into the United States via university campuses and towns organized to handle immigrants. My research finds that this operates in three key ways – Tamil women’s integration into support networks and resources at universities; the enhanced exposure to American society through membership in universities; and the heightened experience of personal growth and independence inherent to independent migration.

The first factor is Tamil women’s integration into support networks almost immediately upon their arrival at schools which provide them resources as students in navigating settlement. American universities, especially in the 1970s and 1980s and more so today, are organized to accept large numbers of foreign nationals as students. Accordingly, most of them have formal support structures for new international students such as international centers, housing information, staff on call, and guidance in navigating a new educational system. Furthermore, given the diversity and relatively liberal environments at most universities my participants attended, numerous informal opportunities (such as ethnic parties, gatherings, socializing events) are in place for Tamil women to not only access available settlement networks and resources, but also to develop their own with fellow Indians and/or cohort members. All these resources serve to make settlement as students a relatively easier process than other migration methods described later.

I think you know universities in the U.S….I mean it’s a microcosm…it’s a world in itself, but it also gives you a much easier and a safer path to assimilation into the broader society because they are by nature much more diverse….Campuses I guess are the best places to meet other people from your own country…which helps out. (Janiki Parthasarathy, 44, Professor)

The provision of formal and informal spaces where Tamil women could construct their own networks is a particularly important element in their settlement as independent student
migrants. Using international centers, informal gatherings, graduate housing colonies and dorms, Tamil women such as Janiki above begin to form friendship networks where they learn the practical and emotional skills necessary to live in the United States. These include the everyday skills of learning to keep home (cook, and clean), and to drive – skills which are not required in India due to their middle to upper-middle class status (given that they had domestic help and chauffeurs in India).

More important to my participants was the increased exposure to American society – what Janiki calls “safer path to assimilation into the broader society” - they enjoyed through their membership at universities which is the second factor in mediating their settlement. Although there is no denying that American universities often create a bubble-like environment for their students, these campuses are also connected to the happenings in the larger American society and are affected by it thereby providing international students with an immediate immersion into America. Tamil women perceived this as crucial not only to their personal settlement as students, but as influencing their later lives as they establish careers and families in America. Integral to this process was the ability to develop personal and professional networks with Americans through their university experience which later aids their labor market incorporation.

Often using the idiom “when in Rome, do as Romans do,” Tamil women argue that “getting to know the people is key to getting to know the country,” and befriending Americans in school thereby learning the American way of life – i.e American methods of shopping, American etiquette and linguistic standards – is critical to the process of successfully adapting to America.

You are here, aren’t you? This is their environment, that's why getting to know people important]. To adjust to the environment, you need to know the people here, at least some of them, so you understand how things are here. (Savitri Ramanan, 61, Physician)

A particularly interesting point to note, is that despite their arrival in the United States as single women without families and children, Tamil women connect this “learning and understanding
how things are here” to better equipping them to be parents in America thereby illustrating the
central thesis of this project that the realms of migration, work, and family life among Tamil
women are interconnected and integrated rather than separate.

…Eventually when the children grow up, you need to have that interaction with others to
help them. You know the children might be in a whole lot of other activities where they
would need your support [and] you should be able to talk to others…activities like sports.
Sports is a very big area where you need the talk… the local talk otherwise you’re lost.
(Kamakshi Swaminathan, 44, IT Professional)

Tamil women perceive that this increased exposure to American society, and the
availability of support networks at universities are crucial to them feeling “at home” almost
instantly and not experiencing the psychological and emotional angst (save initial homesickness)
that accompanies migration. In making this claim, they compare their settlement with their
married counterparts, arguing that the latter’s arrival and location directly into the private
confines of families rather than the more public realms of work or school with their formal
networks and resources, inhibits their settlement. This results, in their view, of family stage and
family unit migrant women having limited networks only with Indians and, as a consequence,
experiencing greater emotional distress in settlement. What Tamil student migrants overlook to
account for (with married women do) is the support mechanism inherent to families which
provides its own ease – albeit a different form – in settlement (George 2005; Kibria 1993;

The final factor in Tamil women’s settlement as students, and which uniquely genders it is
their heightened experience of the personal growth and autonomy they desired in India.
Comparing their experiences with their married counterparts, independent women migrants
contend that, considering their single status and lack of dependence on spouses and/or family
members, their adaptation to the United States was a personal endeavor – one they had to “figure
out” for themselves by relying on themselves alone. In turn as Vidya, and Savitri note, they
believe this to have afforded them the opportunity for personal autonomy – to recognize their own potential and develop self-confidence in accomplishing settlement.

…see I say [as] a [student]…when you come you learn more than what you come [as married women]. You have to do everything on your own so basically you have to learn everything, figure out everything on your own…even the using of credit card, how to get your credit, how to set up your credit, everything…to get a car, to apply for a car loan, you know. Everything you have to do on your own…(Vidya Pillai, 39, IT Professional)

Well, you realize your potential I think [when you migrate independently]. You don’t have to depend on anybody for anything else. You see things differently. When you are a dependent, you come with somebody else and you start seeing things through your husband’s or parent’s eyes rather than your own. (Savitri Ramanan, 61, Physician)

This zeal for personal independence has to be constrained to the reliance they placed on their families when in India, as most of them lived with their parents prior to migration. Thus as feminist migration scholars contend, not only did Tamil women negotiate with gender to immigrate, but their transported gender constructs (of women being dependent on men or family) are reorganized through the process of migration and settlement (Espiritu 1999; Gramsmuck and Pessar 1991; Mahler 1999; Pessar 1999; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Sotelo 2000; Toro-Morn 1995). Essential to this reconfiguration is Tamil women’s enjoyment of a level of financial independence in the United States which they could not have experienced in India. Despite coming from middle to upper-middle class families, and even in some cases having worked briefly in India, Tamil women lacked the monetary wherewithal (either because financially dependent on parents and/or salaries not being large enough) to make major life decisions especially those which challenged parental and appropriate gender standards. Contrastingly, funded education in America offered them not only the ability to distance themselves from parental and societal authority, but also the means to be independent, allowing them as I will argue in later chapters to construct their professional identities as core to their femininity.
In sum, I argue that independent Tamil women migrants negotiate with emphasized Tamil femininity constructs within their families which restrict their independent migration by accommodatively reconfiguring these through parental bargains to emigrate to fulfill their personal ambitions of education abroad. Further, as compared to the other groups of migrants discussed below, these women enjoy a greater ease in adjusting and settling into the United States, aided largely by the presence and consolidation of support networks on university campuses. In the process, they continue to reconfigure transported gender ideas centered primarily on increased autonomy and growth. Although their migration and settlement does not involve families, the experiences gained through this process as single students are directly connected to their later lives as professional and family women.

**Family Stage Migration: Married Women**

Family stage migration involves migration by married Tamil women as dependents of their husbands who have already migrated either for educational or professional purposes to the United States (Sotelo 1994), and comprised the bulk of my sample. Hence the stages in their migratory movements – the first stage involving their spouses, and the next involving them. In the majority of cases among my participants, this form of migration occurs almost immediately upon marriage and prior to the birth of children although there were a few divergent cases. As I have already argued in the introductory chapters, while this form of migration has been has figured predominantly in extant Indian scholarship, there continues to be a tendency to regard wives’ migration as similar to that of their husbands thereby ignoring their uniquely gendered experiences (Bacon 1996; Khandelwal 2002; Kurian and Srivastava 1983; Lal 1999; Lessinger 1995; Rangaswamy 2000; Segal 2002). My research contributes to this scholarship by taking the contradictory stance that, despite their married and legislatively dependent status in migration, Tamil women within this stream exercise agency in determining their own migration and
settlement. Thus, unlike independent migrants, Tamil women in this stream negotiate with the
gendering within their own households and community that constrain them and also the gendered
overtones of restrictive immigration policy that conceptualizes them only within the compulsory
heterosexual framework of marriage that strips them of individuality (Lee 2006; Rumbaut 1997).
In the process, they carve out lives for themselves and their families in the United States.

**Married migration: Choice versus acquiescence**

My findings reveal that the gendered navigations of Tamil women who strategize this form
of migration occur along a continuum of what I call “choice versus acquiescence.” By this I
imply that for these Tamil women, married migration is either a choice – a method to come
abroad in a context where their independent migration is deemed inappropriate for their gender;
or a function of their getting married to a partner situated in the United States – an acquiescence.

Although he [my father] was liberal and all that, he wasn’t about to send me off to the
States on my own. My way out was to get married and come, that’s the way I thought.
(Saraswati Vinayak, 44, Corporate America Executive)

In fact I told them I would like to marry a guy from U.S., you know. Because I thought I
could come here and study or whatever was the idea behind my thinking at that time. I
wanted to come badly to U.S., so my parents looked for alliances [marriage partners] from
the U.S. (Vidya Pillai, 39, IT Professional)

The choice category includes Tamil women like Saraswati and Vidya above who might have
been independent migrants but for gender restrictions on their coming abroad alone. Throughout
my conversations with them, these Tamil women articulated a desire to come to the United
States (often since childhood) to either experience a different “type” of life or to fulfill their
professional ambitions by pursuing an American education. However, at the time they were
contemplating their migration, they were also coming of age when their marriage was becoming
a significant expectation of their families. Accordingly, similar to the actions of their
independent migrant counterparts, they attempted an accommodative reconfiguration of gender
relations and expectations by bargaining with their families to actively seek American based
and/or bound spouses which would facilitate their migration through gender appropriate channels
as well as enable them to fulfill their personal goals.

However, in successfully strategizing this migration, unlike their independent counterparts,
Tamil women had to undertake another level of gender negotiations – that with their prospective
spouses which takes the form of what I call discussions prior to marriage. A number of Tamil
women who migrated through this method had semi-arranged marriages. These are arrangements
where the affianced couple is allowed to talk to each other, without the constraints of family
chaperones, prior to the formalization of the marriage. Using the opportunity these discussions
provided, Tamil women talked of subtly attempting to gauge and/or directly question potential
spouse’s ability to financially support a wives’ education as well as their attitudes to women’s
work. Vidya Pillai cited above narrates a pre-wedding discussion with her husband:

See I told him about my GRE scores [which she had taken in the hopes of coming abroad].
He said “if you can get it [admission] in [American city where he was based] where we are
right now you can go and do your studies.” That way he wanted me to have a career
because he feels it adds a lot of …smartness in you and you are able to cope up with a lot
of things, by yourself. Well I asked him what was his long term plan [was]…what he
wants to do in U.S. and I asked him, like… [whether] whatever he was making is sufficient
to run the family and you know…whether I will have the liberation to go and study in U.S.
if I wanted to…

For Vidya, as with other participants within this category, a prospective partner’s affirmative
responses to women’s education and work or as Pushpa Hariharan, a teacher, notes, her sense of
her husband’s willingness to negotiate on issues important to her, often made or marred their
final decision about marriage. Far from being the whims of demanding women who are seeking
well-off spouses, I argue that these discussions constitute Tamil women’s gender navigations
through a process that traditionally restricts their free choice compared to their male
counterparts, making these discussions the agentic responses of women to structures that disadvantage them (Collins 2000; Mohanty 2002).

The *acquiescence* category includes the minority of the Tamil women in my sample who acknowledged a lack of desire to emigrate and who thus never planned on coming abroad. Making the connections to social location reveals that these were women who either grew up in conservative homes in the Southern India and/or the few younger women in my sample who were beginning to embark upon relatively successful careers in the post-1990s liberalized India. For this group, married migration is not a vehicle for leaving India, but rather *emigration is a function of who they happened to marry*. Unlike their earlier counterparts, these Tamil women were not actively seeking American based/bound spouses but happened to fall in love with one resulting in their consequent emigration. In these cases, spouses play a crucial role in orienting women to improved educational opportunities in the United States or stimulated a desire to experience a new country which makes them active participants rather than passive spectators in the migration decision.

But it was never in my goal to get married to somebody who was here [United States]. I really did not think of going to the U.S. as any different like going to Delhi [Northern Indian city] because everybody was right there in Chennai. even though my sisters, everybody got married. It was my husband who said…you know…”why don’t you just go there and see [it]…” because [he had] lived here for two years. [He said] “I think you should at least see this country…And then we’ll just go from there.” (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

I never wanted to come to the U.S. That was a big thing for me. I did not know what to expect [about the U.S.]. I just thought Americans were very superficial… which it was really not. But when I met [her husband], he talked so much about the U.S. And he said, as a professional career for me… he said that I should do my master’s and Ph.D. here. That’s what he wanted me to do… the only discussion we had when we talked the first time we met was all about the opportunities for me in the U.S. and that’s what opened my eye and I

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4 It is however important to note that discussions about work and American education, while important and often critical are often secondary to gauging potential partners as mates – i.e. what kind of person he is, whether there is a convergence of interests and a physical compatibility between them. Marriages are not cold business arrangements between parents, but made by my participants and their spouses themselves.
said “OK, this might be and this might be what I’m looking for.” (Daya Ishiwaran, 38, Entrepreneur)

As Daya and Divya narrate above, the key mechanism by which married women become actively engaged in married migration is in the transformation of their personal goals such that they not only accommodate their husbands’ migration desires but make them their own – what Daya calls “opening her eyes” - thereby assuming responsibility for their migratory movements. Thus what is noteworthy is that even in a context of possible acquiescence, gender negotiations ensue within gendered households and marriages, such that Tamil women actively participate in the decision to migrate although the latter might have been initiated by their spouses (DeLaet 1999; Morokvasic 1984; Pedraza 1991; Sotelo 1994).

Within this framework of choice versus acquiescence, the family stage migration of married Tamil women takes two forms – namely following “student” husbands (hereafter called student wives); and following “professional husbands” (hereafter called professional wives). Having stated this, it is worth remarking that there is a great deal of similarity between student wives and professional wives considering that the majority of women in both these categories migrated as new brides without children. Accordingly, the gendered nature of their settlement involves navigating their personal adaptation (rather than that of families and children as in the case of family unit migration) to the United States within the context of their marital relationships. 5 A key element mediating the differential settlement of student and professional wives is their settlement destination (i.e the place). Student wives often accompanied their husbands to university campuses and towns, enabling them to avail of the social networks and resources that this destination offers to international students and their dependents, thereby facilitating a

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5 Women in these categories often became mothers in the United States, and consequently their efforts to construct family lives, and ensure the adequate adaptation of their children to the United States mirrors the discussion of the same among family unit migrant women presented later.
personal adjustment similar to their independent migrant counterparts in terms of integration into larger American society. In contrast, professional wives narrated a much more isolating entry into the United States given their migration directly into unconnected households, and their physical location in impersonal housing colonies which limited their interaction and networking opportunities. Nonetheless, my research demonstrates that irrespective of their type of family stage migration, Tamil women’s immigration and settlement experiences are qualitatively and emotionally distinct from their spouses along four key elements: namely wives dependence on spouses; their experiences at playing house; wives’ efforts in resisting their dependent legal status; and the role of husbands in mediating married women’s settlement.

**Wives’ dependence on spouses in a migrant context**

A number of family stage migrant women spoke of having to simultaneously adjust to a new country and a new marriage setting apart their settlement experiences for those of their spouses.

No, I kept myself totally open [about her expectations of life in America]…moving out of the country [India] was a big enough step, but I just decided that I’d let things fall into place the way they did after I moved. Because um... it’s hard enough having to adjust to another human being, you know. Granted, it would have been a challenge for both of us at that point…but for me, one additional step, I was still trying to adjust to you know… obviously a totally different person in my life, so that [settlement] must have been a little more difficult. (Prema Devarajan, 38, Physician)

A critical element that contextualizes Tamil women like Prema’s claim of having “one additional step” in adaptation is that dependent wives usually followed their spouses to the United States immediately upon marriage without having lived together in India. While love marriages, that confer a degree of familiarity before marriage, certainly mitigated the newness of the experience to some extent, this sense of having to “adjust to another human being” was definitely more evident among those who had chosen to enter into semi-arranged marriages as the latter do not offer the same opportunities for pre-marriage familiarity. Thus in making the above comment,
wives like Prema refer not only to gaining familiarity with their husbands but also learning to live with a man, previously unrelated to them while simultaneously dealing with being in a foreign country. Accordingly, their approach to settlement was to “keep themselves totally open” i.e. to avoid having any expectations about America or life here, and to approach their settlement as part of their larger adaptation to being wives. This they believed set their experiences apart from those of their spouses, who, they argued had only to adjust to married life as they had lived in the United States for some duration.

The husbands’ familiarity with the United States led to a key factor underlying Tamil women’s differential settlement experience - their dependence – emotional, physical, and financial - on their husbands to mediate their integration into the United States. Revathi Venkatesh, a 32 year old Corporate America Executive, expresses this best when she notes below that her husbands’ migration as a student, and his professional employment at the time of her arrival constituted such as difference from her own experience as a dependent wife, that she believes he had no conception of how isolating the settlement process was for her.

I came here and sat at home. The whole time he was here…he came as a student…worked in the cafeteria…you know what I’m saying…he went through the whole, typical student type of things. I don’t think he had any clue that what would bother me most would be sitting alone at home and being dependent on him for money and those kinds of things.

I argue this dependence of married wives on their husbands’ immediately upon migration is gendered in that it originates from the gendered overtones of American immigration policy that construct married partners as legal dependents of their American based spouses (Lee 2006; Rumbaut 1997). While the legislation might appear to be gender neutral, the gendered reality is that the majority of dependent partners are women, who were the idealized beneficiaries of this policy at the time of its articulation. Consequently the practicality of immigration legislation in shaping Tamil women’s dependence on their spouses - especially in the case of professional
wives - contributing to their uniquely gendered settlement experiences emanated from visa stipulations that prevented them from driving and/or professionally working immediately upon migration resulting in a loss of personal independence enjoyed.

I had no clue what it meant to be coming [to America]. I’ll never forget…I came to Atlanta. I didn’t realize you can’t go by milk on your own without having a car. I was completely independent in India and suddenly now, I was really depending on this guy [her husband], I didn’t know who the hell he was [since they were recently married]. It was HORRIBLE! [with strong emphasis] And no job. Nobody wanted to give me a job [because of her visa status]… And so I’m sitting over here in this little place…don’t have a driving license. That killed me! Because I had to depend on this guy who I didn’t know from Adam to go get milk! [with emphasis]. And that really, really, bothered me…(Revathi Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

For Tamil professional wives, their immobility and inability to work signified their loss of personal independence, especially since, in India, they had moved freely outside their homes on public transport or had their own ability to drive or be chauffeured. However, more important to them was their forcible confinement to their households due to their inability to work, which not only exacerbated the emotional side effects of emigration, but also made them financially dependent on their spouses. As Revathy so eloquently states above, it was the areas of little dependencies (such as buying milk or feminine products) rather than the bigger dependencies that made settlement especially difficult and emotionally traumatic for professional wives, especially younger professional wives in my sample such as Revathy who had enjoyed some level of financial independence as working women in India. Thus as these women argue, their migrant status had rendered their settlement as a “debilitating experience.” It is important to note that all participants in this category were quick to highlight that their husbands’ had never exploited this dependence by limiting their access to money. I argue that Tamil women’s stating of this caveat is not merely to acquaint me with their husbands’, but is indicative of the subtle underpinnings of power differentials emanating from their dependence in their marriages, which they sense but are not willing to articulate.
As I conversed with these Tamil women, I also began to note that their sense of dependence on their husbands’ was also heightened by the characteristics of the migrant context especially between the early 1970s and 1980s, where there was a no wide-spread Indian presence in America except in key gateway states like New York, California and Texas, and in university towns. This was exacerbated by the structure of American society especially spatial distances between people; highly individualized and impersonal housing colonies; the difficulties in constructing close extended kin/community ties; and the perception of formality in social gatherings. As Prema Devarajan, the physician whose experiences I have been highlighting in this section remembers below, these factors working together served to make professional wives “feel shut out from the world” thereby increasing their sense of emotional dependence on their husbands, who as some Tamil women note, were the only persons they knew and were close to.

It was difficult…emotionally traumatic [to adjust to America]….And at that time, I was not working, so I was home sitting in a small little efficiency apartment… when you’re used to in India to have open windows, big windows in the house, your doors are open… hardly locked doors in India. And here there’s a lock and there’s a chain, little peep hole…it is all locked. I really found that claustrophobic because obviously all of a sudden, I was totally shut out from my outside world. I was cloistered into a small little environment…a place where I didn’t know anyone.

For student wives by comparison, although there was some level of dependence on their spouses, and visa stipulations prevented their professional work, their location in university towns enabled their participation in home based work (example: baby sitting), semi-skilled work (tutoring, working in local stores), or cultural based work (teaching Indian dance/music). This offered them the ability to contribute small amounts to their family income (which was largely dependent on their husbands’ educational stipend) mitigating their sense of dependence to some extent. It also enabled them to build friendship networks with others at the university which assisted their learning about American society, and in a lot of cases, their subsequent attending of university themselves.
Playing house: Constructing home and marriage

I just came here, of course I started cooking, cleaning [laughs]. Initially I would say, the first few months and I enjoyed doing everything, being very domestic. It was a very new experience for me and it was like “man this rocks!” Because for me it was so fascinating…I would say [to her husband] “oh you come home and I’ll have the lunch ready and I used to pack it and take it for him…” [laughs reminiscently]. But for me it was so fascinating, just putting myself as a wife and it was all very thrilling for the first few months. (Hema Nagaraj, 32, Generic Professional)

Another gendered aspect of family stage Tamil migrant women’s settlement was their ideas of “playing house” for the duration of their initial settlement in the United States. This involved married women willingly taking primary responsibility for performing household chores and cooking – even going so far as learning for the first time in their lives to perform these activities which their class privileged background in India had often precluded them from doing – all in the service of “becoming wives.” What is crucial to recognize in this is that Tamil women’s enjoyment of “being homemakers” is a temporary phase in their lives – one to be contextualized in their newly married status and in their first experiences with establishing their own households – which makes it particularly thrilling or “fascinating” in the short term. I argue that this period offers newly married Tamil women and their spouses the opportunity to learn to be a family together and to establish a solid marriage. To do this, Tamil women negotiate with the transported emphasized Tamil femininity constructs which expect them to assume a larger role in domestic arrangements, by choosing to do so during their initial settlement when immigration policy prevents their integration into the public realms of American society. In the process they are reconfiguring these gender constructs to incorporate their agency, such that playing house is their agentic response to traditional gender constraints and a restrictive migrant context which allows them to feel in control of their lives. An essential component of this control, and of the reconfigured nature of emphasized femininity is in their qualification that “they cannot play house forever” discussed next.
Resisting dependent status

As I said, playing house, it was great… I went into it full swing as I [did] everything around the house. It was fun. But obviously I cannot imagine doing that forever. Oh Yeah!! Oh Yeah!! ABSOLUTELY [very sure she can't do it forever] [laughs]. So in about 3 months, I started studying for my [licensing] exams. (Prema Devarajan, 38, Physician)

Following from their agentic strategy of playing house and the consequent reconfiguring of emphasized Tamil femininity constructs is their qualification that “they cannot play house forever” and that it is a temporary phase in their lives, arguing that they need to find other ways to engage them intellectually and professionally. This allows them to actively work to resist their dependent status on their spouses by negotiating with the latter to begin either school or work (depending on visa categories) in the United States. I therefore argue that their willingness to conform to socially designated gender expectations of them as wives (especially upon migration) by playing house emerges within boundaries of that playing. Tamil married women, for the most part, do not perceive themselves as home-makers (a detailed discussion follows in the next chapter), but rather as integrated women who are professionals, wives, and mothers.

Homemaking is thus acceptable (and even enjoyable), in the short-term as they establish their families and marriages and this qualification is crucial to their sense of personal well-being and self-identity. Accordingly, upon reaching their personal limit of playing house, dependent wives such as Prema above, use their time to research possible educational options, study for licensing exams in preparation for embarking on a professional life, and return to full-time school in the United States (which as I will demonstrate in the next chapter is often the only route through which they can access the American labor market on their visa categories). All of which require spousal navigations which is discussed next.
**Husbands’ role in settlement**

I argue that in the context of family stage migration, husbands are an exceptionally crucial gendered resource for dependent wives. As mentioned earlier in this section, husbands often constitute Tamil women’s only close contact in the United States, and their sole source of support upon migration, until such time that wives create their own friendship and women’s networks. Referring to my earlier comments about families providing their own kind of support system in migration, Tamil women acknowledge that they were not as independent in their settlement as their student counterparts (or even their spouses for that matter). But they perceive that they experienced a greater ease in adjustment largely because of their spouses’ presence and assistance rather than “starting from scratch on their own,” which, in their opinion, was the more challenging option.

In making this claim, Tamil women such as those cited below often referenced not only the emotional support that husbands’ provided in settlement, but also the material benefits – of coming into a fully furnished home, of having ready access to money and being shielded from financial difficulties; and learning skills such as driving and using American equipment - that come from having an established family member to rely upon in migration. Thus these Tamil women concluded that although their settlement was oftentimes isolating, and spouse-dependent with limited opportunities for with Americans, mediating the process practically, was much easier than they had anticipated.

*You know, I had someone who could take care of me [when she came to America]…I had a house that was fully furnished, and I had a car… like I had everything when I came. There was a kitchen, there were utensils…and everything was set up for me. I never had to do anything from, you know… scratch. I didn’t have to apply for a credit card. I didn’t have to get my social security number, because my husband was here…he would take care of everything. He taught me car driving…I didn’t have to got outside to look for drivers to learn driving. And all that stuff makes it easy when you have a fall back [option].* (Vidya Pillai, 39, IT Professional)
Maybe because when you come on your own [independent migration]… you might not have all this [husband’s] friends to start with. See I had some starting point here [coming as dependent wife], there [independent migration] you should start on your own. So maybe [as independent migrant you] start on zero…. [As dependent wife] I started on five…(Ramya Venkatraman, 52, Entrepreneur)

More important to these women was the crucial role that husbands’ played in their resistance to their dependence and the consequent reconfiguring of emphasized Tamil femininity constructs. Drawing upon their discussions prior to marriage and/or their realization of the restrictive nature of their immigrant status, Tamil dependent wives call and rely upon their husbands’ in guiding them through the American education system, even to the point of inspiring them to get an American degree and/or advise them about a suitable educational and professional trajectory.

Janiki and Kamakshi explain:

I did not think…I felt motivated to join the Ph.D. program, so at least initially almost all of the motivation was from his [her husband’s] side [laughs]. And he was like..."Oh! what are you going to do [in the United States]?” Especially I think he knew the towns here and the life and if I just came here and had nothing to do…and I think knowing me he probably sensed that I wouldn’t have been happy just sitting at home not doing anything either. So he said, "no, no, you’ve got to take your [entrance exams], take it here [in India] before you come and so that when as soon as I [her husband] go there, I could start processing your applications for student admission…(Janiki Parthasarathi, 44, Professor)

Actually even before I went to school, he had a lot of input…you know…things here may not be the same as colleges in India…so all those things the told me before I had to do it on my own. (Kamakshi Swaminathan, 44, IT Professional)

In sum, I argue that Tamil women who migrate through the family stage method negotiate with gender constructs that privilege their married status to organize their emigration such that it takes the choice or acquiescence route. These negotiations include both parental and spousal bargains and the agentic responses of women such that even within a framework of acquiescence, they are able to exert some choice in deciding to leave. Further, as married wives, Tamil women navigate and resist the dependency institutionalized in gendered immigration legislation through their agentic reconfiguration of emphasized Tamil femininity by choosing to
play house for a limited duration, thereafter negotiating with and drawing upon spousal support
and resources to enter the public realms of school or work in the United States. Additionally, as
compared to their independent migrant counterparts and their spouses, while married Tamil
wives experience greater isolation and loss of independence in migration and settlement, they
also enjoy greater ease in mediating the practicalities of settlement given the spousal support
system they are integrated into. In the process, I theorize their uniquely gendered migration and
settlement experience distinctly separate from that of their spouses.

**Family Unit Migration: Tamil Families**

This migration stream represents Tamil women who migrated with their families (either
marital or parental) as a unit on green-cards thereby attempting family reunification with their
naturalized family members in the United States. Only a small proportion of my sample fall
within this category, the majority of whom migrated with their marital family (i.e their spouses
and children). Unlike their dependent migrant counterparts discussed earlier, family unit migrant
women have spent a significant proportion of their married life in India, where their children
were born and where in some cases they had participated in professional work.

[Migrating to America] would open up a better future for my children. You know at that
time there were not many opportunities for youngsters [in India]. I saw time and time
again, you just had to put away your dream and just do what life offered. Yeh, my kids
were brought here, so they, you know…could climb…you know the career ladder faster
than in India. If we had certain ambitions and dreams it would be easier to [achieve] them
here [United States]. For me and my husband [also]…[United States offered] good job
opportunities and growth in our personal lives…like the ability to buy a home, to buy good
vehicles, to travel wherever we wanted, stuff like that…(Nandini Ramdas, 47,
Entrepreneur)

Echoed by Nandini, these Tamil women, just like their other migrant counterparts,
contextualized their emigration within the economic framework of seeking better opportunities
in the United States. However, what is significant to note about this rationale for their migration
is that it is organized around the benefits of migration accruing to their families and children as
much as themselves. Emigration to the United States is constructed as the method not only for achieving upward economic mobility and improved quality of life for themselves and their spouses - “buy a home, buy good vehicles” – but also for benefiting their children by integrating them into the American economic and educational structure at an early age, accelerating their progress up the “career ladder.” Thus for some participants, like Avni Shankaran, a 58 year old CPA who enjoyed a successful career in India, migration was undertaken only as she says “for the sake of the children,” to distance them from the heavy competition, and corruption in accessing higher educational facilities in India.  

And then we thought maybe for our children it would be better to come to the U.S. because those days education in India was not considered enough to get a good job [and] competition is so high. No, those days coming to the US and studying is a big thing. It was very popular. Not everybody could do it, but people wanted to come. So we thought that’s [coming on a green-card] a right opportunity for kids to come. It’s because of the kids’ education, we came here. And it was the only thing. We came to the U.S. because of the children’s education. If they had to come on their own, we wouldn’t have able to afford to provide that with education. So that’s why we came here, so that we will be able to support them.

For this group of Tamil women, more so than the other migrant categories, the presence and role of family networks in the United States was crucial to stimulating their desire to leave, to their ability to do so, and the choice of their settlement destination. More often than not, these social networks comprised of wives’ kin members in the United States who sponsored Tamil families’ subsequent emigration. Accordingly, for Tamil women undertaking migration involved negotiating with conjugal power in deciding whether or not to emigrate and how this will occur (George 2005; Menjívar 2000; Sotelo 1994). Among my married participants, this took two key forms. One, as in the case of Nandini Ramdas, emigration on a green-card had always been part

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6 Although a small minority of family unit migrants, single women who migrated with their parental families on green-cards also cited similar economic motivations for migration, with the goal of not merely establishing their careers in the United States, but of doing so to the benefit of their parental families.
of her plan as a single woman given her sister’s prior settlement in the United States. She was thus careful to seek a spouse who was equally interested in emigration, and made migration an integral part of pre-wedding discussions. Consequently, when it was time to file the necessary paperwork and decide upon emigration, the decision was jointly made. Second are the cases where Tamil women take the initiative to introduce the issue of migration into their families, but often leave their spouses to make the final decision. Avni Shankaran is illustrative of this method. She only thought about emigrating once her children were born and she sensed their difficulties in growing up in India. Drawing upon the presence of her family members in the United States, she broaches the issue of migration with her husband and they jointly agree to file the necessary paperwork. However, the final decision to emigrate (upon receipt of green-cards) is made by her spouse.⁷

Integral to these marital gender negotiations is the circulation of knowledge within these migrant networks of not only the economic and educational opportunities available in the United States, but also about the emigration process allowing Tamil families the time to deliberate and plan the process of leaving. This careful planning of emigration and subsequent settlement sets this group of Tamil migrants apart from their earlier mentioned counterparts who often admitted to being “naïve” upon emigrating not quite knowing how their American based lives would shape up (Sotelo 1994). By comparison, family unit migrants were aware of the lengthy process in applying for and receiving green cards and as Nandini Ramdas admits, were prepared by family members that they would need to “work like dogs” to achieve their desired economic status in the United States.

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⁷ In the case of single women who migrated with their parental families, the decision to emigrate was taken by parents, often without directly involving my participants who within the generational hierarchies of their households were categorized as “children” and thus not integrated into family decision making processes.
An important component of the deliberate planning and preparation of family unit migration is the realization of the length of time required from initiating the paper work to actually receiving the green-card and being able to emigrate. My research uncovers that this period provided the framework within which marital negotiations about leaving took place. I call this interim period in India “waiting to exhale” as for some participants like Nandini Ramdas, it is an accurate characterization of their lives in “limbo”:

Well, even before I got married, um…she [her sister] had to become a citizen, and she said she was going to file it [green-card paperwork] for me. So I told my mother and to look out for a partner for me at that time and then in ’82, I got married. And my sister filed for us that summer. But in a way, this [filing of green-card] altered a lot of things in my life because I had just finished my master’s, I was wanted to do my M.Phil, and then she wrote to say that already, you know…papers have been filed, and not to start anything. And then after that…that was Ronald Reagan time I think, something happened with the INS here and they delayed all the paperwork, especially for green card, almost 10 years….But every time you asked them [INS], they would say, “anytime.” “You can come in six months, you can come in a year,” so it was always a question mark. And so we couldn’t kind of make any plans…

In a way, my husband and I, we never settled down, after we got married, even though our contemporaries [did]. I just had a part time job and my husband just stuck to his company, and didn’t really look to things better. In a way, we stagnated for those 10 years. We just sat around waiting. We never took any challenges. And that’s a very important part of a strong marriage that a man and woman, you know take challenges together, face them together, and achieve things together, so all that got missed in those years.

[Waiting for the green-card] it’s the same feeling you have when you’re waiting at the bus stop, you know…you want the bus to come, but you don’t know when it’s coming. You just stand there, waiting in limbo, you feel as though your floating…everybody around you, they’re doing stuff, they’re focusing on things, and you just have to hang on to hope and wait. It was hard….My husband and I, we lived in a small apartment, and then we never got anything new. We would think, “oh my gosh what if we buy this now and in three years time we have to go.” So we didn’t buy a very good vehicle, we didn’t invest in land or property. We didn’t even have a second baby…

The emotional and marital difficulties ensuing from green-card emigration as narrated by Nandini have not been examined in the extant scholarship. For these couples, negotiating with conjugal power in undertaking migration has to be examined within this framework of “life on hold” where they feel unable to fulfill not only the social obligations of emphasized femininity
and hegemonic masculinity, but also their own personal ambitions. Consequently the decision to emigrate (upon receiving the necessary documentation) is mediated by this sense of inadequacy by both partners often resulting in both participating in the final decision. It is however important to remark that not all families experience this angst. Some, such as the Shankarans cited earlier, agree to file the paper work and “worry about the decision later,” should they receive the necessary documentation thus proceeding with life as usual.

As stated earlier in this section, while family networks are integral to emigrating, they are an even more critical resource in organizing family unit settlement of Tamil women. Further, considering that in this migration strategy partners and children emigrate together at the same time, settlement experiences encompass not only those of Tamil women and husbands’ as individuals, but as a couple and as parents. Given Tamil gender constructs of differential gender expectations of women and men as wives/husbands and mothers/fathers respectively and their location within the gender hierarchies of their households, I argue that this process although undertaken by both Tamil women and men at the same time is gendered such that women and men experience it differently and often with different outcomes especially in terms of professional work (described in the next chapter). In the following pages, I present these experiences centered on the following emergent themes – role of family networks in settlement; gendered spousal settlement - husbands’ experience; and gendered spousal settlement - wives’ experience.

**Role of family networks in settlement**

There is no denying that for family unit migrants, the process (read: practicalities) of settlement is eased by the presence of family networks in the United States. Similar to the role played by husbands’ in the case of dependent wives, Tamil family unit migrant women characterize their family ties as a crucial source of support – emotional, and financial – in
mediating their successful settlement and establishment of their families in the United States. To begin with, migrants in this category often choose their place of settlement, in the short/long term in close proximity to their families not only because this is required by immigration policy, but also to avail of the resources provided by family ties. After having arrived in the country, these migrants often lived for extended periods of time with their family members while they acclimatized themselves to America, completed the necessary formalities to begin lives here (such as procuring social security cards, driver’s licenses, bank accounts etc), and found jobs to support themselves without family assistance.

We came to [American city] because I had my sister and brother there…and morally and financially if we wanted, they were able to support us. Any other city, we couldn’t have lived…we [would] have [had] to start from scratch, whereas [in the city where her family lived] it was already established. (Avni Shankaran, 58, CPA)

…we had [about] $1000 at entry [into the United States]. And of course, my sister supported us here, so we came and landed right in her house. And she supported us for a month and a half I think….She took care of everything, our food, our clothing, our shelter. During that month we waited for our social security number… (Nandini Ramdas, 47, Entrepreneur)

This living together in an arrangement very similar to the extended family structure at once created for Tamil women, a sense of familiarity in an unfamiliar landscape and enabled their families to draw from the emotional, material and financial benefits this arrangement offers. Thus, family members assisted new migrants in finding apartments (co-signing leases with them), extended them credit, financed their initial stay, acquainted them with budgeting needs, shopping methods and found schools for children. As Avni remembers, their most important contribution was to integrate into their own friendship circle, offering Tamil women and their families an almost instant social network in a foreign environment. In the arena of paid labor, family networks were particularly useful in accessing the American labor market on a green-card. Considering that the American labor market is organized to track new immigrants into low
paying work immediately upon migration, families served to warn Tamil women and their spouses of the need to “start at the bottom” and work upwards; in finding these initial entry level jobs; and in providing the emotional sustenance to persevere at this work in anticipation of improved occupational and economic mobility (Amott and Matthaei 1996; Browne and Misra 2003; Hossfeld 1994; Menjívar 1999; Mohanty 2002; Pessar 1999) (a detailed discussion of work experiences will be provided in the next chapter). Finally, in presenting these benefits of family networks in settlement, I also argue drawing upon Hellerman (2006); Menjívar (2000); Sotelo (1994) and Parrado and Flippen’s (2005) ideas about women and men differently accessing and employing the same migrant social networks; that Tamil women more than their spouses rely on their family networks for emotional capital (i.e. emotional and moral support) especially in the successful adaptation of their children to the United States – which as I will explain a little later women assumed to be their primary responsibility in settlement. Similar experiences with families mediating settlement were also narrated by single green-card Tamil migrant women, except for the fact that they enjoyed a greater degree of personal independence upon migration because they did not have children.

Throughout this chapter, I have elaborated upon the advantages of social networks in migration and settlement. However, it is crucial to note that these networks can also be exploitative of migrants and/or be straitened for resources given the “structures of opportunities” within which these networks operate, thereby affecting immigrant outcomes (George 2005; Gramsmuck and Pessar 1991; Hagan 1998; Menjívar 2000; Parrado and Flippen 2005; Toro-Morn 1995). My research supports this idea in that as professional, upper-class/caste migrants, Tamil women’s migrant networks are rich and are not strained financially or in terms of resources, allowing my participants and their families to draw extensively upon them. Despite
this, strains were evident in these networks especially in the case of family unit migrants (who
perhaps drew upon them most extensively compared to other groups), largely originating from
family tensions. For my participants, a key area contributing to this tension, and thus to
dissension within these family networks was their sense of dependency on their extended family
thereby losing the independence their caste/class status had afforded them in India. A key area of
dependence was financial. As participants reminisced, despite their financial planning prior to
emigration, they realized only on arrival that their transported savings “were not sufficient” to
establishing lives in the United States, requiring them to rely on their families for aid. In turn,
they felt this often constrained the independence they had enjoyed in India to choose how much
and when to spend without feeling guilt.

It was a struggle…financially. We didn’t have that kind of money [as in India] to spend.
We had a lot of money in India, but compared to the U.S., that money is nothing. We had
to think twice to do stuff and could not spend money as you want. (Avni Shankaran, 58,
CPA)

This loss of independence was further exacerbated by their extended stay with their
American based kin, which over time became difficult (especially for those migrants who had
lived in nuclear families in India) as they felt obligated to adjust to their host family’s rules. Avni
Shankaran, whose case I have been following in this section, talks of the particular difficulties
her young children experienced in making this adjustment:

It was pretty strange [when we first came to US]. We had to depend on these people [her
family] for everything. So it was kind of difficult for us…and [though] they [her siblings]
made [her]stay comfortable, we were feeling bad that we had to stay with them. [It was]
tough in a sense…like you know how each household they have their own rules and
things….So we had to follow that [siblings’ household rules]. Like for example the kids…
in the evening, they’re not allowed to go out because without the parent. They were so
used to going out and playing with the kids [in India]. So [if they went out alone], my
brother would get upset, you know…that they should not go like that. So the children
initially found it difficult…that they’re not allowed to go out and anywhere…
For other participants like Nandini Ramdas, whose story I also have been narrating in this section, strains in family networks also originated from her sense that families in their zeal to hasten new immigrants’ settlement were not sympathetic to the latter’s difficulties but rather quite callous.

My sister was the one who sponsored us and brought us here. And she was impatient…she was not patient with all these kind of emotions [in migration and settlement]…she was very insensitive, now in retrospect I’m thinking. She was like, “get over it.” One day, I remember, we brought the wrong brand of coffee, and she said “go return it right now!” [with emphasis]. And you know that was a cultural thing here because back home we never returned anything. I mean it’s not a done thing! You bought it, you bought it. [But she insisted] “go right now, go return it!” [with emphasis]. I would have been more understanding…they [have] just come from India, and they have all those hang ups. Yeah, she was pushing it, she wanted it [the family’s adjustment] quickly, you know. She’s like “get on with it,” kind of thing. But she forgot that we were transferring from [how things are done in India], she forgot how it worked for her. She was very impatient.

Over time this dependence created an unspoken strain in family ties, and accompanied Tamil women’s desire to move out of extended family living arrangements as quickly as possible, and for Tamil women in particular created issues of having to balance extended family demands, with that of their own families as will be explained later.

Analyzing my data within the engendering migration perspective reminds me that gender not only organizes migration, but is also experienced interactionally by women and men in marital contexts. As in the case of the family stage migration of dependent wives, Tamil green-card women also negotiated with spouses in undertaking settlement. The difference however lies in the fact that unlike dependent wives, both partners are migrants at the same time thereby mediating both their own and their family’s settlement. As briefly stated earlier in this section, Tamil women are located not only within gendered hierarchies of their households but they also negotiate gender interactionally with their husbands. In the context of migration and settlement, this often involves the transportation of hegemonic Tamil gender constructs centered on men being breadwinners, and women assuming primary responsibility for the domestic realm, and
their reconstitution in the United States. As I will illustrate in the following sub-sections, this reconstitution often involves retaining hegemonic gender constructs in the initial period of settlement as a mechanism to reap the emotional rewards that accompany appropriate gender performances especially in a structural context where the latter can be easily jeopardized. In this way, family unit settlement is gendered creating distinct experiences for Tamil women and men.

**Gendered spousal settlement: Husbands’ experience**

I was just at home because I wanted him to first get a job. And then I wanted to try on my own. This thing is [when] he first was looking for a job, he didn’t get a job in his...yeah, in his field, in his level type of work. And then he had to come down in his expectations and just take any job that would pay and for his family, he was like, “I need a job.” That’s it. And then my brother-in-law actually took him to a farmer’s market and said, “you could start here as a cashier.” My husband is blown away by it. He said, “no, no.” Yeah, it’s going to be a blow to your ego. Definitely. For him it [downward economic mobility] was more [traumatic] because my husband was also a traditional man, who thinks he has to bear the financial burden of the family, and stuff like that, so. For him it was a little more stressful and scary for him...because according to him, he said, “listen I’ve been working up in this level so long, to back down and work in that level, I might not even fit in.” It was very difficult, though, he felt terrible because when he joined there, he had to do menial tasks of sweeping the floor, stuff like that, so. It was hard on him. (Nandini Ramdas, 47, Entrepreneur)

Reconstituting transported Tamil gender constructs in initial settlement by both Tamil women and men involved reifying the association of masculinity with breadwinning and supporting families in the United States. Accordingly, as Nandini relates, this involved Tamil women deciding with their husbands to allow the latter to take a lead in finding employment and of women assuming the bulk of household responsibilities even if they had not done so in India, and had worked prior to emigration thereby subsuming their personal professional identities and ambitions for the short term Needless to say, the later affects women’s ability to access professional work compared to their spouses as discussed in the following chapter. Tamil men’s focus on finding work (and/or re-qualifying themselves in the United States) thus became the cornerstone of their settlement to the extent that green-card Tamil women noted that the
The settlement of wives and children became secondary concerns for men. In turn, these engagements became arenas for gender presentations and negotiations between spouses.

His concern was only about the studies [for American re-qualification]. Yes, because he was so involved in his studies, so he didn’t think of all [family issues] that. Not even once he expressed anything about [family’s difficulties]. I was thinking “how come he’s not thinking about that, too.” Because his constant [goal] was to get the qualification and get the job. That was his priority. The children were secondary. Secondary, he knows that, unless he does well and gets a job he cannot take care of the children…(Avni Shankaran, 58, CPA)

I argue that this spousal strategizing of reinforcing traditional gender constructs during initial settlement in an immigrant context is efficacious in ameliorating the challenges posed to Tamil green-card men’s masculinity by a migrant context that threatens their ability to be providers. As Nandini so evocatively narrates, the downward economic mobility that accompanies green-card migration – working at “any job,” “at the farmer’s market,” “doing menial tasks” -(due to lack of American skills, and education) is psychically and emotionally traumatic to men who had previously enjoyed not only an upper-class status in India, but also the professional prestige of being engaged in white-collar management work which did not require them to perform the low-skilled job-related activities. My research also reveals that the potential emasculation of Tamil men was also exacerbated by the fact that, in all but one case, the key sponsors of this migration were Tamil women’s families in the United States and not men’s. Therefore Tamil men often moved from a situation where they had their own homes and lives in India to being dependent upon and living with their in-laws in the United States. This posed a challenge to gendered hierarchies and expectations as it often made them, as men, subject to restrictions laid out by their wives’ families contributing to the strain in family networks. Within this precarious migrant context, green-card Tamil women choose to reconstitute emphasized Tamil femininity centered on their familial obligations to aid their partners’ and their children’s smooth adjustment to America. However, the understanding is that this is for a limited duration
and upon their husbands’ successful entry into professional work (either by moving up from low-paying jobs or completing re-qualification), Tamil women will participate in professional work as well. Thus making this bargain they are performing appropriate femininity while providing themselves space to fulfill their personal identities as professionals.

**Gendered spousal settlement: Wives’ experience**

As has already been addressed in my review of the literature (Chapter 2), the gendered nature of settlement between women and men is not only predicated upon paid labor as discussed above, but more on Tamil women’s roles as mothers which facilitate their differential engagement with American society compared to their male counterparts (Sotelo 1994). My research reveals that this occurs through two main settlement activities which women assume responsibility for namely settling children, and managing the emotional life of their families.

First, Tamil women who migrated as a family unit noted that for them personally, the settlement of their children to life in the United States was the primary concern. In stating this, In Tamil women would reference their increased responsibility against their spouses’ preoccupation with work, and against essentialist arguments about women being nurturing and more naturally concerned for the welfare of their children. Aiding children’s settlement involved Tamil women assuming the responsibility (with the assistance provided by family networks) in locating child related services such as school, physicians, extra-curricular activities and child care arrangements. More importantly, as mothers, Tamil women concentrated on facilitating the emotional adaptation of their children into a different cultural milieu which was not particularly supportive of diverse children. Avni Shankaran, the case-study I’m presenting explains:

I was worried about my children...how they would adjust initially. I had to pay more attention to them and see what they’re doing, and what they’re into...what shows they are watching...and what is their participation in school.... The children had a very tough time in making friends...they could not make girlfriends....You know, because when we moved
she [her older daughter] was in 7th grade, and the girls will be looking for boys…and she wasn’t mentally prepared for that…

As Avni indicates, Indian origin children often had difficulty navigating the American education system, and forming friendships especially in adolescence when the cultural dissonance between American and Indians especially on issues of women’s sexuality and dating became prominent. This sense of difference which inhibited their smooth transitioning was further heightened by the fact that Tamil children were often some of the few children of color in largely white schools. Thus to successfully mediate the emotional adjustment of their children, Tamil women such as Avni spoke of the need to pay increased attention to them, and be available to listen and talk to them about their new situation in a way that had not been required of them in India. These situations presented unique challenges to Tamil women as migrant mothers as they themselves were unfamiliar with the situation and had to engage in a rapid learning – which some participants call a “crash course in American culture” - to be able to better support their children without resulting in too much emotional trauma to them. As a result of the traditionally gendered divisions in settlement – men focusing on work and women on family women such as Avni felt that the process had enabled them to access some level of decision making power unavailable to her in India. Simultaneously however, being solely responsible for the daily decisions related to family life, coupled with the demands of work (once she started working) made settlement emotionally trying and hard for her.

Second, as is evinced by the findings presented above, for Tamil women settlement involves not only managing the practicalities of life, but also handling the vagaries of emotions that accompanies the process. This often involved wives bolstering faltering masculine confidence while mediating the strain with the extended family structure, and attempting to mitigate the cultural confusion in children’s adjustment. Readers will probably have noticed that
while discussing their management of the emotional aspect of settlement, green-card Tamil migrants rarely mention themselves. For this group in particular, responses about self only emerged upon direct questioning about “what it was like for you?” What emerges is an interesting psychic maneuver by Tamil women wherein they acknowledge the difficulties and struggle of settling into life in America, and that adjustment was not as easy as they anticipated. But they are equally quick to brush it aside by citing greater emotional trauma for husbands (due to threat of emasculation) and children (because of being different) and thus their lacking of the “luxury of time for culture shocks” themselves.

No, actually, you know I wasn’t [worried about herself] at all. At that time I was more interested in my family settling down. Because I knew that we were in a new place and that they [children and husband] needed that boost and that, you know…that support from me [was important]. Because it can be mentally traumatic, the transition, you know…for my husband, for my child. Yeah [it was difficult for her], but as a mother and a wife, you want to put them first. And you want to do that first, and then manage your thing later, maybe. (Nandini Ramdas, 47, Entrepreneur)

Drawing upon the idea of “connective autonomy” (George 2005:40) where Tamil women’s self is distinctive but also embedded within a set of relationships (in this case families and marriages) which are gendered such that subtle expectations exist for women to guide family’s emotional health; women within this group subsume their personal experiences within those of their families. Accordingly what came through the interviews and the ethnography was that Tamil women were so engrossed in the practicalities and sensitivities of settlement for their families, that when they came up for air, they had already been in the United States for several years, their husbands had moved up the occupational hierarchy, their children had adjusted, and they themselves felt personally settled in those arrangements. It was only at this point, that family unit Tamil women commenced focusing on the self by going back to school and/or starting their professional lives. These two forces working together – settling children, and
managing emotional life of families – organize the differentially gendered settlement experiences of family unit Tamil women migrants compared with their spousal counterparts.

In sum, I argue that Tamil women who migrate as a family unit negotiate with gender such that they rely on family networks in the United States to organize their migration, and bargain with spouses to either make migration an integral component of marriage conversations, or to broach the prospect of migration leaving the final decision to their partners. The same family networks that organize their migration are also drawn upon differently by women and men in mediating their settlement such that they provide men, in particular, with resources to access work, and women to assist their family’s adjustment. Further, considering that in this type of migration spouses migrate together, settlement also involves gendered interactions between spouses themselves such that hegemonic Tamil gender constructs are reconfigured through the process. Tamil women choose to reify emphasized Tamil femininity and hegemonic Tamil masculinity constructs to organize a traditionally gendered settlement where they assume the bulk of the responsibility for settling children and handling the emotional life of their families, leaving husbands to concentrate on work and providing for families. However, the understanding is that this occurs only for a short duration, thereby allowing women the opportunity to focus on their personal identities once their families are settled. In this way, I theorize that Tamil women both challenge the constraints that emphasized Tamil femininity places on them while simultaneously doing gender appropriately.

At the conclusion of this section on strategizing migration, it is important for readers to recognize that although the methods of migration and settlement have been presented as distinct, they do not operate in reality as water-tight categories, but more fluidly with immigration experiences and legalities overlapping (for instance: dependent wives transforming their status to
students thereby changing not only their visa category, but having experiences similar to independent migrants). Nonetheless an elaboration of the different strategies in migration is necessitated as these constitute a key element in determining Tamil women’s professional lives and work-family arrangements.

Further, although gender navigations by Tamil women are unique to each strategy, a framework of the role of gender in migration and settlement emerges that transcends categorical difference. To this effect I theorize that through the migration and settlement process, these Tamil women reconfigure gender relations within their households, marriages, and their own gender identities such that their personal identities as professionals assume commensurate importance with their socially designated identities of mothers and wives, manifesting with increasing or decreasing prominence at different points in their lives. I argue that the migrant context is critical to the development of this integrated femininity – of being professional, wife and mother – as it offers them the structure (distance from family in India, exposure to different gender standards, ability to fulfill personal ambitions) within which their personal identities are consolidated by drawing upon and reconfiguring transported emphasized Tamil femininity constructs. In turn this organizes their professional lives and their work-family arrangements that comprise the contents of the succeeding chapters.

**Constructing Gendered Social Capital: Women’s Networks and Community Work**

Employing the engendering migration perspective to the lives of Tamil women highlights that their gendered settlement includes activities within their households as described above, and those outside them, which serve to connect their households to the larger context within which they were located. Thus Tamil women consolidated their personal and their family’s settlement by solidifying their social capital through the creation of women’s networks and through their own community work (Sotelo 1994). In examining this, I distinguish between social capital and
social networks arguing that there is a dialectical relationship between these. As defined by Bordieu (1986) social capital refers to:

the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network or more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition…which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (P. 248-249)

Simply stated, social capital is the plethora of resources – material, symbolic, cultural, and emotional that circulate social networks, and in the particular instance of migration, networks that span a transnational social space (Evergeti and Zontini 2006; Furstenberg 2005; Hellerman 2006).

In contending the dialectical relationship between social capital, networks and communities, I maintain that in the instance of Tamil women, social capital is predicated upon their economic capital that mediates their migration and settlement. Considering the self-perpetuating nature of Tamil, middle-class, Brahmin migrant networks spanning India and the United States, Tamil women’s privileged caste/class status enabled them to have access to both the social capital (embodied in the social imagination discussed earlier) and the economic ability to employ these networks in migration and settlement. In the United States, they draw upon the resources within these migrant networks (familial or friendship) to construct and consolidate women centered networks (rather than the more male dominated migrant networks that organized their settlement), and engage in community creation thereby richening their social capital stores for themselves and for other migrants (and researches like me) to draw upon. As I will illustrate in the subsequent pages, the Tamil women’s networks and community work is not only gendered but also representative of the agentic and transnational dimensions of their settlement, as much as the above mentioned gender reconfiguration is.
It is noteworthy that building women’s networks, community creation and the subsequent enrichment of social capital occurs throughout the settlement process commencing almost immediate from their arrival in the United States and continuing until the present when I met them. Further, it also occurs throughout their life course, taking different forms and serving different purposes at different stages in their lives. Importantly, although men engage in a similar process amongst themselves, what sets women’s social capital construction apart is that they do not create networks and communities independent from men and their families but in consortium with them which benefits their personal adaptation as migrants while consolidating the settlement of their families (Hagan 1998; Hellerman 2006; Menjivar 2000; Parrado and Flippen 2005; Sotelo 1994).

Corroborating Sotelo’s (1994) research, my research finds that Tamil women begin the formation of women centered networks directly through their interactions with one another, and indirectly through the multiplicity of their ties with other families and institutions. Thus both formal and informal spaces serve as arenas for women’s networks and community creation. Being Tamil (Brahmin) women often served as the common denominator in the creation of these networks and communities, where their shared ethnic and legal status with other women like them created a shared experience which facilitated the emergence of these connections (Evergeti and Zontini 2006; Khandelwal 2002; Portes et al. 1999; Rayaprol 1997). Tamil women, especially dependent wives drew upon this idea of shared experience to connect with – through informal meetings, gatherings and phone conversations - their Indian neighbors, other dependent wives like themselves, and wives of their spouses’ colleagues to ease the loneliness and isolation that defined their initial stay in the United States. We are reminded here that immigration policy which prevented their work and mobility coupled with their homesickness and the newness of
their marriages placed them in emotionally vulnerable positions where they remember longing for women’s companionship.

Accordingly, by reaching out to other women in similar statuses as themselves, they began to create networks that provided them interactions, conversations and support centered on women’s issues ranging from the mundane (such as how to undertake Indian grocery shopping and cooking in America) to the more intimate such as having to deal with menstrual cycles and worries about labor and delivery for first time. It is through this initial small circle of girlfriends that they slowly get integrated into the larger Indian community, introduced by older and more settled migrant woman friends. As Khandelwal (2002) documents in her research of Indians in New York City, at this stage in the formation of women’s networks, Tamil women rely on a shared Indian ethnic status (rather than limiting themselves only to Tamils). The tightening of their community to Tamils occurs later in their settlement especially as they become parents.

Her [my participant’s girlfriend] husband was working in the same place as my husband. And from day one they asked us to come over. And almost twice or thrice a week I would go visit them…and she was not working either and she had two little kids. I would really literally visit their house, twice a week or thrice a week in afternoon and spend like between 2 and 5 pm and just hang around, talk…(Arundhati Chandran, 45, Entrepreneur)

You know just talk to each other…I used to meet with friends…and they helped….They [would] tell me you know…how to use the vegetables available here, especially if you are vegetarian…so you have to adapt all these [American] vegetables to Indian curries…and like [she learned] to make zucchini curry and those kinds of things…(Ramya Venkatraman, 52, Entrepreneur)

This longing for women’s companionship - often titled by my participants as “being better able to relate to women” – rather than a cross-gender one (even if that included their spouses) has to be contextualized in their socialization in India which encourages same-gender peers and friendships over cross-gender ones. Hence there is an ease in same-gender friendships for Tamil women which allows them the space to broach the more intimate aspects of settlement, which they might be diffident to do in a cross-gender network. This reliance on women’s networks has
further to be theorized as occurring at a point in their lives when their husbands were essentially strangers whom they were getting to know in the United States and establish a life and marriage with also contributing to some level of initial discomfort in conversing openly with them. This was complicated by the fact that their spouses were often busy with school or work and thus lacked the time for the depth of companionship that Tamil women were missing and considered important to their adaptation.

Given these factors, for Tamil women (especially married dependent wives) their networks with other women in similar straits as themselves proved to be an essential support mechanism – generating the critical social capital required for their successful navigation of the practical and emotional toll of settlement. As Arundhati and Revathy narrate below, these networks offered them the opportunity to ventilate about the isolating nature of their experience, learn skills (learning driving, learning cook, cleaning), and in a cascading effect motivate newer Tamil migrants to enter school or prepare for re-qualification exams easing their adjustment.

I mean it is [having women's networks] very important because somebody just talking... it’s like counseling, basically. Somebody talk to you nicely... you feel good. I mean I really needed it [when she first arrived]...it helped me to talk to people. It really helped me like made me feel like “OK if I really want to talk, there is somebody with whom I can talk [who understands her situation]. (Arundhati Chandran, 45, Entrepreneur)

And so it [having another Indian migrant woman friend] was just some kind of semblance of normalcy [in the United States]. I had girl conversations...it was just very refreshing. And she was very, very supportive of me going to school. She kept on telling me, “you know you need to go to school in this country, it’s a whole different experience, it will be good for you...” We’re good, very good friends. (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

Thus at the stage of their lives when they are newly married, dependent wife migrants, women’s networks generate a social capital qualitatively different from the men’s networks that might have aided their emigration (Hagan 1998; Menjívar 2000; Parrado and Flippen 2005). I theorize that implicit in the creation of women’s networks and generation of gendered social capital is
that these networks operate on reciprocity and exchange, and that their richness lies not only in the economic status of my participants, but also in integrating newer migrants into them thereby replenishing the resources. Should this not occur, or should the networks become strained, Tamil women indicate their gradual demise either in favor of other better structured networks or their incorporation into a larger community. Accordingly, the formation of these women centered networks is Tamil women’s agentic response to the restrictions placed by gendered immigration policy on their lives which threatens their personal identities centered on having their own friends, connections and resources rather than being solely dependent on spousal provisions. At this stage then, women’s networks are oriented only to their personal adjustment.

As Tamil women begin to build lives in the United States, commencing with work or school and then by starting families these initial “girlfriend” networks get integrated into their creation of Tamil community through informal channels of family friendships, and the formal channels of membership and participation in organized community spaces such as the Temple, Church, Tamil Sangam, CAMAGA, and other culturally based and non-profit Tamil associations. It is at this point in their lives, that I began to notice the tightening of their networks and community to almost exclusively other Tamil (and/or South Indian) families thereby providing the community with the tight-knit structure I encountered in Atlanta. In making this change, they corroborate Khandelwal’s (2002) observation that as Indian communities grow older and become more populated with Indians from diverse regions, languages and religions; the larger “Indian” community structure begins to fragment into local communities particular to one or more ethnicities. As Tamil women such as Manya and Divya note, at this point, after they have successfully completed their initial settlement, there is a desire to congregate with other
women and families who share the Tamil culture and language in an effort to consolidate their lives in the United States – what Manya signifies as a sense of belonging.

And I think it’s a very natural instinct. It’s easy for you to establish [a community] with Tamilians, that doesn’t mean I don’t talk to other [Indians]. But it’s an instinct, I think… when you start talking, your language comes in and if you see somebody talking your own language you feel… “we belong there.” (Manya Ramalingam, 51, Scientist)

[Our community] is clearly the background we come from…we all mostly are [Tamil]. The group becomes even smaller [than in the past] because you know once you don’t talk the same language, there’s not much [connection]. You don’t want to keep talking in English all the time, you want to stay in your own language. (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

Further, at this life stage, their roles as mothers became the essential mechanism by which they engage in network and community creation (George 2005; Sotelo 1994). Furstenberg (2005) argues community work gets accelerated with parenthood to often to generate social capital that directly benefits their children and their families. For Tamil women, this capital implied ethnic and familial social capital that aids the consolidation of their families in America (Evergeti and Zontini 2006; Fuglerund and Engebrigtsen 2006; Menjivar 2000; Sotelo 1994) To this effect Tamil women, often citing essentialist arguments of being naturally oriented (having the personality) to community work, assume the bulk of responsibility in creating and maintaining community. As I listened to them talk, it gradually emerged that they do not perceive this responsibility as a burden but rather their choice – albeit one mandated by emphasized Tamil femininity that not only charges women with domestic responsibility but also with transmitting ethnic culture to succeeding generations – in a migrant context where racially/ethnically and religiously they constitute the minority thereby posing challenges to their ethnicity (Bhattacharjee 1998; Kurien 1999; Purkayastha 2005; Rayaprol 1997). Accordingly, as mothers, they are concerned with the potential loss of ethnic culture, traditions and values among their children and feel a need to socialize their children into their Indian origins, thereby equipping the
latter in being bi-cultural. Tamil community creation provides the necessary social capital to aid this process through resources such as language, dance, religion, music, and cultural training that it offers the younger generation. Additionally, it also provides a safe space for them to not only learn, but also perform Indian-ness free of American cynosure. It is remark worthy, that in building community for this purpose, Tamil women are cognizant of not having to make similar efforts in India because of their children’s automatic immersion into the cultural tradition and the presence of extended kin who have traditionally informally socialized the younger generation into their cultural heritage.

We [Tamil migrants] try to preserve our culture, teach our culture and talk about religion and everything to our children. I think it’s more than what Indian parents [in India]. I’m worried about my children not learning Tamil. So they have [language class], now my younger one can read and write in Tamil, not fluently, but she has started on that, and it excites me more than anything else. Because I think that people take it for granted in India because everything is available, there are grandmas taking the children every day to the Temple, they don’t have to be taught what Hinduism is because it’s just part and parcel of their life. Here we feel it’s more important for them [the children] to learn what is there [culture] and then they can always decide what to do when they grow up but...they have to learn what their mother culture is, what our land has...there are so many great things about India that they have to know. (Shakuntala Mahadevan , 34, Corporate America Executive)

And I would go one step further and say that women do it [engage in community creation], not only for themselves as much as for their own children, you know because they’re always conscious of their children not having the same advantages...especially in this society because of being away from the Indian roots. You know they want to try to promote and cultivate the culture...so the [Tamil] culture...so one reason why I would associate with other Indian families is to get my son to cultivate relationships with other Indian kids his age, so that they would have that feeling of belonging, which it probably may not feel with their school. (Saraswati Vinayak, 44, Corporate America Executive)

In addition to their children’s identities and ethnicity, Tamil women are also concerned with constructing Indian family forms in the United States – i.e. families defined by Indian values especially those relating to sexuality, dating, and cuisine. Given this, Tamil women theorize that maintaining these families, which they perceive as being different from their middle/upper-middle class white, American counterparts, is easier if the families are integrated
into a larger Tamil community where not only the desired values and behaviors are endorsed, but also where their children do not feel and/or are treated as different should they adhere to those values.

If you are still want to follow some of the [Tamil] customs... if you still want to follow some of the traditions, it’s much easier... it’s very hard to do [it] as a single person. It makes it a lot easier when you have other people or other support group to do these things with. And that’s why... a community helps in a huge way. (Neelakshi Arunachalem, 42, Scientist)

[Need to create and belong to Tamil community] to just feel at home, and children can... if there are a lot of children from similar family backgrounds, it’s easier for us [parents] to explain why it’s not OK to wear a spaghetti strap at 15 or 20 [years old], and it’s not OK to date.... You have similar kids so they can understand “how we come from this kind of family”... our family values are different and it’s relatively easy to explain them, because they see their [other Tamil] friends have the same kind of restrictions as they have. (Shakuntala Mahadevan , 34, Corporate America Executive)

A further concern about their family life in the United States is its nuclear nature and disconnection from extended kin support that is available to most families in India.

Consequently, Tamil women turn to their networks with other mothers, and to the formal spaces of the Tamil community to build the fictive kin structure that is so essential to their survival in the United States. Fictive kin is essentially Tamil women’s networks with other Tamil families who over time assume the place of the extended kin support they might have enjoyed in India.

... we all just need and I mean social support [in the United States]. When I mean social support... I know that we have a set of families that are so close that we will just step in and do things for each other. Just like you would without any questions asked when you are at home, you expect your sister or your brother or your parents to be there when you need and I think we have that here through our friends. (Janiki Parathasarathi, 44, Professor)

What is particularly important to recognize about this community creation is that it is gendered such that not only do women assume greater responsibility for it, and build it through their networks with other women, but that Tamil women themselves recognize that their efforts at community are oriented to their families rather than to themselves personally. By contrast,
Tamil men’s community is almost exclusively organized around their work and them being integrated into the familial connections established by their wives. In making this claim, I do not argue that men do not participate in or construct community that benefits their families because some do. In fact, as a small proportion of my participants note, in their particular families, their husbands were more involved in community work than themselves. Rather, I only contend that in women’s network and community efforts the personhood is integrated into the family, wherein the case of most men they remain quite distinct following from hegemonic gender constructions in both cases. Accordingly, this differentially gendered structure constructs gendered social capital.

They [Tamil men] do…they participate with kids. A lot of men the come [to Temple] and bring the kids…they bring the kids and stay there. So they are active, but you know…not active like women…(Shanta Anand, 58, Teacher)

There is no denying that assuming the larger responsibility for constructing social capital, combined with their professional and domestic responsibilities is stressful for Tamil women. However, in reconstituting emphasized Tamil femininity in migration such that their personal and familial identities are tightly interconnected, they choose not to desist from this work in the service of establishing their own and their family’s life in the United States.

Thus in sum, in this chapter I have examined the gendered migration and settlement of Tamil women embodied in their strategizing of migration and construction of gendered social capital. Further, I have connected this gendered migration to their social location in India, their agency and to the transnational space that spans India and the United States. By locating Tamil women within gendered households, marriages, and migrant networks, my research uncovers not only the role of gender in organizing their migration, but their attempts at reconfiguring gender relations through the migration and settlement process. Lastly, throughout my discussion of their migration, I highlight the connections between migration, work, and family.
Summary

In this chapter, I presented my first important finding of how gender structures Tamil women’s migration to and settlement in the United States in the context of their gendered location in India and subsequent negotiations with Tamil gender ideologies; thereby locating them in a migration narrative that has underplayed their voices. I argue that Tamil women’s migration and settlement have to be framed by their social location in India. As upper-caste/class women, my participants benefited from their residence outside the strict gender precepts of Southern India, and from the blended socialization of their youth to bargain with emphasized Tamil femininity within their gendered households and communities, to strategize their migration as occurring through three main streams – as independent women, as married, dependent wives, and as green-card migrants.

Each strategy involves a unique gendered navigation of power hierarchies with households, and marriages, and migrant social networks, contributing to Tamil women and men’s qualitatively distinctive migrant destinies. Further, their choice of the United States as their migrant destination is also emblematic of this gendered choice as it not only represents greater gender liberalness, but also the opportunity to fulfill their ambitions of personal independence and of being professionals. Upon arrival in the United States, a further negotiation with gender ensues such that Tamil women reprioritize their personal professional goals in favor of assuming the larger responsibility for the successful settlement of their families (spouses and children). To this effect, they are instrumental in constructing gendered social capital embodied in women’s networks and their community work. However in so doing, they agentically create spaces for themselves to resist the confines of transported emphasized Tamil femininity by not abandoning their personal professional ambitions, but rather, focusing on these after organizing settlement. In the process, I argue that they are commencing on the construction of integrated
femininity in a migrant context, which is consolidated through their engagement in professional work as described in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5
“GLASS CEILINGS, MODEL MINORITY, AND INTEGRATED WOMANHOOD”: PROFESSIONAL LIVES AND IDENTITIES

I am comfortable with presenting myself as one person…[as a woman] who is a professional, but is also a wife, and also a mother. —— Participant in this Study

Conceived within the engendering migration perspective, this project examines how gender organizes the process of migration and settlement among Tamil professional women. In the previous chapter, I had addressed this by directly uncovering the dialectical relationship between gender, migration and settlement such that gender not only organizes it, but is also reconfigured through it. However, for the most part, I had confined my analysis of gender arrangements and negotiations to the private realms of households/families and marriages, and had only begun to broach on the more public arenas through my discussion of community construction. In this chapter, I extend the discussion by making the connections between the private realm and the public one by presenting Tamil women’s gendered navigations, as immigrant women of color, through professional work in the United States. This chapter finds that far from being distinct, Tamil women’s migration and settlement strategies, and familial gender navigations directly influence their professional lives, identities and outcomes thereby bearing out my central thesis of the gendered realms of migration, work, and family being simultaneously organized by each other. I begin by discussing Tamil women’s experiences in accessing the American labor market in the context of their intersectional social location as immigrant women of color. Next, I present their gendered navigations through the American workplace structured by hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality contributing to the operation of glass ceilings and model minority stereotypes. Third, I outline Tamil women’s self-identification as integrated women – professionals, wives, and mothers – thereby challenging emphasized Tamil femininity which highlights only the latter two identities. Finally, I describe
their performance of integrated femininity at work as they negotiate motherhood through the American workplace.

**Accessing the American Labor Market at the Nexus of Migration and Structures of Opportunity**

I begin with a discussion of Tamil women’s experiences in accessing the racialized American labor market because my research indicates that this mode of entry directly influences their consequent professional success especially in achieving the upward socio-economic mobility that was the raison d’être for their emigration. Referencing my discussion about immigrant labor market incorporation in the literature review (Chapter 2), I argue that Tamil women’s ability to access professional labor upon immigration is predicated upon the “structures of opportunity” (Menjívar 1999:621) they encounter in their context of reception (George 2005; Sotelo 1994). Simply put, this refers to structural impediments and/or facilitators that organize immigrants’ labor market incorporation in the particular place of their arrival.

Corroborating the existing scholarship, my research finds that the critical structures of opportunity that impact Tamil women’s access to professional work in the United States are immigration policy, their transported human capital such as their education and professional skills, and the social capital available in the migrant networks they employ and construct to mediate their migration and settlement. These in turn are influenced by the economic climate (boom or recession) at the time of their arrival in the United States, which as I have already noted in the literature review, not only determines the availability of jobs, but also the nation’s sentiments about immigration and immigrant labor (George 2005; Hagan 2004; Iredale 2001; Khadria 2001; Kibria 1993; Mahler 1999; Menjívar 1999, 2000; Piper 2005; Sotelo 1994, 1999; Tyner 1999). What is particularly important to note is that gender operates structurally within these contexts thereby resulting not only in gendered navigations of the American labor market,
but also in distinct manifestations of the same processes for Tamil women and their husbands such as for instance, both being channeled into initial low-wage work, but differentially approaching and experiencing it. Organized by these factors, my research uncovers three main routes by which Tamil women access the American labor market, each of which corresponds to a strategy of migration and settlement described in the previous chapter, and with its own gendered navigations. These are student migrant route, green-card migrant route, and dependent professional wife route.

Student Migrant Route

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this route to labor market incorporation includes those single Tamil women who emigrated independently to pursue higher education in the United States. However, for the purpose of examining labor market incorporation, in this chapter, I also include dependent “student” wives in this category, who upon emigration enter universities as full-time students either because married migration was their only method to access American higher education, or because full-time attendance at university was a means to circumvent their legal status as dependents of their spouses. Compared to the other routes of labor market incorporation, my research discloses that this group of Tamil women is perhaps the most privileged, in their ease in transitioning into professional labor in the United States. Attendance at American universities is the critical mediator of this process because of the material and psychological resources it provides. Materially, it equips Tamil women with not only the necessary American credentials, but more importantly integrates them into a system of professional networks, lacking among new immigrants, which facilitates the securing of professional work (Hagan 2004).

Oh, it [finding her first job] was very simple. Being in my university, it was a tradition… we had a connection with [Corporate America Company] at that time. We had folks ahead of me who were in [Corporate America Company] and my professor knew other folks
there. So you know...they [Corporate America Company] come [to campus] and say, “we are looking for folks,” and so [my professor] says, “yeah, sure, this is one of my students who is ready for a job,” and they [Corporate America Company] say, “fine” and they interview. So I had two different departments in [Corporate America Company] offer me a job. But the job market was pretty bad and very tight back here…actually the economy was pretty bad when I was graduating...jobs were very difficult to come by. It was my professor who actually [connected her with the job]. (Gauri Ananth, 43, Corporate America Executive)

Professional networks provide job seekers with the necessary social capital in securing jobs, such as contacts in matching workers to jobs, information about job openings and the all important referrals which increase one’s probability of being hired (Huffman 2002; McGuire 2002; Mouw 2003). For Tamil women like Gauri, their integration into these networks occurred either through the professional recruiting connections that the Corporate America Companies establish with universities and with individual faculty mentors, and/or their increased interaction with employed professionals in their field through academic activities (such as conferences, group projects, internships etc) which provides them the necessary connections when seeking professional work.

I further theorize that it is not only their access to professional networks that mediates their successful labor market incorporation, but also the high-status of members within these networks (Huffman 2002; Mouw 2003). Accordingly, in the instance of Gauri, it was the presence of her faculty mentor who was especially instrumental to her securing two job offers during an economic recession. Embodying a high-status network member, her mentor’s personal connection with the company, and the “tradition” of the company recruiting other graduates trained by her mentor, served as the advantageous referral that allowed her to successful transition into a well-paying, professional job immediately upon her graduation.

Further, for a lot of Tamil women in this category, school was integral to acquainting them with the American work ethic, and in interacting with a diversity of people which they believe
equipped them with the essential psychological resources for their successful transition to professional work. Echoing the idea mentioned during settlement of “getting to know Americans is getting to know the place,” Tamil women such as Neelakshi and Kamakshi below, extend this by arguing that their interaction with diverse populations and Americans in school, their learning of American professional standards, behaviors and etiquettes equipped them with a sense of familiarity and self-confidence to access professional work in the United States.

Coming as a student is different because, first of all you go through the education system for one…and then you get to mix with a lot of international students [and Americans] that really helps you put a lot of perspective on the way of life in the U.S [and] you try to assimilate a lot more with Americans…not just living in a community, but like just to work in an office environment….You do need to understand them [to do that] and for me you know…being a student really helped a lot. (Neelakshi Aruanchalem, 42, Scientist)

[Attending school in the United States] made me a little more confident than if you’d just go into the work force and somehow get a job. It wasn’t easy then [to get a job]. Going to school and being able to say that, “yes, I have a degree from here,” it made a lot of difference, I think. See the thing was when I was in school, I was also working there, in one of their departments…so it’s like I was talking and working and I saw it building more of my confidence that I can do stuff here [United States]…. (Kamakishi Swaminathan, 44, IT Professional)

Thus, I argue, for immigrants with no prior experience with work (either in India or the United States) the qualifications, professional networks, and self-confidence provided through the education system are crucial sources of job-related social capital aiding their incorporation into the American workforce. Accordingly, unlike the other groups of migrant women, student migrants were the only Tamil women to successfully integrate into professional work upon their first attempts at labor market incorporation. Having stated this, it is however important to recognize that their relative ease in becoming professionally employed does not preclude this group of migrants from having to navigate their migrant status through the American labor force, which contributes to them experiencing a certain sense of precariousness about their professional positions. Despite appearances (and acknowledgments) of finding jobs “easily,” in our
conversations, Tamil women confided their worry and stress at this time, especially during economic down-turns, for fear that citizens would be preferred over immigrants due to the complexities in legally hiring and sponsoring migrant professionals. Consequently, this required them to be flexible in the location and profile of prospective jobs when attempting to seek professional employment.

**Green-Card Migrant Route**

In terms of relative ease in accessing work, the green-card route follows the student migrant route. This group includes those Tamil women who migrated as part of a family unit on green cards (either their married families or parental families). Readers are reminded about my findings in the previous chapter of family networks in the United States as being the crucial mediator of the migration and settlement of these migrants. My research finds that unlike the other groups, green-card migrants, drawing upon the resources embedded within these networks, often had a more realistic expectation of professional life in the United States, especially of the need to “start at the bottom” of the occupational hierarchy and work upwards. To this effect, I theorize that migrants in this category started their preparations to incorporate into the American labor market in India itself. Referencing the information circulating these kin networks about the demand for certain skills and jobs in the United States, some Tamil green-card women began to prepare for emigration by deliberately training in these skills in India so as to be able to find work immediately upon immigration.

….And so I wanted to check out certain things. Like how we can do business here, you know. So I bought books on that…how to start a business in the U.S. and what the rules and regulations would be…how much money you will have to invest, all that. Then I also took some courses because my sister said, “since you’re an English major, you may not get a job right away. So I went to [an Academy in India] and did my secretarial course….Because I knew office jobs would be easily available [in the United States].
(Nandini Ramdas, 47, Entrepreneur)
...I did my diploma in business administration, I did my diploma in airlines ticketing, secretarial course, a telephone operator, anything that I could educate myself on to find a job right away. When I came here, I wanted like a wide array of things that would give me a job as soon as I can. Technical courses were how they called it. All this was my aunt who was here before [told her that] It [the jobs she prepared for] was in high demand. (Shymala Devadas, 39, CPA)

Upon arriving in the United States, the reality was, however, more complex than they could have anticipated. Although legally, this group of migrants was eligible to work upon establishing landed migrant status in the United States, there was a quick realization of the non-transferability of their Indian educational qualifications and professional experience to the United States (Bacon 1996; Chakravartty 2000; Khandelwal 2002; Rangaswamy 2000; Segal 2002). To a large extent this occurred because Tamil green-card migrants were not in internationalized professions (such as IT) but those with national standards requiring them to either be accredited in the United States or have American work experience to be able to access professional work immediately upon emigration (Iredale 2001; Khadria 2001, 2006). This was further exacerbated by the fact that the majority of these migrants entered the United States during an economic recession where they encountered a constrained job market. Avni Shankaran, a 58 year old CPA, remembers her arrival in America and the subsequent difficulties in finding work which resulted in her husband deciding to return to the third-country where they had moved prior to immigrating to the United States, and returning only when the economy began to improve.

See we came here in ’91 and then the economy was very bad in the U.S., and so there were no jobs readily given, because we don’t have U.S. experience and we don’t have U.S. qualifications. So [her husband] went back [to the third-country] and I stayed with the children because they were already in school and I didn’t want to uproot them. [That is when she began to realize] that it’s not easy to get a good job unless we do some [American] courses.

Working together, these structural impediments to green-card Tamil women’s incorporation into professional work in the United States slotted them into initial low-wage work
in largely feminized occupations such as cashiers, medical transcribers, farmers’ market employees, trainees etc.

[I worked for the local Farmer’s Market]…There is no company that has more international workers than [the Farmer’s Market] when we first came. The entire front end was Indians. It was long, hard working jobs. I guess I don’t know why…[the Farmer’s Market] didn’t worry about your languages. They knew that immigrants coming in were hard workers. OK, we had like 16 hour shifts…seriously…from 7am to 10pm and on Thanksgiving Day we had to stand out there. And we did it gladly [with emphasis]. So I think he sort of tapped into that immigrant people. (Shymala Devadas, 39, CPA)

I argue that this occurs because of the dialectical relationship between the ideological construction, using racial, gendered and sexual imagery, of third-world immigrant women as suited for low-wage labor given their patriarchal characterization as only mothers and wives; and of these jobs being appropriate for third-world women considering their routine, monotonous, and low-paying nature. In turn, this makes immigrant women like Shymala above, vulnerable to labor exploitation embodied not only in low wages, but also in long work hours without commensurate benefits (Amott and Matthaei 1996; Cheng 1999; Hossfeld 1994; Louie 2001; Mohanty 2002).

A point of interest to me was that Tamil women rarely recognized this deliberate channeling and exploitation of their labor (even when I prodded them to think about it), more often arguing that difficult labor market incorporation is something “natural” considering their “outsider” status – what Nandini Ramdas refers to as “all immigrants have the same problems when they came in,” - and of them being willing to work hard, long hours – “doing it gladly” - in the service of eventually integrating into professional work. I contend however, that the latter was only possible among Tamil women because the process was mediated by their class status. Unlike their working class counterparts who often get locked into low-wage work in the United States, Tamil women, by virtue of their ability to re-qualify and accredit themselves over time, were able to make the eventual transition to professional work. Thus, Shymala cited above, was
able to eventually move out of the front end jobs in the Farmer’s Market into the accounting department when she completed her American CPA training.

However, in the short-term of the initial years following immigration, Tamil green-card women experience downward economic mobility, much as their spouses do. What is particularly relevant to note is that although Tamil women testify to these low-paying jobs being more readily available than professional ones, they rarely access them independently; relying rather on their family networks to find these jobs and motivate them to take them up. As I listened to them, I realized that this diffidence in attempting an independent venture into the American labor market (as undertaken by their student counterparts) is rooted in the “culture shock” that accompanies migration especially in emigrating from a less technologically advanced country (at that time), and in encountering a differently organized workforce.

…There was a bank…my sister’s having an account with and she knew the manager of the bank. So when she approached him, she said, “my sister is going to prepare for a CPA exam and she wants to get some experience.” So the manager said for year he’ll keep me in the audit department. But I was not paid like any other, because he took me as a trainee. So the money was not enough….So I got an ordinary job…it was not a big, great job…(Avni Shankaran, 58, CPA)

In addition to these economic structural factors mediating their labor market incorporation, my research also uncovers the critical role played by gender in this process. Readers are reminded here of my findings in the previous chapter, of green-card Tamil women’s gendered bargains with their spouses centered on their choice to perform emphasized Tamil femininity during initial settlement by concentrating on settling their families and supporting their spouses’ labor market trials, rather than immediately seeking jobs and fulfilling their professional ambitions. Professionally, this translated into Tamil women like the ones cited in this section (except for Shymala who emigrated as a single woman with her parental family), entering the American labor market later (and often to supplement spousal income), and being located in low-
paying, feminized jobs for much longer than their male counterparts. This was largely because these jobs offered them the flexible work hours and proximity to their homes especially desired at the time when they were settling in their families.

So I was looking out for a job [after her husband got his], and then I wanted a job close to my home. And then I saw an advertisement for a teaching assistant in …you know a kindergarten school. So I asked them if they had any job openings. They said yeah, they have a teaching assistant job and gave me an application form and I got the job right away…so I think I got $7 [an hour], I think. I told them “I have a 6 year old daughter….’’ So that’s why I took that job because [they have] an after school program. So her school gets over at 2:30, right…and they would pick up my daughter from school and bring her there [to the kindergarten] and I would work till 5 and we would catch the bus and come home. (Nandini Ramdas, 47, Entrepreneur)

So his [her husbands’] brother [who sponsored their green-card] was working for [Health Care Company]. So when I came I just sent my application to [Health Care Company]. I went for the interview, I told them, “I’m looking for a 8 to 4 job because I have a small child, I don’t want…when he comes back from school, I have to be home.” That’s all I [was] looking for. (Bahumathy Mahalingam, 55, Generic Professional)

Although Tamil women’s assumption of the primary role in family settlement was negotiated on the understanding that they would focus on their professional lives when the former was achieved, I argue that this responsibility affected their professional outcomes as it often resulted in delayed or aborted attempts at acquiring American educational qualifications. For Avni Shankaran, the CPA, who had enjoyed a successful, high flying career as the founder and partner of her own accounting firm in India, there is a sense that her career has not quite recovered from her migration and that she will never achieve the same professional success here as she had in India.

No, I would have advanced, definitely [in India]. In India [she] had more opportunities…see in India I could use the knowledge in various fields. Like company law, taxation, finance, auditing and, whereas when I came to the U.S., I was concentrating more on the accounting and the taxation [because that is where she found a job]. My passion was auditing, but I could not do it [because of her inability to train here]. Because I was more…I had to take care of the kids and spend more time with them…doing household work and children. Whereas in India I was not doing all that. All the time, I was only working and coming home.
However, the majority of green-card Tamil women believe that despite their early labor market setbacks, they have achieved and are currently enjoying the improved socio-economic status and professional accomplishment that was the motivator of their emigration. For them this is evinced in their successful transition to and ascension within professional work albeit at a much slower pace than their spousal counterparts. Importantly, I gradually began to realize that their lack of regret, and anger about the latter is not indicative of their resignation to the gender structures in their households and marriages (or to the structural impediments they encountered), but more of this method being their choice given their structural realities.

**Dependent Professional Wife Route**

Corroborating existing scholarship, my research finds that dependent professional wives experience the greatest difficulty in accessing the American labor market often going years without being able to successfully work at professional jobs (Khandelwal 2002; Piper 2005; Rangaswamy 2000). Similar factors that influence the earlier migrant group’s labor market incorporation such as non-transferability of Indian credentials and work experience, are exacerbated in the case of professional wives by restrictive immigration policy, which as already mentioned in the previous chapter, impedes their ability to work. This is further compounded by the fact that unlike the earlier groups of Tamil women, professional wives are perhaps the most disadvantaged in terms of their access to professional networks.

Although professional Tamil wives are able to construct and employ women’s networks as well as those of their spouses in mediating their settlement, my research notes that these gendered networks are relatively poor in work-related social capital (Hagan 1998; Menjivar 2000). By this I mean that because these networks largely comprise other professional wives, rather than the high-status members present in the networks of student migrants or the professional family members in those of green-card migrants, professional wives’ networks are
not efficacious in connecting wives to professional work. (George 2005; Hagan 1998, 2004; Huffman 2002; Mouw 2003). For a small number of Tamil women such as Revathi Venkatesh cited below, husbands’ networks (rich in high-status members, and other professionals) were sometimes effective in finding professional work, but did not circumvent the institutional restrictions on their work embodied in immigration policy. Interacting together then, these structural forces locate Tamil professional wives in what they refer to as “debilitating” positions, where their inability to work (even at low-wage jobs) reinforces their dependence on their spouses.

A particular point of interest which emerged from my discussions with these women was their absolute “shock” in encountering these structural barriers to their successful labor market incorporation in the United States. Unlike their green-card migrant counterparts who were prepared for the “challenges” of seeking work in America, a number of professional wives admitted to having been ignorant or naïve about professional life in the United States, anticipating only that they would have better professional opportunities here than in India. Interestingly for me, despite having been prepared by their spouses for the emotional and psychological effects that accompany migration, the realities of accessing professional work in America had rarely been broached prior to migration. I hypothesize that this occurred largely due to the difference in Tamil husbands’ and wives’ migration and settlement experience, in that, having emigrated for the most part as students (before becoming professionals and then sponsoring their wives’ migration), Tamil husbands’ experienced the ease that the latter route provides in labor market incorporation thereby precluding their anticipation of the incorporation difficulties their dependent wives encountered.
Needless to say, as described in the previous chapter, Tamil professional wives responded by resisting their enforced dependence, by articulating and highlighting their professional identities commensurate with their socially designated ones as wives. This involved their efforts to find any job that would ameliorate their dependence. However, the structural conditions described above made them especially vulnerable in that their labor was exploited either by soliciting their work on a voluntary basis or by not paying them for it. Prema and Revathi explain:

I actually stayed home those two years [after immigration] because of visa stipulations. The H-4 [visa category for dependents of those on H-1B business permits] you know… I could not work. I was [on] a dependent visa at that time. So, I did whatever I could, I studied for my [licensing] exams and I began looking for some position to work here… to do something that was academic related. So I did meet with physicians and I was… you can't call it, "work, work" but I did go to a physician’s office and was informally meeting patients with him. Then I actually officially joined a voluntary internship, a rotatory sort of voluntary thing… because till then [she finished her licensing exams], they refused to even to look at me. It’s [being dependent professional wife] is debilitating in the sense it’s just restrictive. It’s a restrictive visa because it does not allow you to work. It is a dependent visa, so… you can only do voluntary things. And even those voluntary things are fine… but every time you went into the hospital and said you’re interested in doing something, they would really be very concerned if you were going to break their rules… and so you had to go in… literally the way I got in was as a volunteer. They gave me a white coat, but it specifically had my name on it saying volunteer MD. (Prema Devarajan, 38, Physician)

[Through] mutual friends [of her husband’s]… they put me in touch with somebody who got me a job, with one of these IT companies. That was when the IT boom was happening [in the United States] remember? The whole kind of consulting and the IT programming and all that. At that point, I just want to work! [with emphasis] I didn’t care what I was doing. So I told these people… I said, “look I’ll do business development [for them].” Yes [she had a discussion with employer of not being paid for her work, until H1-B comes through]. When I was employed, the employer said "I am going to apply for your transfer from H4 to H1-B, but until it happens I can’t really pay you." So I said, "that’s fine, we'll agree on a salary, but defer it....” So I was basically working with them as a business development person and wasn’t getting paid. It was the idea… the thought was that they are going to apply for my H1-B and after that came through, they were supposed to kind of retroactively kind of pay me. So that was fine. So and it was a good year, I actually made a lot of money for those guys. It went on… January, February, March, April, and no sign of the H1-B. And then we [her husband and her] finally found out, they never applied for my H1-B. So then at that point, I was thinking, you know this is going nowhere really fast… I’ll lose the rest of my life… so it gets frustrating… WHAT DO I DO? [with emphasis]. (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)
In their attempt to answer the question “what do I do?” Tamil professional wives begin to realize that the only viable strategy to circumventing the structural impediments to their labor market incorporation, and thereby accessing well-paying professional jobs, is to retrain themselves in the United States by returning to school full-time.\footnote{It is germane to recognize that I distinguish professional wives’ return to school from that of student wives’ (who I included in the student migrant route) as the latter often emigrate with the express purpose of attending university in the United States and choose the married migration route to fulfill expectations of gender appropriate migration. Accordingly, unlike professional wives who only recognize the need for an American education after negative encounters with the American labor market, student wives often transfer their immigration status to that of students almost immediately upon their arrival in the United States.} Revathi continues:

....So then what I did was… I don’t know what made me do it, but… you know nobody recognizes IIM [Indian Institute of Management MBA] degree [in the United States] right? So who would recognize IIM degree? Only Indian professors. So I [emailed] all the Indian professors [at universities in Atlanta] and I said "look, here I am…this is my background, what do you think I should do?" And [one professor] said, “go back to school.” He just said, "go back and do another MBA, don’t even think about it." He said, “at the end of the day, if you don’t have a degree from here, you’re not going to get anywhere.” So I went back to school and did another MBA. I was actually really depressed in a way because [the university that she attended] is ranked lower worldwide than IIM is. But I had to do it just to get a job here. It was a no brainer…to get a good job, I had to get an [American] MBA.

What is particularly important to note about Revathy’s response, just like in the case of other Tamil professional wives, is that the social capital they draw upon when deciding to obtain American credentials is ethnic in its character, in that they depend upon other Indian compatriots such as the Indian professor above and/or other Tamil wives who have taken the similar route to labor market incorporation. Further, echoing the integrated femininity that Tamil women are constructing and negotiating through the migration process, this motivation to seek American credentials and thereafter professional work, is not only shaped by their self-identification as professional women seeking personal growth and financial independence (as will be discussed later in this chapter), but also by their socially designated identities as wives and mothers seeking increased opportunities through their work to improve their families’ quality of life in the United States.
For Tamil professional wives however, entering American universities is not as simple as it is for student migrants in that it involves a spousal negotiation along two veins. First, my research indicates that unlike the latter who emigrated with the express purpose of pursuing higher education in the America, professional wives have to negotiate with their husbands about all aspects of their academic decision as spouses very often shoulder the financial burden involved in getting an American education. Accordingly, spouses often subtly influence wives’ education decisions (drawing upon their own professional experiences, and knowledge of cost of education) by pointing them in the direction of professions that are particularly well-paying and in high-demand (for example: especially those in IT, business related etc), which for some Tamil wives involves switching from the professions that they had trained for in India and choosing a brand new career path. Having stated this, it is however remark worthy that husbands do not pressure wives into making these decisions, but only inform them of the variety of educational options available to fulfill their goals.

I was interested in doing something like Environmental pollution and would end up being a professor in college... And he [her husband] said, “why don’t you try software and see whether you can understand the basics of software and see whether you can learn something....” (Vidya Pillai, 39, IT Professional)

Meanwhile in 1977, I took a couple of courses…RPG, FORTRAN and ASSEMBLER. I didn’t even speak a word of English. I went to a technical college…. [She chose to do computer programming] because he [her husband] came home and talked about it all the time. So I took classes [in computer programming] and then I thought, “I have the education to work now…why not I try?” (Shanta Anand, 58, Teacher)

The second arena of spousal negotiations by Tamil professional wives who became full-time students involved those around the routines of everyday life balancing the demands of full-time education with those of family life especially for those women who entered school after the birth of their children. I argue that this area of gender negotiations is particularly essential because we are reminded here of my findings in the previous chapter, of Tamil professional
wives choosing to “play house” – i.e. shoulder the bulk of domestic responsibility – during their initial settlement as dependent wives. Although I argued in that chapter that Tamil women’s willingness to play house was bounded by the personal time limit they set for this play, a number of them began families during that period and therefore temporarily extended the earlier time limit to enable them to care for young children before embarking on educational or professional ambitions. Therefore their ability to partake of full-time education was predicated upon negotiating with spouses such that the latter assume a larger share (than previously taken) in domestic responsibilities.

Interestingly, almost across the board, Tamil women ruefully noted that this increased participation of spouses in domestic responsibility was most evident in child care, rather than in the performance of household chores (cooking, cleaning, laundry) which continued to be the purview of women. Choosing to organize their academic schedules such that they attended classes only in the evenings (after their husbands’ return from work to care for kids), and on a couple of days in the week, Tamil women spoke of performing these necessary household chores on their “off days,” thereby making the necessary preparations for their husbands’ to take over. Nonetheless, what became evident as we moved deeper into the interview process was that these initial spousal negotiations over school-family balance became the foundation for Tamil women’s later negotiations of work-family arrangements with their spouses. Two Tamil professional wives narrate their “hectic” lives when they attended full-time school

I was taking care of the household since I was a full time homemaker...I was used to doing everything at home, and so when I started going out [to school] suddenly things wouldn’t change because I still had to do everything. But [if] I wasn’t doing [some chores], my husband would adjust to it in the sense that if I don’t cook he will not say anything but go out and eat, but he wouldn’t cook either because he was not used to cooking. So my daughters...I started spending less time and my husband started spending more with them. My husband would pick them up after [he finished at the] office, he would feed them and
put the kids in bed by the time I got back [from school] at 10 or 11 o’clock at night. (Shakuntala Mahadevan, 34, Corporate America Executive)

So, I don’t remember what happened to my son between age 2 to 5 when I was doing my residency. I’ve gone sleepless nights…36 hours trying to finish things. And then when I went home, all I would to do is actually sleep, you know…I’d go home, eat and crash. That was it! And then next morning, I had to get up and go back to work. My husband did a lot of it [child care]. In fact, this is what my husband said, "I was like a single dad, or a single parent for my son for those 3 years.” ...Just feeding him and getting him dressed or you know…getting him to do their nightly routine and getting him to bed, all of that my husband did. But whenever I had time, say on the weekends, I’ll come home and I’d cook in bulk. I would do all the, the subjhis [vegetable dishes] and curries and sambars [South Indian vegetable curry] and all that for 2 -3 weeks and I’d freeze it. So then he’d have enough in the fridge for feed [everyone]…then he’ll start using it every day till he kind of ran out of it…or if he didn’t like something, he’ll go and buy something for all of us. (Prema Devarajan, 38, Physician)

Upon attending American universities, Tamil professional wives were subsequently successful in accessing professional labor in the United States drawing upon the similar benefits of professional networks, and American qualifications that student migrants experienced. After their difficulties in labor market incorporation, these resources were especially critical to boosting their personal and professional self-confidence that they could be successful professional women, capable of enjoying the benefits accruing from their professional labor especially to their families.

Thus in sum, although at the time of data collection, Tamil women are all involved in professional work and have successfully contributed to their families attainment of an upper-middle class status in the United States; dependent on their method of migration (as mediated by gender) their routes to labor market incorporation offer varying degrees of challenges emanating largely from the structures of opportunity (namely immigration policy, non-transfer of skills, and professional networks) within which they are located and defined as immigrant women of color. Consequently, I theorize that their subsequent incorporation into the American workforce is a
function of the interaction of their agentic decisions (such as choosing to work from the bottom up, choosing to work voluntarily/without pay, returning to school) and their structural position.

**Indian ‘Woman’ in the American Workplace: Gender, Racial, and Migrant Encounters with Professional Work**

Having successfully transitioned to professional work, Tamil women have to now negotiate their racialized gender and migrant status within professional workplaces. I contextualize these experiences within my argument that workplaces are structured by inequality regimes, namely interlocked processes and practices that reproduce and maintain class, gender, and racial inequality within work organizations creating differential work experiences for Tamil women as migrant women of color compared to their American counterparts especially white men (Acker 1990, 2006; Amott and Matthaie 1996; Browne and Misra 2003; Kanter 1977; Mohanty 2002). What becomes immediately apparent through my analysis is that although these experiences are structured along their particular professions and the organizational culture of companies they are employed with (as has been acknowledged by the work and occupations scholarship), key structural elements of difference transcend professional and company boundaries. Given the time and length constraints of this dissertation, it is the latter that I recount in this section.

Despite professional work being less gender and race segregated than in the past, my findings uncover that Tamil women’s differential work experiences occur along two axes of difference – namely being women in male dominated professions; and being people/women of color in white dominated professions. It is important to recognize that although I separate their gender and race experiences for expediency in narration, in reality these intersect such that one cannot be separated from the other (and to some extent this will be reflected in my narration),
and is acknowledged as such by Tamil women. I conclude this section by presenting Tamil women’s agentic reactions to their differential treatment.

**Being in Male Dominated Professions**

Tamil women in male dominated professions such as medicine, engineering, corporate America (which includes management and business related jobs), and certain disciplines in academia have to negotiate gender through the masculine work culture of these work places. Referencing my comments in the literature review (chapter 2), I argue that masculine organizational culture is shaped by the dialectical relationship between the greater proportion of men in these workplaces, and the gendered ideological construction of an unencumbered worker – a man with “zero drag” (Hochschild 1997:xviii-xix) from family life – as the ideal and desired employee especially at higher organizational levels (Acker 1990). Consequently, for Tamil women navigating this masculine work culture results in three gendered encounters which contribute to their differential professional experiences and outcomes compared with similarly positioned (at the same professional level as them) male colleagues.

The first gendered encounter involves experiencing a glass ceiling in their upward professional mobility within their masculine oriented workplaces. With particular reference to gender, the glass ceiling that Tamil women encounter is constructed by their continued characterization in the workplace in solely patriarchal terms which emphasize their maternal roles over their professional ones – what Saraswati refers to as “not being taken seriously”. Simply stated, they are perceived as wives and mothers, rather than as professionals resulting in the workplace constructing them as less reliable employees compared to their male counterparts, who continue to be defined within the parameters of hegemonic masculinity which emphasizes their professional identities creating the perception that they are less likely to “shirk” professional responsibilities for domestic ones.
I feel that women get easily passed over for promotions or not taken seriously. I’m talking more from my experiences and I feel that there have been instances where...I felt like I didn’t get my due just because I happen to be a woman...you know. I’ve had male colleagues doing the exact same work and there’s always been that feeling that they were definitely more on the track to a promotion than I was, and I didn’t feel it was because of any lack of abilities on my part. I think it... [is because] they [men in positions of power in work organizations] don’t take you seriously. The belief is that their [women’s] personal life will take precedence over professional life. And that’s just a matter of the responsibilities a woman takes on right? So the presumption is always that given a choice, a woman will always put family before the corporation. For him [male employees] it is probably just the opposite...[the perception that] he will be sincere about his work and that will come before his family...in the sense that he is less likely to shirk his work because of family responsibility intrusions. So as a result, I think women are not in general taken seriously and kind of given the pass. When there is an equivalent male member around who can perform the same job, I think the woman is very likely [to] get overlooked for promotion or for a salary increase. (Saraswati Vinayak, 44, Corporate America Executive)

Consequently, Tamil women like Saraswati note, that despite the quality of their work, and their commensurate skills with their male colleagues, they tend to be preferred as employees (who execute professional tasks), rather than managers or supervisors at higher organizational levels who are responsible for making decisions and/or running projects/departments. Central to this preference is the fear that the professional demands of these upper-management positions will clash with those of family life, and the perception that in a bind, women (especially mothers) will choose the latter. Therefore, as Saraswati states, women are passed over for promotions and commensurate salary increases thereby creating occupational and wage differentials between them and their male counterparts (Elliott and Smith 2004; Hochschild 1997; Ismail 2007; Maier 1999; Maume 2004; Powell 1999; Reskin and Hartmann 1986; Reskin and Padavic 1994).

My research also determines that complicating this encounter with glass ceilings, Tamil women’s attempts at challenging these organizational impediments to their upward professional mobility is not always easy as they have to be continuously accountable for their gender presentations at work (Acker 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987). Consequently, they are often caught in a double-bind wherein they are feminized in the workplace and thus denied
professional mobility, but simultaneously run the risk of being labeled as “unfeminine” or
derelict in their duties as mothers should they embrace and perform the more masculine
behaviors and traits of being aggressive in the workplace, and prioritizing the latter over their
family lives. Revathy Venkatesh, explains this in a conversation she had with a male colleague
who expected her to “quit” her demanding Corporate America job when she had her second
child, and then was taken aback when she negated that assumption, resulting in his subtle
judgment of her femininity performance through his comments of “you can’t do that!”

….There my [colleague who was] senior to me. We went to India once on a business trip
and he said, "oh, you have one kid, right? What are you going to do when your second one
comes along? You have to quit, right?" I said, "no." [And he said] "What do you mean?
How are you going to manage? You’re going to have to quit, right? You can’t do that [be a
full-time working mother of two children], you just can’t [do] that!" [with emphasis]

For Heman Nagaraj, a 32 year old Generic Professional, being consciously aware of her gender
performance at work to avoid negative cynosure involves the idea of “looking pretty” and yet
“getting her hands dirty” thereby demonstrating both her competence as a professional without
the loss of her femininity. By contrast, because doing appropriate masculinity is connected only
to the work place performance, men do not run the similar risk of being perceived “less
seriously” merely on the basis of external indicators of gender, nor of their professional abilities
being called into question on the basis of their gender (Acker 1990, 2006).

Well…[in her profession] I have to go to a site 20 miles from here, driving a pick up truck,
doing everything and then come back and look pretty. So you have to do both ways. As a
female you wear your suit, you go for meetings, and then at the same time, you say “hey, I
can go to the construction site and get my hands dirty.” So you got to be doing both [but]
you can’t look like scruffy all the time….At the same time [you have to] look
professional…look pretty….It’s more like when a female presents, you can’t wear your
shorts and t-shirt. You got to look professional…like I have to always look professional. I
can’t afford to look like a beach bum. I just cannot! If I was to just go in jeans, people
might not take me seriously.

Either way, the interaction of the masculine organizational culture, and the construction of glass
ceilings for women with families results in the upper-echelons of male dominated professions
being populated not only by men, but as Revathy notes “none of whom had working spouses”
creating an organizational climate which is subtly “telling” – that married women with children
would rarely proceed up the organizational hierarchy to “upper-level management.”

The second gendered encounter with the masculine work culture of these professions
involves Tamil women’s job profiles and interactions at work which not only reinforce their
gender identities and performances at work, but also serve to disadvantage them. This occurs in
several ways. One, is the tendency within male dominated professions to place limitations on
women’s job profiles predicated on the essentialist assumption that their sex impedes their ability
of performing certain aspects of the job (often the more physical aspects).

One thing I can tell you is that, as you know [particular specialty in] engineering male
dominated and it is very much true. Even now it is very much true. And the reason I say
that is because you know, there [is a perception that there] are only certain things a woman
can do. In the sense that for example, you know like inspections that we do... right? For
example, if you’re inspecting a multi-story building or something, generally they [men in
the workplace] feel that, OK, being that you’re a female you are afraid of heights, you
know. I mean not that women don’t do it...but then I think in those situations, there are
definitely restrictions. I’ve had situations where...you know...I was told, you know,
"you’re a female...you may be more comfortable if we [men] do it [the physically
demanding aspects of inspection]." (Vijaya Murugu, 34, Engineer)

Needless to say, this is then used as the justification for denying women commensurate upward
professional growth as men (who perform these job tasks), often on the grounds that they cannot
be rewarded for not doing the same job as men do. Accordingly, Tamil women like Vijaya, talk
of having to continuously and consciously challenge these assumptions by taking on and
competently performing these job tasks often without being able to solicit assistance from
anyone for fear of appearing incapable.

In challenging the masculine work place culture that attempts to restrict their job profile in
the manner described above, Tamil women recount the their third gendered encounter namely
their workplace interactions stemming from their difficulty in accessing informal networks
within the workplace which are crucial to them learning about upcoming job tasks and to consequently move up in the occupational ladder. By informal networks I refer to the “web of relationships…[where] membership is voluntary and [which] help workers achieve work-related, personal, and social goals through unofficial channels.” (Elliott and Smith 2002; McGuire 2002: 304). As I have already outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2), by virtue of their informal nature, the creation and maintenance of these networks is often predicated upon the informal interactions and socializing among co-workers (Elliott and Smith 2002). Interacting with the greater proportion of men in these workplaces, creating and accessing these informal networks is centered around masculine activities such as drinking, golfing, clubbing, and socializing after office hours. My participants contend, that as women they are doubly disadvantaged in their ability to access these networks as not only are they rarely invited to join these interactions, but also because their familial responsibilities hamper their ability to socialize for any length of time after work – both of which have negative consequences for their professional growth. Thus, Prema explains:

Yeah, yeah [not having access to networks] because you know guys tend to you know…go out together and sit in a bar and they drink and they party…. All the male physicians in my group, at least once in a while they’ll all get together, [in the] evenings they’re out in the bar, having a drink over something and then they’ll decide to do one particular study that they’ll happily neglect women out of it. (Prema Devarajan, 38, Physician)

Having outlined the gendered navigations of Tamil women through male dominated workplaces, it is also important for me to briefly account for those of my participants located in largely female dominated professions such as teaching, self-employed/home-based entrepreneurship, and health insurance adjustors/managers. Drawing upon my earlier mentioned arguments of these jobs deliberately recruiting women because of the nature of the work involved, the workplace is not dominated by a masculine work culture. Consequently, Tamil women within these professions do not narrate any gendered difficulties in accessing work or
upward mobility. The catch however, is that because these jobs are feminized, the structure of the workplace only offers limited opportunities for upward mobility, and although women are able to access these more than in the case of male dominated professions, men within feminized professions experience quicker upward mobility (due to the same reasoning about their professional capabilities that exist in male dominated professions) which can in effect create another version of the glass ceiling within these professions (Williams 2007).

Being in White Dominated Professions

Due to the intersectional nature of gender and race, male dominated professions are also those which tend to be white dominated not only in terms of employees, but importantly in the management and decision making positions in these workplaces. Located as migrant, people of color (often as some Tamil women note, the only/one of the few Indians in their workplaces) within this context, Tamil women encounter several professional impediments some of which are racial complications of issues already mentioned in the earlier section such as the glass ceiling and difficulty accessing jobs.

Following from the above discussion about women encountering a glass ceiling in their occupational mobility, Tamil women characterize the upper-management echelons of these companies comprising “an old boy’s network.” Accordingly, while there is no doubt that men dominate these positions, it is important to clarify that considering the racial composition of the workplace, it is white men who occupy favorable positions in these professions. As migrant women of color, Tamil women believe that this disadvantages them in two key ways. One, referencing Kanter’s (1977) concept of homosocial reproduction – like preferring like – Tamil women argue that there is a preference for their own (read: white/man/American), especially in moving into top decision making positions, where the inherited privileges of being white (men) (such as belong to the same class, being of “old money”, having gone to the same schools,
families being known to one another) create an automatic barrier preventing anyone different (along the axes of gender, racial, and migrant status) from breaking through (Elliott and Smith 2004; Maume 2004; Powell 1999; Reskin and Padavic 1994).

[Corporate America Company] is still a very old, traditional company…where [at the top] the men are white and they don’t expect women to go up too far. They’re [also] more comfortable with [people] of their own color or their background….So you have people who have been in the company from their father and grandfather’s [generation]. There’s a lot of shared history, so people know your name, and so those are some of the folks that move up faster than others. And you have the old money…and you have old folks whose relatives have been at a certain level or position [in the company]…so that comes in. And it’s like the subtle knowledge they have…as a whole community. (Gauri, 43, Corporate America Executive)

Second, as women of color not only are they often excluded from informal professional networks, but also differentially treated within formal ones. Compared to their white male counterparts (and in some professional arenas their men of color counterparts), these networks are less likely to invest in women, connect them with professional opportunities and resources, or provide the necessary mentoring and positive evaluations that accessing positions of power in the workplace (Cabrera 2007; Elliott and Smith 2004; Huffman 2002; McGuire 2002; McGuire 2000). Thus, as Tamil women note, often corroborating extant scholarship, although people of color are being increasingly recruited into organizations due to diversity policies, at best they experience a slow climb up promotional ladders, and at worst a racialized, gendered glass ceiling that blocks any further mobility (Ammott and Matthaei 1996; Browne and Misra 2003; Acker 2006; Elliott and Smith 2004; Maume 2002; McGuire 2002). Consequently, as some participants like Revathy note in the particular case of women, the only ones successful in accessing the power of management positions are single, white women who are able to integrate into the old boys networks largely due to their racial privilege.

So race plays a factor [and] gender plays a bigger factor. It’s just the culture in this place. It’s just an old boy’s network. They have their old boy beers, and you know…it’s a lot of traditional Southern people who are here…so they have this whole “my dad and your dad
went to school together,” that kind of thing. Right, so the only woman really I’ve seen who has actually managed to do something…you know kind of had a decent trajectory here, her father-in-law’s a big shot at the [company] and she’s smart… but she’s got the whole pedigree. If you don’t have that pedigree you’re not going up here. (Revathy Venkatesh, Corporate America Executive)

In addition to racializing the glass ceiling, the racial organization of the workplace has also in some cases resulted in white/citizen preference at work which sometimes impeded Tamil women’s initial attempts at accessing professional labor. Tamil women contend that for the most part this occurred in sale and marketing positions – what they refer to as “customer service or front end jobs” - where wariness about their linguistic capabilities and race resulted in them being passed over for jobs; although in a couple of cases, this occurred when attempting to access skilled, professional labor. Nonetheless, Tamil women were quick to reiterate that this constituted merely initial professional difficulties, and did not perceive it as having long term effects on their careers.

I feel, you know…if I had not been an Indian, I would have had a better opportunity [in finding a job when she first arrived in the United States]. Yeah, you know if I were a natural born American feel I would have a definite advantage….In many ways, because say they [employers] want to present a certain image for company… I think in that area, I would lose out. Because even though it’s not very explicit, people do have reservations about hiring other ethnic people in the front end jobs…like say, customer service, things like that… (Nandini Ramdas, 47, Entrepreneur)

…let me put it this way when I finished residency, there was another American girl, she was a Jewish girl, that finished with me. And when it came to job opportunities, even though she had not passed her boards, she was given a preference. (Savitri Ramanan, 61, Physician)

Some other issues emanating from Tamil women’s racial encounters with white dominated workplaces include the difficulties emanating from being vegetarian which some Tamil women attribute to their difficulty in informally socializing on the job. Arguing that most workplaces that they attend are not very sensitive to their dietary restrictions, Tamil women feel
uncomfortable in attending informal gatherings, lunches and dinners as they are unable to congregate over food.

Last week was teacher appreciation week. I was not given any vegetarian food. Whether I’m eating or not, they should offer…they need to consider what we prefer. They didn’t ask anything and that really still bothers me. (Shanta Anand, 58, Teacher)

Additionally, for some Tamil professional women (including myself as documented in the personal narrative at the start of this dissertation), a constant source of irritation is the tendency of their American counterparts to particularize their accents or Indian pronunciations of English words. Saraswati Vinayak, the Corporate America Executive explains:

Speaking the language could be a barrier. Because they [Americans] now got to carefully listen to what you say as opposed to you know...if they are talking "American." So even at work, you know…you don’t express yourself the same way as the typical American does…and sometimes it takes awhile for them to tune into your accent even. Sometimes I would feel like I was dismissed…just dismissed off just because they could not understand what I was saying or did not have the patience to take the time to understand what I was saying. They kind of [look] askance at you. It’s always been a little irritating to me. And sometimes it [the accent and pronunciation] throws people off...[who say]"what the heck are you saying? Why are you trying to say? Use some simple word instead of writing some very bombastic word which no one understands!" So I’ve had situations like that [at work].

While the constant cynosure of accent and pronunciation may appear to be relatively banal, and not signify anything racial, I argue that continuously “looking askance” at how Indians speak English serves to subtly reiterate the non-belonging of Indians within the ethno-racial landscape of the United States, and of the American workplace. As I will discuss later, there is no doubt that our facility with English privileges us in professional settings. However, the reluctance of some Americans to attempt to understand a different articulation of English serves to reinforce Tamil women’s racial status in the workplace, compounding their gendered positioning, in posing some risk of being dismissed or not being taken seriously.

As I had done previously, it is important for me to conclude this sub-section with a brief accounting of the racial navigations of Tamil women in workplaces dominated by people of
color (other Indians or Asians) especially those such as IT, teaching, and entrepreneurship. For the most part, Tamil women in these professions narrated an absolute ease in being people of color in the workplace, such that they did not even recognize their racial difference. They spoke of none of the issues that other professional women raised – such as racial glass ceilings, language issues, job profile difficulties etc – which I attribute (especially in the case of IT) not only to the more diverse racial composition of these workplaces, but also to the fact that in these professions in particular, employers/supervisors tend to be people of color.

But a very interesting finding that emerged from our conversations (and which I will discuss next) was the employment of a gendered controlling image about Indian women (drawing upon model minority ideas) by several workplaces often resulting in Indian employees being preferred (Collins 2000). This was especially the case among teachers, where I began to notice that their lack of difficulty with American parents stemmed from them being racialized (as third-world women) as “natural and good mothers” and thus strict disciplinarians, focused on children’s education. Consequently, American parents are often keen for their children to be in my participants’ classes, contributing to their demand, precluding any negative racial work experiences.

See what they [American parents] say is, “what is the Indian mentality?” We [Indians] want the career…we want to kids [to get an] education. So they [American parents] know that education is the very important for them [Indians]. So they [American parents] don’t want the kids to come and play around or just do coloring or something like that. They want the kids to learn. So they prefer to have the Asian teachers. So they will think that, “Ok, definitely they are not going to just do anything [with the children] they [Indian teachers] will bring the kid out [academically]. (Pushpa Hariharan, 39, Teacher)

For another of my participants, Ramya Venkatraman, who owns her own ethnically oriented business, being Indian/Tamil aids her professional experiences as it allows her the linguistic and cultural capital to interact with her Indian clients to sell the products that she markets.
Agentic Responses to the Racialized, Gendered American Workplace

Throughout this section, I have investigated the racialized, gendered, and sexualized structure of the American workplace through which Tamil women have to navigate being migrant women of color. It is important to recognize that although these structures pose impediments to their professional growth and occupational mobility, Tamil women are agentic actors and devise strategies to create spaces for themselves within these workplaces (Collins 2000; hooks 1984). I argue that in doing this they are demonstrating their commitment to their professional identities, while simultaneously integrating these into the core of their femininity. Accordingly, giving up is not an option, but accommodation and challenge are the more viable choices. To this effect Tamil women choose to construct their differential experiences within the American workplace as completely ubiquitous given their foreign status. Often arguing that similar treatment is meted out to foreigners in India, they contend that it is but natural for Americans to receive preferential treatment over “outsiders.” While ideas like this might appear to sound as though they have reconciled themselves to their structural reality, I contend that they rather, offer Tamil women the space for agentic responses.

By connecting racialized, and gendered professional experiences with their “foreign” status, Tamil women are in effect explaining these experiences as functions of their credentials and abilities not being recognized by Americans. Therefore, the “solution” lies with them (rather than structures) making the necessary efforts to change these conditions. Accordingly, Tamil women often contend that they choose to work harder than their male counterparts (though as I will explain later in the chapter, not at the cost of their familial responsibilities) to demonstrate their professional capabilities, and to stay continuously abreast of all the knowledge in their line of work. This strategy allows them to negotiate with the construction of them as less desirable employees and to carve out some sense of comfort in that they are not merely accepting
structural limitations but continuously reworking them. In the process they believe they are able to transcend their structural limitations. Take the instance of Hema Nagaraj, a 32 year old Generic Professional who openly discusses the “double whammy” she experiences being a woman of color in her male dominated, largely white workplace, which requires her to work much harder to “prove” herself. However, she concludes by commenting that her professional experience is “not bad,” especially once she has been able to prove her worth, thereby illustrating my point.

In a field like architecture, I have not met another Indian architect. So it’s [her company] all people from here [Americans]. It’s tough because you look different but you can’t take it to your heart because you know your stuff… but you have to every time… work a lot harder to prove yourself. That’s the reality. You know…I’m a female, Indian, architect. So it’s like a “double whammy.” But it’s not bad. I mean once you do your stuff right…you just have to work a lot harder… but once you prove your worth then people don’t really see the skin tone or the gender.

Readers will have noticed by this point, that in elaborating on Tamil women’s racialized gender navigations through the American workplace, I rarely use the terminology of discrimination, but rather that of differential treatment. This was a finding that emerged from my interviews with Tamil women where they distinguished between discrimination and differential treatment. Differential treatment often referred to their structural position as women of color within the workplace that resulted in the structural impediments they encountered. However, they were quick to argue that these factors had not, in their opinion, impeded their professional outcomes in the long term (largely because they proved themselves), and thus did not constitute discrimination.

To a large extent in making this claim, they were drawing upon their imaginings of India, where they believed the limitations of being Brahmin and pro-natalist nature of the society would have further restricted their professional growth as Brahmin women. Further, this claim is also organized by their recognition of the model minority stereotype about Indians that circulates
workplaces, which, they argue protects them from outright discriminatory treatment which is faced by their other Asian (usually Chinese), Latina/o and African-American counterparts. The model minority stereotypes Tamil women cite as most associated with Indians are those which classify us as hardworking, intelligent, capable, well-educated, and fluent in English, creating the perception that once we have proved our capabilities we can be “trusted” with more demanding professional responsibilities irrespective of our gender, racial, and migrant status (Reeves and Bennett 2004; Le 2009; Takaki 1998).

What is important to recognize, is that in a psychic maneuver, Tamil women do not merely account for the existence of these stereotypes, but subtly appear to buy into it themselves often by agreeing, that as Indians we are indeed more hardworking, intelligent, educated and capable than our other racial counterparts.

To a certain extent, yes [being Indian precludes from discrimination]. Because I’ve seen generally, they [Americans] have this idea that Indians are smart, Indians speak good English and [that] Indians are hard working. Oh yeah [believes that American perception of Indians at be correct], at least in the circle that I know of. I see other Indian physicians, I They’re all smart, they all communicate very well…you know all of us have different accents obviously, depending on which part of the country [India] we come from. But, any person on the street can understand an Indian. You know I can’t say that they’ll understand a Chinese person. (Prema Devarajan, 38, Physician)

Indians are smart you know and they [Americans] always treat you with respect because you [Indians] are responsible at work…you do your work. (Shanta Anand, 58, Teacher)

See, I think that anybody would not appreciate you from the day one that you join them [the workplace]. They [Americans] are looking at the work, the [Tamil women’s] work ethics, the way that you present your job, how fast you can do it…efficiency, everything. It takes time, but you can always prove yourself. I think you get respect after that. Discrimination comes only when you are a dud right?...[when] you don’t think or do something properly. Once you have work in your hand and you prove yourself, no one stops you after that. But most of the time it [differential treatment in workplace because she’s Indian] was not…it wasn’t that bad because you know everybody recognizes a smart person, I would say [and] I don’t mind calling myself smart...[so] they cannot take you for a ride. (Vidya Pillai, 39, IT Professional)
I theorize that the internalizing and reinforcing of the model minority stereotype is not hubris on their parts, but rather that the model minority imagery acts as a psychological shield by providing them a kit of resources which they believe to be unique to them and which they then employ to attempt overcome racial and gendered structural constraints to achieve the professional success they desire. Thus there is a sense among my participants, that by working hard, demonstrating their ability they can succeed professionally in the United States in ways not possible in India, even if they had made similar efforts. Critical to this is their sense of the United States (in contrast to corruption laden India) being a merit based society – the “land of opportunity” that “rewards hard work” irrespective of racial, gender, or national categorization. In turn this psychic maneuver gives them the emotional capital to focus on their professional lives/identities thereby integrating them into their socially designated ones and thereby constructing integrated femininity.

Having stated that in conclusion, it is also important for me to recognize here that to some extent this attribution of racial/gender structural barriers to individual characteristics (and thus to individual efforts in surmounting these), while an agentic response, is also a function of their class privilege. Operating much like white privilege which renders invisible to the dominant racial group, the workings of privilege in their life (in terms of access to resources, historical privileges accruing to them), Tamil women’s middle and upper-middle class backgrounds in India, and their eventual economic success in the United States, have to some extended blinded them to how their transported educated, class status, and social capital assisted in their racial/gendered navigations through the American workplace (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Feagin 2000; McIntosh 2006; Tuan 1998). This was very visible to me as the researcher whenever they commented on their caste status in India impeding their professional growth, and thereby
resulting in their migration, without the commensurate awareness of that very caste-class status (with the education, monetary capital, and kin ties inherent to it) being instrumental in their ability to emigrate from India, and in mediating their relatively rapid ascension into upper-middle class status in the United States. Accordingly, while I do not deny their hard work and ability as facilitating their successful professional mobility, I theorize that this was aided by their relatively favorable structural positioning as an immigrant group tagged as a “model,” of their middle to upper-class status that organized the process.

**Becoming Professional Women: Transforming Emphasized Femininity to Integrated Femininity**

Through their challenges in accessing the American labor market, and their racialized, gender navigations with the workplace, one finding which becomes particularly emergent from my interviews is the centrality of the professional identity to the femininity/gender identities of Tamil women. Accordingly all my participants self-identified as professional women, and constructed this identity as a “personal identity” distinct from and yet connected to their more “socially designated” identities as wives and mothers. I call this *integrated femininity* because for Tamil women being professionals, just as being wives and mothers, is the core of who they are as women. As I spoke with them, there is no denying that the context of the United States is a critical factor in the consolidation of this identity as it provided them the space and resources to not only negotiate with emphasized Tamil femininity through migration and settlement, but also to fulfill and succeed at professional goals and ambitions. But before I can explain this process, it is important for me to begin with an explanation of the motivators of this professional identity. My analysis finds that Tamil women come by this identity as professionals, through two routes—those who have always desired to be professionals; and those who expected to be homemakers and transformed this expectation upon migration.
Desiring to be Professionals

This category represents the bulk of my participants, who admitted during the interviews to a desire and to some extent a self-expectation to be professionals, dating from their childhood. For the most part, this self-expectation to be professionals can be connected to their social location in India particularly factors such as their upbringing outside Southern India, their blended socialization, and to the role of women family members (especially in the case of those who grew up in the South). Referencing their exposure to the more liberal gender ideas and to role models of professional women from their Northern upbringing, their internalizing of parental ideas of education being a means of independence for women and thus working hard to succeed at it, and the history in some of their families of working women members; Tamil women argued that “it was never clear to them” that they ought to be homemakers – that it should be their only ambition – rather than merely one, in a plethora of personal goals.

But I wanted to accomplish something…I mean be more productive besides taking care of the children and family…there’s so much more that I can do and there is so much more I can do for myself, to accomplish something. So that’s the reason why I started to have my own profession…(Shakuntala Mahadevan, 34, Corporate America Executive)

This non-recognition of homemaking as an “acceptable” feminine expectation (for the times) has to be contextualized in the prevalent Tamil femininity constructs which, while encouraging women to be educated and to work, emphasized wifehood and motherhood as the central feminine identities, superordinate to any other (Khandelwal 2002; Lakshmi 1984; Lessinger 1995; Rangaswamy 2000; Thiruchandran 1997). Accordingly, I argue that in articulating this desire to be professionals, Tamil women are beginning to, and are aware that they are challenging emphasized Tamil femininity constructs, with some Tamil women acknowledging to me that they have “always been [gender] rebels.” For these Tamil women, homemaking is a monotonous, boring activity, which while important (especially when their
children are young), does not fulfill them personally, largely because it confines their interaction and sphere of influence to only their families, and offers limited opportunities for personal growth. It is important to recognize that this aversion to being full-time homemakers is also class influenced, in that as middle to upper-middle class women, homemaking in India often involves supervisory roles with the more physical aspects of the work being performed by paid domestic labor, which in turn contributes to its more mundane nature.

In contrast to the above scenario, Tamil women reference their educational qualifications often arguing that their parental insistence on higher education equipped them with personal skills, capabilities and qualifications which not only needed to be productively utilized, but also gave them the insight that they “could be much more than mere homemakers.” Importantly, education provided them a source of identity – of being a highly educated woman – which for them automatically coalesced into a nascent professional identity, on the grounds of professional work being the automatic extension of a higher education (and one quite interestingly not anticipated by their parents). Three Tamil women explain:

I am not the kind to say "hey, I could have just sat at home." And…I’m in no way saying that they [homemakers] are not contributing….But I just didn’t see myself as being fulfilled by just doing that. I don’t think it [being a full time homemaker] would have been complete fulfillment for me. I see that [being homemaker] as important, I mean I get a lot of joy out of that, but personally, for me I would have felt…I’m sure if I had just stayed at home and done that, I would constantly question, "did I do what I wanted in life?" My intellectual fulfillment... and it’s not just intellectual, emotional growth, personal growth [occurs through professional work]. (Janaki Parathasarathi, 44, Professor)

I’m not one of those ones who’s cut for a routine, monotonous chores...[an] at home person...you know, tending only chores at home. I’m not one of them. I have to be constantly doing something more than that. No, I felt like I can do something much more than that [being a homemaker]. That’s what it was. I felt like I can something more. I thought I had some capabilities beyond the routine of cooking and cleaning...so I felt I shouldn’t be sitting at home and doing only what I’m suppose to be doing like a traditional woman, but I should be doing something much more....I definitely wanted to be a career person. (Manya Ramalingam, 51, Scientist)
Oh because I’ve worked towards it [becoming a professional], and I’ve spent quite a miserable number of years studying for it. I have trained myself for how many years of education? 22-24 years of education for a goal to work. So, if I was not to work, then I wouldn’t have gone through that effort. The stakes are much higher after education. I mean, if I had just done high school and I got married [immediately] it might be a slightly different….(Gauri Ananth, 43, Corporate America Executive)

Therefore my research finds, that this group of Tamil women who had a self-expectation to be professionals, drew upon their social location in India particularly their parents’ emphasis on education, to use this resource to begin to fashion personal gender identities that contrasted not only with prevalent gender constructs, but also parental expectations of them. Within the confines of emphasized Tamil femininity, while parents fashioned education as providing women with a means of independence (especially in a marital context), Tamil women reworked this idea, to extend the boundaries of this independence, and thus femininity, to create spaces for the construction and performance of nascent personal identities as professionals. Importantly however, in beginning to voice this identity in India, there is a cognizance among these Tamil women that being professional is not contradictory to being mothers/wives, but rather complementary such that none of them expected to be single, career women, but women who would be and do both. In articulating and beginning to operationalize this, I contend that they were embarking on the construction of integrated Tamil femininity which as I will argue later, is consolidated in the United States.

…[I realized] that you could be a great mom and yet work, so that staying at home and working needn’t necessarily be in conflict with each other and the quality of care as a mother definitely does not suffer if you are efficient enough to manage your time and you could be good at both. (Hema Nagaraj, 32, Generic Professional)

**Expecting to be Homemakers**

This category represents the minority of my participants who explained that they had always anticipated being full-time homemakers rather than professionals. Making the connections to their social location in India, revealed that these were Tamil women who grew up
in Southern India, in relatively more conservative families than their Northern counterparts mentioned earlier. Accordingly, not only were they socialized into traditional Tamil gender expectations of women being homemakers, but these women chose this as their life paths. For them, this choice was consolidated and to some extent legitimated by the lack of other Tamil working women (especially Brahmin, upper-class women) role models in Southern India especially in the late 1970s to the 1980s.

My research finds that migration to the United States was the primary instigator of their professional identities, where these Tamil women began to make the gradual transition from self-identifying as homemakers to self-identifying as professionals, wives and mothers. To a large extent this transformation was organized by their structural location in the United States as immigrant women/families of color. As mentioned above, while being homemakers in India might not have involved the physical aspects of this work for Tamil women, the presence of extended kin networks and Tamil community enveloping Tamil homemakers, kept them involved, busy, connected and stimulated. By contrast, using very similar terminology as their “anticipating being professional” counterparts, homemaking in the United States assumes a monotonous, disconnected nature largely because of the availability of home-assistance technology and the spatial segregation of the United States which leaves them relatively isolated from other Indian/American homemakers. This is further exacerbated by what some of my participants characterized as the “economic and social volatility of the United States,” especially considering their immigrant status.

I think that you know your life is very [economically] volatile here [in the United States] and things change so dramatically. And also back home you know I would have the support of my family. Here you’re kind of on your own. One thing is….I mean back home if you’ve been working for 15 years, they [company] would feel an obligation. And here it’s not like that. Your performance needs to be good. And you can just be cut off…Friday you might just lose your job, so things like that. And …lack of support, I would
say... family support... so I can’t just go anywhere here. Back home, I think my brother would just come out and help or something like that. So I think just being kind of by yourself here and in this kind of society where you’re only as good as you perform... being independent [by working] is very important... because if [her husband] doesn’t have anything [loses his job], I’m providing insurance [financial insurance to the family by her working]. (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

Because you’re [my participant] able to contribute something, all the burden is not on your husband... [especially given the] kind of job situation in U.S. It’s so easy to see lay offs and all those things, so you’re not as tense... when one person loses the paycheck, the other person can support and that’s a very healthy thing. You’re not losing your sleep because you would miss a paycheck. (Shakuntala Mahadevan, 34, Corporate America Executive)

Although Tamil women prize the merit oriented structure of the American workplace, they are aware that the commensurate implication is that “you are only as good as you perform,” and that American employers do not feel a sense of obligation toward employees (as they perceive Indian employers do) which would preclude them from terminating their work at short notice. Further, as Divya so eloquently notes, as immigrant families, they lack a social support structure they would have enjoyed in India (with the presence of their families) that could to some extent buffer adverse economic times. Considering this, Tamil women like Divya and Shakuntala feel far too economically and socially vulnerable in the United States, to organize their family lives around a single person’s income. I argue that in turn, this serves as the motivation for these Tamil women to embark upon professional lives in the United States, so as to provide economic “insurance” to their families. Interestingly however, although the motivation for professional work might have been familial in nature, once they embark upon it in the United States, it becomes a source of personal identity, much as in the case of their earlier counterparts.

**Constructing Integrated Femininity**

Irrespective of the route by which Tamil women come to identify as professionals – either by always desiring to be one, or expecting to be homemakers – migration and settlement in the United States the critical mediator of the transformation of emphasized Tamil femininity to the
integrated femininity that is the core of their identities. I argue that this identity is constructed at
the intersection of their social location in America as middle-to upper-middle class immigrant,
women of color, their agency, and the structural conditions of their life here. As I have already
demonstrated, as an immigrant community of color Tamil women perceive themselves as being
particularly economically and socially vulnerable to the vagaries of life in the United States.
Given this, and their goal of improving their quality of life and socio-economic status through
migration, women’s professional work becomes an integral component of their settlement
navigations. This is also influenced by the recognition by both groups of women cited above,
that homemaking in the United States is not merely monotonous, but also serves to inhibit their
successful adaptation to the society because it confines them only to the private realm of their
families, disconnecting and isolating them from the larger American society. Thus (as I will soon
elaborate), professional work is constructed as particularly essential in the United States, to
orienting them to American culture, to befriending Americans, and in providing them with a
sense of personal satisfaction lacking in homemaking. Although it appears that engaging in
professional work is a necessity of their structural position, rather than their choice, I contend
that the distance that the United States provides Tamil women from family and community
gender structures in India, their experience with bargaining with emphasized Tamil femininity
constructs to undertake migration and then to organize their gendered settlement, and the
resources (such as funded education, well-paying jobs not available in India at that time,
prevalence of working women) to act on their personal goals for professional work (which might
have been nascent in India), to consolidate their choice to work in the United States.

In attempting to explain how emphasized Tamil femininity is reorganized into integrated
femininity through their professional work, Tamil women reference the reasons and benefits
(often interchangeably) accruing from the latter. What became immediately apparent from our conversations was their inability to separate the personal and familial benefits of their work (except upon deliberate probing for it). By this I do not mean that they are unable to perceive the importance of their professional work to themselves as individuals (and women), because they are, and value these very individual benefits. However, interestingly, what emerged from the analysis was that while they did the latter, they also embedded the self within the familial context such that professional, wife, and mother could rarely be separated such that benefits accruing the self were automatically connected to those accruing to their families. These benefits of professional work embodied three interconnected areas – financial, psychological, and social.

Financial independence for themselves and their families was their first perceived benefit of their professional work (George 2005; Kibria 1993; Menjívar 1999; Pessar 1999; Sotelo 1994). By financial independence Tamil women referred to several things. One, working enabled them to have access to their own money to some extent shoring their marital power of asserting their right to spend without permission, guilt or approval. Interestingly however, few Tamil women characterized “own” money as having separate bank accounts, but more in a psychological sense that they are contributing members to the family income, and thus have the freedom to spend “their” money.

But still, when it comes to argument, you can always say, "I’m also earning, I’m a earning member, I want to do it for my family." For example yesterday I had to take a couple professors to lunch. I don’t have to get permission from anybody, but I need to tell where I’m going, what I’m doing, where I’m eating or things like that. You know that’s my own thing…I can do it. But still when you started working, you have the power and you don’t have to get the permission…that word permission…I don’t like that. You don’t have to get permission from your own husband. (Shanta Anand, 58, Teacher)

This was particularly important to dependent wives and/or those who had expected to be homemakers, who had noticed a hesitation in their free spending on themselves prior to their working, not because their husbands’ prevented them from doing so, but more because they were
aware of not contributing to the family income and thus being hesitant to make “frivolous” expenditures. For the most part, this spending involved what I call “making luxury purchases” (clothing, jewelry, knick-knacks for the house) for themselves, and for their children (Pedraza 1991; Sotelo 1994). Daya and Hema explain:

Like I said with [buying] the pair of jeans, right, I feel like “hey, I’m making the money, too, I can buy the jeans. Nobody has to tell me what to buy and how to spend.” So I feel more comfortable spending money that I have contributed. Whereas if I was not working, I felt like “oh you know, I’m not doing anything, I shouldn’t be buying so much stuff. I mean I really like little things…I tend to splurge on buying some artifacts or something like that which is really not a necessity but more of a desire to have and all that kind of stuff. I feel like I don’t have to think about it when I feel like I’m contributing. (Daya Ishiwaran, 38, Entrepreneur)

I don’t know just, let me think about this, it’s probably just buying a small thing for myself or for the kids, or even for buying a gift for my husband, I feel a lot better if I’m buying it with my money than taking this money and giving him a gift. Yes, that’s there [the fact that in a joint account, can’t differentiate whose money it is], but I think that’s all good in theory, but it’s, you know subconsciously he knows it’s his money and subconsciously you know it’s his money. I personally felt really uncomfortable doing that even for the short while that I was doing that [when she was a dependent non-working wife] [because] I just knew that at some point it’s going to be “hey, you don’t even know why you’re spending all this.” It’s bound to happen….(Hema Nagaraj, 32, Generic Professional)

Two, for Tamil women, being financially independent also, and perhaps more importantly, referred to allowing them to provide economic security to their family – especially the assurance that they are capable both financially and psychologically (as discussed below) of supporting their children should some misfortune befall their spouses. We are reminded here, that this was the very expectation that their parents had of them, while emphasizing their education but not necessarily their professional work. Tamil women rework this gendered expectation as their agentic response to the structural vulnerabilities of being immigrants in the United States.

The third conceptualization of the financial independence that their professional work provides is in contributing to their family’s upward movement in the class hierarchy such that they are able to establish an upper-middle class status in the United States as a dual-income
family, and enjoy the privileges/benefits accruing to this status. Perhaps the most important benefits of this status for Tamil women, and for which they see their work as being essential, include a better quality of life by ensuring economic stability through the acquiring of economic assets and preparing for retirement; and offering educational and cultural opportunities for their children. These opportunities include affording specialized schools and American university education for their children, as well as Indian cultural training by attending music, dance, and language classes. Further, as almost all my participants noted, by virtue of being dual-income families, they are better able to financially assist their families in India, as well as contribute to Indian charities, which I argue are important methods by which Tamils maintain transnational connections and ties with their homeland/hometown.

….Because see…both my children studied in Montessori school and [they] never had any problems paying about $1000.00 per month for the school fees. I could send them to music class, dance class, Bal Vihar [Sunday School at Temple]…and you need money for everything. Now [given her working], where I can put them in ten different classes rather than just two classes. Because it is all about money in this country. Nobody teaches anything for free. Everything is hourly based, you go for one hour dance you pay $20.00, you go for one hour music you pay $20.00…[And] You can help so many people [being dual income]. A lot of family things you can do…a lot of people are who are suffering from…we had sponsored somebody who has an open heart surgery. All that I wouldn’t have done if my husband was the only person earning or I was the only person earning. Because it squeezes you, it squeezes you a lot. (Vidya Pillai, 39, IT Professional)

The second main benefit that Tamil women envisaged as accruing from their professional lives is the psychological and emotional resources it affords them, enabling them to self-identify and take considerable pride in being professionals (George 2005; Kibria 1993; Lim 1997; Mahler 1999; Pessar 1984; Sotelo 1994; Zentgraf 2002). Juxtaposing professional life to homemaking, Tamil women argue that they experience immense personal growth through their work. I began to notice that this “sense of personal growth” was intricately connected with professional work enabling Tamil women to contribute more than just to their families – what they refer to as “contribute to society” - which simultaneously affords them a sense of personal accomplishment
of having productively utilized their skills and education, while contributing to the enhancement of these same skills and of their personalities. Hence Tamil women like Prema and Daya cited below, argue that professional work provides them as source of personal fulfillment that is unique to them, and cannot be obtained by being mere wives and mothers, which is our “natural endowment” as women, and thus routine to all women.

You know, I consider the usual things of home life…cooking, cleaning, something that everybody does. You’re not the only unique person to do it. But, working in an area where you really enjoy yourself, is something that’s absolutely unique to you. Nobody else shares that drive. (Prema Devarajan, 38, Physician)

Work…it’s important because it makes you feel like you’re complete. Whereas kids and everything else is life…you know…it doesn’t really end. It just kind of goes on, that’s it! That’s the reason I work. I had to find something else that was away from the regular realm of things like kids. That [homemaking] was regular life, but that was not what was bringing any satisfaction in terms of mental satisfaction of having something that you were doing. Yes... [kids provide a sense of satisfaction], but that was not enough. It was not enough…you could learn everything there is to learn about Gerber, diaper rash and everything in the book. But you could never master it. You’re [not] going to get the best diaper [award]. But work allows you to go further [you can be the best at it]. (Daya Ishiwaran, 38, Entrepreneur)

In turn, as Tamil women note, working “boosts their self-esteem and self-confidence,” not only of being capable professionals, but also of being self-reliant to handle any challenge.

…See previously I used to ask him…like give me the direction and everything, which now [since working] I get the confidence. I can do it! Wherever I have to go and even if he goes for traveling job and everything, I can handle…and when the kids get sick, you don’t have to depend on anybody. Even when you’re a home maker, you will do it, but the thing is, in the back of your mind you will not have the confidence… “am I doing the right thing or not?” But because if you work, you see so many people, you hear so many stories from other people and everything, from that experience…you experienced all those things. So when it comes to you, with your child or with your family activities, and you will think, “OK, they also went through that, so the same that I can also do that. I’m not going to get into any trouble or something.” So you know you get that confidence level. Your confidence level really goes up when you work. (Pushpa Hariharan, 39, Teacher)

Accordingly, professional work becomes a source of personal identity for Tamil women, integrated into the core of their womanhood such that they often very simply note, that that being
professional is such an integral “part of them,” that they are unaware of how to self-identify without being professional.

I mean I cannot imagine being comfortable just not doing anything, just staying at home. It’s [working professionally] kind of defined who I am. I mean irrespective of my profession, like I said… it all boils down to… giving me an identity of my own. I mean it defines [her], it makes me a person in my own right and [without it] I don’t feel that I have an identity, I would say. For me it [working] has been more about giving me a sense of who I am and boosting my esteem, self esteem and my own sense of like the person that I am. (Saraswati Vinayak, 44, Corporate America Executive)

The third area of benefits accruing to themselves and their families from their professional work is the social. Following from the psychological resources and personal identity that work affords them, Tamil women talk of their professional lives enhancing their familial identities as mothers and wives in two key ways. First is in making them more effective mothers especially to American born/raised children through their own integration into American culture and society which they believe enhance their ability to socialize and interact with their bicultural children. Second, is in the direct psychological benefits accruing to their children from being working mothers evinced in them being role models of strong, independent women, thereby challenging traditional, and rigid gender stereotypes about women’s and men’s roles.

Therefore, it becomes evident through my analysis that in the context of the United States, Tamil women begin to and consolidate their identities as professionals. I argue that being professional signifies their “personal identity,” juxtaposed against and yet entwined with their “socially designated” identities as wives and mothers such that each is seen as influencing and enhancing, and referencing the other. In this process, Tamil women integrate being professionals into the core of their womanhood thereby extending the boundaries of emphasized Tamil femininity and constructing integrated femininity. Crucial to integrated femininity is that its faces – professional, wife, and mother – are not hierarchically organized in subordinate and dominant positions, nor manifested individually. Rather, as Tamil women like Prema and Saraswati
explain, despite the existential conflict inherent to constructing and performing femininity with multiple faces, they are integrated women who are at once professionals, wives, and mothers, performing this womanhood such that its faces manifest together, but each with increasing or decreasing prominence at different stages in their lives.

I can see myself in two different roles. And there is always that conflict between those two roles. You have your female role...which is typically to raise kids... But the other side of me, which is you know, obviously a working woman who likes to work. It’s a struggle...it’s a constant struggle having to juggle the different hats at the same time. But would I really give up something [working] for the other [family]? Probably not. So as time goes on, more and more, I am comfortable with the fact of just presenting myself as one person. As one person who is a professional, but is also, a wife, also a mother. (Prema Devarajan, 38, Physician)

Well it [working] makes you feel more complete, more, you know at peace...at the same time it does produce a lot of stress, too. It’s kind of a double edged sword, I would say. You can’t live it, you can’t live without it. That’s the kind of equation I have with work. I can’t imagine not working, but at the same time work drives me crazy, too, especially at times when the personal...your personal life clashes wildly with what’s going on at work....But at the same time, I could not imagine what I would do without a job. I think I would feel like some part of me is not there. (Saraswati Vinayak, 44, Corporate America Executive)

In the next section, by outlining Tamil women’s performance of integrated femininity in their work lives, I demonstrate their choice to heighten the manifestation of their familial identities vis-à-vis their professional ones especially at the point in their life course when they have young families.

**Doing Integrated Femininity at Work: Motherhood and the American Workplace**

My research reveals that for Tamil women, performing integrated femininity in their workplaces constitutes their agentic response to their location as (immigrant) mothers within the masculine organizational culture of the American workplace, and within larger American society. As has already been outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2), and in earlier pages of this chapter, the ideological construction of the “unencumbered man” as the ideal employee serves to disenfranchise working mothers not merely because they are perceived to be “riskier”
employees, but also because of the commensurate lack of institutional support for maternal and familial demands within the American workplace (Cabrera 2007; Gerson 1985; Hochschild 1989, 1997; Hynes and Clarkberg 2005; Ismail 2007; Rubin 2006). In developing a strategy to successfully navigate being professionals and being mothers through this workplace, Tamil women draw upon and reconstitute the gendered expectations embodied in emphasized Tamil femininity, and what they consider to be the biological imperatives of the female sex, to maximize both their professional and familial lives.

…When you’re single, you can rebel all you want, but when you [women] have a family, you have to make sure the family runs right? Because…well see, I’m a feminist, OK, but at the same time, as a feminist you had to fulfill your job. So taking care of your children is your [women’s] job. (Ramya Venkatraman, 52, Entrepreneur)

Readers are already familiar at this point with Tamil emphasized femininity being organized around women being wives and mothers rather than professionals. As Ramya explains, embodied within this construction of femininity is the gendered expectation that family life (especially upon marriage) is a feminine domain -one women are solely responsible for organizing and successfully managing irrespective of whether or not they choose to work - thereby freeing men to focus solely on providing for their families through their work lives. What is essential to recognize is that this expectation serves as the premise on which women are judged to be appropriately feminine – whether or not they are “good mothers”- depending on their successful fulfillment of these expectations (DeMeis and Perkins 1996; Doucet 2001; Guendouzi 2006).

…You’ve got to have this household that is running and working well and the children are well taken care of and all that…and you feel like…if you’re not doing that, somehow you’re failing in your role [as a woman and mother]. (Janaki Parathasarathi, 44, Professor)

Hence, although Tamil women extend the boundaries of emphasized Tamil femininity to include their personal identities as professionals, within this reconstitution, there continues to be
a self and spousal expectation that upon starting families, they will assume a larger responsibility
in organizing and administering the latter. I argue that in embracing this expectation, Tamil
women are not surrendering to emphasized Tamil femininity, because they do not perceive the
gendered familial expectations as precluding them from engaging and being successful at
professional work. Rather, this self-expectation assumes particular importance in the United
States considering that as people of color, Tamil women feel invested in constructing Indian
family forms as a site for the cultural socialization of their children, and thus for resistance
against Americanization (as I will explain in the following chapter) (George 2005; Pedraza 1991;
Pessar 1999; Sotelo 1994).

This gendered social expectation of them as mothers, is further complicated by what Tamil
women explain as being the biological imperatives as the female sex (Blain 1994). They argue,
like Saraswati below, that they experience a change in their life’s priorities upon the birth of their
children such that, while being professional continues to define them, they begin to recognize
that their children constitute their legacy and their primary priority.

You know you want to be [a] successful career woman. But being a mother, you realize
that that [motherhood] is your primary role compared to everything else. So when your
child is sick or when your child has something that’s important going on in their lives, you
drop everything to attend to that need. So when that happens, you know where your
loyalties lie and where your priorities are… that desire to ruthlessly pursue a career,
doesn’t compare to your desire to be a better mom. So I think, [as a mother] I’ll take a back
seat in my career….I’ll [definitely] have something [professional career], but not be
crazy…go crazy behind it [at the cost of] having a good relationship with my child.
(Saraswati Vinayak, 44, Corporate America Executive)

Interestingly, using the analogy of “just like in the case of animals,” Tamil women
attribute this transition in their life priorities to being “natural” i.e. biologically based and
triggered by their maternal instincts to care for their children (Blain 1994). In making this
argument, they are quick to point out that these maternal instincts are unique to women, and
lacking in men who have the contradictory instinct of focusing on work to the exclusion of all else.

You can think about all the things being equal, but nurturing is different with the mom and it’s different with the dad. The mother is supposed to take care of...even if you take the bird, the lady birds take care of their babies, right? The male birds go and bring the food and female bird takes care of the [babies], that’s nature’s way...that’s how nature intended to do. (Ramya Venkatraman, 52, Entrepreneur)

It’s [experiencing a change in life priorities] just maternal instinct. You [women] just have to take care [of children]...I wouldn’t say it’s you know...chauvinism or anything like that. It’s just in the way we are created. I would never go for [saying] men are greater than [women]. It’s just all the physiology...you know even if you see animals, the mom’s are always protecting the children, so...(Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

They substantiate this, by contending that children (without any prior training) recognize these maternal instincts in their gravitation toward mothers especially during infancy and childhood, and when they are ill. Further, equipped with these instincts which make them naturally more concerned and invested in their children, Tamil women believe that as mothers, they play a crucial role in the formative years of their children’s lives.

Thus, drawing upon the socially and biologically based arguments mentioned here, Tamil women navigate being professionals and mothers through the American workplace by developing gendered self-expectations which results in them doing integrated femininity such that they reorient its faces to allow their motherhood identities to manifest more prominently, especially upon starting families, and when their children are young. Consequently, this results in them choosing to make “compromises” in their professional careers and ambitions for the short-term to allow them the time to care for and raise their children. In performing integrated femininity in this manner, Tamil women cite the benefits accruing to their children from this compromise. These include their enhanced ability to maintain a successful equilibrium between their professional and familial demands such that one does not overwhelm or unbalance the other
to the detriment of their families and to spend sufficient time supervising their children to ensure that they do not go astray.

So if I give more importance to my professional life, you know, and I keep going up in the ladder...going up in the totem pole, that may be good professionally, but I know for a fact that the family life will lag. And [so] you know...I just do not take on so much [at work] that I’ll be engulfed in that...(Vijaya Muruggan, 34, Engineer)

I want to have an equilibrium in between my office and my home because I have children, [and] I have to take care [of them]. I don’t want to be just a professional mom and leave my family...and tomorrow I know that my children are into drugs. You know? I don’t want that. (Vidya Pillai, 39, IT Professional)

This reorientation of integrated femininity through the American workplace – such that “they are there for their children” – has also to be framed within Tamil women’s immigrant social location in the United States. As immigrant families, Tamil women and their spouses form “a solitary unit,” lacking the extended kin support readily available in India to care for and protect children. This vulnerability is further heightened by their perception of “American threats” to their children’s well-being embodied in drug use, drinking, sex etc. Considering these then, Tamil women believe that by making compromises in their professional lives, and prioritizing their motherhood identities especially when their children are young, enables them to not only successfully raise their children, but also protect them from these threats in an environment where the social control of extended kin networks is lacking.

Interestingly, readers might have noticed that in navigating motherhood through the American workplace, Tamil women talk of prioritizing motherhood identities over professional ones, but not discarding the latter. For me, this is an immediate indicator of their performance of integrated femininity rather than emphasized Tamil femininity because despite their attention to their motherhood roles at this stage in their lives, Tamil women do not construct these as sufficient to defining them as women. Being professional completes their identities, enhances their motherhood responsibilities, and thus is a necessary condition (albeit a much compromised
one) even when they are focusing on establishing families. Also, for them this reorientation of the faces of integrated femininity is a dynamic process that is continuously changing depending on their life stages. Thus, prioritizing motherhood identities over professional ones is their agentic response given their life stage as young parents, and the structural conditions of the American workplace and of their position as immigrant parents in the United States. Accordingly, Tamil women anticipate that as they move through their life course, and as their children grow older, more independent, and responsible, they will further reorient integrated femininity to prioritize their professional ambitions.

Basically for next year, I’m not looking to a more demanding job. But I will tell you that once my second one [child] is a little bit older, I will start looking around for something [a job] that’s more challenging. (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

Definitely, I was looking for a change [in jobs] once the kids grew. [Her old job chosen to accommodate the demands of family life] became very monotonous and I wanted something more challenging. (Manya Ramalingam, 51, Scientist)

Corroborating existing scholarship about the professional scaling back strategies undertaken by working mothers, my research finds that performing integrated femininity in the American workplace involves three principle professional compromises by Tamil women namely: choosing family friendly job profiles, choosing flexible work schedules, and switching career paths to home-based entrepreneur work (Becker and Moen 1999; Cabrera 2007; Hochschild 1997; Jacobs and Gerson 2004). The first professional compromise made by Tamil women in the context of their motherhood responsibilities involves placing limitations on their job profiles such that these are family friendly. By this Tamil women mean working jobs which do not involve long office hours or have a demanding set of responsibilities which could potentially infringe on their familial time. To this effect, Tamil women such as those cited below, attempt several strategies such as choosing part-time and/or contractual work (especially in the IT field), deliberately passing on or giving up jobs or opportunities for upward professional
growth (especially when their children are young) particularly into supervisory or managerial positions which include a demanding job profile in terms of time, responsibility, and travel, and in some cases even changing their professional paths to more family friendly work, especially upon realization of the demands of being parents in the United States.

And so to me, one big step...which was a big jump was to not take the research track career option. I have a Ph.D...why can’t I handle a research track? But I took that decision which was quite a come down when I took this lower level non-tenured track, lecturer, second class citizen thing, so that I could have a family...(Kamala Vivek, 46, Scientist)

It [Manager level job] was high responsibilities, just the responsibility level. You have eight people under you. If they don’t do something, then you are the one who needs to be sitting there [at work]. See as a CPA I can get up and leave at 5:30pm [even if] something [accounts] are not balanced. It’s the manager’s job to figure out that I keyed a wrong invoice [and so the accounts did not balance]...it’s not my job. It’s a demanding job. I could not give that when [her son was born] and calling sick and this and that. And so I thought, by having less demanding job [as a CPA and not the manager], I’ll be tired as soon as I come home and I’m able to spend more time with him. (Shymala Devadas, 39, CPA)

And after both the kids, I was thinking whether I should [work] in HR [for which she was trained in India]. And [she realized] that it’s too much pressure with kids and everything. I want to be with my kids. So the teacher profession is the best professions because I get summer holidays and everything so I can be with my kids...and I can spend a lot of time with them...(Pushpa Hariharan, 39, Teacher)

Following from this need to be employed in family friendly work, is Tamil women’s second compromise with professional work as working mothers namely making flexible working hours a condition of their paid work. For Tamil women, flexible working hours implies two things. One is having a work schedule which not only allows them to leave work early so that they can fulfill their responsibilities to their children (such as chauffeuring them to extracurricular activities, cooking for the family, meeting children when they return from school etc), but also where their efficacy as professionals is not judged by the hours they work, but by the completion of the task which accords them the flexibility of taking work home and/or working out of home. The other, involves having the flexibility to take time off work when
children are ill and/or to attend children’s activities (events, games, PTA meetings), which they argue they (rather than their spouses) tend to be largely responsible for (as will be outlined in the following chapter). Shymala, Shakuntala, and Nalini explain:

You know when I say flex time, it’s like they’re [the workplace] not too rigid…they don’t expect you to be there at 8. Nobody is hovering over your head. [But rather that] they have a good working environment where they’re like, as long as you’re doing your job, they don’t bug you, you know. (Shymala Devadas, 39, CPA)

And I operate in a [work] environment where [the attitude is] “get your job done, I don’t care if you work from 9 to 5, or you work from 3 to 12, I don’t care. As long as you’re delivering against your deadlines, that’s what I care about.” So it’s like actually the most open environment I could be working in. (Nalini Kumaran, 31, Generic Professional)

For me, I think it [having kids] definitely makes a big difference so when I look for a job. I [look for] flexible hours is one main thing. I ask always…the first things I ask is whether the timings are flexible. So that I can come back home if my child is sick, or work from home…and if my child has a concert, I can come back early. I would definitely work and compensate for it [leaving work early], but flexibility and timing helps a lot. (Shakuntala Mahadevan, 34, Corporate America Executive)

We are reminded here that due to the lack of institutional policies in the workplace for these very things, my participants talk of having to personally negotiate these arrangements with their supervisors. Thus their ability to undertake this compromise is largely predicated upon having supportive bosses as well as developing the necessary social capital – i.e. relationships of trust – with their bosses, which they then draw upon to fulfill their motherhood responsibilities. Concomitantly, Tamil women such as Revathy below, argue that should they lose the privilege of this arrangement in their current workplace, they would look to change jobs.

And the only reason I work here is because I have that advantage [having flex time]. The minute I lose this advantage of being able to work from home and having flexible hours, I will leave. Tomorrow if I lose that advantage, I will quit. (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

The final professional comprise undertaken by a few Tamil women in my sample is their decision to move out of employee based work to home-based entrepreneurial work especially when their children are young. As has been noted by scholars such as Berke (2003), Green and
Cohen (1995), and Jurik (1998), Tamil women contend that home-based entrepreneurial work offers them an increased degree of flexibility and family friendly job profiles that cannot be experienced in paid employment simply because as entrepreneurs, “they are their own bosses,” and can thus develop their own job schedule.

So that’s why I was looking for to do your business where I can set my own timing and be with the kids when they were young. And even if I found it [full time job], I won’t have the flexibility. If you have a job [working for someone else], you have to be there certain hours and then you cannot just…like leave [work] at 4 pm. So then with the kids, scheduling becomes a problem. Like if they have some show in the school. You cannot tell them, "oh I have to be in the office so I cannot come." All the other parents will be there, only we will be missing. Yes, in the beginning when I started the business, I was doing business from home, so I can set my own hours around the children’s activities. In fact I started business, home business so that I can stay home and when my kids needed, I can be with them…that’s the main reason I started a business rather than going to work. I went full time business outside [having an office outside the home] only when my kids were in high school. Till then, I was doing from home. (Ramya Venkatraman, 52, Entrepreneur)

….Specially….I would say it’s more because it’s our [husband and wife] own business that I have more flex time. The flexibility of time is a lot more [with own business]. I’m not answerable to anybody, but I mean, that is advantage. Like right [referring to the interview being conducted] now I can sit here for next 3 hours and have this conversation [with the researcher], but [if] working [for a company], I cannot do that. (Arundhati Chandran, 45, Entrepreneur)

For the few Tamil women in my sample who are entrepreneurs, their home-based businesses run the gamut from real estate, to ethnic businesses, to advertising, and/or working in their spouses’ business. What is also important to recognize is that these businesses are home-based only while their children are young, and as my participants argue, benefit from having their mother at home. As children become more independent and involved in school, Tamil women begin to move their businesses outside the home to a formal office space. There is no denying that home-based entrepreneurial work, while having its benefits also carries its disadvantages of the lack of physical and emotional boundaries segregating domesticity and employment, and a much slower rate of business growth (and corresponding increased rate of business failure) than other entrepreneurial work (Berke 2003; Green and Cohen 1995; Mies,
1984; Mohanty 2002). Despite this, what I began to notice, was that home-based entrepreneurial work offered Tamil women not only an avenue for professional work that accommodated their familial obligations, but also one that afforded them a sense of personal growth, and of contributing to their families and to society. Hence their commitment to these businesses despite the difficulties becomes a means by which they perform integrated femininity at work.

Thus what becomes particularly evident through the above negotiations of Tamil motherhood through the American workplace is that while Tamil women compromise with the demands, and responsibilities of their professional work given their self-expectation of being mothers, their very desire to negotiate rather than give up working is indicative of integrated femininity being the core of their identity as women. Reiterating from my comments earlier in this chapter, for them, only professional work (through its various benefits as listed earlier) offers them a source of identity that is personal and yet enhances their socially designated identities. Given this, professional compromises so as to accommodate the demands of their motherhood identities rather than full-time homemaking is perceived as the most viable scaling back option.

Having stated this, it is important to recognize that doing integrated femininity in the workplace so as to incorporate job compromises is not constructed by Tamil women as a forced choice, but rather an agentic one organized by the structural demands of the workplace, of their location as immigrant parents, and of their identity as integrated Tamil women.

It’s not that there’s going to be any restriction [from spouses/family on her being able to work full-time]. If this [working full-time] is what I wanted to do, I could have put my foot down…I could have found a baby sitter, I would have found another alternative, but I just didn’t choose to do it. (Arundhati Chandran, 45, Entrepreneur)

That’s the choice [choosing a less demanding research job] I made, because you have to give up something for something…so that was my philosophy and I was willing to give up that [heading her own research lab]. (Manya Ramalingam, 51, Scientist)
This was made especially apparent to me, when drawing upon my own personal biography of professional work defining me, I asked participants whether they regretted the professional compromises they were making. A particularly important finding emerged from this line of questioning namely: that performing integrated femininity at work in this manner did not involve a form of false consciousness on the part of Tamil women. Rather, in making this choice, Tamil women are fully aware that they are placing themselves on the “mommy track” professionally, which is in turn contributing to their lower incomes, slow professional growth and upward mobility compared with their male counterparts, and other women.

In terms of career progression, I probably would have made director sooner if I had stayed on the old job [which was more demanding and which she changed to accommodate her family demands]. The delay [in upward professional mobility] is because this is a new job that I’ve taken…and so I had to learn a lot. So from that perspective…yes…it [making professional compromises due to familial demands] has had an impact [on her professional growth]. (Nalini Kumaran, 31, Generic Professional)

….Well I could probably gone up a little bit higher than I am now [if she was single or had no kids] because I could have played the networking game a little bit better and stayed the extra hours, and not have to run off at 4 o’clock and stuff like that. It’s a big price you pay for it [making professional compromises due to familial demands]. The price is that I can’t move up. (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

Further, they also recognize the interplay of agency and structure in shaping this compromise in that they contend that in addition to the above mentioned structural factors that organize this compromise, it was also possible because their husbands, in alignment with hegemonic Tamil masculinity, have assumed the responsibility of being the primary contributors (read: earning more than wives) to their families, thereby facilitating women’s job compromises.

You always think when these situations [having to decide about work-family compromises] come forward…he’s [her husband] is earning more and you don’t want to affect his career. So we [her spouse and her] decided OK I will do it [make professional compromises]. He is the main breadwinner, mine is only secondary. I am working because if anything happens…you need [another income] in an emergency, for entertainment…all those extra…. (Bahumathy Mahalingam, 55, Generic Professional)
In stating this, they are however aware of the tautological nature of their argument in that their husbands’ ability to earn more is predicated on them being unencumbered by domestic responsibility (as desired by the workplace and thus rewarded) which Tamil women choose to perform, which in turn, constrains them not only their job profiles and responsibilities, but also the monetary rewards accruing to them from their professional work. Thus what becomes increasingly evident is that for Tamil women, performing integrated femininity at work by reorienting its faces such that their motherhood identities manifest with greater prominence than their professional identities especially when they have young families, is their agentic response to the structural exigencies of their lives and of the American labor market, and therefore not a response that is developed irrationally, or regretted by them.

Yes, I kind of regret [her professional compromises] sometimes because I see all these young people who are like directors and [she asks] "why, I can’t come there?" But at the same time I know that I’m always making that choice [of compromising professionally because of familial demands] consciously I know that I’m making that choice, so. (Diya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

I didn’t regret for a minute [not taking] the research track. And I knew realistically it wasn’t going to happen for me. So I made that [decision], and it was a good decision for me. (Kamala Vivek, 46, Scientist)

Thus in sum, through their professional work in the United States, Tamil women expand the boundaries of emphasized Tamil femininity to incorporate their personal identities as professional women, thereby constructing integrated femininity. Integrated femininity is then performed in their workplace such that it facilitates the undertaking of professional compromises to accommodate their motherhood responsibilities – compromises which Tamil women choose rather than being forced, and thus feel satisfied to undertake.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have examined the professional lives and destinies of Tamil women in the United States. I argue that Tamil women’s accessing of professional work is gendered and thus
distinct from their male counterparts as it is mediated not only by the economic and political climate in the United States, but also by their legal status, transported human and social capital, and the gendered nature of settlement. Accordingly, Tamil women are engaged in low-paying, feminized work for a longer duration than their spouses, and experience greater difficulty in accessing professional work. However, unlike their working-class counterparts, they are eventually successful in entering the realm of professional work. Their engagement with professional work is the critical mediator of their transformation of emphasized Tamil femininity into integrated femininity wherein they incorporate their professional identities, into the core of the femininity, on par with their socially designated identities as wives and mothers. Thus for them, being women implies being integrated women who are at once professionals, wives, and mothers, with each of these faces manifesting together, but with increasing and decreasing prominence at different stages in their life course. Tamil women then perform integrated femininity within their workplaces in their attempt to balance being professionals and mothers. In the process, especially when they have young families, and in response to their vulnerabilities as immigrant parents lacking extended family support in the United States, Tamil women choose to reorient the faces of their integrated femininity to highlight their motherhood identities. This involves them making professional compromises such as choosing family friendly job profiles, choosing flexible work schedules, and choosing home-based entrepreneurial work, as a mechanism to be involved mothers, available to their children. In turn, this influences their household labor arrangements which will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6
“BEING ON A ‘TREADMILL TO OBLIVION’: GENDERED HOUSEHOLD LABOR ARRANGEMENTS

[Being a working mother]…that’s somebody that’s on a treadmill to oblivion…doing something all the time….I mean all the time, doing something…[and not] having a moment’s downtime. --- Participant in this Study

Throughout this dissertation, I have been theorizing the interconnections between the gendered realms of migration, work, and family life. In the previous chapter, I examined the racialized, gendered, and migrant navigations of Tamil women through the American labor market such that they construct and perform integrated femininity through their professional labor. My research finds that these gendered negotiations at work (the public realm) in turn influence the organization of Tamil households (the private realm) in terms of the division of household labor (defined in terms of household chores, child care, and decision making) in the United States.  

Accordingly, in this chapter I uncover the performance of integrated femininity by Tamil women in their households, such that although they are successful in negotiating for increased spousal involvement in domestic labor, they continue to perform the larger proportion of it (especially child care) particularly when they have young families and have reoriented the faces of their integrated femininity to give prominence to their motherhood identities. In the process, I contend that doing integrated femininity through household labor results in the construction of what I call new Tamil/Indian family forms characterized by husbands’ increased involvement in domestic labor, egalitarian decision making, and wives’ retaining certain aspects of household labor as a bastion of femininity performance. I begin by outlining the contextual

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1 It is germane to note that this identification of the social space of the United States is not happenstance, but should be read as these negotiations occurring only in the context of the United States as they would not occur (in the same manner) in the same way in India. In making this claim, I am aware of societal transformations in Indian society with men in dual-income families being more involved in the domestic sphere. However, as voiced by my participants, these newer arrangements are as yet atypical among Tamil Brahmin couples such as my participants who came of age in 1950s-1980s India.
factors shaping the work-family bargains in Tamil households. Next, I discuss the emergent
gendered bargains and household labor arrangements identifying two main types of
arrangements developed by Tamil families. Third, I present the nexus between power and
marriage highlighting the egalitarian decision making patterns in Tamil families. I conclude by
theorizing the connections between gender, accountability, and household labor.

**Contextual Factors Shaping Work-Family Bargains**

Every day we learn something new [about how to divide household labor]. It’s like OK, this works, the cleaning lady works, no cooking works. These all [happened] after nearly 10 years of juggling. It’s not something that’s happened in an instant in time. It has happened over 4 years, over 3 jobs, over working part-time, full-time, school….It’s just…we had to make it work. (Hema Nagaraj, 32, Generic Professional)

Recapitulating from the literature review (Chapter 2) and illustrated by Hema, my research finds that the division of household labor in Tamil families is a contested terrain – where far from being static, arrangements are continuously negotiated between spouses over the course of their marriage and considering the professional and familial demands on them at various points in their life course (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane 2000; Doucet 2001; Kemp 1994). Accordingly, it is important to recognize that my glimpse into their household labor arrangements is a snap-shot at one moment in their life course when I was invited to observe them and will change in the future as it has from the past.

However, because my sampling technique enabled me to interview Tamil women along a range of ages, I was able to observe household labor arrangements at different points in a life course scale – from those with young families (toddlers, infants, pre-teen children), to those with older families (college going/married children and return to couple based households) thereby enabling me to discern the contextual factors that organize these arrangements. Corroborating existing scholarship, I find that the work-family bargains in Tamil households are shaped at the nexus of their structural location as immigrant, upper-middle-class families of color in the United
States, and gender construction and performance especially Tamil women’s integrated femininity (George 2005; Kibria 1993; Menjívar 1999, 2000; Pedraza 1991; Pessar 1999; Sotelo 1994; Toro-Morn 1995). The particular factors organizing these bargains are (a) Tamil women’s work in the United States; (b) structural conditions in the United States; (c) birth of children; (d) husbands’ retirement and age.

Work-family bargains in Tamil households have to be contextualized within the demands of Tamil women’s professional work in the United States. As in the case of white, middle-class, dual-income families, my research finds that Tamil women’s engagement in professional work results in their spouses’ increased participation in household labor, even to the point of these arrangements becoming more egalitarian (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1989, 1997; Kroska 2004; Shelton and John 1996). Extending this scholarship I argue that in the case of Tamil professional women, it is not merely women’s work hours, and job demands that co-relate with their spouses’ increased household labor performance, but more importantly the integration of their professional identities into the core of their femininity such that being professionals (i.e. professional work) defines them as women, thereby creating a personal desire to work. Coupled with their location as immigrant families, Tamil women’s professional labor is also crucial to their families especially in establishing the economic security and socio-economic status desired in the United States. I theorize then that Tamil are financially and psychologically empowered by the commingling of professional work and integrated femininity to negotiate greater involvement of their husbands in household work – an involvement that the same husbands may not countenance in India (George 2005; Lim 1997; Pedraza 1991; Zentgraf 2002).

One key area of Tamil women’s work in the United States which mediates this spousal bargain is the increased time deficits Tamil women experience – what they call “time crunch” -
in balancing full-time work and family despite having made professional compromises in light of
the latter obligations.

See now I expect him to share a lot of stuff [household work]. Yeah, because of the time
 crunch. Because now that I am working full-time I feel that it would be nice to have one
more hand . . . to take the children around classes and all that stuff. It would be really
helpful. Now I expect [her husband’s involvement at home]. (Vidya Pillai, 39, IT
Professional)

What is particularly critical to note about Vidya’s statement is her use of the word “I
expect” to indicate the gradual transformation in the gendered expectation of husbands’ with the
commencement of Tamil women’s work. In the United States, at a distance from familial and
community mechanisms of social control, Tamil women begin to challenge emphasized Tamil
femininity and hegemonic Tamil masculinity which constructs rigidly dichotomized gender
expectations (women-family; men-work), by developing expectations of their spouses’ increased
(if not equitable) participation in domestic labor in light of their own engagement in professional
work. These transformed expectations are then negotiated by Tamil women in their increased
discussions and verbal demands/requests for their husbands’ involvement in household labor
and/or making the latter, a condition of their engagement in professional work

I told him, like, "I am taking up a job outside and they told me flexible hours, which is
good, but I still need your help with the kids . . . for pick up and drop off children and all that
stuff" And he said, “yes.” We both talked about it [his participation in household labor]
before I took up a job. And I was very clear when I told him, that if I am going to work, he
is supposed to help me with a lot of stuff [at home]. Otherwise I am not taking up a job.
We agreed upon it [husband participating in household labor], before I took up the job.
(Vidya Pillai, 39, IT Professional)

See [traditionally] the husband he goes out [to work] and the wife is the one who does
everything for him [at] home. It’s not like that here [America]. It’s like OK . . . you [women]
go to work . . . You [wife] cooked today, so I’m [husband] going to cook [the next
day]. . . I’m [husband] going to help you. It’s not like, “oh, you are the wife, you are
supposed to do only these things. I [husband] am not going to do these things. This is my
boundary.” It’s not like that [in America]. It’s whatever you [husband] can do, I can also
do that [also]. It’s 2 of us contrib[uting] to the family and it’s not one person who just [has
to] do everything for the family. (Pushpa Hariharan, 39, Teacher)
These transformed gendered expectations of spouses have also to be contextualized in the second factor organizing work-family bargains in Tamil households namely the structural conditions they encounter as immigrant families in the United States. As has already been mentioned at different points in this dissertation, as immigrants, Tamil families are bereft of the family support available through extended kin networks (grandparents, parents etc) and the relatively cheap availability of domestic workers in India which mitigate the challenges of being dual-earning families to a large extent.

….Because you know in this country, you don’t get any domestic help or your parents. Here you are by yourself, you basically manage everything by yourself. You are left with a small child [to care for], with all the housework…you have to cook you have to clean you have to take care of a child and all that stuff. A lot of responsibility. (Vidya Pillai, 39, IT Professional)

….The lacking of infrastructure [in the United States]…you don’t have that support system of grandma can come and take care [of children] or grandpa can pick him up from school…(Daya Ishiwaran, 38, Entrepreneur)

Mediated by their privileged caste and class status in India, my participants noted that neither their husbands nor themselves had been involved in the practicalities of household labor (cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping etc) in India, leaving these to be performed by domestic help. Further, for the few couples who had worked in India prior to emigration (and the remainder who drew upon these experiences with their family members in India), extended kin networks were a critical resource that buffered working parents from the physical demands of child care (bathing, feeding, playing etc), as these were assumed by grandparents - a more trusted child care provider than the formal agencies available in America. Thus the responsibilities of having to perform domestic labor without assistance, and raise children without family support embodied the challenges my participants encountered as dual-earning immigrant families in the United States.
Also important is the role of gender ideologies within the structural context where, in addition to available support for household labor in India, dichotomized gender expectations of role of men being that of providers and decision makers rather than participants in child care and/or domestic labor resulted in Tamil men’s involvement within households being much lower than their female counterparts.

We always had servants [in India] and somebody to manage. So we never got the chance to do all that [household chores]. When we were in India he [her husband] was all the time working and I was taking care of the kids and you know…his involvement in day-to-day household, it was not that much. (Avni Shankaran, 58, CPA)

In the United States, although the labor market continues to prize the “unencumbered male” ideology, there is also a growing prevalence over the last couple of decades, of the ideology of “involved fatherhood” (Gerson 2006) This ideology is centered on men being more involved as fathers, both qualitatively (type of activities) and quantitatively (total time spent), in the raising of children by participating in all aspects of child care ranging from the essential activities (such as bathing, feeding, playing etc) to the more discretionary ones (like supervising children, engaging with them in extra curricular activities etc). In turn, this has resulted in the creation of a social expectation of what Hochschild (1989:xxvi) calls the “New American Man,” who is a loving, involved father, considerate husband and breadwinner, and whose proportion of household labor has been increasing, influencing my participant’s ideas of men’s involvement in family life.

It just that this [American] society is different [from Indian society in] the way men play a role in running the household, in bringing up the children, and everything…(Neelakshi Arunachalem, 42, Scientist)

…. [Her husband] is very involved with the kids. And even when I go back [to India] now, you don’t see the men being that involved with their children’s lives and activities in India. Whereas here [United States], I think when we raise our families here, it’s more likely that both the mom and the dad are very closely [involved]. (Janiki Parthasarathi, 44, Professor)
Thus, drawing upon their vulnerabilities as immigrants lacking informal support mechanisms to successfully care for families, their need to be engaged in professional work in the United States, and referencing American gendered expectations of fatherhood, Tamil women expect and negotiate for their husbands to assume a larger role in household labor particularly in some aspects of child care. They argue that this bargain is predicated upon the realization (especially on the part of their spouses) that not only does domestic work have to be completed for their families to run successfully, but also that there is no one save themselves (as a couple), in the United States to perform that labor, necessitating that men be involved.

He saw me struggling. So he knew that I needed help. So he joined in. [It happened] automatically he took up the job, whatever he can do, he took up. Otherwise, things would have been put off, and then the house would have been a mess, and the children would have suffered. Because here [United States]...I mean there is no other way. I mean he had to help me out, because both of us are working, and then we had to get the things done on time. And his involvement with the household is much more than what it was in India. Well, because we don’t have anybody else to help us with these chores. We had to do everything ourselves. So that’s the reason his involvement in household. (Avni Shankaran, 58, CPA)

This realization of the need for husbands’ to participate in household labor given their structural vulnerabilities as immigrants, is also mediated by the third contextual factor organizing work-family bargains namely the birth of children (especially succeeding children). Through my conversations with Tamil women, I gradually began to recognize the importance of this factor as a milestone in undertaking work-family bargains, not merely because children increase the amount of household labor, but more because of the spatial transitions involved in becoming parents. As Tamil women noted, prior to starting families, couples often lived in small, utility apartments where domestic work was not arduous (as there were only two inhabitants), and combined with their own dependent migrant status, often resulted in women performing the bulk of household labor. With the birth of children (especially onwards of the second child), couples often moved into larger family forms where the increased spatial and familial sizes
commensurately increased household labor. Coupled with the factors mentioned earlier (wife’s work, and lack of informal support), the birth of children enables Tamil women such as Neelakshi below, to bargain for their husbands’ increased involvement especially in child care, even to the point of these arrangements becoming equitable (as will be discussed later in this chapter).

It [division of household labor] has completely changed over time. [laughs] Before you really didn’t have that much work, you know when you didn’t have children. Once you have children slowly responsibilities start coming..."OK, who’s going to be taking them over there? OK, who’s going to wake up in the morning and take them [to school]?" [Her husband] was doing everything [for children] from day one and slowly he became both mom and dad...(Neelakshi Arunachalem, 42, Scientist)

The final contextual factor shaping Tamil women’s work-family bargains is their transition to a stage in their life course characterized either by their children having left home and/or their husbands’ reaching retirement age, wherein Tamil women contextualized their spouses’ increased involvement in household labor as a function of these life course transitions. My ethnography within Tamil households revealed, that in most of these cases, while husbands had retired, wives continued to work/study full-time, resulting in husbands taking on a larger proportion of household labor (especially in terms of chores) because they were home-bound, and also because the demands of domestic labor had reduced substantially given there were only two of them.

Thus, drawing upon these interconnected contextual factors, Tamil women are successful in undertaking spousal navigations that result in transformed household labor arrangements. In the process, Tamil couples (and women in particular) are engaging with transported Tamil gender ideologies and expectations - especially those related to men’s non-involvement in the domestic arena – transforming them to meet the demands of family life in the United States. Interestingly, as I will demonstrate in the next section that highlights the intricacies of household
labor using the instances of domestic chores and child care, these transformations in gender ideologies are such that it enables Tamil couples to accommodate the structural exigencies of their immigrant lives in the United States, while simultaneously performing gender in a manner appropriate to the retention of the Tamil/Indian orientation of their families and. In the process, I argue that the accommodative reconfiguring that organized their gendered migration to the United States, continues to dynamically operate in the migrant context, such that although they rework emphasized Tamil femininity and hegemonic Tamil masculinity constructs, these are not discarded. This allows them to lay claim to the identity of being Tamil/Indians (read: non-Americans) in the United States.

**Gendered Bargains and Arrangements: The Intricacies of Household Labor**

This section outlines the gendered bargains that organize the household labor arrangements in Tamil families centered primarily on the activities of domestic chores and child care. For the purpose of this study, domestic chores includes a range of tasks ranging from cleaning (vacuuming, mopping, dusting, dish washing, bathroom cleaning), laundry (ironing, washing, folding clothes), to household maintenance work (yard work, cars, fixing etc); while child care includes activities loosely categorized as physical care for children (bathing, feeding, dressing etc), school related care (PTA meetings, homework, school trips/visits, curricular activities), and extra curricular child care tasks (sports, cultural activities, leisure activities with children). Referencing the extant scholarship of household labor arrangements among American, dual-income families, and immigrant families, I have modeled the emergent patterns of household labor performance in Tamil families. In so doing, I extend this scholarship by not merely listing how these activities are divided, but importantly, how they are perceived through a gender lens by Tamil women and men, thereby influencing how these are performed (i.e examining the consonance or dissonance in spousal gender ideologies/attitudes/expectations toward household
Further, in attempting to be attentive to the unique social location of Tamils, I also account for Tamil cultural constructs, social networks, and women’s agency – i.e. the interconnections between hegemonic gender constructs, Tamil community gossip and commentary, and Tamil women’s agentic navigations of these – in organizing household labor such that it simultaneously becomes a site for gender performance as well as retention of Tamil/Indian culture as a bulwark to Americanization. Thus, the two main models of household labor performance by my participants are: women centric-men involved households, and equal partnership households.

**Women Centric-Men Involved Households**

Women centric-men involved households are those where wives perform the bulk and/or the larger proportion of household labor compared to their spouses, but are successful in bargaining for their husbands’ sustained involvement in certain activities of household labor, most particularly in child care. These households constitute the majority of my participants. Corroborating existing scholarship on the consonance between spousal gender ideologies and attitudes shaping household labor performance, my research finds that although there is a transformed gendered expectation of husbands’ greater involvement at home given the contextual factors listed above, in these households, there continues to be an a shared spousal expectation that the bulk of domestic responsibilities is a feminine arena, with Tamil men’s involvement being limited to “assisting” either by routinely or intermittently performing certain tasks, depending on their professional demands and schedules (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1989; Kamo 1988; Kroska 2004; Shelton and John 1996). In making this claim, there is a recognition by these Tamil women of the accommodative reconfiguring of Tamil gender constructs in the United States such that, although husbands are more involved at
home, the performance of appropriate Tamil femininity is predicated upon their assumption of the “primary responsibility” for household labor.

Although there is help [from her husband], you just feel your primary responsibilities [are the home]. And sometimes it just becomes challenging because even though you work, you still feel responsible for home and you know…taking [care of] the kids… I just feel that I HAVE to do that also. So I wouldn’t just brush it off just because I have to work. I just feel it’s my responsibility to do that [attend to household labor matters] in addition to working. (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

….So the priorities are very clearly defined. For the woman it has to be the kid and the job and for the husband it’s got to be the job and the kids. (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

Wives’ primary responsibility for household labor and husband’s limited involvement in the same occur along two main interconnected veins. First is the construction of rigid gender dichotomies in the performance of domestic chores. In this arrangement, Tamil women, in their attempts to bargain for their husbands’ increased performance of domestic chores, rigidly dichotomize traditionally feminine and masculine household activities (as defined by them), choosing not to trespass into the masculine domains – what Divya notes as “it’s not my job” - thereby compensating for their spouses’ relative lack of involvement in feminine tasks.

….Sometimes I also would like help in the yard or something and then I think, "oh it’s not my job, just let me sit here, because that’s not my thing to do." Right? So we’re kind of drawing the gender [line] here. So he’s responsible for the trash and the yard and fixing things…and things like that. So even though I can do that [masculine chores]…like taking the trash out, I just wouldn’t do it because I just feel like, "yeah, it can be done [by him]. I’m going to sit because I’m a woman kind of thing…” (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

In developing this arrangement Tamil women are cognizant that feminine domestic chores are those which are largely confined to the interior of the home (cooking, cleaning, laundry, bathing/feeding children etc), are arduous and tedious, and have to be performed routinely and/or

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2 It is worthwhile to remark that these two veins of men’s involvement in household labor are not mutually exclusive categories. Rather, they merely represent the various patterns of male involvement emergent from the data. Accordingly, as occurs in a number of cases, while domestic chores can be rigidly dichotomized according to gender; husbands’ can simultaneously be very involved in various aspects of child care.
daily to maintain family life thereby offering them little discretion in performing them. By comparison, masculine activities are more discretionary and less immediate in that they tend to be external to the household, and the physical work connected to the upkeep and maintenance of the home (such as yard work, gardening, car/appliance maintenance etc) (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coleman 1991; Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1989; Kemp 1994; Rexroat and Shehan. 1984; Rubin 2006; Shelton and John 1996). Thus although men might perform these masculine tasks regularly, their involvement in household labor is weekly/monthly or on a needs basis (as and when maintenance work is needed) as opposed to women’s more daily performance of the same – a fact acknowledged by Tamil women. However, a particularly interesting point is that coupled with the gendered expectation that household labor is primarily their responsibility, Tamil women reference this limited spousal involvement to argue for their husbands equitable “participation” at home. I contend that this occurs not merely because husbands are challenging hegemonic Tamil masculinity expectations and are being recognized for the same (as will be documented later in this chapter of men’s limited involvement at home garnering praise), but also because both partners are symbolically performing gender appropriately through this arrangement (Bianchi et al. 2000; West and Zimmerman 1987)

I think my husband and I take equal turns [in domestic chores]. He does other things in the house, like for instance if there’s some kind of maintenance problem…watering the plants, for instance is something that he does exclusively, feeding the pets or anything like that is what he does…. (Saraswati Vinayak, 44, Corporate America Executive)

The second path of household labor performance in these families is men’s involvement as “helping or assisting” in certain aspects of core domestic chores and child care. I distinguish men’s involvement at home from their “participation” on the grounds that this involvement often takes the form of what George (2005:89) calls “forced participation” by husbands considering the contextual factors that shape their family life in the United States. Thus, especially in the
arena of domestic chores, I began to notice that Tamil husbands performed these tasks either intermittently when their wives’ were unable to get to it themselves due to professional or personal demands or when husbands evince a superior skill/interest in certain chores compared to their wives and thus perform them more routinely (such as on a weekly basis). Bahumathy and Vijaya explain:

The way we separate what we do [at home] is…you know…I do all these stuff [larger proportion of household labor], and if I am tired or something, I can always lie down and tell him, “can you take care of this thing?” And he will always jump in. (Bahumathy Mahalingam, 55, Generic Professional)

Now one thing I do admit my husband does is he’ll vacuum the entire house. That is his chore and you know…[he] religiously does it. And on the weekends, he’ll help me clean around the house. As far as vacuuming, I think he is just fast, he can get it done a lot quicker than me. I think that is the main reason why [he does the vacuuming]. Because I take my time. So he feels that he can get it done faster and you know be done with it. So I think that is the main reason why he does it. (Vijaya Muruggan, 34, Engineer)

Irrespective however, this involvement by husbands in domestic chores occurs less frequently that their wives’ who are commensurately engaged in performing the bulk or the larger proportion of the daily chores of family life (such as routine cleaning around the home, dishes, and laundry) as illustrated by the Tamil women cited below:

….Most of the things [household labor] I’m doing…cooking, cleaning and dishwashing….What was daily [chores] I’m doing it, whereas he’s [her husband] doing [vacuuming and laundry] only once a week. (Avni Shankaran, 58, CPA)

….When I do cleaning it’s everyday cleaning…like the counter cleaning or if the bathroom’s a little dirty, or if it’s getting too cluttered, just pick up stuff. You know that maintenance kind of cleaning. You know men they will not think…“there is something fallen here” [motioning to the kitchen counter]…they won’t clean it up! Even [her husband] every once in a while…he will wear shorts, and open all the windows and spend half a day cleaning the house. And that’s because it’s gotten so dirty he can’t stand it anymore. So he can’t stand it anymore, then he’d do it. Half a day!! Can you believe it? [voice rising progressively]. [He does cleaning and vacuuming] once a month. That is what I am saying, instead of leaving it for once a month, maintain it on a daily basis. I am always telling him’ “why don’t you do it on a daily basis?” But men, they will let it pile up and do it once a month! There is no maintenance you know! (Shymala Devadas, 39, CPA)
I do the cooking and I load the dishwasher, my husband unloads the dishwasher. That is the unspoken rule kind of thing. I do the majority of cleaning. All the bathrooms and all the toilets, and vacuuming the whole house, and periodic cleaning...like when kids throw the books all around the place and once you wash three loads of clothes you have to fold all those and put them in the hanger and put them away. I do it on a daily basis. Not everything...but kitchen cleaning, daily, and bathroom cleaning, every 2, 3 days or once a week, depending on the time. He has never done it [cleaning bathrooms], actually, probably once in 12 years of married life. (Shakuntala Mahadevan, 32, Corporate America Executive)

My analysis of this spousal involvement being “assisting” rather than “participating” is made particularly evident by Tamil women having to solicit this involvement by their husbands - what they refer to as “he has to be pushed.” Arguing that men lack a natural inclination and/or initiative for the intricacies of family life especially the performance of chores, Tamil women such as Revathy and Saraswati cited below, talk of having to throw temper tantrums and/or instruct husbands of chores to be performed. I thus argue that in this process, it becomes evident that Tamil women, in addition to physically performing domestic chores, also assume supervisory roles within their families wherein they are often responsible for planning and outlining the tasks to be accomplished, with their husbands assuming the executor roles by implementing those tasks according to their wives’ instructions (Coltrane 2000; Doucet 2001; Hochschild 1989; Kemp 1994; Rubin 2006).

….The laundry, usually, I just dump it and tell him "go do it or whatever." He will not take the initiative to do the laundry. But I’ll tell him to do it and, he’ll do it. It just doesn’t strike him [to do the chores]. If I tell him to do it, he’ll do it. So I leave [for work] and I call him during the day [as her husband works out of home] and I say, "can you just go upstairs, put the stuff in the machine?" Then it’ll happen. But it’s not going to happen on his own accord. For him...you kind of [have to] push it, push it…until it [gets] done. I was expecting him to figure it out on his own...you know what I mean, like, “Dude, I shouldn’t have to tell you this right?” [with emphasis]. He [her husband] tells me “honestly, I would do it if you told me.” But why should I tell you? Figure it out, you know! (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

If I did not insist that [her husband] contribute to that [household labor], I mean I would be left virtually doing every little thing. I have to sometimes throw a big tantrum and make a big fuss to get him to agree to participate in certain activities at home. For example, the dishes. They [her husband and child] eat nicely and nobody will load the dishwasher,
nobody will unload. I have to yell a couple of times, [and] say "hey I need some help here, I cannot do it." (Saraswati Vinayak, 44, Corporate America Executive)

Having discussed how domestic chores are performed in these households, I now move to the arena of child care. My analysis reveals that while Tamil wives are more successful in bargaining for husbands’ greater involvement in child care (more so than in domestic chores), this involvement continues to be conditional on the demands of men’s work and the age of their children. There appears to be a shared spousal expectation that child care and rearing especially when children are young will be performed almost exclusively by Tamil women. This expectation operates at the nexus of biologically essentialist arguments of maternal instinct and a mother’s care being essential to children’s development at this life stage, and of the commensurate reorientation of integrated femininity by Tamil women such that they choose to make professional compromises to accommodate these maternal “urges” and responsibilities. Accordingly, considering that Tamil women have made themselves more available to perform these activities when their children are younger, men’s involvement at this stage is predicated upon their work schedules such that should a conflict arise, work often prevails over family responsibilities.

As children get older, and husbands more established in their careers (allowing them greater flexibility to accommodate family life), Tamil women are able to negotiate (in light of the contextual factors listed above) for their spouses to assume a significant proportion of child care responsibility thereby enabling women to refocus on their professional aspirations. For Tamil men, referencing the involved fatherhood ideology, child care activities often involves spending quality time engaged with children, rather than merely acting as caretakers (or babysitters). However even as they assume a larger responsibility for child care than for domestic chores, the gendered nature of this care is very evident. Corroborating existing scholarship, Tamil women
perform the larger share of “essential or immediate” child care activities (bathing, feeding, dressing etc), undertaken on a daily basis, and to which husbands contribute, but only intermittently when they are available (Blain 1994; Brayfield 1995; Doucet 2001; Leslie, Anderson, and Branson 1991; Peterson and Gerson 1992; Rubin 2006).

Yes, I always did all that stuff [essential child care]. Bathing, giving him clean clothes, washing his clothes, make sure he’s clean before he goes to bed, brushing his teeth, feeding him when he comes from playground…all those basic things. (Bahumathy Mahalingam, 55, Generic Professional)

Like with my daughter, the majority of [care] is me. I have to take care of her, bathe her, feed her, that kind of thing. All of her you know [needs], like is she being fed, bathed, you know…everything. OK, [she is the ] primary care provider [which] means you know…basically taking care of my daughter from when she wakes up to when she goes to sleep. That’s how I think of it, meaning all her needs have to be met and I am doing that. (Vijaya Muruggan, 34, Engineer)

Accordingly, fathers perform the lion’s share of the “fun related” activities of child care which while integral to their children’s holistic development, tend to be classified as extra-curricular activities which can be performed at their discretion in ways the essential tasks of bathing and feeding cannot. Thus Tamil women note that their spouses spend extended periods of time engaging with their children through play, by having long conversations and discussions with them, and reading to them – all of which is done relatively routinely. I argue that what is particularly crucial to recognize about the division of child care in this manner is that men’s ability to perform the “fun related” activities of child care is indeed organized by women’s bulk performance of the essential activities which denies them the time and as Tamil women note the physical and mental energy to engage with their children leisurely, thereby rendering the latter a masculine domain.

So I would definitely say he [her husband] does more fun things with them than I do. Because I’m so tuned to getting the basics done and that is such a stress that yes, if I have time leftover I will try to do [the fun stuff], but my focus is on getting the basics done first. (Nalini Kumaran, 31, Generic Professional)
He’ll take her outside to play, that’s one thing. He’ll read books with her. And then he will, he teaches her a lot [by informally talking to her]. Unlike for example, you know when I pick her up and I bring her home...I may be involved but not that much, I’m just asking her, “you know so what happened in school?” But he gets involved in those things [aspects of child care] which interest him. So he’ll take her to the library, which is his favorite past time….He’ll take her to the library, they’ll sit there, you know...spend a lot of time reading books, they have computer games there that they play. So, he does get involved [in child care]. (Vijaya Muruggan, 34, Engineer)

He’ll [her husband] just sit in one place [and say to their children], “oh you want to read? Come on honey, let’s read.” Or “OK I’ll read to you, and we’ll cuddle and read.” So he’ll come in and he’ll hug her and he’ll play for a little while with her…play games, play ball, whatever. And then [her husband tells my participant] “Ok, can you get her to eat?” It’s a stereotype [that mother does all the essential child care] that will play right in front of my eyes. (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate American Executive)

This demarcation of child care however, is not a conflict free process, as it often results in Tamil women such as Revathy and Daya below, sometimes feeling cheated out of the parenting experience as they perceive themselves being constrained to embody the role of “policing mom” – the strict parent who is constantly scheduling children and ensuring that they complete the necessary, but banal activities – while their spouses are tagged as the more “fun parent,” spending more quality time by engaging their children in activities they enjoy.

We both spend time with them [children], but doing different things. I’m doing all the essentials that need to be done, he’s doing all the fun stuff. So that bothers me a little bit [but] bear in mind the kids needs both, right? Right now it’s always “mom that’s saying, ‘have a bath, eat, eat, eat…do your work, do your work, do your work, go to sleep, go to sleep. [stating repetitively with emotion]. So all the policing…that mom is doing, and the fun stuff dad is doing. How is that fair? (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

I think my husband does a much better job at entertaining the kids than I can because when it comes down to entertainment, I’m like “ok, I’m done, now I need to go, I need to fix this…I need to put away this stuff [do basic chores].” And they’re [her children] like, "mom, you’re not fun at all." (Daya Ishiwaran, 38, Entrepreneur)

Having stated that, it is remark worthy that especially as children enter the pre-teen and pre-college years, Tamil men begin to assume a larger share in “essential activities” especially those connected to school related curricular and extra-curricular activities.
He would teach them actually, when the kids got older and [began] middle school, he would sit with the homework and made sure everything was completed and things like that… I mean [on a] daily basis. And mostly it was my husband who was going and talking to the teachers and things like that…(Arundhati Chandran, 45, Entrepreneur)

As explained by Arundhati, Tamil husbands assumed almost complete responsibility for all their children’s school work such as assisting them in completing homework, assignments, preparing for college admissions and attending meetings with teachers; and for chauffeuring children to activities and sports. Although structural factors (such as being established in their careers) aids this transition, I noticed that they key mediator of this process (just as in the case of domestic work) was husbands’ greater ability and/or interest in these activities compared to that of their wives. Thus for instance, Tamil women often explain that as their children progressed in school, and the assignments got more demanding (surpassing their personal ability), or as their children got more enthralled with sports (such as soccer), their husbands got more involved.

But when he [her son] was older, with any sports activities, my husband will be there. He will teach him baseball, taking him for ball games, sports and everything. Because men don’t like to get involved with homework and stuff like that. He [her husband] always likes to do any kind of sports stuff, playing ball game, taking him to games and stuff. (Bahumathy Mahalingam, 55, Generic Professional)

And now especially as the kids are older, he’s the one that’s running [around with the children]. He’s taking them to soccer practice or tennis practice and so forth. He’s been around to do all of that now [as opposed to when children were younger] much more…. the extra curricular, especially sports related activities. He enjoys that…he likes to go and watch them play soccer or take them out for their practice lessons and so forth. (Janiki Parthasarathi, 44, Professor)

Until this point, I have accounted for the intricacies of who does which household labor activities in women centric-men involved households. Following from this, Tamil women attempt to explain the reasoning behind the organization of their household labor into this particular pattern. My analysis uncovers the operation of four interconnected reasons for wives’ greater involvement in household labor than their husband’s namely: essentialist arguments rooted in biology; psychological arguments connected to gendered standards of perfection;
structural arguments about husbands’ job demands; and cultural arguments about differential
gender socialization. Central to all these arguments is the role of gender expectations and gender
identity such that for both Tamil women and men, although they negotiate with Tamil gender
constructs to rework traditional gender expectations of them, doing household labor along the
patterns described above serves as a site for doing integrated femininity and reconstituted
hegemonic masculinity.

Tamil women most often cite biologically essentialist arguments to explain their husbands’
relative non-involvement in household labor. Central to this argument (in addition to the oft
mentioned maternal instinct) is the notion that men are “naturally” unable to discern and
therefore address the intricacies of family life (defined in terms of daily household labor
activities), being more suited to attend to what they call “the larger picture of the family” – i.e.
ensuring that the essential elements of family life (housing, clothing, food) are readily available.

They [men] look at the big picture of how is the family going? How is the family moving
along? My kids are fed, my wife’s happy…I’ve got my house and I want to travel, I want
to do these things…they look at all the big picture of things. And as long [as those] things
are just chugging along fine, I think they’re OK with it. And I think that it’s just a genetic
difference. It’s the testosterone…[That’s why] I believe that men don’t worry so much
about the nitty-gritty details of life. They’re very motivated and driven…they want to
accomplish it, they have a set of goals, that’s really what they want to do. All of the other
things [are approached by them as], "oh by the way," Not that they’re not involved, not
that they don’t care, but I think that extra comes from the estrogen. As long as they’re
[men] there for them [families] and they globally provide all the needs [for families], then
at the grass roots level, kids can grow and thrive on their own. Because I think they [men]
feel that they are supposed to be the breadwinners and you know provide everything for
their children, but at the same time, they don’t feel that they have to be be involved in the
minute to minute details of their children. (Prema Devarajan, 38, Physician)

Within this discourse, the differential proportion of household labor performance between
Tamil women and their spouses is attributed to biological gender differences which predispose
men toward breadwinning enabling them to better compartmentalize their lives, such that the
condition of the home does not interfere with their professional responsibilities (Blain 1994).
Consequently, often arguing that “men are just like that,” Tamil women note that their spouses limited involvement in household labor (and their participation in the same having to be solicited) can be attributed to men being naturally lazy to the extent that they are either not perturbed by an unkempt home (or undone chores) or just “cannot” do housework.

In his [her husband’s] perspective we don’t need to clean the house...you know...we don’t need to be doing the laundry, we just buy new underwear if we run out. You know what I’m saying? So like if my kid doesn’t have pajamas, it will bother me. But he’ll just put on something else [on her]...whatever...jeans to go to sleep...big deal! So it’s things like that. These things [intricacies of family life like clean clothes, a clean home] matter to me, and it just doesn’t matter to him, that’s all. He just wants to live...he’s fundamentally a very lazy guy. He just wants a stress free life (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

My husband is not one of those [men who can do household labor]. I mean he can just barely make coffee and that’s about it. He is not one of those men who can do things around the kitchen. I mean, there are some men who just cannot do...he falls into that category. He’s not somebody who does anything around the house...he’s not even a handyman, he can’t even put a light bulb... (Arundhati Chandran, 45, Entrepreneur)

Readers will be reminded here, that Tamil women have referenced this essentialist discourse earlier, when attempting to perform integrated femininity in their workplace (chapter 5). However, in the form that this discourse was used when discussing household labor arrangements, I began to notice that Tamil women were constructing these arguments as their agentic responses – coping mechanisms if you will – to not only the challenges of being dual-income, immigrant parents, but also those emanating from having to assume primary responsibility for a significant proportion of household labor (Blain 1994). Rather than berating husbands for their limited involvement at home (which Tamil women admit carries the risk of causing friction in their marriages and add to their stress levels), Tamil women applaud this as men contributing according to their limited biological capability, with additional contributions being biologically impossible. The agentic nature of this response was made particularly apparent to me, when I noticed that some Tamil women emphatically believed and supported this
discourse, often drawing upon their own educational backgrounds in science, biology, and medicine to convince me of its validity. Accordingly, for these Tamil women, the gendered division of household labor had evolved naturally over time resulting in their larger performance of it compared with their spouses.

…[That’s] how we’ve evolved as a human…men going out to hunt and women bearing children and being there for the cave men. They [men] used to go out and bring the food, so I think the division of labor started from there and it’s just been there in our minds as we [evolved]. It’s not that men don’t want to do it [household labor], it’s just that it doesn’t come naturally to them, and I don’t like to keep on telling, asking [for her husband’s participation]. (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

Following from this essentialist discourse, is the second reason that Tamil women cite their husbands’ limited involvement in household labor (especially domestic chores) namely psychological differences between women and men centered on standards of housework performance and interests. Given their maternal instincts, and natural predisposition toward household labor, my participants contend that as women, they are perfectionists about the quality of their home and thus of household labor. Further, considering that the larger proportion of household labor is performed by them, Tamil women believe that they set the standards for housework performance in their families, against which they judge their spouses’ contributions. Despite laughingly noting, that with the onset of their professional demands and the birth of their children (which necessitated their spouses’ involvement at home), they have lowered their personal standards, Tamil women explain their husbands’ limited involvement in domestic chores as occurring because the latter believe they cannot perform household tasks correctly enough to meet their wives’ standards. Thus Tamil husbands often choose to let their wives’ perform the bulk of household labor because “they are better at it.”

….Men don’t have patience. So what is the point? I never ask him to do it [domestic chores] because he knows he cannot do it like me. And he will always be like, “if I do it, you don’t like it, and you do it again. So what’s the point of doing the same work
twice...you [wife] do it. I won’t interfere.” (Bahumathy Mahalingam, 55, Generic Professional)

See I think [chuckles] it’s a small thing but...every now and then my kids would ask my husband to teach them something. And of course he would teach them. And then they would come to me and say, “Mom, is Daddy right?” So he would always say, “If they think you are the one who knows everything, why do they even have to bother coming to me?” So the problem is that makes them a little uncomfortable that maybe the are not up to par [with standards set by women]. It is probably an excuse...but maybe we [women] are at fault too, [for] not allowing them [men] to make mistakes. (Savitri Ramanan, 61, Physician)

Following from this reasoning is the corresponding one of men’s limited participation being rooted in their disinterest with household labor, and thus (as I have described earlier), the activities of household labor that men tend to perform routinely are those which interest them or for which they have skills superior than those of their wives. I argue that although this discourse is valid (especially to my participants), it is important to recognize that it carries the risk of concealing the power dynamics inherent to gender relations (Blain 1994). By attributing housework to personality and biological differences between women and men, there appears to be an underlying assumption that to some extent women are the cause of the household labor performance disparity (because they set too high standards that men cannot reach) – what Savitri referred to as “we are at fault too for not allowing them to make mistakes,” - and men’s involvement will only occur when women terminate setting standards for the same. In the process, not only is the onus of negotiating for more equitable divisions of household labor on women, but so is that of choosing either to retain a particular quality of family life and perform the bulk of labor themselves, or lower these standards so that men can be involved according to their capability.

Well, he’s [her husband] like, “hey, I’ll do it my way, it’s going to get the job done, it’s not going to get the job done to your high expectation, but this is the way I’m going to do it. If you can’t deal with it, do it yourself.” And I think he’s got a fair point. If I’m that picky about something, yes, I’m going to do it myself. I used to be way more picky before [the
children]…so the bar has come down., But his bar is still lower than mine now. (Nalini Kumaran, 31, Generic Professional)

The third argument that Tamil women make to explain their husbands’ limited involvement at home is a structural one, centered on the demands of their husbands’ professional work especially considering the ideological organization of the American workplace, and the fact that their husbands’ are the primary providers of their families. In making this argument, Tamil women recognize the interaction of the gender expectations embodied in hegemonic Tamil masculinity of men being providers for their families, and engaged largely in the realm of work (as opposed to family), and their own ability to make professional compromises for motherhood in light of their spouses’ engagement with professional work, as shaping men’s limited involvement at home. In attempting to perform hegemonic Tamil masculinity, Tamil men encounter social pressures to be successful at their professions, thereby enabling them to support their families. In the American workplace, success is predicated not only on experiencing zero-drag from family life, but also working at jobs with demanding profiles (such as long work hours, travel, working on weekends, bringing work home etc) – none of which accommodate the demands of family life (citations). While these structural conditions of the workplace, preclude Tamil men’s equitable participation in household labor, their performance of this work (and the commensurate financial rewards) facilitates their wives’ making professional compromises thereby enabling them to perform the bulk of housework.

The final reasoning Tamil women use to explain their husbands’ limited involvement at home is a cultural discourse on the differential gender socialization of Indian women and men. Readers are reminded here of my comments when discussing the social location of my participants (Chapter 4), that while growing up in India, Tamil boys were socialized to concentrate on education and work, and rarely expected to perform household labor, thereby
relegating the same to women. Relationally however, for Tamil women, there is an acknowledgment that although their blended socialization as girls did not require them to learn to perform household labor, there continued to be a parental expectation that these would be their responsibility upon marriage (although if they had remained in India, the physical tasks would have been performed by domestic help). Consequently, Tamil women contend that despite their involvement in professional work, their spouses continue to conceptualize household labor as feminized work, and coupled with the differential gender embodied in their socialization as children, men not habituated to perform the intricacies of household labor resulting in their limited involvement in the same. It is also important to note that this is further exacerbated by a migration pattern where dependent wives are confined to their homes upon initial settlement, and perform the bulk of household labor at this time. Accordingly, as some participants note, both spouses get boxed into this pattern, with men not perceiving the need to get involved, and women failing to ask or negotiate for spouses’ involvement.

Part of it [reason she performs bulk of housework] is because I was home when I first came here [United States]. I was home [as her visa status did not allow her to work] and he was going to work and it just happened that way [for her to perform bulk of housework] and it just continued that way, that’s it. (Arundhati Chandran, 45, Entrepreneur)

Just as in the case of the earlier described discourses, the socialization discourse also involves an inherent negation of the operation of power in doing gender through household labor, as it conceptualizes gender expectations as constructed through socialization, and statically performed without agentic maneuvering by people (Demetriou 2001; Kimmel 2004; West and Fenstermaker 1995). Hence, it carries the potential of blaming women for the non-involvement of their spouses within families. However, I argue that all the above mentioned discourses that Tamil women cite to explain their husbands’ limited involvement at home are agentically constructed by them considering the exigencies of their lives (Blain 1994). This affords them
some control over their lives and marriages such that they are simultaneously able to negotiate for some involvement by their husbands in household labor, while retaining both their professional and motherhood identities as the core of their femininity. In the process, through one’s larger and the other’s limited share, both Tamil women and men are reworking hegemonic Tamil gender constructs and doing these through household labor performance.

**Equal Partnership Households**

Equal partnership households constitute the minority in my sample, with Tamil men “participating” (as opposed to the “assisting” in women centric-men involved households) equitably in household labor. What sets these households apart from women centric-men involved households is that Tamil husbands perform all aspects of daily routine domestic chores and child care, (as opposed to the more intermittent and/or fun activities performance of the earlier model), and often make the necessary professional compromises (similar to those of their wives) to accommodate their familial demands. In devising these arrangements, my participants echo Hochschild’s (1989) findings that equal partnership households are only possible when both partners make professional compromises as opposed to be more predominant pattern of only working mothers scaling back. Further, as I will highlight later in this sub-section, this arrangement is also influenced by husbands’ more egalitarian gender ideology (as opposed to the above described group) and attitudes especially about household labor which matches their wives’ similar expectations of shared households (Coltrane 2000; George 2005; Hochschild 1989; Kamo 1988; Kroska 2004; Shelton and John 1996; Sotelo 1994).

My analysis reveals Tamil couples organize equal partnership households in two main ways. First, is the equitable division of labor according to interest and ability, with each partner assuming complete responsibility for those chores they are better able to perform (Blain 1994).
But pretty much both of us do all the chores, so. It’s not like set chores like “you do this, I
do this,” kind of thing. There are certain things which he enjoys doing which I don’t enjoy
doing. So that makes my life easier, so he can do that and I do the rest of it. It’s not really
any kind of a hard and fast deal. It’s basically…it so happens he chooses to do what he
enjoys doing and basically with experience [they have learned that] one person enjoys
doing it [the particular chores], one person has the ability to do it, it’s easier [for them to
do it]. (Manya Ramalingam, 51, Scientist)

Other stuff around the house was not mine. Like laundry and vacuuming, cleaning, general
cleaning around the house…He [her husband] has always done it. (Kamakshi
Swaminathan, 44, IT professional)

Consequently, Tamil women in these households noted little need to instruct or solicit their
spouses’ participation in domestic chores, with the latter often performing these activities off
their own volition. What distinguishes this division of labor according to ability and interest from
a similar version in women centric-men involved households is that unlike the latter where
husbands appear to only perform those activities which they perceive their wives’ being less
capable of performing or which they are interested in, in equal partnership households, this
division of labor according to interest extends to the “essentials” of both domestic chores and
child care (for instance cleaning, laundry, bathing/feeding children, school work etc). Hence,
unlike the earlier model where men tended to perform this labor weekly or intermittently and/or
confine themselves largely to the “fun related” activities of child care, in equal partnership
households husbands are engaged in domestic labor on a daily basis, with husbands’ in about
four of these households performing the bulk of domestic chores.

More interesting to me perhaps, is the second way in which household labor is equitably
divided in these Tamil families, namely doing household labor together. By this I mean, that in
some families, Tamil couples shared domestic chores, by performing these together with both
partners being simultaneously engaged in different aspects of the same tasks. Take the instance
of Shanta Anand, a 58 year old teacher:
We both [do it together]. One person will put the cooker on until I take care of some diaper problem or as soon as they [children] come [home], you know…make sure [they] start doing their homework, talk to the kids about their school day or they will be usually in the kitchen talking to us [her husband and herself while they are fixing dinner] how their day went. And then we both cook, both wash the dishes. One will wash the dishes and one will put it in the dishwasher. One will unload and one will put it in the shelf. We both worked together. We both did most of the things together. You know…he will sweep and I will pick up the things and put it in them in order. You know we both clean, he likes to clean. And then we both do it together….

In the arena of child care, these Tamil women described their equitable partnership as “being single parents, each with one child.” By this Tamil women meant that each partner would assume complete responsibility (for essential and fun activities) for one child – i.e. a single parent. In turn not only are the child care responsibilities equitably divided between them, but Tamil men are also engaged in the essentials of child care almost from the birth of their children.

But [younger daughter] is completely [her husband’s] responsibility. The older one is completely my responsibility. So it’s like after we pick them up from day care and bring them back home….[And] our entire efforts at that point is getting them bathed, getting them fed, getting ourselves fed, [and] getting both the kids to sleep. He was a very involved father from the get go. Like right now, [with] both kids…I will heat up [the older daughter’s] milk, give her milk. [Her husband] will heat up [younger daughter’s] milk and give her the milk, then I will take [older daughter] up for her bath and dress her up, then [her husband] will take [younger daughter] up and [do the same]. When both of them are done getting bathed and all that, [her husband] will give [younger daughter] her dinner, I will give [older daughter] dinner. So even in the morning, it’s the same thing. Like getting [older daughter] is getting her teeth brushed or combing her hair, give her breakfast…all of that I do. [Younger daughter]…getting her diaper changed, giving her breakfast…he does all of that. (Nalini Kumaran, 31, Generic Professional)

One person will be taking one kid to one place and [the other parent taking the ] other one and so we. A lot of times what we define our family as, single parents living together, because one is with one child all the time. OK, taking them to different activities, music classes or instrument classes and their sports activities, we would just take them around, and then go with them all their parties and all their stuff, and that’s pretty much it. (Neeklakshi Arunachalem, 42, Scientist)

As I conversed with Tamil women, I gradually began to recognize that for some of them, sharing household labor in this manner is not only efficient (especially considering that most have two or three children), but also offers them an opportunity to spend time together as a family, even if it
is while being engaged in routine chores. Thus, these Tamil women believe, equitable participation in all aspects of household labor – what they call “sharing” – is the cornerstone of their marriages, and critical to not only the overall health of their marriages and families, but also to them being recognized and respected as individuals within their households.

Needless to say, these couples admit that these arrangements have evolved over the course of their marriage and especially with the birth of their children when household labor increases exponentially. This emergence of equitable partnership households occurs at the nexus of balancing the demands of two careers and family life and shared egalitarian gender ideologies (but especially that of husbands) in these households organized around three interconnected factors namely: wife’s job demands, husbands’ job profile, and expectations and husbands’ biography. The first factor is Tamil women’s job demands. Reiterating my comments at the start of this chapter, the majority of couples in equal partnership households cited this arrangement emerging as Tamil women’s jobs got more demanding (despite their professional compromises).

What is particularly interesting to note to about this, is how equitable partnership was negotiated by these couples in light of this factor. Research on professional scaling back by dual-income families argues that one solution couples use is to be one-job, one career couples – i.e. where couples distinguish between jobs and careers, with one partner (most often women) choosing to have a job (flexible hours, limited upward growth etc) and the other a career (Becker and Moen 1999). I however argue, in light of their construction and performance of integrated femininity, none of my participants characterized their work as jobs, but as careers. Accordingly, Tamil women negotiated with their spouses for each to concentrate on their careers at different stages in their life course. Thus, in the particular instance of equal partnership households, at the point in their lives where I am showcasing them, Tamil women were often focusing on growing
their careers by traveling, putting in longer hours at work, while husbands, having for the most part achieved their career trajectories for the moment, supported and accommodated the demands of their wives’ work by equitably performing household labor.

Therefore the second factor organizing equitable household labor arrangements is Tamil men’s job profiles. Husbands’ ability to participate equitably in household labor is not only mediated by their upward job progression, but also by their location in relatively flexible professions in terms of work schedules, location of work, and self-directed job profiles (not being answerable to higher work authorities). For the most part these professions included academia, entrepreneurship (especially home-based entrepreneurship) and some IT jobs where husbands’ either worked on consultancy basis or had the ability to bring work home.

Right…[her husband does computer] programming…if he does [leave] work for a couple of hours [to deal with family matters]… he can compensate the hours on Saturday. You know if the children are sick, if he takes a couple…half a day off or something like that, he can compensate of he can stay home and finish it, too. He has done it. Because his job is flexible that’s why when they [children] are sick he was able to stay home with them…or go to the school and pick them up and keep them. (Shanta Anand, 58, Teacher)

Our life would have been different if [her husband] had a different job. Being in the University [academia], he had a flexible schedule. So he was able to do things [at home] and that’s because of the type of job he has. (Neelakshi Arunachalem, 42, Scientist)

The final factor organizing the equitable sharing of household labor is expectations and husbands’ biography. Diverging from the Tamil women who constitute the women centric-men involved households, the majority of Tamil women in this group argued that their own and their spouses gender expectations of household labor performance were symmetrically aligned in that neither expected the gendered traditional division of labor, with husbands not only recognizing the demands that balancing work and family place on women, but also the centrality of work to their wives’ sense of self which lead to their sharing of household labor.

I always assumed that if, you’re [my participant] working 40 hours, the husband’s working 40 hours, your job is equally important as the husband’s. So why should the wife come at 3
and keep the dinner ready, when the husband can just come in and eat the dinner. [She didn’t understand] why women have to think that even though they’re working, they are the first person who has to run home and cook and keep it ready. I just assumed that [there would be] equal partnership. I think for the most part, his expectations were also the same. (Hema Nagaraj, 32, Generic Professional)

I don’t really see like myself as like, "hey, I’m a woman like you know, I need to stay home" or something like that, that’s definitely not my thinking. And that’s certainly not [her husband’s] thinking either. It doesn’t mean I don’t do it [household labor], but it’s just, that he’s not expecting that…So that is what I’m saying…we’re not the typical [Tamil] family here. He does not have that expectations and it doesn’t bother him a bit that I don’t actually do those things. (Neelakshi Arunachalem, 42, Scientist)

It is important to note, that Tamil women such as Neelakshi recognize that this lack of traditional gender expectations and the commensurate equitable participation by their spouses is “not typical” of Tamil families. In analyzing the reasoning for this atypical behavior by their husbands, Tamil women most often point to the latter’s personal biography and family background as being different from the prevalent gender norms in India thereby mediating this process.

He [her husband] lost his mom when he was 3 years old…you know and his sisters were married at that time…only his brother and grandmother was there. What happened? I think…this is my own guess… because he was brought up without a mother, that made him do things [around the house] maybe. I don’t know. Because he was brought up by old grandmother [who could not do a lot around the house necessitating that he helps her]. That must be the reason he got into doing it…(Shanta Anand, 58, Teacher)

It [her husband’s equitable sharing of household labor] might be because he’s been here [United States] alone and he’s been taking care of stuff….Besides he’s been alone [living away from family] a lot… not just here, even in India in a hostel…you know…when he was in Bangalore in IIM. So you have to deal with stuff yourself, and maybe he just learned to do things [household labor] by himself. So it wasn’t really difficult or different for him to do housework [after marriage]. (Kamakshi Swaminathan, 44, IT Professional)

As explained by Shanta and Kamakshi, the majority of Tamil husbands in these households grew up in families with either working mothers and/or lost maternal figures (mothers) early in their lives which influenced them ideologically by shaping their gender expectations of women such that they did not perceive household labor as being a solely feminine arena; and also practically
by necessitating that they learn how to perform domestic chores (especially cooking, cleaning, laundry) early in their lives. This was further consolidated by the fact that a number of these Tamil men such as Kamakshi’s husband, lived away from their families (in dorms) in India as they pursued higher education, and later as they emigrated to the United States alone.

Thus, in final, it is important to note that despite its atypical nature, both Tamil women and men in equal partnership households symbolically perform gender through their household labor. It is merely that their gender performances are transgressive – challenging and perhaps reconstructing emphasized Tamil femininity and hegemonic Tamil masculinity constructs. I argue, that distinct from the women centric-men involved households, where limited male involvement at home is condoned and appreciated considering the structural exigencies of immigrant life, the transgressive gender performances in equal partnership households carries the risk of being critiqued by the larger Tamil community in Atlanta within which they are located, and which continues to prize domesticity as a feminine bastion, in the service of constructing and preserving “authentic” Indian families in a migrant context. Hence, egalitarian households run the risk of resembling white, American families thereby jeopardizing the structures of Tamil family as constructed transnationally. To mitigate this threat to Indian family structures, Tamil women in both women centric-men involved and more importantly in equal partnership households retain certain aspects of household labor as arenas of gendered ethnic performances, which will be elaborated upon in the final section of this chapter.

Having modeled the household labor arrangements in Tamil families, it is noteworthy that I do not treat these models are being mutually exclusive. Reflective of my comments at the start of this chapter, of household labor arrangements being fluid, changing, and continuously negotiated over the life course, Tamil couples might move between these arrangements at
different points in their lives and/or combine different aspects of both in responding to their unique needs (George 2005; Hochschild 1989; Sotelo 1994). Thus, for instance as they progress from households with young families, to older ones, the division of household labor can take the form of women centric-men involved patterns in domestic work, and equitable partnership patterns in child care activities. Thus the models patterned here represent larger archetypes for household labor performance in Tamil immigrant, dual-income families, with the recognition that these archetypes are being minutely reworked on a daily basis.

**Power and Marriage**

The gendered nature of household labor arrangements in Tamil households is not only confined to the division of domestic chores and child care, but also includes Tamil women’s negotiations with power in their households. As I progressed with data collection, I began to recognize that Tamil women’s conceptualization of marital power diverged significantly from the extant scholarship – relating to both white and immigrant families- cited in the literature review (Chapter 2), in that they did not perceive power as being predicated upon the division of domestic work and child care, or even their earning capacity (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Blumberg 1991; Johnson 1997; Lim 1997). Rather, for them, ideologically, martial power was embodied in a sense of empowerment – of possessing and retaining a sense of personal identity distinct from, and yet connected to their socially designated identities – that facilitates their independence rather than being constrained by stereotypical gender ideologies. Practically speaking, this sense of empowerment translated into being equal participants in all aspects of familial decision making. Thus, interestingly, irrespective of whether or not household labor arrangements were equitable, *all* my participants contended that they were *equal partners in their marriages* and that they shared household power with their spouses, without one partner being superordinate over the other.
Having stated that, my research also finds that Tamil women uniquely navigate “being equal partners” in their marriages such that power arrangements in their families are fluid, dynamic, and shaped by the demands on their families at the time. For the most part, being equal marital partners was defined by Tamil women as being integrally involved in all aspects of familial decision ranging from finances, to buying assets, to decisions pertaining to their children, rather than being merely consulted and/or informed about the decisions after the fact. The Tamil women cited below explain the decision making process in their families pertaining to these areas:

It [decision making] is joint in terms of you want to buy something, like this sofa for example, it’s something that we do it [decide on buying it] as a joint decision and then the choice [of which sofa] is pretty much left to me. [Also] whether to invest in some properties, those kind of things…we make a joint decision. [Her husband] would never do it alone. [We discuss] “Ok, you’re going to take $400… and put it into this, and this is something we want to do.” And we reassess things on a yearly basis, I would say, just to see if that’s being profitable or if there is any use to that. We do that. (Daya Ishiwaran, 38, Entrepreneur)

Whatever decisions we make, both of us sit together, decide and [then] do it. If we want to put our kid in a class…some new class, we think whether it’s going to be feasible, whether it will be good for her and whether it’s very expensive. We talk and we see whether it’s ok to go ahead. (Shakuntala Mahadevan, 34, Corporate America Executive)

We make decisions together. We discuss and [then] decide. Like financial decisions. Like investments, if we have to do some investments, then we both talk about it and see which is better, pros and cons and everything. And then we decide. [Or like] the house…buying of the house. So when we moved to Atlanta, we decided to buy a house, and we saw quite a number of houses, and some he would like, some I would not. But finally with the house we both liked and then we decided on buying this house. (Avni Shankaran, 58, CPA)

What is particularly critical to note about this equitable decision making process, is that Tamil women predicate their equitable status in their households not on taking a lead in decision making, but in the latter occurring through spousal discussions. This has to be contextualized in traditional decision making in Tamil Brahmin households (especially when they were growing up in India), where financial and decision making power was the preserve of masculine
authority, such that men (oftentimes their own fathers) not only controlled the family’s purse strings, but also unilaterally decided the course of family life, and merely informed women family members of the same (Khandelwal 2002; Rangaswamy 2000; Segal 1998; Subrahmanian 1989; Thiruchandran 1997). Thus, for my participants, being equal partners in their marriages, such that they are integrally involved in decision making implies all familial decisions being discussed between spouses with an understanding that the decisions will be negotiated by what they call a “give and take.” This involves both partners being flexible enough to agree to a decision that the other is firm about, without one partner always having to concede to the other. Needless to say, as Tamil women note, this negotiation improves over the course of their marriage especially as they get more comfortable with each other over time.

I think in an equal marriage, they [decisions] are sort of discussed and with both partners being allowed to give input. One may be a more…may have more expertise in that [the one being discussed] area, but there is a need for input [from the other partner]. I think that’s sort of equal…not making decisions based on some notion of superiority, like you know, "I KNOW ABOUT THIS!!! [with loud emphasis], I don’t discuss this with you" kind of a thing. (Kamala Vivek, 46, Scientist)

Additionally, being integrally involved in decision making also includes an acknowledgement that while both partners’ inputs are necessary to making any decision pertaining to family life, the skills of one partner (irrespective of gender) in a particular area may be superior to the other’s resulting in that partner perhaps making more informed inputs, which the other partner might need to concede to. Thus simply put, for Tamil women being equal partners in their marriages involves being jointly involved in all decisions about family life, such that they make equal contributions to the discussions pertaining to each decision, and with both partners being flexible enough to either concede to the other.

A particularly interesting point of note, in Tamil women’s negotiations of marital power in their households is the role of their agency in navigating this process. While there is no doubt
that for Tamil women power is predicated upon being jointly involved in decision making, for a number of them, being equal partners in their marriages involves having a choice of how to be involved in decision making. This was particularly evinced in the arena of financial decision making in their families. For the most part, the majority of my participants did not see the need to maintain separate bank accounts from their husbands as symbolic of their empowerment or their independence. In fact, most of them conceptualized separate bank accounts as antithetical to a “true” marriage, often noting to me that separate bank accounts are more indicative of roommates than a married couple, who trust each other. Interestingly, despite the importance of financial independence to them personally, few Tamil women operated their joint bank accounts on a regular basis, choosing rather, to let their husbands perform the bulk of what I call the “practicalities” of finaces namely operating accounts, paying bills, taxes, mortgages, making investments etc.

Like paying the bills, managing the finances, investing for the long term, investing for the children’s education, those things I have no clue about any of it. He [her husband] does that completely. Because I just felt like I couldn’t do everything, so I told him that between the cooking and cleaning and that [managing finances], I felt like that [managing finances] was his cup of tea more. So I said, “go ahead!” At least if we have to do on an ongoing basis, let it be something we at least enjoy doing! (Nalini Kumaran, 31, Generic Professional)

Readers will have noticed the careful use of verbs such as “operating,” “managing,” and “paying,” which is not merely happenstance, but rather is indicative of a marital negotiation by my participants. Simply put, Tamil women argue that while decisions about finances (where investments should be made, where assets should be purchased, etc) are jointly made, the implementation of these decisions are largely undertaken by their spouses as a form of gendered household labor performance. Accordingly, Tamil women such as Divya below contend that having equitable power in their marriages implies having a choice not only to decide whether or
not to be involved in certain decisions, but also the extent of being involved such that they
choose to let their husbands take the lead in financial aspects of family life.

NO [not handling finances is not contradictory to being equal partner]! Because I feel just
by me allowing him to do that [handle finances], it’s being an equal partner. If I had the
strengths [capabilities], I would definitely challenge him and if I had more strengths than
him in that way, I would definitely make sure that he just doesn’t make those decisions.
But because I am not inclined that way…I wouldn’t say that I don’t know how to do it, but
I’m not naturally inclined to think to that way. I feel that if I were to let him [handle
finances]…that’s equal sharing. Both my husband and I each one of us has skills,
strengths, so why not just play on our strengths and not on [how] the outside world is
going to look at [us]. (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

Particularly in the arena of finances, in making this choice for husbands to assume the
larger responsibility, Tamil women often cite the earlier mentioned argument of the latter being
more skilled/capable in financial planning and implementing and of themselves lacking interest
in the same. However, they are quick to argue that this does not negate their marital power
because they believe that had they been capable or more interested in finances than their spouses,
they would have definitely assumed a larger responsibility for it. Thus, the cornerstone of this
argument for my participants is that couples need to play on their strengths in decision making,
and accordingly, Tamil husbands’ larger share in the financial aspects of family life is merely
skill based and not gendered. While I do not disagree with this argument, I however contend that
men’s larger share of the practicalities of finances is indeed gendered household labor
performance, as Tamil women construct these responsibilities as “added burdens” to their other
“essential” domestic responsibilities (chores and child care). Hence, in light of the fact that Tamil
women spend a larger share of their time on essential household labor activities, they lack both
the time and inclination/interest to perform the practicalities of finances such as paying the bills,
mortgages etc. Needless to say, when attempting to understand their satisfaction with the
household labor arrangements in their families, Tamil women claimed that financial activities are
as much a household activity as domestic chores and child care. Given this, the majority were
extremely satisfied with the division of household labor in their families such that they performed a larger proportion of the “essential” activities, with their spouses performing the bulk of the financial ones.

Finally, another noteworthy aspect is a perception by Tamil women that their professional work did not directly contribute to their equal status in their families, but served, rather, to bolster their position in an egalitarian environment. This contradicts the extant scholarship on migrant women’s bargains with marital power in the United States, especially in the context of their paid labor (George 2005; Gramsmuck and Pessar 1991; Kandiyoti 1988; Kibria 1993; Lim 1997; Menjívar 2000; Parrado and Flippen 2005; Pedraza 1991; Sotelo 1994; Toro-Morn 1995; Zentgraf 2002). Often arguing that being an equal partner in marriage has to be negotiated by women (rather than men voluntarily granting that status to them), Tamil women attribute their marital power to their integrated womanhood which allows them to define themselves as individuals, albeit ones located in familial contexts. Professional work in the United States while directly contributing to the development of integrated womanhood, is perceived as buttressing their equal status in their families, by offering them the psychological resources (as discussed in Chapter 5) – particularly a sense of identity, self-confidence, and self-esteem – and the material benefits – such as knowledge of American society, and their contributions to their family’s socio-economic status - to challenge Tamil patriarchal constructs that operate in the transnational social space. Unlike their working-class counterparts, whose marital power negotiations are often driven by their financial independence in the United States which enables them to bargain out of performing certain domestic chores and child care, Tamil women do not construct a direct link between their professional lives and equal status in their marriages, because for them, martial power is not predicated upon chores and child care (Kibria 1993; Lim 1997; Pedraza 1991;
They instead perceive their professional lives as sources of psychological rather than material support in bringing about an equal partnership in marriage relationships, an expectation that many of them articulated before their marriage.

Thus in sum, despite the household labor arrangements discussed earlier in this chapter, all Tamil women consider themselves to be equal partners in their marriages. This sense of equal power is continuously negotiated throughout their married life, and is embodied primarily in their *choice* of how to be involved in decision making such that they integrally participate in the making of all familial decisions, while often leaving the practicalities or implementation of these decisions to their spouses.

**Gender, Accountability and Household Labor Arrangements**

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that the performance of household labor is an arena for symbolic enactments of femininity and masculinity by both Tamil women and men not only in terms of who performs the different aspects of household labor, but also how these are perceived. In this section, I add more texture to this by bringing household labor into the context of the immigrant status of Tamil families. I contend that Tamil women and men’s gender performances through household labor occur within a transnational social space defined by hegemonic Tamil gender constructs transported from India and reconstituted in the United States, American gender and family ideologies, and the presence of the Tamil community in Atlanta. These are the ideologies and resources that Tamil women and men reference in constructing their definitions and perceptions of the various activities of household labor (domestic chores, child care and decision making), which in turn influence the gendered arrangements of these activities in their households. In turn, the former serve as the institutional arenas which render Tamil women and men’s gender performances accountable as appropriate or transgressive, and thus sufficiently Tamil/Indian (Lorber 1993; West and Zimmerman 1997).
With particular reference to performing household labor as working women, Tamil women such as those cited below, often talk of experiencing an internal pressure to be “supermoms or superwomen.”

I put the pressure on myself. I don’t know if it’s me or is it society, or what it is! But yes, there’s a huge pressure to be everything and do everything, [and do it] perfectly….If I were to define super woman [she would say being] great [at] everything, you know a great mom, a great wife, great career woman. You see other working women around, like I see other Tam working women around me…people who you talk to even…they all give me the impression of being very much on top of their game, very organized, very kind of…“we’ve got our act together.” And definitely, any stay at home mom, regardless of race, and it’s whether White America or Indian or whatever…a stay at home mom does feel a little bit of superiority [that] “I’m doing my job,” [compared to a working mother]. (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

Being a working mom, the main challenge is balancing all these tasks. I think the reason for that is because you want to prove to people that you’re good in both fields you know…that we’re taking care of everything that needs taken care of at home, and then on top of that, you also want to show that you’re really good in your professional life so that the people that look at you, get a very impression about you, you know…(Vijaya Muruggan, 32, Engineer)

[For women] our own expectation, is like...we feel like we have to be the super women running this wonderful house, which is always clean and neat and your kids are well groomed [laughs] and of course, we all want our kids to be overachievers, too, so we want to sign them up for every single thing in school. (Janiki Parathasarathi, 44, Professor)

As explained by DeMeis and Perkins (1996) the concept of supermoms was developed in the 1990s to refer to “mothers who remain heavily involved in family work while also meeting the demands of paid employment” (p. 777). Accordingly, for Tamil women being supermoms implies not merely balancing their multiple roles as professionals, wives, and mothers, but excelling in each of them separately, and together as integrated women. In turn, the time and effort required to achieve this contributes to what Saraswati Vinayak, whose comment opens this chapter, calls “being on a treadmill to oblivion.” As I got to know them, I began to realize that although they characterized this “pressure” they experience to be “supermoms” as personal/individually unique to them, it is in fact an internalized gendered expectation that is
articulated by the Tamil community that they are a part of in Atlanta (made up largely of their friends who share similar class status as them) evinced in the fact that it is experienced by the majority of my participants.

In its attempt to preserve Tamil/Indian culture and family forms in an immigrant context, the Tamil community (both through its formal and informal spaces) rearticulates a very narrow, homogenized version of Tamil culture centered on preserving and retaining traditional emphasized Tamil femininity (defined only in the context of domestic roles) and hegemonic Tamil masculinity constructs and roles within which most of my participants were socialized, and which they negotiate with in their migration, work, and family lives (Bhattacharjee 1997, 1998; Das Gupta 1997; Gupta 1999; Hussain 2005; Kurien 1999; Mukhi 2000; Rudrappa 2004; Shah 1997a). Concomittantly, as perceived by the Tamil community, only these traditional performances of gender by individual Tamil women and men, and families organized around these gender ideologies are judged to be “authentically” Tamil. Thus as working women, my participants confess that the expectation to be supermoms stems from the subtle judgement that as professionals they have already transgressed the borders of appropriate Tamil femininity, and considering that working (as opposed to being homemakers) was their own choice, they have to make an added effort to prove that their professional lives do not impede the fulfillment of their domestic responsibilities (defined largerly in terms of performance household labor activities) which could result in them being judged as “bad mothers” (Guendouzi 2006:901).³

Within the narrow gender framework of the Tamil community which renders their gender identities and performances accountable, being authentically Tamil women is organized around

³ It is important to recognize that in making this claim, I focus in particular on the location of my participants within the Tamil community in Atlanta. I am however aware that similar constructions and judgements about gender and ethnicity occur across other immigrant groups, and that the pressure to be supermoms is not unique to Tamil women, but is even present among white-American women. I am however arguing that as ethnic, immigrant women, Tamil women uniquely navigate this characterization.
women assuming the responsibility for maintaining and ensuring not merely the smooth running of family life, but also the quality of their homes, and of superior accomplishments (academic, cultural and behavioral) of their children. Correspondingly, being authentically Tamil men is centered on providing for the material needs of families. Thus, as Shymala explains below, should their families be lacking in any of these designated gendered areas, Tamil women’s femininity and mothering abilities are called into question, accompanied by the sense that she is failing in her key responsibilities.

I think that’s culture, that women…you know…if the house is not well [kept], then it shows on the woman. Nobody says, “you know he must be an awful husband, the house is dirty.” When the house is dirty, the first thing they say, “my God she must be a lazy woman, did you check the house?” So nobody ever thinks wrong of the man, as long as it’s a big house…[then] they think, “OK the man’s doing well. You know he’s provided, he’s given her the house and everything. God, can’t she keep it clean?” [So] I want to keep it clean to prove…what, I don’t know? It bothers me if the house is not clean. Why does it bother me? Because it shows badly on me when somebody walks in and does not show badly on [her husband]. (Shymala Devadas, 39, CPA)

What is particularly important to recognize about this construction is the caste-class overtones that imbue it such in the particular instance of domestic chores that while Tamil women are judged for the quality of their homes, there is not a commensurate expectation that they need to perform the chores of maintaining the home themselves. Drawing upon their privileged social location in India, where most of my participants’ families employed domestic workers to perform domestic chores, the majority of Tamil women conceptualize domestic chores as the “minor details” of family life that are necessary to keep body and soul together, but not important enough to argue over creating unnecessary friction in their families. Also, as an activity, domestic chores are not critical to their identity as integrated women nor to their sense of being equal partners in their marriages. Accordingly, as I have already mentioned earlier, while Tamil women are successful in bargaining for their husbands’ to be involved in some aspects of domestic work (largely due to structural constraints of being immigrant, dual-income
families), there is no push to further increase these performances or even attempt a more egalitarian arrangement with respect to chores.

Because like as far as I’m concerned, it’s [domestic chores] a really minor detail so it’s something that is not so big that it’s going to hurt me or something... so I’m not going to make a big deal about it [performing a larger share of it]. (Vijaya Muruggan, 34, Engineer)

What I meant is that household work to me is actually…it’s a pain in the neck... it has to be done! You know some people actually enjoy doing all the household [work]. That’s not me. I just do it because it has to be done. The bigger work is the kids [child care activities]. (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

Rather, over time, as their families grow and domestic chores increase exponentially without corresponding increases in their spouses’ involvement in these activities, and in the context of the importance of Tamil women’s work to themselves and to their families, Tamil respond by choosing to “outsource” domestic work. Thus they employ maids to perform this labor within their homes, rather than performing it themselves or getting involved in spousal conflicts in an attempt to solicit husbands’ increased performance of this labor.

Oh, I have a maid [to do the cleaning]. We have a cleaning service once a month. When we were in an apartment, we would have to clean ourselves, before the kids were born. [But] at the point when you started having the kids, we decided that fighting over who’s doing the household duties was a big pain…we found ourselves squabbling about “oh we haven’t cleaned this, it’s not as clean as it looks, it’s as dirty as it looks,” you know. And that’s when we decided we are just getting a cleaning service and got that [domestic chores] out of the way. (Gauri Ananth, 43, Corporate America Executive)

We outsource cleaning, so we don’t clean much. We outsource most of the cleaning, so I vacuum once a week…just the high traffic areas. It [outsourcing domestic chores] happened when we moved into a house... [in] the apartment you don’t need it [a maid service]. But we moved into a house and it [household cleaning] just became too much. That time we were getting it once a month...a thorough cleaning. Now I get it every 2 weeks. After my daughter was born, the first one...we got [the cleaning service] every 2 weeks because I just couldn’t handle it. Because frankly, I got tired of saying [to her husband] "do it, do it, do it!" (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

I argue that this act of outsourcing domestic work is itself a gendered one, as corroborating extant scholarship on white, middle-class families, Tamil women are central in negotiating for domestic help at home, as a means of reducing their own performance of household activities which they
construct as a burden, and not particularly fulfilling (Cohen 1998; Oropesa 1993; Van Der Lippe, Tijdens, and De Ruijter 2004). Key to the spousal negotiations involved in deciding to outsource domestic work is Tamil women’s argument that by employing maids to perform the drudgery of domestic chores (such as cleaning, vacuuming, laundry, bathrooms etc) on a regular basis (often every week/two weeks in most Tamil families), not only are both spouses freed from having to perform these activities (and men in particular from having to increase their performance of these), but more importantly that this enables them to spend more time in child care, which as I will argue a little later, is an important site for femininity performance by Tamil women.

See when I [started] working I told him [her husband], “every weekend [we spend cleaning] and it’s like we had just two days for four of us [the family] to be together. I do not want to be doing this [chores].” So we got a cleaning lady and the very fact that I don’t have to fight and he doesn’t have to fight [to get chores done] makes every penny worth it. She comes, she cleans, she goes. And we are just with the kids doing our stuff. (Hema Nagaraj, 32, Generic Professional)

Needless to say, Tamil women continue to perform the larger proportion of domestic chores between maid visits as recounted by Revathy’s vacuuming of high-traffic areas cited earlier.

More importantly, Tamil women’s professional work is an important mediator of this decision in that, their contributions to the family income (albeit smaller than that of their husbands’), results in their family’s progression into the upper-middle class/upper-class income bracket in the United States, affording them the disposable income to hire domestic workers. Thus, (as recounted in Chapter 5) a number of my participants admitted that upon commencement of their professional lives in the United States, and the demands being dual-earning couples creates for family life, Tamil women used their own earning capacity to bargain with spouses for “luxury purchases” such as a maid service. For them, this contributes to establishing the quality of life that they had desired and which stimulated their emigration from India. Saraswati Vinayak, the Corporate America explains:
I subcontract it [domestic chores] out to a cleaner. Unlike the bad old days when we’d have to do everything. Nowadays it seems to be a lot more accepted [in the United States] that you have household help. I’ve always been of the opinion that if I spend my time earning the money why can’t I have a few luxuries? So this [hiring a cleaning service] is my reward to myself more or less.

Therefore in sum, the central argument that I am attempting to make is that for Tamil women it is not necessarily the performance of domestic chores that embodies their symbolic enactments of Tamil femininity, but rather their assumption of the responsibility for maintaining the quality of their homes especially in the context of their professional obligations. To do this, Tamil women not only take the lead in deciding upon outsourcing domestic work, but also in planning how this will be undertaken namely by identifying the maid service, planning when they will visit, the chores the maid will perform, and by doing a larger share of domestic chores between maid visits. What is particularly important to recognize about this maneuver is that it allows Tamil women to successfully construct and perform integrated femininity (enabling them to work and have a family life) while simultanesously enabling them to retain aspects of emphasized Tamil femininity necessary to be judged as appropriate Tamil women.

In contrast to domestic chores, my research finds that for Tamil women the performance of child care activities is an important site for femininity construction and performance, and also where they are judged as being “good Tamil/Indian mothers” by the Tamil community. This is particularly evident when Tamil women reorient the faces of their integrated femininity in the context of their professional lives, such that their motherhood identities are performed more prominently especially when their children are young, to allow them the flexibility of being readily available to engage in child care activities rather than in the performance of domestic chores. Although their structural vulnerabilities as immigrant parents, enables Tamil professional women to negotiate for spouses’ increased involvement in child care (more so than in domestic chores), my research finds that Tamil irrespective of whether or not child care is equitably shared
by Tamil couples, women retain two main activities as bastions of femininity performance – cooking and cultural socialization of children- and which in turn enables them to retain the Tamil/Indian-ness of their families.

Cooking or feeding the family continues to the designated as a feminine chore often on the grounds that women are more organized at it, and more capable of performing it largely due to differential socialization as children (Coltrane 2000; DeVault 1991; Hochschild 1989; Shelton and John 1996). In turn, cooking, especially among immigrant families, is characterized as as a means of retaining traditional gender roles and hierarchies within migrant families in an immigrant context that is continuously challenging traditional family forms (George 2005; Kibria 1993; Sotelo 1994). This is corroborated by my participants, all of whom have assumed complete responsibility for feeding their families, irrespective of how other household labor activities are divided. I argue that despite Tamil women’s cognizance of the added time and work demands that feeding the family places on them as working mothers, they chose to retain and perform this activity as a means of not only performing gendered ethnicity, but retaining the ethnic character of their families embodied in “mother’s cooking” and the availability of South Indian cuisine especially to their children.

Accordingly, Tamil women explain that they experience subtle internal pressures to be “good Indian mothers” embodied in the gendered expectation, both within their families, and the larger Tamil community, that cooking is their “natural responsibility” and should thus be performed by them.

I mean that’s how I’ve been brought up and I’ve seen my mother, my grandmother, even though she was working she would be the one who would do it [cooking] and I guess we as children would expected her to do it rather than him [her father]. So generally...the kitchen department….it’s usually the women….In general, it’s naturally to say, "OK, SHE'S the one who does it!" [emphasis]. (Kamakshi Swaminathan, 44, IT Professional)
This is particularly evinced in the fact that despite not having necessarily been trained in cooking (much like their Tamil male counterparts) when being socialized as young women, Tamil women rather than men begin to develop these skills especially upon starting families. Given this, Tamil women contend that over time, they have become more efficient and/or better at cooking than their spouses, and perhaps more importantly can cook the variety of dishes their children enjoy, resulting in their spouses and children looking to them to feed the family. Manya and Kamakshi explain:

….It’s just by practice [that she] cooks. It’s not that he’s not willing to do those things…. But I feel like “OK, you [her husband] don’t know much to do [cooking], so you’re going to be wasting time.” I guess over a period of years when you cook, you’re [my participant] more efficient and faster in doing things [than her husband]. (Manya Ramalingam, 55, Scientist)

My kids…they expect me to give them food, they don’t expect their dad to do so. But kids generally, love variety…so they kind of expect the mother to go around, look for other things that they might like to make the extra effort to make something that they like…(Kamakshi Swaminathan, 44, IT Professional)

More interesting, is the entwining of ethnicity with this gendered performance. Through my conversations with Tamil women, I began to recognize that for them cooking served as a means of transmitting ethnicity to their children through food (Khandelwal 2002; Rangaswamy 2000; Srinivas 2006). Thus Tamil women contend that their almost exclusive performance of cooking within their families is because they cook South Indian/Indian cuisine, which is more difficult and tedious than American based cuisine (pizza, pasta, burgers, salads), which their husbands are more proficient at, but which Tamil women characterize as being insufficient in feeding their families in the long term. Integral to this, as explained by Arundhati and Vidya below, is their need for their children to have familiarity with South Indian/Indian cuisine as a means of knowing their origins and not being embarrassed by their cultural practices; and of making and retaining meaningful transnational connections with extended family in India (such
as visiting grandparents for extended periods of time and not being dependent on American
cuisine).

Because we [my participant and her husband] like it [South Indian/Indian food] [and] I
guess because we were raised eating that. [With the] kids were little...it’s not that we
always made them something else [non-Indian food] because there was only Indian food.
We always fed them Indian food, so my kids really liked any kind of food. (Arundhati
Chandran, 45, Entrepreneur)

The good part of my children is they go to India every summer. For the two months over
summer vacation and my parents never have any problems keeping them because they
would eat whatever is homemade. Particularly, they don’t crave for pizza and stuff like that
[American food]. Since I am cooking them [South Indian/Indian] food [at home] they eat it
very well and there are no problems in India. (Vidya Pillai, 39, IT Professional)

Needless to say, as has been demonstrated throughout this dissertation, Tamil women
rework the traditional gendered expectations of cooking being a feminized chore, to account for
their agency by arguing that as mothers, not only is it their choice to perform the bulk of the
cooking in their families, but that they gain immense personal satisfaction from their children’s
enjoyment of their cooking. Thus, over time, in embracing and gaining satisfaction through these
mothering activities, cooking is not necessarily designated as a chore.

….Especially with my kids are growing up… I like to make things for them that they like.
You know cook some dishes that the children enjoy and cooking on a daily basis
sometimes. now it’s... it’s not even, I don’t even see it as a big chore anymore. (Janiki
Parthasarathi, 44, Professor)

Further, being located in the United States, and and being working women whose professional
lives define their femininity affords Tamil women the opportunity to transform their methods of
cooking from those prevalent in their families in India, and prized as the only appropriate way of
feeding the family. Thus a number of my participants spoke of embracing “newer” (for them)
cooking methods such as cooking in bulk on weekends, storing food, using an Indian food-
preparation service, and preparing only the staples (rice, chapattis, dosa etc) on a daily basis –
adaptive responses which they believe to be necessary to accommodate their motherhood and professional identities.

However, illustrative of the connections between gendered ethnicity, accountability and cooking, in making these maneuvers, they are always aware that they run the risk of being judged as bad Indian mothers, and of their femininity being called into question by the Tamil community made up of their compatriots.

Everybody was asking me about it [ordering Indian food from outside], it was like this HUGE DEAL! [with perplexed emphasis]. Like friends of mine saying "Revathy doesn't cook, she just orders food from outside." I said, "I do cook, I do do stuff." I didn’t realize, it became like this...almost embarrassing thing [that] I have to hide. It was AWFUL! [with emphasis]. I don’t know why I let it [comments] affect me so much...but I just kept thinking about it [comments], because I felt like just the worst woman in the world. I don’t know why it should be such a big deal...I never figured that out. I mean what’s the big deal, so what if I got that from outside? I mean it was huge, I can’t tell you. It’s a lot of the society pressure. I’m telling you that time when I ordered the food, it was just eye opening for me. It was awful, I mean I had people asking me, “you don’t cook?” So some say, "you get food from outside, you’re husband takes care of the kids [husband shares child care responsibility with her], what do you do?" (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

....Yes, I would say that they [Tamil women who do not cook at home on a regular basis] would be stereotyped [by the Tamil community] as being lazy or you know...if they’re working, they [Tamil community] would just say, “oh they’re just taking advantage of working...and being lazy, and not doing their role,” definitely, yes! I think it is expected as Indian women [for us] to be the primary [person] taking care of the meals. (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

As explained by Revathy and Divya, my participants are aware that the Tamil community (referring largely to their friends and neighbors), in its reworking of traditional Tamil hegemonic gender and familial constructs, equates “good Tamil/Indian mothering”- and hence appropriate femininity performance - with women cooking daily (a gender standard existent in India). With due understanding to the demands on working women’s time and their American location, the above mentioned transformation in methods of cooking are more-or-less acceptable, on the condition that women personally perform this activity diligently, ensure that their families are
being sufficiently fed, and thus prove that as working women, they have not abandoned their feminine responsibilities in favor of career progression – what Divya calls “taking advantage of working and being lazy.” Hence a number of my participants spoke of experiencing a sense of guilt and of failure in their roles as mothers if they do not cook for their families – feelings I argue that are indeed personal, but which are rooted in community opprobrium of their gendered behavior. Divya continues:

I would feel very guilty if I don’t cook…it’s like I didn’t do my job or something. And I hate that feeling, but it always comes. And my husband makes fun of me…even if it’s not even two meals [that she has missed cooking]…he might just mean it as a joke, but he’s being sarcastic sometimes, "oh you didn’t even go to the kitchen today," something like that. I feel like, "oh why is it only my job to go to the kitchen? Even you’re welcome." I do say that sometimes, but then again, I also feel guilty and I can’t help feeling that. I think it’s in us as both women and particularly Indian women…

These feelings are further complicated by the fact that in rendering Tamil women’s gender performances accountable, and their own judgements about their successful mothering, the Tamil community and my participants draw upon transnational models of “good mothering” and appropriate femininity. These are embodied in the feminine figures of their mothers, grandmothers, sisters-in-law, who not only performed this activity when they were young, but continue to do so in India, equating this activity with successful mothering. In turn, I gradually began to recognize that my participants connect a sense of “home” and comfort with “mother’s cooking” (and cooking of South Indian food), which they desire to recreate in the immigrant space of the United States to anchor their children (Srinivas 2006). Hence, cooking becomes a site of femininity construction and performance, and is thus retained by women as integral to their mothering responsibility.

It’s, an Indian the expectation [that being good mothers connected to cooking] because you know I’ve always seen my mom cooking and my in-laws, and my sisters-in-law, everybody cooked on a daily basis and not only once, but three times [a day in India]. So, it’s [assuming complete responsibility for feeding the family] definitely based on how we
grew up, and some people have changed that after coming here, but I just personally couldn’t… (Divya Chandrashekar, 40, Corporate America Executive)

For me, comfort was sitting [and] eating my mother’s rasam-sadam, and aloo curry… and I just want my kids to have that. It’s a huge deal. So I have to make sure that I cook for them [her children]. It takes up a lot of my energy. So my husband says, “cooking takes up time. Let’s get someone to cook for us.” I cannot handle the thought of my children eating somebody else’s food other than my own. I cannot handle it! That is the only thing that is preventing me from doing it. Because for me… that is such a strong bond between mother and child… for a child to remember the mother’s cooking. I cannot do it! (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

The second child care activity which is retained by Tamil women as a means of performing femininity is the cultural socialization of their children. Readers will be reminded here of my earlier comments of Tamil women taking a larger role in the construction of and participation in Tamil community in Atlanta. As in the case of domestic chores, and cooking, this is connected to the construction of gendered ethnicity by the Tamil community such that women are perceived to be keepers of the “authentic” Tamil culture and family, and thus most appropriate to transmit the same to their children (Bhattacharjee 1997, 1998; Das Gupta 1997; Dasgupta and DasGupta 1998; Gupta 1999; Hussain 2005; Kallivayalil 2004; Kurien 1999; Mukhi 2000; Nagel 1994). It is important to recognize that this equating of women with cultural retention is not merely an immigrant response, but is true of all nations and groups (Bhattacharjee 1998; Hussain 2005; Nagel 1994). Accordingly, despite their blended socialization in India, a number of my participants spoke of having experienced some type of Tamil cultural socialization (learning dance, music etc), with the subtle parental expectation that their children would in time benefit from this upbringing. This comes to fruition as they navigate being immigrant parents in the United States.

From the previous chapter, readers will be reminded that Tamil women perform integrated femininity in the workplace by compromising on their job profiles so as to accommodate the demands of being mothers. For the majority of Tamil women, this involved having work profiles
that were flexible enough for them to attend all their childrens’ activities, despite their spouses’ increased and even equitable sharing of these. My analysis uncovers that Tamil women’s preoccupation with children’s activities is centered on their children being bicultural in the United States, and Tamil women’s commensurate concerns that their children successfully integrate into both cultures. To this effect, Tamil parents feel the need to involve their children in both American activities (such as band, soccer, learning a Western instrument, choir etc), as well as Tamil/Indian cultural ones (such as learning classical Indian dance, Carnatic music, learning Tamil, attending Sunday School at Temple and other cultural/religious activities). For the most part, while both parents shared the responsibility for being involved – i.e. chauffeuring, attending, participating – in the more American related activities especially those connected with school, Tamil women assumed almost complete responsibility for the Indian cultural activities.  

In the evening I would go pick them up and take them to all different classes they are supposed to go…taking them to dance and music and all the extracurricular activities that children have. I do all that. And I also will sit with them when they practice dance, music and all that stuff. (Vidy Pillai, 39, IT Professional)  

I take care of all the music part and then you know…all Indian activities part, and everything, I am concentrating on those and that’s completely me. (Neelakshi Arunachalem, 42, Scientist)  

This involved not just the practical tasks of chauffeuring children to and from these activities, but researching and deciding which cultural socialization activities their children would perform, coordinating with other Tamil parents so that their children shared similar activities and in that way made Indian friends, (which as noted in Chapter 4 was one purpose while women created Indian community), and supporting children as they learned these cultural

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4 In making this claim, I am not negating father’s involvement in the same. Often I noticed that children’s activities became a family event, with all siblings and both parents attending. Rather, my argument is that for the most part, Tamil women appeared to take the lead in the organizing, planning, and implementation of cultural socialization more than their spouses, although in a few cases, husbands’ were more involved in this because they had been trained in dance/singing/playing music instrument as children.
traditions by ensuring they practice and perform regularly. This was particularly illustrated to me through my ethnographic observations at various community sites and cultural activities where I witnessed not only the larger presence of women than men, but of mothers accompanying their children to these events and supporting their performances. Cited below are excerpts from my fieldnotes at the Annual CAMAGA Music Concert which demonstrates Tamil mother’s investment in their children’s cultural socialization.

The concert began with children, teenagers and youth [singing] presentations. As the first children, youth came out to present, parents would set up their photography equipment and record the entire performance of their child as well as those of others. As soon as the emcee [would] announce the performers, and their accompanists come backstage in the order of their performance, mothers would get up with their children and accompany them to the back. Fathers would stay behind in the auditorium if they were present and record their children’s performance on cameras. Women came to the forefront in accompanying their children backstage, preparing them for their performance and in critiquing their performances with them.

One mother in particular was very interesting to observe. She herself is a trained musician and has her own music school in Atlanta. Her sons were singing and playing in the program. Whenever their turn came up, she would accompany them on stage. She would situate them comfortably on the stage, would then check the mikes, asking her sons to play or sing a note and gesture to her husband in the audience to check whether it sounded alright. In one instance, her sons were singing in a group of three. Once she situated them on the ground before the mikes, she gestured frantically to her husband, quietly calling out in Tamil… “the printed sheets with the lyrics, they are in the bag…at the back of the auditorium…Oh! Never mind…they are here with me.” She then took out the printed sheets and placed them before her sons. Once her sons were situated, she’d run back, around the stage and into the auditorium and seat herself in the front row before the stage and then keep time and sing along with her sons. They kept checking with her as they performed.

Another instance of mother’s investment in their children’s performance was in preparing their children to go on stage. I noticed a woman who was shepherding a group of teenagers who were going to sing as a group. There were three girls and a younger boy. She was the parent of one of the teenagers and had accompanied them into the auditorium so they could find their place on the bulletin board and then register to confirm their participation. After that, she walked out with them. When I intercepted them, she was asking them to drink some water out of a cup. The girls had a plastic cup to themselves and she tried to tip the water into the young boy’s mouth. “have some water…it’ll help your throats so you can sing” she was telling them. The boy accepted the water and then closed his mouth rapidly saying “it’s hot! It’s hot!” “Yes, it’s hot water” the mother replied, “that helps with your throat…” (CAMAGA Music Concert, February 2008)
For Tamil women, their reasoning for taking complete responsibility for the cultural socialization of their children often included the interest/capability argument that they cite when explaining the division of household labor. However, I contend that while this might be true, the underlying factors that make women’s greater interest/capability in cultural practices are socially constructed and are centered on gendered ethnic conceptualizations of women (especially mothers) as transmitters of culture, which becomes particularly critical in an immigrant context.

Reiterating from my discussion of women’s role in community creation in Chapter 4, despite the added time and effort commitments that community work and cultural socialization require of them as working mothers, Tamil women chose to assume this responsibility to ensure not merely the retention of Tamil ethnicity and cultural practices in the United States, but also their children’s familiarity, comfort, and ultimate identification with the same.

I want them [her children] to have this whole sense of our traditions, so I’ll do all the traditions…I’ll get up at four in the morning…I’ll do all my prayers. My husband will say, “forget it, to hell with it, just be yourself, you don’t need to do everything.” But I want to get [the children into] activities. I’m just more involved in all that, and I feel more compulsion to kind of… “oh they have to do these things.” (Revathy Venkatesh, 32, Corporate America Executive)

Additionally, this is also connected to accountability in gender performance stemming largely from community approval of having successfully socialized their children into “authentic” Tamil ways (read: fluent in spoken Tamil, knowledge of dance, music, history etc) and thus having protected against the Americanization of their children. In so doing, they are designated as “good Tamil/Indian mothers.”

In conclusion, I argue that Tamil women are constructing new Tamil/Indian family forms in the United States through their gendered negotiations of household labor (domestic chores, child care and decision making) in the context of their structural vulnerabilities as immigrant families in the United States, and the demands of being dual-earning households. This new
family form is characterized by husbands’ domestic involvement, outsourcing of domestic chores, and equitable decision making. Taking this along with their upper-middle/upper-class status (and corresponding location in predominantly white neighborhoods) in the United States, the resulting familial transformation begins to resemble white-American, upper-middle/upper-class, dual-earning households. I contend that it is in response to this threat of becoming Americanized (read: assimilated) and of losing the Indian-ness of their family lives, that Tamil women retain two key child care activities – cooking, and cultural socialization- as bastions of resistance to this assimilation. The uniquely “Indian” nature of these activities (cooking Indian food, and Indian cultural socialization), lend themselves to the retention and transmission of Tamil ethnicity and cultural practices within the family life. However, this is further complicated by gender, accountability and class such that the appropriateness of Tamil women’s femininity performances and commensurate judgement as “good” Tamil/Indian mothers is connected to them performing these activities rather than merely organizing, planning and outsourcing them as in the case of domestic chores. Thus simply stated, new Indian family forms are constructed by Tamil women in response to the structural exigencies of their lives as immigrants. These families are characterized by transformed household labor arrangements, equitable decision making, and the retention the responsibility for ensuring the quality of the home, cooking, and cultural socialization of children by Tamil women. In the process, these immigrant households simultaneously operate as an adaptive social form and a bastion of resistance to Americanization (George 2005; Menjívar 1999; Parrado Flippen 2005; and Pessar 1999; Sotelo 1994).

**Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed Tamil women’s performance of integrated femininity within their households by analyzing their household labor and decision making arrangements. I argue that referencing their social location as immigrants in the United States, Tamil women
organize their professional lives are essential not only to themselves as individuals, but also to the economic well-being of their families in the United States. Accordingly, they are successful in bargaining with family patriarchy evinced in their husbands’ increased (although not always equitable) involvement in the domestic sphere, and their enjoyment of an equal partnership status in all aspects of familial and financial decision making. To this effect, their families begin to resemble their white, upper-middle/upper-class American counterparts. However to counter this threat of assimilation into American society, and thereby retain the distinctive Tamil/Indian character of their families, Tamil women retain cooking and cultural socialization of their children as a bastion of femininity performance which in turn allows them to maintain and transmit Tamil ethnicity to their children. Thus, the above features coalesce into the construction of new Tamil/Indian family forms in the United States – which at at once adaptive and retentive - that are distinctive from their counterparts in India, and serve as a bulwark against Americanization.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION

In the eyes of traditional South Asian society, like many other societies, a woman is not a person in her own right; she is primarily her father’s daughter, a wife or a mother. These women are renegotiating their identities as women, wives, and mothers when they come to the United States. They struggle with their own sense of ‘self’ as they themselves adjust to a culture very different from that of their childhood and as they bring up their children in this rapidly changing and sometimes confusing world.

---Sangeeta R. Gupta, *Emerging Voices*

Inspired by the the growing body of feminist migration scholarship and my personal experiences as an immigrant in the United States, this dissertation is a feminist qualitative inquiry into the gendered migration and settlement of first-generation, married, Tamil professional women. Specifically, I ask three interrelated research questions namely: (1) How do first-generation Tamil professional women negotiate with gender in their migration and settlement in the United States? (2) How are their professional lives circumscribed by their intersectional social location as upper-caste/class, immigrant women of color, and mothers in the United States? (3) What are the gendered work-family negotiations in their households? Through my employment of a critical gendered lens on Indian migration to the United States, this dissertation not only challenges the androcentric biases in the extant scholarship, but also contributes to it, by excavating women’s voices and narratives in a discourse that has underrepresented them (Chandrasekhar 1982; Donato et al. 2006; Lal 1999; Madhavan 1985; Morokvasic 1984; Pessar 1999; Puwar and Raghuram 2003; Segal 2002; Sotelo 1999; Thadani and Todaro 1984; Weinberg 1992).

Further, my emphasis on particularizing the experiences of one Indian regional group – the Tamils – as opposed to “Indians” as a composite whole, builds knowledge about the diversity of Indians in the United States. The choice of Tamils was made not merely on the basis of the palpable dearth of sociological knowledge about this group in the United States, but more
because, as described in the previous chapters, they are truly representative of the new cadre of post-1965 Indian emigrants – middle-class, educated, professional migrants. Thus the sample for this study includes 33 first-generation, married, Tamil professional women living within the Greater Atlanta Metropolitan Area who migrated to the United States between 10-30 years ago. Data was gathered using a combination of multi-part interviews with my participants (each approximately 4-5 hours in duration), and an 8 month long ethnography in Tamil community sites and participant homes in Atlanta.

Recapitulating from Chapter 1, the feminist orientations of this project lie in my attention to an intersectional, structural, and transnational perspective on migration that problematizes the role of gender (in interaction with other forces) and agency in organizing migration, work, and family life. This is embodied in the engendering migration perspective within which the research questions and emergent findings have been framed (Donato et al. 2006; Pessar 1999; Pessar and Mahler 2005; Sotelo 1999, 2000). The purpose of this perspective as articulated throughout this dissertation is to uncover the fullness of migrant women’s lives not as a variable, juxtaposed against men, but rather as integrated with those of the latter, thereby constituting the gendered migration process. Thus integral to this framework is the conceptualization of gender as a structure that embeds key societal institutions – and of particular interest to this project, those of family, community, and work – and organizes an individual’s social location and corresponding access to privilege and disadvantage in undertaking migration, work, and family life (Collins 2000; Kimmel 2004; Lorber 1993; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 1994; Zinn and Dill 1996). Operating as a structure, gender is culturally/interactionally produced in emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity constructs and expectations into which my participants are socialized and in reference to which they develop gender identities. These are in turn
performed within gendered institutions and subject to judgement which validate their appropriateness (West and Zimmerman 1987). Utilizing these theoretical ideas, I attempt to theorize Tamil professional women’s gendered migration and settlement experiences centered on the construction of integrated femininity as their agentic challenge to emphasized Tamil femininity, articulated in the migrant context of the United States, and performed within the realms of work and family life resulting in the creation of new Tamil/Indian family forms.

The feminist underpinnings of this project are also evinced in the methodological premises that organized data collection and analysis, outlined in Chapter 3, such that these were primarily oriented to my participants being co-constructors of the narrative presented here, and thus subjects rather than objects in the research process, resulting in the excavation of their voices (Acker, Barry, and Esseveld 1991; Cook and Fonow 1990; DeVault 1999; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002; Reinharz and Davidman 1992; Smith 1987). To achieve this, I employed feminist techniques in interviewing, framed the emergent findings within a constructivist grounded theory perspective which recognizes not only the researcher’s personal motivations and influences on the research process, but also participants as active collaborators in it, and engaged in self-reflexive praxis that enabled me to interrogate my power as a researcher (DeVault 1999; Charmaz 2006; Gottfried 1996; Harding 1987; Maynard 1994; Mies 1991; Naples 2003; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Accordingly, true to feminist principles, my goal in this dissertation is not to develop a generalized account of all Tamil and/or Indian migrant women, but rather one unique to Tamil Brahmin women thereby recognizing the diversity and multiplicity of narratives and views (Collins 2000; Gottfried 1996; Mohanty 2002; Weisser and Fleischner 1994).
Theorizing Tamil Women’s Migration and Settlement: The Intersection of Social Location, Integrated Femininity and New Indian Families

This research project illustrates my central argument that the gendered realms of migration, work, and family life are interconnected such that the negotiations and happenings in one have implications for the others. In so doing, I continuously connect the private and public spheres providing a fuller conceptualization of Tamil women’s migration, work, and family life in the United States thereby contributing to the extant feminist migration scholarship. This is particularly evinced in my theorizing of Tamil women’s construction and performance of integrated femininity in the United States. My research finds that integrated femininity is Tamil women’s agentic response to the constrictions that emphasized Tamil femininity place on their migration and professional work, and commensurate organization of family life (Collins 2000; hooks 1984). Supporting the central premise of the engendering migration perspective of gender not only organizing the process of migration and settlement, but also being reconfigured by it, my research finds that this agentic gender construction and performance by Tamil women occurs within a transnational social field bounded not merely by their physical social location (their caste, class, racial location) in both India and the United States, but also by their mental and emotional imagery – through transportation and reconstitution – of hegemonic Tamil gender expectations and roles (Das Gupta 1997; Kivisto 2001; Pessar and Mahler 2005; Sotelo 1999, 2000).

I contend that Tamil women’s gendered navigations with migration, work, and family life, and eventual construction of integrated femininity have its origins in their social location in India as Brahmin, middle-to-upper-middle class women who for the most part grew up outside of Southern India and/or had working maternal figures resulting in their blended socialization as girls during childhood and youth (Pessar and Mahler 2005). As described in Chapter 4, this
socialization is characterized by the combination of conservative and progressive gender standards – the mechanism through which their parents challenged prevalent gender expectations. Accordingly, my participants not only enjoyed greater freedom in determining the personal expression of their gender identities through their dress and behavior, but also in obtaining a higher education commensurate with that of men, which was the prevalent trend at the time. For their parents however, this emphasis on daughter’s education was perceived as a means of facilitating her independence within the heteronormative framework of marriage, rather than an alternative to marriage (i.e. being single women engaged in careers). Hence, upon attaining adulthood and irrespective of their educational qualifications, Tamil women were expected to marry and subordinate their professional identities to their familial ones as wives and mothers. Simply put, as women they were defined as wives and mothers who might work, but whose work is secondary to their familial roles. This is the cultural articulation of emphasized Tamil femininity into which my participants were socialized, and against which they developed and performed their gender identities as integrated women (Connell 1987; Kimmel 2004).

Drawing upon their own highly educated status in India, my analysis reveals that Tamil women began to bargain with the above articulated emphasized Tamil femininity in India, by prizing their professional ambitions and their desire to engage in professional work, often as a means to personal autonomy – the earliest foundations of integrated femininity (Kandiyoti 1988). For a large proportion of my participants, their inability to achieve this in India (largely due to community opprobrium, and lack of financial independence), created a desire to emigrate to the United States which, for them, drawing upon information circulating migrant networks and media, was the embodiment of gender progressiveness. Needless to say, dependent on their age and marital status, this personal goal was also entwined with the desire for their families to
experience an improved quality of life in the United States. At that time however, emigration was a masculine bastion among Tamil Brahmins, affording Tamil women the opportunity to migrate only as married women rather than independent migrants. Thus, as explained in Chapter 4, for Tamil women, this necessitated their accommodative reconfiguring of emphasized Tamil femininity constructs such that they engaged in parental bargains by either agreeing to marry, but only an American based/bound spouse thereby facilitating their migration, or agreeing to entertain the idea of marriage on the condition that should an educational opportunity in the United States come through prior to the arranging of the marriage, they would pursue the former. Additionally, considering that the majority of my participants emigrated as married women, accommodative reconfiguring of gender standards also occurred in the context of spousal discussions prior to marriage, where Tamil women raised the issue of being professionals, gauging potential partners’ reactions and support of the same, which in addition to other personal factors often emerged as the critical criterion to their agreement to the marriage. Accordingly, Tamil women immigrated to the United States through three main streams – as independent migrants, as married wives in family stage migration, and as members of families in family unit migration. In each of these routes, they engaged with gender hierarchies within their households (parents and husbands) such that migration was undertaken at the nexus of their personal ambitions to be professional and their familial ones of an improved standard of living. Thus as this nascent stage, Tamil women were interweaving their personal ambitions as professionals, with their socially designated ones as wives and mothers. At this stage however, it remains in the realm of ambition rather than a cohesive identity that defines them as women.

I argue through my analysis that the construction and performance of integrated femininity as a cohesive feminine identity by Tamil women occurs only in the context of the United States,
through their agentic reconfiguring of transported emphasized Tamil femininity constructs (Collins 2000; hooks 1984; Lorber 1993). As detailed in the previous analytic chapters, the consolidation of this identity occurs through two key processes in the migrant context namely settlement and professional work. Despite their personal professional ambitions that organize their emigration from India, upon arrival in the United States, Tamil women have to navigate their structural vulnerabilities as immigrants of color who lack a support system in the United States to organize family life, and encounter difficulties in accessing professional work immediately upon migration. Considering these, Tamil women continue the accommodative reconfiguring of gender commenced in India, by reorganizing their priorities to heighten their familial ones choosing to focus on organizing the successful settlement and adaptation of their families (spouses and children), prior to embarking on their own personal professional goals (George 2005; Sotelo 1994; Menjívar 2000; Pessar 1999). The particularly crucial component of this gendered negotiation is that Tamil women do not eliminate the possibility of professional work in favor of homemaking in the United States, but merely reposition it as occurring after initial settlement, illustrating their commitment to their professional identities.

As discussed in Chapter 5, in addition to their transported personal professional ambitions, the structural exigencies of their lives as immigrants in the United States, especially their increased economic vulnerability and the need to be dual-earning families to achieve the upward socio-economic mobility, works to heighten their need to be engaged in professional work, triggering Tamil women’s transformation of emphasized Tamil femininity to integrated femininity. Despite their delays in accessing professional work due to the gendered nature of their settlement, and the structural impediments they encounter being women of color (and mothers) in the American workplace, for Tamil women, professional work in the United States
offers them greater opportunities for personal and financial independence compared to India thereby. In turn, I argue that this not only enables them to fulfill their nascent professional ambitions, but also to integrate these into their familial roles such that Tamil women perceive their professional lives as directly benefiting their families.

In the process, I theorize that Tamil women self-identify as professionals, and construct this identity as a “personal identity” distinct from and yet connected to their more “socially designated” identities as wives and mothers – which I define as integrated femininity. For them, professional work offers them an identity unique from what they perceive to be the “natural” and social expectations of all women to be wives and mothers. In so doing, they reconstitute transported emphasized Tamil femininity which, while including the possibility of professional work, subordinates this to women’s familial roles as wives and mothers; into integrated femininity. Thus, I argue that integrated femininity has three interconnected faces – professional, wife, and mother – each of which becomes a site for femininity performance (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Simply put, for Tamil women identifying as integrated women implies that the multiple faces of integrated femininity are not hierarchically organized such that one identity is subsumed to the others, but rather that they are manifested with increasing or decreasing prominence at different stages in their life course, without one face being completely eliminated/discarded in favor of the other. Accordingly as I have demonstrated throughout the dissertation, Tamil women rarely choose to give up professional work in favor of full-time homemaking, or to locate themselves in demanding jobs that could impinge on their familial responsibilities especially when then they have young families. Rather, there is a gendered self-expectation that they can be working mothers – i.e. that they can do both work and family, and that both define them as
women—and to be one without the other would make them incomplete. Referencing the theoretical ideas discussed earlier, it is important to recognize that integrated Tamil femininity is constructed by Tamil women as relational to hegemonic Tamil masculinity, which to a large extent, continues to be organized around Tamil men being the primary breadwinners and providers of their families (Connell 1987; Kimmel 2004; Lorber 1993; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). Thus, I contend that the gendered self-expectation described above is a uniquely feminine response, in that although hegemonic Tamil masculinity is being reworked in the United States to include some domestic responsibilities by men, only their accomplishments at work (rather than at home) define them as men and render their masculinity performances as appropriate (Connell 1987; Kimmel 2004).

Integral to this conceptualization of integrated femininity is its characterization as Tamil women’s agentic response which enables them to simultaneously reify and challenge the operation of patriarchy in their lives (Kandiyoti 1988). Within the purview of this dissertation, this was illustrated in their performances of integrated femininity within the American workplace, and in their household labor arrangements, such that Tamil women are the final arbitrators of how and when the faces of their integrated femininity will be reconfigured and the shape the resultant work-family compromises will assume. Thus, for Tamil women, as described in Chapter 5, doing integrated femininity at work especially when they have young families, involves reorienting the faces of their integrated femininity such that their motherhood identities manifest more prominently than their professional ones enabling them to successfully parent in an immigrant context where they lack extended kin support, and where they have to contend with the threat of Americanization given that their children are bicultural. Professionally, this involves them utilizing a number of scaling back options such that choosing family friendly job profiles,
flexible work schedules, and home-based entrepreneurial work, which facilitate their complete involvement in a range of child care activities (Becker and Moen 1999; Berke 2003; Cabrera 2007; Green and Cohen 1995; Hochschild 1997; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Jurik 1998).

Familially, their embodiment and performance of integrated femininity within their families through their household labor arrangements results in the construction of what I call new Tamil/Indian family forms in the United States. These families are characterized by three features. One, is husband’s increased involvement (although not always egalitarian) in both domestic chores and child care activities resulting from Tamil women’s spousal negotiations in the context of the criticality of their professional work not only to themselves personally, but more to their families’ socio-economic status; and their location as disconnected nuclear families without kin support in the United States. I theorize that this feature sets apart Tamil migrant families from their counterparts in India, as husbands’ participation (even in a limited capacity) in domestic responsibilities would not have occurred in India largely because of the availability of familial and domestic help and the lack of a coherent gender ideology of involved fatherhood.

Second, is Tamil women’s status as equal partners in their marriages, in contrast to the prevalent patriarchal power hierarchies in similar families in India. This is evinced in Tamil women’s involvement and participation in all aspects of familial and financial decision making, in the United States, which is bolstered by the psychological and emotional benefits emanating from their engagement in professional work. Third, is the retention by Tamil women of two key child care activities - namely cooking and cultural socialization – as a means of doing gendered ethnicity in the United States (Bhattacharjee 1997, 1998; Das Gupta 1997; Gupta 1999; Hussain 2005; Kurien 1999; Mukhi 2000; Nagel 1994; Srinivas 2006). I contend that, essential to this feature is the recognition that the performance of domestic chores by Tamil women is not a site
for femininity performance as, as drawing upon their privileged caste-class status in India, these activities are conceived as the minor details of life, which need to be performed but which can be outsourced to other women. Contrasting, the performance of cooking and cultural socialization activities (in addition to being involved mothers) is an arena for doing gender appropriately as it enables Tamil women to be working women, while meeting the gendered social expectation of being “good” Tamil/Indian mothers.

Drawing upon transnational models of the chores being feminine and of their local Tamil community connecting these to a reified “authentic” Tamil culture and gender standard, by performing these activities, Tamil women are attempting to retain the Tamil/Indian character of their family life in a migrant context where the transformed household labor and decision making arrangements results in their families closely resembling their white, upper-middle/upper-class, American counterparts. By performing these two child care related activities, and through the resultant retention and transmission of Tamil culture, their families can be distinctly identified as Tamil/Indian in a non-Indian context. Thus, extending arguments in the feminist migration scholarship of immigrant households being bastions of resistance against racism, I theorize that new Indian family forms are simultaneous sites of adaptation and of resistance, not against racism, but against assimilation into white, upper-middle/upper-class America (George 2005; Menjívar 1999; Parrado Flippen 2005; and Pessar 1999; Sotelo 1994). (Refer to end of chapter for theoretical model)

**Implications**

Considering that Indians are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, and the fourth largest immigrant group after the Mexican, Chinese, and Filipino communities, I believe that this research project is a particularly timely contribution to the extant sociological scholarship as it has been designed to address what I consider to be lacunae in this body of work
(Reeves and Bennett 2004; Terrazas 2008). Specifically, my research has implications for several bodies of sociological scholarship.¹ First is the sociology of South Asians. I contend that my emphasis on the Tamil Brahmin migrant experience challenges the homogenization of Indians evident in the literature (Bacon 1996; Khandelwal 2002; Lessinger 1995; Rangaswamy 2000; Rayaprol 1997; Segal 1998). As explained by Guha (2007) and Thapar (2003), India is land of unparralled cultural diversity coalescing into an Indian identity that is heterogenous and organized along four major intersecting axes namely caste, class, language and religion. Rather than addressing our inherent diversity as Indians, I find that the existing scholarship on Indians in the United States uses as its main unit of analysis a homogenous category called “Indian,” thereby overlooking the critical influence that these axes have in determining our experiences, and of particular interest in this project, our migration and settlement.

In this project, by emphasizing the specific – i.e the Tamil Brahmin women’s experience - I do not deny the universal Indian chronicle. In fact, as explained at different points in this narrative, I extrapolate from research on “Indians” to the Tamil experience where relevant. However, considering that gender is the critical component of my analysis, it behooves me to be attentive to its specific local production, performance and expression – as structured by the caste/class, religious, and regional location of Tamil Brahmin women and men- rather than relying on a generic “Indian” gender standard (Mohanty 2002; Sangari and Vaid 1989).

Furthermore, my attention to caste and class is particularly relevant as it facilitates a critical lens on Tamil Brahmin migration and orientation toward professional labor as organized by their

¹ It is important to note here, that there is a rich body of work on Tamils (both from India and the diaspora) within the humanities. Often employing a critical and gendered lens still rare in mainstream sociological scholarship, this research is almost exclusively centered on the Tamil language, culture, arts, dance, music, religion and diaspora formation. However, insight into the intricacies of Tamil migration, and daily life centered on work and family in the diaspora is underrepresented in both the humanities and sociological scholarship. It is to the latter that I attempt to contribute to.
history of education, urbanization and professional accomplishments as seconded by my participants and outlined in Chapter 4 (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Subrahmanian, 1989). Thus by centering this project on Tamil Brahmin women, I highlight their specific social and historical transnational positioning as shaping their migration, work and family; and in so doing, build on the sociology of South Asians.

My second contribution through this project is to the sociology of migration and work through my particularization of Tamil women’s migration, work, and family lives. In so doing, I am answering the call made by feminist migration scholars to theorize the gendered migration of Asian middle-class women who are significantly under represented in the migration scholarship necessitating my constant extrapolations from the scholarship on working class Latina and Asian (largely Filipina, Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese) migrants (DeLaet 1999; Donato et al. 2006; Espiritu 1999; George 2005; Pedraza 1991; Pessar 1999; Sotelo 2000). Additionally, my emphasis on migrant women’s engagement in professional work challenges the prevalent thematic trend of locating migrant women largely in the personal realms of family life, or in low-paying feminized work, thereby generating new insights on migrant women’s labor in the United States. Thus through my examination of their professional work, my research theorizes Tamil women’s migrant, gendered and racialized transactions with the American labor market and their male and white dominated workplaces, in a transnational context shaped by their unique social location in India, their transported social and human capital, and the rich migrant social networks they are able to access and develop. Also, in examining their work and family lives in a migrant context, my research articulates the interconnections between the gendered realms of migration, work, and family life such that, not only do each represent an arena for gender
performance and transformation, but that together these result in the reconstitution of transported
gender and family structures.

With reference to the migration scholarship, it is also to recognize that relative invisibility
of women’s lives compared to men’s is also evident in Indian/South Asian migration narratives
referenced in this dissertation. While women are accounted for, it is exactly that – they are
acknowledged without being incorporated into the scholarship – and thus relegated to chapters in
anthologies, researched largely in terms of their familial roles, and/or a “sex” based variable to
differentiate their outcomes from men (Bacon 1996; Khandelwal 2000; Lal 1999; Lessinger
1995; Madhavan 1985; Rangaswamy 2000; Segal 1998, 2002). Thus, Indian “women’s
perception of their world” (Weinberg 1992:31) is missing in the larger Indian/South Asian
migrant experience – a lacunae that I address through my particular emphasis on Tamil women’s
voices and perspectives on their own (and their family’s) migration to and settlement in the
United States. Thus, as I have argued in the previous chapters, my analysis reveals that while
Tamil women might be followers in the migration process, they are active agents in determining
their lives by navigating gender structures and Tamil ideologies that constrain their movement to
successfully pursue their personal and familial goals for migration through the channels available
to them. Also, they play a crucially agentic role in reconfiguring their feminine identities in the
United States and in so doing, constructing new Indian family forms.

My final contribution is to the sociology of gender and family through my developing of
the new theoretical idea of integrated femininity which is performed by Tamil women within
their families. I argue that integrated femininity, as a theoretical concept draws upon and extends
extant gender theorizing as it articulates the operation of gender at the structural,
cultural/interactional, and personal/identity planes (Collins 2000; Lorber 1993; Risman 1994;
West and Zimmerman 1987). Also it illustrates the dialectical relationship between agency and structure in migrant women’s lives such that Tamil women are able to create viable migrant destinies for both themselves and their families in the United States. More importantly, integrated femininity incorporates the axes of difference into an articulation of gender, and in so doing addresses the unique positioning of race/ethnic and immigrant women within the opportunity structures of the United States (Collins 2000; Garcia 1997; Mohanty 2002; Shah 1997; Zinn and Dill 1996). Through my analysis of Tamil women’s employment of integrated femininity in their household labor arrangements, my research extends our understanding of work-family compromises in dual-earning families by articulating the idea of new Indian family forms being constructed both as a response to the structural exigencies of an immigrant life, and to the threat of assimilation into white, upper-middle/upper-class America. By theorizing these arrangements among Tamil Brahmin families, I argue that my research advances the scholarship on race-ethnic and immigrant families, which have heretofore been largely concentrated around African-Americans, Latina/os, and/or working class migrant families. Thus in sum, this research project has an especially timely examination of the gendered migration and settlement of Tamil Brahmin professional women in the United States, advancing sociological knowledge in the areas of migration and work, gender and family, and the South Asian diaspora in the United States.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Throughout this dissertation, I have excavated Tamil women’s voices and perspectives on the gendered nature of their migration, work, and family lives in the United States. Although my findings have been detailed and myriad, it is important for me to conclude with a brief statement of what I consider to be the limitations of this project and to hint at possible areas for future research emanating from the findings presented in this dissertation. A primary limitation of my
The project is the small sample size of 33 first-generation, married, Tamil professional women. Recalling from Chapter 3, where I discussed my methodology, to a large extent the relatively small sample size is a product of the difficulties I experienced in recruiting participants considering that Indians are generally wary of participating in projects in such project due to the personal nature of the questioning. For me, this was also complicated by my difficulty in marketing the multi-part interview structure of my project to potential participants who are understandably busy managing their work and family lives. Further, my limited duration (only 8 months as compared to the year or two year long duration employed by other feminist migration scholars) in the research site also shaped my small sample size especially since a large proportion of the time was spent in establishing rapport with the Tamil community in Atlanta and in recruiting participants, leaving a relatively smaller proportion for completing interviews. In my defense however, I argue that the limited size of my sample is compensated with the depth of my interviews (each 4-5 hours in duration) and the data I gathered which enabled me to construct a composite narrative of Tamil women’s migration, work, and family life, making the connections between India and the United States.

Successfully connecting India and the United States is the second limitation of my research. An integral component of the engendering migration perspective is its transnational character that contextualizes immigrants in both their sending and receiving countries to obtain a dynamic and transformative perspective on migration (Donato et al. 2006; Kivisto 2001; Schiller et al. 1992b; Pessar 1999; Sotelo 1999, 2000). To achieve this character in research, feminist migration scholars advocate research sites in both sending and receiving communities to better articulate these transnational linkages (examples of this research include George 2005; Gramsmuck and Pessar 1991; Mahler 1999; Menjívar 2000; Parrado and Flippen 2005). As is
evidenced in my findings, I have been unable to employ this method of research, in the above described form, which constitutes the limitation of this project.

To a large extent this methodological choice was influenced by the time and monetary constraints on this research project. However, as I got deeper into the research process, I also began to recognize that this was further complicated by the fact that my participants (like other Tamil Brahmins) had been internal migrants within India making the identification of a single Tamil research site in that country particularly difficult (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Sivasupramaniam 2000; Subrahmanian 1989; Vellupillai 2000). In fact, a significant proportion of my participants noted that their parents only moved back to Tamil Nadu (the home state in Southern India) only after they had immigrated to the United States, and thus the concentration on Southern India as a possible research site might have undermined the transnational character I was attempting to recreate. Needless to say, I do believe that I have successfully developed a transnational perspective on Tamil women’s migration and settlement in the United States through my data collection methods. Reiterating from Chapter 3, I employed a variety of interviewing techniques (primarily institutional ethnography centered on why questions; and active interviewing centered on playing devil’s advocate) which enabled my participants to mentally locate themselves in India while being physically located in the United States, allowing me to access the stores of knowledge relating to their childhood, young adulthood, gender socialization, and Tamil gender constructions.

Finally, the third limitation of this project is its particular emphasis on Tamil women as the primary source of data collection. Despite my overarching goal of this project to excavate Indian women’s voices silenced in the migration discourse, in identifying this as a limitation, I reference feminist migration scholarship that cautions researchers from treating gender as a variable
through the adoption of an “add and stir” approach that merely adds women to the narrative while ignoring men (Sotelo 1999, 2000). In my defense I argue that although I am particularly attentive to women’s voices, I frame my research questions and the emergent findings within a within a conceptualization of gender, not as a variable, but as a structure that not only embeds other social institutions, but is also responsive to human agency, and relationally organizes femininities and masculinities, and concomitant privileges and opportunities (Collins 2000; Connell 1987; Kimmel 2004; Risman 1994; Zinn and Dill 1996). Methodologically, my reliance on only women for data collection was influenced by the time constraints I have already mentioned, despite my developing a shorter interview schedule for husbands. I did however receive opportunities to interact with husbands informally at community sites and/or in their homes through my ethnographic observations. Also, similar to mentally positioning Tamil women in India, I used the above mentioned interviewing techniques to ask Tamil women to periodically respond from the perspective of their spouses throughout the interview process. I believe that together, these methods have enabled me to construct a balanced, gendered narrative of Tamil migration and settlement in the United States.

These limitations and the findings emergent from this dissertation hint at numerous possibilities for future research. In this final section, I attempt to identify some of them. My goal in this project was to examine the interconnected realms of migration, work, and family life. Considering this, an examination of household labor arrangements was one piece in my narrative, which has in turn, furthered our knowledge about race-ethnic and immigrant family life. However, considering the dearth of critical scholarship from a gendered, intersectional, and transnational perspective on household labor arrangements in dual-income, professional, (Indian) immigrant families, this could be an area for future research that can be undertaken using both
interviews with and ethnographic observations of both partners much as in the case of Hochschild’s (1989) and Rubin’s (2006) work with largely white, middle-class/working class Americans. Specifically, this research should examine how these professional families adapt traditional family structures to the structural exigencies of their lives as immigrants and being dual-earning, how professional work organizes this process distinctly from low-wage work, and whether or not in the process these families “assimilate” into the American, dual-earning household structure. Integral to this research should be a deeper analysis of power structures within professional immigrant families, and the process of their adaptation and/or retention in the migrant context.

Another area for further research emanating from this project is the contemporary examination of professional migration between India and the United States in the 21st century from a gendered perspective. I have taken a historical approach in this dissertation, examining the lives of Tamil women (and their families) who emigrated between the 1960s and the 1990s, in an attempt to create a holistic narrative of post-1965 Tamil migration to the United States. While a relevant body of scholarship, it is also important for research to reflect changing societal trends, which in the particular instance of professional migration, is evinced in a new pattern of contract based, temporary, and circulatory migration between India and the United States centered on IT skilled workers. The emerging body of scholarship in this area (for example Chakravartty 2000; Iredale 2001; Khadria 2001, 2006) is however experiencing similar shortcomings as the early migration scholarship in that it assumes a largely statistical and quantitative perspective that either treats gender as a variable, or assumes a supposedly gender neutral stance on this migration while displaying its androcentric bias.
Findings from this dissertation project of the American labor market and workplace being gendered and racialized, as well as the legal and economic framework of attracting immigrants to certain forms of work could be the basis for examining 21st century IT based skilled Indian migration from a critical perspective. This research should ask what racial, sexual, and gender ideologies are being employed to designate IT work as “immigrant work” attracting Indian migrants to perform it, how this labor is exploitative of immigrants despite it being designated as professional work and being well paying (as opposed to low-paying feminized work), and what are the differential experiences of migrant women and men engaged in this work? Of particular interest to the framing of this research should be the influence of the changing social and economic contexts in India in framing this professional migration stream such that in direct contrast to my participants, it includes a significant number of educated, single Indian women; and the racial dynamics inherent to a significant number of IT companies that employ these contractual professionals in the United States being either Indian owned, or having Indian/South Asian/immigrant dominated workplaces and management hierarchies.

Additionally, drawing upon ideas mentioned by Tamil women engaged in IT based work in this project, another area of further research in this vein is an examination of women IT professionals’s work-family navigations especially considering their choice of this profession (and in some cases switching occupational tracks to become IT professionals) as a family friendly occupation (due to their ability to work out of home, engage in contractual rather than full time work, and choose their own work schedules). In this manner, the theoretical idea of integrated femininity can be further operationalized in particular occupational settings (rather than in the overarching setting of professional work as in this project) through an examination of
how it is performed by working mothers in these professions, and in the organization of their corresponding familial lives.

Finally, an interesting extension of this project would be a deeper examination of gendered ethnic performances by immigrant/ethnic mothers through cooking and cultural socialization activities. In identifying this area of future research, I am not denying the extant body of scholarship (for example Das Gupta 1997; Dasgupta and DasGupta 1998; DeVault 1991; Khandelwal 2002; Mukhi 2000; Rangaswamy 2000; Srinivas 2006) that connects food (in particular) and cultural activities to femininity performance. However, drawing upon the findings of my research, I am arguing that future research should examine not only the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class in cooking and cultural socialization, but also the increased meaning that performing these activities has for working immigrant/race-ethnic mothers in particular. Thus an interesting approach to this would be to compare working immigrant mothers and homemaker’s perspectives and approach to feeding their families. Also despite a wealth of knowledge that connects the construction of women as keepers of culture with their involvement in ethnic community activities (for example: Das Gupta 1997; Dasgupta and DasGupta 1998; Kurien 1999; Mukhi 2000), additional research is required from a motherhood perspective, examining mother’s motivations for involving their children in a plethora of these activities, for their own investment in constructing cultural/ethnic communities in a migrant context, and for the added “burden” or responsibility that balancing work, family, and community, places on them.

Thus in conclusion, this dissertation employed the engendering migration perspective to examine the migration, work, and family lives of first-generation, married, Tamil (Brahmin) professional women in the United States. It finds that within a transnational context defined by
their social location in India, transported hegemonic Tamil femininity constructs, and their physical positioning as immigrant women of color in the United States, Tamil women construct and perform integrated femininity. I theorize that integrated femininity involves the incorporation by Tamil women, of their professional identities into their core of their femininity such that it constitutes a personal identity unique to them that is simultaneously distinct from and yet connected to their socially designated identities as wives and mothers. Thus in turn, their professional identities operate in simultaneity with their familial identities rather than in hierarchical relation to them – with each identity being heightened at different stages in their life course. Integrated femininity is then performed by Tamil women in organizing their work-family arrangements such that they construct new Indian family forms characterized by husbands’ increased (although not always equitable) involvement in household labor, equitable decision making, and wives’ retention of cooking and cultural socialization as a mechanism of retaining the Indian character of their families as a bastion of resistance against their assimilation into white, upper-middle/upper-class America. Therefore through my dissertation, I have demonstrated not only that the gendered realms of migration, work, and family life are interconnected, but also that gender organizes all aspects of the migration and settlement process, and is in turn reconfigured through it. In doing so, my research advances sociological scholarship in the areas of migration and work, gender and family and the South Asian diaspora in the United States.
Figure 7-1. Theorizing Tamil Women’s Gendered Migration and Settlement: The Intersection of Social Location, Integrated Femininity, and New Indian Families.
APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Background

- Can you begin by describing for me your family in India?
  a. Where you were born, lived?
  b. What your parents did?
  c. Siblings and what they do?

- What was something that was emphasized as important by your parents when growing up?
  a. Was education (going to college/professional education) emphasized in your family? For both boys and girls? What was your experience with gaining an education in your family? Why was education emphasized?

- What was expected of you as a girl in your family? Was it different from boys?
  a. Do you remember being treated the same as or differently from your sisters/brothers/women/men in the family?
  b. Why do you think this is?

II. Migration Stories

- In the proforma you filled out, you listed ______ as the time you migrated and _____ as how you migrated. Can you elaborate on that for me by describing for me:
  o How you decided to migrate? What was it like to make that decision?
  o Why you decided to migrate? What were your reasons? Did you participate in making that decision? Was it your choice
  o Was coming abroad always an option for you?
  o Was the US always your preferred migration destination? Why?

- How did you tell your family about your decision to migrate? What reactions did your decision/choice set off in your family? (close and extended)?
  o Do you think that some of those reactions were related to you being a woman?
  o What were their reactions to those decisions (supportive, antipathy)?
  o How did you prepare to come to the US? (passport, visas, contact information, networks)

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1 This version of the Interview Guide was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Florida. Minor changes in the wording of the questions and/or terminology used (for example: my interchanging of the term “migration” with “coming abroad” as explained in chapter 3), emanating from my experiences in the field have not been recorded here, as they only assisted in facilitating coherent interviews, but did not change the content of the questions as laid out below. It is also important to note, that this is the revised version of the original interview guide, to accommodate findings already emergent from initial interviews.
Do you have any memories of those final days prior to migrating or on the day you migrated? What were you feeling? What did you do?

**IF MARRIED MIGRATION** – did you and your husband migrate together (or one came earlier?)
- If you came together, do you think that your personal experiences with migration were **different from that of your husband/wife? In what ways?**
- If didn’t come together – what was it like for you in India after your spouse migrated?
  - How soon after, did you follow your spouse?
  - Did you live on your own after your spouse migrated?
  - At the time you migrated to be with your spouse, were you ready to leave India or not?
  - **Do you have any memories of those final days prior to migrating or on the day you migrated? What were you feeling? What did you do?**

Was migration a big trend in the Tamil community at the time when you were migrating? If yes, what were the main reasons for migration at that time (for both women and men)
- Were your reasons similar to these?
- **Is there a tradition of Tamil women migrating? If yes, to which countries?**
- How do women traditionally migrate (single, married, for professional/educational purposes)

Did you know people (Tamils, Indians or other professionals) in the US prior to migrating?
- Did having these connections assist you in the migration process? (figure in the decision to migrate). If yes, how? Did they assist in planning and in the actual migration?
- **Did these contacts influence when/where/how you migrated?**
- Do you think you would have migrated without those contacts? How would your migration experience have been different without these contacts?

What were your expectations about migrating? What did you expect to happen? Did this really happen in your life?

What was it like when you first came to the United States? Can you remember your first experiences/impressions/feelings when you first arrived in the US? Can you elaborate on some of the first things you did or experienced? What were some of the challenges you encountered?

Following what you have told me about your first experiences, can you describe for me how you went about settling down in the US? In your opinion would you classify the settlement process as difficult or easy?
- **Do you think that there are differences in the settlement experiences of you and your spouse?**
- Were your contacts helpful in settling the US? If yes, how? If no, why not?
How did you go about with - apartment search, socializing to life in US, finding jobs, child care, health care, schools etc? *(shared by partners/women’s role)*

- What is like for you to be an Indian in the US? Do you encounter a feeling of being a race/ethnic minority? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
  - Do you feel as if you are *treated differently* in the US because you are a minority? Explain? Can you give me some instances
  - Were you prepared to be treated differently?

- How did you eventually feel a sense of comfort with settling in the US/Atlanta? How did you form social relationships and networks in the US?

- **IF MOVED TO ATLANTA** – in the proforma you indicate _____ as the date you moved to Atlanta and _____ as reasons. Elaborate (if required)
  - Did you think you would be comfortable settling here? Why? *(economic, cultural community, family standpoint)*
  - What does it feel like to be Indian in Atlanta? The presence of Indians, and an Tamil/Indian community in Atlanta, was that considered when moving to the city?

**III. Work Experiences**

- For the purpose of this study, I have defined you as a professional? Would this be how you define yourself? Why?
  - Why do you feel the need to be a professional? Do you see professional work as giving you certain advantages? Explain?

- On the proforma, you have indicated that ______ is where you are currently working in Atlanta? I would like you to elaborate some more on your work life in the US. Can you tell me:
  - Did you always plan on working upon migrating to the US? Reasons?
  - Why did you start working in the US? What were your reasons for working?
  - Was this your first job in the US? If no, can you tell me something about your work history prior to this job and why you made a change in jobs (if they did)? *What were your first experiences in the US labor market? Have these since changed?*
  - On migrating to the US, *what steps did you have to take to secure a job* in the US labor force *(licensing, exams, interviews etc)*? Can you describe the process for me and your feeling about it at the time?
    - How did you find your first job?
    - Did you make connections at that job which helped in securing your current job?
    - Do you think *networks are important in the US labor market as an immigrant*?
    - What were some of the challenges or barriers you first encountered when trying to access a job in the US? How did you overcome these?
Can you tell me if your skills in India transferred easily in the US context? Reactions
Did you notice any differences between your experiences with work life in the US and those of your spouse?

Now, I want to move your attention a little to your experiences in the workplace in the US. How have your experiences at work here been different from those in India?

What do you think are the challenges of work life in the US?
Have you noticed any differences b/w your experiences and those of your spouse?
Can you describe me your typical work day? What are the demands of your job (schedules, travel, commuting, duties and responsibilities)
Can you describe your office environment for me (race, gender, class)/composition
  ▪ As a person of color/Indian are you in a minority in your work place? What does this feel like?
  ▪ Are you aware of being treated differently because you are Indian?
  ▪ Are you aware of being treated differently because you are a woman?
Are you aware of being Indian-American in your workplace? Do you feel because your Indian, your experiences have been different from your other colleagues? In what ways? / what does it feel like to be an Indian in your workplace? (check against earlier experiences)
  ▪ How have you coped with it?
  ▪ Has it affected your personal (own) life/family life in any ways?
  ▪ Do you think your professionalism/ability to perform your job has been questioned because you are Indian? What has been said about it? How have you dealt with it?
  ▪ What about promotions/higher positions in the office? Do you think as an Indian you have equal access to those positions? Do you want those positions?
  ▪ Do you have access to professional networks and connections in your present job? How did you develop these? How have these been useful to you?
  ▪ Can you describe some instances/experiences when you feel you were treated differently at the workplace

What are some issues raised for you being a working mom? Do you think your husband, as a working dad faces similar issues? Reasons

IV. Family

Can you tell me the story of how your marriage came about? (check proforma for answers)
  ▪ How did you meet your spouse? When did you decide to marry? Why at that time?
- How did you marry? (did you go back to India/marry someone in the US/marry before migrating)
- What expectations did you have of your marriage? Of yourself as a wife, your husband as a spouse?
- Do you think living in the US has influenced your marriage in ways different from if you were living in India?

- If I could, can I ask you about some of the contested topics in your marital relationship and some areas of consensus?

- In your opinion, what constitutes the concrete tasks of housework? Why do you label them as housework?
  - Traditionally in Tamil families in India who performs these tasks and why? Has this continued in the US too?

- Can you describe for me your routine once you get back from work? And on weekends?! Can you explain to me, who participates in performing these tasks that you have listed as housework in your family in the US?
  - Can you tell me how often you perform these tasks?
  - Look for nature of tasks that they do, time involved in completing the tasks, reasons for doing those tasks, whether tasks done routinely or sporadically
  - Example: Cooking: what do you typically cook during the week? Do you make it from scratch? Do you have any assistance in cooking? What does your spouse do while you are cooking? How much time do you spend in cooking?
  - Example: Cleaning: What are the cleaning needs in your home? What do you do/what does your spouse do? Why? How long does it take you to do this? When do you do these tasks?
  - Is the current house work arrangement you are describing the same as when you first migrated to the US? If yes, why no change? If no, why the change? How changes?
  - Do you think that your housework arrangements are typical of Tamil couples in the US? Reasons
  - How did these arrangements come about? Narrate to me the discussions that resulted in your current arrangement.

- In what ways is your spouse involved in the tasks you listed as housework?
  - Was your spouse involved in domestic work in India as well? Why?
  - Why is your spouse involved in house work in the US?
  - How does this make you feel?
  - Can you tell me how this change (if occurs) came about? For example: what were some of the discussions you had with your spouse about her/his involvement in house work?
  - How does your spouse feel/react to this involvement in house work? How do you respond to her/his concerns/reactions?
  - Typical of the Tamil community?
Out of 100%, if I was to ask you to chart the contribution of you and your spouse make to what you have described as housework, what will your response be? Why?

- Managing both work and family in the US, how do you think this process may be different or similar to doing so in India (ask to imagine if haven’t married prior to migration)? Would you have faced similar issues in India?

- Do you conceptualize your household being headed by someone? If yes, by whom and why this person?
  - Is this arrangement typical of Tamil in the US?
  - Is it similar to the arrangement of your parents?
  - Has this arrangement changed in the context of the US? Reasons
  - How does this arrangement influence decision making in your family?

- Are you considered to be a bread winner in your family? Who does your income support? (family in US/India etc)
  - Your being a bread winner, how has that affected your family? Your relationship with your husband and your marriage?

- In your opinion, what are some of the key decisions made in your family/about family life?
  - Who is responsible for these decisions? (financial and other)? Why do you say so?
  - Pick some of those listed areas and question as to how those decisions are negotiated b/w spouses

- One major area of family decision making is finances. Can you elaborate on the process by which these decisions are made in your family?
  - Do you participate in making these decisions? If yes, why and in what capacity? If no, why not?
  - Is your involvement in decision making problematic in your marital relationship? Why? How do you feel about it? Deal with it? (do you comply with it/challenge it or not)
  - Is this form of decision making traditional to the Tamilian community? Why?
  - Did this form of decision making exist prior to your migration to the US? If yes, reasons for its continued existence in the US?
  - Has coming to the US and your work in the US changed the decision making style? If yes, how and why? If no, why not?
  - Similar to or different from the arrangement among your parents

- Do you think that your experiences at work and the fact that you are working contribute to the decision making process in your family? How and why? (effect of American networks, extra ethnic networks)
• Talk to me about what it feels like being parents in the US? Can you tell me something about the challenges you face as a parent in the US?
  o What do you think are some issues your kids face in the US? How do you deal with it?

• Can you elaborate for me, what in your opinion constitutes caring for children? (disciplining, teaching/socializing, homework, activities etc, play etc)

• Can you elaborate for me what kind of child care activities take place in your home?
  o In your family, in your opinion, who is primarily responsible for child care? Why?
  o How do you feel about this? How does your spouse feel?
  o Has this arrangement changed since you first migrated to the US?
  o Can you describe your child care arrangements while you are at work? How did you decide on this type of arrangement? Change since first came to US?
  o Do you believe that your professional life has influenced the child care arrangements you have described for me?

• What form of assistance do you get from your spouse in child care activities? Elaborate? How does this make you and your spouse feel?

• Husbands being involved in housework, is that something accepted by your Tamil friends in Atlanta or do you think it’s frowned upon? Reasons
  o Is men’s involvement in housework publicly acknowledged?
  o Does he participate in household labor in front of friends and family or is it not talked about much?

• Are you satisfied with how the household work is divided in your families? Reasons. What would you like to see changed?

• Finally, can you tell me some of the effects that managing both work and family has on you (wife) in particular? Do you think your spouse experiences it differently? Do you think it would have been easier if you were in India?

V. Community

• Do you feel the need for an Indian/Tamil community in the US? Why do you feel the need to participate in Tamil community activities?
  o Is there an increased need for community after the kids? Why?
  o Do you think there’s a similar need for community involvement in India?

• Using your particular instance, do you think that women play a larger role in community than men? Reasons?
  o How does this happen in your case?
What roles do you observe women performing in the Tamil community in Atlanta?
Are you active in the Tamil community activities? If yes, in what capacity are you involved in the Tamil community (role of organizer, participant, leader, cultural/religious/economic/social)? Is this
Are men and women differently involved in community activities? Reasons?

- How does your professional life affect your community involvement? Can you elaborate on some details for me? (schedules of work, shift system, tiredness etc)

- Is there anything else that you would like to add to the study or any suggestions that you would like to make which you believe would help me to better understand your experiences and the Tamil community in Atlanta.
APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFORMA

Please respond to the following questions seeking your demographic information either by circling the appropriate response or by filling in the required information

Demographics

Name: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________
Time: ________________________________
Place: ________________________________

1. Age: ________________________________
2. Gender: Female Male
3. Place of birth (city/town/village; state) in India: ________________________________
4. Place of residence (city/town/village; state) in India: ________________________________
5. Last place of residence (city/town/village; state) in India before migration: __________
6. How would you define your class status in India (parental and married home)? __________
7. How would you define you current class status? ________________________________
8. Type of migration to USA (for example: H1B, green-card, F1 etc): __________________
9. Date of migration to USA (month/year): ________________________________
10. Type of migration for spouse: __________ Children (if born in India): __________
11. Are you presently a citizen/green-card holder of USA:
    Yes No---------(specify status in US) No response
12. Is your spouse presently a citizen/green-card holder of USA:
    Yes No---------(specify status in US) No response
13. Marital status? ________________________________
    a. How long have you been married? ________________________________
    b. Married before migrating? Yes No
c. Married within Tamilian group? Yes No -------------------( which group)

d. Do you have children? Yes No

e. How many? ------------ Ages of children: -------------------------------

f. Gender of children: ---------------------------------------------

g. Born in the USA/India (please list by each child): ------------------

14. Profession in India (if applicable) & company/organization where employed prior to migration:----------------------------------------

15. Current profession in Atlanta and company/organization where you are employed: -------

16. Duration in company/organization where currently employed (years/months): ----------

17. Spouse’s profession and company/organization where employed prior to migration: ----- 

18. Spouse’s profession and company/organization where currently employed in Atlanta: ----

19. Duration of spouse in company/organization where currently employed (years/months):--

20. Place of first residence (duration of 6 months and longer) in USA --------------------------

21. When (year) was the relocation to Atlanta? Why? ----------------------------------------

22. Gross Salary per annum: You: ----------------- Spouse: -----------------

23. Total household income per annum: ---------------------------------------------------------
First-Generation Tamil Women Wanted to Discuss Issues of “Migration, Work & Family in USA”

Who Is Eligible?
First-generation married Tamil women who have settled in the US and/or Atlanta between 10-30 years ago and who would like to share their migration stories and express their views about work and family life in the US through personal interviews. Participants must be currently residing in Atlanta, GA and must be professionally employed or recently retired from professional employment in Atlanta, GA.

What Is the Study About?
The study will investigate professionally employed Tamil women’s migration to the US and their work life in the US. Also, the interviews will address how these women balance work and family life. Lastly, the study will explore Tamil women’s participation in the Tamil and/or Indian community in Atlanta given their work and family commitments.

How to Sign up?
If you are eligible and would like to participate, please call the study coordinator to get more information and to sign up for the interview. Please leave your name, phone number, e-mail address and the best time to call you.

Namita Manohar at (352) 256-7428, namita@ufl.edu

I WANT TO HEAR WHAT YOU THINK!!!
Email Message to List Serve

Hello Everyone,
I am Namita Manohar a Ph.D. student with the Department of Sociology at the University of Florida. My areas of interest in the study of sociology are family, gender and race with a focus on Indians and Indian-Americans in the United States. My interests have led me to develop a dissertation project that seeks to explore first-generation married Tamil women’s migration, work and family life in the United States. The study focuses particularly on professionally employed Tamil women who are currently residing and working (or have recently retired) in Atlanta, GA.

I am grateful for your time in reading through this announcement and would deeply appreciate your participation if you should so desire.

Purpose of the project:
To document the migration stories of first-generation married Tamil women currently residing in Atlanta. Additionally, the study seeks to investigate the professional lives of Tamil women and how they balance work and family commitments.

How can you help?
I am currently conducting individual interviews for the project. Interviews will scheduled depending on your convenience.

If you are a first-generation married Tamil woman who is professionally employed (or recently retired), who came to the US between 10-30 years ago, and are currently living in Atlanta, I hope you would consent to participating in this study. You can also help by passing along information about this study to your friends and colleagues who may be able to participate. Please feel free to contact me either by phone or e-mail at the numbers below.

Contact Information of researchers:
Namita Manohar: Phone number: 352-256-7428, E-mail: namita@ufl.edu
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Namita N. Manohar received her doctorate in Sociology, with a doctoral concentration in Women’s and Gender Studies from the University of Florida in 2009. Her research interests include race and ethnicity, gender, migration, and family sociology with a particular focus on Indians in the United States. She is currently teaching in the Department of Sociology at Brooklyn College, and serving as the Coordinator of their Women’s Studies Program.