

**Gendered Ideologies and Strategies:
The Negotiation of the Household Division
of Labor among Middle-class
South Asian American Families**

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine the challenges faced by professional immigrant women and their families in terms of balancing the demands of work and home. I use the case of Indian Christian nurses from the state of Kerala who, starting in the late sixties, immigrated to the U.S. with their families. Because the nurses come first and are upwardly mobile while their spouses lose status in the immigration process, there is a drastic change in gender relations in these households. This shift in the immigrant households provides a fertile research opportunity to understand how these couples negotiate, challenge, and transform conventional gendered practices and discourses. The struggles around the household division of labor and child care of these American families will add to our understanding of the classic “double-shift” dilemmas of two job couples in the U.S.

I relied on ethnographic and in-depth interviewing methods in conducting this research project. In order to understand the dynamics of gender relations in communal life, I spent eighteen months doing extensive participant observation in an Indian Orthodox Christian immigrant congregation in an urban area of the U.S. Using my ties in the congregation, I conducted fifty-eight interviews, which included twenty-nine couples.

I divided the twenty-nine couples into archetypal households based on the domestic division of labor along the lines of housework, child care and financial decision making. They include the following four types: traditional households, where the women do the housework and child care and the men are in charge of the financial decision making, forced-help households, where the men are forced to share the child care, egalitarian households, where all aspects of domestic labor are shared and female-led households, where the women shoulder almost all the labor in the household, including the financial decision making. I analyze how the division of

labor varies with participation in the labor market on the one hand and connections back home to Kerala on the other.

The immigration pattern of the Indian Christians from the state of Kerala, at the southernmost tip of India, is unique vis-a-vis other Asian Indian groups and unusual relative to most other immigrant groups because of the prominent role that women played in the immigration process to the U.S. The shortage of nurses in the U.S. in the 1960s resulted in heavy recruitment of nurses from Asian countries, especially after the 1965 liberalization of immigration policy. By the late 1970s, immigration of Indian nurses to the U.S. was exceeded only by Filipinas (Ishi 1987). The majority of these Indian nurses come from the state of Kerala, where the British colonial legacy had stimulated the recruitment of young Christian women who supplied India's need for nurses and eventually immigrated to many parts of the world to meet the global demand.

Whereas with most other Asian Indian groups, the men immigrate first, in the case of Kerala Christians, female nurses have come first and only later sponsored husbands and families. Because women were the primary agents of immigration, their husbands and sometimes fathers and brothers were dependent on them when they joined them in the U.S. Rather than the continuation of the economic arrangement in India, where women generally made a secondary contribution to family income, this cohort of female immigrants became the uncontested breadwinners, and men were downwardly mobile, both economically and socially (George 1998).

The primary role of the women in the immigration process and their leadership in the family has resulted in drastic changes in gender relations in their households. This shift in the immigrant households provides a fertile research opportunity to understand how these couples negotiate, challenge, and transform conventional gendered practices and discourses. The

struggles around the household division of labor and child care of these American families will add to our understanding of the classic “double- shift” dilemmas of two job couples in the U.S.

Most studies of American middle class families tend to focus on white native born people. As a group, the Kerala immigrants have done fairly well in the U.S. enjoying a high median family income like many other Asian American immigrants (Andrews 1983:108). The Indian Christian nurses are highly valued professionals in the U.S. labor market who are able to achieve the American middle-class dream of owning the two-or-three-car-garage home in the suburbs. Highlighting the child care and work struggles of these South Asian American households will broaden our understanding of who must be included in our conception of American middle-class families.

I relied on ethnographic and in-depth interviewing methods in conducting this research. In order to understand the dynamics of gender relations in communal life, I spent eighteen months doing extensive participant observation in an Indian Orthodox Christian immigrant congregation in an urban area of the U.S. I call Central City. I actively participated in church life, volunteered to teach Sunday school, and organized youth activities such as the Christmas play and Christmas caroling. I attended many women’s groups and prayer meetings in the homes of members. I also participated in various national church conferences, where I interviewed church leaders and attended seminars.

Using my ties in the congregation, I visited and interviewed married couples from the church in their homes and workplaces. I spent days and nights over at church members’ homes, watching home movies, looking at photo albums, washing dishes, and sharing in family prayer. I first approached those most active in the church for interviews and gradually moved toward the

more marginal families, using a snowball sampling method. I conducted fifty-eight interviews, which included twenty-nine couples.

In this paper, I examine what is happening in the domestic sphere of the immigrant community. Based on the interviews with twenty-nine couples in their homes, I look for differences in how each household dealt with dividing the labor of housework and cooking, child care and financial decision making. I also look at how these negotiations affect the gender relations in each household.

I chose to define the household division of labor along three dimensions, namely, child care, housework and cooking and financial decision making. These three dimensions of household labor correspond to the analytic categories of class/economic factors, status/sociocultural factors, and power/relations of power. When it came to decisions about child care, economic factors — such as whether the couple could afford child care or obtain shift work — mattered most. Similarly, housework, especially cooking, was clearly linked to status in that this was a gender-specific task relegated to women within the household. Financial decision making issues — such as whether both partners had equal say in money matters — tapped into relations of power. These dimensions are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, but rather provide broad categories that are useful in examining the division of household labor.¹

In Kerala, the household division of labor is strictly demarcated. That this was true in the natal homes of the immigrant couples that I interviewed became apparent when I asked them to describe the marital relationship and the division of labor in the households of their parents. Because all but one of their mothers were homemakers, household chores, child care and cooking were exclusively in the maternal domain whereas financial affairs, breadwinning, and

disciplining children fell within the paternal realm. I next asked them about the division of labor in their own households in the U.S.

Based on their responses, I categorize the households into four types. On one end of the spectrum there is the traditional male-headed household, where the men make the financial decisions and the women do the rest of the domestic labor. On the other end is the anomalous female-led household, where the men are not present or active, and the lion's share of the labor falls on the shoulders of the women. In between these two ends fall the other two types. The first of these is the forced-help household, which appears to be similar to the traditional household except that the exigencies of immigration have forced the men to take an active role in child care. The other category is the partnership household, where there is a relatively egalitarian sharing of the domestic labor between the couple.

Several factors explain the variation in the division of labor in these households. I focus on three primary factors that are significant in shaping the division of labor in all the households. First, the pattern of immigration — whether the husband or wife is the primary immigrant — affects the resulting division of labor in the household. Second, the immigrants' relationship to the U.S. labor market also determines the type of division of labor in the household. Third, the couple's access to help with child care, especially from Kerala, is another critical factor in shaping the type of household division of labor. The following table shows that these three factors impacted the four household types in different ways, with the issue of child care having the greatest variation among the four household types.

Variations Among Household Types

Household Types

Shaping Factors

Immigration Pattern

Relationship to Labor Market Arrangement for Child care

Traditional

Men are the primary immigrants.

Men have high status.

Women have less or equal status.

Women stay home.

Kids are left in Kerala with relatives or at boarding schools.

Forced-Help

Women are the primary immigrants.

Women have high status.

Men have lower status relative to their jobs in India and their wives' jobs in the U.S.

Men are forced to help.

Couples work alternate shifts.

There is some child care help in the U.S

or Kerala.

Egalitarian

Women are the primary immigrants.

Women have high status.

Men have lower status relative to their jobs in India and their wives' jobs in the U.S.

Men help.

Couples work alternate shifts.

There is little outside support.

Female-Led

Women are the primary
Immigrants.

Women have high status.

Men are absent, not active and have low status.

Women are mostly alone.

There is some support from relatives and the community.

The couples, when faced with these differing post immigration conditions, must also reconcile their existing gender ideologies with their post immigration realities by using appropriate gender strategies. There is a difference between what people say is their gender ideal and the reality of gendered practices, especially in the marital relationship. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1989) makes the distinction between gender ideologies and gender strategies to make the point that there can be contradictions between the two. A person's gender ideology has to do with his or her understanding of manhood or womanhood and how the individual identifies with masculine or feminine ideal types. Gender strategies, on the other hand, are plans of action that individuals adopt to reconcile their gender ideology with their lived reality.

The most common point of reference for the gender ideologies of these couples was Kerala. Some women held ideologies that contested the Kerala norm, and they attributed these ideologies to American societal influences. Another point of reference for gender ideologies was religion. Some women talked about the importance of obeying husbands as a religious obligation. In some households, there was a fit between ideology and lived reality, whereas in others, there was dissonance. But both men and women used different gender strategies to sustain the fit or adjust for the lack of fit between ideology and lived reality.

To attempt to understand the variations in the division of household labor, I begin by looking at traditional households. After examining the factors that explain the division of labor in this household type, I present an archetypal family that best represents the traditional household. Then I look at how the couples who fall into this category deal with the different dimensions of the division of labor, namely child care, housework and cooking, and financial decision making. I do this for each of the household types.

Traditional Households

Explanation of the Division of Labor

The eight families that fall into the category of traditional households follow the Kerala norm of maintaining gendered domains in the division of household labor. The wife is responsible for the cooking and cleaning and the child care. The husband is the patriarchal disciplinarian and has the final say in the arena of financial decision making.

Traditional households stand out relative to the other categories in a number of ways. First, their pattern of immigration is opposite to the norm in the community. Only one of these couples followed the pattern of the wife immigrating first and later sponsoring the husband. In four of the cases, the man came first and later sponsored the wife. Two of these couples came together, and in one case, each partner was here independently before they met in Kerala when family members arranged their marriage. On the average, they immigrated earlier than the families in the other categories because most did not immigrate on the basis of nursing. Five of the couples came on the basis of student or professional visas other than nursing.

What is also distinct about this category is that the men are not downwardly mobile like the men in the other categories. Seven of the eight men have a master's degree or higher degrees from either Kerala or the U.S. Six of the eight men hold professional jobs in the U.S., and almost

all of them are making salaries equal to or greater than their wives. Likewise, although five of the eight women have at least a bachelor's degree, only two hold professional positions in the U.S. Of the three women who were nurses in India, only one works in the nursing field on a full-time basis. The high level of education of the members of this category concurs with their relatively higher class backgrounds in Kerala. Only one of the eight couples came from an impoverished background, whereas the others were either middle class or upper middle class in Kerala.

Finally, unlike the other households, these families had a variety of options when it came to child care. These included for the mothers to stay home and raise the children, send children to boarding schools in India and leave them with relatives in Kerala.

The distinctive features of immigration and background allow these families to maintain a traditional division of labor in the household. The Itoop family is representative of the traditional household.

The Itoops

It was twenty-six years ago that Mr. Itoop left Kerala as an ambitious young man with a dream to continue his education. Leaving behind his young wife and three children, he came to a college in the U.S. in 1970 to get his second bachelor's degree in computer science and business administration and eventually a master's in business administration. Although he had "money, property, and everything" in Kerala, he was not content. His bachelor's education in physics had instilled a fascination with the U.S., where he wanted to see "NASA and the space ship going to the moon and things like that."

Two years later, his wife joined him after leaving their children in a boarding school in Kerala. For Mrs. Itoop, the trip to America was not the fulfillment of a dream. In fact, her dream had been to go to college and become a teacher. However, her father thought otherwise, especially when Mr. Itoop's family approached him with a marriage proposal. Consequently, at the age of eighteen, she married Mr. Itoop, who was eight years her senior. When she joined her husband in the U.S., he was still a student. In order to support the household, Mrs. Itoop, who had never worked for pay a day in her life, found a job in a factory. After her husband completed his MBA, she quit her higher paying factory job for a secretarial job.

Despite meeting his educational goals, Mr. Itoop had a very difficult time finding a job. It took him two years to find a job as the administrator of a small nursing home where he still works. After seven years of separation from their children, the family was reunited when the children permanently immigrated to the U.S. in 1977. However, the arrival of the children brought some changes in the workload, especially for Mrs. Itoop

The Itoops, like many middle- and upper-middle-class families in India, had a lot of help in the management of their daily lives back home. For Mrs. Itoop, the transition from life with her natal family to life with her husband was not a big change in terms of domestic duties. Before marriage, she claims "At most, we had to take the dirty plates to the kitchen. We had servants to do that . . . I was lazy to do even that." When the Itoops set up their own home after their marriage, she describes her life as easy, despite having three small children. She credits the servants, especially one particularly "smart" woman who ". . . used to do all the cooking, cleaning, and also took care of the kids. She was very capable. She used to bring me coffee in bed."

However, life in the U.S was a stark contrast for Mrs. Itoop. She complains that here, “We have to do everything in the place of servants. Everything!!! Buy groceries, get everything together, cleaning and everything. We have to go outside and make money, too.” With the exception of the activity of making money, Mrs. Itoop had to do everything on her own. Mr. Itoop recalls how difficult it was for his wife when he says “. . . The men back in India, they don’t think of such things — helping in the kitchen. So I was continuing just like that, and she was continuing in her own way as an Indian woman. She never complained. But gradually, I realized that it is not nice to take advantage of the situation. So I started to help her.”

Mrs. Itoop admits that her husband has become more helpful, especially now that the children are all out of the house and they have more time on their hands. For instance, she explained that if he comes back early from work, he will make tea or cut vegetables, but she still does all the cooking. Not only does she not mind the cooking, but she is critical of the young women of the second generation for not cooking for their husbands. As she put it, “We struggle so much to cook for them. That is how we feel. Do you think today’s youngsters will do that? ‘You are tired and I am tired, too.’ She will sit down and if he wants [food], he has to make and eat it. That is the attitude.”

She points to American culture as the causal factor behind the shaping of women who are not “subdued.” When I asked her what it meant to be subdued, she pointed to some American women who worked with her as examples of those who were not subdued. “These women consider their own opinion to be most important All my women bosses are divorced. The attitude they show at work is the same as the one they show at home” She also brought up the example of nurses in the Indian community as women who were not subdued because they

try to control their men. For Mrs. Itoop, “classy” women are subdued, and neither the nurses nor her female superiors at work fit into this category.

Correspondingly, Mr. Itoop has what he calls a “dictator” feeling that parallels Mrs. Itoop’s gendered calling to be subdued. Especially when it comes to financial decision making in their household, his “dictator” feeling decrees that “I make my decisions and that is none of her business.” In practice, however, he does discuss decisions with his wife. Mrs. Itoop admits that if there is a difference of opinion, they will talk it over and her husband “will make her agree” with him because he is the final decision maker.

In the lives of their children, Mr. Itoop was the final decision maker for the important decisions of their lives. When it came time to arrange the marriages of their sons, they looked for young women who would make good brides for them. Mrs. Itoop recalls a case where she was keen on a particular woman for her son but they found out later that Mr. Itoop’s prudent rejection of the proposal saved them from a bad match. She used this as an example to illustrate why both she and her children acquiesce to Mr. Itoop’s superior decision making capacity. Much like the Itoops, the other families in this category followed a rigidly gendered division of labor.

Child Care

Because the immigration of these families was not nursing based, most of the women in these families were not the primary breadwinners in the household. As a result, they had more options relative to the couples in the other categories vis-a-vis child care. For instance, four of the eight women in the traditional households did not work outside the home so that they could care for their children while they were young. The other four couples sent their children to either boarding schools or to relatives in Kerala for different periods of time. But whether they stayed

home to raise their children or worked outside the home, the responsibility for the children fell on the women in all these families.

The men expressed the expectation that their wives are the primary caretakers of their children in a number of ways. Explaining why his wife doesn't work outside the home, Mr. Mathen stated: "She is raising my kids. I shouldn't say my kids — our kids." Although he very quickly corrected himself on the fact that the kids also belonged to his wife, Mr. Mathen's patriarchal authority over his wife and children was always assumed in his statements.

Her husband forbade Mrs. Paul, a registered nurse, to work after their first child was born. Unfortunately, he lost his job soon after. When he couldn't find a job after three months, she decided to go to work against her husband's wishes. Currently, she stays home caring for their two children while he runs a real estate business to support the family.

Mr. Zachariah talks about the child care issues of their household in the past tense because both their children are grown up. He regrets having sent their first child to day care. He feels that he and his wife should have adjusted shifts as was common with other two-job families. But his wife was not like the other "girls," who were able to work and take care of their children at the same time. Consequently, she quit work after their second child was born to stay home and take care of the kids. Mr. Zachariah did not discuss his own untapped potential to help with child care but pointed out his wife's relative limitations.

Whereas the men in this category are clear about their wives' exclusive child care responsibilities, the women are more ambivalent about it. For example, Mrs. Zachariah had a different perspective than her husband on the issue of child care. As she put it, "I threw away my good jobs because of the kids." For Mrs. Zachariah, it was a series of career compromises that finally led to her staying home to raise the children. After she got married, she wanted to

continue her education and get a master's degree in nursing. But instead, she decided to let her husband continue his education because they could not afford for both of them to be in school. When her first child was born, she "threw away" a good job to be closer to home. Finally, she stayed home after the birth of her second child and found it extremely difficult to find a job again when the children were grown.

Similarly, Mrs. Cherian, who has a master's degree in a natural science field from India, chose not to work outside the home because both she and her husband agreed that she should stay home to raise the children. After the children had grown up, she decided to try and find work but was unable to do so since her field had changed dramatically in the fourteen years that she had been away from it. She is now working in a clerical field where she does not have the opportunity to apply her educational skills.

Although men, such as Mr. Zachariah, focus on their wives' responsibilities and limitations, most of the women talked about missing the support of family members and servants that they had in India. This led some of the couples to leave their children with family members in India, especially during the early childhood stages. Once the children were older, they were brought back to the U.S. or sent to boarding schools in India.

Housework and Cooking

Traditionally, cooking and cleaning in Kerala society is quintessential women's work. In fact, the men I interviewed talked about being shooed away from the kitchen by mothers and sisters. Consequently, the majority of men in this category comfortably admitted to never helping their wives, resting on the assumption of a permanently gendered division of labor. For some, it

was a matter of pride, as in the case of Mr. Cherian who differentiates himself from many men in the church because he does not cook or clean at home.

There were a few exceptions — such as Mr. Itoop, who has started to cut vegetables, and make his own tea, and sometimes even wash dishes because he wants to help his wife and not take advantage of her. Close to retirement and with the kids out of the house, Mr. Itoop has more time to show such appreciation for his wife. Mr. Zachariah, however, had no choice in the matter. His wife became extremely ill a few years ago and had to be hospitalized for an extensive period. He was forced to learn to cook and clean, especially because she never completely recovered from her illness.

Another exception was Mr. Mathen who claimed that he did a lot of work both inside and outside his home. In fact, he claimed not only to help his wife with the cooking, but also to be able to cook anything by himself. When I asked him how many times he cooked in a week, he said that there was no fixed number. Rather, he cooked only when he felt like it. His wife, a full-time housewife until very recently, was responsible for every meal, but he might help her if he was in the mood. He did not like to clean the house, especially the bathrooms, so this was also her responsibility. Mr. Mathen felt that he did a lot relative to his father who never entered the kitchen. Mr. Mathen, who had immigrated to the U.S. by himself for his college education, had been forced to learn to cook to fend for himself. Thus, although he is not responsible for the cooking, he felt that his potential capacity to do things around the house was greater than the norm in Kerala.

As in the case of Mr. Mathen, Kerala was the point of reference for most of the women in this category. For example, Mrs. Itoop used the household division of labor of her relatives in

Kerala to explain why it was culturally justified for women to be responsible for domestic duties in a two-job household:

Back home, even if there are servants, things are the same. Women work too. . . . Nowadays, to live, both must work. If you compare things, the women back home struggle four times more. They are up at four in the morning. There will be two or three school-age kids. You have to bathe, feed, and dress them all. The men will be lounging around. The women do everything. They make breakfast, feed everyone, pack [lunch] for everyone, and pack for themselves and run. Often, they have to catch a bus to get to the school or the bank.

The memory of her own family's experiences as well as the current lived reality of her female relatives that she witnesses on her trips back home prompt Mrs. Itoop to say that "This is our culture. It has always been like that."

Although all the women in this category would identify with Mrs. Itoop's cultural credo, a few of them articulated awareness of alternative ways of thinking. For instance, Mrs. Stephen, a medical doctor, told me that her workload increased tenfold after immigration, especially without servants. When I asked her if her husband had helped her, she said, "Not enough. Not according to the standards here, but then back home we never had to think about it. He didn't have to help me there." Although she accepts her husband's failure to help her, she is also aware of a different set of American standards that she could use to assess his failure.

Similarly, Mrs. Paul, who is a full-time housewife, is aware of how difficult it is for some of her professional friends who get no help from husbands in the domestic arena. She speculates that, had she gone to work, she may not have had the same peaceful atmosphere at home. She is very grateful that she doesn't have to work for the family to get by because she doesn't think that her husband would have helped. Although she recognizes that the men in the immigrant community are used to the Kerala norm of not helping, she reasons that they need to help out more given the alternate circumstances in the U.S.

Financial Decision making

Unlike the child care and housework, the decisions regarding finances are traditionally in the male domain. All the men in this category see themselves as the final decision makers, much like Mr. Itoop. Mr. Mathen, however, feels that even though what he says is what goes, he is better than his father because at least he discusses decisions with his wife.

Mr. Cherian has a different perspective on such spousal participation in decision making. He complains of feeling compromised when he says, "In India, men control everything. Here it is impossible. . . . Here both husbands and wives work. Over there the ladies stay home so they don't know what the hell is up. So here we have to discuss with them. Otherwise they don't feel that equal." For Mr. Cherian, immigration has brought a sense of loss of control over his children and his extended family based social status in the community. To have to discuss financial decisions with his wife is another instance of loss of control despite the fact that he makes the final decisions.

The women in this category follow Mrs. Itoop's lead in giving priority to their husbands when it comes to financial decision making. There were religious, cultural, and practical justifications for why men should be in charge. There was also a sense that things had improved given that they were better off than their mothers. But ultimately, as Mrs. Stephen explained, when she disagrees with her husband about financial matters, ". . . he laughs and says that he will think about it, but that is the extent of it."

For Mrs. Paul, her husband's leadership is mandated by her religious beliefs. But she also points out examples of why other alternatives can be the source of marital discord when she says,

"I was a religious type, so what I learned was that I should not challenge my husband's authority, but learn to live under his authority. Life unlike this would be hell. We know many people in America who have quite a bit of money. . . .

When they are registered nurses, then they earn more than their husbands, and there are problems in the household. They lose their peace.”

Mrs. Itoop believes that her husband should be in charge even though she claims that she understands and can handle all their financial affairs very well. This is because she believes that women should be “subdued” because it is both culturally appropriate and a practical tactic. As she explained, “We should be subdued and want the family to be successful. Men feel that we should listen to them. That gives them satisfaction. . . .”

In Mrs. Itoop’s assessment, women are stronger than men. In fact, she believes that many women play the traditional role to keep their men happy: “I know a lot of women in our society, many of them are very capable, more so than the men. Some don’t show it that much. . . . They [the women] are very smart. They give more importance to their husbands.”

In conclusion, families like the Itoops are able to sustain their traditional division of labor after immigration because of a number of factors. The primary immigrant status of the male and his positive relationship to the U.S. labor market maintains the considerable status gap between husband and wife. The various options that these households had for child care, including that of having the women stay home on a full-time basis, again supported the maintenance of a traditional division of labor.

For these traditional households, there is a fit between their gender ideologies and post-immigration lived reality. As the Itoops delineated it, the “subdued” woman and the man with a “dictator feeling” are complementary to each other. It is relatively more difficult for the women of the traditional households who rely on a variety of gender strategies to help sustain this fit in the face of post-immigration changes. Without the additional help of servants or relatives in the U.S., women in traditional households “throw away” good jobs or choose not to work because they feel exclusively responsible for the domestic realm. And although immigration and entry

into the U.S. labor market might make them more ambivalent about the status quo division of labor, many of these women continue playing out the traditional role to keep their men happy, as Mrs. Itoop observed.

Kerala becomes the reference point by which they justify their level of participation in household labor. For example, Mr. Mathen felt that relative to his father, he did a lot of work around the house although in actuality Mrs. Mathen was still doing the lion's share. Or Mrs. Itoop, reflecting on the current "second shift" struggles of her female relatives in Kerala, postulated that immigrant and second-generation women should accept their cultural obligations to do likewise. For these traditional households, Kerala is the measure by which they assess and adjust to the changes in their lives.

Only one of the women in the traditional households are working as nurses on a full-time basis. When wives are nurses and men have lower status in the U.S. job market, then forced-help households occur as men reluctantly accommodate to helping out with the child care.

Forced-help Households

Explanation of the Division of Labor

Not unlike traditional households, the wife does the cooking and cleaning and the husband is in charge of the finances in the eight families that fall into forced-help category. Where they differ is in the area of child care. In these latter households, the husband is forced to help with child care because they do not have the alternate choices that the traditional families have in this realm.

The women in this category were the primary immigrants, and all of them immigrated on the basis of nursing. Unlike the traditional households, these couples experience a gendered reversal in their relationship to the U.S. labor market. All the women in this category are registered nurses, except for one who did not pass her boards and works as a medical technician. The men in this group range widely in their educational and occupational backgrounds. Four of the eight men have college degrees from India, although only one, an engineer, was able to get a job matching his credentials in the U.S. Most of the men are doing technical or clerical work and the majority of the men have unstable job histories, with periods of unemployment and moderately successful attempts to start their own businesses.

These couples subscribe to the traditional ideology of the division of labor in the household, but the men are forced to help with child care because they have few other choices. These couples are not able to survive on a single income, and in some cases, despite leaving children for periods of time in Kerala, the men still have to help with child care in a substantial way. The Thambis are one such family who exemplifies the challenges faced by the forced-help households.

The Thambis

Mrs. Thambi's immigration to the U.S. was the fulfillment of her father's dream and the fruit of his planning efforts. She became interested in nursing as a ten-year-old after she got her first vaccination. As she recalls, "You know when you get vaccinated, you get a bump. Well, my sisters would do the poking and I would bandage it up. From then on, they said I should be a nurse, and I agreed." After her nursing training, her father "talked a lot and thought a lot about America." In fact, it became a family enterprise to find a way to send Mrs. Thambi, the eldest of

eight children, to America. Her brother searched newspapers and magazines for advertisements put in by American hospitals and sent inquiries to them for job openings for his sister. Meantime, her father found a friend in America who was able to sponsor her and take legal responsibility for her. This was how she ended up immigrating to the U.S. in 1975.

A year after her arrival, she went back to Kerala for an arranged marriage with Mr. Thambi, who was working in the United Arab Emirates. Mr. Thambi had bachelor's degrees in physics and in education and was a highschool science teacher in North India when he got the opportunity to immigrate to the U.A.E. as a bank employee. A year after their marriage, he joined his wife in the U.S. Unhappy with his first two jobs as security guard and cashier, he tried to study respiratory therapy but had to drop out of the program because of the illness of one of his children. Finally, after working as a data processor for a period, he is now working as a computer operator.

The birth of their first child brought a critical change to the lives of the Thambis. Julia was born with life-threatening problems. Treatment included multiple surgeries and eventually a kidney transplant. Julia needed care and attention twenty-four hours a day. The Thambis worked out their schedules so that one of them was always home with the children. They could not afford to have Mrs. Thambi stay home because she was the primary breadwinner. But Mr. Thambi told me that it was really important to him that his wife was home when Julia and the other children came back from school. Consequently, he chose to work an evening shift to allow his wife to be there for the kids in the evening. The Thambis seem to have worked out a traditional division of labor in their household. However, there is a self conscious and forced nature to this arrangement. They are both very aware of the shift of power in the relationship and make concerted efforts to match their practices with their traditional ideology. For instance, Mrs.

Thambi asserted that she was exclusively responsible for the cooking and the cleaning because her husband “does not know how to cook or clean.” Because he does not know how to make coffee, she has to wake up earlier to do this for him before she leaves for work at five-thirty in the morning. She has given up on trying to teach him because he refuses to learn. Yet, there is a corresponding way that Mrs. Thambi also refuses to learn, as evident in the following excerpt from our conversation:

Mrs. T: He does not know the ABCDs of cooking. On the other hand, I don't know anything about billing.

S.G.: You don't know?

Mrs. T: No.

S.G.: Is that by choice?

Mrs. T: Maybe I don't want to learn.

S.G.: Why not?

Mrs. T: I don't like it.

S.G.: You don't want to learn about it?

Mrs. T: I just go to work and get my paycheck. I don't even know how much I make a year. I don't want to know anything about money. . . .

Later on in the interview, as we discussed the different experiences of men and women in the immigration process, Mrs. Thambi's comments illuminated the reason for her self-elected ignorance regarding money matters:

Mrs. T: . . . I think they [the men] feel a little insecure when they don't have jobs. If they don't have jobs — if they have jobs, I don't know. . . . if he [her husband] makes much less money, he may [feel insecure]. I never give him a chance to feel that way.

S.G.: How do you think you do this?

Mrs. T: I mean — I don't know — in the first place, I don't talk about salary. “You make this much?” or “I make this much.”

S.G.: He takes care of all the money issues?

Mrs. T: Yeah, I don't ask him about that. I don't tell him about that. When the income tax comes, I ask, "So how much did I make?" I don't know exactly how much I make. I don't know where the bank accounts are. Like sometimes I say, if something were to happen, I don't even know where the bank is. I don't think he feels that way [insecure].

S.G.: You consciously make an effort to not make him feel that way?

Mrs. T: Yes.

Despite Mrs. Thambi's concerted effort to not participate in financial matters, her husband is aware that his wife's working outside the home changes the balance of power relative to Kerala. He said that he tries to run his household like his father ran his natal household. Perhaps this is why he says, "I really like it that I don't think that she has any idea about financial matters. . . . I don't know if she ever paid any attention. I really never heard her." He is not sure about how much his wife knows about financial matters, but he likes to think that she doesn't know much.

However, Mr. Thambi struggles to articulate why he feels the need to be in control of their finances:

"Ours is a male dominated society, right? I always like to get a little more money than her. I don't know why I like it. . . . It's not the money itself. When she makes more money, I feel a little inferior. I don't know why. . . . I want to manage the home in a comfortable way. I want to be the head of the household. I like it that way. I don't know why. I am not sure about it."

Mr. Thambi's desire to be the head of the household is much like Mr. Itoop's "dictator feeling." But Mr. Thambi is a lot less comfortable with it, especially given his awareness of male domination and his wife's bigger paychecks. Mr. Thambi's headship is something that Mrs. Thambi accepts. Before marriage, her father was in charge of her life. She would send all her money to him to help the family. After marriage, she wasn't able to send money as much as she

wanted because “once you are married, they own you.” Although her husband supported her sponsoring all seven of her siblings to immigrate to the U.S., it became a problem when she wanted to send money every month to her parents.

Her relationship to her natal family and her desire to keep sending them money was one of the issues that they had to confront. The way she resolved it was to say that all women have this problem after marriage and it was not right on her part to want to do more than other people. She accepted that framework because she believes that women should always be below their husbands. This belief is similar to Mrs. Itoop’s notion that women should be subdued, but Mrs. Thambi has to self-consciously conform her behavior to match her ideology, especially regarding financial decision making. Although she believes in the traditional division of labor, she is not able to maintain the traditional ideals when it comes to child care. Her husband confirmed that looking after the kids was the main change for him relative to his father’s role in the natal family.

Child Care

Although some of the traditional families immigrated at a stage when their children were older and could take care of themselves, all of the forced-help families had to face the problem of babysitting for their infant offspring. The most popular solution employed by these couples was to juggle their work schedules in such a way that one of the parents was always home. Because shift work is available to nurses, many women I interviewed worked evening or night shifts and their husbands worked during the day or vice versa.

Three of the eight families opted to take their infant children to India, where grandparents or other relatives took care of them for a few years. For instance, Mrs. Joseph left her kids with her husband’s parents for two years while she studied for her nursing licensing exam. A couple

of people talked about how relatives they had sponsored were able to help out with child care, as was the case for Mrs. Peters. However, a majority of the couples, especially the men, complained about the difficulty they had in dealing with child care issues.

Couples lived like strangers for years — hardly seeing each other as they handed off the child care baton to each other in between their work shifts. But sometimes rearranging schedules did not take care of overlapping periods when the children needed supervision. Mr. and Mrs. Papi found themselves in such a predicament. For a while, they relied on the generosity of neighboring Malayalee immigrant families who were in the same boat. Eventually, because they could not work out their scheduling overlap, Mr. Papi had to quit his job and look for one that would accommodate their child care needs.

The men I interviewed talked about their involvement in child care as one of the biggest changes relative to their own fathers' roles in the household. Mr. Elias exemplifies their view when he yearns for a past where mothers were the exclusive caretakers of children. As Mr. Elias put it,

Back home taking care of the kids means, when they get back from the school, ask them to go and study. That is it. Here you have to change diapers, give them baths, help them dress, and the day is gone. Back home, even if the father and mother are there, mother stays at home and father works outside. Mother takes care of the kids. Mother is the one who forms the character of the kids. Here, the mother works outside the home, and so that is left to the father. That is the biggest difference here. Back home it is the mother's sole responsibility. Isn't it? . . . Here it is the opposite.

Additionally, in Kerala, the role of the disciplinarian was the jurisdiction of the father. It appears that the mother may have taken over some of this role in the U.S. setting. In an informal discussion with four immigrant nurses, children's disciplining became a topic of discussion. All the women agreed that the kids came to them for permission to do things, but this was the cause

of conflict with husbands, who were consistently more conservative, especially when it came to daughters. Mrs. Varkey theorized that perhaps mothers were better able to relate to their American-born children because their study of American psychology for their registered nurse licensing exams enhanced their understanding of American culture.

Living in a culture where children are encouraged to question authority, the immigrant first generation has to tolerate attitudes and behaviors in their own children that are disrespectful by Indian standards. It is especially poignant for the fathers in this category, who not only lose their unchallenged patriarchal status, but also become partially responsible to “form the characters” of their children. This raises the question that if child care is forced upon the husbands, what is the consequence for the other dimensions of the household division of labor? Does it mean that the men reassert their authority even more emphatically in the areas of housework and cooking and financial decision making?

Housework & Cooking

Whereas child care was a difficulty for all of these families, cooking and housework was clearly allocated as female labor. The most popular standard of measurement when it came to male cooking skills was the ability to make a cup of coffee. Many of the men claimed coffee making as the sole item in their repertoire of cooking skills. Whereas Mrs. Thambi asserted that her husband refuses to learn to make even a cup of coffee, Mr. Thambi, like his contemporaries, claimed coffee making as his only cooking skill. Although the truth about Mr. Thambi’s coffee making abilities may never be established, it is clear that his wife, along with all the other women in this category, is responsible for the cooking.

Like Mrs. Thambi, most of the women accepted their roles as the food preparation specialists in the household. They gave different reasons for their exclusive expertise in the production of culinary items. For example, both Mrs. Varkey and Mrs. Elias cited their husbands' busy work schedules as the main cause for the men's lack of interest in cooking. As Mrs. Varkey explained, "Engineering association meetings. He is very busy with this."

In Mrs. Peter's case, she gave a number of reasons for her husband's not knowing how to cook. At first, she said that he didn't have any interest in or the talent for cooking. I asked her if it was true that she wouldn't let him into the kitchen, as he claimed. Finally, she expanded on her resistance to her husband's presence in the kitchen as follows: "It makes me uncomfortable to see a man cook. He is not used to doing it. I don't think he has any experience doing it."

Mrs. Papi was more forthright about her reasons for not wanting her husband to cook when she said "Everyday I have to cook something. If I am sick, he will cook. Otherwise, I will do everything. I don't like him to do it on a daily basis. . . . When I am not here, for the kids he makes [meals]. This is not the way men in our country is doing. . . ." She believes that to keep up tradition, she must not let her husband cook. But she is sometimes forced to ask him for help, given the lack of auxiliary support from relatives or servants in the U.S.

Mr. Papi is unique in this category because he likes to cook. He often cooks for church functions at church with a group of men. But he recognizes that his wife does not like him to cook everyday. Furthermore, he claims that she enjoys cooking as creative release from the tension of work. Consequently, he limits himself to helping her on special occasions.

Whether it is because men like Mr. Thambi refuse to learn to cook or others like Mr. Papi have to restrict themselves, cooking for this category is a female preoccupation. However, other types of housework seem to be less rigidly cordoned off in these households. Washing dishes and

laundry were examples of tasks with which some of the men acknowledged helping women. Mr. Joseph explains why this may be the case when he says:

When she has to work, she has to go. I have to take care of the home, and take care of the kids. Some of my friends, they have to cook. Some of the ladies work two jobs. . . . The man of the house may not have a job. So they take care of the kids. They even cook. I didn't have that kind of hardship. When my wife is away at work, I used to change the diapers, wash the dishes once in a while. These things are not acceptable back home, but there is no choice.

Relative to some of his friends, who had to cook, Mr. Joseph felt that his lot was not so bad, which perhaps made it easier for him to do the occasional dishwashing.

Financial Decision Making

Like cooking, financial decision making was a clearly gendered task among the forced-help families. Both men and women talked about how the latter would bring home paychecks, but it was their husbands who endorsed the checks. They claimed that the women did not even know how much they made. This pattern was very consistent with Mrs. Thambi's claims about not knowing anything about financial matters.

What was striking about the women in this category was that, with the exception of one, they did not talk about disagreements with their husbands regarding financial matters. Mrs. Peter was representative of the women in the forced-help category when she gave the following description of how she and her husband dealt with financial matters. As she put it, after her marriage and his arrival in this country, "Everything shifted to him. He had the responsibility to become the head of the household. That is the way that I thought. So I handed over everything to him. . . . He thinks that he is the man and he should take care of me. That is the way he thinks."

Although the women in the traditional household category, like Mrs. Itoop, also adhere to the model of male leadership, they talked about disagreements and critiqued their husbands. They seemed aware of alternate standards of spousal involvement and compliance based in American society by which they could judge their husbands. They justified their own behavior as owing to religion, culture, or practical strategies. In sharp contrast, the women in the forced-help category consistently resorted to what seemed like the party line: "I don't know how much I make. I don't even sign my paycheck." It seemed as if they, like Mrs. Thambi, had self-consciously decided to have a hands-off policy when it came to the finances.

Some of the women expressed their good fortune at having found trustworthy and cooperative husbands who were also good money managers. The measure of the goodness of their husbands for these women was the extent to which they let the women help their natal families. For instance, as Mrs. George observed, "I am really lucky. I have no complaints. If I need to do something for my family, if they are in trouble or something, he helps them. My sister needed some money and he gave it to her. You know some Indian men, they don't do anything for the wife's family. He is not that type."

The one exception was Mrs. Elias, who seemed to be very frustrated by her husband. Even though she felt that he gave her what she needed, she was dissatisfied with the unilateral decisions he made regarding the investment of their money. Mr. Elias agreed that he makes all the decisions and that he doesn't take his wife's opinions into account, partly because she does not have the confidence that he possesses in financial matters. She complained that he regularly sends a lot of money to his relatives in Kerala and even constructed a house there without consulting her. She felt that he loved his relatives in Kerala more than his own children. But even she assumes his headship in the conjugal relationship.

For the men in this category, their forced involvement in child care and to some extent in housework undermines their sense of themselves as men and as heads of their households. Additionally, their headship becomes even more vulnerable relative to wives who are earning more than them on the average. Consequently, the men compensate by exerting their patriarchal leadership in those dimensions of household labor other than child care.

It is a tenuous ideology of male headship that Mr. Papi is trying to justify when he says, “In family life, my thinking is always that the man should be the leader. That does not mean that he should flaunt his power. She is equal to him but still, you know, that man should be ‘first among the equals.’ Somebody has to take leadership, and in the ancient world, history shows that man has always had this role.” On one hand, Mr. Papi relies on historical tradition to argue that men have always been the leaders in the home, yet he is faced with the reality that his wife is equal to him. Like Mr. Thambi, he struggles to establish a justification for his leadership, leaning on the weak proposition that he is first among equals as a result of his gender privilege.

In conclusion, for the forced-help households, the primary immigration of the women and their relative success and stability in the labor market challenges the traditional power dynamic in the household. The men’s difficulty with finding jobs and maintaining stable employment in the U.S. underlines the precariousness of their positions as traditional heads of the household. Their position is further jeopardized when they are forced to literally get their hands dirty doing child care instead of doling out doses of patriarchal discipline from a symbolic distance.

Whereas there is a fit between ideology and practice in the traditional households, there is dissonance in the forced-help households. Mrs. Thambi and others like her respond to the dissonance by adopting the gender strategy of ignoring the reality of their relative economic success. By not knowing how much they make or not signing their paychecks, these women

consciously choose to play down what is threatening to their traditional ideology and their husbands.

Despite such efforts on the part of their wives, men such as Mr. Thambi or Mr. Papi are ill at ease in their positions as the heads of the household. They struggle to articulate why they should be the heads or the leaders. They had to give up educational plans — as in the case of Mr. Thambi — and a job — as in the case of Mr. Papi — to work out child care needs for their households. Faced with the reality that their jobs/career goals are secondary to those of their wives and that they consequently become responsible for the child care, these men have difficulty articulating their positions as “head of the household.”

The reversal of status between husbands and wives in the forced-help households has compelled both to make adjustments against ideology, but the tension between ideology and practice remains unresolved. There is another response to the reversal of status between husband and wife — namely, that the ideology itself shifts to egalitarianism.

Partnership Households

Explanation of the Division of Labor

The eight households that make up this category take a shared approach to the division of household labor. The couple shares the housework and cooking, the child care, and the financial decision making. They talked about this sharing as a necessary and logical adaptation that had to be made in the face of changes in lifestyle resulting from immigration.

The men are very involved in the raising of their children, and they do not complain about it. In a couple of cases, the men seem to cook more frequently than their wives. None of

them claimed headship of the household despite having been raised with this prevalent ideology in Kerala.

As in the forced-help households, the women in this category were the primary immigrants, and these couples also experienced a reversal in status vis-a-vis the labor market. All the women in this category are registered nurses. Two of the eight women have bachelor's degrees in nursing from India. One has gone on to get a masters in public health. On the average, they are positive about their professional status. In contrast, almost all the men feel extremely negative about their occupational experiences in this country, and most experience a loss of status at work.

Only one couple left their children in Kerala with their parents, and the majority of these families did not get much help from their relatives. Consequently, the men did not have much choice but to help with child care. Perhaps as a result, these couples were more dependent on each other and seemed to be better friends as in the case of the Eapens, who portray well the compromises of the partnership household.²

The Eapens

Unlike Mrs. Thambi, who was playing nurse from her childhood, Mrs. Eapen was nursing a different dream. She wanted to become a teacher, but she couldn't pursue this career because of financial obstacles. Even if her parents could have managed the fees for the teacher's training course, they did not have the huge sums of mandatory "donation" money required to obtain a job.

Consequently, Mrs. Eapen made a practical decision and went for a nursing education in north India where a job was guaranteed upon graduation. But even before she and all her co-

graduates looked for jobs locally, they filed for employment immigration visas at the American embassy as well as other embassies. Within a little over a year, she got a job in the U.S. and arrived here in 1976 after being sponsored by her cousin.

Three years later, she was back in Kerala because her marriage had been arranged with Mr. Eapen, who was himself waiting to immigrate to Kuwait. Because he couldn't find a job in Kerala with a bachelor's degree in mathematics, his sister had promised to take him to Kuwait. After their marriage, he immigrated to the U.S. and tried his hand at a few jobs, ending up doing manual labor in a factory.

Mr. Eapen had a very difficult time with this transition. His wife, who had not yet passed her RN licensing exam, was working as a nursing assistant. She became pregnant soon after his arrival, and he had to continue working to help make ends meet. When she finally got her license two years later, Mr. Eapen was able to quit the factory job. He was unemployed for a few years while he studied respiratory therapy on a part-time basis and ultimately got a job as a respiratory therapist.

Despite some improvement in his work conditions, he is very unhappy with the quality of life in the U.S., which he describes as full of tension. The biggest points of tension for him center on the issues of child care and family life. Like many couples, he and his wife arrange their work schedule in alternating shifts so that somebody is always with the kids. But as he explains, this arrangement leaves him unsatisfied: "When the husband is at home, the wife is at work. When the wife is at home, the husband has to work to adjust to the kids and their child care. So where is the family life?" They don't like the option of giving their children to a babysitter, so they manage themselves. In fact, he claims that he enjoys taking care of the children, but the quality of family life is missing for him.

Another point of tension for Mr. Eapen is the work that he has to do around the house. As he explained, “Here I had to do cooking. I had to do the cleaning — I don’t mind to do that. I know some Indian men are thinking they don’t do this work. I do it. . . .if she will end up having to do everything, she cannot do it, right?” Here, he expresses his discomfort at being caught between the prescription that “Indian men don’t do this work” and the practical reality of the limitations of his wife’s time and energy after working nights.

His wife elaborated on the “tension” that her husband experienced as follows: “Here life is more frustration, more tension. . . . Because my husband, he had three sisters and he was the one son — I think he found it more difficult here. He said he made a mistake. He should have never come here.”

In spite of the fact that Mrs. Eapen understands her husband’s tension, her assessment of the conditions of work in the U.S. leads her to have very democratic expectations for the division of housework. As she puts it,

In India, you leave the dishes in the sink, the lady comes and washes. Here you can’t do that. Because you work — everybody works so everybody has to help. Before I go to work, I leave everything neat and tidy, so I expect the same thing when I come back from work too. Because I don’t want to work eight-hour p.m. shifts (3 p.m. - 11 p.m.). . . . That is really hard. The floor where I work, it is so damn busy. Sometimes I don’t get out even (at) midnight — two o’clock in the morning. So I don’t want to come two o’clock in the morning to find out (that) the whole sink is full of dishes.

Just as with child care and housework, the Eapens are democratic in their financial decision making process. Mrs. Eapen said that she was fortunate in finding a man who is responsible and does not waste any of their hard-earned money. She, however, complained about Mr. Eapen’s penchant to be overly generous. She is concerned that others may take advantage of him. He knows that she disapproves, so he doesn’t always tell her about his monetary openhandedness.

As a result, she had to set down some limits concerning his spending habits:

Couple of incidents happened, so I told him — I don't like the way you do that. If you are going to do that, it's not good for our family life. I straightforwardly told him, so after that, he didn't do it again. I said — I work hard; you work hard. It's our money, not only your money and my money. We have a combined account and everything. If you want to do something, even though I may not like it, you can still always tell me before you do it.

Mr. Eapen's plan was to go back to Kerala after five or ten years of saving up some money. But his wife and children are less keen to go back. In his truly democratic way, he said that they could do whatever they want, but he hopes that his wife will eventually go back with him to a less tension filled life in Kerala. The partnership of the Eapens was evident in all the dimensions of the household division of labor.

Child Care

Although the couples in the forced-help category had some support from Kerala as well as some babysitting help here, most of the partnership household couples had no help. The exceptions were two families who received intermittent help from family members that they sponsored.

Most families resorted to alternating shift work to accommodate child care needs. The majority did not use babysitters. Like the Eapens, some did not like the idea and others could not afford babysitting, as was the case for the Samuels. After working the night shift for seven years, Mrs. Samuel switched to the day shift after their younger child entered school. Because they both left very early for work, they had to depend on their seven-year-old to take care of things. As Mrs. Samuel put it,

I didn't have any babysitting for them. We didn't have money for that, and besides, there was no babysitter available. My daughter was very responsible.

If you gave her the key and showed her how to open and close the door and how to go to school, she would do it. She used to wake my five-year-old up, get him dressed, and drop him off at the kindergarten. . . . They would go to school and come back at three o'clock. Sometimes when we came back, the door was left wide open as if somebody was inside. My God! We would take a step inside and call out to them "Are you in there? Did you lock the door?" And they would say, "Oh yeah!"

Like the Samuels, the Punooses also had to rely on older siblings to look after younger ones. When their first two children were very young, the Punooses immigrated to the U.S. But they left the children with grandparents for two years. They eventually had another child, who had a fifteen-year gap with his oldest sibling. While the older children helped take care of the baby, the Punooses worked alternating shifts.

Several couples had been used to having a lot of help in India, as is the case for most middle-class families. For instance, in the Lukos family, neither husband nor wife was used to doing any work at home. Mrs. Lukos described their life before immigration as follows: "Each of my kids had a nanny, and the servants were there to cook. He never did anything. He just went to work and came back. I never did anything personally. . . . That changed tremendously. He started doing child care. It was important that he participate and I learned, too." Mr. Lukos agreed with his wife's assessment of the change when he said, "In India, I never did any child care. . . . Here I used to help in every way. Since she had to work the night shift, I had to do plenty of work, and she had plenty of time with the kids."

The Markoses represented another case of a family that had a lot of help in India with servants and babysitters. Moreover, Mrs. Markos's mother, who was in Kerala, offered to take care of their children after their immigration to the U.S. But Mrs. Markos refused her mother's offer. As she explained, "We have solved our problems ourselves. Never bothered anybody."

Mrs. Markos's desire not to trouble anyone and manage their own problems was an underlying theme expressed by other couples in this category.

Housework and Cooking

Juggling cooking and cleaning along with work and child care was a challenge for all these couples. Cooking was easier for two of the men than for others. Both of these men, who had lived away from home in their bachelor days, had some experience fending for themselves and even admitted to enjoy cooking. For example, Mr. Thomas, who left home at sixteen for technical training in north India, maintained that he does most of the cooking in the house. His wife concurred that he not only does the cooking, but also most of the hard work in terms of the cleaning.

Mr. Samuel also asserted that he enjoys cooking and does it on a daily basis for his household. Because he had to live on his own in north India for about six years, he had to learn how to cook for himself. He is glad to have this skill because he can use it for the benefit of his family and friends. As he put it, "I don't think it is degrading myself or cheap to do housework and things like that." Rather, he takes leadership for the communal cooking efforts at church functions or at other community events.

Although his wife appreciates his talents, she complains that he cooks and entertains too much. As she observes: "All the time he has a lot of company here. Cousins, friends, and everybody. He cooks and invites everybody every day. Chicken fry, fish fry, chicken curry — something every day. So I don't cook too much." Whereas Mr. Samuel does the cooking, she does most of the cleaning in the house as part of a shared division of labor.

Mr. Thomas and Mr. Samuel are exceptional in their love for cooking. Most of the men in this category had to learn to cook against their pre-immigration instincts. For instance, Mrs. Philip describes the initial shock and consequent adjustment in her household as her husband started to help her with the housework.

I came first, and after eleven months, my kids and my husband came. O God! That was the time I was studying for the psychiatric courses (for the licensing exams), and we had little kids. My husband did not do any work. By 4 a.m., I had to get ready, get the milk ready. At that time, I had a newborn baby. Then I went to work. At noon, I needed to go to classes at [the] hospital. I took the bus there. By 10 p.m., I would come home and see all the dishes, the kids sleeping in dirty clothes. My husband then was not used [to it] and did not know how to do the work. I managed for about two weeks and then burst out crying. I was like a mad woman. I told him that I get up at 4 a.m. and between work and school get back at 10 p.m. . . . If I have to cook and clean till 12:30 a.m. at night, how long do I have to sleep? This is when he realized how I was doing all the work. So he slowly started to help and do the chores around the house. Things started to get better after a month.

Similarly, Mrs. Markos reminisces about the metamorphosis of her husband when she says, "He was not a very good cook. He only knew how to make rice. Now he learned everything. In the beginning he was not very good. . . . He never washed plates after eating. After some time of marriage, he has changed. He is a very understanding person." In the case of the Punoose household, they have worked out a shared division of labor in which Mr. Punoose does everything but the cooking. Mrs. Punoose admits that she does most of the cooking but her husband helps her whenever necessary. She states "From the day he came here, he is doing all the cleaning. We both work together, and in emergency situations, he helps me." Mr. Punoose also does all the grocery shopping for the household. Mr. Punoose and the other men in this category all accepted the need to help their wives and were able to adapt to the exigencies of post-immigration life.

Financial Decision making

What was striking about the partnership households was that both men and women, in their discussions about financial decision making, assumed a democratic process. The women were especially straightforward in their affirmation of a shared ownership and responsibility for financial matters. Mrs. Eapen put it best when she said, “I work hard. You work hard. It is our money.” Thus, she felt justified in setting limits on her husband’s generosity with their money. Why are these women so different from their contemporaries despite having very similar backgrounds? Why do their husbands go along with the changes despite coming from traditional homes?

The women pointed to the post-immigration cultural and structural context to explain why their households were democratic about financial matters, especially relative to Kerala. For instance, Mrs. Thomas explained why she was primarily in charge of the finances in their household:

Most of the things are still under my name — it did not change — phone bill, credit cards, and all other things. He is not good at checking and writing, but he used to do it when it was necessary. He managed. When he had some problem and he could not do it, he would give it to me. I am better at talking in English. When you come from a rural area of India, there is a problem in talking. There was only Hindi in that part of the country where he was working. So I took the responsibility of dealing with all kinds of matters. He has picked up a lot now, so it is less of a headache for me.

Having immigrated before her husband and being armed with better linguistic skills, she was in charge. The new conditions after immigration shifted the responsibilities to her so that she was not only participating, but also in charge of their financial affairs.

Immigration also brought changes for these families because of their contact with American society. Mrs. Philip talked about how many of her nurse friends had changed as a result of interaction with their American coworkers.

They learn more. They are not the servile women, and they talk back to their husbands. They are not like slaves. They have more freedom. The country has changed them. . . . An example — I give my paycheck to my husband and he gives me ten dollars to go and spend. Then they [American coworkers] ask you “Why? You are working. You make the money. Why do have to go and ask him?” Then the women think about this, and they start to feel that they should have more freedom, and they start living that way. . . . I have eight family friends here. All of them are aggressive and different from when they came here. . . . But husbands have changed also. They realize that the women are working like them and take this into account.

It is not only the nurses who have changed, but also their husbands are forced to change when faced with their newly “aggressive” wives. In addition to interactions with Americans, there are also structural conditions of American financial transactions that encourage the democratic participation of the couple in financial decision making. Mrs. Punoose gave one such example when she explained why she argues and fights with her husband about financial matters in a way very unlike her mother:

Mrs. P: My father deals with everything. My mother does not know anything. She knows just cooking only. My father, whatever he does, he does not even tell to my mother. . . .Yes she never argued. But here we have to. Here you can't do anything yourself. If you buy, both of you have to sign. Both are working, and both are responsible for the payment. Everything should not be in one person's name. It won't happen anyway. Everything is shared.

S.G.: Do you think that's better?

Mrs. P: I think that's better. If everything goes to one person, you end up with nothing. Everything is not controlled by one person. Everything is equal. Equal responsibility. If I need money, I have money. If he needs money, he has money.

Mrs. Punoose points to the structural conditions of financial transactions in the U.S. that allow for the participation of both husband and wife. Although a woman may choose not to sign her own paycheck, she has to participate in all major credit-based transactions such as the purchase of a home or a car. Especially because her salary may be the larger and the more stable of the two, in most cases, her husband would need her to cosign for all loan applications related

to major purchases. Thus, Mrs. Punoose can confidently assert, “Everything should not be in one person’s name. It won’t happen anyway.”

Consequently, she underlines the fact that both members of the couple become responsible for payments. The new structural conditions of post-immigration finances impose equal ownership and equal responsibility on the couple, contributing to the required participation of the women in the financial matters of the household. Although some women, like Mrs. Thambi, may choose to just sign on the dotted line, women like Mrs. Punoose like the fact that they and their husbands can have equal responsibility and control over their shared financial investments.

In conclusion, the partnership households are very similar to the forced-help households in the primary immigrant status and relative employment success of the women and in the difficulty that men have in the U.S. labor market. These households receive very little help from Kerala relative to the traditional and forced-help households.

Unlike in the forced-help households, the husband’s participation in child care in partnership households does not lead to the reassertion of his patriarchal status in the other areas of the household division of labor. Rather he responds to the changes in post-immigration life in an egalitarian manner by extending himself and sharing in all the responsibilities of domestic life. Often following his wife’s lead, the husband in the partnership household transforms his gender ideology to fit with the new reality. Consequently, as in the case of traditional households, ideology and practice are once again in synch in the partnership household.

The Eapens exemplify this process of ideological transformation. Although both Mr. and Mrs. Eapen probably started out with traditional expectations of marital roles, the starkly different post-immigration circumstances led them to adopt egalitarian ideologies to match their

new reality. Certainly, Mrs. Eapen and the women of the partnership household cohort are more forceful than their husbands in their espousal of egalitarianism for their households. As Mrs. Philip recalled, it was the women of the eight couples she knew closely who became “aggressive and different,” leaving behind their “subdued” selves. But their husbands, like Mr. Eapen, change despite being haunted by the knowledge that “Indian men don’t do this kind of work.”

But whereas Kerala is the main reference point for traditional and forced-help households, the partnership family seems more immediately influenced by the cultural and structural conditions of life in the U.S. For example, although all the households faced similar changes in the post-immigration structural and cultural context, the couples of the partnership households referred to these new circumstances as factors to explain the changes in their lives. Finally, there are some households in which men are unable to play even a marginal role, resulting in female-led households.

Female-led Households

Explanation of the Division of Labor

These five households fall on the opposite end of the spectrum relative to traditional households. For one reason or another, the women are the heads, and the responsibility for the housework, child care and financial decision making falls disproportionately on their shoulders. There isn’t a family that is most representative of this category, given that there are various reasons for the existence of this anomalous type of household. I have identified five households that belong in this category. Their inclusion is merited by the literal absence of the man in one case, the unreliability of a couple of the men and, the extreme dependence of two men on their wives.

The women in this category were also the primary immigrants, with the exception of one who was sponsored by her immigrant husband after their arranged marriage in Kerala. As with forced-help households and partnership households, the women are better situated than their husbands in the U.S. labor market. All of the women are registered nurses. Of the three employed men, two are in the nursing field, but in auxiliary positions and one works in a factory. Of the remaining two men, one is unemployed and one is dead.

In four out of the five cases, these households have gotten help to care for their children from relatives in Kerala. In two cases, grandparents have come for extended stays. In another case, a sibling immigrated with the explicit intention of helping with child care.

Although their pattern of immigration, relationship to the labor market, and access to extraconjugal child care is similar to the households in the forced-help category, the different responses of the men in these families to the post-immigration conditions results in female leadership in all the dimensions of household labor.

Absent Men

Mrs. Jacob is an extremely unusual person in the immigrant community, not only because she is a widow, but also because her husband was a white American man. From the time she was a young girl in her village in Kerala, Mrs. Jacob had different ideas about what she wanted to do with her life. She was enamoured of the consumer items that she saw people bring back from the city — items like sweet-smelling soap. As a little girl, she used to sit in a corner and pretend to talk in English to herself. It was the desire to speak English and find the sweet-smelling soap that inspired her to pursue a career in nursing, a decision that was intolerable to her father, a

prominent politician in their village. So she ran away to Bombay — a journey of three days and nights — to look for opportunities for schooling.

Eventually, she got a bachelor's in nursing, which placated her father because it was a college degree. She first immigrated to Kuwait, where she worked for three years, before she came to the U.S. Unlike most other immigrants, she did not connect with the Malayalee community. She eventually met her husband through a roommate, and they got married against her parent's wishes. Unfortunately, three years after the marriage, he was diagnosed with a terminal disease and died after a few years. Left with two young children to raise, Mrs. Jacob went on to get her master's in community health and supports her family as a single mother.

When I went to interview Mrs. Jacob in her home, I noticed on her bathroom wall, a plaque that represented her position on marital gender relations. It said something like the following: If God had meant for Eve to be ruler over Adam, he would have used a bone from Adam's head to create Eve. If God had meant for Eve to be ruled by Adam, he would have used a bone from Adam's feet. That God uses a bone from Adam's rib signifies that God wanted Adam and Eve to be equal partners. From what Mrs. Jacob said about her marital relationship, the last scenario from Eden was the one most descriptive of her marriage.

When I asked her to compare her relationship with her husband to that of her parents, she said: "My mother was very subdued. She went along with whatever my dad said. . . . She did not have anything more and there was no gratification. My husband and I, we would discuss and plan. If I wanted to do something on my own, I did not feel like I had to ask him for permission. Whenever I was going to be late. . . . I did not have to get permission."

Mrs. Jacob told me that one of the main reasons that she ran away from home to become a nurse was because she did not want to end up like her mother and her sister. In the case of the

latter, she was forced to get married at a very young age by a dying grandmother who wanted to see one of her grandchildren get married. Mrs. Jacob thought that it was “cruel” that her sister, who had wanted to attend college, never got the chance to do so because of her early entrance into matrimony.

After her husband died, Mrs. Jacob was left with the difficult task of caring for her children. Although she was able to handle the financial and household responsibilities, she found that she needed support with the task of raising her children. Consequently, she sponsored her sister and family to the U.S. to help with the children. She also joined the immigrant orthodox church and had her children baptized there. She describes this experience as “very hard. That is when I knew the meaning of swallowing your pride. I didn’t want my girls to not have any identity at all.” Without her husband, she felt less comfortable among his friends and sought support from the more familiar immigrant community to bring up her children.

Unlike most of her contemporaries, Mrs. Jacob left home with the explicit intention of finding a more egalitarian option than being in a marriage like that of her parents, where her mother was “very subdued.” She started her family life in a partnership household with her husband, but with his death, she was left to head her household on her own.

Unreliable Men

Unlike Mrs. Jacob, neither Mrs. John nor Mrs. Kurien had to run away to become nurses. They went with the full knowledge of their families and with the intention of helping their families. They are both the eldest daughters with multiple younger siblings. Coming from poor families, they both told their husbands before marriage that their intention was to continue helping their natal families. That they had to negotiate this points to the cultural expectations that

a woman, once married, belongs to her husband's family and her natal family does not have any rights over her. In both cases the husbands did not keep their end of the agreement, and this contributed to the spousal conflict present in both these marriages.

Mrs. John tearfully told me about the betrayal of the pact that her husband made with her: "When the proposal came, I told him I am the eldest in the house. I have to support my family. He said it is okay. He can do everything for me. After marriage, he changed totally." She bitterly observed that he might have agreed to her conditions before marriage because he wanted to come to the U.S. and she was his ticket.

Similarly, Mrs. Kurien also thought that she had gotten her husband to agree to her plan to help sponsor her family members to the U.S. Although she was able to bring them over, he made it very difficult for her to support them as they tried to stand on their own two feet. For instance, her sister had to pay him to live with them. But his mother and a number of his sisters, whom they sponsored, stayed with them for no charge. One of her husband's nephews created a lot of trouble for them with the law, and her husband took the nephew's side against Mrs. Kurien because of his loyalty to his family.

This was the last straw for Mrs. Kurien, who decided that she would take a different strategy with helping her brother, who was about to immigrate to the U.S. As she put it, "I was determined to help my brother, no matter what my husband said. I became more outspoken then. My husband made me more outspoken, so I told him 'If you want to say anything, say it to my face because I am going to help my brother. If you agree with it or not, I don't care a bit. You can go to hell.' And he was more cooperative."

In addition to reneging on their pre-immigration pacts, both Mr. John and Mr. Kurien were not reliable financial managers, nor did they help out with child care and household duties.

Mrs. John has to work double shifts constantly in order to get the extra overtime money because her husband has not been able to hold down a job since he was laid off eleven years ago. She told me that her husband was the type who wouldn't even heat up the food that she prepared for him in the microwave. She used to have to do that for him, but she is too tired these days. She remembers the days when she would have to cook for many of his friends, who were always over at their house drinking and playing cards.

What irks Mrs. John even more is the way that her husband has mishandled their money. He was prone to making expensive purchases on their credit cards without consulting her. Once he put the house on sale, and she found out about it only when the realtor called to ask if he could come by with a potential buyer. Another time he bought a car and called her from the dealer's office to ask for her signature. She refused, but when the car dealer showed up at her door, she relented and signed. Without contributing anything to the household, he used to burden her with his whimsical purchases. She told me that she used to believe that she had to obey her husband, but realizes now that these ideas don't work.

Mrs. Kurien had a similar litany of criticisms about her husband. Although he may have taken care of the immediate needs of the children when she was at work, he did not do anything else in the house. She complained "Very seldom did he ever cook. I still remember when I went away for a couple of days and came back, all the dishes were in the sink. . . . He doesn't even know where his own clothes are. . . . I go and do my night shift, and then I have to cook breakfast and wake up my husband and feed him. . . . He won't even make a cup of coffee."

Likewise, when it came to financial affairs, Mrs. Kurien had to change her ways to deal with her husband's incompetence. She said that she used to give him her paycheck, and she didn't even know how much money they had. But he invested in the stock market, lost a lot of

money, and never told her about it. This was the catalyst in their relationship that made her take greater control over their finances.

Interestingly she sees his losses in the stock market as an answer to her prayers. As she put it, “When his family came, all these problems came with them, and I just couldn’t take it. I had to work. I had to take care of him. I had to take care of the kids. It was all just too much. I just wanted to kill myself. And then I prayed like I used to do as a child. I asked God to make him more understanding. And I think that’s how he lost his money.”

Both Mr. John and Mr. Kurien are aware of the difficulties that their wives face. For instance, whereas Mr. John notes that it is very difficult for his wife in the U.S. to handle work inside and outside the home, he admits that he helps her only sometimes, when she asks for help. He observes, “Nowadays she is tired — getting sick. Otherwise there is no problem. I am thinking that I should do a little more work for the house. It will be good for her . . . but since I don’t have that kind of routine experience, I don’t do it. Something else will come up and I will go for it.”

Mr. Kurien also observed that, because his wife takes care of all the cooking and household labor and then goes to work, “It is very stressful for her. I know, but there is no choice.” When I pointed out to him that there was another choice and that he could help her, he said that he had very limited time.

It appears that both these couples started out following the traditional division of labor paradigm where the men were in charge of the decision making and the women did most of the other labor. Along with feeling betrayed by their husbands vis-à-vis their pre-immigration agreement, these two women were also dissatisfied by the unreliable manner in which their husbands dealt with their common finances. As a result, these women had to take greater control

over the financial reigns in their households in addition to being responsible for the child care and the housework.

Dependent Men

Similarly, Mrs. Simon and Mrs. Mathew are also responsible for a disproportionate share of the household labor. But their reasons are different. Their husbands are present in their households and are both employed. However, they are extremely dependent on their wives, resulting in the latter carrying the lion's share of the burden of running their households.

Mrs. Simon was working in India as a nurse when many of her neighbors and coworkers started immigrating to the U.S. She also wanted to come and see if she could make it here. Furthermore, she felt that her children would have better opportunities in the U.S. However, her husband did not want to leave India. He did not have the same ambitions as she did. But finally they decided to come when they got the opportunity. After immigration, Mrs. Simon went through the usual attempts to establish herself as a registered nurse, and her husband secured a blue-collar job.

Mrs. Mathew immigrated after she had an arranged marriage with her husband, who was already in the U.S. His brother and sister-in-law — a nurse — sponsored Mr. Mathew who, in turn, looked for a nurse to marry when he came back to Kerala. Mrs. Mathew married him, even though she did not like him, because of the opportunity to come to the U.S. The significant limp that Mr. Mathews procured from childhood polio probably contributed to Mrs. Mathew's dislike of his looks. However, she wanted to help her parents, who were not financially secure.

Mr. Mathew, who had a high school education from Kerala, became a nursing assistant upon immigration. His newly arrived wife also started as a nursing assistant, but soon passed her

exams and became a registered nurse while he continued as a nursing assistant. His limp does not allow him to try for other jobs that would require greater physical capability.

Both these women are responsible for all the cooking and housework. Mrs. Simon works two jobs, which means that she is working every day of the week. She cooks for her family in the evenings after coming back from work. She explains how she had to struggle with her husband, who expects her to be with him at all times:

Saturday mornings are the only mornings I get to sleep in, but he expects me to get up at 6.30 in the morning and make an Indian breakfast — get up and move around. He doesn't want me to sleep once he gets up — that's always his nature. He says women should not sleep in the daytime, it's bad and you know, and finally he got tired of telling me. . . . I said no matter what you say, I have to sleep in, and I have to sleep in the morning. . . . If you are that hungry, you can have bread or hot cereal. So he doesn't bother me nowadays too much.

Likewise, the labor of child care is again the responsibility of the women. According to their wives, both Mr. Mathew and Mr. Simon are not very patient with their children. Mrs. Mathew has taken over child care because, as she put it, “He gets upset with the kids easily. I don't like it when he starts yelling at the kids, so I do most of the child care.”

In Mrs. Simon's case, her husband is very authoritarian and tries to control his children like his father controlled him. But Mrs. Simon intervenes in his disciplining because she believes that this approach will not work. Consequently, he accuses her of spoiling the children. I overheard the Simons's college-age daughter announce to her mother after church that she would be going to see a play with her friend. When her mother told her to ask her father about it, the daughter quipped, “As if he wears the pants in the family.” Both Mr. Simon and Mr. Mathew are unable to adapt to circumstances where the patriarchal authoritarian role does not work with

children. Consequently, their wives have to intervene and take on a greater responsibility in the care of their children.

Finally, both women felt that they had the greater responsibility in making and carrying out the day-to-day decision making of the household. In talking about their household, Mrs. Mathew said, "I do feel that I can do many things now, whether it is going places or making decisions about taking the children to the doctor or anything. In fact, he tells me to do everything on my own, so I end up doing it all on my own." I had the opportunity to witness what she meant by this when I was over at the Mathew's residence. She decided, against his wishes, that they were going to church after my interview. I watched as she told him what to wear and what clothes the children should wear. She was the driver, which is extremely unusual for most of the families, and this may have something to do with his disability.

As for Mrs. Simon, she feels burdened by her husband, who needs her presence for most activities. As she stated,

My husband always makes decisions with me. He doesn't want to make decisions by himself. Like even if I tell him "you go and do it," he won't do it. He still wants me to go with him. Even if he wants a tee shirt, he doesn't know how to go and do it. He wants me to go with him, and I have to say, "this is good for you — take it." That's the type he is.

Perhaps this was the reason he evaded my multiple attempts to set up an interview with him separately, whereas he seemed happy to talk to me whenever he saw me at church or during visits at his home.

Whether unreliable, dependent, or absent, the men in this category leave the women with the larger share of the burden of household labor. For the most part, these families immigrated to the U.S. with traditional expectations of sharing the work of their households. The exception is Mrs. Jacob, who immigrated with the express intention of finding more egalitarian options than

those available to her in Kerala. Their domestic experiences in the U.S. with unreliable and extremely dependent or absent men create a dissonance between ideology and practice.

The dissonance is extremely severe in the case of the unreliable men because it is caused by the complete breakdown of the “patriarchal bargain” in what used to be traditional household (Kandiyoti 1988). Both Mrs. John and Mrs. Kurien were in tears as they told me about the betrayal of their husbands in not keeping up their end of the immigration bargain. Furthermore, not only were these men unable to contribute their share of the division of labor in the household, but they also became obstacles in the way of their wives, who were trying to do it all on their own. As a result, Mrs. John recounts that she told her husband to go to hell because he made her do it.

Rather than adjusting against ideology, like the forced-help families, the women of the female-led households, for the most part, reject the ideology that does not correspond to their lived experiences. In the face of dissonance between ideology and practice, they, like Mrs. John, realize that the dictate to obey one’s husband doesn’t work anymore.

They, however, cannot adopt a new ideology that fixes the dissonance, like the couples in partnership. They continue living with the contradictions of female-led households, where they are not socially supported and rewarded for their headship, as are the men in the traditional families. Yet as pioneers, they must come up with strategies that work for them while carrying the burden of husbands who are unreliable, dependent, or absent in their roles as domestic partners. Some of these women turn to relatives in Kerala or the Kerala immigrant community for help, especially with raising their children.

Conclusion

One of the biggest changes the Kerala immigrants face upon arrival in the U.S. is the change in the domestic sphere. All the couples have to find a way to deal with a new set of circumstances without the accustomed and easily accessible help from relatives and servants.

In the traditional households, couples like the Itoops had a larger set of options available to them, which allowed them to maintain a traditionally gendered division of labor. If men felt compromised, it was relative to the ideological standards in Kerala. In practice, their lifestyles are not very different. Women voiced awareness of alternate standards by which they could judge men, although they did not demand change. Overall there was little inconsistency between the gender ideology and practices employed by these couples, as seen best in the Itoop household.

In the forced-help households, men like Mr. Thambi experience the greatest change in the area of child care. It is with unsteady voices like Mr. Thambi's that the men claim headship over the household, whereas their wives claim ignorance in financial matters. In this category, the fit between gender ideology and lived experience is more tenuous, although the women, like Mrs. Thambi, make concerted efforts to make it fit.

In partnership households, men and women share the domestic labor and see it as a logical and necessary adaptation to post-immigration circumstances. There were many possible reasons for their egalitarianism. The women in these households spoke about influences from the American society that impacted them and, in turn, led them to aggressively demand changes in their husbands. The men are all downwardly mobile relative to their wives. As families, they have less help from Kerala and consequently fewer connections. As a result, these couples are more dependent on each other within the nuclear family. Perhaps this is why the men are more

willing, following the leads of their wives, to alter their traditional gender ideologies to fit with the new realities of post-immigration life.

The final category consists of female-led households, where the women have the disproportionate burden of responsibility for household labor for a variety of reasons. The men in these households are absent because of death, partially present, but unreliable, or extremely dependent on the women. In all the female-led households, the women have to let go of their traditional ideologies in the face of absent, partially present or incompetent partners. There are no clearly viable resolutions to the tension between ideology and practice for these households.

On a spectrum of change, the traditional households had the fewest changes, and the partnership households had to make the most changes in terms of the fit between gender ideologies and lived experience. Relative to the division of labor in their natal homes, all the immigrant men in the U.S. are forced to do at least some work that their fathers would not dream of doing. Furthermore, they face the loss of patriarchal status in relation to their wives and children, coupled with a general loss of status vis-a-vis the wider society in the U.S.

In conclusion, the post-immigration struggles around the household division of labor for the South Asian American two-job couples are clearly linked to the lack of help with child care and household work in the U.S. In a less industrialized society such as India, the presence of the structural support of extended family, and cheap child care and household help made it easier for middle-class women to enter full-time work. They did not face the same type of second-shift problems that Hochschild (1989) outlines in her work. Consequently, they were able to maintain a traditional ideology of a gendered division of labor that named the domestic sphere as the responsibility of women.

In the U.S., their struggles are similar to those of native born American two-job couples facing what Hochschild (1989) calls the “stalled revolution” where society has not adapted to the exodus of women into the workforce. However, the South Asian couples have both additional challenges and resources in their second-shift struggles. Unlike their native born counterparts, the South Asian American men face a pronounced loss of patriarchal status in the household division of labor that is especially difficult for them, given their larger loss of status in the economic and social realms as a result of immigration. Conversely, unlike native middle class American families, these South Asian American families obtain extra support from extended family members, especially in the area of child care, despite their often transnational existence.

Given that such South Asian American families are increasingly becoming a part of the American middle class, their struggles around the division of labor in the household must be included in our examinations of two-job American couples. This is important not only because their presence more accurately reflects the makeup of the American middle class but also because their experiences broaden our understanding of the classic double-shift dilemma for dual-income families.

Notes

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¹ Although I am aware that household work also involves “invisible work” done most often by women, which is not accounted for in easily identifiable categories such as cooking or cleaning, I do not deal with the subtleties of “invisible work” in this project. For more on this, see DeVault (1994).

² Sociologist Prema Kurien similarly argues that the South Asian American couples she studies become better friends because of having to depend more exclusively on each after immigration (Kurien:1998).

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