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## Abstract

This qualitative study examines multiple facets of motherhood among thirty Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers living in Queens and Schenectady, New York, in the United States. These women belong to a growing Indo-Caribbean population that immigrated over the last forty years to the U.S. Indo-Caribbean families share a unique historical and cultural footprint that combines experiences, traditions, and practices from three distinct locations: India, Caribbean nations, and the United States. Despite the complex socio-cultural tapestry of this group, currently, little information is available about this group, including a lack of research on motherhood. Using the tenets of Social Feminism Perspectives, Gender Identity, and the Cultural-Ecological Framework, Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers were interviewed using open-ended questions concerning their conceptions and practices of motherhood and the socio-cultural values influencing their schemas about motherhood within the context of life in the U.S. The mothers' testimonials were analyzed using both NVivo 10 and the traditional high-lighter method. The analysis revealed that participants: (1) viewed motherhood as a life changing experience, a blessing, and a huge lifetime responsibility; (2) maintained a primary nurturing role modeled by their own mothers, but worked to avoid the struggles that they and their mothers experienced in order to provide for a better life for themselves and their children; (3) valued high expectations for their children's behavior including respect for authorities, good behavior, hard work, and academic excellence along with high levels of control and harsh discipline when these expectations were violated (although there was a tendency for discipline to be less extreme than what they had experienced as children); (4) maintained a strong value in educating their children about their religious and cultural heritage and sought out communities that would provide social support for these values. The findings provide a basis for understanding how factors within the family of origin and the socio-cultural environment of the participant's childhood and her new environments, in the U.S. shape her conceptions of motherhood and parenting practices.

Conceptualizations and Practices of Motherhood among Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Mothers  
Living in the United States: A Qualitative Investigation

by

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B.S. Cazenovia College, 1997  
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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
Child and Family Studies in the David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Development

Syracuse University  
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Conceptualizations and Practices of Motherhood among Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Mothers  
Living in the United States: A Qualitative Investigation

**CHAPTER I**  
**Introduction**

**Background of the Study**

Currently, immigrant families in the United States who trace their roots to the Caribbean encompass over 4 million people (*not including undocumented immigrants*) (U.S. Department of Justice, Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 2000). Between 1981 and 2002 alone, it is estimated that 187,600 Guyanese and 102,800 Trinidadians migrated to the United States. As a subset of these Caribbean immigrants, Indo-Caribbean immigrant families are unique in that they share a unique historical and cultural footprint that combines varying experiences, traditions, and practices from three very distinct geographic locations: India, Caribbean nations, and the United States.

In addition, unlike many other groups of immigrants in the United States, Indo-Caribbean immigrant families historically have transplanted or immigrated on two or more occasions. Initially transported by the British from India to the Caribbean as indentured servants between 1838 – 1917 (Vertovec, 1992), many subsequently migrated from the Caribbean (primarily from Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago) to the United States *en masse* during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fleeing socio-political and economic oppression. Their culture and experiences in the Caribbean, and their life within the United States, have combined to define their current existence and shape their personal identities as immigrants.

Yet, despite the complex social and cultural tapestry of Indo-Caribbean immigrant families, there is a dearth of information on their identity formation, ethno-theories about parenting, maternal and paternal roles and, more importantly, womanhood and motherhood.

Using the tenets of Social Feminism Perspectives (Osmond & Thorne, 1993), Gender Identity (Mohammed, 1992; Mohammed, 1995; Spade & Valentine, 2004), and Cultural-Ecological Models (Super & Harkness, 1986; 1997; 2002), this study examines the conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers living in the United States. It focused on the meaning of motherhood, the challenges associated with the role of being a mother, the values and beliefs that influence Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers' cultural schemas and internal working models about motherhood, the social support for motherhood, and how the prevailing influences of motherhood in the United States have shaped their experiences as mothers.

### **Gaps in the Literature about Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Families and Motherhood**

The scholarship on motherhood has grown significantly over the last three decades, further encapsulating the mothering identities and experiences of Caucasian American, African American, Hispanic American, African Caribbean, East Indian, and other Asian mothers (Arendell, 2000). However, despite the growing body of work on motherhood, research on Indo-Caribbean immigrant families is thin, fragmented, and largely confined to children's mental health (Brent, & Callwood, 1993; Bryan, 2007; Daniel, 2004; Gopaul-McNicol, 1998; Murphy, & Mahalingam, 2006; Thrasher & Anderson, 1988), grief/loss experiences as they relate to parental migration (Baptiste, Hardy, & Lewis, 1997a; 1997b; Persaud, 2008; Warikoo, 2004, 2005; Plaza, 2003; Pottinger, 2005, 2006; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie 2002), childrearing practices and parenting styles (DeYoung & Zigler, 1994; Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2006; Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, & Evans, 2006; Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, & Xu, 2009), the assimilation experience and transnational relationships of West

Indian immigrants in the United States (Foner, 1997; 2000; 2001; Kasinitz, 1992; 2008; Waters, 1996; 2001), and racial and ethnic identity (Wariko, 2005; Waters, 1999).

Few investigations have examined and elaborated on the sociological, historical, cultural and psychological issues embedded in the conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers living in the United States. Past research has contributed to inaccurate generalizations, assumptions, and stereotypes about Indo-Caribbean families (Plaza, 2003). For instance, the prevalent, one-dimensional characterization of Indo-Caribbean immigrant women as traditional and subservient negates their unique history, and experiences, as well as their individual and familial strengths. These inaccurate representations can have implications for educational planning because they limit our knowledge of this group, fail to capture multiple perspectives, and could impact intervention services for a group that has been experiencing challenging times.

The limited and fragmentary information available regarding conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers can be attributed to a number of factors, including a long-standing tradition of their being misunderstood within the context of studies on women (primarily from India), or other Caribbean women from different ethnic groups (primarily of African Caribbean descent). Only a limited number of studies have explored the conceptions of motherhood independently of general familial issues among different ethnic/cultural groups. Moreover, the tendency of Indo-Caribbean families to maintain lives separate from mainstream America by living in ethnic enclaves has contributed to their unwillingness to participate in research studies. Furthermore, Indo-Caribbean immigrants do not have a unified ethnic group identity. Rarely have Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers who reside in the United States been studied in their own right especially since “Indo-Caribbean women

have had limited room to express their individuality and need for equality in a marriage” (Roopnarine et al., 2009, p. 38). It is this lack of centrality and scholarship about motherhood and Indo-Caribbean women that gave rise to the current study.

### **The Present Study**

This study seeks to amplify the conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant women in the United States in order to fill the significant gaps in the literature and address biases that exist towards this unique immigrant population. Attention has been paid to the diverse and current challenges facing Indo-Caribbean immigrant communities in the United States. As outlined below, the present study utilized an in-depth-interview approach to document the changing conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers living in the United States. The confluence of propositions related to knowing and understanding processes within families, as these ideas exist within Social Feminism Perspectives (Osmond & Thorne, 1993), Gender Identity (Mohammed, 1992; Mohammed, 1995; Spade & Valentine, 2004), and Cultural-Ecological models (Super & Harkness, 1986; 1997; 2002), was instrumental in guiding this study and in framing the interview questions. Specifically, the following were examined: (1) The meaning of motherhood (i.e., changing conceptualizations, challenges, values and beliefs); and (2) the practice of motherhood (i.e., the presence or absence of social support, spouse/partner, childcare, and cultural activities) and (3) how these factors collectively determine the conception and practice of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers living in the United States.

### **Constructing Identities of Motherhood for Immigrant Women**

A review of the literature on motherhood reveals that the literature has focused primarily on the role of maternal employment (i.e., gender inequality and motherhood penalty), changes in

reproductive experiences (i.e., early and late motherhood, infertility, involuntary childlessness, and lesbian motherhood) and challenges experienced as women transition to their new roles as mothers. In spite of many demographic changes in the United States, traditional and historical North American ideologies of a heterosexual, married, full-time mother still continue to overshadow and limit the study of the identities of mothers and their experiences of motherhood (Arendell, 2000).

Immigrant mothers in the United States face unique challenges because many are forced to reconstruct and transform existing identities of motherhood based on prevailing North American ideologies, immigration patterns, culture/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion and gender role expectations (Kim, Conway-Turner, Sherif-Trask & Woolfolk, 2006; Sotelo-Hondagneu & Avila, 1997; Tummala-Narra, 2004). Based upon this, one can infer that Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers also experience similar personal challenges, since they too are measured by the traditional North American “yardstick,” thus leading to further feelings of inadequacy (Gillespie, 2003; Letherby, 1999). Conducting studies on the shared experiences of mothers, particularly immigrant mothers, will help to normalize the mothering process, allowing mothers to devise their own scripts, conquer feelings of incompleteness, and recognize how societal ideologies of the perfect mother are only myths (Arendell, 2000; Hequembourg, 2004).

The current study provides a more realistic representation and portrayal of today’s Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers and the challenges they face in their everyday lives. It is hoped that this effort will encourage an expanded scope of research topics, using diverse methodologies that provide data to inform intervention services for Indo-Caribbean immigrant families.

## **Existing Literature on Indo-Caribbean families is outdated**

The study of changing conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers living in the United States is important for several reasons. First, this line of study will help to correct traditionally inaccurate theoretical frameworks that have historically undergirded relevant research. Research on Indo-Caribbean families (mainly lower-income families with limited comparative reference) was first conducted in the 1950s. At the time, Indo-Caribbean family formation and dynamics were unfamiliar to most researchers, many of whom were of European descent. In some cases, the findings from these studies contradicted the dominant North American family discourse and, as a result, Indo-Caribbean families took the blame for such societal problems as promiscuity, marital instability and deficient child socialization (Mohammed, 1988a; 1988b). These findings, combined with a dearth of information concerning Indo-Caribbean family organization patterns, resulted in inaccurate theoretical frameworks to guide interpretations of Indo-Caribbean immigrant family life in the United States.

Second, it will provide a lens through which contemporary Indo-Caribbean society and Indo-Caribbean women in particular, can be examined. The fact is that Indo-Caribbean immigrant families in the United States are experiencing many changes relative to higher divorce rates, common law unions, alcoholism, unemployment and increased acculturation towards mainstream practices (Nevadomsky, 1980; Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005 p. 322; Samuel & Wilson, 2009; Singh, 1996). Little is known about the impact on Indo-Caribbean families stemming from trends and changes in family structure, such as increased divorce rates (Singh, 2005), interracial marriages, dismantlement of the dowry system (Deen, 1995), dissolution of the caste system (Van Der Veer & Vertovec, 1991), smaller households, delayed marriage and

childbirth, single parenthood, increased immigration, a growing aging population, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the impact of globalization (Bernard, 2003). With respect to Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers living in the United States, increasingly they have assumed roles as significant wage earners in the family (Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Xu, 2009). This has brought about opportunities for increased educational attainment, greater mobility and freedom, and greater equality in gender roles, and possibly changes in conceptions of motherhood. Along with these changes, continued growth of this population, and the need to give greater voice to this rarely studied group of immigrant mothers outside the context of husband-wife roles, all provide further impetus for this study.

Due to the multidimensional nature of motherhood, all mothers do not experience motherhood in the same way (Ruddick, 1994). Evidence suggests that mothers who are minority, lesbian, single, immigrants, or poor are not worthy of in-depth study in their own right and, as a result, there are few studies in which they have been studied separately (Arendel, 2000). An expanded understanding of Indo-Caribbean mothers' everyday challenges, unique experiences, and the realities of their motherhood will require a paradigm shift that moves beyond a deficit model to a strengths perspective. By focusing on the changing conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers, this study differs from prior work. The findings from this qualitative study offer insights that capture the actual voices of the respondents, provide opportunities to understand the lived experiences of mothers (Letherby, 1999), and uncover emerging themes of Indo-Caribbean immigrant motherhood in the United States.

Further, this study focuses on multiple generations, with special attention being paid to the transmission of beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, cultural/religious practices, resources and

services from one generation to the next (Aquilino, 1999). Segmented Immigration Theory (Zhou, 1997) and studies using intergenerational samples traditionally show a decreased assimilation for second-generation immigrants (Marshall & Marshall, 1988), with females more generally maintaining multiple cultural identities (Lopez, 2002; Rambaut, 1996; Waters, 1996). In the process of examining the conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers, this study offers greater insights about how, or in what way(s), mothers retain their ethnic identity or assimilate into prevailing beliefs about gender roles, egalitarianism in childcare and household roles among major ethnic groups in the United States.

Finally, while the immigration process may have altered the identity development and experiences of Indo-Caribbean immigrant families, it has also played a significant role in how these individuals develop a sense of identity throughout their adult life cycles. For a number of previous immigrants to the United States (e.g., Italians, Irish and Hispanics), there was increased pressure to acculturate and/or assimilate. However, for many recent immigrants, the pressures to conform to the mainstream values of United States society have not been as intense.

The reality is that Indo-Caribbean immigrant families arrived with “an invisible suitcase full of family values and material standards which were influenced by a particular creolization experience” (Plaze, 2003, p. 21). Over time, Indo-Caribbean immigrant families in the United States have had the complex task of determining which cultural customs, beliefs, and practices to renounce or keep in favor of the “Anglo-American” ideal (Roopnarine, Shin, Meera & Lewis, 2001).

This study extends prior work and provides valuable information on the shared elements of Indo-Caribbean cultural continuity that may have traveled with these women. Potential examples include the identification of ties, if any, these women still have to the Indo-Caribbean



culture in the areas of religion, gender roles, and parenting practices. Additional examples include couple and parent-child practices and beliefs that are departures from the idealized scripts of Indo-Caribbean motherhood, as well as evidence of how the women have configured their own personal identities, cultural schemas, and internal working models of motherhood.

Within these complex experiences, this study also examines variations and similarities of changing conceptions and practices of motherhood among women based upon whether they are first or second generation, Indo-Caribbean, immigrant mothers. Put differently, qualitative data on these core areas invite a more in-depth interpretation of the types of identity development and social negotiation that shape the everyday experiences of Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers. This analysis provides a platform for understanding what cognitive schemas might undergird Indo-Caribbean immigrant motherhood, especially given the enormity of the structural, historical, religious, and cultural factors that shape and influence the role of being a mother.

The chapters that follow include the following: Chapter II - an examination of the three theoretical frameworks (Social Feminism perspectives, Gender Identity perspectives, and the Cultural-Ecological Model) and how each was used to guide the development of the interview questions and the interpretations of the findings; Chapter III - an in-depth background on Indo-Caribbean immigrant families that describes their movement to the Caribbean, their immigration to the United States and challenges related to their ethnic identity; Chapter IV - a review of the motherhood scholarship that consists of both prevailing North American ideologies and mothering within an Indo-Caribbean cultural context; Chapter V - a discussion of the methodology, beginning with the research design, sample, procedures, measures and concluding with the analysis approach; Chapter VI - a description of the four main themes that include (1) Indo-Caribbean influences on current parenting, (2) Cultural and religious practices, (3)

participant's relationship with her mother and (4) Intense mothering. Each theme was supported with the use of NVivo 10, the traditional high-lighter method, and testimonials from the participants in this study. Chapter VII concludes this study and, in the process, discusses implications for practices, the limitations of this study, and provides recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter II**

### **Theoretical frameworks**

A combination of the major tenets of Social Feminism perspectives (Osmond & Thorne, 1993), Gender Identity perspectives (Mohammed, 1992; Mohammed, 1995; Spade & Valentine, 2004) and Cultural-Ecological Models (Super & Harkness, 1986; 1997; 2002) helped to contextualize this study and shape the interview questions. This study recognizes that issues of gender, socio-historical experiences and cultural practices can have profound influences on how immigrant women execute their role as mothers and how their conceptions can possibly change as they come into contact with more egalitarian roles in the U.S. Moreover, the intersections of these theoretical frameworks will assist in locating the interrelationships among gender, culture and motherhood. As stated already, this has the potential of contributing to a greater understanding of Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers' conceptions and practices of motherhood prior to their arrival in the U.S. and at some later point.

#### **Social Feminism perspectives**

Historically, women's contributions to society have been marginalized and, in some cases, overlooked altogether. However, with the rise of the Feminist Movement and Feminism, several attempts have been made to revise history so that women's contributions can be included in order to "render the invisible visible" (Mohammed, 1995, p. 22). Feminism is basically

concerned with the inequality of power relation between women and men (Mohammed, 1995, p. 30); its introduction helped to expose the subordinate positions of women and, in doing so, attempted to redefine and alter women's unequal position within both the family and society. This process of inclusivity and increased awareness did not occur overnight. As their rights and roles became increasingly recognized and validated over time, women began to feel increasingly visible and liberated. In an Indo-Caribbean context, the constructions of the devoted wife (*pativrata*) and divine motherhood, as portrayed in the mother Goddesses (e.g., *Mother Sita* and *Radha*), are paradoxical because women are viewed as the sources of succor, but are expected to be subservient to men and mothers-in-law. Feminist theorists argue that immigrating to the United States provides opportunities for Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers to develop an increased awareness of their situation and shine a light on decades of oppression caused largely by patriarchy, thus creating the opportunity to more fully develop their own scripts.

Feminist theories include the perspectives of Liberal Feminists, Social Feminists and Radical Feminists. Each perspective has differing views on patriarchy and the relationship between gender and oppression; however, all are grounded within the context of (1) an awareness of women's oppression, (2) the factors that reinforce the continuation of women's oppression, (3) efforts to end the subordination of women, and finally a future plan for equality between men and women (Avis, 1986). Feminist theories have extended our understanding of the study of motherhood, and have led to the development of an increased awareness of the everyday realities confronting mothers, including recent demographic trends in motherhood and career (Avellar & Smock, 2003; Hoffnung, 2004; Reid, 2002; Rowlingson & McKay, 2005; Sellers, Thomas, Batts & Ostman, 2005; Vejar, Madison-Colmore & Ter Maat, 2006), diversity in relationship and reproductive experiences (Gillespie, 2003; Hequembourg, 2004; Letherby,

1999; McQuillan, Greil, White, & Jacob 2003; Shelton & Johnson 2006; Stewart, 2003) and resulting distress and depression levels (Collett, 2005; Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005; DeGroot, Vuurman, Edge & Rogers, 2004; Franco, Sabbatini & Crosby, 2004; Hornstra & Jolles, 2006; Letherby, 1999; Paris & Dubus, 2005). The use of feminist theories enables a more appropriate analysis of how the preceding topics impact (positively or negatively) the mothering experience for women in this study (Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

Studies on motherhood have utilized feminist theories, mainly social feminism, which investigates women's oppression in society due to patriarchy and capitalism (Avellar & Smock, 2003; Hequembourg, 2004; Hoffnung, 2004; Kurdek, 1993; Kurdek, 2006; Reid, 2002; Rowlingson & McKay, 2005; Sellers, Thomas, Batts & Ostman, 2005; and Vejar, Madison-Colmore & Ter Maat, 2006). The perspectives within Social Feminism recognize that motherhood contains a macro, socio-cultural dimension (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Studying issues related to motherhood only at the individual level is no longer acceptable because this practice fails to take into consideration how individual, familial and societal factors impact the mothering experience. For instance, issues such as care-giving arrangements should not only be studied exclusively from the interpersonal level, they should also include the contributions of fathers, extended family members, and siblings and other informal support systems. Cross-cultural studies have demonstrated that men, extended family members, and siblings participate in childrearing by providing nurture and care to children. This is quite evident in cultures with a collectivistic orientation, such as the Marquesans, Micronesians, Aka, East Indians, Malaysians, Chinese and Indo-Caribbean families (for reviews, see Hewlett, 2010; Martini, 2005).

Secondly, feminist theorists, in particular social feminist scholars, recognize that families come in many forms. The traditional ideology of a family that is heterosexual, married, and with

children, contains many biases that perpetuate the oppression of diverse families. Recent scholarship on motherhood has given credibility to women and mothers who are poor (Rowlingson & McKay, 2005), minority (McCreary & Dancy, 2004; Reid, 2002), lesbian (Hequembourg, 2004; Kurdek, 1993; Kurdek, 2006), or not raising children (Gillespie, 2003; Letherby, 1999). Feminist scholars assert that since all mothers do not experience motherhood in the same way (Ruddick, 1994), they should not be limited by masculine or feminine traits; rather, scholars should strive for androgyny (combination of masculine and feminine traits; Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

In sum, the study of motherhood is dynamic, ever-changing, and fluid. The use of concepts and constructs drawn from feminist theories, specifically social feminism, offers a basis for understanding the voices of a group of women, who historically have been oppressed, and measured against traditional constructions of the divine wife and mother embedded in East Indian religious edicts and beliefs (see Kurtz, 1992).

### **Gender Identity Perspectives**

To some, gender identity perspectives and feminism are synonymous when attempting to understand and explore the everyday lives of mothers. For women and mothers worldwide, especially Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers, “gender and ethnicity are interlocked structures” (Mohammed, 1992, p.48). An individual’s gender identity is shaped by “economic, political, social, psychological and cultural factors... men and women shape and define each other... masculinity and femininity are categories which exist not only in opposition, but in relation to each other” (Mohammed, 1995, p. 24-25). Gender identity is the process of females learning the role of being feminine and males learning the role of being masculine. These complex roles are embedded within personality traits that are influenced by both biological and social

environments and help to shape our schemas and internal working models about gender identity and gender-differentiated roles.

Within East Indian religious traditions, epics of *Lord Ram* and his wife *Sita* represent the “ideal model” for relationships between husbands and wives (Mohammed, 1998; Roopnarine et al., 2009). For instance, *Sita* is depicted as docile and submissive and *Ram* is seen as the patriarch, strong, powerful and brave. Manhood for many Indo-Caribbean men is defined by control, superiority and male dominance. The father is considered the head of the household, the breadwinner and decision-maker (Seegobin, 1999). He maintains financial control and strong ties to family members, particularly other males. In most instances, he is the primary breadwinner, also serving as a bridge to the outside world. Within the family, he is considered the primary disciplinarian, using physical punishment and social threats to produce well-behaved children. Finally, he tends to have a closer relationship with his sons (Dabydeen & Samaroo, 1994).

With regard to the ideal role for women and mothers, East Indian stories, images and songs of *Mother Sita*, *Santoshi Ma*, *Kali*, *Lakshmi*, *Radha* and *Durga* (female deities) (Mohammed, 1998) are significant in reinforcing the roles and expectations of Indo-Caribbean women and mothers. They are expected to be submissive, passive, and transmitters of the Indo-Caribbean culture. They live within a prescribed gender role and are expected to confine themselves primarily to the home and the company of other females. Mothers, in turn, although treated as inferior to their husbands, assume a multitude of roles that identify them as caregivers to their children, their husband’s parents, and in-laws. Mothers are responsible for childcare, household duties and in many cases work alongside their husbands outside the home (Mohammed, 1995).

Socialization and gender development are reinforced through the positive and negative stimuli that are provided by family, school, peers, religious institutions and the media (Lamb & Lewis, 2005). Gender influences are multifaceted patterns of identities and relationships that are ethnocentric, fluid, continually changing, culturally and socially influenced based on individual and group life (Spade & Valentine, 2004). For instance, beginning at an early age, Indo-Caribbean girls are expected to assist their mothers with duties in the home so as to prepare them for their future roles as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law. In contrast, boys are socialized to learn a trade, take charge, and become the breadwinners of their future families. The formation of gender identity is multidimensional. It is fluid and continually evolving, and consists of more than the sexual and physical differences between men and women. Rather, gender identity forms the basis of knowledge that gives meaning to the differences between men and women and, consciously or unconsciously, shapes much of our everyday lives.

In sum, for Indo-Caribbean mothers in particular, “the imagery of gender – that is the identity, expectations, roles, responsibilities and so on of men and women – is firmly rooted in the ethnic consciousness of the women of this group” (Mohammed, 1992, p. 230). Mohammed argues that the traditional notions of gender identity and gender roles rooted in East Indian religious traditions and practices can restrict Indo-Caribbean women from expressing their separate identity and undermine their efficiency as women (Mohammed 1994; 1998). This has led to the creation of a long standing, voiceless history among East Indian and Indo-Caribbean women (Mohammed, 1995). The use of gender identity will help to decipher to what extent Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers are maintaining traditional gender identity and roles in cultural transition after immigrating to the United States.

### **Cultural-Ecological Framework**

Emerging out of Whiting and Whiting's (1976) cultural-ecological framework, the developmental niche model (Super & Harkness, 1986; 1997; 2002) also helped to shape the organization of this study. This model consists of three interacting sub-systems: (a) physical and social settings; (b) customs and practices of child-rearing; and (c) psychology of the caretakers. Each of the three sub-systems of the developmental niche model is described below.

The first sub-system consists of the physical and social settings, which include the individual's mother, child and her environment. Motherhood is thought to be a socio-historical construct (Forcey, 1994; Apple & Golden, 1997), which consists of complex social interactions between the mother, child and environment (Apple & Golden, 1997). Feminist scholars note that motherhood, as traditionally constructed, is synonymous with womanhood (Chodorow, 1989; 1990; Forcey, 1994; Glenn, 1994; Rothman, 1994; Ruddick, 1994; Schwartz, 1994) and femininity (Chodorow, 1990; Glenn, 1994). This sub-system also includes gender beliefs (Apple & Golden, 1997; McMahon, 1995), race and class (Baca Zinn, 1990; Collins, 1994; Stack & Burton, 1993) and most importantly family law (Abramovitz, 1996; 2006; Fineman, 1995). Families tend to perpetuate the constraints and practices that they experienced as children. For instance, we learn our models of parenting from our parents. Hence, this sub-system manipulates how social policies are implemented, the delivery of resources and the nature of intervention strategies.

The second sub-system of the developmental niche model involves the customs and practices of child-rearing. This consists of the biological, cultural and social ways of providing nurture and care to one's child. Motherhood is also shaped by nurture and care for one's child and, consequently, is believed to be an integral part of the familial level (Thorne, 1993). The mothering experience is considered to be a product of marriage (Glick, 1977) and biological



reproduction (Arendell, 2000). The practice of motherhood consists of multiple roles (Marks & MacDermid, 1996) and includes the responsibility of providing nurture and care (Forcey, 1994; Presser, 1995; Thorne, 1993), and protection and training (Ladd-Taylor, 1994; Leonard, 1996) to dependent children and other family members (Ribbens, 1994; Thurer, 1993). Through this devotional process, a lifetime connection unlike no other is formed between a mother and her children (Oberman & Josselson, 1996).

The third sub-system of the developmental niche model is the psychology of the caretakers, namely their ethno-theories and cultural identity, and how these combine to influence the roles and practices of parenting and child rearing. Motherhood is believed to be entrenched within a woman's life course (Allen & Pickett, 1987) and is considered to be the most important identity for many women (Forcey, 1994; Rogers & White, 1998; Rothman, 1994; Ruddick, 1994; Schwartz, 1994). In this view, motherhood is a learned process that is shaped through a combination of intergenerational interactions, existing cultural messages (Barnard & Martell, 1995; Lightfoot & Valsiner, 1992), and ideologies about the family and childhood (Ribbens, 1994).

At the core of this conception of motherhood is the notion of "intense mothering" (Hays, 1996), which involves practices, roles, and relationships centered on the sacrifices mothers make for children and family (Ladd-Taylor 1994; Ribbens, 1994). "Intense mothering" emphasizes mothers who are deeply invested in their role--emotionally, physically, mentally and financially. Applying this concept to Indo-Caribbean women, "intense mothering" is influenced by the doctrines and teachings of Hinduism (discussed earlier), which, from a very young age, teach Indo-Caribbean girls clearly defined, gender-differentiated roles. This socialization process continues into their adulthood and transition to motherhood (Bernard, 2003).

## **Importance of the Developmental-Niche Framework**

The three sub-systems of the developmental-niche framework – (a) physical and social settings; (b) customs and practices; and (c) psychology of caretakers interact with each other as one system. Super and Harkness (1986) state “the developmental niche provides a framework for examining the effects of cultural features on child-rearing in interaction with general developmental parameters” (p. 546). This framework was essential for the study. It not only helps us to understand the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the mothers and their cultural environment, but the model also provides a basis for laying bare the cultural schemas, or internal working models regarding motherhood and mothering. All three components of the cultural-ecological model apply to the current interpretation of motherhood and mothering practices.

In closing, the propositions within Social Feminism perspective (Osmond & Thorne, 1993), Gender Identity perspective (Mohammed, 1992; Mohammed, 1995; Spade & Valentine, 2004), and Cultural-Ecological models in general, and the Developmental Niche Model in particular, (Super & Harkness, 1997, 2002), are guiding elements in understanding the adjustment and changing conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in the United States. The confluence of these theories enhances our understanding of the interrelationships among gender, culture, and motherhood, and how they form the cultural schemas or internal working models of motherhood and mothering among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in the United States.

In order to place the exploration of present conceptions of motherhood among the cohort of Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in the proposed study, the next chapter, (Chapter III) examines the historical background of Indo-Caribbean immigrant families, beginning with a discussion of their arrival to the Caribbean as indentured servants.

## **Chapter III**

### **Research and Background on Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Families**

This chapter focuses on the movement migration of East Indian families to the Caribbean nations beginning in 1838. The discussion includes the exploitation and hardships they, particularly East Indian women, endured, and the important role that religion, cultural practices, patriarchal systems and unity among one another, played in their survival. This journey included indentureship, creolization, industrialization, colonization and other hardships. East Indians lost various aspects of their ancestral culture during this journey, and were forced to alter their traditional identities, roles, and family systems. The review of this historical literature is important because it outlines the historical background of Indo-Caribbean immigrant families and presents a roadmap for the following section that discusses their subsequent journey of immigration to the United States.

### **The Indentureship Period in the Caribbean: 1838**

The Caribbean, which consists of many countries and islands, extends from Guyana, South America, to Cuba. The original inhabitants of the Caribbean were the Amerindians (Arawaks and Caribs). Following the arrival of the Europeans in 1492, many Amerindians died due to violence and diseases contracted from the Europeans. The cruelty of human beings continued via the institutions of slavery and indentured servitude with Africans and East Indians forcibly brought to the Caribbean by the British government to work on the plantations to maintain the agricultural sector. The movement of East Indian families to the Caribbean began in 1838 after the abolishment of slavery in 1834. Faced with the difficulty of finding new plantation workers and cheap labor, the British government transported over 400,000 East Indians from India between 1838 and 1917 to work as indentured servants on the sugar

plantations once fueled by the labor of Africans brought as slaves (Lal, Munro & Beechert, 1993; Odie-Ali, 1986). The highest concentrations of East Indians were brought to Guyana (43.5%), Trinidad (41%), Surinam (35%), and Jamaica (5%; Samuel & Wilson, 2009).

Originally, East Indians were brought to the Caribbean under the pretext that they would be doing gardening work (Scoble, 1840). They were contracted to work for five years and received a monthly salary of three to seven rupees (Scoble, 1840). During this time, they faced many challenges (Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005), such as exploitation, loss, hardships, and suffering at the hands of the plantation owners:

Plantation life was dehumanizing. They faced long hours of toil with little pay, poor diet, rampant diseases, insults and beatings, intolerable drudgery and loneliness. Almost 60% of the men lacked female companionship. Death from malaria, dysentery, typhoid, tuberculosis and other diseases took their daily toll. The estate workers were woken at 4:30 am. They toiled in the torrid sun from dawn till dusk, far beyond their capacity. (Bisnath, 2007, p.11)

During this period of indentureship, Europeans, who controlled all of the social institutions, comprised the most powerful group. The second most powerful group were Africans and the third and least powerful group were Indo-Caribbean families (Mohammed, 1995). Indo-Caribbean men, in particular, found themselves at the bottom of the social and political hierarchy. Their “coolie culture was seen as uncivilized and having low morals” and, as a result, they experienced many discriminatory acts (Plaza, 2003, p. 11). For instance, the plantation owners were White, the traders were Chinese and Portuguese, the skilled manual laborers were Africans, and the agricultural jobs were relegated to Indo-Caribbean families (Ryan, 1990). The

occupations of each group contributed to their geographic separation (Singh, 2005) and racial stereotypes (Glasgow, 1970), some of which still persist today (Plaza, 2003; Stewart, 2003).

For Indo-Caribbean families, the Indian caste systems, combined with their race and class, and positioned them in a hierarchy with which they were unfamiliar (Brereton, 1990). Hindus are the product of a caste system, which consists of four major classifications. The *Brahmin* caste is the highest (referred to as the educated, elite, and priesthood), second are the *Kshatriyas* (considered to be noble warriors and guardians of the realm), third are the *Vaishyas* (who are businessmen, farmers and money lenders) and the *Sudras* (who serve the needs of the upper three castes) are fourth (Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005). A person's caste is determined from his or her parents' caste, and, while the family and/or individual may shift to another religion, it did not alter their hierarchal position within their relatively closed caste (Mohammed, 1992). The caste system divided and alienated members based on their status, and individuals who were non-practicing Hindus and/or converted to Christianity were even further alienated.

In facing these challenges, Indo-Caribbean families drew on their collective history to rebuild their ancestral culture and renew their identities. They did this mainly through their shared religious heritage, which included religious scriptures, *songs*, *pujas*, religious deities, Indian films, Hindu *pundits* and the family unit (Mohammed, 1998). Rituals included *Deepavali*, *Janam Ashtami*, *Holi*, *Ram Nouni*, and *Shewratri*, which were observed via the family's altar or temple. Their religious heritage played a critical role during the birth of a child, celebrations of children's accomplishments, during wedding ceremonies, funeral processions and particularly during times of crisis (Ally, 1990). Families would seek the help of their Hindu Pundit or an indigenous Kali healer first, rather than a mental health counselor or even a medical doctor (Singer & Aarons, 1967).

The continual practice of these religious and cultural activities provided a stabilizing force (Ally, 1990) for support, continuity, a strong sense of cohesion within the family, socialization of children (Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005), reinforcement of desired values for both adults and children (Bernard, 2003), as well as strength and endurance. Once the five-year period of indentureship ended, Indo-Caribbean individuals were free to stay or return to India, and some did return to India. However, the majority ended up settling in the Caribbean due to government incentives, land ownership (Prasad, 1999; Ramesar, 1976; Roopnarine, 2006) and relationships they had formed with other East Indian families. As indentureship drew to a close, most Indo-Caribbean families were able to maintain and reconstitute many of their traditions relating to marriage, family forms, childrearing beliefs and prescribed gender roles for men and women (Mohammed, 1998).

To summarize, due to various factors such as immigration, industrialization, urbanization, population movements, creolization and inter-marriages, the Caribbean is a melting pot of immigrants, and home to over thirty million people who add to the rich diversity of the region (see Grosfoguel, 1997; Marshall, 1982). This diversity is evident in the various languages spoken (English, Spanish, French, Hindi, Creole and Patois), the rich food, music, dance, and clothing (Roopnarine & Brown, 1997) and the unique customs and traditions. For Indo-Caribbean families, the movement and transition process from India to the Caribbean was meant to be temporary (Ally, 1990). Yet, today, they account for 47%-51% of the population in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana (Gopaul-McNicol, 1998), with significantly smaller percentages of the population in Barbados, the Bahamas and Jamaica (Plaza, 2003).

### **Indo-Caribbean Immigration to the United States: 1965-1987**

In order to understand the sociocultural attitudes and behaviors of Indo-Caribbean immigrant women in the United States, it is important to consider how they arrived in the United States. This section focuses on the immigration patterns demonstrated by Indo-Caribbean immigrants. After arriving in the United States, these immigrants encountered many hardships; however, at the same time, they experienced many gains due to increased opportunities for a better life. For many Indo-Caribbean mothers, starting over in the U.S. meant separating from their children and other family members for an extended period of time, working the “second shift,” while simultaneously continuing to fulfill traditional gender roles at home, and attempting to adjust to life in the United States.

In the decades following the movement of their ancestors to the Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean immigrants migrated to the United States as part of a second population movement that occurred between 1965 and 1987 (U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1990). This second immigration was heavily influenced by (1) the United States Immigration Act of 1965 and (2) by the limited resources, overpopulation, limited employment opportunities, political repression, discrimination, and socio-political and economic depression taking place in the Caribbean. Due to these factors, large numbers of Indo-Caribbean immigrant families chose to relinquish some of their roots in the Caribbean in order to move to the United States, Canada or England, in search of a better life.

As these Indo-Caribbean immigrant families migrated to the United States, their migration patterns typified one or more of the four modes identified within the migration process: (1) seasonal migration, which occurs when one (or both) parent(s) migrates for up to six months to work at seasonal employment; (2) or chain migration, which occurs when one (or more) parent(s) migrates for an undefined period and sends for the rest of their family once they

have established a livelihood and some degree of economic stability; (3) parental migration, which occurs when parents migrate and do not send for their children, because they prefer that their children be raised in their native countries by extended family members; and (4) family migration, which occurs when the entire family migrates all at once (Pottinger, 2005; Pottinger & Brown, 2006; Pottinger, Stair, & Brown, 2008). In all but the last case, parent-child separation is the immediate result of the migration choices. At times, some of these pathways necessitate a parent, or both parents, leaving their children in the care of extended family members for periods of time ranging from six months to five or more years (Roopnarine et al., 2006). In cases in which the parents migrate illegally, the separation and reunification process becomes even more complex. However, in the end, no matter how the separation occurs, its effects upon parent-child attachments or bonding, child-shifting, and the quality of contacts during the time apart are immeasurable (Roopnarine et al., 2006).

Following their migration to the United States, Indo-Caribbean immigrants had to acculturate in order to succeed in their new culture. Originally presented by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936), “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149). The acculturation process can occur within four levels, integrated, assimilated, separated, and marginalized. (1) *Integrated* refers to individuals who maintain their native identity and cultural practices while, at the same time, adapting to some aspects of the new culture; (2) *assimilated* implies that the individual has chosen to give up his or her native identity and adapt fully to his or her new culture; (3) *separated* are individuals who choose to detach and isolate themselves from their new culture; and (4) *marginalized* includes persons who are in opposition to both their new and



old culture (see Berry, 1986; 2003). Factors that may contribute to a person's level of acculturation include his/her language, religious beliefs, educational status, employment, country of origin, geographic environment, societal norms, prevailing beliefs, gender roles, level of interactions with other groups, age and length of time in the United States (Padilla, 1980; Berry, 1986; Berry, 2003). However, in order to acculturate successfully, immigrants must successfully navigate some, or all, of a myriad of challenges. There are limited studies that have explored the dynamic evolution of acculturation among this group of immigrants; therefore, it is difficult to draw any conclusions with respect to the degree at which their cultural values, beliefs and behaviors have changed or remained the same over time after coming into contact with other groups.

### **Adjustments as Challenges**

Based on what they see on television, many immigrants, including Indo-Caribbeans, have an unrealistic view of, and high expectations about, life in America. Once they reach the United States, however, the majority quickly realizes how hard life is for newly arrived immigrants, and they face a long road ahead of them to achieve financial success and upward mobility. In the case of Indo-Caribbean families, they face a myriad of challenges, including starting over, downward mobility, getting used to climate changes (i.e., winter), adapting to new forms of transportation (i.e., trains), and living in an apartment or basement, sometimes with other family members. This can produce overcrowding and, over time, result in conflict and separation among family members (Ally, 1990). Additional stressors include changes in traditional roles for men and women due to the need for both parents to work outside the home, having to place their children in a day care center (Grasmuck & Grosfoguel, 1997), and difficulties integrating into the larger U.S. society. The hurdles to adjusting to a new life are considerable (Ally, 1990).

Indo-Caribbean immigrants also experience conflicts with dominant North American child-rearing practices and face challenges relating to expiration of their student visas, deportation, long periods of separation from family members, unmet expectations about life in America (Baptiste, Hardy and Lewis, 1997b; Horowitz, 1981; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993; Strier, 1996), and a lack of community or institutional support (Strachan, 1983). For those individuals who immigrate illegally, things are even worse. Their experiences with discrimination, exploitation exacerbate the above-mentioned challenges further, which negatively impact their contributions and likelihood of reunification with family members and mental health stability (Bernard, 2003).

### **Ethnic Identity**

In addition to these issues, a significant issue with which many Indo-Caribbean immigrants struggle is their ethnic identity. One factor that contributes to a person's level of acculturation is the depth of his/her ethnic identity (Samuel & Wilson, 2009). However, Indo-Caribbean immigrants to the United States do not have a unified group identity. Instead, they refer to themselves as Indians, Indo-Caribbeans, Indian Caribbeans, Guyanese, Trinidadians, Americans, East Indians, West Indians, or Caribbeans. This lack of a unified group identification is evident in research studies, and has led to Indo-Caribbeans' voices either being muddled, misrepresented or absent altogether (Plaza, 2003). Other factors, such as religion, skin color and physical characteristics, gender role socialization, and length of time in the United States, serve to unite or alienate members within the Indo-Caribbean community. Lastly the *creolization* process, multiple migration patterns, minority status, music, food and clothing.

There are multiple ways of looking at Caribbean identity within the United States. Berry's (1997; 2001) immigrant adjustment model shows the complex, multidimensional and

non-linear patterns of adjustment among immigrants. Indo-Caribbean immigrants view themselves as “brown skinned.” However, after immigrating to the United States, they quickly realize that the social milieu is primarily based on “black” or “white” and, oftentimes, “brown” is seen as invisible or not included in the larger conversation. Hence, many Indo-Caribbean immigrants, depending upon their jobs, social and professional affiliations, neighborhood, and educational level, may elect or be forced to adapt to one orientation or the other. These choices can lead to many difficulties with regard to adjustment, social acceptance, availability of opportunities, incidents of racism, and prejudice from both the Indo-Caribbean community and the larger society.

As a case in point, based on the recent 2010 U.S. Census, if an individual identifies him/herself as Hindu, Muslim or Indian (which includes a large number of Indo-Caribbean immigrants), he or she will be coded as Asian Indian. Similarly, if an individual identifies him/herself as Indo-Caribbean, Indo-Guyanese, Indo-Trinidadian, West Indian, East Indian or Caribbean, this would be considered a multiple-race response. Additionally, if an individual identifies him/herself as Guyanese, Trinidadian, Jamaican, and so on, this response will be coded as “Some Other Race” within the Census. According to the Census Bureau, in 1980, there were 48,608 reported Guyanese Americans living in United States (50% were women). In the 1990s, this number increased to 81,665 immigrants who self-reported as being Guyanese Americans living in the United States. According to the 2000 Census, the number of Guyanese Americans residing in the United States is estimated to be 214,528.

The lack of unified group identity has far-reaching consequences. Using the 1996 Canadian Census and thirty qualitative interviews, Plaze (2003) tried to “unpack” the Caribbean migration story and compare migration, settlement, living arrangements, family structures and

employment of Africans and Indo-Caribbeans who have settled in Canada. In 1996, there were approximately 100,000 Indo-Caribbeans living in Canada (Birbalsingh 1997, p. 212), including illegal immigrants; however, only 15,912 self-identified in the census as a combination of South Asian and Caribbean. The discrepancy between the numbers of Indo-Caribbeans living in Canada, and the respondents who self-identified as being South Asian or Caribbean with single or multiple ethnicity, is one demonstration that there is an “identity issue” (p. 6) among Indo-Caribbean immigrants. In addition, as a part of this study, another question known as the “visible minority question” was asked to determine whether the respondent saw him/herself as a visible minority. From this question, 46,296 respondents self-identified as a mixed visible minority who self-reported as neither black, Chinese, nor South Asian. In response to questions raised, the author hypothesized that the following factors may have contributed to Indo-Caribbean immigrants having identity issues: being a product of a *Creolized* culture (a blend of Europeans, Africans and Indians), being unable to identify themselves as South Asians, the length of time since they migrated to Canada, and circumstances that have impacted their settlement.

In another study using qualitative interviews with thirty second and third-generation African Caribbean immigrants living in London, Reynolds (2006) explored how respondents utilized their community and family networks to maintain and enhance their cultural and ethnic identity. The interviews revealed that respondents felt very socially excluded and utilized the confines of their ethnic enclaves, kinship activities and family rituals as a way to stay connected to their culture, ethnicity, and family. After Indo-Caribbeans immigrate, not only do they have to deal with these ethnic identity issues, but also, for the first time, many find themselves having a minority status and experiencing prejudice, discrimination, and racism due to the color of their

skin (Lashley, 2000; Valencia, 2006). This can have a direct effect upon their acculturation and how they see themselves. According to Patterson (1975, as cited in Warikoo, 2005), “an ethnic group chooses whether to integrate with local culture or to maintain a distinct cultural identity based on maximization of economic advantage [...] adults are primarily concerned with maximizing economic capital; youth, on the other hand focus on maximizing symbolic capital” (p. 822).

In one school-based study, Warikoo (2009) examined students’ perceptions of racial discrimination among second-generation Afro-Caribbean and Indian/Indo-Caribbean students from both New York and London. Results indicated that Afro-Caribbean students (14-18 years old) experienced racial discrimination from police officers, potential employers, and other adults outside of their school, whereas Indian students reported experiencing racial discrimination from other peers inside their school (peers who were either black or white). Reasons for the racial discrimination were attributed to wearing turbans, speaking with an accent, perceptions of weakness, low peer status and lack of style. More importantly, instances of prejudice and discrimination not only affect the adolescent; these dehumanizing events impact their family as well who are often the first point of contact for the victims.

Using a sample of second-generation Indo-Caribbean immigrants, Warikoo (2005) studied the relation between gender and ethnic identity through the participants’ choice of music and clothing preferences. Findings from this study showed that girls were more interested in Hindi movies, Indian music, Indian clothing, and Indian holidays and events than were boys. In contrast to the girls, boys in some cases had flexible identities that included both Indian and Hip-Hop influences, and some distanced themselves altogether from the Indian culture. Overall, for both males and females, three factors were found to influence their gender differences in

preferences: (1) media images; (2) incidents of racial discrimination from other peers at school; and (3) stricter parental controls and socialization for girls versus that for boys. The findings from this study demonstrate that, given their social context, an individual's social capital will determine his/her success and level of acculturation. Boys experienced more peer pressure and racial discrimination, and, consequently, made a conscious decision to acculturate and/or assimilate. It will be intriguing to see how the teenagers' preferences change as they become adults.

Due to one, or more, of the reasons described above, approximately 13,700 Indo-Caribbean immigrants returned to their native country in the Caribbean between 1965 and 1976 (Bernard, 2003). This return migration was an outcome of improvements in the quality of life in the native country and/or the economic standards, or the quality of life in the United States not meeting personal expectations. Today, many Caribbean families maintain residences in both the Caribbean and the United States, traveling regularly back and forth between their two homes. This return migration had a positive impact both upon the Caribbean countries that were able to capitalize on the increased education and skill level of the returning immigrants and upon the immigrants themselves because, among other things, their class level and hierarchy increased after they returned to the Caribbean (Strachan, 1983).

### **Adjustments as Successes**

Although Indo-Caribbean immigrants experienced many hardships during their immigration and adjustment to the United States, they also benefited from many opportunities that resulted in better jobs, housing, and access to healthcare, education and employment. These opportunities allowed many families to escape harsh living conditions in the Caribbean and to create a better quality of life in the United States. According to Roopnarine and Shin (2003),

“English speaking Caribbean immigrants have fared relatively well in North America and Europe” (p. 130). Research indicates that Indo-Caribbean individuals are literate in English, possess high school or college degrees, and enjoy a labor force participation rate of 80% (Livingston-Baker, 2006). In 1990, the labor force participation for Jamaican female immigrants living in New York City was 79.5%, 77.5% for Guyanese female immigrants, and 59.9% for female immigrants from India (Foner, 2000).

The overall transition and adjustment pattern of Indo-Caribbean immigrants to the United States usually occurs over several years, with financial success as a key goal. Financial success depends on a number of factors, including the number and age of dependents, the educational level of the parent(s), the availability of resources, and a support system in both their native and host countries upon which they draw for support. Obtaining employment, education and housing, and whether the individual and/or family are documented (Valencia, 2006) can also determine if the individual and/or family will flourish or continue to struggle.

Currently, approximately 80% of Indo-Caribbean immigrants live in various ethnic enclaves within New York City, with Richmond Hills, Queens, serving as the most popular destination, and, thus, also hosting one of the largest concentrations of Caribbean immigrants. “This ethnic enclave is large and concentrated enough that it has the option of forming its own, unique ethnic identity aside from other South Asians and Afro Caribbeans” (Warikoo, 2005, p. 809). New York City has a wide variety of cultures, so the pressure to assimilate is not as intense. As a result, this group has largely maintained its distinctive and independent cultural identities (Ally, 1990) and lives within close proximity to other relatives who may have assisted in their overall transition to the United States. These enclaves serve as an extension of the immigrants’ native country in the Caribbean.

In conclusion, indentureship and subsequent migrations have created significant disruption in the lives of Indo-Caribbean immigrant families. In some aspects, Indo-Caribbean immigrants have remained “culturally distinct” by holding on to strict Hindu religious practices, cultural values, traditional child-rearing practices, persistence of patriarchal traditions, and prescribed gender roles as they relate to manhood and womanhood (specifically as it relates to child care and household duties) (Pitsch, 1999). They have a long standing loyalty to East Indian movies, devotional songs and other forms of music, traditional Indian dance, clothing, jewelry and food, which are unifying ingredients in the home and at social and cultural events. Resisting change and continuing to live separately in various ethnic enclaves (both in the Caribbean and the United States) allow many Indo-Caribbean immigrants to remain culturally distinct.

At the same time, being forced to live, work and interact with individuals from other diverse backgrounds, and to participate within the larger society, has resulted in various changes within the Indo-Caribbean identity. Their transition first to the creole culture in the Caribbean, and later adapting to more egalitarian roles in the United States, have led to the dissolution of the caste system, dowry practices, arranged marriages and a decrease in extended family networks. These transitions have also led to an increase in divorce, women working outside the home, men sharing in childcare and household responsibilities and increased educational attainment (Samuel & Wilson, 2009). Applying models of acculturation to further understand Indo-Caribbean immigrants is a very complex and difficult task. This, combined with limited data on this community, makes it very difficult to draw any conclusions as to what degree Indo-Caribbean immigrant families have acculturated. The findings from this study on Indo-Caribbean immigrant motherhood help to shed some light on this area.

The next chapter provides a longitudinal account of the scholarship on motherhood. To begin, this research will consist with the definition of motherhood, growth within this area of



study with regard to both conceptualization and operational definitions, and a discussion of the continuing usage and influence of traditional North American ideologies in this body of research literature. In addition, Chapter IV will include a review of the motherhood scholarship from an Indo-Caribbean cultural context. Specifically, this area of scholarship takes into account factors that impact Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers, including religious and cultural practices, the couple relationship, parenting and child-rearing practices, disciplinary practices, separation and reunification due to immigration, the second shift for women and, finally, extended family networks. In varying degrees, these factors shape the meanings, identities and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in the United States.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Research and Background on Motherhood**

In order to structure the discussion on Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in the United States, it is important to examine first dominant North American conceptualizations of motherhood. This chapter provides the reader with an overview of the multi-dimensional nature of motherhood beyond nurture and care of one's child. The second section of this chapter provides a brief historical review of the scholarship on motherhood from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. This review includes the considerable improvements that have occurred in the theoretical and research domains to strengthen our knowledge base on motherhood. However, even with these significant strides, there is still much work to be done, especially in the areas of research focused on immigrant, lesbian, and poor mothers.

#### **Historical Review**

Embedded in the ethos of the family are traditional ideologies of motherhood regarding responsible oversight and care of children. For several decades, research on motherhood in the

United States has been grounded in the biological events of birth, reproduction, maturation, and death (Rossi, 1980); and the social events of marriage, motherhood, grand-motherhood, and widowhood (Glick, 1977). While applicable to many of today's mothers, this construction lacks sensitivity and inclusiveness due to the changes in family structure patterns, hence; there is a critical need for an expanded definition of motherhood.

Motherhood is defined as a complex and dynamic set of activities (Phoenix, Woollett & Lloyd, 1991), relationships, meanings, and identities (Forcey, 1994; Ruddick, 1994) that are entwined at the individual level (Ribbens, 1994), the familial level (Forcey, 1994; Presser, 1995; Ribbens, 1994; Thorne, 1993), and the societal level (Stack & Burton, 1993). Each level works in concert with the others to reinforce traditional ideologies of motherhood. Recent literature has characterized motherhood as a natural, life-changing event (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005; DeGroot, Vuurman, Hornstra, & Jolles, 2006), a role to adulthood (McQuillan, Greil, White, Jacob, 2003; Stewart, 2003), and central both to the socially constructed meanings of femininity and identities of womanhood (Collett, 2005; Gillespie, 2003; Franco, Sabattini & Crosby, 2004) and to ideals about the perfect mother (Shelton & Johnson, 2005).

Motherhood is also defined as being filled with complicated dilemmas and problems. Many mothers are penalized for their participation in the labor market and experience a difficult time balancing the multiple roles of being a mother and an employee. Single mothers are one of the largest impoverished groups (Hoffnung, 2004; Rowlingson & McKay, 2005; Sellers, Thomas, Batts & Ostman, 2005). Poverty affects their status as women (Avellar & Smock, 2003; Hoffnung, 2004), and the socio-emotional aspects of motherhood (Edge & Rogers, 2005; Paris & Dubus, 2005). For mothers who are lesbian, or women who achieve motherhood through fertility treatments or artificial insemination, they are sometimes referred to as an

oxymoron, an incomplete institution, and a stranger (Hequembourg, 2004) because they do not conform to traditional ideologies of motherhood (Letherby, 1999). The preceding beliefs about motherhood reflect two themes, one that continues to embrace the traditional beliefs of motherhood and the other that seems to define motherhood in a negative light.

Motherhood is filled with expectations, struggles and rewards. A review of this scholarship shows the conceptualization of motherhood is minimized by beliefs that continue to focus on expectations and struggles, to the exclusion of rewards and resilience. There is no doubt that traditional beliefs about motherhood continue to prevail and are often used as the yardstick by which other groups are measured. In particular, beliefs about the ideal family, traditional gender roles, and the notion of intensive mothering continually influence how the study of motherhood is defined, which ultimately impacts the outcomes of research findings.

This approach fails to take into consideration the significant changes in the demographics of the United States. These demographic changes are often detrimental to mothers who do not conform to normative paths, especially mothers who fall into the lesbian, single, immigrant, poor, or minority categories. With these groups of women are those who select both motherhood and employment, women who delay motherhood, those who remain childless, and those who are infertile. No single description can capture the multidimensional nature of motherhood. In fairness to scholars who rely on traditional definitions of motherhood, creating a holistic definition of motherhood, applicable to all types of mothering experiences is an overwhelming undertaking, and it is “faulty to think that any one definition will be appropriate across the field of family research” (Copeland & White, 1991, p. 4). Nevertheless, the continued use of traditional ideologies of motherhood impacts social policy, research, intervention strategies, and cross-cultural generalizations. Moreover, at the level of individual, lived experience, traditional

ideologies of motherhood make a significant impression upon women who deviate from the normative confines of motherhood, causing them increased social and psychological distress, and typecasting many as deviants or outsiders and “subjects of a deviancy discourse” (Arendell, 2000, p.132).

### **Motherhood in North American Industrialized Societies**

Normatively, the character and utility of a mother has been depicted as being a heterosexual woman who is legally married and a full-time mother with children (Thorne, 1993). The term “womanhood” is often used synonymously with the term “motherhood” (Forcey, 1994; Ruddick, 1994; Schwartz, 1994). Similarly, motherhood is often connected to the family, because many structures and conditions that differentiate the family unit inherently determine the structures and conditions within which motherhood is experienced (Thorne, 1993).

The family unit has long been recognized as one of the most important institutions in the United States and in societies around the world. Due to various social and demographic changes in the United States over the past three decades, there is an urgency to catalog these changes and to re-evaluate traditional North American definitions of the family to include diverse family structures and relationships. Ultimately, “failure to define concepts in conceptually precise ways results in operational flaws that undermine the quality of information available to researchers” (Sabatelli & Bartle, 1995, p. 1027). These older definitions of the family do not adequately reflect the pluralism that exists in family in 21<sup>st</sup> century North American society. To be accurate, traditional definitions must become more inclusive to account for current multicultural, multi-sexual family units.

Many assumptions that underlie definitions of motherhood and the family mirror each other because both are dominated by a heterosexual, middle-class, European-American family

ideology. A family can be conceptualized as a social group that is part of the institution of marriage (Rodgers, 1973) with a shared common history (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999), ethnic and religious values, extended prior experience and future, as well as biology, and temperament (Copeland & White, 1991). The family system consists of roles, hierarchy, and legal rights and responsibilities (Germain & Gitterman, 1996), which serve to maintain homeostasis within the system and sub-systems (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). Families are an intergenerational social group governed by social norms regarding what comprises acceptable behavior(s). Reproduction of offspring (Murdock, 1949), the care and development of the young (Cheal, 1991), along with the inclusion of a man and a woman in maintaining a socially approved sexual relationship of sharing and intimacy (Meyer, 1990) are considered important aspects of a functioning family.

Historically, the integral component of the family is the mother. Therefore, it is important to discuss traditional definitions of what motherhood means. In the past, for some women, providing responsible oversight and care to one's developing child was not valued in a positive light and, instead, was passed on to "peasants" (van Der Heever, 1990). This sentiment was documented in several French studies that found that infants were being abandoned, beaten, deprived and abused while they were in the care of wet nurses and surrogate mothers (Badinter, 1981). The dichotomy of these conflicting roles (the good and bad mother) resulted in the mothering role not being respected and honored as significant. With the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a shift in thinking occurred and the importance of the mothering role was reborn. This rebirth was attributed to a combination of Freud's assertion that "there was no love like a mother's," and the findings of several influential studies demonstrating significant evidence that supported the importance of the mother-child bond (Dennis, 1973; Freud & Burlingame, 1944; Provence & Lipton, 1962; Spitz, 1945; Stone & Church, 1957). In the subsequent decades, motherhood and

the functions of monitoring and surveillance, nurturing, and responsible caregiving were considered to be integral to the growth and development of children (Barnard & Solchany, 2002).

Expanding on the work and suggestions from prior scholars, the decade review of motherhood scholarship that appeared in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (1990-2000) reveals that describing mothering experiences and constructing theories of motherhood were at the forefront of family research (Arendell, 2000). This analysis reveals that scholarship on motherhood is becoming more multidisciplinary and inclusive in its methodology and sampling procedures. Essentially, a paradigm shift has occurred that gives primacy to the everyday realities that confront mothers. These realities include changing demographic trends, maternal satisfaction, distress, social support, maternal employment, economic distress, and social policy. These stressors, while not new to mothers, are now being examined more rigorously for their impact upon the mothering experience (Arendell, 2000).

For example, in the past, the decision to have a baby was not one that a woman controlled. However, due to birth control, abortion, and employment, many women gained agency in their lives by being able to choose when or whether to bear a child. By virtue of working outside the home and enhanced educational attainment, many women spend less time at home, and more time developing other aspects of their personal identity. This is especially evident among middle class, married women who are employed. The birth rate among this group has dropped significantly from 3.7 in 1956 to 1.9 per woman today. The acquisition of multiple identities and roles outside of motherhood can result in motherhood being seen as “one element in life, and not its defining core” (Snitow, 1992, p.41). Along with struggling with a

woman's identity as a mother, Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in the United States have the added pressure of struggling to identify themselves within the greater American landscape.

In comparison to earlier decades, which generally focused on the effects of children as they relate to motherhood, the current scholarship from the 1990s through the present time has continued to expand conceptually and methodologically and, in doing so, has broadened the lens to include real life experiences of women today. Specifically, recent research on motherhood (i.e., from 2000 – to the present), demonstrates an increased focus in the areas of maternal employment, diversity in reproductive and relationship experiences, and psychological distress during the postpartum period. This more recent analysis of motherhood also expands upon prior scholarship that focused on varied non-normative discourses of mothers who are differentiated as late mothers (Shelton & Johnson 2006), early mothers (Stewart, 2003), childfree women (Gillespie, 2003; Letherby, 1999), lesbians (Hequembourg, 2004), and infertile women (Letherby, 1999; McQuillan, Greil, White, & Jacob 2003). This scholarship also addresses issues surrounding motherhood and career (Avellar & Smock, 2003; Hoffnung, 2004; Reid, 2002; Rowlingson & McKay, 2005; Sellers, Thomas, Batts & Ostman, 2005; and Vejar, Madison-Colmore & Ter Maat, 2006) for both traditional and non-traditional families (Kurdek, 1993; Kurdek, 2006). Findings from this set of studies demonstrate how traditional beliefs still continue to dominate women's identities of motherhood, and often results in increased distress levels (Collett, 2005; Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005; DeGroot, Vuurman, Hornstra & Jolles, 2006; Edge & Rogers, 2005; Franco, Sabattini & Crosby, 2004; Letherby, 1999; McCreary & Dancy, 2004; Paris & Dubus, 2005).

The study of motherhood is changing, expanding across multiple fields of study (Snitow, 1992). Researchers are incorporating a plethora of multi-method research strategies in

an attempt to gain a better understanding into the everyday experiences of mothers. In relation to motherhood, issues such as marital conflict, depression, maternal satisfaction, social support, distress, and employment are being given more research attention (Arendell, 2000). However, despite these changes, there remains an obvious trend in the way motherhood continues to be defined in the literature. Traditional and historical North American ideologies of a heterosexual, full-time mother still continue to overshadow and mask the complex identities of women, thus stifling attempts for a fundamental transformation.

### **Mothering in an Indo-Caribbean Cultural Context**

According to Reddock (1984), two-thirds of the East Indian women who migrated to the Caribbean as indentured servants were single, widowed, separated, abandoned by their husbands, or women who had been prohibited from remarrying in India. Furthermore, there was a significant imbalance in the ratio of East Indian males to females, with males greatly outnumbering females. For example, in Trinidad, there were 2,117 males to every 1,000 female migrants. By 1911, the ratio of males to females had decreased to 1,354 males for every 1,000 females (Mohammed, 1988). It has been argued that the disproportionate number of Indo-Caribbean women during the indentureship period threatened the institution and survival of the family and created competition among Indo-Caribbean men (Mohammed, 1992).

On the journey to indentureship, Indo-Caribbean women, the majority of whom were Hindus, brought with them an “invisible suitcase” (Plaze, 2003), consisting of many aspects of their life in India. The contents of their suitcase(s) included Hindu religious/cultural practices, couple relationships, their strict patriarchal system, the traditional language of Hindi, their caste system, and traditional gender roles, all of which were instrumental in shaping their conceptions and practices of mothering/parenting inter-generationally (Bernard, 2003).



It is also important to note that Indo-Caribbean women, mothers, and grandmothers served as the driving force and active agents in re-establishing their Indian culture following migration. This included reinforcing ancestral gender identity, gender roles and socially appropriate behaviors for boys and girls, men and women, husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers. This process favored Indo-Caribbean men in particular because it (1) allowed men to re-establish and maintain male domination; (2) granted mothers-in-law control over their daughters-in-law; and (3) provided sons with greater opportunities for advancement over daughters (Mohammed, 1998; Mohammed, 1994). Women found strength in recreating their ancestral culture; at the same time, it was restricting and oppressive to them (Mohammed, 1988, p. 383). Therefore, one can easily question, "If Indian women sought independence in the first place, then who was it from?" (Johnson, 1984, p.15).

### **Religious and Cultural Practices**

The foundations, literary philosophies and mythologies contained within Hinduism govern many sectors of Indo-Caribbean family life including gender identity/roles, parenting, marriage, appropriate behavior, motherhood and fatherhood. Hindus subscribe to the teachings and stories contained in such Hindu religious texts and mythology as *The Bhagavad Gita*, *the Ramayana*, and *the Mahabharata*. Interwoven in these texts are teachings and ideology that form the framework for understanding Hinduism, family practices, patriarchal traditions, the Indian culture, gender identities, and the transmission of culture inter-generationally.

The teachings from these religious texts also influence the internal working models about manhood and womanhood (Kakar, 1991), as well as morally and socially appropriate behaviors for men and women. For example, the Shastras (i.e., the laws of Manu 200 B.C. – A.D. 200) discuss gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities for men and women within the family,

and support the continued superiority of men and the subordination of women through the reinforcement of a patriarchal system.

Also embedded in Hindu religious edicts are beliefs and images about the devoted wife (*pativrata*) and divine motherhood, as portrayed by Mother *Sita* and *Radha*. These beliefs and images are paradoxical to the understanding of traditional constructions of the divine wife and mother (see Kurtz, 1992). For instance, Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers are expected to be the primary caregivers of their children and their intense nurture, care and emotional ties with their children extend well beyond the child's adolescent years. Mothers often will engage in co-sleeping and early mothering practices that are thought to be indulgent of the child's needs (Roopnarine & Evans, 2005). Mothers spend a significant amount of time with their children and that seems to foster close emotional ties with their children (Roopnarine & Evans, 2005). Overly protective of their children, they also serve as the mediators between children and their fathers. Although seen as favoring men, Hindu religious constructions of mother and wife guide the principles of Indo-Caribbean motherhood. Women will "turn to religion and learn to cope with the pressures of marriage life and motherhood through the teachings of the scriptures" (Samuel & Wilson, 2009).

### **Couple Relationship**

In the Caribbean, Hindu wedding ceremonies were not legally recognized until 1946, well after the indentureship period. In the Indo-Caribbean culture, cohabitation and procreation without marriage are frowned upon. Marriage is considered an important, life-changing experience, as it links families to the future (Bernard, 2003). Indo-Caribbean women traditionally marry fairly early (e.g., by age 26, 82% are married and by age 30, 97.7% are married) and are socialized to believe that marriage is a life-long commitment (Niehoff & Niehoff, 1960). Hence, marriage

rates for Indo-Caribbean couples are comparatively high as a result of “more conservative beliefs about sexual activity and greater conformity to traditional patterns of marital norms and the sexual division of labor” (Roopnarine, 2002, p.223). Marriages are traditionally arranged within religious preferences by the elders in the family, and followed by legal marriage in accordance with traditional Hindu customs (Smith, 1996).

In some instances, the dowry arranged prior to marriage is presented in the form of money or land to the groom’s family by the bride’s family. The marriage ceremony is a very lavish event and, following the event, historically, the bride will move into her in-law’s home, assume her new identity as a wife, daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law and, most importantly, become an active member of her new home (Mohammed, 1992; Mohammed, 1994). For both Hindu and Muslim brides, “marriage represent[s] simply a changing of the guards” (Mohammed, 1988, p. 386). She is now under the rule of her husband, her mother-in-law and her newly formed extended family. Immediately upon arriving in her new family’s home, she is expected to assume her role as primary caretaker of the household chores and care for the elderly in her spouse’s home (Mohammed, 1988). Within this model, divorce rates are low due to strict Hindu customs which presume that marriage is for life, regardless of personal difficulties between the couple. Between 1870 and 1940, Hindu women had no way to get a divorce (Ali, 1995); but today, divorce among Indo-Caribbean families has become more common in the Caribbean.

As mentioned earlier, women and mothers traditionally live within the confines of a strict, dominant patriarchal system where they are subjected to high levels of oppression (Mohammed, 1995). The continued reinforcement of this patriarchal system can lead to domestic violence (emotional, mental and physical) (Mohammed, 1988). Between 1872 and 1900, there were reportedly 87 murders of Indo-Caribbean women in the Caribbean of, which 65

(i.e., 75%) were spousal murders (Brerton, 1979). Unfortunately, over time, violence against women has not diminished. In a recent study of 1,504 parents in Trinidad and Tobago, findings reveal that women have been the victims of varying forms of physical, psychological and verbal abuse by men in their homes (Narine, 2011). Equally disturbing is that protection orders have been ineffective in reducing repeated offenses (Spooner, 2009).

Data collected by UNICEF via the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) using participants from Haiti and Guyana revealed that women and adolescents (both males and females) think that it is acceptable for men to abuse women under the following circumstances: “(1) if she went out without telling him, (2) if she neglected the children, (3) if she argued with him, (4) if she refused to have sex with him, (5) if she burnt the food” (Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2013). As a result, women remain silent sufferers.

The findings from this study are not unique and reflect a level of institutional acceptance that has a long-standing patriarchal history in the Caribbean among both Indo-and African-Caribbean families. Cross-culturally, domestic violence has been found to have both long and short-term consequences for women’s mental and physical health (Bonomi et al., 2007; Garcia-Moreno, 2008; Mouton, 2003). Therefore, one can infer that studies on Indo-Caribbean immigrant women may reveal similar findings.

Sadly, most Caribbean countries do not have adequate policies and mental health services and, as a result, physical violence towards women continues to be an intergenerational problem with far-reaching consequences for children, women, families and society (WHO-AIMS Report on Mental Health Systems in the Caribbean, 2011). It becomes important, then, to give Indo-Caribbean mothers a voice in order to better understand their perspective on identity, motherhood, and life.

## **Parenting and Child Rearing Practices**

In the Indo-Caribbean culture, families are based on collective, rather than individual needs; children are expected to demonstrate a strong sense of duty to parents (Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005). Children are thought to be gifts from God and serve the important functions of ensuring family longevity, continuing the family bond, and eliciting emotional connections. Among Hindu families, there are several ceremonial activities that occur at a child's birth. For example, a Hindu priest is consulted to read the child's astrological chart to determine the first letter(s) of the child's name. On the child's ninth day, his/her hair is shaved and the child may wear a "*tikka*" (a small dot on the forehead) to keep away the evil eye.

Many of the childrearing practices of Indo-Caribbean families stem from their ancestral culture and Hindu religious scripts. These childrearing practices often include low levels of nurturance (DeYoung and Zigler, 1994) and a poor understanding of children's developmental milestones. Traditionally, mothers spend a great deal of time role modeling and teaching their daughters how to cook, clean, and care for younger siblings in order to prepare them for their future roles as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law. They also pay closer attention to their daughters than their sons so as to prevent early sexuality, pregnancy and shame to the family name. In contrast, more leverage and greater financial investment is devoted to boys to enable them to obtain an education and/or learn a trade to prepare for their future roles as husbands and providers (Kakar, 1981; Wilson, Wilson, & Berkele-Caines, 2003).

Although increased support is provided for males, culturally, there seems to be tremendous pressure on, and lack of support for Indo-Caribbean males. For example, a recent study by the Centre for Economic and Social Research (CESRA) exposed the high suicide rates for males in Guyana and urged the government and health officials to treat the findings as a

public health problem. According to the findings, suicide is one of the leading causes of death for Hindu males, particularly those who are Indo-Caribbean and from rural communities between the ages of 10 and 35. Between 1995 and 1999, the Guyana suicide rates increased by 128.3% and in 1999, the suicide rate for every 10,000 Guyanese citizens was 2.3%. The author could not point to any single factor that contributed to the increased deaths by suicide and/or the high prevalence rates among Indo-Caribbean Hindu males. It was speculated that it could be a combination of the following factors: family conflicts, alcohol, drugs, homelessness, depression, illness or betrayal/heartbreak, thus exposing the need for increased awareness, resources and counseling services to assist surviving family members and prevent future losses (LaRose, 2004).

In addition to a strong sense of duty and socially appropriate behaviors, education is another pivotal core value for Indo-Caribbean children. The opportunities stemming from migration and the changes in social status engendered by migration have caused many Indo-Caribbean families to realize that their survival depends on acquiring a level of learning for themselves and, certainly, for their offspring.

In the past, migrating from India, being forced to work on the plantations, and not being able to speak English, did not allow East Indians to have access to the standard education that was dictated by the customs of the day. Nonetheless, as their lives improved, parents went to great lengths to ensure that their children were educated and/or learned a trade so as to ensure their increased success, economic mobility, and viability. Today, because of their commitment to education and academic excellence, once migrating to Canada, the United States, England or other developed countries, the percentage of Indo-Caribbean students who pursue higher education remains relatively high (Ally, 1990).

Along with the emphasis on education and, more specifically, academic excellence, parents instill in their children an internal and external hierarchy of respect. Within the context of very strict traditional Hindu religious beliefs, parents ensure that their children are honorable and obedient, show respect, and follow prescribed gender roles. Younger siblings are expected to respect their older siblings, daughters-in-law are expected to respect their mothers-in-law, and wives are expected to follow their husbands' direction. Finally, elders, such as grandparents, are revered because they offer support, stability, guidance and are integral to the transfer of family values and cultural norms, even after multiple migrations (Ally, 1990).

### **Disciplinary Practices**

The beliefs of Indo-Caribbean parents concerning discipline and institutional support for harsh punishment comprise a crucial component of parenting. Indo-Caribbean children who do not adhere to the strict expectations of their parents are often disciplined using harsh physical punishment. In the Caribbean, many believe that "to spare the rod is to spoil the child" (Korbin, 1980, p.87). Thus, in an effort to reinforce acceptable behaviors in children, parents will use punitive child-rearing practices and authoritarian parenting styles, such as harsh physical punishment, high levels of control, low levels of warmth and praise and social threats in order to influence children's behavior (Deyoung & Zigler, 1994; Duburow, 1999).

This native form of parenting is widely used and accepted among Indo-Caribbean families (in the United States, this form of discipline is seen by many as abuse and, thus, challenges traditional methods of parenting among Indo-Caribbean parents). In a study conducted in Barbados using 499 adults between 20 and 59 years old, the great majority of respondents (83.8%) indicated that they generally and/or occasionally approved the use of corporal punishment by parents. Furthermore, they also indicated that the same punishment

should be given to both sons and daughters. On the other hand, 22.7% males and 23.8% females indicated that they “generally disapproved” of corporal punishment and indicated that it should never be used (Payne, 1989).

In another study using 40 Guyanese immigrants and 40 Caucasian parents (with similar demographic characteristics) in the United States, researchers explored the relationship between *machismo* and punitive child-rearing practices (DeYoung & Zigler, 1994). Traditionally, the term *machismo* is synonymous with the ethos of Hispanic males because it signifies strength, bravery, aggression, dominance, male superiority and marked sex roles (DeYoung & Zigler, 1994). The findings showed that *machismo* scores were higher for Guyanese parents than for Caucasian parents, and there were only marginal differences between Guyanese mothers and fathers. Furthermore, higher *machismo* attitudes and beliefs among Guyanese parents were linked to increased authoritarian and punitive child-rearing techniques, as compared to Caucasian parents. Unlike the study discussed previously on families in Barbados, Guyanese parents punished their daughters more severely than their sons, because their daughters posed greater risks to their family name and honor (DeYoung & Zigler, 1994).

Research has also explored the socialization preferences considered important among urban Guyanese parents (Blake, 1961). In a sample that consisted of 758 respondents (36% male, mean age of 43.5 years, mean education of 8.6 years and 34% female-headed households), obedience, honesty and mannerly conduct were considered the three most important characteristics that parents would like their children to possess at an early age, and remain with them throughout adulthood. In contrast, being considerate, neat and clean and getting along with others were considered the least desirable characteristics. Responses varied only slightly based on the age and gender of the respondents (Blake, 1961). More recent research seems to support



these dated findings (Wilson & Berkeley-Caines, 2003). Needless to say, there is enough evidence to show that corporal punishment and authoritarian parenting styles can have negative consequences on children's social skills in a number of cultural communities (Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2006; Roopnarine & Metindogan, 2005).

### **Separation and Reunification**

According to the Harvard Immigration Project, currently, one in five children in the United States is the child of an immigrant, and this number will be one in three children by 2040 (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2001). Since 85% of these children have been separated from their parents during the migration process (Suarez-Orozco et al, 2002), it is obvious that "migration is a common family disruption for children in developing countries" (Pottinger, 2005, p.490).

Caribbean families are no exception. Migration is a powerful phenomenon (Chamberlain, 1999; Marshall, 1989), and, with regard to Caribbean countries, males are often the lead immigrants, resulting in 25% to 46% of households headed by females (Thomas-Hope, 2002). As a result, the ways in which families support migration and the role of migration have become the focus of many studies (Fog-Olwig, 1993; Pottinger, 2005; Richardson, 1983; Thomas-Hope, 1992). In the case of Indo-Caribbean immigrant families, "migrating from India to the Caribbean and, years later, from the Caribbean to the United States, reproduced the old challenges, the old struggles, and the necessity to re-establish themselves in a new and alien society" (Ally, 1990, p. 5).

Historically, West Indian women (including both Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean women) have been the lead migrants. In an effort to provide a better life for their families and take advantage of economic opportunities available in the United States, these women/mothers

migrate, leaving their families behind for a period of time until they can settle and establish the financial means to send for them. This is a very difficult process filled with implications for the separated and restructured family. The migrating parent experiences feelings of guilt, anxiety, depression and loneliness due to being separated from her children and will make every attempt to send frequent barrels containing clothes, toys, and food for her children. The term “barrel children” has been coined to describe these children and their life circumstances (Crawford-Brown & Rattray, 2001, p. 108).

However, the frequent shipment of barrels does not fill the void of a missing parent, because the children who are left behind with relatives and/or friends (a process referred to as child-shifting) are sometimes not left in the care of a nurturing caretaker and/or are inadequately supervised (Rohner et al, 1991). Some children may have to assume adult responsibilities at a young age (Crawford-Brown & Rattray, 2001), and take care of younger siblings, which may cause them to lose interest in schooling (Pottinger, Stair & Brown, 2008). During this parent/child separation period, “children had the intellectual and conceptual tools to understand parental migration, to rationalize separation and even to envision reunification; however, this did not mean that they were emotionally inured to separation and there was a dissonance between intellectual acceptance and emotional adjustment” (Jones, Sharpe & Sogren, 2004, p. 100). In the Caribbean, there is societal support for migration and separation, but inadequate attention is paid to children who are left behind and are forced to adjust, often at a young age.

Over the past ten years, studies have documented the psychological outcomes and grief/loss experiences that children from the Caribbean have experienced due to parental migration. According to school samples from Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, it is estimated that 10.5% and 35%, respectively, of children have parents who have migrated (Jones et al.

2004; Pottinger, 2003). Another study using 9 to 10 year olds in inner-city Jamaica revealed that parental migration was directly related to children's poor school performance and psychological difficulties (Pottinger, 2005). These researchers discuss severe difficulties among separated children due to migration: poor mental health, depression, suicidal ideation, poor self-esteem, poor school performance and increased vulnerability to drugs and delinquent behaviors (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003; Arnold, 1997; Crawford-Browne, 1994; 1999; Sharpe & Sogren, 2004). Interestingly, these results are similar to findings in studies dealing with topics such as parental divorce or death (Bentovin, 1986; Hetherington & Arasteh, 1988; Pottinger, 1999).

Once reunification between the parent and children does occur, it is often difficult for the children to pick up where they left off due to the time apart and the development of ties with other primary caregivers (Lashley, 2000; Roopnarine et al., 2006). For the children, who are often in their adolescence, the transition to their new homes can be very difficult because they are relinquishing ties to family members and friends, and having to re-adjust to their biological parents, as well as an unfamiliar environment, weather, customs and other practices. It is important to note that transitioning to adolescence is difficult enough without these other challenges accompanying migration. According to Loudon (1993), another challenge children face as they are transitioning to a new school environment in the United States is the placement tests. Teachers may infer that these children are 'backward' or maladjusted, and refer them for special education or mental health services (Morrish, 1971).

In terms of mental health services, there is a stigma associated with seeking mental health services among Indo-Caribbean immigrant families. Therapy is a relatively new trend in the West Indies (Sewell-Coker et al., 1985), which contributes to the reluctance, especially among Indo-Caribbean immigrant parents to solicit help from a mental health counselor. In addition,

many Indo-Caribbean families believe that family matters should remain private. Their unwillingness to seek help from a counselor is further compounded by what is often the therapist's lack of awareness and cultural competence when delivering services. Research has noted "that mental health counselors in North America are oftentimes ignorant of West Indian cultural attitudes toward migration, as well as Indo-Caribbean family structures and child socialization practices. Without such an understanding, counselors run the risk of further alienating the parents and children of Caribbean families" (Gopaul-McNicol, 1998 p. 18) and, to make matters worse, when services are rendered, they are often at the insistence of school personnel, or Child Protective Services (Gopaul-McNicol, 1998).

When counseling does occur, outreach is traditionally related to problems stemming from immigration, separation and the reunification process, unmet expectations, conflicts between native and American values, beliefs and cultural expectations, downward mobility, pressures to become successful, discrimination and prejudice, scrutiny and lack of understanding from outsiders (Baptiste et al., 1997a; Baptiste et al., 1997b). These problems also encompass issues, such as discipline, guilt, abandonment, poor school performance, delinquency, issues related to identity and belonging, grief, and loss (Smith and Johnson, 2004). As noted already, the aforementioned issues have long-term consequences on the mental health, and stability of the family (Glasgow & Ghouse-Shees, 1995). In most cases, mothers carry the burden for the family, and these issues can affect their role as parents, and their mental and emotional state of mind (Arnold, 1997).

The grief and loss felt by mothers who migrate and leave their children behind in the care of others for an extended period of time is unquestionably very difficult. To further complicate the situation, some individuals in the United States may not understand the harsh conditions that

have forced these families to migrate and the ways in which the opportunity to come to the United States is a second chance at life for their family. This lack of understanding can result in Indo-Caribbean mothers feeling tremendous guilt, because the sacrifices they have made for their children are sometimes interpreted as abnormal, and equated with child neglect or abandonment.

### **The Second Shift – Changing Perspectives of Indo-Caribbean Motherhood**

For Caribbean women, “public admiration” is achieved through the auspices of motherhood (Plaza, 2003). However, leaving their children behind in their native country, the absence of extended family networks, working outside the home and, at the same time, maintaining primary responsibilities for both household chores and childcare, can be very challenging. This process of negotiating multiple roles allowed Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers to become more cognizant of the inequalities that exist between their traditional husband-wife roles and those of their non-immigrant counterparts. The second shift creates many strains on the children, the marital relationships and the overall well-being of the mother. Hence, the exchange of resources and the sense of fairness encouraged women to desire/demand more equal and individual rights from their husbands. This paradigm shift required many Indo-Caribbean males to adapt to their new environment and assume new roles by assisting with childcare and household duties, something which was an uncommon practice in India and the Caribbean (Chamberlain, 1995; Plaza, 2003).

In a recent study of 60 Indo-Caribbean immigrant couples with young children, Roopnarine et al. (2009) examined beliefs about mothers’ and fathers’ roles and how these beliefs impacted the division of child care and household labor. Findings revealed that fathers showed evidence of increased involvement with child care and household labor especially on the weekend, whereas mothers, while also working outside the home, still carried a heavier burden

of child care and household labor than their husbands. These findings demonstrate that, although Indo-Caribbean immigrant women in the United States are exposed to more egalitarian roles and have achieved greater educational attainment, maternal and paternal roles and responsibilities are still demarcated along traditional gender lines. Moreover, fathers still perceived themselves as financial providers and mothers as the primary caregivers, thus supporting ancestral Indian practices and beliefs about women as “inherently unequal” (p. 181). Because motherhood competes with being a wife, the study also demonstrates that there is a gender component to mothering, inasmuch as men and women think about their relationships/roles toward their children in different ways.

Immigrant mothers in the United States face unique challenges because many are forced to blend their native identities of motherhood with dominant American ideologies, immigration patterns, culture/ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, and so on (Kim, Conway-Turner, Sherif-Trask & Woolfolk, 2006; Sotelo-Hondagneu & Avila, 1997; Tummala-Narra, 2004). For Indo-Caribbean women/mothers in the United States, the effects of migrating to the United States and the increased opportunities to further enhance their employment and educational goals have changed the family structure and, most of all, the “progression of women’s gender roles” (Zentgraf, 2002). This change is especially significant, since women are expected to be submissive and men are expected to be dominant (Roopnarine, 2002). Cross-cultural studies of immigrant mothers could help to unravel certain behaviors and outcomes that may be culturally specific, but not universally applied.

As discussed in the previous section, prevailing American conceptions of motherhood have changed. However, they have not changed at the same pace for Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers, and some of this has to do with their strong connections to India, Hindu religious

doctrines, the strict patriarchal system and traditional gender roles. The change, or lack thereof, of Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers' conceptions of motherhood was explored in the current study.

### **Extended Family Networks**

Extended family networks (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins) are a long-standing unifying force for both East Indian and Indo-Caribbean family structures. These networks can exist both in the home and among fictive kin. They serve many functions, such as sharing of resources and mutual responsibilities for each other's children. They also function as a stabilizing force for married couples (Dudley-Grant, 2001), and provide a sense of continuity (Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005). Over time, the institution of the family and extended family networks remain at the center of the Indo-Caribbean culture (Barrow, 1996).

Researchers show that "migration extended the family rather than disintegrated the family" (Plaza, 2003, p. 14). For example, many individuals who immigrated depended on their network of extended family in the Caribbean to care for their children until they could be reunified. Indo-Caribbean immigrants in the United States would frequently send back 10% or more of their income, to assist family/children back home (Valencia, 2006). This dependence and reciprocal process were integral in allowing families to immigrate and transition successfully to their new environments, while maintaining strong familial/social ties in the Caribbean. In turn, receiving support from families in the United States provided increased income and stability for family members back home in the Caribbean.

Moreover, the bonds that existed between families both in the United States and the Caribbean existed beyond the transfer of financial resources (Plaza, 2003). For families living in the United States, maintaining ties to their families in the Caribbean was crucial to maintaining

ancestral customs, identities, cultural survival, and retention of ancestral values. This phenomenon can be referred to as secondary migration, which is the migration and settlement of a group of people that carries with it a socio-cultural process. It may undergo changes by way of adaptation to the host country's socio-economic and political conditions and/or through adoption of the host country's socio-cultural values and practices. For Indo-Caribbean families, maintaining their cultural traditions depends upon several factors: (1) the conditions under which individuals left their homeland; (2) the distance between their homeland and the host country; (3) the length of their stay in the host country; and (4) the economic and political conditions in the host country (Jayaram, 1997).

In many ways, Indo-Caribbean immigrant families, especially mothers, still mirror their East Indian ancestors by continuing to embrace traditional Hindu religious doctrines, traditional family structures, child rearing, mating, prescribed gender roles, parenting practices, food, music, clothing and their dominant patriarchal system. Their identities, experiences and conceptualizations of motherhood may now consist of East Indian, Caribbean and dominant American ideologies. Hence, Indo-Caribbean women's enhanced gender identities can provide a broader lens through which to understand the complex nature of their maternal roles and whether they differ inter-generationally. The current study assists in determining the degree to which these multiple/changing identities have influenced the conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant women.

In the next chapter, the focus will be on the method that was used to operationalize this study. Chapter V will include a discussion on the qualitative research design, a description of the participants, procedures and measures used in the interview process and, finally, the analytical



processes that included NVivo 10, the high-lighter method and journaling that were all used to make sense of the data.

## **Chapter V**

This chapter describes the research method, design appropriateness, the population under study, procedures, and measures (including interview questions and informed consent), and includes a discussion of the qualitative data analysis process using both NVivo 10 and the traditional high-lighting method.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

A review of the scholarship on Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers discussed earlier demonstrates that little is known about how Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers construct their roles, identities, and experiences as mothers. A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it provided a better possibility for exploring the Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers' cultural schemas of motherhood, how they executed their roles as mothers, possible intergenerational shifts in the conceptions of motherhood, and shared elements of Indian and Caribbean cultural continuity and mothering in the context of structural, historical, and cultural factors. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a qualitative research design captures

“in depth complexities and processes; research on little known phenomena or innovative systems; research that seeks to explore where and why policy, local knowledge and practice are at odds; research on real, as opposed to stated, organizational goals; and research for which relevant variables have yet to be identified” (p. 91).

In line with this perspective, it was important to avoid introducing bias into the mothers' responses based on a set of survey items related to a particular topic. The intent of this

investigation was to discuss and capture data related to mothers' experiences from a grounded perspective.

## **Method**

This study utilized a qualitative research design featuring a strengths-based interview approach to capture a broader perspective and detailed understanding of the interviewee's life experiences. A qualitative approach helped to ground this study and deepen the researcher's understanding of how Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers construct and make meaning of motherhood in the context of their lives in a new cultural community (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995; Ambert, 1994). Qualitative research is meant to be person-centered and has a more flexible methodological foundation. Therefore, findings from qualitative studies are immensely important because they capture the actual (less filtered) voices of the respondents and provide opportunities to understand the lived experiences, personal representations, and social constructions of people's lives (Creswell, 1998). The design, data collection, data exploration and research interpretations of this study followed closely the various stages of those presented by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p. 317), which include data preparation, data exploration, specification/reduction of data, and interpretation.

## **Sample**

Thirty Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers from Queens, Schenectady, and Syracuse, New York, were recruited for this study using snowball sampling. A snowball sampling technique (referral strategy) was used due to the size and difficulties in reaching and interviewing a large, representative sample of the Indo-Caribbean population. Individuals eligible to participate were Indo-Caribbean immigrant women born in one of the English-Speaking countries of Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados, Grenada, or Antigua, and who were biological mothers

actively parenting at least one child under the age of eighteen (the children could be born in either the Caribbean or the U.S.). The researcher recognizes that women can become mothers through biological means, adoption, step-parenting, surrogacy, an older sister/aunt, child shifting and other means, all of which are important. However, this study only focused on biological mothers.

## **Procedures**

Prior to the start of the data collection process, the principal investigator completed both the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) and gained Syracuse University's Institutional Review Board approval (IRB). Following the IRB's approval, recruitment flyers (Appendix A) containing the title "Conceptions and Practices of Motherhood among Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Mothers Living in the United States" and a brief description of the study were distributed via both mail and in person to various temples, mosques, shops, laundromats, stores and restaurants within Indo-Caribbean communities, such as Richmond Hill, Queens and Schenectady, New York, inviting eligible Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers to participate. Other outlets, such as Facebook, e-mail, telephone calls and word of mouth, were also used to obtain the sample.

The recruitment process was challenging for a number of reasons. For instance, mothers were hesitant to participate because of the general reluctance of this population to participate in research studies. Mothers were nervous about being interviewed, concerned about what questions would be asked, the recording process, their unfamiliarity with the interviewer, the time commitment and confidentiality. After several visits to Queens and Schenectady, New York, I was able to obtain the first set of mothers who agreed to participate in this investigation. After their eligibility was verified, an appointment for a face-to-face interview was arranged either in their homes or another convenient location of their choosing. Most of the interviews occurred in the mothers' homes, while others took place at the participant's temple and/or various eateries.

At the beginning of each interview, an informed consent (Appendix B) was obtained and the content of the interview, along with an explanation of the nature of the study, was explained

to each participant. Participants were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Each participant was told that her name would not be used for identification and that, instead, pseudonyms would be used in lieu of her name. After reviewing the consent form and answering their questions/concerns, participants who agreed to participate signed the consent form.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face using a digital audio recorder. In addition, notes were taken of the participant's body language (crying, laughter, and nervousness) and observations of her home (pictures, altar, and artifacts), if the interview was conducted in her home. The interviews ranged in length from forty-five minutes to three hours. Because there was no prior relationship with the participants, it was important to spend adequate time in the beginning of each interview to build a level of rapport. "As time is spent with subjects, the relationship becomes less formal. The researcher's goal is to increase the subjects' level of comfort, encouraging them to talk about what they normally talk about, and eventually to confide in the researcher" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 73). My experience, both as a social worker and an Indo-Caribbean immigrant mother, allowed me to conduct a good interview and, most of all, gather rich data. A good interview, according to Bogdan and Biklen, (2003), will "produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives" (p. 96).

## **Measures**

Derived from the literature review presented in earlier chapters, the interview questions were developed. The questions were semi-structured, open-ended and focused on attitudes/beliefs, parental roles, cultural practices/messages, expectations and competence in an effort to determine how they impact the conceptualization and practice of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers (Appendix C). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), "in

keeping with the qualitative tradition of attempting to capture the subjects' own words and letting the analysis emerge, interview schedules and observation guides generally allow for open-ended responses and are flexible enough for the observer to note and collect data on unexpected dimensions of the topic" (p. 71). The participants were told they could skip a question or add to the prepared questions. This flexible framework lends itself to new discoveries and exploration of emerging themes (Moustakas, 1994), with the goal of gathering data that are "detailed and complete enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 95; Maxwell, 2005).

Participants also completed a family background questionnaire that included information on their place of birth, length of time in the United States, ethnic identity, age, marital status, educational attainment, occupation, renting/owning a home, religious affiliation, number of family members in the household, household income, number and ages of children, and type of school that their child/children attended (Appendix D).

### **Data analysis**

Following techniques used for coding qualitative data, as outlined by Bogdan and Biklen, (2003), Strauss and Corbin, (1998), and Auerbach and Silverstein, (2003), there were several phases of analysis with the eventual goal of identifying differences and commonalities in the content from the transcripts. This method of analysis uses an inductive approach defined as "the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980, p. 306; Patton, 1990; Patton; 2002). To start the analysis process, each tape recording was transcribed into written text via a transcript. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) stated: "Transcribing research data is interactive and engages the researcher in the process of deep listening, analysis, and interpretation.

Transcription is not a passive act but instead provides the researcher with a valuable opportunity to actively engage with his or her research material from the beginning of data collection (p. 304).” Initially, attempts were made to use Dragon Naturally Speaking speech software program to text software; however, this software can only be programmed to recognize the interviewer’s voice and is not useful for transcribing interviews. Subsequently, two professional transcriptionists were hired to transcribe the large volume of tape recordings, and each transcript was verified twice against the recording.

Following the transcription process, NVivo 10 was used to store and organize the interviews. This is a qualitative data analysis software package for analyzing large amounts of qualitative data effectively. This software was instrumental in the data analysis process because it allowed me to condense large amounts of data, group responses, and find patterns and themes. Following the steps in NVivo 10’s model, all of the transcripts and tape recordings were uploaded into a data file in preparation for coding. The purpose of coding is to “expand and tease out the data in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 30). In the beginning, several text query searches were run. However, the word-frequencies approach was too broad and did not reveal reliable themes. Therefore, all of the transcripts were re-organized and re-loaded by cutting and pasting all of the responses to question one, question two, and so forth into a file. Fortunately, all of the participants were asked the same questions in the same order, and the transcripts were saved using the same consistent paragraph style. Using the text-search and query tool options in NVivo 10, words and statements that occurred most frequently both within and across all questions were easily found. Results from the text search queries were displayed using NVivo 10’s models, charts, and reports. For instance, the reports provided by NVivo 10 detailed words and phrases that had the

highest number of occurrences and coverage, which were printed and reviewed at each step during the analysis process.

This process subsequently led to the development of nodes, referred to by NVivo 10 as containers, which allowed me to store related words, concepts and phrases in one area, with the goal of combining ideas around a particular theme. Within NVivo 10, there are four types of nodes: (1) Free nodes, which capture emerging ideas that stand on their own, for instance, negative motherhood; (2) Tree nodes, which are emerging ideas that can be arranged hierarchically and manage connections between ideas, in this case, the participant's childhood; (3) Case nodes, which organize themes around a specific topic, which, in this study, are mother's struggle, relationship with mother, and definitions of motherhood; (4) Relationship nodes, which organize themes between topics that have a connection with each other, such as discipline and Indo-Caribbean influences.

After coding the first fourteen interviews, no new themes or ideas were found and, therefore, the conclusion was made that the data had reached its saturation point. Nevertheless, the remaining interviews were coded for accuracy and consistency. All of the related nodes were combined to form four emerging themes, which are discussed in the results chapter.

In addition to the analysis conducted via NVivo 10, the traditional high-lighter method was also used to produce a combined description of the data. Following the steps outlined by Van Kaam Method (Moustakas, 1994), the transcripts were read, high-lighted and organized by question. Each transcript was color-coded to organize the mothers' accounts of their childhood experiences, relationship with their mothers and their own motherhood, which led to the emerging themes. It soon became evident that there were common themes both within and across all questions that were then clustered to produce a composite description. The emerging



themes from the traditional high-lighter method supported the themes from NVivo 10 that increased the reliability of the analysis process.

### **Reflections of Participant's Homes**

All of the mothers I visited were extremely warm and welcoming. In the beginning of the interviews, many of the women were hesitant because they feared the unexpected. However, after the first few minutes, they became increasingly relaxed, talked more openly and even ignored the presence of the tape recorder. By the middle of the interviews, there were bursts of laughter and tears of pain. They were entrusting me with their stories, which, for many, this was the first time sharing this information with a non-family member. At the end of our interviews, which in most cases lasted between forty five minutes and three hours, I felt a tremendous connection to the women. On occasions where the mothers discussed painful memories, it was difficult to end the interview when the tape recorder stopped and, as a result, the journaling process was extremely helpful in allowing me to process the information.

Following most of the interviews, I was given a tour of their home and a chance to meet their children and/or spouse, when present. I met younger children who played and talked with me; however, the older children stayed in their rooms. The children that I met were extremely polite, kind and enjoyed showing me their room(s) and favorite toys. In two of the interviews, the participant's husband sat in the room where the interview was taking place. On a few occasions, the two husbands even interjected and shared stories of their own childhood.

I was impressed at how nicely all of the participants' homes were decorated and organized. In many of the homes, I noticed their family altar or religious pictures proudly displayed. Family pictures, wedding pictures, pictures of their children and, most of all, children's graduation pictures and awards adorned their living room walls. Glass dishes, flower

vases, and other decorations were also part of the décor. Bookshelves were filled with books, toys and Indian movies. Finally, in two of the homes, I noticed a *tabla drum and harmonium* which are traditional Indian musical instruments.

### **Journaling**

In addition to NVivo 10's reports, models and charts, a journal was maintained by the researcher that served as a methodological log where a detailed account of the research process, beginning with the recruitment process, the interview exchanges, surprises, observations and insights gained, could be kept. This journal also contained notes on the coding and analysis phase, which was an important aspect of the analysis process and was extremely helpful in drawing connections between concepts. Moreover, due to the sensitive nature of some of the interviews, especially ones involving abuse, harsh punishment and poverty, the journal was very effective and therapeutic because it allowed this researcher to process any thoughts and feelings, while remaining objective. This process is supported by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), who note that, "as more and more interviews are analyzed and you continue to memo what is going on in your data, you may come up with several analytical dimensions or subcodes." (p. 312).

I converted some of the notes from my journal and the transcripts into a table showing how each theme was developed, the definitions used, and supporting quotes (Attachment F). This made the link between analysis and interpretation less difficult, thus producing a revised model for Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Motherhood (Appendix H). As a visual learner, I found it useful to create a conceptual model based on the data collected to help me see and reflect upon the various aspects of motherhood as conceptualized by the Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in this study. It also helped me to see various aspects that were missing from the original model, which was generated from the literature (Appendix E).

The combined use of NVivo 10 and the traditional high-lighter method was an invaluable part of the analytical process because it increased the reliability of the results and enhanced knowledge of the data. Many argue that “the use of a computer for qualitative analysis can contribute to a more rigorous analysis” (Bazeley, 2010, p.3), but “the researcher must integrate their chosen perspective and conceptual framework into their choices regarding what and how to code, and what questions to ask of the data; software cannot do that” (Bazeley, 2010, p. 11). This was precisely the case for this study because NVivo 10 alone would not have been sufficient in producing an in-depth analysis without the traditional high-lighter method. Finally, responses from the family background questionnaire were entered into SPSS and reported in frequency tables.

## Validity and Trustworthiness

It is important that the researcher is cognizant of his/her feelings, biases and preconceived notions and how he/she may manipulate the research; a process known as *reflexivity* (Miles & Huberman, 1984; 1994). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), reflexivity in qualitative research is another course of action that is similar to objectivity in quantitative research. The researcher of this study is an Indo-Caribbean mother and an immigrant from Guyana and, thus, holds an insider's view of experiences that may pertain to different aspects of Indo-Caribbean motherhood. Reflexivity requires the researcher to consider how personal biases may emanate from the researcher being a member of the group under study, and how this might influence data collection, as well as facilitate access and openness of the participants (Daly, 1992).

Within qualitative research, credibility, dependability, and triangulation are important factors necessary to achieve reliability and validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Credibility involves the fit between the participant's statements, narratives, intended meaning and the researcher's interpretation. For example, how credible are the intended messages between the sender and the receiver? In addition to the notes taken, each of the interviews was recorded using a digital voice recorder and saved under pseudonym for each participant. Each recorded interview was then transcribed from speech to text, and verified twice for accuracy. Substantial effort was made to protect the auditory nature and content of the interview. This checks-and-balance process ensured greater reliability and reduced human error but, more importantly, it allowed the researcher to uncover effectively emerging themes that would not have been captured using quantitative analyses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hartmann & Pelzel, 2005).

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the research instrument over time. Utilizing the proposed set of interview questions for each participant served as a consistent and

dependable base for the development of the interviews. Confirmability relates to the researcher's ability to maintain objectivity or some analytic distance with the goal of presenting findings that are not personal to the researcher, but reflect the thoughts and ideas of the interviewees (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This standard was achieved because all interview data were traced back to the appropriate source(s). For example, all of the transcribed narratives were saved into Microsoft Word files and NVivo 10 using both pseudonyms and date. Hard copies of the interview data, along with all tape recordings, were safely stored to ensure confidentiality. Lastly, in addition to the audiotapes, personal notes during and after each interview and observations of the home environment (e.g., religious shrines) were noted, a demographic data sheet was included to enrich the data analysis process (see Mohammed, 1992).

To conclude, this study utilized a qualitative approach with in-depth interview questions that examined the meanings, identities and practices of motherhood among a group of mothers who rarely take part in research studies. The findings of this study were analyzed using two methods that added to the reliability of the results. These results, while at times painful to read, provide an in-depth perspective into the participants' childhood, their socialization, their cultural schemas and internal working models. Through it all, many of the participants developed tremendous resiliency and coping mechanisms that have contributed to how they define and execute their current roles as mothers. A further analysis of the study findings is presented in the upcoming chapter.

## Chapter VI

### Results

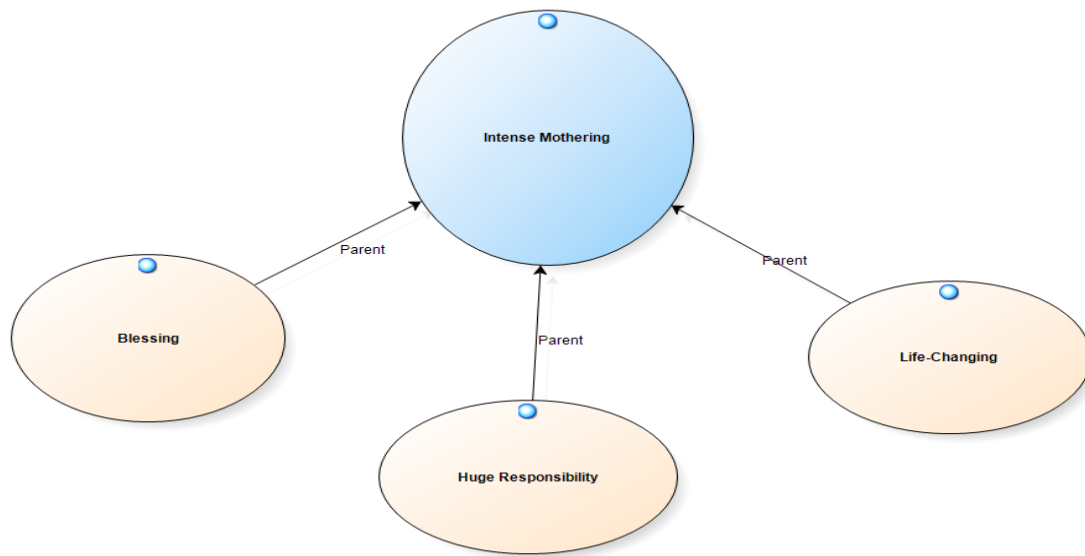
#### Description of Sample

The sample consisted of thirty women, ranging in age from twenty-five to fifty-three years old. The women were born in Guyana (28) and Trinidad and Tobago (2) and their immigration status ranged between two to twenty years. Twenty-seven individuals in the sample were married, one was divorced, one was separated and one was single, never married. All of the women were mothers with between one and five children. With regard to religious affiliation, eighteen women identified as Hindu, two were Christian, five were Muslim and one was Mormon. Seventeen women were employed full-time, three were employed in part-time work, one was a student, one was unemployed and, eight were homemakers/childcare providers. With respect to the mother's occupation, ten worked in the health field in some capacity (C.N.A., Home Health Aide, Pharmacy Technician, Pharmacist, Nurse Attendant, Intake Specialist, Nurse Aide and Registered Dietician). Eight of the mothers worked in various business fields (Banking, Sales, Administrative Support, Accountant, Loan Processor, and Book-keeping). Five of the mothers worked as homemakers and/or child care providers in their homes and, lastly, the remaining seven mothers were either students, unemployed or left this question blank. The participant's family income annually varied considerably: four households earned less than \$20,000 annually, eight households had annual incomes between \$20,000 and \$40,000, seven households earned between \$40,000 and \$60,000 annually, and eleven households had an annual income between \$60,000 and \$100,000. With regard to educational attainment, twelve women had a high school education, ten women had some education beyond high school (ranging from

vocational/technical school, some college or an Associate Degree) and, finally, nine women had undergraduate to graduate degrees.

This study utilized a qualitative approach to examine the meaning of motherhood as it related to women's relationship with their own mothers, their life experiences in their families of origin, and their own practices of motherhood. Participants' responses to the interview questions were analyzed using NVivo 10. The results predominantly clustered into four main themes: 1) "Intense Mothering," defined as life-changing, a blessing and a huge responsibility; 2) Participant's relationship with their mothers, consisting of their mother's nurture, sacrifices and hardships; 3) Indo-Caribbean influences which includes high expectations, values and beliefs and discipline and finally; and, 4) cultural and religious practices that shaped mothering. These four themes, combined with the mother's demographic characteristics, helped to enhance our understanding of the conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in this sample. The discussion of each theme revealed in the NVivo 10 analysis of interview responses provides the primary focus of this chapter.

## Theme 1: Intense Mothering



*Figure 1.* NVivo 10's model of intense mothering. The sub-themes include: A. Life-Changing, B. Blessing, and C. Huge Responsibility.

The women were asked several questions in an effort to a) bring out the meaning(s) of motherhood and mothering to them; (b) determine challenges associated with the role of being a mother;(c) identify values and beliefs that influence their cultural schemas and internal working models about motherhood; (d) recognize the role of social supports; and, (e) understand the influences of prevalent American ideologies and how they collectively shape the conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers. These questions included: (1) What does being a mother to your child/children mean to you?; (2) What is the role of a mother in a child's life?; (3) How has becoming a mother changed your life?; (4) What challenges, if any, have you experienced as an Indo-Caribbean mother raising a child/children in the United States?; and, (5) How have your beliefs and practices about motherhood changed or evolved since coming to the United States?



The overarching theme that emerged is the notion of “Intense Mothering.” Motherhood is characterized as a life-changing experience, a blessing, involves teaching, and a huge responsibility. Based on the NVivo 10 results and the mother’s testimonials, it was clear that Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers had established psychological boundaries with the outside world, and this has shaped their thinking about their children. To a large extent, their mothering relationship with their children provides a central component of their adult identity and provides tremendous happiness, joy, love and fulfillment that was evidenced in their interviews.

**A. *Life-changing.*** From an early age, Indo-Caribbean girls are socialized to cook, clean, take care of the house and younger siblings, and exhibit good behavior, values and beliefs in preparation for their roles as wives and mothers. As a young girl gets older, her parents prepare her for marriage. Following her wedding, it is assumed that the next natural step is becoming a mother. Hence, for Indo-Caribbean women, the role of motherhood is both biologically and socially driven. The option of not having children, having children later in life, or even the use of contraception is generally not an alternative. As Deepa explained, “I never thought of not having kids...I always grew up thinking I would marry and have kids, I haven’t thought about having grandkids.” This outlook was echoed by Indira, who observed, “Without kids, I don’t know how my husband and my relationship would be.” It cannot be overstated that Indo-Caribbean women conceive of the role of being a mother as a central part of their life cycle.

In describing how much their lives had changed since becoming a mother, “life-changing” was the term most commonly used to describe how the mothers felt. At first, Sanya regretted becoming a mother and contemplated an abortion due to her age, being unmarried and not having the financial or familial support needed to raise a child. She said, “*When I got pregnant, I did consider abortion. The reason is childish. I don’t know how to be a mother.*”

*Thanks God for Barney (the TV Show); he taught me all my nursery rhymes. Those insecurities that crept in my mind, bringing her home was overwhelming.”* Looking back, Sanya now considers the birth of her child to be her most important life- changing experience. For instance, she said, *“I often wonder what life would be like if I hadn’t become a mom. What path would I be going down? My daughter forced me to stay on the straight and narrow. At a very young age, I couldn’t do anything without a babysitter. I used to take her everywhere I went. I couldn’t afford a babysitter. It forced me to grow up sooner than the people in my age group. I don’t wear motherhood on my sleeve like it is a burden.”*

The remaining twenty-nine women also embraced this life-changing experience because it forced them to mature, to become stronger, to be more patient, and tolerant. In addition, motherhood spurred them to become more compassionate and considerate of others. It also expanded their emotional responses. Finally, these women came to value their new awareness of time passing and mortality.

For instance,

Geeta observed that *“I was 26 when I became a mom. It changed me in a way that there is no other person that is more important than this little flower.”*

Anupa had a similar experience, noting that *“It has made me more patient and less patient. Time is very important because any time away from her has to be a good purpose. If I look to her to be this 100 percent, this wonderful child; I want her to know that I am spending all of my time for her. It has made me stronger, more tolerant, more passionate. I think of my own mortality a lot. No amount of money can replace a mother. I have a fear that I could die and leave her; who is going to be there? Now you realize a sense of self-worth; I look at her as so important. Because she depends on me I*

*am so important. I think more of myself because I want people to think more of her. It was a big deal for me to put myself first; to be more of an egoist. This is what is good for me and the baby and this is the way it is going to be. The focus is doing what you can and being the best. I have to be giving 100 percent.”*

Tara underscored the life-changing nature of motherhood when she said, *“It has completely transformed my life. I remember before I had kids, the one thing I must say is that I was not as ambitious as I am now. I wasn’t as aggressive when I’m at work as I am now. Because I know that I have goals that I want my children to have a certain lifestyle I want my children to live.”*

Shanti spoke of the huge responsibilities she faced as a mother, *“As only daughter and the youngest, I would say because of the way I was brought up, I was naïve and immature, so having the kids made me grow up, made me become a woman, made me know the importance of life. You are responsible for these other lives. You have to do the best you can to raise them. They were brought into this world – it was our choice, so we have to do the best that we can do to make them happy and make their lives as normal as possible in this crazy world we are in.”*

Deepa shared that becoming a mother had made her appreciate the sacrifices her mother made for her even more. *“It just came into me like that. You realize how your parents shared their love for you.”* This increased love and happiness comes from knowing that they are fulfilling an important role being with their children. As Devika noted *“It was great becoming a mom, I be happy that I’m a mom, I wanted to care for a kid, Ashley turned out to be a very nice child she would sleep all the day. If she weren’t around, life couldn’t be this great for me.”* Nalini observed that, *“I was this person that would go anywhere with my friends, now I love*

*being home with them.” Similarly, Smita noted that “becoming a mom made me so much stronger and so much I have learned. Like being a mother, how my mother raised me. But being a mom I could not explain not having kids, how I would feel. I think it’s the best thing ever – I think every woman should have kids.”*

The women revealed that, since becoming mothers, their focus has shifted from their own needs and desires to their children, and that they now have a greater sense of purpose, self-worth and a sense of responsibility. They had learned that their new roles as mothers required them to serve as role models, and to teach and guide their children educationally, physically, mentally and spiritually so that they could be successful.

The mothers reflected on their roles as mentors and teachers. As Sanya said, *“We are put here on earth to be an example to children, teach them certain things like life skills. So when they go out into the world they can remember the things you teach them.”* They recognize that this role is very important, that it begins at the birth and never ends. These sentiments are evident in the following quotes:

*Leela: Now I have a daughter I have to show the world how to bring up a child. I want that child to be more motivated than what I am.*

*Indira: No more partying or going out on Friday nights, no staying out late. I couldn’t let her go. She was attached to me and I was very attached to her. You don’t realize how empty your life is until you have children. You automatically adjust and then you can’t picture life without them. My world would end.*

*Lolita: Your life change so much. After I became a mom I am not a free person any more. I am closer with my kid. If I have to go somewhere I can’t leave her.*

Chandra: *It is important to educate my kids and bring them up right – lead them in the right track; in spiritual and social and everything. They know the right from the wrong. You want your kids to grow more decent and educated. If I wasn't a mom today; I was born to be a mother.*

Gayatri: *When you get the kids, all the focus changes to them; they take everything.*

Gita: *I feel like now I have a purpose. There is good and bad. I cannot imagine my life without my children; I cannot remember what it was like before; what would I do with my time? I've become more patient. Married at 23, had a child at 24; I was still very young. I grew as a person. Nothing really matters other than the kids. I'll spend on the kids over me. I am more aware of how I look at myself. I am critical of myself. My son is in a swimming class and he was saying I can't do it. It hit me that wow – that has to come from somewhere. They are with me 24/7. I have to be a good role model for them. It has made me more aware of how I value myself.*

Sheila: *You do not think like a child no more – you don't do a lot of things that you use to. You have to put the child first.*

Usha: *They changed my life tremendously. One of the reasons: It's not me anymore – I'm not single anymore – I have not one but two children and I have to provide for. Now it's not about me – it's about my kids. It's about what we can do for them and what we can help and make them better. And try to let them understand that education is very important and how hard they work to get what they want and to stay in school. It's hard what you have to do as a mother to keep your children in the straight and narrow especially my daughter – she's in high school.*

**B. Blessing.** Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in this study viewed the birth of their children as life-changing experiences and blessings that brought tremendous joy, happiness and fulfillment. For instance, prior to childbirth, Rita was receiving long-term treatment for a brain tumor. During the course of her treatment, she became pregnant and her doctors were worried about her medical condition. However, she still went through with the pregnancy because it was her first child. She remembered that, after giving birth, her doctors conducted an MRI to determine the impact the pregnancy had on her illness. The results of the MRI showed that “there is no tumor in my head, my daughter take away the tumor in my head.” In addition to Rita, other participants in this study also shared the same feelings, for example:

*Anupa: I think the biggest like the happiest moment is when I heard my baby cry. And not just the crying but the doctor actually said, he said “oh perfect baby she did everything she was supposed to do.” And I’m like is that me? Is that me? And all I’m thinking is like I could die right now. It means a lot. You get to take care of this life that you can mold any way you want to. Raising her has been a wonderful experience. I miss something, and I can’t believe I wasn’t there to hear her say that. You want to be there for everything.*

*Chandini: I’m sorry I couldn’t be a mom again and again.*

*Deepa: It was like an angel come in the house.*

*Geeta: I’m blessed, really blessed to be a mother to my kids. My role is to protect my children and give them the life that I didn’t have. Nurture them in a way that they get older they know what a father is and mother’s love. I want to be that role model for my children.*

*Gita: Being a mom is everything to me. There is nothing else in my world besides my kids. I don't go to school, I don't go to work. From the moment my eyes open to the moment my eyes close they are my purpose. I live to be a good mother for them. When I pray one of my first prayers is show me how to be a good mother to them.*

*Heema: I always felt it wasn't enough – I should be doing more and taking them to the park. I've learned if your kid is with you and they are happy, they are fine. I put no value on work defining me as a person. When you're a stay-at-home mom your paycheck in a sense is happy kids. My reality is messy. Love my kids and my reality.*

*Kamla: Motherhood is the best title. There is nothing that comes remotely close to being a mother. There is nothing I can accomplish; every single degree. To have someone looks at you and depends on you and to care for; it is the best feeling on earth.*

*Nalini: Being a mom means the world to me. It means everything. I would give up anything for them. They are my babies. My happiness.*

*Radika: Being a Mom means everything to me. Being a mom tells who I am really. I get to see the real me by being a mom. I get to see if I am an evil person, a mean person – I get to see me; my personality; the way I react to my child. To see who I am. I never know who I am until I became a mom.*

*Shanti: It's a blessing. When I finished having my son I told myself that women in Guyana we should kiss their feet because of the things they go through. The hardship they go through – they are being beaten – they are being punished – so much hard house hold chores and they still have to go – we are spoiled over here. The men would come home and if there's no food they would hit them.*

*Smita: It's the best feeling in the world there's nothing better. I have my job and you can have a home – but having my children and being a mother is the best thing ever. My kids look up to me – they come to me - I take care of them. They go to their dad too but of course I'm their mommy. I still do everything for my children - my son is 20 but I still do everything for him and my daughter the same thing. But being a mother oh my god is the best thing ever.*

*Sunita: They are my will? They are my happiness? When my kids are happy - I am happy. I can work and I can help them with anything. I am not rich but whatever I can do for them I do it wholeheartedly. I want to build this relationship – confide in one another. You share joy and love.*

*Usha: It's an amazing experience. I would not regret it for the world. I love my kids and I watched them and I had that opportunity to watch them grow up. Not a lot of parents have that opportunity to see their kids grow up – their first step, their first walk, their first everything they did I was there with them.*

*Vidya: I think I mean a lot to them. They are my life; everything for me. I would give up everything for them. I think a mother is very important in a child's life.*

*Leela: I am proud to have two daughters. I have the world's best daughters. They always listen to me. They understand. They have good feelings. If I said I am not well they ask what they can do for me. They see when I am in a good mood – when I am in a bad mood. They know me so well. They hug me a lot. They help me clean. They are so good – they clean their own room. They are so good in school; it is making me so proud to hear their report cards. The teacher tells so much that I don't know if I want to cry or laugh. I thank God for that. I want them to have a better education than the way I think.*



**C. Huge Responsibility.** Unlike any other role or function, for these Indo-Caribbean immigrant respondents, the role(s) of a mother was by far their most important. As Anupa observed, *“As much as they say that society raises a child, sometimes it is only one. It is overwhelming at times but most of the time I feel so blessed. Also a little worried; am I doing the right thing? I can get a passing grade just doing 75%. I don’t want a passing grade, I want 100%. I was striving for 100 percent all the time. That is how I sleep well at night.”*

Not only did the mothers define this role as life-changing and a blessing, they also regarded it as a huge responsibility because the stakes were so high. According to Sanya, *“this is my chance to change my generation; to end the cycle of abuse and ignorance. I have a great friendship with my daughter, at the same time I could be her parent. She has these strengths that I am very weak and insecure in. She has them because she’s just been loved. She is 17 years old and she still comes and wants to hug me and kiss me. I still know how important it is, because I didn’t have it.”*

For many Indo-Caribbean women, the role of a mother was both a full-time and a lifetime responsibility and it began with the birth of their child/ren. As Adrika reflected, *“Mothers are always working 24/7, seven days a week, no I think its 28/7 there is some extra kind of something pulling you all the time.”* The same goes for Tara, who said, *“Basically I am there for them and that they are number one in my life. If they ever need anything whatever else is just priority they are number one priority regardless. I would drop anything and deal with whatever they needed me to deal with.”*

During this time, the pressure mothers faced to make better lives for their children than what they themselves had, and the enormous responsibility of raising children to appreciate their heritage, culture, and values, constitutes an enormous challenge. Tara touched on this when she

said, *“The biggest thing for me that I’m leading them or instilling the right values in them that when they grow up they will be able to make the decisions that will make them happy.”*

Recognizing how important motherhood is, many Indo-Caribbean mothers internalize this role with the belief that their children, husbands, families, other mothers and society were judging them. The yardstick they were judged by could place enormous pressures on them to succeed in the mothering role. Indira echoed this phenomenon when she said, *“I want to be the perfect mom but I am so far from it. I try not to compare myself to other mothers. Reading all this stuff about parents, they give you this false impression of what you are supposed to be like. I am trying to be the best mother I can be in my own way. I can’t live up to the grandiose expectations that society has for these mothers.”*

For many Indo-Caribbean families, the combination of traditional gender-differentiated identity/roles and a strict patriarchal system result in, mothers often have sole nurturing responsibility for their children. For instance, as Meena notes, *“both parents are important, but the mother places more importance on how they behave, how they dress, the way they speak.”*

Based on the women’s responses to the questions about their mothers, it is evident how differently they viewed their mother’s role as compared to their father’s with regard to their upbringing. Radika expresses this distinction very clearly, *“The role of a mom is everything, especially for a girl. No Mom should ever walk away on their child, your father will be there, but what a mother can do for that child; you can never talk to your dad the way you can with a mom. You can never share your feelings. I used to wake up every day and blame my mom for leaving me. Now I’m in a better place. Why didn’t she just take me with her? I would never tell her.”*

## **Theme 2: Participant’s Relationship with their Mothers**

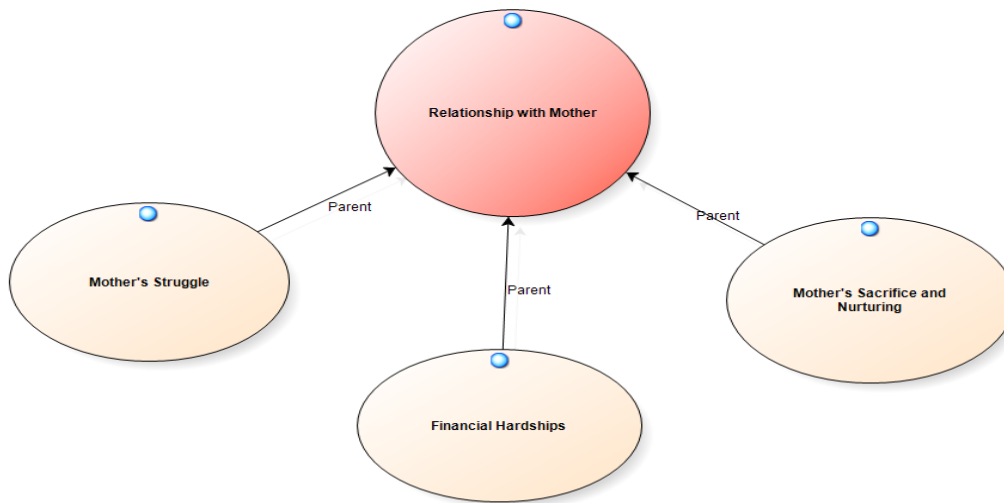


Figure 2. NVivo 10's Model of Participant's Relationship with their Mothers. The sub-themes included: A. Mother's Nurture and Sacrifice, B. Mother's Struggles and C. Financial Hardships.

The discussion of this theme stemmed from two questions: (1) Can you please describe your childhood? For instance, your relationship with your parents (both positive and negative); and, (2) Can you describe the role of your mother in your life? For instance, can you discuss the values she taught you, her expectations for you, and her sacrifices as a parent when you were growing up?

**A. Their mother's nurture and sacrifice.** In describing their childhood, the women recounted many stories about the nurturing, care and sacrifices that their mothers made for them and their siblings while they were growing. As children, they remembered how loving, hardworking, and supportive their mothers were. Since becoming mothers themselves, they have realized how challenging the role of a mother is, and, as a result, have come to appreciate the sacrifices of their mothers even more. Several of the women said, "We have it easy in America. We don't have a lot of kids, our husbands don't drink and beat us, and we don't punish like her." The participants' experiences of Indo-Caribbean immigrant motherhood were reinforced through religious teachings, institutions within the family, Indo-Caribbean culture, the strict patriarchal

systems, and, most of all, through the modeling of other mothers, especially their own mothers and grandmothers.

Their mothers sacrificed and worked hard to provide for their families, as evidenced in the following women's recollections.

*Adrika: Dad was always working and sometimes I remember seeing something in her face – like something was troubling her –but I couldn't figure it out – you are a child you don't know what it's all about - like a worried look. She sacrificed a lot to get things done.*

*Heema said she respects and loves her mother. “I can start crying when I talk about my mom. She is so sacrificial without looking for gratitude for it. She got married to my Dad when she was 16 and became a mother at 17 years old. I respect my mom for taking on so much responsibility at such a young age.”*

*Leela: My Mom is a role model mother who could raise ten kids, although she was very sick. She was 42 when she lost her husband. She spent all her time behind her kids; she always makes sure we had food and comfort us so well.*

*Rita: My Mom was 30 when my father died with seven kids. She takes her kid and we work together and survive.*

*Sheila: My mom was everything. She was mother and father. She was a very good mother – she grew us up without a father –she was both. She did her best. She was there from day one until now.*

According to Deepa, Gayatri and Gita, their mothers endured incredible pain and suffering for their children. As she cried, Deepa said that it was very difficult for her parents to raise eight children:

*I remember seeing my mom gardening. My Dad was tough to deal with; he would drink; insult my mom, abuse her. When I started teaching I got independent he always used to tell us to get work; to take care of ourselves; because he is not going to work all the time. We used to feel hurt when he tells us that. I couldn't have him tell my mom a single word any more. I will take her. I feel very hurt to see what she went through. I used to pray that I would be happy, not like her. Until now, my mom has to take care of a sick sister; go through a lot taking care of my Dad at 74. My Mom never retired; she still has to clean the house and do everything. I can't imagine myself doing the work my mom is doing now, with 8 kids. She works in the garden; she comes in and sews, and cooks. I see that it was hard. Being a mother now I realize it."*

The same sentiments were shared by Gayatri:

*"It was hard to see my Mom crying – I have the best mom in the world – she never let go of her kids. For my Mom children were her comfort; she never went to another man. I see what my father done to my mom – he beat my Mom. My Dad buy poison for my Mom to drink. My uncle came over and hit my father. My Mom took all four kids and go away. I always say I never want to marry; I don't want my husband to treat me the way my father treat my mother; 18 years married to my husband he never slap me. I told my Mom I'm not going through that. I was 10 years when my Dad gave my mother poison. She was going to go kill herself. This punishment is too much for her. My Dad started to fight and beat her. She went in her room. She was going to jump. Called the neighbor. My Mom jump and he hold her back. Why my Dad was doing this – because he had a lot of girlfriend; sweet women. My Dad would be good for a month, then he would drink and gone off again. Me and my brother don't go to school. My next two sisters go to*

*school and have education. If she had nothing to cook she would go fishing to get something to cook. I tell my kids I had a very hard childhood. I want the best for my kids. My Mom never leave my Dad. She is a very great woman, to go through all this. I said Mom you need to leave him.*

Similar feelings were echoed by Gita:

*From childhood, my mom is the best mother I could ever ask for. My mom always celebrated us, always made us feel loved no matter what else was going on in, or how much sadness she had. She couldn't do much for us because she didn't have her own money because it was the businesses, but in her little ways she would be nurturing and loving. She was overshadowed by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. She lived in a bedroom for 20 years. She is the strongest person I know in spite of everything she has endured. She is the energizer bunny. I can treat my mom so mean, and she will still cook, clean and do everything for her children. She lives for us. She puts everybody before her.*

Anupa gave thanks to her mother for taking care of her children so that she could work.

*"I don't know where I'd be without my mother."*

*Chandini: I would never forsake her because she is a very good mom. She did her best she can do for us. She did a lot for me I should never be ungrateful because when I had my kid, my daughter especially she was born in the U.S. and I had to work and she took care of my daughter from day 1 until 10. I could go to work and not worry and she never charged me a dime. So I think god bless her for that. For my dad when my dad was sick she dedicates her whole life to my dad. Everything she could do she did for my dad.*

*Cook, clean, everything. Anything you think about a mother or wife should do, she did. So I am very thankful and I'm grateful for her.*

Geeta: She said that *"her mother is the leading lady in my life, especially with my kids. Even when my husband is in charge; she is there to love them when I can't be there. If something were to happen to my mother I would be so devastated. She is the leading woman in my life."* Adding to this, Kamla said that her mother would come to her house after work, to clean, and cook so that she could be with her daughter. *"I have been doing it with my mother all along. I've had breakdowns with all this. My mom has been my rock. This is a woman who does for me unconditionally. She is not supposed to be taking care of my kids at age 54. She wakes up at 5 a.m. so I can get to sleep so I can go to work. My husband wouldn't even do that. My Mom puts herself on the back burner. If I don't have something – a shoe or a shirt, the next day it is there from her, to make me feel better. I don't think the word love you mean anything that's why I call her god. I can't describe how beyond this woman is; she is Mother Theresa when it comes to my life. She is such a positive person, don't worry. The only place she goes is to church because of me. She takes care of them at night. She puts them to sleep."*

**B. Their mothers' struggles.** For many of the participants, talking about certain parts of their childhood was difficult because it brought to light their mother's struggles, and recounting these memories was at times painful and heartbreaking. As children, several of the participants witnessed the struggles their mothers endured due to death (3), divorce (3) and abuse (7).

Although the women had different childhood experiences, the depth of their stories provided a connection between their mothers' struggles during their childhood and how it has shaped their current roles as mothers. For instance, the women in this study are maintaining similar levels of

nurture and care as their mothers; however, they are also utilizing external opportunities via education and employment to provide a better life for themselves and their children.

The families of Leela, Nalini, and Rita faced the unfortunate circumstance of losing a parent. Leela and Rita recalled losing their fathers suddenly, leaving their mothers to care for the children (five to eight young children). They spoke about how hard it was for their mothers and their older siblings to pick up the pieces. More importantly, they spoke of how their father's death affected them as children and the difficulties they still experience as adults in developing long-term relationships with others. For Nalini, her father committed suicide by drinking poison when she was six months old. Through her tears, she said that she would never know what it meant to have a father, and she could not understand why her father did not want to stay alive to raise her. Her struggle was further exacerbated because her mom has never talked about her father's death. Her mother's silence fueled speculation about the reasons for her father's death. This prevented her from finding any resolution with this loss.

*Leela: my mom said there is no more daddy any more – when he took ill, they rush him to the hospital. The doctor put him in a chair and said, “have a last look at your husband.” My mom went into shock and her blood pressure went up; she had high blood pressure from that date on. They brought him home, and we dress him. At his funeral, I see him lie down there... My Mom was not a healthy person, even before my Dad's death. After his death she got a little healthier because she need to take care of the kids; we were so small.*

Divorce was another factor that led to hardships for the mothers of Meena and Vidya. Meena reported that *“my childhood was a little complicated... My parents got divorced when I was 11. “My Mom was the regular housewife, cooking and taking care of the kids.”* The same



applied for Vidya who said “*when my parents separated, she (my mother) was my mother and father. I was nine years old when they separated. My baby sister was six when he left. She struggled alone to raise us both.*” For Vidya, her parents’ separation resulted in her not only losing her father but also her paternal grandparents’ whose house they had been living in. Losing her father and her grandparents at the same time, as well as witnessing her mother’s struggles, impacted her both as a child and now as a mother.

As children, seven of the thirty women (Gayatri, Geeta, Gita, Kamla, Radika, Shanti, and Sunita) experienced various forms of abuse, including emotional, mental and physical abuse stemming from alcohol use by their fathers. The women talked about the fear and tension in their households and how it prevented them from discussing the abuse they witnessed as children. More importantly, the women also talked about the limited support from extended family members, their community and the Indo-Caribbean governments.

Gayatri shared how hard it was for her mother to raise four kids. She said that her *Dad was not a stable person. He liked to drink. She had to work, fishing, and stuff like that. Many times my Mom would cry because my Dad go out and drink. She had to run with her four kids. My mom would hug the kid; love them. That kind of growing up – if we want something, my Mom said OK – she would go market and do farming. Childhood was tough.*

Geeta began telling her story from the age of five, but she said she would never go back to that time in her life.

*My Dad was an alcoholic, which influenced our childhood. He was a very good father in a way, but in another way, he was very violent. As a little child....I took the role on of sheltering my brother and my sister. My mom was too quiet – so I sheltered them.*

*Growing up in that home made me want to be more than that. I always said when I grow up I would never be like that. Half the time when my father was sober, he never remembered what he did. As part of the culture, we never brought it up. As an adult I told my Dad once, "You were never the man I could look up to." He said "Can you forgive me?" I said "No". My father continued to drink and he would hit my mother. And I never could understand why she would not leave him. That made me bitter towards her. "I wondered why my mother stays with my father." As I got older, I realized it was cultural, there was nowhere to go. She did the best that she could do. My sister and I talk about it, but sometimes things were too emotional for us. We were always separating them (mother and father). When I was 7 or 8, my Dad sent my sister and I to the store. We knew something was going to happen. We went to buy matches. As we came back, we heard yelling and screaming. My Mother had very long hair. He had her down in a headlock. My brother was screaming. Another time that stood out to me occurred when I was in puberty. That's when I moved to Georgetown; my heart was heavy. My Mom almost killed him – she had an ax. She had enough of him. My cousin from next door had to grab the ax from her. She almost chopped him in two. He was hitting on her and cursing her; what angered her was that he would tell her that she came from the gutter. It was the opposite. I was very embarrassed of my father. I did not bring friends home. It molded me to what I am today. It made me want to do better for my children; a better sister, a better wife, a better person in general. I never cried with my mom; My sister cried. I didn't. I felt if I broke down it wasn't good for my sister or my brother. I bear the brunt of the emotional scar. I was always so afraid that something was going to*

*happen. My Dad was always drinking and I never knew when he was going to misbehave.*

Gita remembers one Sunday helping her mother prepare a lot of food. Afterwards she went to her grandmother who lived upstairs to ask for bowls. Not realizing something was wrong, she said that her grandmother:

*Went downstairs and told my Dad that we didn't want my little sister to play with her, to get us in trouble." Immediately following this exchange between her father and her grandmother, her father came in and "wiped the table clean with his hand and everything broke. Then he went back to work." She tells this story with some laughter. However, the disappointment of what happened is still part of her memory. Gita goes on to say she watched her "Mom cry a lot when I was young. She had a lot of hardship with my Dad. My Mom would come in our bedroom to put us to sleep; I remember her sobbing due to marital problems. Her husband was physically never there. She was always second. His parents and the business always came first. I remember wiping her tears.*

Kamla also experienced an abusive childhood:

*My Dad was a drinker. My Mom and Dad left us in Guyana when I was two to come here. Then they came to pick us up at 4 and a half. I didn't even know who my Mom was when I saw her at 4. I started seeing abusive issues; my Dad would hit my Mom, and my Dad cheating on my mom. Anything positive from my childhood – no - I have mentally blocked everything out that was positive. Because of my father, I have a lot of issues with Guyanese men drinking alcohol. The first time I noticed I was probably 7; oh my god, I cannot believe my mom went through that. I walked into the room with my mom and my dad. My mom was standing on one end of the bed and my dad was on the other end of*

*the bed; she looked totally helpless, he threw a roti at her and said this is what you are cooking? I realized that there were so many issues. My mother said - go back to your room, and my dad said - she needs to see this.” ...“I didn’t see my Mom crying; I was more scared than anything, but I don’t think I cried. I was scared that he was going to hurt my mom. Even something like going to church, he would break tables. It was horrible; like living a nightmare. It last for like six years. The abuse was to my mom and my brother. Just to see what my mom was going through. I was his favorite, so I was spared. The hatred was towards my brother. My brother got blamed for everything that I did because he was the older; he would hit my brother. My Dad told my Mom you need to cook all the time. When my father would beat my mom; one time my brother got up and hit my father. My brother was probably 12 years old. My father took a step back and my father was crying and packed his bag. My mother made my brother apologize to my dad.*

For Radika, her mother experienced a different type of struggle. Her parents divorced when she was two years old, and her father and step-mother prevented her mother from visiting. The separation from her mother lasted until she was eighteen years old. This interview was painful for Radika because she not only lost her mother at a young age, but she was also treated terribly by her step-mother. As a child, she recalled having had few places to reach out for help. Although she lived in a hopeless situation for much of her life, today she finds happiness in mothering her two children.

*My Dad wouldn’t let my mother in. He figured she left. It was too many years later so he figured it was no sense in her coming back. My relationship with my stepmom was not good; she was very evil. I couldn’t go places, have friends. She also had a daughter. I*

*was really treated as Cinderella, basically. My Dad knew, but at one point, I used to be afraid; I had to keep it to myself. When he went to work, she would take it out on me. They were all aware of my situation, but they didn't know how to help me. I wanted to leave so many times; I cried myself to sleep. I wanted to leave so bad. It was so bad that the teachers at school knew what was going on at home. That is how evil she was. She never cared where she was; she would come to my school and embarrass me. My whole school was involved in my life; trying to look out for me. One of the teachers reached out to my brother, and said - you have to get her out. The way she treated me. Not many young kids can live with it for too long. Yes, she used to spank and abuse me. I try not to remember it.*

Sunita's story added another dimension to the struggle. Her story began when she, her husband, and three young children went to the American Embassy in Guyana for an interview in preparation for immigration to the United States. Excited and overwhelmed with joy about the possible opportunities in their future, she did not realize that her life would soon change forever. She was told during the interview at the Embassy that her mother-in-law failed to include her name on the immigration paperwork. Consequently, she was told that she would not be joining her children and husband when they immigrated to the United States. She said that, on hearing this news, she immediately went to the bathroom and cried uncontrollably because she would be separated from her three children who were her life. She said that her goodbyes to them were the worst moments of her life.

She could not challenge her husband and also did not want to stop her children from having the opportunity to go to the United States. She was separated from her children for six years and, during the separation, she cried, worried, and felt sad and depressed. In an effort to

cope with being separated from her children, she would make their beds every day, wash and fold their clothes, and cook as if they were still with her. She said that she felt herself “going mad” during the separation, but there was no one to turn to for support, so she held it in and continues to do so today. When they were reunited, her difficulties were exacerbated due to her husband’s extra-marital affairs, continuous abuse of alcohol, and violent behavior toward her. Sunita shared her experiences with her husband in the following manner:

*He always came and drank and beat me and put me out. We get an apartment and I came over (to US) in December month, he went and drink and he put me out. I call the cops twice. We get the next place and we go there and the same thing --- last year January 18<sup>th</sup> he walked out on me. He doesn’t beat me anymore because I told him I would call the cops.*

This interview was difficult for the interviewee because, for the first time, she was verbalizing the pain and suffering that she had endured with the long separation from her children and the abuse at the hands of her husband. The relationship with her husband has not improved in the United States. Her only saving grace is being with her children and making up for lost time.

According to the Caribbean Human Development Report published in 2012, rates of domestic violence in the Caribbean are extremely high. Furthermore, the country with the highest rates among eight other countries referenced in this report is Guyana. This does not include unreported cases. Within the Indo-Caribbean community acts of domestic violence are rarely reported, because they are an accepted part of the culture. In this study, few women said that their mothers reported their fathers’ repeated domestic abuse. Although Sunita reported her husband, it was after a number of times and she was in the United States. Another participant, Rita told her mother about her husband’s severe beatings, to which her mother responded, “When

*your husband beat you, they are blessings from God.”* This violence within the Indo-Caribbean community inflicts a high cost on the victims, their children and the society at large. Cultural beliefs about domestic violence, fear and the lack of institutional support in the Caribbean for victims and their children continues to perpetuate the cycle of dysfunction and abuse among Caribbean families.

**C. Financial hardships.** Sixteen of the thirty women experienced immense financial hardships growing up. These were families that ranged in size from five to ten children and had only one adult member who worked and provided for the family. In all instances, the fathers were the primary breadwinners and worked mainly in low-paying jobs, such as cane cutter, rice mill worker, animal caretaker, carpenter or a driver. Having only one income and with many children to support made it very difficult to make ends meet. Culturally, Indo-Caribbean mothers are responsible for child-rearing, household duties and the emotional burden of “making ends meet.” When this did not happen, their mothers felt the guilt and struggled to provide for their children. All sixteen women indicated their families experienced grave economic hardship; yet, they were grateful for the basics, such as food, shelter and each other.

Deepa, grew up with eight siblings:

*We couldn't afford what other people had. I didn't have a shoe when I was very small.*

*My Mom would get clothes from her nieces or nephews, school uniforms for us to wear. I didn't think other people did that. I thought it was only us. My Mom used to sew for a living and doing gardening, and poetry. We didn't have money to buy grocery. We never used to buy anything out there; all vegetables from our garden and yard. As we get older, I passed my exams, I went to college, and I worked. I used to give all my salary to contribute to the house; my mom used to take my money to the market and buy clothes for*

*us. I was the fourth child. Five sisters and three brothers. We went through hardship. We used to go in the reefs and pick the dry cow dung and put it around the plants, and then go with our bucket and water the plants. We used to go to the rice plants with my dad to pick out the weeds from 9 in the morning to 5 in the evening. Passing through it hard way*

In addition, Devika also had nine siblings.

*My Mom couldn't afford to send us to school with money and new uniforms. Sometimes, especially during the Christmas holidays, it is a hand-me-down thing. Whatever my elder sisters wear, we have to wear. Why can't I get the same? When my Mom would bake a cake, we would just get a slice. When you go to school when it re-opened in September, everybody go with a new bag or a new pair of sneakers or a new uniform. I say why can't we get a new one, too? I feel very sad. But who could I complain to?*

Listening to their stories of financial hardship was difficult, but the stories of gratitude for what they did have were admirable. Many interviewees appreciated their fathers' hard-work, but they also remembered their mothers' struggles. Somehow their fathers could remain emotionally detached; it was not the same for their mothers, who felt personally responsible for the family's financial hardships. It was interesting that several of the women stated that it was their moms who "could not afford clothes or shoes for us, my mom could not send us to school, and my mom could not give us presents" as opposed to stating "my dad" or "my parents."

In keeping with the Indo-Caribbean culture, where families are based on collective, rather than individual, needs or support. Children are expected to demonstrate a strong sense of duty (Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005) especially during hard times. In this study, nine of the thirty women provided examples of the strong sense of duty expected by an older sibling, and, in some



cases, they were speaking of themselves. As the family shield, older siblings were expected to assume various roles, especially after a parent's death, divorce or during abuse. For instance, sometimes older siblings had to forsake school for work, in order to contribute to the household income. According to Leela, *"after my Dad died, my brothers and sister all work and give her money. By having all these bigger brother and sister, who act like mother and father, I didn't really miss my Dad. They were comforting me and, if I am mad, they were there for me. They were like a mother and father to me."* They also served as a shield between their abusive fathers and their mothers and younger siblings.

*Geeta: As a little child....I took the role on of sheltering my brother and my sister. My mom was too quiet – so I sheltered them. Growing up in that home made me want to be more than that. I always said when I grow up I would never be like that. I never cried with my mom; My sister cried. I didn't. I felt if I broke down it wasn't good for my sister or my brother. I bear the brunt of the emotional scar.*

*Sanya: The hardest part was missing my sister. When I was still living with my parents, they offered me to go into foster care. I didn't know much about it. I stayed there for her. I thought if I was there I could protect her. Of course after they left I couldn't protect her. That was harder for me than actually being abandoned. I don't know what is going to happen to my sister. I felt that my mother wouldn't be able to handle it emotionally. You have this anger toward your mother but at the same time you are trying to be protective of her and her emotions.*

While still in their teenage years, many of the mothers were forced to become an adult overnight:

*Kamla: The abuse was to my mom and my brother. My brother got blamed for everything that I did because he was the older; he would hit my brother. When my father would beat my mom; one time my brother got up and hit my father. My brother was probably 12 years old.*

*Meena: After the age of 11, when they got divorced, I was the eldest of two sisters and I started adopting some of the roles of my mom. Cooking and cleaning plus going to school; it was interesting, and I gained a lot of experience from it at that age. Have to do so many things. I learned so much. Sometimes it was overwhelming.*

*Smita: I had three older brothers and being the only girl I had to be an assistant to my mother and help with a lot of chores and help for my older brothers and then I had two younger sisters. Moments of coming home and having all chores and it was a task because then you had school work and getting ready for exams between trying to help my mom. I had to take the Common Entrance exams in high school and I could have done a lot better but I was like a second mom in the home.*

Within the Indo-Caribbean community, there is limited attention given to how the early assumption of these adult roles impacts an individual later in life. The results of this study demonstrate that, although mothers may have been the first point of contact for the struggles discussed above, nonetheless, a lack of familial or institutional support, combined with silence, may have worsened the effects of these problems. These struggles are internalized and transmitted inter-generationally. It is remarkable to note the resiliency of the mothers in this study and how their experiences provided them with the strength to create a better life for themselves and their children in order to prevent a replication of their own difficulties in their

offspring. Their resiliency can be seen in their positive thinking and approaches to life, and in their hard-work, dedication and commitment to being better parents.

### Theme 3: Indo-Caribbean Influences on current parenting

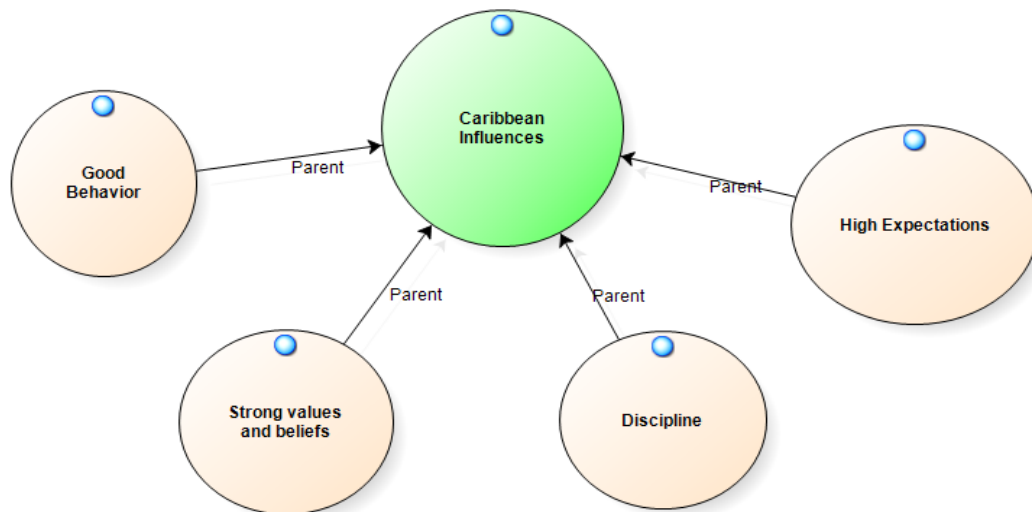


Figure 3. NVivo 10's Model of Indo-Caribbean Influences. The sub-themes include: A. High expectations, B. Strong values/beliefs, C. Good behavior and discipline.

Growing up in the Caribbean, the women talked about being raised “*the right way*,” by which they meant that they were raised with high expectations, and strong values and beliefs, including an expectation of good behavior and discipline. These high expectations helped shape a large part of their childhoods. These principles were underscored by a belief in the values of hard-work, education, and good behavior for many of the children.

**A. High expectations.** In this study, nineteen of the thirty women talked about the expectations that their mothers had for them. These high expectations were focused on such values such as respect for authority, having good behavior, being decent, responsible, hardworking, and honest. These expectations were considered necessary in ensuring their

children's long-term success. More than half of the mothers talked about how stern their own mothers had been and how much they feared "the look."

Chandra: *She taught us she always wants her kids to be decent, grow up and know how to live; know how to care for family and know your spending; how to budget yourself. If you have a little amount of money, know how to spend it to make your ends meet.*

Leela: *My mom said as a girl you have to grow up, learn to respect yourself, cook, clean – in order to get a good husband; that is the Guyanese way. If you don't know how to make roti you not a good wife.*

Sanya: *She taught us the value of hard work. Daddy was a very unreliable provider. He is very picky; he wants to do carpentry and that's it. He would go away and sometimes he would come back with no money.*

Tara: *My mom was very authoritarian and she always the one that was like this is the way it is and this is the way it's going to be. There was no compromise. With the whole friend's thing – if I had to go out with friends an older cousin would have to go with us. My mom was like "no I want to prevent her from making any mistakes." She held on very tight.*

Furthermore, these expectations also emphasized that going to school and getting an education would result in a better future for their children.

Devika: *She always wanted her child to have education. She always encourages us to go to school. Take our education and we gonna be somebody good later on. All of us came out with a high school degree. Three of us were teaching, which was good. It was a struggle, but we made it good. She encouraged us to be honest and ask. Never steal from anybody. Be honest and do your best. She always wanted me to become a teacher.*

Esha: *Encouraged to go to school to take education, but we never want to go. My one sister went to high school. Oldest sisters never went to high school. Education is important because she never went to school.*

Geeta: *She taught me that school was important. Some of the values she instilled in me, when I was younger; when somebody says something harsh to you, walk away. Every silver lining has its own cloud. She would tell us, don't bother; every dog has its own day. I would never understand that. I learned that silence is the best defense. If you start yelling and screaming, you are the same as that person. Those are things that she instilled in me.*

Meena: *We have our culture in a way that you are expected to be on your best behavior, practice good manners, respect elderly, help around the house. She did as every mother would want for a child. My mom expects us to excel and do best in school.*

Chitra: *They wanted every generation different. They wanted us to be better off the other generation. Try to do better. My parents would say: ok, try to do better than I did.*

**B. Strong values and beliefs.** Anupa, Chitra, Deepa, Devika, Leela, Sanya, Shanti and Usha recalled their parents being overly strict and overprotective, which was evidenced by having to do homework, going to school, and taking education seriously. Leela said that her father's "*ambition was for all his kids to have a good education,*" while Sanya reported that "*they instilled in me from a young age the value of hard-work and education.*"

These strong values and beliefs not only played a role in supporting hard-work and education, but they also helped to reinforce good behavior in their daughters. For instance, Chitra discussed that her mother "*just wanted us to go to school, take our education, be good girls out there, ya know. No boyfriends. You know how it goes. Teach us to cook, to clean the*

house.” The same goes for Shanti, “*I wasn’t allowed to go anywhere and, if I do – she always told me before the sun goes down, make sure you come home.*”

According to Anupa, “*from the time I was about 8 we were doing after-school classes, so it was...it was nice, but it was very much concentrated on school. School was a big deal. Even when we came home, my grandfather was like “where is your report card” you know. And you had to take it to show him. Even the report card, it was a little flimsy booklet and it had to be wrapped in plastic. And I remember mom would go get like the tougher plastic that you would use like over tables. Even that had to be neat. For the teachers, for them, and my grandparents. It had to be a certain way. It was good, but like certain things had to be done a certain way, and there was no real exception to it. That’s how we were raised. You know strong values. Education was big.*”

**C. Good behavior.** Valuing good behavior was shared by many women, such as Adrika, Anupa, Bibi, Chandini, Chandra, Chitra, Deepa, Devika, Geeta, Smita and Vidya. Indo-Caribbean Parents went to great lengths to ensure that their children were displaying good behavior, both at home and in public. For instance, in the Caribbean, teachers, neighbors or relatives were allowed to reprimand or discipline children if they were behaving outside the norm. Examples of unacceptable behaviors included talking back to elders, going to parties, using indecent language, and not doing well in school. For girls, additional unacceptable behaviors include dressing inappropriately, wearing pants, having a boyfriend or girlfriend, having pre-marital sex, and staying out late at night, to name a few.

*Chandini: They don’t want us to go here and there. They don’t want us to go to movies or go to any club or all of that. Church is ok. A wedding, any religious function. But when it comes to like party and all of that, we couldn’t go. My dad was very strict. We*

*couldn't wear pants when we were back home, but now we came here and we have no choice...the place is cold!*

*Chandra: Caribbean parents believe in decency. Your language, the dressing.*

*Disrespect. American feels like as soon as their kids are teenagers, they are grown and should be independent. Back home, you are a child as long as you are at home, and follow the rules of that home. We were afraid of my father, even though I was married. If he hears you did something wrong; don't go, stay away. We are very enclosed. At a wedding I want to dance, but it is hard to come out, you feel like you are in a shell. You are not exposed. People will think otherwise about you; what will people say.*

**D. Discipline.** In the Caribbean, many believe that “to spare the rod is to spoil the child” (Korbin, 1980, p. 5), and spanking is an acceptable form of parenting among Indo-Caribbean families. Hence, Indo-Caribbean children who deviate from the strict expectations of their parents, teachers and elder relatives are often disciplined by high levels of control, harsh physical punishment or lack of an emotional connection; these practices are institutionally supported (DeYoung & Zigler, 1994; Duburow, 1999; Payne, 1989; Wilson & Berkeley-Caines, 2003).

All of the women remembered being disciplined as children either by strict control or harsh physical punishment and, now, as mothers, many are advocates of this form of discipline. According to Adrika, “*It doesn't hurt to give a little crack now and then again*” or Nalini “*if they do something bad, give them two spank.*”

Many of the mothers in this study were worried about their children coming into contact with other children who did not share their values. Hence, they resorted to higher levels of control to regulate their children's interactions with their peers and outsiders.

This was evidenced through Chandini's statement:

*Well, we raise our kids far different from here. Back home, we used to spank them, yes. Over here, you don't have that. That's why I think these kids going wayward. They need spanking not to hurt them or anything, but just to let them wake up and know what they should do the right thing. No parents want bad things to happen to their children, but I believe in spanking because we have that back home, and I think that's why we be growing up as good kids. We never gave our parents trouble. That was good, you know, because Caribbeans, they want their children to be good. But you know I think that's the law over here. Not to spank or you know I don't believe in that.*

This sentiment was also supported by Meena who said:

*To spare the rod and spoil the child – that is the way we were brought up. Those times I can remember clearly. There are a lot of things that children get away with nowadays, that we can't. We cannot have those attitudes back home. We would get serious spankings. Being a single parent alone with us, my father was very overprotective. Soon, it is dark. You cannot leave home. You cannot go hang out with friends. Strict household. You are expected to go to school and be back home at a specific time.*

Some of the mothers discussed the impact of their parents' "look," meaning a stern look, and use of a strong voice. For Geeta, *"My mother was never a beater. Her voice was very strong and very authoritarian. We were afraid of that. I was very afraid of my Dad. It is very racial when you think about it. Don't bring any black guys in here, because I will kill you. Growing up, we couldn't even look at another race. One thing that diverted us to stay in our culture."* For Leela, as children, they would play hide-and-seek, which could result in a bruised knee. She remembers showing it to her parents, who would say they are *"good for you, you didn't listen."*



Shanti: *My mom was primarily the caretaker for us. Anything I need, I would go to my mom. My dad had this voice that was very heavy, and my other two siblings were very afraid of him. I was brought up in fear – I grew up with fear. I was never punished – we were never hit. When I say fear - I don't mean the regular fear – it's like the fear of speaking up. We were told kids should be seen and not heard. Even if you do something, even if it was right, you weren't allowed to speak for yourself.*

All the mothers did not use harsh punishment as a tool to control their children's behaviors and instead used other alternative methods, such as inductive reasoning. For instance, Indira said that *"My parents' perspective; you can beat your child; it is OK. The things that you say don't really hurt. I don't think the Guyanese understand the damage they can do to a child. They weren't raised to be tuned in to certain behaviors. They are very dismissive. They have the mentality that, in Guyana, we never got sick. You could beat your kids and it didn't matter. They never analyzed the effects it had on society. My Dad used to get beat in school; that is why he didn't finish school."*

Another participant who disapproved of harsh punishment was Sanya:

*Caribbean parents believe that food, shelter and clothing is enough. They don't take time to form friendships and spend time with their children. I think a parents' rod is their word, not the whip, whereas Caribbean people like to use the whip a lot. I raise my child; I just have to give her a look; she knew. If I raised my voice, she used to get upset. Your word should be effective; it should be enough to move your child. You shouldn't have to beat them. Caribbean families from old time, they thought if you had a roof over your head and food in your belly, and clothes, it was enough.*

Based on the review of theme two and the research on discipline (DeYoung & Zigler, 1994; Duburow, 1999; Payne, 1989), it is evident that Indo-Caribbean immigrant families to varying degrees are continuing to mirror Indo-Caribbean influences particularly as it pertains to high expectations as it relates to education, strong values and beliefs, and good behavior. In addition, Indo-Caribbean immigrant parents to a large extent still believe their bond with their children is for life and they go to extreme lengths to safeguard this relationship. On the other hand, while they continue to engage in high levels of control and still believe in the value of discipline many are utilizing less extreme and alternative forms of discipline to achieve desired outcomes in their children. One explanation for the change in belief and practice regarding discipline could be the result of coming into contact with other groups in addition; prevailing beliefs and laws in the United States do not support harsh punishment.

## Theme 4: Cultural and Religious Beliefs and Practices

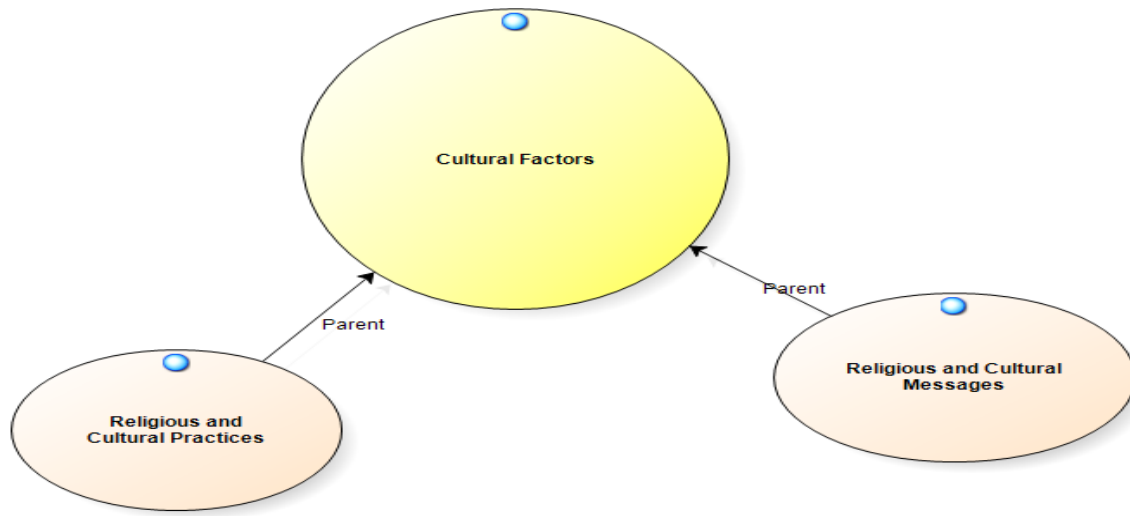


Figure 4. NVivo 10's model of cultural and religious beliefs and practices

Religious teachings shape many aspects of Indo-Caribbean family life including gender identity/roles, parenting, childbirth, marriage and socially appropriate behavior (Kakar, 1991). Indo-Caribbean families are deeply influenced by cultural and religious practices by their temple/mosque/church and religious leaders because the institution of religion provides a strong sense of stability, identity, and cohesion, particularly in the United States. The mothers, regardless of religion, said that they prayed, meditated or visited their altar daily and paid weekly visits or went on special occasions to their temple/mosque/church. For example, the family's place of worship was featured prominently in the living room within many homes I visited.

Adrika explained that her family is Christian and shared that, *“Every morning we say prayers, at lunch we say a prayer and dinner and prayers at night before we go to sleep. We go weekly to church and my daughter sings in church since she was two years old.*

Gita also underscored the central role of religion in her life: *“Religion is a part of everyday life. We are Muslims. My husband practices more – prays five times. I feel like it is in my heart. I try to get at least 3 of the 5 prayers in. I know what an important part religion has been in my life. I want my kids – when I have gone astray – the presence of God is in me. I try to teach him. We try to pray together. It is important to lead by example. They see when we pray. Religion is a way of life and a guiding post throughout everything.”*

Prior to becoming mothers, several of the women noted that their involvement in religious and cultural practices were a matter of familial obligations. However, since becoming mothers, their support and reinforcement of cultural and religious activities became a priority and a vehicle through which they transmitted their cultural heritage to their children.

*As Bibi said, my father would go to Georgetown and buy all the Hindi books. He buy even harmonium and bring it home for us to learn it and know Hindi as a foreign language. Now at this age, I’m not embarrassed to say I’m learning Hindi and then now I regretted that in those days we didn’t learn the harmonium, and so as children got the opportunity now and I know the value for it and they have it now. So I am getting them involved in choosing this culture that is why when we came up here and live up here in Schenectady that is why we choose it here and at temple. We didn’t know anybody else here but we heard about the temple and that is how we end up coming into the temple just for their benefit.”*

*Chitra: We go to the Mandir if they have a cultural show we go to that and stuff like that. You don’t want them to forget where they came from, you know? Like I will always remind them we are Guyanese.*

*Gayatri: It is important to me because I born in the Hindu family and I want my kids to stick with it. Maybe when they grow big if you pick a Christian or Muslim gal, still stick on your religion; stand up for the culture. I want them to know about the religion. I don't have a problem with what they choose in life. I want them to carry on with it.*

*Radika: Growing up I was never in one culture. My Mom was Muslim. When I was with her family I was doing Muslim stuff. I grew up in a Christian home with my Dad. I am married in a Hindu home; for my daughter, we encourage her that she should know what her religion is. I never had the opportunity to know one religion. I was so confused of who I really was. I know Hindus religion is for kids. I know when kids follow the religion they turn out to be better kids. I want her to stick to her religion. I want her to follow it because I want her to be focused in life. Religion does teach you a lot about rights and wrongs. I don't know half of it, but I want her to stick to it. I do feel that I am trying to overcompensate with my daughter, to make up for what I didn't have in my childhood.*

To safeguard their children from being influenced by opposing values and beliefs, mothers go to great lengths to get their children involved in religious education, learn Hindi, play musical instruments, sing and perform in various cultural and religious activities and, assume leadership roles in their perspective religious institutions. Three mothers noted that their children were on the boards of their temples. One mother (Chandini) proudly noted that her daughter at eleven years old was performing the “*Puja*” (a religious ritual) at her temple in Sanskrit. In the Caribbean, a female, conducting the “*Puja*” is unheard of.

*Chandini: Yes well my daughter she is doing a lot in this Mandir. She can read the Hawan, she is reading the Gita, she is reading Sanskrit. She is doing a lot and she love it*

*so I let her do it. I do help participate whenever they need me. I think if they stay out there it's bad. So I rather have her in something that will benefit her in her future life. Yeah it's better to have her come to the Mandir rather than have her go out there partying with friends and you know you don't know who is the right friend and all of that, so I'm happy she's in church."*

*Geeta: I'm not going to be here forever, and the culture has to go on, so you have to teach to the younger ones. If you don't, what are they going to know? If you look back, that is how religion and culture maintains its validity. It came from my Mom.*

Within these cultural and religious activities, there is still a high reliance on the advice from a religious leader to facilitate the name selection following childbirth, to perform the nine-day rituals after the birth of the child, and any accompanying celebrations. For instance, among Hindu families, the *Pandit* (religious leader) is involved in the rituals associated with a traditional wedding, as well as other religious functions, and in marking an auspicious event. Finally, he/she is still being called upon during times of sadness, sickness, and death.

*Anupa: When I was in labor we called the Pandit and he said my husband can't see the child for three weeks and all that was going through my head was like why me? Had I known that this was a bad weekend I probably would have just scheduled to deliver sooner. We were not that religious like my husband and I never went to temple together. You know we probably went to like people's religious function. So for us to suddenly be welcoming this into our relationship and like holding it up so highly when we like never looked upon it for anything.*

*Chandra: When I have my first child my husband went to a priest (Hindu) and the priest said it is not good because your house is not clean. My husband ignored him and went to*

*another priest who said the same thing. Your wife is not clean. He planned puja and did a prosperous religious function. We did the same thing for the second and third child. It is very important when you have kids to do prayers.”*

As evidenced in the discussion of this theme, religious and cultural teachings and practices continue to play an important role in maintaining the cultural heritage and identity among Indo-Caribbean immigrant families living in the United States. Furthermore, maintaining their residence within prescribed ethnic enclaves such as Richmond Hill, Queens and Schenectady, New York not only provides easy access to things they were used to in their native countries such as Indo-Caribbean foods, music, movies, and clothing but more importantly, it allows this group to remain connected to their cultural and religious heritage. In addition, living within close proximity to other relatives, friends and their temple/church/mosque also serves as sources of socialization and stabilization for both themselves and their children.

*Indira: Religion is very, very important. Going to the mosque, praying, on Sundays they have a teacher. It will be their foundation of who they will be. I want them to be what I am and what my husband is – Muslim. If when they are older, they choose differently, they can answer for themselves. I go when I can. My husband can read Arabic so he tries to teach them too. Every day they ask at least one question that pertains to religion.*

*Lolita: Normally we watch Indian show and listen to music. My daughter is playing the harmonium. I want them to get the same kind of like your own religion; we are Hindus; I want her to grow up in a Hindu way. We celebrate New Year and Christmas; but I want her to grow up in my way.*

*Rita: Since I was a little girl I go to church. We play drum, we play harmonium, we play dantal and I sing. The church in Schenectady – Hindu people buy a church. We were the*

*first set of Guyanese to move to Schenectady. How I support my church; I am paying mortgage for the church. I pay every month. They have fundraising. My daughter and son do dancing and performance to support the church. When I am home we play music. I pray before I leave my house. My daughter and son do the same thing. We look at it like it is good to keep in the family. Stay respectable.*

Certainly, all mothers do not experience motherhood in the same way. However, the findings from this qualitative inquiry capture the voices and lived experiences of Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers, providing a more realistic representation of their world which includes the notion of “intense mothering,” the relationship with their mother, Indo-Caribbean influences, and religious and cultural practices. The description of each concept provides an expanded understanding of the everyday challenges, unique experiences and realities facing Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in the United States. These findings also demonstrated a need to move beyond looking at Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers through a deficit lens and instead understand them through a resiliency framework. Such a shift captures their relationships with their mothers and their current role as mothers with their children. Finally, the results also offer greater insights on how and in what way(s) mothers are retaining their ethnic identity or assimilating to life in the United States. The combination of all four themes demonstrates a need for a more accurate theoretical framework to guide interpretations of Indo-Caribbean immigrant family life in North America.

To summarize, changes in demographic trends in the United States, increases in immigration, women’s participation in the labor force, and the number of female headed households have all shaped the discourse surrounding what it means to be a mother. In the past two decades, the scholarship on motherhood has been at the forefront of family research



especially as it pertains to the meanings and identities of mothering. However, to date, the scholarship on motherhood has not included the beliefs and practices of Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in the United States. The findings of this study reveal four central themes: 1) intense mothering; 2) women's relationship with their own mothers; 3) Indo-Caribbean influences; and, 4) cultural and religious practices. Together, these four elements contributed to the meanings and identities of Indo-Caribbean immigrant motherhood.

## **Chapter VII**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

There is a dearth of information on Indo-Caribbean immigrant families in the United States, particularly as it pertains to their family dynamics, identity formation, and conceptions of maternal and paternal roles. Using the tenets of Social Feminism Perspectives, Gender Identity Perspectives, and the Cultural-Ecological Framework, this qualitative study examined the participants' demographic characteristics, their cultural and religious influences, as well as their mother's parenting practices to determine how these elements shaped their meaning, identities and practices of motherhood. The analysis established four main themes: 1) Intense mothering along with sub-themes such as life-changing, blessing and huge responsibility; 2) The participant's relationship with her mother focusing on her mother's nurture, sacrifice, struggles, and high expectations; 3) Indo-Caribbean influences, included high expectations, strong values and beliefs, good behavior and discipline; 4) Cultural and religious beliefs and practices. Based on the results, the above mentioned themes combined with the participants' demographic factors strongly influenced the meanings and practices of motherhood among the participants in this study.

The above mentioned four themes are captured in Appendix H (Conceptual Model of Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Motherhood) is a visual representation that illustrates the experiences of the participants and has nuanced our understanding of this group's continuity and change as it pertains to motherhood. For instance, the participant's relationships with her mother, the notion of "intense mothering" combined with the influences of the Caribbean, cultural and religious practices are evidence of cultural continuity. These factors have collectively shaped the attitudes/beliefs, parental roles, nurture/care, competence, expectations and behaviors of mothering among this group of mothers. The visual representation (Appendix H) also includes examples of change such as the mother's increased educational attainment, enhanced employment status, and decrease family size.

This study examined variations and similarities of changing conceptions and practices of motherhood among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers. The results provide a more current depiction and better understanding of the types of identity development and social negotiation that shape the everyday experiences of Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers. This analysis provides a platform for understanding what cognitive schemas and motivations might undergird Indo-Caribbean immigrant motherhood, especially given the enormity of the structural, historical, religious, and cultural factors. In reviewing the 1999-2000 decade review on motherhood (for review, Arendell, 2000), mothers of other racial and ethnic groups in the United States share some of the themes found in this study. First, like mothers in other racial and ethnic groups, the participants in this study drew upon their childhood and past experiences as a reference for their current roles as mothers. In particular, their experiences of being mothered were discussed in great detail. Second, the participants in this study share similar prevailing practices and beliefs concerning nurturing, care, education, advice, discipline and the ways in

which child rearing and parenting practices are executed. Third, work, whether it was within the home or outside the home, was a common denominator in how motherhood is defined and practiced. Fourth, the father's level of involvement in co-parenting and the influence of gender differentiated roles also played an important part in the mothering experience.

Pertinent to this study are the participants' experience with abuse and living within the confines of a strict patriarchal culture that both constrains women's roles, yet amplifies the importance of motherhood. The opportunity to immigrate to the United States may represent in a sense a flight versus fight from danger. The perceptions, perhaps unconscious, that life in the United States, especially within an existing Indo-Caribbean community, may afford not just economic improvement; but, for women, freedom from a patriarchal culture that condones violence against women. Furthermore, the educational and economic opportunities provide the means for women to be self-sufficient and not entirely dependent on their husbands. In the face of what seems like a very antagonistic stance towards wives by husbands, one could see how the concept of intense mothering is fed. Through a place of mutual love and joy that fills in the lack of love elsewhere. One may say that intense mothering is more prevalent in the United States, as women react, perhaps both unconsciously and deliberately, to alter what was characterized at some point as stern parenting style. Also pertinent to this study are the value of education and the reinforcement of religious and cultural activities which originates in the East Indian culture. It is impressive the range of education and incomes of the women in this study and the lengths through which they are undergoing to reconstitute their native culture for their children.

The tenets of Social Feminism Perspectives, Gender Identity Perspectives, and the Cultural-Ecological Framework were selected because they assist in locating the inter-relationships between gender, culture and motherhood. For instance, the participants' physical

environment, provided close proximity to temples, restaurants, grocery stores and other relatives fostering the complex social interactions necessary in maintaining religious practices and their ethnic identity, as stated in the first sub-system. Their customs and practices, related to child rearing, gender roles, religion and motherhood functioned as the vehicle, described in the second sub-system, which allowed them to maintain a strong hold on native practices and beliefs from the Caribbean. The psychology of the caretaker with respect to women's socialization, lessons learned from their mothers and their cultural identity in shaping their beliefs and practices of parenting, child rearing and motherhood explicitly support the three sub-systems within the Cultural Ecological Models (for review, Super & Harkness, 1997, 2002).

These findings also support a combination of Social Feminist perspectives (Osmond & Thorne, 1993) and Gender Identity perspectives (Mohammed, 1992; Mohammed, 1995; Spade & Valentine, 2004). Social Feminism perspectives focus on the power relations between men and women, exposing the subordinate positions of women in an attempt to redefine and increase women's position within both the family and society. Similarly, Gender Identity perspectives argues that traditional gender roles, as in the case of Indo-Caribbean families, can restrict women and mothers from expressing separate identities and consequently undermine their success. Both theories also privilege the public role for women and mothers by valuing it in a monetary way. There appears to be more support for finding fulfillment outside the home, because there is the long-standing belief that the family held women back. Both theories may view the participants in this study as individuals, who do not have any power, yet fail to recognize this reality. In spite of this, Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers do not subjectively feel oppressed; they are finding more fulfillments within the home and more specifically, in being a mother. The increased sense of self-worth associated with mothering is certainly

pertinent to gender identity; and the recognition of the abuse as wrong, and the differences in power between male and female between lived experiences as children viewing parental relations, and adult relations within the U.S. can be framed using Social Feminism perspectives. Both theories are complementary and intersect well within the cultural ecological framework.

### **Cultural/Religious Practices and Indo-Caribbean Influences**

The results point to the shared elements of Indo-Caribbean, cultural/religious and traditional continuity as a central theme in influencing motherhood among this group of women. In the planning of this study it was assumed that the participants would experience various levels of difficulties with regard to housing, climate, employment, prejudice, and racism in reconstructing and transforming their livelihood and sense of identity. It was also assumed that these difficulties would provide added pressures to acculturate to prevailing practices and beliefs in the United States. More importantly, it was thought that Indo-Caribbean immigrant families would experience personal challenges raising a child in the United States. The findings suggest that although Indo-Caribbean immigrant families experienced various hardships after migrating to the United States, they were resilient and have largely succeeded in the United States. This is evidenced through their employment status, educational attainment, home ownership and livelihoods. Their resilience and success is due to two phenomena, namely: 1) the continuation of religious and traditional practices by means of “an invisible suitcase full of family values and material standards” (Plaze, 2003, p. 21); and, 2) Indo-Caribbean influences contributing to their focus upon how far they have come providing support for the Immigrant Drive Hypothesis (see Foner, 1997).

During the indentureship period, East Indians were brought from India to the Caribbean as Indentured servants to work on the sugar plantations leaving behind their families. When they

arrived in the Caribbean, they were forced to create a new beginning amidst tremendous uncertainty, limited power and immense hardships. During this time, they lost many aspects of their native culture, such as their language. However, out of necessity, women in particular, benefited the most because, for the first time, they gained access to education, employment opportunities and were able to select their own spouse. These opportunities would pay dividends for women and mothers and pave the way for future generations. Although the circumstances that brought them to the United States are different, in some respects, their second immigration was a repeat of history because they left behind family members, were uncertain of their futures, experienced unfamiliar hardships and more importantly, had to reconstitute their lives in a new, unfamiliar context. The literature on Indo-Caribbean immigrant families also included the impact of separation and reunification as families' immigrated and the importance of extended family networks during the separation period. All of the participants were fortunate to immigrate to the United States as a family, including both parents and children. Nevertheless, they left behind many members of their extended family networks such as siblings and in-laws who once provided support for their family stability.

Similar to their ancestors' settlement and adjustment in the Caribbean, the mothers who immigrated to the United States utilized traditional practices and their collective history to rebuild their native culture, identities and lives in the United States. In doing so, they are putting their painful past behind and utilizing their arrival to the United States as a second chance at creating a better life. This phenomenon is based on the painful and dire circumstances they left behind and the drive to make it against the odds by intentionally focusing on how far they have come (the positive) rather than how far they still have to go (the negative). For instance, in addition to balancing employment outside the home, mothers are also maintaining traditional

mothering roles that depict the devoted wife and mother. Secondly, they are electing to live within various ethnic enclaves such as Queens or Schenectady, New York, permitting a smoother transition and the ability to remain culturally distinct. The literature review on Indo-Caribbean families (Chapter III) discussed the importance of ethnicity in contributing to the bond and identity among this group of immigrants. In many cases, this bond helps to reinforce a unified group identity. One of the questions on the Family Background questionnaire asked participants to identify their ethnicity. The options included: Indo-Caribbean, East Indian, Guyanese/Trinidadian, Indian, American, and others. Of the thirty mothers, twenty-one identified as Guyanese/Trinidadian, three indicated Indo-Caribbean, four selected East Indian, and one each identified as Indian and American. Hence, these results suggest a strong allegiance to both nationality and Indo-Caribbean influences in determining their ethnic identity.

Immigrant parents see a brighter future for themselves and their children by means of educational attainment (see Foner, 1997). Among the participants, the value of education continues to remain high and as a result parents work extremely hard so that their children can have the opportunity to earn a higher level of education than they did. Indo-Caribbean families are regarded as collective and in response children are expected to demonstrate a strong sense of duty to their parents (Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005). Parallel to their ancestors, the mothers in this study are going to great lengths to maintain cultural and religious practices through involvement with the temple and the reinforcement of gender differentiated roles. For their children, many parents fear negative influences from dominant American practices; therefore, there continues to be a strong emphasis on education, high expectations and discipline. For instance, participants were asked “*what if any challenges have you experienced raising a child in the United States?*” Fifteen participants said that it is the same as their native countries, and that they have not

experienced any difficulties. On the other hand, eleven participants said that it is different and finally, one participant said that it is a combination of both. The differing responses shed light on what immigration means to each individual or family, why do individuals immigrate and what are they leaving behind?

### **Participants' relationship with their Mothers and "Intense Mothering"**

Motherhood is intertwined at the individual, familial and societal levels. The mothering role consists of life-changing events, blessings, and happiness. On the other hand, this role also consists of expectations, challenges, and difficult decision making as it pertains to balancing work and family, husband/wife roles, single motherhood, poverty and competing North American practices and beliefs. The literature review on motherhood (Chapter IV), combined with the limited number of studies on Indo-Caribbean immigrant families, contributed to a number of inferences in the planning of this study. For instance, it was assumed that traditional ideologies of motherhood among white, middle-class, heterosexual marriages in the United States would overshadow and limit the identities and experiences of motherhood. According to the study, however, the notion of "intense mothering" reveals that, in spite of many demographic and gender role changes in the United States, the traditional definitions of motherhood as defined by East Indian and Hindu beliefs are more typical of this population.

Most of the participants in this study were significant wage earners. Their immigration to the United States allowed these women's roles to expand, outside the home, while not displacing a highly valued and culturally-embedded core aspect of their identity. These women found strength and self-fulfillment in their primary role as mothers and as a result, do not feel oppressed due to competing standards set by major ethnic groups in the United States.



It was also assumed that the participants' beliefs and practices about motherhood would change once coming to the United States. The assumption is that dominant beliefs about gender roles, equality in childcare, and household roles among major ethnic groups in the United States are better. Eleven participants said that their beliefs and practices about motherhood stayed the same or changed only slightly. On the flip side, seven participants said their beliefs and practices about motherhood changed since coming to the United States. It appears as though neither the number of years in the U.S. nor demographic factors played a role in their responses. These findings both support and depart from the idealized scripts of Indo-Caribbean motherhood, and provide evidence of how the women have configured their own personal identities, cultural schemas, and internal working models of motherhood. This may change how researchers think about motherhood, in that the concept of motherhood may reflect a continuum of experiences and interpretations that cannot be easily generalized.

For Hindus, the images of both Mother Sita and/or Radha influence the social constructions of motherhood and womanhood among Indo-Caribbean women. This may be true; however, the findings suggest that it is the participants' mothers' struggles, sacrifice and nurture during their childhood that have shaped the lenses through which they viewed their mothers and more importantly, how it informed their roles as mothers today. Motherhood is considered to be inter-generational and the results of this study are an example in support of this contention. It is important to note, that the participants are still continuing to rely heavily on their mothers for childcare, guidance and support. As mothers today, many of the participants see themselves following their mother's footprint through the relationships with their children. The participants in describing their roles as mothers discussed the huge responsibilities of being a mother.

Nevertheless, they also characterized their mothering roles as a blessing and life-changing through which they found refuge and validation.

With regard to the couple relationship, the institution of marriage is still held in high esteem. Most of the mothers in the study were married and unlike their ancestors whose marriages were arranged, each of the women selected their own spouse. Once becoming wives and mothers, the women immediately assumed their roles for which they were socialized from young by their mothers. The interview questions did not address the role(s) of their children's father or husband in the participants' construction of motherhood. From the responses, the fathers shared economic resources; however, the mothers maintained a strict division of labor and viewed child rearing solely as their responsibility; partly contributing to limited co-parenting. It appears as though these mothers have established a semi-permeable membrane between their parent-child relationship(s) and their husbands, because there was a lack of reference to their husbands in their interviews. This demonstrates the unique challenges Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers face as they are forced to demonstrate a strong lineage to native identities of motherhood and at the same time adapt to dominant/competing views.

Following this, many of the mothers in the study spoke about their painful experiences with their fathers, providing evidence of the dominant patriarchal system within which women and mothers experienced significant levels of oppression (Mohammed, 1995). This system of patriarchy has been a precursor to abuse (physical, emotional and mental) and, in the Caribbean, there is institutional acceptance for this behavior. As a result, rates of domestic violence in Guyana (based on self-reports) is the highest among the Caribbean countries (Caribbean Human Development Report, 2012). Although the question of domestic violence was not asked during the interviews, two women talked about their traumatic experiences as victims of domestic

violence. In the United States, there are strict laws and policies in place to respond to domestic violence, and more importantly, there is support for the victims. It is unclear what the rates of domestic violence among Indo-Caribbean immigrant families are in the United States.

In closing, this sample of thirty first-generation Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers were all raised in the Caribbean countries of Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. They all immigrated to the United States as a family (husband and children) and are living within the ethnic enclaves of Queens and Schenectady, New York. These ethnic enclaves help to increase efforts in maintaining their culture of origin as opposed to becoming Americanized. This study set out to examine the conceptions and practices of motherhood and mothering among Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in the United States. In doing so, the results revealed that many of the mothers had positive childhoods which consisted of close relationships with their parents, particularly their mothers for the nurture, care and sacrifice she provided. They are also thankful for growing up in the Caribbean and having strong ties to their community, religion and Indo-Caribbean culture which consisted of high expectations, a strong emphasis on family and education, and strong values and beliefs. On the other hand, many of the participants also experienced various levels of adversity and/or tragedy during their childhood via financial hardships, death, divorce, harsh disciplinary practices and witnessing domestic violence. These experiences (both positive and negative) have consequently influenced the lens through which they conceptualize and practice motherhood. The participants do not see their childhood negatively because their lives and upbringing were common with their culture, their community and native upbringing in the Caribbean. They came away learning and improving from the experience; however, to an outsider, some of their childhood experiences may be difficult to read.

Today, these mothers are doing better because their childhood experiences (both positive and negative) have forced them to become more resilient and determined to provide better opportunities for themselves and their children. Beginning with their immigration to the United States, their arrival as a family has created opportunities for a new beginning. In looking back and reflecting on their childhood, it appears that Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers in this study are making conscious efforts to cope and be resilient by gaining employment outside the home and taking steps towards acquiring an education. While difficult, these efforts demonstrate that Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers are finding ways to make both their lives and their children's better. Furthermore, their increased education and exposure to prevailing childrearing practices in the United States have influenced traditional Indo-Caribbean parenting models to produce more quality in their relationships with their children. Finally, the acceptance of more egalitarian roles, pressure towards men's increased roles in the home and no tolerance for domestic violence. These components have provided opportunities for a better marriage resulting in the sharing of more household responsibilities with their husbands and having more power/say in the decision making process.

The results of this study cannot be generalized to all Indo-Caribbean or immigrant mothers due to the non-probability sampling approach. This research suggests that similar studies should be done with other immigrant groups to explore similarities and differences. For instance, one may investigate how other immigrant mothers utilize religion and cultural practices to shape their notion of motherhood and construct a life in a new world. One could examine whether the relationship between Indo-Caribbean immigrant women and their mothers are as significant among other immigrant groups.

It is also evident that traditional definitions of motherhood among majority groups in the United States combined with the continual usage of traditional methodological approaches to exploring motherhood have influenced the findings of past research and to some extent still continue to do so. With this in mind, future research on motherhood should focus attention upon developing a framework that supports diverse mothering experiences. A preponderance of evidence suggests that Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers are struggling with varying levels of depressive symptomology. Due to cultural and religious ideologies as well as the maintenance of traditional ideas and practices about motherhood they may not be soliciting and/or receiving adequate intervention.

The narrative of this study drew on painful stories of abuse, neglect, death, divorce, financial hardships and other personal struggles prior to immigrating to the United States. Having never had any psychological counseling to help them process their childhood experiences, the stories remained hidden. An investigation of the effects on the victims (both mother and children) is of absolute importance in understanding how Indo-Caribbean children become parents. The sadness and distress exhibited in the mother's stories spoke to the need for increased research and intervention services within the Indo-Caribbean community both in the Caribbean and throughout the United States to address the problem of domestic violence.

### **Implications for Practice**

Recognizing that victims of domestic violence, women and children, need to feel secure and supported, some Caribbean governments are beginning to seriously address these issues, albeit within the confines of patriarchy and limited resources. The Guyanese government has signed the Skeldon Accord. Trinidad and Tobago currently have public campaigns against domestic and family violence. Although these are a start, the Indo-Caribbean community

(families, temples, and other organizations) both in the Caribbean and the United States is still behind in the development of increase awareness and intervention programs.

There is an urgent need for increased education and intervention programs within the Indo-Caribbean communities, both in the Caribbean and the United States, to address the abuse that mothers and their children endure and the silent stories they are continuing to harbor. Abuse and “keeping it hidden” are part of the Caribbean culture and as a result, Indo-Caribbean families are not receiving the adequate support and the interventions they need to address the impact of family violence and abuse. Unfortunately, these experiences can have long term mental health consequences on the continued suffering of this community. Hence, there is an urgent need to increase our awareness of Indo-Caribbean immigrant mother’s psychological health as it pertains to stress, depressive symptomology, hidden stories and abuse (both as a child and adult).

Second, there is a great need to establish intervention strategies that can lend themselves to more effective ways of communicating, growth and trust between Indo-Caribbean immigrant parents and their children, thus fostering opportunities for increased communication, flexibility and understanding. More often than not, harsh punishment and high control are mechanisms used by Indo-Caribbean parents to encourage socially appropriate behaviors in their children. To a large extent, Indo-Caribbean immigrant parents control and/or limit their children’s environment and access to social activities outside of religious events in an effort to keep them safe, oftentimes going so far as deterring their children from developing close relationships with friends who are non-Indo-Caribbean. The continual usage of these tools limits their children’s ability to recognize their own cultural disposition and more importantly to learn and build a rapport with others outside of their community.

Finally, Indo-Caribbean immigrant families in this study relied heavily on their religious leaders and institutions for guidance, stability, cohesion and support. Thus, this is an opportunity for religious organizations and leaders to recognize the value that is placed on them and create outreach programs that will bring these issues to light so that women, children and families can receive the help they need. Individuals' actions and behaviors today are an outcome of past experiences and the only way to break the cycle of dysfunction within the Indo-Caribbean community is to address the family baggage and stress individuals are carrying. The constructions of manhood, womanhood, motherhood and fatherhood should not be left only to religious edicts and images. These teachings need to be conveyed in ways that are realistic, applicable, and have the goal of creating equity between men and women. Everyone including religious and political leaders, educators, counselors, grandparents, parents and children, should be part of the solution. It is not enough for researchers to simply conduct and publish research articles, or for religious leaders to turn a blind eye to family dysfunctions and focus solely on spiritual aspects. Interventions need to move beyond theory to the development of programs that will effectively provide the assistance that Indo-Caribbean immigrant families and more importantly, Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers.

### **Limitations of this Study**

The findings from this study have extended our knowledge on the topic. Nonetheless, the topic has not been exhausted. The results only reflect the sentiments and experiences of the participants. The sample size is respectable for a qualitative study; however, it is limited to first generation Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers living within the enclaves of Queens and Schenectady, New York. Many of the participants in this study continue to struggle with painful experiences from their childhood with no help in processing the harm. These experiences and

feelings can manifest themselves in varying levels of depressive symptomology; therefore, the results of this study should be carefully interpreted.

This study only included mothers who were actively parenting (children under the age of 18 yrs. old); it would be interesting to see whether the ages of the children made a difference in the mother's responses in future studies. It did not make a difference in this study. Secondly, the majority of the sample was from low-to-middle-income working families which increased their familial financial hardships. Would their responses have been different if they were from middle to upper incomes families? The sample also only included biological mothers; it would be beneficial to include Indo-Caribbean immigrant women who are adopted or surrogate mothers.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Given the results of this study, there are clearly many issues that came out in the interviews such as the role of men in the conceptualization of motherhood, domestic violence and harsh disciplinary practices. This study clearly suggests more investigation to determine whether: 1) a different methodology would have produced similar results; 2) does employment or education status make a difference in how they embrace and value motherhood; 3) is there is a continuity of domestic violence in their current homes; 4) for Indo-Caribbean families who immigrated to the United States do they see their experiences differently as compared to those who are still living in their native country; and finally, 5) will there be convergence and/or divergence in findings for other immigrant groups.

### **Hypotheses for future research can include:**

- How do dysfunctional family dynamics currently impact women's views of motherhood?



- How do conceptions and practices of motherhood vary based on employment status, immigration, education, geographic location or immigration status?
- How do women define the division of household labor between their role and their husband/partner's role?

## Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

A Qualitative Research Study on the  
Conceptions and Practices of

# Motherhood

among Indo Caribbean  
Immigrant Mothers

Living in the United States

For questions and/or to participate in this study, please contact  
Darshini Roopnarine, MSW, Doctoral Candidate at Syracuse University

315-575-4941  
or via email at  
[roopnatd@lemoyne.edu](mailto:roopnatd@lemoyne.edu)



### Brief Description of Study:

**Little is known about how Indo Caribbean immigrant mothers construct their roles, identities, and experiences as mothers.**

Indo Caribbean Immigrant Mothers are being sought to participate in a research study that will examine

- (1) *The meaning of motherhood* (changing conceptualizations, challenges, values and beliefs);
- (2) *The practice of motherhood* (social support, spouse/partner, childcare, cultural/religious activities) and how they collectively determine motherhood among Indo Caribbean immigrant mothers living in the United States.

### You are eligible to participate if you meet all of the following criteria:

- (1) Indo Caribbean immigrant women who are biological mothers with at least one child under the age of eighteen. (Can include children who were born in either the Caribbean or the U.S.)
- (2) Indo Caribbean immigrant mothers who were born in one of the English-Speaking countries of Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados, Grenada, and Antigua.
- (3) Indo Caribbean immigrant mothers who immigrated to the United States within the last 10 years (2002 – 2012) and are Permanent Residents and/or US Citizens.

**You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one discussion that will be arranged ahead of time either in your home or another convenient location.**

# Appendix B: Informed Consent Form



1

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND FAMILY STUDIES  
**INFORMED CONSENT**  
DAVID B. FALK COLLEGE  
OF SPORT AND HUMAN DYNAMICS

**Title: Conceptions and Practices of Motherhood among Indo Caribbean Immigrant Mothers Living in the United States**

**I. Purpose:**

You are invited to be in a research study. The study is to understand how you define and practice motherhood as an Indo Caribbean immigrant woman living in the United States. Approximately 40 Indo Caribbean Immigrant mothers will be recruited for this study.

**II. Procedures:**

You will be asked to answer questions in a one-on-one interview and a brief family background questionnaire. The questions pertain to the meaning and practice of motherhood addresses (attitudes, beliefs, expectations, desires, motivations, parental role, competence, skills, nurture/care and behaviors). The process should take approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours to complete.

The questions will be the same for each participant and all interviews will be audio recorded. These audio-recordings will be kept confidential and will be transcribed electronically using numerical ID's. No names will be used in any published work or public presentation. The audio-recordings will never be used for public presentation and can only be accessed by me or my faculty advisor. The audiotapes and any notes pertaining to our interview will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

**III. Confidentiality:**

Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. We will keep your study data as confidential as possible with the exception of certain information that we must report for legal or ethical reasons, such as child and/or spousal abuse, intent to harm yourself or others. By law we must report incidents of child or elder abuse. We will use coded identification numbers instead of your name on the survey and recorded interviews. Only the student investigator and faculty advisor will see the information you provide. Your survey answers will be kept in locked file cabinets and on the student researcher's computer. All files will be destroyed at the completion of the study. There will be no reference to individual identity when the study information is presented.

**IV. Risks:**

This study may make you feel emotional discomfort. If you begin to feel that your emotions are too much to handle, you may stop taking the survey or participating in the interview. In case you want to see someone to help you to work through any of these difficult feelings, we will provide you with a list of free or low-cost resources that can assist you.

**V. Benefits:**

Your participation will help to advance our knowledge and may lead to development and support of initiatives to assist the Indo Caribbean community in the United States. I hope to understand Indo Caribbean immigrant mothers' meaning of motherhood and your everyday life. How the role of Indo Caribbean immigrant mothers changes through each generation and finally how culture plays a role in how you raise your children in the United States.

EXPIRES

DEC 1 7 2013

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## Appendix C: Interview Questions

The scholarship on motherhood (chapter II), discusses a number of factors that contribute to the conceptualizations and practices of motherhood (Appendix 1). Some of these factors include: societal factors, the couple relationship, cultural factors, the mother, parenting and child rearing, the child and extended family networks. They are interdependent and collectively impact the {attitudes, beliefs, parental role(s), nurture and care, competence, expectations, behaviors} of each mother ultimately shaping her meaning and practice of motherhood. For Indo-Caribbean immigrant mothers, cultural and individual factors appear to be the strongest. The age range of the sample is between infant and eighteen years old; as a result, there are limited questions on care because this factors changes as each child ages. The interview questions for the proposed study were derived from the Conceptual Model of Motherhood (Appendix I) and will be used for each participant:

**Opening Questions:**

- Can you please describe your childhood – for instance, your relationship with your parents (both positive and negative).
- Can you describe the role of your mother in your life – for instance, can you discuss the values she taught you, her expectations for you, and her sacrifices as a parent when you were growing up
- What are common “sayings” that you have heard from your parents and family members growing up about how to raise a child?

**Attitudes/Beliefs:**

- Can you describe the pregnancy and birth of each of your children?
- What does being a mother to your child/children mean to you?

**Parental Roles:**

- What is the role of a mother in a child’s life?
- Are there any differences in the way sons and daughters are raised?
- What are Caribbean’s parents beliefs about child rearing?

**Cultural Practices/Messages:**

- Do you and your children participate in Caribbean cultural/religious events? If yes, to what extent? How and why is it important to you?

**Expectations:**

- How has becoming a mother changed your life?

**Competence:**

- What, if any, challenges have you experienced as an Indo-Caribbean mother raising a child/children in the United States?
- How have your beliefs and practices about motherhood changed or evolved since coming to the United States (ask for examples)

## Appendix D: Family Background Data Sheet

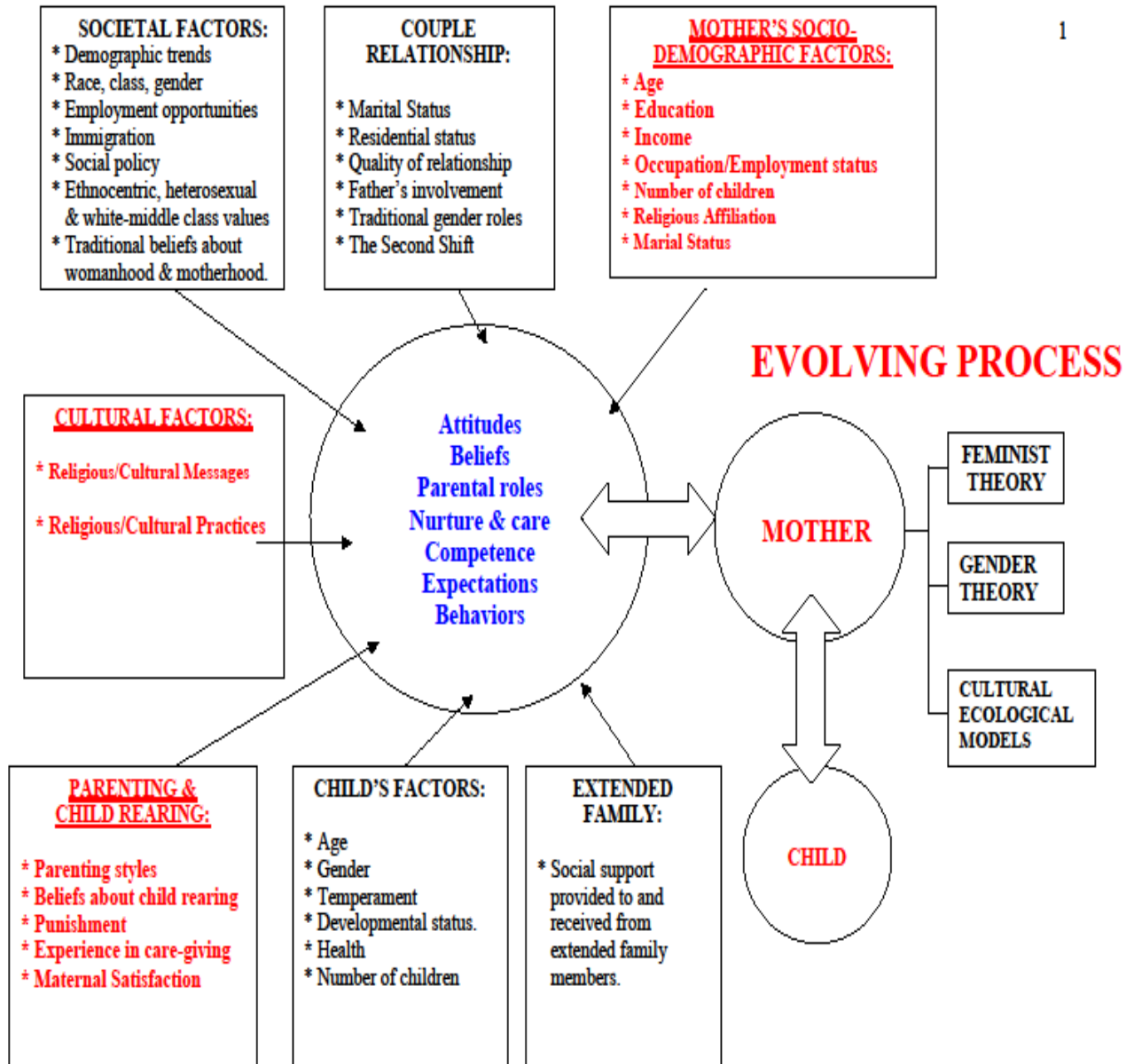
ID # \_\_\_\_\_

### Conceptions and Practices of Motherhood Among Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Mothers Living in the United States

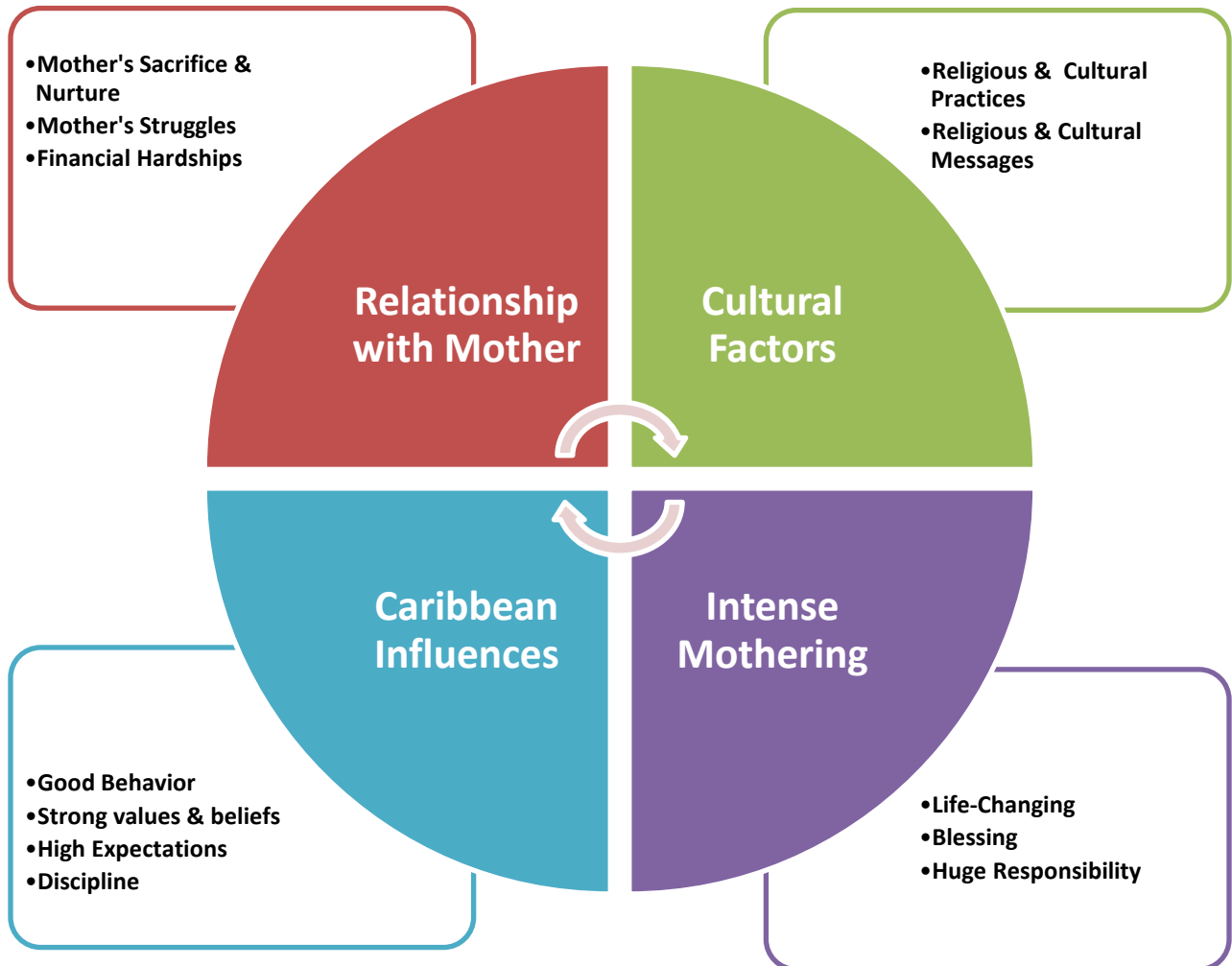
What is your age? _____	Are you currently married? (circle one) Yes _____ No _____				
Where were you born? _____	How many years have you lived in the US? ____				
What is your resident status? _____	How often do you visit your native country per year? _____				
What is your religious affiliation? _____	Do you participate regularly in religious/cultural events? Yes _____ No _____				
<b>How do you identify yourself?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Indo-Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/> East Indian <input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/> Guyanese, Trinidadian, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Indian <input type="checkbox"/> American Other (please specify): _____	<b>What is your family's annual income?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$20,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000 - \$40,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$40,000 - \$60,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000 - \$80,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$80,000 - \$100,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Above \$100,000				
<b>Were you married when you came to the US?</b> Yes _____ No _____	<b>What is the length of your current/past marriage?</b> _____				
What is your occupation? _____	What is your partner's occupation? _____				
<b>What is your highest education level?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School <input type="checkbox"/> High School <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational/Technical School <input type="checkbox"/> Some College <input type="checkbox"/> Associate Degree <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor Degree <input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree and Beyond	<b>What is your partner's highest education level?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School <input type="checkbox"/> High School <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational/Technical School <input type="checkbox"/> Some College <input type="checkbox"/> Associate Degree <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor Degree <input type="checkbox"/> Master's Degree and Beyond				
<b>What is your current employment status?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Full-Time (35 or more hours/week) <input type="checkbox"/> Part-Time (less than 35 hours/week) <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed (looking for work) <input type="checkbox"/> Seasonal/Temporary <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Homemaker <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)	<b>What is your partner's current employment status?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Full-Time (35 or more hours/week) <input type="checkbox"/> Part-Time (less than 35 hours/week) <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed (looking for work) <input type="checkbox"/> Seasonal/Temporary <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Homemaker <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)				
Do you rent or own your home? _____	<b>How many members in the household?</b> _____ <b>How many are extended family members</b> _____				
<b>How many children do you have?</b> _____ <span style="float: right;"><i>Please tell us a little more about each child</i></span>					
<i>Name</i>	<i>Boy / Girl</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Us Born</i>	<i>Caribbean Born</i>	<i>Type of school he/she attends</i>
<b>Did the whole family migrate all at once? (Please explain)</b> <b>Who came first?</b>					

## Appendix E: A Conceptual Model of Motherhood

{This study focused primarily on three aspects of this model: Mother's Socio-Demographic factors, Cultural Factors, Parenting and Child Rearing}



## Appendix F: Main Themes (NVivo 10 Results) of Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Motherhood



## Appendix G: References and Coverage of Main Themes (NVivo 10 Results)

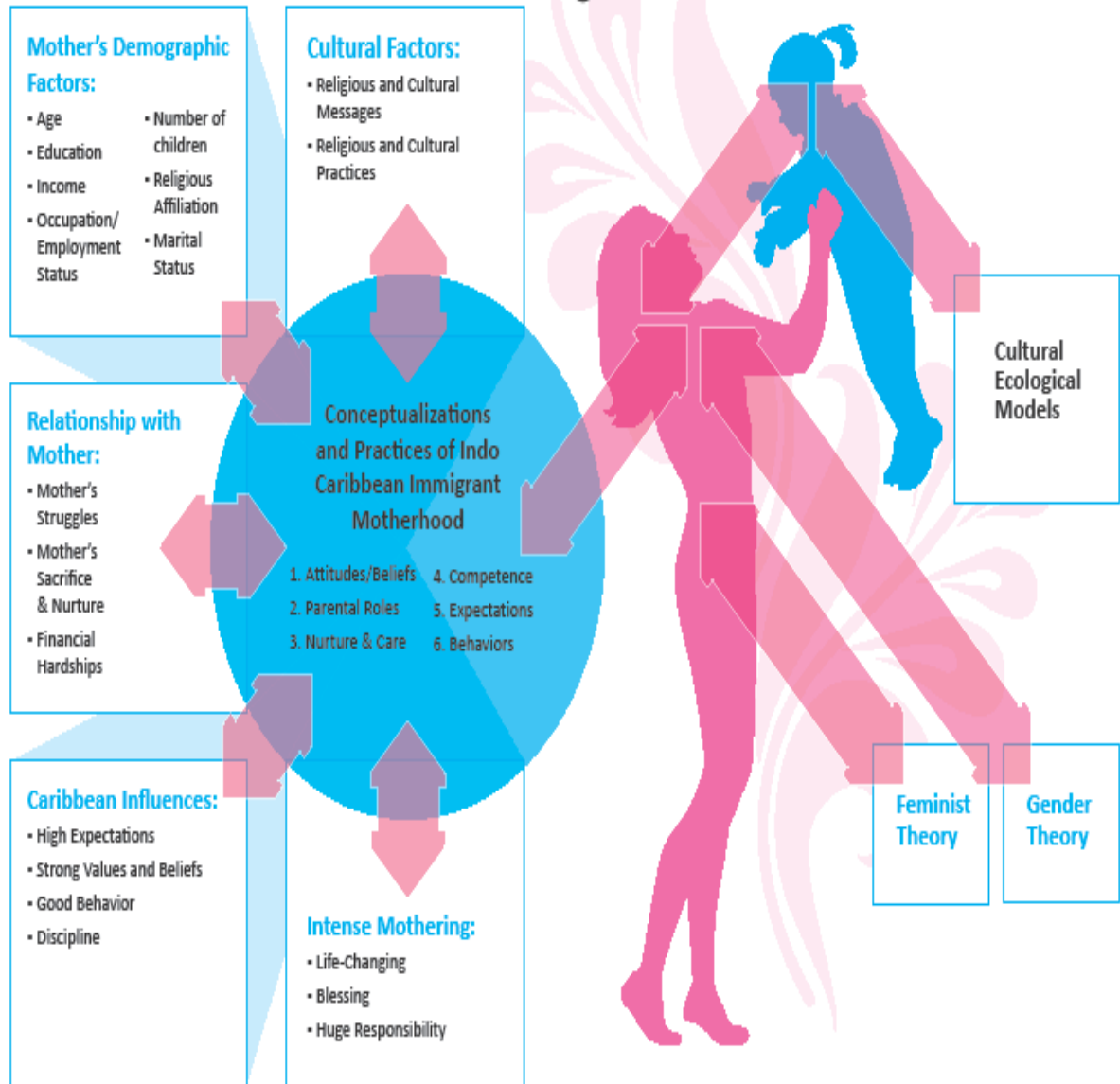
<b>THEME ONE - Participant's relationship with her mother</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please describe your childhood (your relationship with your parents both positive and negative)</li> <li>• Can you please describe the role of your mother in your life? Can you discuss the values she taught you, her expectations for you and her sacrifices as a parent?</li> </ul>		
Sub - Themes	Defined As	NVivo 10 Analysis
<b>Mother's Struggles (Silent Stories)</b>	Abuse, Death, Fear, Harsh punishment, Hard childhood, Lack of love, Unstable father, Alcoholism, Tension, Divorce, Time apart, Abandonment, Loneliness, Separation, See mom struggle, Mom was the protector, Lot of responsibilities	446 References
<b>Mother's Sacrifice and Nurturing</b>	Role model, Protector, Strong, Hard-working, Loving, Ran the house, Giving, Ailing spouse, Lots of kids, Sadness, Worry, Difficult, Crying, Beat, Unequal, Death, Concern, Loneliness, Punished, Abuse, Domestic Abuse, Sickness	185 References
<b>Financial Hardships</b>	Poor family, Financial hardships, Many siblings, Struggled, Dad worked alone, Large family, Farming	244 References
<b>The family's Shield/Older Siblings</b>	Shielded Abuse, Increased adult responsibilities, Became a father/mother figure at an early age, Contributed financially early, Had to help out more, Had to give up school to work	216 References
<b>THEME TWO - Caribbean Influences</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some common "saying" that you heard from your parents and family members growing up about how to raise a child?</li> <li>• What are Caribbean parents' beliefs about child-rearing?</li> </ul>		
Sub-Themes	Defined As	NVivo 10 Analysis
<b>High Expectations</b>	Strict/Stern, Taught good manners, Good values/beliefs, manage the house (budget), To be good wife/mother, Obedient, Practice religion, To be decent, Education, Respect for authority, Enforcer	164 References
<b>Strong Values and Beliefs</b>	Education, Protective, Good behavior, Strong values, Respect authority, Hard-worker	72 References
<b>Good Behavior</b>	Seen and not heard, No smoking, No drinking, Be good, Overprotective, Decency, Respectful Good manners, Polite, When you get older, When you have your own kids	35 References
<b>Discipline</b>	Good behavior, Spanking, Very strict, Supervision, No outing besides church, Strict, Appropriate dress (no pants), Beating, Over protective, Consequences, within limits, Time and place for everything, Cannot go out late	51 References



<b>THEME THREE - Intense Mothering (Life-Changing, Blessing and Huge Responsibility)</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does being a mother to your child/children mean to you?</li> <li>• What is the role of a mother in a child's life?</li> <li>• How has becoming a mother changed your life?</li> </ul>		
<b>Sub - Themes</b>	<b>Defined As</b>	<b>NVivo 10 Analysis</b>
<b>A. Life-Changing</b>	Positively changed my life, Uplifting, More patient, Made me stronger, More tolerant, More passionate, Increase self-worth, Value myself more, Your/my life changed, Grow up, Made me become a woman, Stronger, Transformed my life, Ambitious, It's not about me, it's about my kids	333 References
<b>Teacher/Nurturer</b>	Teach, Extra comfort, Try to fix it, Advice, Teach right from wrong, Teach them the right thing to do, Be there, Guide, Love, Most comforting, Turn to for help, Role model, Time, Be an example	657 References
<b>B. Blessing</b>	Blessing, Total happiness, Means a lot, Thankful, Really nice being a mother, Proud, Happy, Wonderful experience, The World, Love to be a mom, Enjoy being a mom, Amazing, Beautiful, Best Feeling/Pleasure, My children are good, Enjoy them, Beautiful children, We sit and talk together, Open and close with each other, No complains,	
<b>Happy</b>	No amount of money can replace her I feel happy, happiness, Fulfilled your dreams, A kid make you happy, I was born to be a mother, Great becoming a mom, Happy I am a mom, No one that is more important, Now I have a purpose	
<b>C. Huge responsibility</b>	Exhausting, Overwhelming, Lots of responsibilities, To be there for them, To make right decisions, To cook, Don't want them to stray away, Cook all the time, To teach values and good behavior, To set an example, Protect and give them a better life, Fulfill their life, To do everything, To continue their religion/culture, Mold them, Care for them, Not doing enough, Change	457 References
<b>THEME FOUR - Do you and your children participate in Caribbean cultural/religious events? If yes, to what extent? How and why is it important to you?</b>		
Yes (ID): 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 30 No (ID): Sometimes (ID): 7, 9, 17		YES = 19
Yes (ID): 13 No (ID): Sometimes (ID): 28		NO = 4
Yes (ID): 1, 12, 15 No (ID): 23 Sometimes (ID): 29		SOMETIMES = 5
Hindu & Muslim – ID 14 Hindu & Christian – ID 18 NO to any religious participation – ID 19, 20, 26		

### **Appendix H: A Conceptual Model of Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Motherhood**

# Indo Caribbean Immigrant Motherhood



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- B.S.** 1997: **Bachelor of Science**  
Cazenovia College
- A.S.** 1994: **Associate of Applied Science**  
Cazenovia College

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:**

**Director** 2011 to Present  
**Collegiate Science Technology Entry Program (CSTEP)**  
Le Moyne College, Syracuse, New York

CSTEP is an academic enrichment program developed to increase the number of historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students pursuing careers leading to professional licensure or professions in mathematics, science, technology and health-related fields. Students in the program also include veterans, non-traditional, transfer, ESL, and commuters.

- Lead efforts to implement the first Collegiate Science Technology Entry Program at Le Moyne College, including developing a vision that exemplifies the *OneLeMoyne* mission.
- Manage and approve all expenses, records, and assure compliance with NYSED and Le Moyne College regulations. Write all evaluative reports and grant re-submissions for a \$608,000 grant.

- Supervise and provide staff development for a team of ten professional and student staff and an advisory committee.
- Direct ongoing program assessment and analysis, mapping longitudinal data to our strategic plan, and guide overall planning, budgeting, decision making and program evaluation.

**Director**

2011 to 2012

**Service Learning Grant: the Corporation for National and Community Service**

Le Moyne College

- Wrote and received funding (\$50,000) from the Corporation for National and Community Service to promote service learning.
- Established a community-wide Health and Science Fair in Syracuse. Built partnerships among the CSTEP Programs, faculty, staff and students from Le Moyne College, the Syracuse EOC, Syracuse Community Health Center, Syracuse University Health Services, and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

**Director**

**College Access Challenge Grant Program (CACGP)**

2012 to 2013

Partnership between Le Moyne College and Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center (EOC)

Le Moyne's CSTEP Program received a grant (\$50,000) from HESC to create a program focused on college access. CSTEP partnered with the Syracuse EOC to develop a Scholars Program for historically underrepresented, economically disadvantaged and non-traditional students.

- In collaboration with the EOC, created the first EOC Scholars Program that focused on college admissions, financial aid, career services and academic development. Additional services included GED, ESL, computer certification and individual advisement.
- Fostered partnerships among Le Moyne's Offices of Admissions/Transfer, Financial Aid, Career Services, the Syracuse EOC, and other leaders to establish a blended curriculum.
- Developed enrichment activities that raised student educational aspirations through student readiness classes, college awareness activities, college visits, shadow days, college and financial preparation workshops. Additional services focused on workforce readiness skills.

### Select Highlights of Accomplishments at Le Moyne College:

- Received funding for two external grants (CACGP \$50,000 and Service Learning \$50,000) that created many opportunities in the areas of students success and access.
- Served over five hundred students who are historically underrepresented, economically disadvantaged, non-traditional, ESL, and GED through the CACGP Program.
- Developed over sixty student civic engagement opportunities to connect classroom knowledge with service in the areas of health and wellness.
- Created strong partnerships with the Admissions and Transfer Office, Communication Department, Financial Aid and faculty to direct the marketing, branding, and recruitment process, resulting in meeting/exceeding enrollment goals (with SED and LeMoyne College permission).
- Fostered a strong community of students with retention rates of 80 percent in the program.
- Developed a curriculum of supportive services that integrates academic, professional and personal student enrichment activities, including research opportunities, internships, graduate/professional preparation, standardized test preparation, a career development speaker series, peer tutoring and mentorship to improve science and mathematics comprehension.
- Implemented college-wide collaboration across Counseling, Advising, Tutoring, Career Services, Financial Aid and Continuing Education to provide support and advising that is solution-focused and addresses academic, financial, and career goals. Results included a program student GPA higher than the college average and 85 percent graduation to employment or graduate school attendance.
- Implemented Noel-Levitz student-learning best practices and created an academic workbook that is employed by other CSTEP programs, Le Moyne Upward Bound and the Syracuse EOC.
- Aligning with current trends, designed CSTEP's first *Wired* summer program utilizing the internet and Blackboard to deliver a three-week program during which pre-freshman CSTEP students interacted remotely with staff and students to with modules on: Active Learning, Enhanced Literacy, The Research Process, Inspire and Motivate, and Reflection.
- Developed and led efforts to allow transfer students to shadow/participate in the academic and professional workshop series, mentoring and transition services of the CTSEP program. Targeted transfers from community colleges (OCC, MCC, HVCC, etc.) who were CSTEP participants as well as non-participants to allow all transfers to benefit from these services.



**Director**

2010 to 2011

**Assistant Director**

2006 to 2010

**Collegiate Science Technology Entry Program**

Morrisville State College, Morrisville, New York

- Led the first Collegiate Science Technology Entry Program at Morrisville State College, including efforts to develop and implement a vision for CSTEP that exemplifies the philosophy and commitment to open access and expanding the educational pipeline.
- Managed expenses, maintained budget records and assured compliance with NYSED and university policies including all reports and grant submissions (CSTEP \$200K, Service Learning \$25K, Internal Scholarship Account \$20K).
- Supervised a full-time Assistant Director, Social Work Interns (MSW) and twenty-five student employees. Additionally, led the CSTEP/Service Learning Program Advisory group consisting of ten faculty and staff members.
- Successfully worked across divisions and the offices of Student Development, Judicial Affairs, Tutoring, EOP, Advisement, Disability Services, Career Services, Admissions, Financial Aid, Health and Counseling Services to maximize opportunities for internships, employment, enrichment activities and student outcomes.
- Oversaw the assessment of the program's effectiveness and shared results with students, Vice Presidents, internal and external constituents and NYSED via regular reports.

**Select Highlights of Accomplishments at Morrisville State College:**

- The results of five years of longitudinal data on student outcomes led to grant funding to support the successful re-application of the CSTEP program (\$800,000 for four years), the first Science Technology Entry Program (STEP) (\$600,000 for four years), and the first Service Learning Program (\$50,000).
- Led efforts to develop a curriculum and counseling services that are systemic, interdisciplinary and results-driven, integrating strong financial, academic, professional and social support for student engagement and success.
- Developed and facilitated two weekly workshop series focused on academic and professional development. Also implemented peer and professional tutoring, individual mentoring, internships, and research opportunities to further enhance student outcomes.
- Received SED and Morrisville's approval to over-enroll by twenty students each semester due to an 88 percent retention rate in the CSTEP Program.
- Developed a minimum of twenty student placements each semester to support internship/research/experiential learning both on and off campus.

- Established a strong visible presence and reputation on campus and within SED.
- Developed parallel services to allow transfer students to participate in CSTEP activities to boost engagement and retention.

**Assistant to the Director**

2001 to 2005

**Residential Services, SUNY Cortland, Cortland, New York**

- Served on a team that supervised fourteen hall directors. Directly supervised two hall directors and one full-time support-staff member.
- Served as the liaison between the Office of Residential Services and Physical Plant, Facilities Office, project coordinators, custodial and maintenance supervisors, Residence Hall staff, faculty, staff and students in the renovation projects.
- Contributed to the annual five-year facilities plan and budget.
- Assessed all residence hall damages caused by vandalism; worked with the office of Judicial Affairs and Physical Plant to implement the institution's policies and procedures.

**Select Highlights of Accomplishments at SUNY Cortland:**

- Managed the closing/opening of residence halls for renovations and situations requiring multiple re-assignments of students.
- Served in leadership role in the design, construction, and opening of three major residence halls to support an increase in recruitment and retention of students. Purchased all furniture and equipment for each hall with project budgets from \$350K to \$650K.
- Served as sole project coordinator for twenty projects that enhanced the facilities.
- Developed and managed the residential facilities inventory system which included the processes of refurbishing; discarding, and overseeing systems for damage assessment.
- Implemented programs in the areas of vandalism, recycling, conservation, and safety.
- Developed the Leadership House which provided a dynamic housing option for students to cultivate their leadership skills through their academic and civic engagement pursuits.

**TEACHING and RESEARCH EXPERIENCE:**

- Comparative Social Institutions, Cazenovia College Fall 2013

- Class, Status and Power, Cazenovia College Spring 2012
- Methods of Inquiry, Cazenovia College Fall 2011
- Contemporary Ethnic Families, Cazenovia College Spring 2011
- Comparative Social Institutions, Cazenovia College Fall 2012
- Comparative Social Institutions, Cazenovia College Fall 2010
- Families in Cross Cultural Perspectives, Syracuse University Spring 2008
- GNED Practical Study Skills, Morrisville State College Fall 2007
- Research Methods, Morrisville State College Spring 2006
- Teaching/Research Assistant, Syracuse University 2004 to 2006  
(Research Methods, Cross-Cultural Perspectives, Human Sexuality)

**Chair** 2011-2012

NYS CSTEP/STEP Assessment Committee

- Lead the CNY I Region to develop a pilot instrument that was used to increase awareness of CSTEP/STEP's impact, assess our statewide programs using the same instrument, and provide verifiable results to support stability of funding.

**Researcher** 2005 to 2006

**Department of Child and Family Studies, Syracuse University**

- Created a comprehensive questionnaire that was used in the data collection process, developed a codebook that was used to code the parent-child book reading activities, and independently learned the Noldus Observer program which was used for data analysis.

**Project Manager** 2005 to 2006

**National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, Syracuse University**

- Constructed a variety of resources on marriage education programs that would aid couples and families to find useful information on healthy relationships.

**Masters Internship** 2003 to 2004

**Vice President's Office for Student Affairs at SUNY Cortland**

- Analyzed the Residential Services budget and provided recommendations for maintaining a better accounting system.
- Spearheaded a comprehensive study to improve SUNY Cortland's student connections to the institution and to one another. The final report was called *Person to Person Links* and was disseminated to the community. The findings revealed how students, faculty and staffs were connected to the institutions and areas for improvement.

- Gave invited presentations at the President’s Retreat, President’s Welcome Meeting, SUNY Best Practices Conference, NASPA, and CSPA. Numerous programs were developed that increased awareness, effectiveness and retention.

## **Internship**

2002 to 2003

### **Counseling Center at SUNY Cortland**

- Provided individual and group counseling to students.
- Created SUNY Cortland Wellness Survey that combined questions on social norms and an environmental management approach to encourage healthy self-management.

## **Committee and Community Service:**

### **Le Moyne College**

- Chair, HEOP Search Committee
- Member, Diversity and Inclusion Committee
- Member, Benefits Committee
- Member, Campus Climate/Employee Satisfaction Committee
- Member, Careers Services Search Committee
- Member, STEP Search Committee
- Developed various day-of-service projects that supported the North Side Learning Center, Elmcrest Children’s Center, and a Health/Wellness Fair for the Syracuse community.

### **Morrisville State College**

- Co-Chair, CSTEP/STEP Statewide Grants Committee,
- Chair, CSTEP/STEP Statewide Assessment Committee
- Co-Regional representative of the Central New York I Region
- Member, APACS Conference Committee
- Chair, Diversity Committee
- Member, Assessment Committee
- Member, Middle States Committee
- Member, Education Opportunity Program Search Committee
- Developed numerous community service and service learning projects, including the annual “Supplies for the Soul” a campus-wide event, which served up to 300 families.

### **SUNY Cortland**

- Member, Affirmative Action Committee
- Member, Recycling Committee
- Member, Long Range Planning Committee

- Member, Director of Judicial Affairs Search Committee
- Member, Director of Physical Plant Search Committee
- Chair, Energy Conservation Committee
- Chair, Director of Facilities Planning Search Committee
- Chair, Person-to-Person Links Committee
- Chair, Damage Assessment Committee
- Member, Project Coordinator, Facilities Search Committee
- Chair, Director of Admissions Search Committee

### **Manager and Bookkeeper**

**The Lincklaen House, Cazenovia, New York**

1997 to 2001

- Co-supervised a staff of sixty employees which included the Front Desk Staff, Housekeeping Staff, and Wait-staff at an upscale Historic Inn.
- Responsible for Accounts Payable and Receivable and overall operation which resulted in the rebranding of the business and thirty percent increase in profits after the first year.