

A Journey across Countries, Constructs, and Dreams: Perspectives of Indian American Families of Youth with Developmental Disabilities on Transition from School to Post-School Settings

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on the findings of a qualitative study that focused on the perspectives of four Indian American mothers of youth with developmental disabilities on the process of transitioning from school to post-school environments. Data were collected through in-depth ethnographic interviews. The findings indicate that in their efforts to support their youth with developmental disabilities, the mothers themselves navigate multiple transitions across countries, constructs, dreams, systems of schooling, and services. The mothers' perspectives have to be understood against the larger context of their experiences as citizens of this country as well as members of the South Asian diaspora. The mothers' views on services, their journey, their dreams for their youth, and their interpretation of the ideas anchored in current conversations on transition are continually evolving. Their attempts to maintain their resilience and their indigenous understandings while simultaneously negotiating their experiences in the United States with supporting their youth are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Indian-American mothers, transitioning, diaspora, disability, dreams.

The last two decades have witnessed a rising interest in the transition of students with disabilities from school to various post-school settings in the United States. "Transition," as the term is used within the context of services for students with disabilities, has been described as the point of time when students "prepare to exit school and enter the adult world" (Wehman et al., 2020, p. 2). It is the movement of students with disabilities from high school to living in the community, working in the community, attending post-secondary institutions and "other aspects of entering adulthood such as financial literacy, travel and social relationships" (Wehman, 2020, p. xix). Integral to the efforts on transition planning in the United States has been an inclusive perspective that visualizes people with disabilities living and working in the community (Butterworth et al., 2017) or attending post-secondary institutions (Lindsay et al., 2019) and experiencing a good quality of life.

Families of youth with disabilities have been recognized as critical stakeholders in the transition planning process (Gauthier-Boudreault et al., 2018; Gilson et al., 2018; Greene, 2011). They play an important role in advocating for their son or daughter (Hetherington et al., 2010), supporting them in articulating the vision or dream for the future (Mount, 2000), and seeking

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opportunities for their youth to work and live in the community (Gilson et al., 2018). However, while our knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse families and their experiences navigating school for their child with disabilities has grown (Jegatheesan, 2009; Lasky & Karge, 2011; Palawat & May, 2011), relatively less is known about their perspectives on the process of transition. This article presents the findings of a qualitative study that focused on understanding the perspectives of four Indian American mothers of youth with developmental disabilities on the process of transition. Using a case study approach, this study sought to answer the following questions: (1) How do Indian American mothers of youth with developmental disabilities understand the process of transitioning from school to post-school settings? (2) How do they navigate their experiences with the schools and other systems of services? (3) What meanings do they attribute to disability-related constructs and practices they encounter in the United States? (4) What do they want for their youth with developmental disabilities? The findings of this study reiterate the significance of understanding how mothers of Indian American youth with developmental disabilities continually engage with, construct, and reconstruct the ideas and practices they encounter in the United States and imbue them with their own meanings based on their evolving experiences. The families' efforts to maintain their resilience and their understanding of disability and related constructs while simultaneously negotiating their lives as members of a diaspora and an immigrant in the United States are discussed in this article.

Literature Review

Practices in the area of transition have traditionally been based on the assumption that there are universal norms of adulthood (Harry et al., 1999). Such a position does not take into consideration the heterogeneity of beliefs emerging from various cultural groups. For instance, it is assumed that individuals with disabilities will move out of their parents' homes or will work independently in the community. However, such an expectation may conflict with the views of families who come from a cultural context where "moving away from home" is not necessarily the role expected of a "normal" adult. Similarly, Rueda et al. (2005) reported that for Latina mothers, rather than temporal markers of independence such as making decisions on their own when they left school, it was the taking on of increased responsibilities that came with certain milestones such as marriage that were associated with being an adult.

Constructions of adulthood and the inherent expectations might be different amongst culturally diverse families. The emphasis on individualistic values implicit in constructs such as self-determination might conflict with families from collectivist cultures (Pewewardy & Fitzpatrick, 2009; Smith & Routel, 2010) where the system's attempts to view the child as an "autonomous individual" (Rueda et al., 2005, p. 412) may be perceived as "a disturbing violation of their view of the child as embedded in the family" (Rueda et al., 2005, p. 412). While the dominant perspective encourages increasing decision-making on the part of the youth and decreased family influence, some families, on the other hand, consider honoring family perspectives as important (Geenen et al., 2001).

Similarly, other studies report that culturally and linguistically diverse parents might have their own visions and dreams for the future of their children. Parents may want more focus on traditional education and academics and attending college, thus contradicting any stereotypes to the contrary that might exist (Gil-Kashiwabara et al. 2007). Perhaps what is missing in this analysis is how experiences and perspectives of immigrant families of youth with disabilities on transition planning and disability are shaped not only by their status in the host country but also by their relationship with the country that they have left behind. Parent dreams could continue to be informed by their experiences in the country they have left behind (Lai & Ishiyama, 2004). The

traditional analysis tends to focus on the cultural differences that exist between immigrant families and the services in the host country, but what is obscured is the larger context of the families' membership in the diaspora and how that affects their constructions or reconstructions of disability, transition to adulthood, and inclusion.

The term diaspora has been defined in different ways, and the meanings imputed to this term have evolved with time. The typical definition of the term "diaspora" describes it as a "translocational" identity that positions itself in relation to "a home that has been left behind or lies elsewhere" and a home that people might hope to return to (Desai, 2004, p. 19). Integral to these traditional definitions has been a tendency to characterize the diasporic experience in the binaries of the homeland and the host country and notions of displacement and loss (Gabriel, 2011). More recently, scholars interested in this area state that the tendency to circumscribe the diasporic experience into typical binaries renders a simplistic view of an experience that can be complex and embrace multiple facets (Bhatia, 2007). They argue that the diasporic experience could potentially bring with it a challenge to dominant ideologies both in the homeland as well as the land that one migrates to (Goodley et al., 2013) and could indeed demonstrate the resilience that comes with this migration (Gabriel, 2011). Relatively less is known about the experiences of families of youth with disabilities who are members of the diaspora and how they navigate the multiple facets of this experience, including parenting a child with disabilities, negotiating the service system, and dealing with the intersecting and conflicting expectations around transition to adulthood. Recent work that explores the perspectives of families of children with disabilities in the diaspora in the UK draws attention to the ways in which families continually negotiate the tension between different and, at times, contradictory epistemologies of disabilities they encounter. Drawing on the findings of a qualitative study, Goodley et al. (2013) describe how diaspora, disability, and family intersect in complex ways. Families of children with disabilities in the diaspora continually negotiate ableist practices within both the host country as well as the diasporic community that they are members of. Goodley et al. (2013) reiterate the importance of professional practices recognizing the complexity of this experience as well as the identity of these families.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of Indian-American parents of youth with disabilities on the process of transitioning from school to post-school environments. Data were collected through the case study approach. Although there are differing opinions on whether the case study is a qualitative method (George & Bennett, 2005) or a type of qualitative research (Starman, 2013), it shares some significant attributes that intersect with qualitative research. These attributes include its focus on the insider's perspective (Fetterman, 1988), the context, and the meanings attributed to taken-for-granted constructs and experiences (S. Rao, 2000; Starman, 2013).

The characteristics of a 'case' in a case study and the nature of case studies have been defined in different ways. Merriam (1998) defined a 'case' as a "single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p.27). Expanding on this definition, some scholars have stated that these boundaries also include those of time and space (Creswell, 1998). Others have stated that it is a study of real-world phenomenon where the boundaries between that phenomenon and the context surrounding it may be blurred (Yin, 2018).

The case study approach in qualitative research has gained recognition over the years as one that brings with it several advantages, including the ability to understand a process that unfolds over time (S. Rao, 2000). It is suited for certain kinds of inquiry and questions, such as "how" or "why" (Yin, 2018), and can be useful in informing practice (Ocasio-Stoutenberg & Harry, 2021).

The case study approach has been used in the field of special education to understand the unique perspectives of culturally diverse families of children with disabilities (Harry et al., 1999; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Findings from these studies have been powerful in highlighting the dissonance between how these families construct disability and how it is viewed within the schools in the US. It has shed light on the perspectives of these families on parent-professional interactions, and why some families might decide to withdraw from collaborating with the schools (S. Rao, 2000). My choice of this method was shaped by the possibilities it offers in understanding how culturally diverse mothers of children with disabilities might attribute meanings to disability and transition-related constructs that are typically assumed to be universal. I was interested in understanding how they navigated their experiences with schools and other systems of support. I felt that the qualitative case study approach provided me the opportunity to document the unique experiences and perspectives of the mothers as well as the ways in which those perspectives changed and evolved over the years as well as over different spaces.

Participants

All four mothers were first-generation immigrants to the United States, and their ages varied between 50-56 years. The women spent their early years in India and grew up in the states of West Bengal, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. The languages spoken by the mothers were Tamil, Kannada, Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, and English. All of the mothers were proficient in English and had a college-level education. Three of the four youth with disabilities were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. One of the youths was diagnosed with Microcephaly. The ages of the youth varied between 19-28 at the time of the study. The mothers were recruited through the local Indian community.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with four mothers to understand how Indian-American parents of youth with developmental disabilities navigate and interpret the process of transition. In-depth interviews were primarily chosen as the methodology for data collection for two reasons. First, the process of “transition” from school to post-school environments for young people with disabilities is a complex process. While the terminology appears to be deceptively simple, underlying this process are taken-for-granted understandings about coming of age, being an adult, and notions of independence. In-depth interviews help uncover these understandings and identify how parents interpret and assign meaning to this process. Second recursive in-depth interviews provide an opportunity to follow up on emerging themes that surface during the first interview. They encompass an inductive process, which is the essence of qualitative inquiry and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016).

Oral and written consent was sought from each participant prior to conducting the interviews. Each participant was interviewed three times. The first and second interviews were conducted in person with three of the participants and lasted between 75 to 90 minutes. An additional third follow-up interview was conducted on the phone with all four participants. For one participant, the second interview was conducted on Skype. Each of the phone interviews lasted for approximately 40 minutes. The interviews were iterative in nature. The purpose of the initial interview was to explore the perspectives and experiences of the parents. The focus of the second and third interviews was to further follow up on consistent and recurring themes that were apparent in the initial interview. The interviews reflected the practice of active listening (Seidman, 2019)

and seeking conversational depth (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Follow-up questions were used to further understand the experiences of the participant or seek examples (Seidman, 2019).

The protocol incorporated broad, open-ended questions that focused on areas such as mothers' vision and goals for their sons, mothers' experiences and perspectives on current supports and services, mothers' understandings of disability, and ideas such as independence. The mothers alluded to their experiences living in this country as well as their early experiences in India. This was a recurrent theme throughout each interview. While the length of the initial interviews varied between 75-90 minutes, an additional half-hour to an hour of conversation preceded and followed each interview. The total amount of time spent at each in-person visit averaged 3 hours. These conversations were integral to the cultural norms of 'visiting' that are associated with the Indian culture. They were critical to establishing rapport and building connections as a fellow diasporic member. In addition to interviews, maintained participant observation notes on each visit.

Positionality

My interest in this study emerged from my identity as an Indian American as well as my interest in working with culturally diverse families of children and youth with disabilities. As mentioned in the section above, the literature identified a dissonance between the conversations on transition in the dominant culture and the ways in which culturally diverse families of youth with disabilities interpreted this process. Having grown up in India, and raised children in the US, I was aware that while there were some common intersections in how being an adult was defined in India and the US, there were differences, too. I was curious to learn more about how Indian American mothers negotiated and interpreted this process of transition. Being an Indian American myself, I anticipated that, as an insider, it might be relatively easier for me to build trust with Indian American mothers. I thought my familiarity with the cultural norms of interaction in the Indian American community, my proficiency in Indian languages such as Hindi, Kannada, and Tamil, as well as my prior experiences working with culturally diverse families might enable me to gain access and build trust with the mothers.

However, I soon realized that despite my status as an insider, I was an outsider in other ways. I was not the parent of a young person with a developmental disability. While I knew what it was to be a member of the South Asian diaspora, I had not encountered similar experiences as the mothers had with schools and educational systems. My role as a faculty member in higher education, as well as my access to professional knowledge in the field of disability, were associated with power and privilege. My credentials and my role as a teacher educator placed me in a potential hierarchical role of judging families and their decisions. Based on their prior experiences with schools and professionals in education, sharing their stories with me could place them in a relatively vulnerable position. They were cautious and wanted to know if this information would be shared with the larger Indian American community, thus potentially increasing the isolation that they were experiencing. In addition, while I felt that I empathized with their perspectives as parents, I learned that I did not really know the extent to which some of the mothers were exhausted and stretched in terms of time and resources. Some of them appeared to be going through a crisis, including taking care of elderly members of their families or dealing with schools. Building a relationship with the mothers involved being transparent about the purpose of the research, continually seeking consent, including the consent to continue participation in the study, and even unintentionally not reinforcing my presumed role as an 'expert' or a professional. I had to be careful not to talk or act in ways that would reiterate the traditional parent professional hierarchies that are mentioned in the literature on special education. I had to continually reiterate that I was there to learn from them. While some of the constructs and terms that the mothers shared were ones that I was familiar with,

I had to be careful not to assume that my interpretations reflected their understandings. I also learned that their perspectives and experiences reflected a hybrid and complex lens rather than lending themselves to simplistic binaries.

Data Analysis

The study generated 270 single-spaced pages of data. Data analysis was inductive in nature and drew on the constant comparative method first described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and elaborated further by Charmaz (2014). The researcher read the first four interviews and then began coding the data. As is typical of the coding process, each segment of data in an interview transcript was assigned a code. The codes assigned to a segment either were those selected by the researcher or were participant-generated in vivo codes. After coding the first four interviews, the researcher developed an initial list of codes. These initial coding categories were then reexamined for similarities or differences and revised to generate a new list. This list was further refined and used to code the rest of the transcripts. Coding of the interview transcripts generated several different coding categories such as 'gentle encouragement,' 'graduated independence,' 'did not figure in his grand scheme of things,' 'balancing everything,' 'been my child in my last life,' 'early years,' 'communication is important,' and so on. As a process of the data analysis, codes were compared with each other to create conceptual categories. Conceptual categories were further compared and contrasted to generate themes.

In addition to coding, analytical memos were maintained throughout the fieldwork. Memos were written following each interview. Analytical memos were also written to compare and contrast emerging themes across interviews (Mihás, 2021). As the data collection progressed, memos were written to further explore sensitizing concepts that arose during and after the coding of the data. Findings indicate that mothers' perspectives and experiences on the process of transition cannot be understood separately from the multiple transitions they themselves have to navigate as they make meaning of their journey supporting their sons with disabilities. These transitions include navigating varying expectations, models of schooling, understandings of constructs such as independence, and interpretations of disability and inclusivity.

The Mothers

Sumita is the mother of 25-year-old Tapas—a young man diagnosed with microcephaly. Sumita works at a law firm. Tapas attends a day training program for people with developmental disabilities on the weekdays. Sumita has been in the US for approximately 30 years. She lives in a condominium with Tapas and her current husband. Sumita has a vivacious and upbeat personality. She takes pride in her family and her home. She, Tapas, and her husband Adit like to travel and enjoy trying out new dishes. Her house is meticulous with pictures of family everywhere.

Ananya is the mother of 23-year-old Varun—a young man with autism who has recently graduated from a large state university. Ananya describes herself as a homemaker. She is an active participant in the Indian Community especially in the Arts. She has been in the US for about 25 years. Ananya has a great sense of humor and a pragmatic approach. Our interviews were interspersed with frequent laughter as she narrated stories from her life in India and the US. Family was a recurrent theme in her conversations. She lives in a suburban neighborhood with her husband. Her mother-in-law lives with her.

Shailaja is the mother of an 18-year-old young man with autism, Anand, who is currently in a segregated school for individuals with disabilities. She works in information technology. She has been in the US for 27 years. Shailaja has a quiet demeanor. She has a very close-knit circle of friends and family. Her daughter and Anand share a close relationship with each other.

Indra is the mother of a 20-year-old young man with autism who attends a community college. Indra describes herself as a stay-at-home mother. She has been in the US for 27 years. She lives in a condominium with her husband and son. The aroma of freshly cooked South Indian food greets you when you enter her house. Indra and her husband are devoted to their son.

Findings

Scholars in the area of transition have drawn attention to the “tumultuous” nature of this stage (Wehman et al., 2020, p. 3). A significant characteristic of this stage identified in the literature is the “huge shift in the way that services and supports are provided” (Wehman et al., 2020, p. 3) as well as the fact that in contrast to the schools, services are provided by several different systems. For culturally diverse families who are members of the South Asian diaspora, these difficulties are further compounded by the fact that they have to negotiate not one but multiple transitions. These transitions involved continual navigation of a complex system of schooling, supports and services, new interpretations of constructs, and new expectations for interactions and communication.

Navigating Multiple Transitions Through School Systems and Services

The mothers discussed not only their most recent experiences with the school districts or the adult service system but also their early encounters with the system, especially when they came to this country as new immigrants. These early experiences introduced the mothers to schooling in this country. They set the stage for the mothers to figure out ways of navigating the schools and the network of services in this country, ways to communicate with professionals, and ways to advocate for their child and their youth.

Early Years

As an immigrant in her early years in this country, Ananya had to learn to navigate the educational system in the US. She was shocked and concerned that judgments were made on her son as well as their family on more than one perceived difference, including the fact that they spoke Tamil at home. She and her husband encouraged her children to speak Tamil at home so that they continued to be familiar with the language. Coming from India, where people speak different languages, she could not understand why this was an issue. In particular, she was taken aback when one of his teachers called her in to talk about her “mothering.” The teacher, in Ananya’s view, was having a difficult time relating to Varun. She could not understand that Varun’s parents intentionally chose to speak to him in Tamil at home in order to encourage proficiency in his native language. Varun was in the process of picking up English and navigating his transition to a new context. The teacher attributed Varun’s difficulties to Ananya’s ‘poor parenting.’

So, like Varun, he spoke Tamil at home at that point. He understood English, not to say that he did not understand. He had a tough year because the teacher could not relate to him. And then one day, she calls me and says, ‘Come and talk to me!’ And then (she is) teaching me about

motherhood, you know. I don't need a lesson on motherhood from a girl who has not been a mother yet.

This was Ananya's introduction to the educational system in the US. She realized that it was not only Varun but her who was at risk of being judged. She had to actively step in and voice her concerns, a new experience for her, one that she had not encountered before in her experience growing up in India. In the example of the situation above, she not only conveyed her concerns to the principal but was also compelled to advocate for concrete action to rectify the situation.

As the children grew older, the mothers encountered situations where they had to communicate their needs to the school more explicitly. When their voices were not heard, it meant even seeking legal resort as needed, an experience, which was very difficult and stressful. For Shailaja, conflicts with the school system began in the early elementary school years and continued in the late elementary school years of her son on to high school. At one point, they had to hire an attorney to ensure that her son had access to extended school year services when he was in an upper elementary grade. This was the first time that she and her husband were engaged in a direct conflict with a school. Describing their experience during this period, she says:

It was sheer hell, you know, every waking moment. I just wanted the problem to be gone. It was extremely stressful. My husband was the one who had the strong will to keep going, and we tried, we hired an attorney, we went through mediation, and at that point, the school district brought their attorney, and we got advice from many people. Our lawyer said you can fight it but the judges often go with the school district. So, at that point, we gave up.

Their early experiences introduced them to the system of schooling in the US and set the foundation for how they would need to navigate the services and interactions with the professionals in their later years.

Later Years and Closer to Post-School Transition

When Anand entered high school, Shailaja and her husband decided to have him moved to a school for students with disabilities with the expectation that there would be an increased focus on vocational and life skills. However, they did not expect that there would barely be any focus on academics. The low expectations in this segregated setting and the lack of home-school communication became problematic. For Shailaja, it was critical that Anand was given homework on a daily basis at school, similar to other high school students. She believed that regular homework provided structure for Anand and enabled him to review and generalize skills taught in school. She was surprised to see that, in contrast to regular high school, homework was not a priority for the students in this school. Shailaja and her husband had to advocate for homework and hold the school accountable.

He was used to doing homework every day when he was in the public school system, and when he started here, you know they said, 'No, we don't have homework policy!' And to me, that just was not working out for me. I said, 'Look, it gives me a way for figuring out what he is working on, what he is having trouble with, and how I can relate what he is doing at school with what is going on at home and how I can generalize the skills that he has

used today.’ So, they resisted. Then I said, ‘I need a log from you guys to tell me what happened during the day.’ They said, ‘Oh, we don’t do that after they turn 15,’ but you know every child is different.

For Shailaja and her husband, it was shocking to see that homework was no longer a requirement and that the school felt no obligation to report on the daily activities of their son once he turned 15. It was at this juncture that they became aware that access to academics was not considered important for the students in this school.

Sumita encountered a number of challenges that compounded her experiences with the service system. Navigating the school system in the early years was relatively calm because her first husband and her mother (who lived with her) were her biggest support system. Her mother took care of all the household chores as well as Tapas, including providing day-to-day caregiving. She was a great source of emotional support for Sumita. Her mother’s support enabled Sumita to work, share the caregiving of her son, and eventually go to graduate school. However, there was a stage in her life when both her first husband as well as her mother were seriously ill. Her husband used to assist her teenage son with daily living activities but at this point, his own health was compromised. Sumita was the primary caregiver for three individuals with disabilities in her family. It was at this point that she had no choice but to seek assistance outside of the family. It was a traumatic transition for her because until now, she had very little information on the supports and services available through the system. She had not felt the need to pursue information about these services, as she did not anticipate using them. She kept calling the state for assistance to help provide support to her son. It was only when she broke down on one of the calls that support came through. Recalling this incident, she says:

Mom was terminally ill, my husband was ill, and Tapas was completely depending on me. And me being in school and working, I did not have any help. I did not even know where to approach; I did not even know there is this kind of service available. They would say (you can have) respite services, when you need somebody you have 2 hours. Tapas’ father was very ill. So, I was very scared to leave Tapas with him. I called the state, I was like totally in tears, and I said, ‘I need help yesterday.’ So, they had a Medicaid rep come over in within 4 weeks of my crying or whatever you call it...and I had help in 4 weeks, which I can think is the best I can say.

Sumita’s story illustrates how fragile the support system is for some Indian American families, and once their natural supports are at risk or have faded, relying on the state for services is frightening, especially when the supports do not come through in a timely manner. It took some time for Sumita to learn how to negotiate the system. Having to abruptly rely on the support of professionals and aides was a major transition for her. Not all aides were equally trained or a good match for Tapas and there was a frequent turnover of the aides. Over time, Sumita developed a relationship with the aides and has come to appreciate how vital their support is for their family.

For Ananya, while the early years with her son in the school system were difficult, things got relatively easier as he got older and entered middle and high school. Ananya got more familiarized with how schools function in the US and increasingly comfortable in advocating for her son. Ananya was initially not comfortable with the style of communication and advocacy that she witnessed in schools. She did not want to adopt a style that she perceived as “aggressive.” Through close observation over the years, she developed her own style of communication and advocacy, one that she believed was gentler but equally effective. Ananya felt that it was important

not to go into meetings with “guns blazing.” She believed that it was critical to build relationships with the school district in order to get the professionals to appreciate the strengths of her son. She underscored the art of communication and paying attention to how the message is delivered. Ananya’s style and approach evolved over time as she watched the modes of communication and interaction in the country. She learned from observing her husband closely as well as others who participated in these meetings. She continually reiterated that contrary to typical understandings, “assertiveness need not be nasty.” Discussing her observations and experiences at school meetings, she says:

So, then I started speaking and things like that, few times I asked, ‘Do I make sense?’ And, they said, ‘Yes, you do,’ and in that room, also I got encouragement about how I was delivering the whole talk, speaking about my son and things like that. Then I realized sitting there and talking if you don’t go in with your guns blazing, they are actually willing to sit and listen, they are actually willing to admit if they have misconceptions about your child and where they can correct it. Yes, there are times that you have to be assertive but assertiveness need not be nasty.

The style of communication she learned to develop is not exactly what she learned in India. It is something she had to teach herself after coming to the US. She did so by observing other professionals, coaching from her husband, and from the practical realities of living in this country. She says, “This is basically where I have learned little bit of my deliver style. I can’t say that in India I had big opportunities to talk like this, confront people like this, I would say.” It was a hybrid style of communication that acknowledged the style of communication typically used in the US as well as one that resonated with her values.

As the mothers navigated their own transitions through the school systems and services, they began to advocate for services and supports that aligned with the vision that they had for their sons. The mothers’ dreams and visions were informed by their experiences living in the US, their own experiences growing up in India, as well as the values and perspectives of their family. Some of the mothers discovered that their vision was not always aligned with how the US schools and systems perceived their son or the ways in which they defined accepted practices.

Envisioning a Future for their Youth

A major purpose of transition planning is to identify the needs and preferences of the young person with a disability for their future, including post-secondary education, living in the community, employment, and other aspects (Greene, 2014). Families play an important role in participating in this process and helping identify these preferences (Grigal & Neubert, 2004). Current literature calls for a person family interdependent approach to transition planning for youth from culturally diverse backgrounds (Achola & Greene, 2016) and indicates that culturally diverse families might have their own priorities and goals for transition that go beyond “legalized protocols” (Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenberg, 2020, p. 117). Each of these mothers had their own vision for their young person, one that was based on a close understanding of the strengths and dreams of their sons. Throughout the middle school and high school years, the mothers focused on educating the system on the strengths of their sons, broadening the horizon and vision for their youth, and learning ways to communicate with professionals in the system.

Strengths-Based Perspectives

For two of the mothers, the dream was that their child be able to attend college. Higher education was important and they made sure that their sons got access to higher education. For Indra, this meant providing Pratik with the scaffolding that he needed to make this happen. Indra passionately believed that it was critical that Pratik get access to academic opportunities that were available to all individuals. Coming from a family that placed a lot of emphasis on academics and being an engineer herself, she saw no reason why Pratik should not be able to attend college, given his interest and strengths in the sciences and math. While Pratik had the label of autism and did not use speech reliably to communicate, she saw him no different from any other student in terms of his capacities or his interest in learning. A challenge that Indra encountered in the school system was the tendency of schools to slot Pratik into classrooms for students with significant disabilities. The continual low expectations, the tenuous access to the general education curriculum, and the stereotypical assumptions about students with autism deeply troubled her. In addition, the tendency of schools to categorize students into tracks based on their perceived abilities disturbed her. When Pratik was entering high school, she could not understand why, despite his abilities, he was not perceived as being capable of addressing the challenge of Advanced Placement classes, especially when given appropriate support. Throughout Pratik's elementary and secondary school years, Indra and her husband continually dispelled assumptions that Pratik belonged in segregated classrooms for children with autism where the focus of the curriculum would be restricted to communication, social skills, and independent living skills. Indra and her husband worked hard to develop relationships within the school district and built strategic alliances that enabled them to successfully advocate for Pratik to attend some honors as well as advanced placement classes. For Indra, vocational training programs, or what are more traditionally known as "transition" programs, were not of the highest priority. She felt that such programs were a way to exclude students with autism from access to post-secondary education. She wanted to honor Pratik's desire to go to college like other students of his age, and she believed that given the right support at school and home, he would succeed in this area.

He was always very curious. And hard working too. Only thing I have to sit with him. And you show him the right way to get it done, he will do it. He learns differently, that is what I have to say. Even his AP Calculus teacher said he learns differently, so if you can teach him the way, he learns. You start the engine and he is on his own. That is exactly what we did.

She kept reiterating the importance of focusing on Pratik's strengths and educating the school district to do so. In one instance, when Pratik was in high school, he spent part of the day in a special education classroom. During this period, Pratik demonstrated some challenging behaviors. As a part of the transition planning process, there was pressure to move him to BAMC, a center for individuals with autism. Indra and her husband, along with the support of his case manager and the behavior therapist, were able to stop this from happening:

The school did not know what to do, so they thought of BAMC and everything. We stood by, the case manager stood by us, but nobody knew. The behavior therapist did a functional behavioral analysis FBA and she was able to pinpoint exactly (what was happening). The problem is they put him in the special ed class and he is so smart he needs to be challenged.

He did not get anything in that class. So she (the behavior therapist) found out that it was the problem with the teacher. It does not always happen like that. She did (an) amazing (job). That is where the advocacy (worked). We did our evaluation and proved that he can be in the regular class. It was a struggle.

Indra felt that this strengths-based approach emerged from how she was brought up in India by her parents, especially her father. Both she and her brother are engineers. She recalls that her father never made her feel that she was any less capable of being an engineer because she was a woman. He constantly reiterated the importance of capitalizing on her strengths.

My father has been a strong supporter, not just for this. He has always been right through my childhood. He has always brought me up with the strong belief that focus on your strengths, so, not like how we were brought up in India, being a girl, you don't feel like...because I am an engineer and my brother is an engineer. Both of us are engineers, you know. He made sure I feel same. In 70s and 80s in India, my dad was like that, so it helped me. So, I decided I am going to work on that.

For Shailaja, on the other hand, what was important was that Anand get access to work and have a job. It is for this reason that they decided to put Anand in a school for only students with disabilities so that he could get vocational training and training in life skills.

Hmm, like we moved him after his 10th grade. He was by then mostly doing self-contained classes by then, you know, things got very difficult for him, and most of everything he was doing was self-contained classes. And so we moved him to a special ed school where the focus is more on the functional skills, life skills, and independent living skills you know.

While the mothers had dreams with regard to their youth getting access to a quality and meaningful education, they also hoped that their youth would find happiness and a place where they were valued for who they were and who they wanted to be.

A Quest for Happiness

Ananya focused on the bigger vision, which was hoping that her son would find a place where he was accepted and his strengths would be valued. While she considered that it was important to nurture goals such as having a college degree or living on one's own, she also thought it was equally important for her son to be surrounded by people who recognized his value.

Basic simple things, you know. That he can do things for himself in life, just basic things like getting his salary, because he is quite bright and he should be in a place where people can recognize what he can give and not get distracted by other areas where he lacks or social skills or not talking sort of things.

For Sumita, given her experience with the system, she felt it was important that Tapas got to live in a setting where he had the opportunity to experience Indian American Culture and food. Happiness meant providing the opportunity for Tapas to continue to enjoy Bollywood films, Indian food, and other shared facets of the Indian American cultural experience, a theme that has been echoed in other studies that have focused on the perspectives of Indian American families of children with disabilities (Zechella & Raval, 2016). Sumita was concerned that the community living opportunities for Tapas would not provide him the opportunity to cherish and nurture his identity as an Indian American man. She reiterated that Indian American food, culture, and lifestyle were important for Tapas and that this would be a priority. She and her current husband were not in a rush to move Tapas to live outside their home. They indeed enjoyed having Tapas with them. Indra very clearly stated that she could not imagine Pratik living on his own nor could she imagine her husband and she living without Pratik. It was clear that the thought of Pratik moving out was unthinkable, especially because they considered him an integral part of their life.

While the mothers did not necessarily envision independence as moving out of the house, they nevertheless believed in encouraging their sons to be independent. The mothers had their own definitions of independence.

Navigating the Construct of Independence

There are certain constructs that have been key to the discourse on transition planning. Integral to this discourse have been concepts such as independence, self-determination, and self-advocacy. Transition planning serves as a bridge to adulthood, and related to this process is a vision of what being an adult means. Independence is often an integral aspect of this vision (Ankeny et al., 2009). Not much is known about how culturally diverse families construct independence or self-determination. Current literature indicates that dominant constructs such as independence, choice, or self-determination are not necessarily universal and might not resonate with the expectations of families from culturally diverse groups (Black et al., 2003; Trainor, 2002). The mothers in this study had their own definitions and interpretations of independence. All four mothers expressed their views on independence. However, their notions of independence could not be circumscribed to simplistic binaries of Western vs. Indian notions of independence. The mothers' understandings of independence emerged from their own history of growing up in India, the ways in which they were brought up by their families, as well as their experience in the US or other parts of the Global North. The mothers constructed and reconstructed their own interpretations of independence.

Becoming independent was seen as a graduated process. For the mothers, there was no mythical developmental milestone for independence nor did it manifest itself in concrete actions like moving away from home. It evolved over time in small steps. They saw it as a skill that each of their children acquires uniquely in their own way. For some, they may need more scaffolding, and for others, it may happen quicker or at a certain point in time. They saw their role as a parent to provide opportunities where their son could exercise independence. For instance, when her son went to college, Ananya did not tell him when and how often to call her. She thought that was a natural opportunity for him to learn how to "make that call."

I don't call him at all. That is not to say I don't worry. But I decided that he also has to learn to make that call. I said, 'tell me a day that you want me to call because I don't know your schedule.' He said, 'I will call you every Friday,' and I said that is fine, 'call me every Friday, that way we

know if you are coming home or not coming home, and then you can give me a rundown.'

Other times, fostering independence might require gentle coaxing or questioning to prompt the young person to the next step. Interestingly, there was no rush to “normalize” their son and neither was there pressure to succumb to the typical yardsticks of success evident in the larger community. Indra talks about Pratik’s experiences navigating the first few weeks in a community college. It took him a while to get used to a college campus and finding his classes. While Indra was close enough to offer help, she had to allow him to figure it out for himself.

First day he went, he got lost. He called me. I said, ‘look around, ask people.’ Then he asked somebody and then I saw him near the entrance. By the time I reached him, he had already found someone to help him.

Similarly, Ananya talks about her experiences with teaching driving to her son. Teenagers are expected to learn how to drive. That is considered a milestone and a rite of passage to adulthood within this society. Varun did not show a major interest in driving and neither were his parents in a hurry to push him to that milestone. They knew he would learn to drive when the time was right, and he felt comfortable to do so. As of now, they accepted that it did not figure in his “grand scheme of things.”

He did not do it when he was 16. He never took the car to high school or anything because, with the perception problem, the driving is a bit off for him to get the hang of it, once he got the hang of, it he was OK. Sometimes we had to remind, ‘Varun don’t you have to go, don’t you have to drive? Why don’t you drive so you get some practice?’ He would say, ‘No, I don’t want to drive!’ So, he is not the eager one behind the wheel. But, nowadays, he is comfortable and driving around a certain radius. I don’t think it just figured into his grand scheme of things, or it had that much importance.

Independence for the mothers did not necessarily mean big goals such as living alone in the community or holding a job in the community to support themselves. It meant simple day-to-day things. Communication has been an area of challenge for Pratik. Indra and her husband recognize the strides that Pratik has made in this area over the years and applaud him for his growth and efforts. Every step to communicate independently is acknowledged and Indra and her husband focus on developing confidence rather than the fact that he continues to need support in this area:

Language is hard for Pratik. Even now, it is there. So, I kept telling him, ‘not everybody is perfect. Everybody is good at something and not good at other things. So you should feel good about who you are.’ So slowly, we have worked through this. So that is the main thing I can say has brought him to where he is. He is proud of himself, and we are proud of him so probably that is what has made him to where he is now. Of course, it is a struggle but it was a good journey.

Independence was not a static attribute situated within the person. It depended on the context and how the adults around their son communicated a presumption of competence. All of the mothers believed that their sons had the capacity for independence if the adults around them

expressed that belief. Sumita and her current husband feel that Tapas can do more for himself in his day-to-day activities if he is encouraged to do so.

My mother would say, 'He does not understand,' and do it for him. Adit says, 'Why do you think he can't do it? He knows and understands more than you think he does. You have to let him do things for himself.'

Some of the mothers traced their notions of independence to their early experiences growing up in India. Ananya grew up in the urban city of Kolkata, India, in the 70s and 80s. She talked about how, even in those times, her parents gave her a lot of independence. However, she emphasized that there were boundaries. She was free to go out with her friends but she had to come back at a certain time.

We had a little structure. The independence was within those walls. Before I was going out, if I said, 'I will be back by 6:30pm,' I had to be back by 6:30pm. You had to give an explanation if it was 6:31pm. I can see my dad standing at the door like this, standing in that pose, and I would know that was not good. But then those were the checks and balances of those days.

After coming to the US, the notions of independence she brought from her homeland and her upbringing have further expanded. These notions of independence are fluid as she continually grows with her children, constructs, and reconstructs independence in her current home within the US. Even though Ananya had structured independence growing up, she seems to be open and welcoming of the wider latitude of freedom that children here grow up with, albeit with some boundaries. She talks about the overt emphasis on rights in this country but the relative absence of the mention of duties.

I love the independence of this country. I love them to have all of these things within limits. It is not like suddenly it is my room and you cannot come in. It is your room and I am going to come in because I am still your parent. Simple rules. I feel that we grew up, we had enough privacy in our lives. I mean, we all grew up to be good individuals.... They are only concerned with their rights. So that is a concern for me that in their formative years of their life, they are only concerned with their rights, nobody tells them about their civic duties in their growing up years. If you are going to be late, it is your responsibility to call me. If I have to call you-you haven't called me and you are late, that is bad.

Ananya explained that this came from her own background, where her parents allowed her to make small decisions. Ananya also talked extensively about teaching her son how to speak up for himself. Throughout the interviews, Ananya reiterated how important it was for her that her children learned to speak for themselves. She perceived speaking for oneself as a basic skill needed for survival. She also believed that it is much more powerful when a young person argues for himself rather than to be spoken for by the parent. There was one instance in high school where Varun wanted to be in the Biology honors class. Ananya encouraged Varun to speak to the teacher himself.

You know it is coming from him, rather than a rehearsed speech, you know how a rehearsed speech from parents you can see, so that was my main concern, and that is why I advocated for more independence from him.

She continued to gently encourage him to use this skill and approach when he entered college. Varun hesitated to approach faculty members. Ananya explained to him how to interact with the faculty members

I told him, ‘Professors have different expectations from high school teachers, maybe you should go and talk, again the same thing; you have to go and find out. You cannot just decide from here the teacher wants this, no you have to talk to him because you don’t know what is in his mind. You might find out that he is perfectly willing to help, so take a chance and ask.’

Ananya reinforced a style of communication and advocacy that focused on speaking for oneself without being ‘aggressive.’ She felt that people are naturally helpful and the onus is on us to communicate our needs in a clear manner. The mothers not only had to navigate different systems of schooling and services, they also had to negotiate varying frameworks for disability including the ones within their own communities.

Navigating Different Models of Disability

Understandings of disability have shifted in the Global North. The current predominant model of disability is the medical model that approaches disability as a deficit within the child that has to be remediated or fixed. The mothers in this study encountered the medical model at different points of their child’s life, including during their sons’ schooling. As explained in the sections above, the mothers felt uncomfortable with the global judgments inherent in the medical model and its tendency to focus on deficits. The mothers challenged the tendency of the schools to view their sons in essential and reductive terms such as a label. The mothers had to navigate ableism not only in the dominant culture but also within their own families or communities.

Resisting the Narratives of Pity and Karma

The mothers encountered the framework of pity or charity along with the tendency to view disability as an outcome of one’s past karma. Existing literature on Indian families of children with disabilities draws attention to the use of the lens of karma to interpret and understand disability (Alur, 2021). Situated in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, actions in our current life and past life are integral to the law of karma. These actions “leave behind a trace” and lead to certain consequences (K. R. Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 47). So, “good deeds must bear the fruits of happiness and good fortune. But evil deeds must bear the fruits of sorrow, misery, and ill-fortune” (Dutta, 2020, p. 2764). Within the context of Karma, disability is viewed as a fruit of one’s actions in a past life or even the current life (Gabel, 2004). Pity or the charity model is also another lens that exists within the Indian subcontinent (Ghai, 2002). Similar to the medical model, the mothers expressed discomfort with both the lens of karma and the pity or charity model that they encountered typically amongst their extended family or community. For Sumita, her family was an anchor of support. Yet, a family member sometimes expressed sadness at Sumita’s situation, especially because she had to parent Tapas.

And sometimes, you know, when I was doing my Master's, I used to bring home charts and flow charts and I used to bring video tapes of me teaching in the class. She would watch it for a few minutes and then she would start crying. She would tell Tapas, 'look at your mom, she was an intelligent girl all her life, I wish you could read.' I used to stop her and say, 'you can't expect something which is not happening right now, making yourself sad, and which will make me sad.' So, it was a challenge for me.

The mothers instead anchored themselves to narratives that were positive. In doing so, they reinterpreted seemingly fatalistic narratives of destiny to ones that were more positive. Adit, Sumita's current husband, views Tapas, his stepson, as a child in his last life. He believes he has come back into this life to fulfill that relationship. Describing this perspective, Sumita says:

Adit, my husband, always talks about destiny. He says, 'this child could have been my child in my last life, maybe I left him in-between and went, and I have come back to fulfill that gap.' That is what he feels about him being in his life. And I think I am starting to believe that because Tapas is so close to him.'

For Indra, the Hindu law of Karma seemed too deterministic. Instead, she decided to take a more pragmatic solution-centered approach.

You know, we always find a way to blame karma and blame something else, but even I felt if there is something you need to work on you need to work on that instead of looking at the problem. You know instead of looking at what caused it, work on what we have to do.

The mothers countered any negative narratives by creating an inclusive space in their family. Home was the place where their child was valued. Home was where notions of inclusion and inclusivity began and where they were anchored.

Constructing Family as the Space for Inclusion

The model for supporting adults with disabilities has shifted dramatically in the last four decades. The focus now is on inclusive practices. Inclusion in regular education classes and access to the general education curriculum, opportunities for building relationships and friendships with peers, collaborative practices, and living and working in the community with support are some of the core ideas underlying inclusive practices for students with severe disabilities (Alquraini & Gut, 2012). Interestingly, while there has been such a shift in the ideology that underlies services for adults with disabilities in the US, the mothers varied in the extent to which they were aware of these current practices.

Three of the mothers had not received any specific information on the most current practices in the area of inclusive education as well as transition planning. This necessarily did not mean that the mothers did not embrace an inclusive ideology but they did not receive the information from the systems they interacted with. They had to figure out the pathway for their son and their family on their own. For the mothers, home was the place where their child was valued. Home was where notions of inclusion and inclusivity began and where they were anchored. Sumita says,

I love going out, I love being social, I like meeting people and I was not going to give up on that. Why not include Tapas in it so he is exposed at that time? So, we decided, we are going to a restaurant. He had to order food and after he ate he said, 'thank you I like the food.' After that, there was no stopping, we go to Broadway shows in New York...pin drop silence in Indian movies, when he sees Sharukh Khan, who is his favorite, he goes like, 'Whoo!'

They made sure their sons were a part of all the experiences of a family. Indra's son helps plan the family vacations.

We have introduced him to everything. We don't stop him from anything. We do it together. So we wanted him to experience everything, and we always do our research whether it is appropriate for him or not, and we have taken chances so that has helped him a lot. We follow his lead. He plans vacations. Last five, six years he plans vacations. Last year we did zipliner but he found a zipliner where it is a double family zipliner. We try to do things because he may not do alone. So we wanted to expose him to that. We found a place where you can go with a dad and mom, it is a two-seater. So, we introduced him to that. So, we always try new places, new activities so he feels good about himself that he can do it.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

Recent literature in the area of transition and culturally and linguistically diverse youth and families has drawn attention to the importance of addressing issues of equity (Trainor, 2017). Several factors have been identified as barriers to equitable transition outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse youth with disabilities. One of the biggest barriers is the assumption of universality in transition practices (Trainor, 2017) as well as the tendency to privilege or value the constructs that reflect the dominant group (Achola & Greene, 2016; Lo & Bui, 2020). This growing literature reiterates the importance of addressing the complex intersections of transition, culture, disability, and equity (Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenburg, 2020; Trainor, 2017). The findings of this study draw attention to four areas that might be important to ensure participation for families of culturally and linguistically diverse youth with developmental disabilities, in particular those from the diaspora.

First, the diasporic experience is an important facet for some culturally diverse families of children with disabilities (Goodley et al., 2013) that they bring to the transition process. Their understanding of this process, the underlying constructs as well as their dreams intersect with ideas and expectations that cannot be easily relegated to neat geographical and temporal spaces. These ideas emerge from their experiences living in this country as well as their own experiences growing up in their country of origin. Separating these experiences would reduce the complexity and the inherent dynamic nature of how families interpret and understand this process. Culturally diverse parents, including those from a diaspora, undergo multiple transitions, navigating a complex array of experiences as they support their youth with developmental disabilities, a facet that tends to be obscured in the conceptualization and enactment of transition practices. They are continually making meaning of the experiences and constructs they encounter. In order to provide types of support that are meaningful to Indian American families of youth with developmental disabilities, it is important for professionals to recognize their experiences against the larger context of their

membership in the diaspora. When parents refer to their experiences in their homeland, it is important to listen to their thoughts rather than view them as not being applicable to the current country and the education system. Current understandings of transition practices need to further explore the complex nuances in the intersections between culture, disability, and transition, including the dynamic and transformative nature of the diasporic experience.

Professionals need to acknowledge and celebrate the capacities of Indian American families of youth with disabilities, including their ability to capitalize on the strengths of their youth. Challenging the deficit-based lenses typically used to describe students and families from communities of color, Yosso (2005) drew attention to the numerous forms of cultural wealth that exist in communities of color. Similar to findings from prior studies that focused on Indian American families of children with disabilities (Zechella & Raval, 2016), this study indicates that Indian American families of youth with disabilities too bring with them their own assets, including a strengths-based ideology. Instead of offering labels as a solution or recommending that their youth be placed in segregated settings, there should be continued efforts to provide access to general education settings and inclusive post-school settings. Professionals need to honor and value the dreams and hopes of the families, even if these dreams and hopes may not necessarily fit neatly into existing universal templates of transition services. For some families from the South Asian diaspora, education and academics is important. The value placed on academics, along with practices such as homework, comes from their experiences growing up in India as well as their cultural background. The emphasis on academics should not necessarily be viewed as reflecting unrealistic expectations or placing parents in a position where they have to prove their youth's value and worth. They are expressing dreams that have been voiced by families in the dominant society, as well as cultural and familial values that are important to them.

Culturally diverse families may have differing understandings of independence, including the temporal aspects of independence (Rueda et al., 2005). Their understandings of these constructs may not manifest themselves in the ways in which they are typically interpreted in the US or in concrete outcomes such as moving away from home (Rueda et al., 2005). The mothers in this study do want their youth to be independent but they visualize this process occurring in gradual steps rather than through clear temporal markers. They want their youth to learn how to speak for themselves but their approach to advocacy could be different, perhaps even a little gentler. The dominant interpretation of what constitutes advocacy has been critiqued in the scholarship in the area of transition as well as special education (Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenburg, 2020). These dominant styles often privilege white, upper-class parents who have the cultural capital to navigate the system (Ong-Dean, 2009), thus potentially disempowering culturally and linguistically diverse families who may not feel comfortable with using those approaches. Given this reality, recent studies indicate that culturally diverse families may adopt a variety of different styles and figure out creative ways to “negotiate the system” (Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenburg, 2020, p. 123). Indeed, the prescriptive styles of interaction embedded in dominant advocacy patterns, along with the emphasis on procedural aspects might present a formidable barrier for culturally diverse families (Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenburg, 2020). The existing expectations for an individualistic style of advocacy may conflict with approaches that might be rooted in more relational contexts where there is an emphasis on the cognizance of the other person's perspective.

Finally, three of the mothers had not received current information on the best practices in the transition from school to post-school environments or the legal mandates. This indicates a gap in the access to information for culturally diverse families, something that has been reiterated in more recent literature (Gil-Kashiwabara et al, 2007; Kim & Morningstar, 2020; Landmark et al., 2007). Who is provided with what information? Whose voices are heard, and whose voices are valued? Who gets access to services? Who is excluded? Trainor (2017) argues that it is important

to understand the dynamics of privilege and power and how they come to disadvantage youth with disabilities from certain groups. While the mothers embraced an inclusive posture based on their indigenous understandings of inclusivity, they were not privy to current information on more recent practices that would have provided expanded access and more choices for their sons as well as the family.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study have some limitations. Because of the small sample size and the fact that it was limited to mothers of youth with developmental disabilities who were from middle-income groups with fluency in English, the findings cannot be generalized across all Indian American families of youth with disabilities. Qualitative research recognizes that research is not a neutral process and is informed by the subjectivity and identity of the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). Thus, it is important that researchers continually reflect on their positionality (Holmes, 2020) and how that could inform various aspects of the study including how participants perceive the researcher as well as the analysis of data (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Memos serve as an important means to reflect on the researcher's positionality. Drawing from suggestions made by Mihas (2021), I wrote a variety of memos through this study including those that focus on method and my positionality. Member checks are recognized as a means to evaluate the trustworthiness of the data (Brantlinger et al., 2005) and the extent to which the findings capture the perspectives of the participants. A summary of the themes emerging from each transcript was shared with the participant during the course of the research study. In addition, participants were invited to share their feedback on the overall themes of the study to see if it captured their understanding. Findings were shared with another scholar who served as an external auditor (see Brantlinger et al., 2005) and whose interest lies in the area of culturally diverse families of children and youth with disabilities.

The findings of this study draw attention to new questions that future studies could explore. What barriers exist with regard to South Asian American parents accessing current information and services? What practices could ensure equitable access to services for South Asian families from the diaspora? In what ways can professional training be broadened to develop sensitivity to diasporic experiences? Additional research can shed further light on these questions. A wider study that includes dads and spouses would shed light on the experiences of the family as a whole. It might also be interesting to have a variety of families at various junctures of their lives in this country. A study that combines participant observations at school meetings along with interviews might shed light on how school personnel interact with and interpret the perspectives of the families.

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