

## Indian-American Bicultural Identity Integration and Cultural Transmission

Biculturalism (also known as multiculturalism) has been defined in previous literature as having experienced and internalized at least two sets of cultural meaning systems (e.g., beliefs, values, behaviors, languages) (Repke & Benet-Martínez, 2017). There is a scant amount of literature empirically investigating biculturalism and its psychological, sociological, and anthropological effects, however, its prevalence and importance is slowly becoming more acknowledged by psychologists as the population of multicultural people grows (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). The primary question that is investigated in the existing literature on biculturalism is how bicultural individuals negotiate their different, and often opposing, cultural orientations (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Studies have examined self-esteem (Domanico, Crawford, & Wolfe, 1994), social networks (Repke & Benet-Martínez, 2017), individual differences (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005), developmental processes (Kich, 1992), cultural schemas (Maira, 1996), psychological functioning (Farver, Bhadha, & Narang, 2002), and issues of face (Baig, Ting-Toomey, & Dorjee, 2014) among bicultural individuals. While this may seem like an extensive list of topical research in this field, only a handful are empirical studies (most are interviews or observational studies), and virtually none have been replicated. Research on bicultural experiences is still in its infancy, and its importance grows each day as our society becomes more globalized and multiethnic.

Being bicultural is a constant tug-of-war between one's native culture and the majority culture of the place they reside. Individuals often have mixed feelings about being a part of two cultures, and speak about their dual cultural heritage in both positive and negative terms. They associate their biculturalism with feelings of pride, uniqueness, and a rich sense of community and history, but also voice the identity confusion, dual expectations, and value clashes from different communities (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) interviewed bicultural Americans to better understand these conflicting emotions:

“Being bicultural makes me feel special and confused. Special because it adds to my identity: I enjoy my Indian culture, I feel that it is rich in tradition, morality, and beauty; confused because I have been in many situations where I feel being both cultures isn't an option. My cultures have very different views on things like dating and marriage. I feel like you have to choose one or the other.”

— 19-year-old second-generation Indian-American

“Biculturalism seems to me to be a dichotomy and a paradox; you are both cultures and at the same time, you are neither.”

— 19-year-old first-generation Chinese-American

These quotations are a snippet of the complex and confusing duality that comes with being a part of two cultures. Studies exploring the acculturative stress to balance both identities have shown that such pressure is associated with psychological stress, apathy, depression,

delinquency, withdrawal, disorientation, and poor self-esteem (Domanico et al., 1994). Acculturation in this field has been defined as a multidimensional (non-linear) process that involves taking on an identity as a member of the majority group, while also accounting for one's orientation to both one's ethnic culture and the larger society (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Domanico et al., 1994). The complicated process of negotiating between two cultures has been found to result in four acculturation positions: assimilation (identification mostly with the dominant culture), integration (high identification with both cultures), separation (identification largely with the ethnic culture), or marginalization (low identification with both) (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Farver et al., 2002; Baig et al., 2014; Dasgupta, 1998). In an effort to better understand the psychology of biculturals and the way in which they perceive their identities, Benet-Martínez created the Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) scale, which measures the degree to which a bicultural individual perceives his/her identities as "compatible" versus "oppositional." Individuals who score high on BII find it easy to integrate their two cultures, and tend to see themselves as either part of a "hyphenated culture," or part of a unique, emerging "third" culture. They do not view their two cultures to be mutually exclusive, oppositional, or conflicting. On the other hand, biculturals who score low on BII tend to find it more difficult to incorporate both cultures into a cohesive identity. They usually feel like they should just pick one culture (as referenced in the introductory quotes) and are sensitive to tensions between their two cultures, and view this incompatibility as a source of internal conflict (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

Difficulties in integrating both cultures could be a result of acculturation stressors, including cultural or ethnic prejudice and stereotyping, feelings of cultural isolation, or strained intercultural relations (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). This could also be due to higher interconnection between people of the same ethnicity, leading to lower levels of U.S. identification (Repke & Benet-Martínez, 2017). Shifting to an integrated acculturation style from a marginalized or separated one is also difficult since an integrated style is generally related to family SES, years of U.S. residence, and even religiosity scores (Farver et al., 2002).

Figuring out which parts of both identities to integrate is a difficult question for many biculturals to answer. By acculturating, individuals risk alienating themselves from their families and their culture of origin; by resisting acculturation, they risk being alienated from their peers and majority group (Domanico et al., 1994). The pressures from different communities for loyalties and behaviors can lead biculturals to choose to keep their ethnic and mainstream identities separate through culture frame switching in an effort to reaffirm their intragroup (ethnic) and intergroup (American) identities (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

Psychologists are beginning to realize and label this complex negotiation of two cultures, and are building their understanding of how multicultural individuals use several, often conflicting, cultural frames and integrate their different cultural identities into a coherent sense of self (Repke & Benet-Martínez, 2017). They are finding that research on this topic is important in order to explore how individuals develop a sense of community despite culture clashes, mixing, and integration (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Much of the current research described thus far has indicated the crucial need for further research using different cultural groups. The present study focuses on the Indian-American demographic, since the literature is especially sparse when it comes to studying biculturalism in this specific ethnic group. The cultural values,

rituals, languages, and traditions are very distinct in India compared to other ethnicities, and are very different even within India (Baig et al., 2014). As a result, the difficulty in negotiating Indian and American cultures is very complex.

The present research on Indian-American biculturalism is sparse as well, as can be expected since the overall literature on biculturalism is not expansive. A bulk of the exploration of Indian-American identity is also qualitative, with studies primarily using essays, narratives, and interviews to describe the Indian-American bicultural experience (Min & Kim, 2000; Baig et al., 2014; Maira, 1996). Empirical research is thus largely missing, although a few studies have attempted to explore topics such as cultural continuity (Dasgupta, 1998) and psychological functioning (Farver et al., 2002) among Indian-Americans.

A bicultural Indian-American values and seeks their ethnic heritage, history, and rituals, yet they are also tempered by the awareness of being American (Kich, 1992). Thus, fulfilling their need to belong is a struggle, much like other biculturals. However, what differentiates the Indian-American bicultural experience from other bicultural experiences are the topics of cultural conflict that make balancing the two cultures difficult. Indian immigrant parents primarily hold conflicting views when it comes to marriage, career, gender roles, dating, and premarital sex (Farver et al., 2002). The Indian perspective on these topics are much more conservative when viewed in comparison to the American perspective. Indian immigrant parents generally want their children to have an arranged marriage and a high-salary career (usually in medicine or engineering). They do not want their children to date or have premarital sex. They also usually have specific gender roles for males and females, in which males are granted more freedom and are pushed to pursue a career, and females are more protected and are not encouraged as much to pursue a career. Times are changing, however, and the cited studies on this topic are a bit outdated, so it is possible that this perspective has drastically shifted, though at this time, there is no empirical evidence for this. Indian parents fear cultural obliteration and “Americanization” (adoption of Western ways of life and beliefs), and push their children to familiarize themselves with Indian culture through celebrations, festivals, youth groups, food, language classes, and religion (Dasgupta, 1998). As a result, the bicultural Indian-American can perhaps be described in the following way: They are taught by their immigrant parents about cultural practices and to observe religious rites and beliefs. They may feel connected to their Indian heritage, and may even feel a sense of pride or commitment to their ethnic group. They may visit India once a year, but primarily speak English, participate in American culture, have American friends, and prefer an “un-arranged” marriage (Farver et al., 2002). This describes, to some extent, the balancing act Indian-Americans are constantly performing in order to stay loyal to both of their identities, which proves to be very difficult at times. Indian-Americans report using Indian patterns of behavior, food, clothes, and languages at home and switch to more “Americanized” cultural norms at school or with peers (Maira, 1996).

Maira (1996), describes the criticism and pressuring that exists from both sides: “Some Punjabi girls in California say that they are criticized by their peers for not ‘dressing American’ and are reprimanded by parents for wearing Westernized clothes or makeup. One girl said the only option she had was to hide her ‘Americanized’ self.” Min and Kim (2000) describes Asian-American rejection of traditional gender roles, referencing an essay one of their

participants wrote, titled, “Reaching the glass ceiling — at home.” Dasgupta (1998) relates yet another account from an Indian-American college student, who says,

“Dating and the desire to be with the opposite sex is a natural urge and it would be a gross injustice not to allow adolescents to fulfill this urge. The adolescent child may feel lonely and may need the companionship of the opposite sex in order for his/her life to feel complete...It is like a parent, whose mouth is full of candy, telling his child not to eat any candy because it is bad...The hypocrisy of the disapproval of adolescent dating becomes quite evident.”

Due to these clear, differing beliefs, in which Indian-Americans hold more liberal beliefs than their immigrant parents (Dasgupta, 1998) about dating, gender roles, clothing, religion, and other aspects of culture, it is possible that first- and second-generation Indian-Americans would pass on different beliefs and values to future generations compared to the ones their immigrant parents passed on to them, and these customs and practices would be a blend of their two identities.

The concept of passing down Indian-American culture has rarely been studied empirically, and the existing literature primarily expresses the fear of Indian immigrant parents that their children will fail to pass on their culture (Maira, 1996). The younger generation of Indian-Americans constantly confront and challenge the belief system of the older generation (Baig et al., 2014), and struggle with figuring out which parts of each of their identities they should pass down. This would be affected by the degree to which one is devoted to various aspects of the natal culture and the degree to which one is identified with the dominant group (Dasgupta, 1998). Immigrant parents report experiencing “selective acculturation,” in which they got to decide which parts of American culture they wanted to adopt — this is a very different experience than Indian-Americans, who are forced to maintain a multidimensional cultural identity (Baig et al., 2014). In spite of this “forced acculturation,” children may still wish to preserve their family’s cultural and ethnic identity (Maira, 1996). It has been found that as bicultural individuals got older (especially if they entered college), their appreciation for their bicultural heritage grew. They began to view ethnic values such as a strong work ethic, respect for scholarly achievements, and esteem for elders positively. Min and Kim (2000) described an account from their participant Jean, who said she taught her children to follow the Filipino custom of “mano” to show respect for elders, in which they place the right palm of an elder’s right hand against the younger person’s forehead.

In light of the existing research on bicultural integration, specifically the experiences of Indian-Americans, I realized that there is a prevalent gap in the research in not only the BII of Indian-Americans, but also the way in which their perception of their biculturalism would affect how much of their Indian culture they would choose to pass on, especially when they are torn between being loyal to the ethnic and mainstream cultures. Therefore, the research question I explored in this study was: How does an Indian-American’s perception of the compatibility of their two cultures affect the amount of Indian culture they choose to pass on to future generations? To investigate this question, I sent out a survey to Indian-Americans which measured their Bicultural Identity Index (BII; the level to which they view their two cultures as “compatible”) and asked them to rank aspects of culture (food, clothing, celebrations, art, etc.)

according to how “Indian” or “American” they would choose to pass on that particular aspect of culture. I hypothesized that participants who scored lower on the BII would either choose to pass on cultural aspects that are very “American” or very “Indian” (no in-between), and participants who scored higher on the BII would choose to equally pass on Indian and American cultural aspects for each factor. In other words, I predict that the higher an Indian-American’s perception of the compatibility of their two cultures, the greater the amount of Indian culture they will choose to pass on to future generations.

### Method

**Participants:** This study had 33 participants. The participants consisted of Indian-Americans who were 18 years or older. Eighteen participants were female, and 15 participants were male.

**Procedure:** Participants were asked to fill out a survey (Appendix A), which was created through Qualtrics. The survey had three parts. The first part was meant to measure the participants' Bicultural Identity Index. It consisted of a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, and had 8 items for participants to answer. The second part of the survey also had 8 items, and used a slider scale for participants to indicate, for each cultural aspect (food, language, celebrations and festivals, art, parenting, clothing, manners, jokes), how “Indian” or “American” they would choose to pass on to future generations. The third part of the survey asked participants demographic questions about gender, age, and whether they identify as an Indian-American.

**Analysis:** To analyze the data, I first calculated Cronbach’s Alpha to test the reliability between the items on the two scales. I then conducted a t-test to see if a significant correlation existed between BII and the amount of Indian culture a participant chooses to pass on to future generations (cultural transmission score). Lastly, I conducted a regression analysis between my two variables to see if my independent variable (BII) would predict my dependent variable (cultural transmission).

## Results

My dataset consisted of data from two multi-item scales: Bicultural Identity Index (BII) and cultural transmission. The data from both scales contain responses from Indian-Americans from an online survey. The values for the BII scale ranged from 1-5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. The values for the cultural transmission scale ranged from 1-5, where 1 = Completely American and 5 = Completely Indian. Each scale was analyzed for reliability, and the pair of variables was analyzed for correlation.

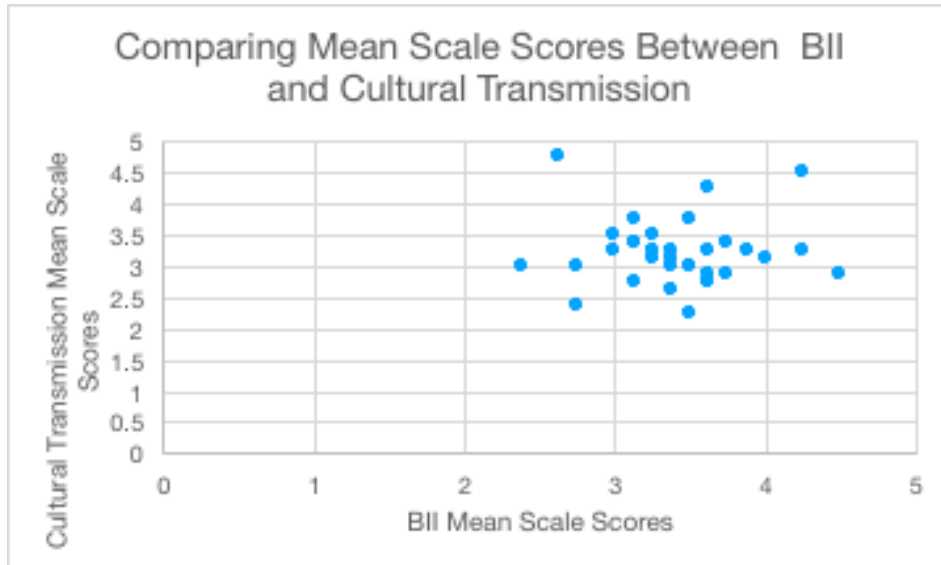


Figure 1: A scatterplot comparing the mean scale scores of BII and cultural transmission. By analyzing this, we can see that there is no correlation between the two variables.

I hypothesized that Indian-Americans with lower BII scores would have either a very high or very low cultural transmission score, and Indian-Americans with higher BII scores would have a cultural transmission score that falls in the middle of the scale. More specifically, students who scored low on BII would be more likely to choose answers in the extremes for the cultural transmission questions (“Completely American” or “Completely Indian”). In other words, I predict that the higher an Indian-American’s perception of the compatibility of their two cultures, the greater the amount of Indian culture they choose to pass on to future generations. I predicted this because students who struggle with integrating their identities probably would not choose to integrate the customs that they choose to pass on, either.

I analyzed the correlation between the BII mean scale score and the cultural transmission mean scale score. The reliability of the BII scale, as given by the coefficient alpha of 0.23, is low. This indicates that there is a low likelihood that the BII data is free from random error. However, the reliability of the cultural transmission scale, as given by the coefficient alpha of 0.72, is relatively high. This means that there is a high likelihood that the cultural transmission scale is free from random error. The correlation coefficient,  $r$ , of the BII mean scale score and the cultural transmission mean scale score is -0.002, which means there is virtually no

correlation between these two variables, as can be seen in Figure 1 (shown above) and Table 2.

Table of Means and Variances		
Scale	Mean	Variance
BII	3.42	0.21
Cultural Transmission	3.22	0.28

Table 1: The mean and variance of the two scale score variables.

Table with Significance Testing							
Test	Scales Used To Estimate r	N	r	t	Degrees of Freedom = N - 2	p-value	Result
1	BII & Cultural Transmission	33	-0.002	0.01	31	0.5	Fail to Reject Null

Table 2: Significance testing to determine whether significant correlations exist between the two variables, BII and cultural transmission.

In Table 1, I reported the variances of the two mean scale scores of both variables: the BII mean scale score had a variance of 0.21, which is low, and the cultural transmission mean scale score had a variance of 0.28, which is also low. This shows that participants' answers had a small range for both the BII and cultural transmission questions. In Table 2, I conducted significance testing between the two variables, and since the p-value of 0.5 is higher than my alpha value of 0.05, I fail to reject the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis was that there is no difference between the BII and the cultural transmission mean scale scores. In other words, I cannot say that the BII mean scale scores are significantly different from the cultural transmission mean scale scores.

I also conducted a regression analysis (Figure 2) to investigate whether participants' BII predicts their level of cultural transmission of Indian customs. The residual plot examining the independent (BII) and dependent (cultural transmission) variables shows residuals clustered around the center of the graph, and a sparseness on the left and right sides of the graph. The plot does not reflect even spread and the points on the plot are not random. Additionally, there are some outliers on the left and right side. Based on the QQ plot (Figure 3), there is some deviation from Normality, especially on the upper end, but it is perhaps not so severe as to invalidate the Normality condition since the rest of the points fall reasonably near the line on the plot. I also conducted a regression analysis on individual cultural components against one's BII to determine if a specific cultural component (such as food, language, art, etc.) could be predicted by one's BII. However, the individual QQ plots for seven of the eight cultural components (except for food), deviated from Normality significantly, and the residual plots for all

eight cultural components do not reflect even spread, do not have random points, and most seem to have a trend or pattern, indicating no independence, which is concerning.

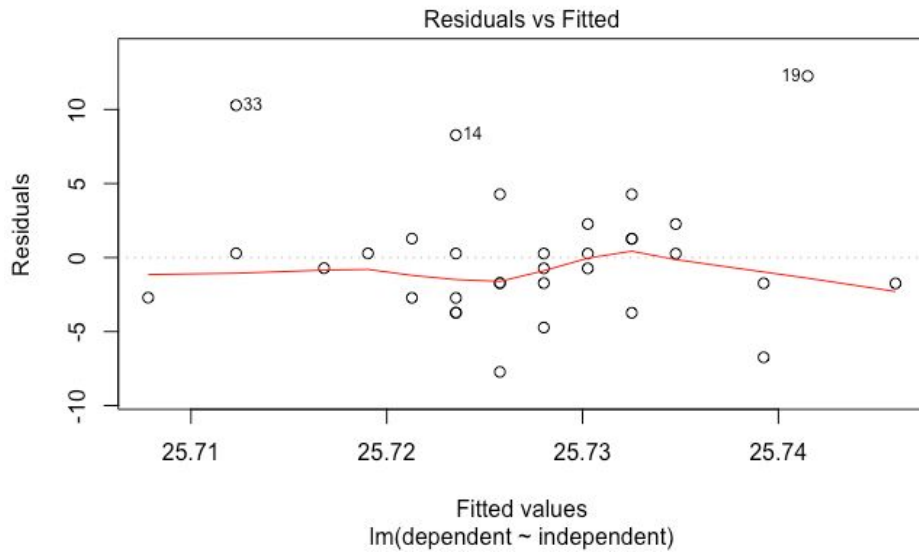


Figure 2: A residual plot to determine whether the independent variable (BII) predicts the dependent variable (cultural transmission).

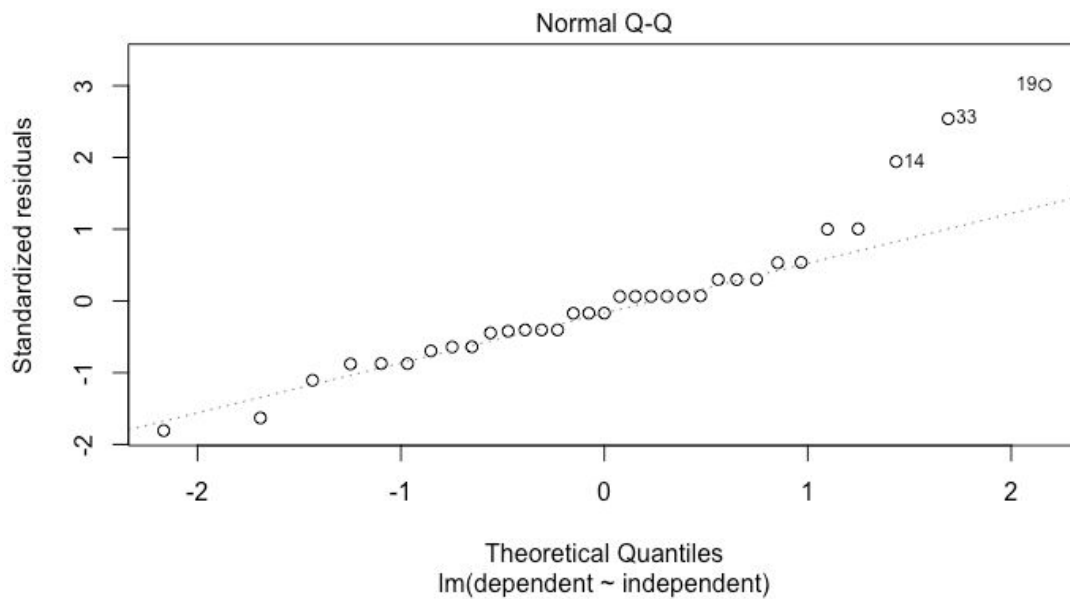


Figure 3: A QQ plot to analyze the Normality condition.



## Discussion

The results showed no correlation between Indian-American participants' Bicultural Identity Index and cultural transmission. There was also no evidence that one's BII predicts the level of cultural transmission they choose. Thus, there was no evidence supporting my hypothesis that Indian-Americans with lower BII scores would have either a very high or very low cultural transmission score, and Indian-Americans with higher BII scores would have a cultural transmission score that falls in the middle of the scale. In other words, I did not find evidence that an Indian-American's perception of the compatibility of their two cultures affects the amount of Indian culture they choose to pass on to future generations.

Though this study did not yield statistically significant results, its importance is still grounded in the fact that this was the first empirical attempt to fill a gap in Indian-American biculturalism research. The existing literature in this field does not focus on cultural transmission and the amount of Indian culture that is preserved (or lost) through generations due to biculturalism.

This study had several limitations. Firstly, the sample size was quite small, and the sample was a convenience sample, which could have biased the results. Secondly, in the demographic portion of the questionnaire, I asked "Do you identify as an Indian-American?" and offered three choices of response: "Yes," "A little," and "No." In hindsight, I realize this is a loaded question. I should have left this question open-ended for participants to self-identify. Third, when participants indicated their level of cultural transmission in the second part of the survey for different cultural aspects, each person's idea of what is the "American way" and "Indian way" would be different, and this would have undoubtedly biased participants' responses.

This study connects to class concepts because it explores cultural norms from the perspective of a bicultural individual. It discusses the space between cultures and the thin line that biculturals balance on to combine their different identities and be loyal to both of the cultures they are a part of. This study also explores how social norms can change through generations, especially norms relating to how we transmit and preserve cultural information. Future studies can hone in on the question of how much information is lost through the generations as a direct result of biculturalism and the identity confusion and conflicting loyalties that accompany it. Future studies can also explore bicultural gender differences in the transmission of social norms, since previous studies have explained how upholding and passing on cultural values usually becomes the responsibility (or burden) of the female (Farver et al., 2002; Dasgupta, 1998).

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## APPENDIX

### Bicultural identity Survey

Please rate your agreement with each statement below.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I am simply an Indian who lives in North America.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I keep Indian and American cultures separate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel Indian-American.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel part of a combined culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am conflicted between the American and Indian way of doing things.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like someone moving between two cultures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel caught between Indian and American culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't feel trapped between the Indian and American cultures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

This next part is meant to understand how much of each culture you would choose to pass down to future generations (i.e. kids, nephews, nieces, etc.).

For each cultural aspect below, please move the slider to indicate the level in which you would want to teach future generations the "American way" or the "Indian way."

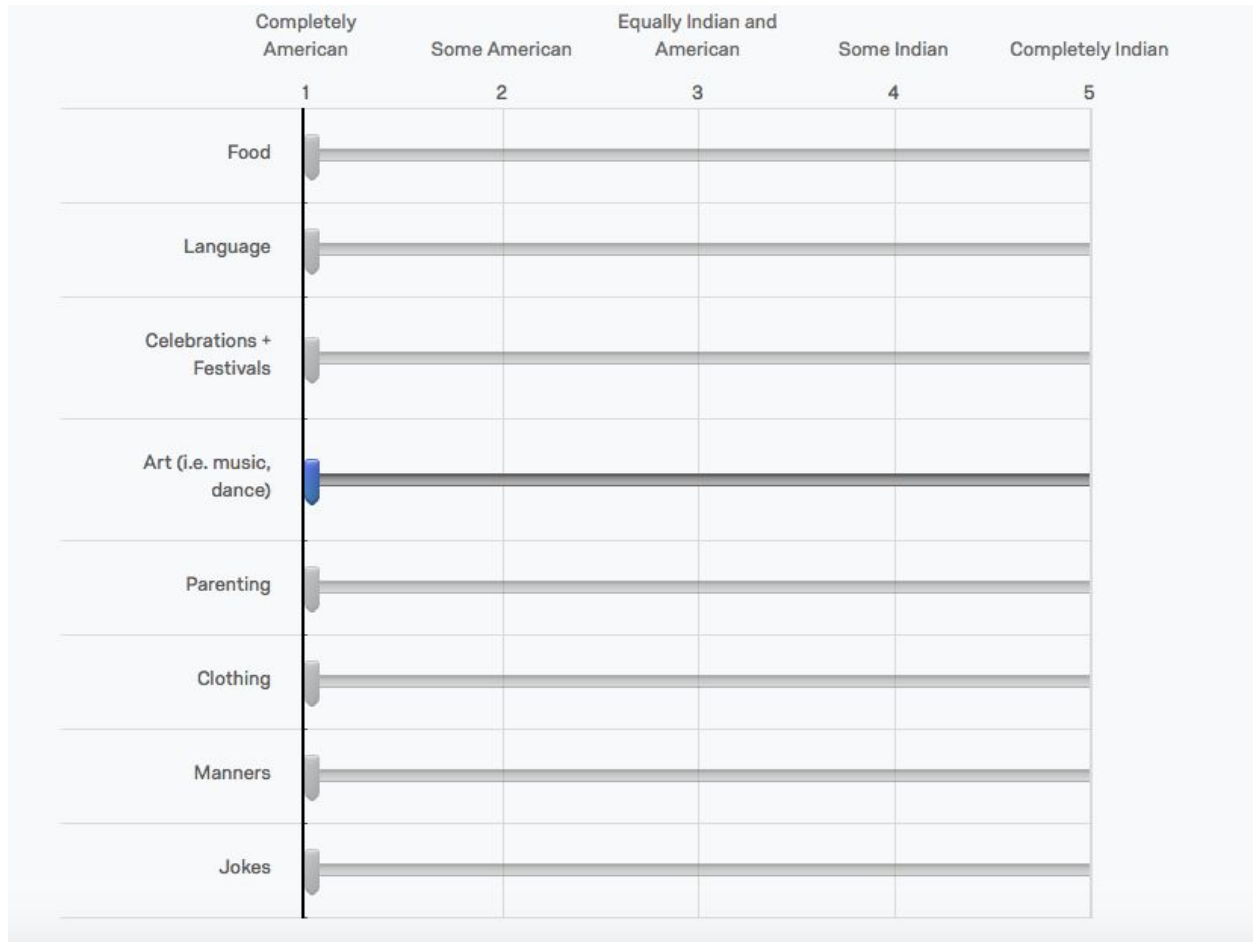
If you are viewing this survey on your phone, the labels may be distorted. If so, see below:

1 = Completely American; 2 = Some American; 3 = Equally Indian and American;  
4 = Some Indian; 5 = Completely Indian

#### NOTES

If you want to choose "1 = Completely American," you must click on the slider — it is not automatically selected.

If you believe there is no difference between the "Indian way" and "American way" for the category, please select "3 = Equally Indian and American."



Do you identify as an Indian-American?

- Yes
- A little
- No

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Another identity (please specify:)

How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18 - 24
- Over 25