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‘Why I Sent My Child Away’: Culturally Structured Motivations for Long-distance Parenting

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Abstract

Although long-distance parenting is often depicted as a response to crisis (e.g., economic) or other stressful life events, it is sometimes undertaken in various culturally normative situations. This current study explores the motivations of South Asian Indian immigrant parents for sending their young children to India to live temporarily with their grandparents. This qualitative study involves in-depth interviews with first generation immigrant parents about their experiences and motivations for sending their children to India. Analysis of the data revealed five themes, namely, (a) contextual and daily challenges in caring for their children in the United States, (b) parents’ concern around paid group childcare, (c) grandparents as ideal caregivers but unable to stay in the United States, (d) presence of other extended network of relationships and support in India and (e) parents wanting their children to maintain their language and customs. Findings suggest culturally grounded beliefs around optimal childrearing (e.g., grandparents as ideal caregivers, presence of extended network of support in India and maintaining Indian traditions and values) and parents’ contextual needs (e.g., parents’ busy schedule around job and education) when traditional caregiving context changes due to migration to a new country. Implications for researchers are discussed.

Keywords: South Asian Indian immigrants, long-distance parenting, cultural beliefs

Long-distance parenting is a reality for an increasing number of families around the world. Recent scholarship has revealed important aspects of this phenomenon, particularly the socio-emotional burdens of a fragmented family life (e.g., Agunias, 2006; Basok, 2000; Dreby, 2006) and the impact of separation on children when parents move away for work (e.g., Ling, Fu, & Zhang, 2015). However, much of the research on long-distance families has focused on separation in the context of work-related migration largely motivated by economic difficulties at home and more promising opportunities abroad. In contrast, other contexts and motivations for long-distance parenting are less understood. The present study explores the motivations for engaging in long-distance parenting in a population of high income South Asian Indian migrants in the United States.

Motivations for Engaging in Long-distance Parenting Practice

In Western cultures, the traditional notion of the family involves the nuclear unit living under one household with parents providing primary care for their children (Edgell & Docka, 2007; Smith, 1993). Family separation is often seen as a response to crises or scarcity of resources, with this separation entailing substantial emotional burdens for all members involved. Indeed research supports these notions. For instance, in the growing work on migrant domestic and care workers—parents generally report migrating for work in response to extreme poverty and the absence of economic opportunities, and taking on this separation only as a last resort in such a difficult context (e.g., de Guzman, 2014). This body of work has also highlighted the extreme difficulty of family separation and the negative impact of this experience on family members (e.g., Fresnoza-Flot, 2014; Parreñas, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002).

However, families may operate across distance for reasons beyond migration for work and not necessarily in response to poverty and resource scarcity. Parent-child separation is sometimes undertaken as a normative practice such as the case of child fosterage in Western Africa (Brown, 2011; Pillai & Sharma, 2013; Poeze & Mazzucato, 2014) whereby children are moved from their natal homes to be raised by other families. Relocating children in the context of fosterage is undertaken for various reasons that can include resource scarcity, the need or desire to establish family alliances and ties, the distribution of childcare among extended kin, and as a strategy to educate children in both practical and socio-emotional domains (Brown, 2011; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985).

Increasingly, families operate across borders in order for children to pursue educational opportunities. Scholars have identified these practices among South Korean and Taiwanese families that choose to send their children to schools in Western nations but because of their young age do not want them to migrate on their own. Sometimes dubbed as “kirogi” (i.e., “goose”) or ‘astronaut’ families, fathers typically remain in their home countries to continue work while the child and mother reside overseas as the child attends school. The father frequently travels from the country of origin to the host countries to visit his family (e.g., Lee & Koo, 2006; Waters, 2002).

Finally, Bohr and Tse (2009) have also identified a practice among young Chinese immigrant parents in Canada who send infants back to their home country to be raised by their extended family members. Parents in their study identified career needs, high childcare costs and the desire to maintain cultural traditions as underlying reasons for their decisions to send their children away. Although much of the research on family separation has examined this phenomenon as a response to hardship, there may be numerous underlying motivations for long-distance family life.

Asian Indian Immigrant Families in the United States

The number of Asian Indian immigrants in the United States has risen considerably since the 1965 US Immigration and Nationality Act which removed the ban on migration from India and created employment-based immigration channels for this population (Zong & Batalova, 2015). Today, Asian Indians are the third largest group among Asian Americans in the United States after Chinese and Filipino populations (Hoeffel, Rastog, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). Asian Indians in the United States have high rates of employment, income and education compared to other foreign- and native-born populations. Moreover, most Indians arrive on employment-based visas and constitute a diverse population in terms of religion and linguistic background (Zong & Batalova, 2015).

There is substantial diversity in the structure of Indian and Indian-American families and the values that they hold. Nonetheless, researchers generally characterize Indian culture as one that is oriented towards collectivism and interdependence with the family as a central social institution that influences many aspect of daily life (Seymour, 1999, 2010; Tuli, 2012). And although the primary responsibility for childrearing rests with the child’s mother in Indian families; childcare is typically a communal experience with the involvement of a wider network of adult caregivers

(e.g., Nair et al., 2007; Seymour, 1999, 2004, 2010; Tuli, 2012; Tuli & Chaudhury, 2010).

Contemporary Indian society and family life are undergoing rapid and profound changes due to industrialization, urbanization and globalization (Seymour, 2010). Differential economic opportunities across regions within the country are fueling internal migration, and many families are moving away from joint to nuclear household structure and migrating from rural to urban and/or small town to big cities. Such changes are affecting childrearing practices and child development in India (e.g., Seymour, 1999, 2010). Despite these changes, researchers suggest that Indian families are still generally close-knit and characterized by respect for elders, solidarity, social relationships involving multiple people, filial piety, mutual dependence, extended family and moral obligation to look after elderly parents (Abels et al., 2005; Miltiades, 2002; Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002; Seymour, 1999, 2004, 2010; Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010).

Study Goals and Theoretical Approach

In this study, we examine Asian Indian immigrant parents' motivations for engaging in long-distance parenting by sending their children back to their countries of origin to live temporarily with their extended families. This practice has not generally been acknowledged in the literature and its prevalence, effects and underlying motivations remain unclear. Because of this dearth of information, the current study is exploratory and represents an initial attempt to describe and understand this phenomenon. Our study draws from in-depth interviews of Asian Indian immigrants in the Midwestern United States.

This study is grounded in the developmental niche framework (Super & Harkness, 1986), which is a theoretical lens that can be used to interpret children's cultural socialization within a cultural context. Super and Harkness (1986) conceptualized the developmental niche as comprised of three components, namely (a) the child's immediate 'physical and social settings' (e.g., local terrain, regular activities and companions); (b) the 'customs of childcare and child rearing' (e.g., typical practices around nurturance and education); and (c) the psychology of the caregivers (e.g., implicit parental beliefs and ethnotheories). These three components are open systems and are embedded in the broader social ecology. Thus, each can shift in response to changes in the broader context, and each can serve as venue through which outside influences can impact upon the child. The three components are also responsive to the child's characteristics (e.g., age) and thus, the child is not a passive recipient of outside

influences but himself bears upon the factors that impact upon his development. Finally, the three components work in coordination towards consistency. For instance, typically, the psychology of caregivers reflects the child's physical and social ecology and serves as underlying motivation for normative practices around childcare (Harkness & Super, 2006). However, when one component shifts, so must the others. Research has shown that ethnotheories around parenting and childrearing undergo changes as families migrate to a new country. In contrast, some ethnotheories around parenting and childrearing are also continued even after migration (e.g., Bornstein & Cote, 2001, 2004; Cote & Bornstein, 2000; Dasgupta, 1998; Raghavan, Harkness, & Super, 2010). Shifts in the caregiving context of parents in this study (i.e., migration) may help explain the shift in the caregiving practice (i.e., sending children away) as a means of re-aligning the three components of the niche.

Methods

Participants

This study was conducted in a Midwestern city in the United States with a population of approximately almost 450,000 of whom 0.6 per cent are Asian Indian (American Community Survey 2010–2014; U.S. Census, 2014). The sample consisted of 12 first-generation Asian Indian immigrant parents representing eight families. There were four mothers interviewed on their own, three mother–father pairs interviewed together and one mother–father pair interviewed separately.

All participants were married, originated from the southern region of India, and had been in the country from six to sixteen years. Parents either had one child living abroad at the time of the interview or had recently re-united with their child after sending them abroad. Mothers ranged in age from 30–35 years ($M = 32$) and fathers from 33–40 years ($M = 36$). The respondent pool had a high level of education (2 BS in Engineering, 6 master's degrees, 2 MBAs and 2 MDs). Household income ranged from US\$100,000 to US\$299,999; which is approximately two to six times the median household income in that state. At the time of the interviews, three families had children living with grandparents in India and five had children who lived previously with grandparents in India but had already returned to the United States to be reunited with their parents. The length of parent–child separation ranged from 3.5 months to 2 years 10 months ($M = 17.2$ months) at the time of the interviews.

Procedures

Voluntary long-distance parenting in the Indian community is not typically discussed openly. It is a sensitive issue that sometimes carries stigma and is not a normative practice within the broader majority population in the United States. For this reason, participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, which allowed the researchers to identify individuals who could best speak to the phenomenon and grow the sample in ways that may not be available through more commonly employed methods in social science research (Creswell, 2013).

Individuals within the first author's network who fit the study criteria (i.e., adult, Asian Indian, currently had or has had a child sent back to India to live for a period) were sent email invitations describing the study, and were asked to email back the research team, if interested.

Consistent with snowball sampling, participants were asked to help identify other potential interviewees who might have experience with the practice examined in this study. The first author conducted the interviews face-to-face in locations chosen by the participants and repeated until saturation was reached and data collection no longer yielded novel findings. Interviews ranged from half an hour to a full hour and consisted of demographic items and open-ended questions regarding their motivations for sending their children back to India as well as the experience of parental separation. Interviews were conducted in English, audio-recorded, professionally transcribed and checked for accuracy.

Data Analysis and Coding

Data were processed using thematic analysis, which refers to identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes across the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved several steps, namely: becoming familiar with the data by repeated reading of all transcripts and field notes, developing initial codes through line-by-line analysis and identifying all statements that referred to participants' motivations for engaging in long-distance parenting, searching for 'patterned responses' among the initial codes and grouping them into themes that speak to the phenomenon of long-distance parenting (e.g., identifying repetitions in content both within and across interviews), and developing superordinate themes by looking for interconnections and overlaps among the themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The first author conducted all steps of this analysis. The second author independently conducted holistic analysis

by familiarizing herself with the transcripts (first step) and then noting down broad themes that emerged from the data. In other words, she did not go through line-by-line analysis but instead examined the transcripts holistically and noted down emergent themes. This step was undertaken as a validity check which will be discussed in the latter section of this article. At the end of the process, the authors compared the final themes, discussed similarities and differences and resolved discrepancies through discussions and by returning to the data.

Several steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the data. First, researchers incorporated reflexivity within the entire research process—acknowledging internal suppositions such as personal values and individual backgrounds (Gearing, 2004; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Throughout the study, the two authors met to reflect on and discuss their experiences, assumptions and emerging thoughts around issues related to the study (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). They engaged in ‘bracketing interviews’ which refers to employing supervisory skills of an experienced researcher who provides an outsiders’ perspective ‘lending authenticity and credibility to the social construction process and to the knowledge generated’ from identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns/themes within the data (Rolls & Relf, 2006). The first author is of Indian descent and is active within the Indian community in the study site. Thus, she was well positioned to recruit participants and was familiar with various aspects of ‘Indian culture’ and nuances of communication (e.g., euphemisms) that facilitated the interview process. The second author served as a facilitator to help her make explicit and process the first author’s personal assumptions and emerging conceptions during the data collection process.

Finally, as previously mentioned, both authors coded the data but the second author only conducted holistic analysis so as to focus on broad themes emerging from the data. This allowed for both researchers to tackle the data from different perspectives and compare and contrast the themes that they gleaned from the data.

Results

A total of 85 statements were identified as relevant to the issue of motivations for engaging in long-distance parenting in the detailed line-by-line analysis. These statements were subsumed into 12 meaning units/sub-themes during abstraction. Those units were further collapsed into the following five themes. See **Table 1** for a summary.

Theme 1. Contextual and Daily Challenges in Caring for their Children in the United States

Parents' busy schedule. In explaining their reasons for engaging in long-distance parenting, respondents overwhelmingly mentioned practical concerns in providing full quality care to their children. For example, as many of the respondents held full-time jobs or were enrolled in post graduate programs (e.g., medical school), many talked about having hectic work or study schedules that made it difficult to fulfil the high demands of raising children. Some used terms like having 'no time' to focus on their children and expressing concerns that they might not be able to take time off work to care for their children if they got sick. This challenge of balancing work and childrearing is reflected in the explanation given by Gina, a working mom of two daughters who sent her eldest back to India when she was 10 months old:

This goes back to ... let me think ... 2007, and I was still in my third year of (medical) residency. Being a resident, I have to do like 30 hours of call. My husband works. So, I thought it was difficult for me to take care of her and I'm sure that my mother-in-law is going to take good care of her and so I sent her to India.

Multiple children, inadequate attention. For some parents, having multiple children added yet another layer of challenge—giving them even less time to take care of all their children adequately. As Anu, mother of a 3-year-old daughter and 3-month-old son noted, 'we thought maybe for a little while, we'll get a breather while he [infant son] becomes little bigger'. Some parents expressed concern about the safety of their children when they are unable to provide adequate attention. This concern was specifically with regard to the safety of the younger child and the potential for the older child to unknowingly hurt them. Vipin, the mother of two girls who were back in the United States at the time of the interview, 'My elder one was very, very active and we got so nervous because we thought that ... she might do something to my younger daughter ... unknowingly.' She recounted a time when her older daughter tried to pull the younger one off a swing, not realizing how dangerous this was. She described this moment as the 'major point of decision' and when she and her husband began thinking about sending their daughter to India.

Theme 2. Parents' Concern around Group Day Care

Health concerns. Most participants in the study were either dual career couples or a couple where at least one was enrolled in advanced education. Thus, alternative caregivers were needed. Although paid day care was an alternative that they could afford, parents expressed concerns about the safety and quality of those settings. One set of concerns revolved around exposure to illness at a very young age. Some parents indicated that very young children would 'have no immunity' yet and would be especially susceptible to disease. For this reason, some reported that although they might consider day care when the child was older, sending their children during infancy and toddlerhood to India was a safer option. As one parent explains:

If she (10-month old daughter) goes to daycare, she catches all the colds and cough and fever. We both work so we may not be able to take care of her. So, I thought (to send her to day care) if she is little (older) like 3-year-old or something ...

Beyond hypothetical scenarios, some parents did initially send their children to day care but later pulled them out and sent them to be cared for in India after multiple experiences of illness. Others had seen how often their first child was sick in day care and thus opted to send their second child to India to avoid the same predicament and/or to avoid having that older child bring illness that might infect their younger siblings. One parent recounted their experience:

I wanted to send my second kid to India. The reason is because we have seen a lot of things with my first kid, because he used to go to the daycare starting from the fourth month, and we faced a lot of things like every week we still get a cold, a cough, we used to go visit the doctor frequently because of that. And our life got totally changed ... he [would get] sick for almost a month or one and a half month and then he recovered. Then two weeks after, he got sick again. Because of, you know the cold and a lot of other diseases that he caught from daycare, or from other kids.

Poor dietary habits. Parents also expressed concerns around poor dietary habits that children can develop in day care. For some respondents, sending their child to India and being cared for by grandparents meant access to healthy homemade food and having a healthier feeding

schedule in contrast to 'giving him store food', and irregular feeding. For Vina (mother) and Vimal (father), who are both working parents and had their 2-year-old daughter in India at the time of the interview, this issue was especially salient given their challenges with their child who they already considered as a 'picky eater'. Vina explains:

She had problems with feeding even starving at a young age when she was 2 months, 3 months old. She never used to enjoy eating or drinking milk. Even when I introduced solids, it was the same thing. She used to spit it out we used to spend lot of time. Like each feeding session would take an hour. Sometimes even one and a half hour and so, we thought maybe she is not ready [for daycare] and that's why we had to send her to India with my in-laws.

Lack of adequate attention. Some parents had concerns around the amount of attention children actually get in day care settings. In contrast to one-on-one attention they might receive when cared for by relatives, parents raised concerns about how their child might just be one of many. As one parent noted:

I don't think he'll have more one-on-one interaction because each teacher would be having like what six kids to take care of ... with my parents, it was all one-on-one interaction and you know it was a lot of learning and you know talking and reading books.

Theme 3. Grandparents as Ideal Caregivers but Unable to Stay in the United States

Grandparents as ideal caregivers. Respondents generally considered grandparents as ideal caregivers, saying things like 'nothing better than the grandparents themselves', and describing them as 'patient', 'experienced', 'having time' and as the 'most trustworthy' of caregivers. Respondents noted that the grandparents were retired and thus had a lot of time. Others talked about how they themselves were raised well by their parents and thus they had substantial experience in caring for their own children. In some cases, respondents considered grandparents as being even 'better' caregivers than themselves.

In contrast, participants considered paid care, even when it is not in group settings, as less reliable. Several participants considered the option of hiring nannies, but also did not trust them as much as they did

actual relatives. One parent indicated that they used to have a nanny but still did not feel the same level of trust. He noted, 'I just wanted him to be taken care of by somebody who I can trust'. Another parent describes her concerns in more detail:

I can call for a nanny and all. But again, I don't feel like trusting them because I am in a different country. I really, maybe if it's an Indian Nanny may be I will trust but I don't know about really other people because you hear so many different cases. With you know, babies being kidnapped or all that really you don't want to trust anybody. So, we thought of option of maybe having like an Indian nanny and then maybe keeping both the babies at home and we tried for a while but we couldn't really get anybody that they can come to our home and you know take care of both my son and daughter. But we didn't really find anybody. We could maybe if we go with an American nanny type of thing maybe we could have got somebody. But I didn't really like you know feel like trusting them. I could trust more my parents and you know I know that she'll be safe with them. (Dina, mother of a 2.5-year-old boy and a 5-month-old daughter who was in India at the time of the interview)

Grandparents wanting to care for their grandchildren. Consistent with respondents' desires to have their children cared for by their own parents, respondents noted that the children's grandparents also communicated a desire to be involved. Respondents reported that their own parents echoed their concerns around paid care. As one parent noted, 'In fact they (child's grandparents) are the one, they forced us ... to take her (granddaughter) ... they didn't want the risk her you know sending her at that early age [to the day care].'

Visa restrictions. Although participants wanted grandparents to care for their children, and grandparents expressed willingness to care for the children—visa restrictions often prevented families from making such an arrangement. For many families in the study, grandparents came to the United States to help care for children, but could only stay in the country for short periods of time. And because some grandparents came to the United States, they developed bonds with the children that made family separation all the more difficult. As one parent recounted, '[child's maternal grandparents] were here and they were so attached and they wanted to take her'.

Theme 4. Presence of Other Extended Network of Relationships and Support in India

Broader social and kinship networks in India. Being migrants to the United States, participants reported that they had limited social support and kin networks in comparison to what they have in India. This was especially challenging given the responsibility of raising children, which fell solely to the parents and not a broader community of caregivers in their native country. Several parents talked about how in India, there is the extended family, neighbors and friends who can assist with childrearing. Participants talked about how neighbors and friends drop in for an hour or so to visit, how children visit other people's homes in the neighborhood and how there are numerous people to whom parents can rely for help. In contrast, raising children in the United States is an isolating experience:

Here ... we don't know anybody. You don't even know who lives next door. In this apartment, really, I don't know who lives next door. So, it's like if I need any help, it's just my husband and me. And my friends are there but I can't ask them everyday to you know and come and look after the baby or something.

Participants talked about how children benefit from broad social networks as well. Descriptions evoked a sense of communal childrearing and a high level of interconnections among families and neighbors that made for a positive experience for not only the parents, but the children as well. One parent describes what their children could have in India:

At home it's just you and your husband. That's it—nobody else is there for them. See that's another thing when you send the kid to India. They get to see a lot. Like they get to see so many faces, they get so excited.

Domestic helpers. In addition to formal and informal networks of support, respondents also reported access to paid help. Several participants suggested that access to paid domestic assistance freed up time for primary caregivers to focus on the child. For instance, one parent indicated that her mother had a domestic worker at home who could do things like clean dishes and do other house chores. Thus, her mother could 'put more time into (the) baby'.

Domestic workers also provided direct care that parents considered as high quality. Dinesh, a working father of two boys, talked about how

they had to send their son to India when he was a year old because his wife was recovering after giving birth to their second child. In addition to his wife's parents, Dinesh explained that there were domestic care workers who assisted:

They'll take care of the baby and they'll take care of him during feeding time or changing or during bed. They probably spend like four hours with the baby So, this domestic help, when they come, they might stay with them for whole day ... only take care of the baby ... just to play with the baby That gives a lot of free time for grandparents and they get the rest. That's required actually to take care of the baby. (Dinesh, a dad of 2 children, a 6-year-old son and a 6-month-old son)

Theme 5. Parents Want Their Child to Understand Their Culture and Language

Maintain Indian traditions and values. Majority of the participants reported that one big motivation for sending their children to India was for them to learn about and/or maintain 'Indian culture'. As children grow up in a country other than the parents' place of origin, some expressed concerns that they would not develop the connections to India. As one mother notes, 'I would definitely want them to know their Indian roots. I really, I am very strict about that. We have been brought up in India and I want them to even appreciate everything of that country where their parents are from'.

For some parents, losing connections to Indian culture meant adopting new sets of values that might be too "Americanized," as one parent puts it. Probed about what this means, parents gave examples of children having to be completely independent and out of the home by the age of 16 or 18, whereas this was not typical in Indian culture. Others talked about traditions and religion and their desire for children to maintain those. As one parent explains, 'we practice Hinduism, so I would want her to do the same'.

Learning to speak the native language. Several parents specifically talked about language acquisition. Sending children to India when they were young was especially important, as this was a critical time that language was emerging. Participants who had been reunited with their children at the time of the interview indicated satisfaction in having their children exposed to their native tongue at a young age—making it easier

for them to learn and maintain the native language. One parent explained that their child was in day care and that ‘she was almost about to speak’. When they took her out of day care and brought her to India, ‘she was about to speak English’ but then she started to speak their native tongue ‘in a full-fledged way and she was speaking in our language’.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the practice of long-distance parenting among South Asian Indian immigrants living in the Midwestern United States. Overall, interviews evoked themes that reflect a convergence of traditionally held notions around childcare and family and a shift in the traditional caregiving context as a result of migration. Parents’ responses reflect deeply held traditional notions of childcare, notably, the involvement of extended family, the acquisition of ‘traditional Indian culture’ and collective care. However, set against the backdrop of migrant family life, this model of child caregiving was difficult to sustain. For example, although grandparents were sometimes present in the first few months of the child’s life, visa restrictions and other issues did not allow for them to remain in the United States and thus they were absent from the child’s day-to-day life. Parents’ views about collective and family care could not be sustained and paid care was viewed with suspicion. Unable to provide the same context, experience and contact with the ‘typical’ cast of socializing agents in their traditional view of childrearing—parents in this study respond by sending children home to India in order for them to be reared within a context more consistent with deeply held beliefs around family and childcare. The decision to send children back to India appears to be a response to this disconnect.

Harkness and Super (2006) conceptualized children’s socialization as occurring within three coordinated systems of the ‘developmental niche’—the psychology of the caregivers, customs of childrearing and the caregiving context. When there is inconsistency among these components, changes or adjustments occur in order to re-establish a sense of balance. For example, researchers have documented shifts in caregiving beliefs after migration such that they begin to align, somewhat, with the predominant beliefs in the new home country (e.g., Bornstein & Cote, 2001; Moscardino, Nwobu, & Axia, 2006). Nonetheless, many parental beliefs, like those expressed by parents in this study, are more stable and continue even after years of migration (de Guzman, Carlo, Brown, & Knight, 2012). Indeed, the great body of work on migrant parenting

suggests inconsistencies in parenting beliefs and practices between migrants and majority populations (e.g., García Coll, Meyer, & Brillón, 1995; Rosenthal & Roer-Strier, 2001). Findings from the current study illustrate the complex interplay among notions of caregiving, caregiving practices and the caregiving context.

Several implications can be drawn from the findings. First, although there exists a growing body of research examining changes in parental beliefs in the context of migration, few studies have examined what happens when those beliefs do not change and thus become inconsistent with their new caregiving context. Bohr and Tse (2009) similarly showed how Chinese parents in Canada sometimes send their infants to be reared by grandmothers in China. Little else is known about how migrant parents respond to such disconnects among traditionally held notions of caregiving, predominant parenting practices in a host country and other components of the caregiving context.

Second, consistent with findings of other researchers examining long-distance parenting in the context migration, parents in this study reported that spending time away from their children was an emotionally difficult experience. Some parents expressed regret in sending their children away even though they had initially thought that this practice would benefit the child. Because research examining long-distance parenting that is undertaken outside of resource scarcity is somewhat new (e.g., “kirogi parenting”), the effects of this separation on the parents and children is not yet quite understood. On the one hand, some researchers have suggested that this separation may have serious long-term consequences particularly because of disruptions in the parent–child attachment or relationship (Bohr, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). On the other hand, several scholars have argued for a need to expand theoretical approaches towards the child–caregiver relationships to include cultural models of childcare that may involve the broader family and community as primary attachment and caregiving figures (e.g., see volume by Quinn & Mageo, 2013). Seymour (2013) specifically highlights the role of the extended family and bonds formed by children with multiple caregiving figures in India, such that dyadic relationships (e.g., mother–child attachments) may be de-emphasized and instead affect is distributed more broadly across various caregivers. Set against this broader cultural model of family life, the effects of these brief periods of parent–child separation on children’s well-being remains to be examined.

Finally, this study was conducted in a setting where there is a low density of ethnic minorities and few Asian Indian families. There are few cultural resources (e.g., Indian culture groups, festivals and culture schools)

from which parents can draw to support their children's cultural development. It is unclear to what extent this may have impacted the parents' motivations to send their children abroad. Parents noted that they wanted their children to learn about 'Indian culture' including the language and customs. It is worth examining further how families might respond to their new home country if they were situated in areas where such resources and intra-ethnic ties were more readily available.

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes Around Motivations for Engaging in Long-distance Parenting Themes Sub-themes Sample Quotes

Theme 1. Contextual and daily challenges in caring for their children in the United States.

1a. Parents' busy schedule

'We work on a schedule. So, if I have to take off from work like say when she is sick you know I have to find somebody else to cover for me and you know with no back-up back here umm ... we thought maybe we should send her again now to our in-laws to India.'

1b. Multiple children and inadequate attention

'We had him the second one and then it was getting very difficult for both of us and we thought you know we couldn't give her [daughter] much attention if she were to be here.'

Theme 2. Parents' concern around group day care.

2a. Health concerns

'The reason is because we have seen a lot of things with my first kid, because he used to go to the daycare starting from the fourth month, and we faced a lot of things like every week we still get a cold, a cough, we used to go visit the doctor frequently.'

2b. Poor dietary habits

'She had problems with feeding even starving at a young age when she was 2 months, 3 months old. She never used to enjoy eating or drinking milk. Even when I introduced solids, it was the same thing. She used to spit it out we used to spend lot of time. Like each feeding session would take an hour. Sometimes even one and a half hour and so, we thought maybe she is not ready [for daycare] and that's why we had to send her to India with my in-laws.'

2c. Lack of adequate attention

'In daycare, basically, at that age, I don't think he'll have more one-on-one interaction because each teacher would be having like what six kids to take care of ... with my parents, it was all one-on-one interaction and you know it was a lot of learning and you know talking and reading books.'

(continued)

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes Around Motivations for Engaging in Long-distance Parenting Themes Sub-themes Sample Quotes (*continued*)

Theme 3. Grandparents as ideal caregivers but unable to stay in the United States.

3a. Grandparents as ideal caregivers

'I could trust more my parents and you know I know that she'll be safe with them.'

3b. Grandparents wanting to care for their grandchildren

'... in fact they (child's grandparents) are the one, they forced us ... to take her (granddaughter) ... They didn't even want the risk her you know sending her at that early age [to the day care].'

3c. Grandparents' visa restrictions

'My parents cannot be here for a longer time, more than six months ... because of all the visa restrictions ... and that is the reason why he went there.'

Theme 4. Presence of other extended network of relationships and support in India.

4a. Broader social networks in India

'Back home you have lot of support system. And that time when I was born, my grandparents were with my mom too. So, it's not just my mom caring for, it's like you know in family you have so many people looking after you and then you have all these neighbors, friends, and everybody that you can go to.'

4b. Domestic helpers

'... domestic help, when they come, they might stay with them for whole day ... only take care of the baby ... just to play with the baby ... That gives a lot of free time for grandparents.'

Theme 5. Parents want their child to understand their culture and language.

5a. Maintain Indian traditions and values

'... we wanted her to kind of understand the culture and just get to know what India is in her own perspective yeah ... I would definitely want them to know their Indian roots.'

5b. Learning to speak the native language

'I think that's because there (in India) you would communicate more with people. So, every day, they'll have some visitors, our friends coming to home and playing with them. So they tend to pick up language easily.'

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