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The golden ties that bind: boundary crossing in diasporic Hindu wedding ritual

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The interpretive research in this article goes beyond considering how diasporic consumers cross borders between home and host cultures, to examine how they cross boundaries within their home culture. In keeping with ethno-consumerism, the authors utilize Hindu meaning categories of sacredness, purity, and auspiciousness to examine the wedding ritual among diasporic Hindus. The authors unpack the transformation of outsider fiancées into insider daughters to show how gold is employed to separate, link, and cross boundaries in extended families. This article demonstrates the agency of the relationships between the gold and its givers, in collectively co-creating an aesthetic subject who is a visual representation of a daughter embedded into the collective self of the extended family. In doing so, the authors demonstrate how diasporic Hindus utilize the cultural code of gold to shape and reaffirm collective identity.

Keywords: Hindu; gold; boundary; wedding; ritual

Introduction

The consumption practices of immigrant communities can significantly influence markets in their adopted (“host”) countries (Beji-Becheur, Özçaglar-Toulouse, and Zouaghi 2007). Many of these communities are considered to be diasporic because they enact a significant collective identity that is distinct from the host culture and maintain strong ties and attachments to their home culture (Tölöyan 1996). Moreover, diasporic consumers may adopt a hypercultural ethnic identity – an identity in which home-country traditions and material object symbolism become more important post-immigration (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005). For example, diasporic consumers often espouse religious beliefs that are distinctly different from the mainstream culture of their host country. Furthermore, diasporic consumers often become more fervent followers of their religion (Beji-Becheur, Özçaglar-Toulouse, and Zouaghi 2007; Pearson 2001) as they strive to create, protect, and perpetuate their culturally embedded selves (Heisley and Cours 2007) in their host country. Consequently, there is a need to understand how religious beliefs influence the consumption practices of diasporic communities.

The consumer research that has focused on the inter-relationships between religion and consumption (e.g., O’Guinn and Belk 1989; Palmer and Gallagher 2007; Wong 2007) has been limited to an examination of consumers in their country of birth. Other consumer research (e.g., Beji-Becheur, Özçaglar-Toulouse, and Zouaghi 2007;

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Lindquist, Hogg, and Shah 2004; Mehta and Belk 1991; Peñaloza 1994) has examined the consumption of diasporic consumers more generally, rather than specifically focusing on the influence of religion on consumption. Even so, this work has uncovered the importance of religion as a determinant of diasporic consumption. For example, Mehta and Belk (1991) found that over half of the immigrant Indians in their study identified a religious item as their favorite possession. Venkatesh (1995) notes that the increasing separation of religious and secular life in contemporary Western society has not been mirrored in Hindu India, a society that still reflects hierarchical principles diametrically opposed to the egalitarian ideals espoused by Western societies (Dumont 1972). Given Mehta and Belk's findings (1991), it appears that diasporic Hindus continue to place high importance on religion in their lives. More than 30 million people of Indian origin live in at least 150 countries outside India (Rukmani 2001). Since 80% of Indians in India identify themselves as Hindus, Hindus are logically the largest religious group in the Indian diaspora. Consequently, these diasporic consumers are an appropriate context within which to examine the influence of religious beliefs and practices on diasporic consumption.

As well as having to cross borders *between* the culture and consumption practices of their family and those of the host culture (Lindquist, Hogg, and Shah 2004; Peñaloza 1994), diasporic Hindus also have to cross the boundaries or barriers (Belk 1997) that exist *within* their diasporic communities. Since the most important affiliative group for a Hindu is the extended family (Minault 1981), there exists a plethora of traditional rituals (Rook 1985) that serve to reinforce and strengthen the bonds between extended family members, and to maintain and affirm the boundaries that separate the extended family from those outside it. As we shall demonstrate, boundary rituals, the rituals that groups enact to signify existing boundaries and/or facilitate the crossing of such boundaries, protect and perpetuate collective family identity. Treise, Wolburg, and Otnes (1999) explain that rituals can confer three social benefits: order in society, the experience of community, and the opportunity for individual transformation (Driver 1991). These benefits become even more critical for immigrant Hindu families because of the fragmentation of traditional relationships.

One important boundary crossing ritual is the traditional Hindu wedding. As in most exogamous societies, Hindu women marry out of their natal extended families and into their conjugal extended families, requiring that the outsider fiancée cross the boundary into the groom's extended family. However, the transformation from outsider fiancée into liminal bride, and then into insider daughter¹ is a particularly difficult transformation to effect. This is because a prospective bride, being an unmarried Hindu woman, is traditionally viewed as liminal (Venkatesh 1994), and hence dangerous to patrilineal patrilocal kinship system which characterizes most Hindu communities (Kolenda 1984). Consequently, the traditional Hindu wedding which incorporates the outsider fiancée into the groom's extended family is the major cultural performance of any Hindu family entailing spending that is at least as lavish as their resources² allow. The consequent reunion of even far-flung extended family makes the Hindu wedding the ideal opportunity for the groom's family to maintain and affirm the boundaries of their extended family. Paradoxically, the groom's family also has to facilitate the safe passage of an outsider into their family on this same occasion. How do Hindu families manage these seemingly inconsistent objectives? Despite the huge amount of resources expended on a typical Hindu wedding, consumer researchers have not yet addressed this important theoretical question.

Gold, deeply woven into the social, cultural, and religious fabric of Hindu society, plays an integral role in the rituals that permeate Hindu life from birth to death (Bayly

1981). Gold, whether in the form of gold jewelry or symbolized by other golden-colored substances, is particularly pervasive in the enactment of the traditional Hindu wedding ritual. The large numbers of Hindus living outside India also continue to employ and deploy gold and the symbolism of gold in weddings (Vegh 2009). We note however, that we do not attribute agency to the gold itself. Instead, in keeping with Borgerson (2005), we believe that the transformative agency resides in the *relationships* between the gold and the consumers giving it. Thus the gold items given, together with its givers, collectively co-create the bride as an aesthetic subject (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008) that is presented as a visual image (Schroeder 2002). This visual presentation of the bride as a daughter embedded into the collective self of the groom's extended family is particularly critical given the religious basis of India's notable orientation to the visual (Shukla 2008). The older members of diasporic communities hark from a time and a place (traditional India) where entire communities shared the same cultural assumptions and consequently, constituted interpretive communities who decoded the meaning of visual objects in the same manner (Davis 1997). However, because interpretive strategies are not instinctive, but learned as part of the socialization process, the spatial dislocation of diasporic communities may lead to fractured interpretive communities. As we shall demonstrate, this fragmentation poses additional challenges for the enactment of the wedding ritual in diasporic communities.

This difficulty in interpreting the wedding ritual is mirrored by the increased difficulty in enacting the wedding ritual. Weddings represent key opportunities to depict and strengthen the ties of diasporic Hindus with their home culture, their extended families, their local ethnic group, and to a lesser extent, members of the host-country culture. However, the splintering of intergenerational extended families, the degradation of traditional knowledge, and the resistance of increasingly "Westernized" younger family members over time, increase the difficulties faced by diasporic families in enacting the traditional Hindu wedding ritual. As the movie *Bend It Like Beckham* so humorously depicts, this confluence of circumstances can create enormous stress as first-generation diasporic Hindus try to reenact the cultural code of their forefathers in an adopted country. Furthermore, as Nelson and Otnes (2005) point out, cross-cultural marriages are increasingly common as second-generation family members acculturate to the host culture. Yet, these marriages are more problematic for first-generation family members that are trying to perpetuate home-country identity. This leads us to infer that diasporic Hindus have both a greater need to protect and affirm their collective identity, and yet greater difficulty in meeting that need, compared to their forefathers in the home country.

Consequently, the purpose of our interpretive research is to gain insights into how diasporic Hindus employ various categories of gold to signify, maintain, and cross boundaries of the extended family. We ask two specific research questions. First, we ask, how do diasporic Hindus utilize the material object symbolism (Heisley and Cours 2007) of gold to transform an outsider (the fiancée) into an insider (a daughter of the extended family)? Second, we ask, how do diasporic Hindus enact the cultural code of gold to shape and reaffirm their collective identity? Next, we present the conceptual foundations that underpin our investigation of these research questions.

Conceptual foundations

The extant consumer literature on ritual and material object meaning is informed by Western, Cartesian conceptualizations of self and sacredness that may not be directly transferable to a Hindu context (Venkatesh 1995). Consequently, in keeping with the

paradigm of ethno-consumerism proposed by Venkatesh (1995; Meamber and Venkatesh 2000), we seek to understand Hindu consumer behavior by employing theoretical categories originating within Hindu culture. Thus, we next provide a review of the Hindu concepts of collective self and sacredness, and the role of gold in wedding ritual, all of which differ from prevailing Western perspectives.

Collective self

The preponderance of consumer research on the meaning of possessions has been based on the Western notion of an individuated self. The concept of self in Hindu culture differs from the Western Cartesian self in that the Hindu self is not the demarcated property of a single individual but an entity that extends to, and is linked with, the selves of several others (Venkatesh 1994). This more collective view of self has implications for the meanings of possessions for Hindus because the Western concept of possessions belonging to specific individuals is notably absent in India (Mehta and Belk 1991). For example, previous research has noted that among Hindus, gold jewelry is viewed as family property, and is significant as a store of family capital. But, this notion of a possession's meaning stemming from its exchange value has not been prominently evident in studies of American consumers' meaningful possessions.

Hindus, with their long history of invasions, and centuries-old caste system, maintain relatively impermeable boundaries between their in-groups and out-groups (Bayly 1981). Hindus make clear distinctions between themselves and others based on nationality, religion, ethnicity, caste, and sub-caste. Caste, a uniquely Hindu concept, represents the quintessential social category that stratifies Indian society hierarchically and laterally on the basis of hereditary hierarchical occupational groups (Dumont 1972). One's caste and sub-caste (finer gradations within a caste) defines one's relative status in a society obsessed with purity and pollution (Douglas 1966). For instance, the untouchables who occupy the lowest level of Hindu society were historically employed as washermen and barbers who removed the impurities from everyday life (Douglas 1966). Hindus, then, are no exception to the observation that humans need public and private rituals to maintain, transcend, cross, or re-cross boundaries (Belk 1997).

In recognizing that the self is culturally embedded, consumer researchers have found that younger South Asian women identify with a collective of friends whose consumption patterns, like theirs, continually cross the borders between the home culture of their families and the host culture outside their families (Lindquist, Hogg, and Shah 2004). However, in traditional Hindu weddings, these young women are expected to support the older women's perpetuation of traditional rituals within a diasporic pocket of the home culture. Consequently, our work goes beyond considering how diasporic consumers cross borders *between* home and host cultures (Lindquist, Hogg, and Shah 2004; Peñaloza 1994) to examine how they cross boundaries *within* their home culture.

Hindu conceptualizations of sacredness

Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) define the sacred as that which is set apart, by contrasting it to the profane (that which is ordinary). One distinction between Hindu and Western culture is the pervasiveness of religion and religious values in everyday life. Hindus place a greater and more widely shared importance on spiritual values (Venkatesh 1995). Hence it is critical to employ a Hindu view of sacredness, when examining Hindu

rituals. Hindu sacredness diverges from the Durkheimian perspective (Durkheim 1915 [1968]) of sacredness espoused in the West, partly because of underlying concerns with purity and auspiciousness. Das (1982) suggests that sacredness can be best understood using both the purity–pollution continuum (whether the participant is in a bounded or liminal state) and the auspiciousness–inauspiciousness continuum (whether the rituals pertain to life or death). Thus, she suggests that a wedding ritual would be pure and auspicious while a cremation ritual would be impure and inauspicious.

Concerns with attaining purity, a state of non-polluted perfection, is common in diverse religions. In the traditional Hindu view, an entity in its ordinary state, termed “normal ritual status” (Srinivas 1952), exists on a continuum between ritual impurity and ritual purity. Contact with less pure (i.e., more polluted) elements moves that entity along the continuum towards ritual impurity while contact with purer elements moves that entity toward ritual purity. The processes of purification include cleansing, sacrifice, and contamination. Devout Hindus engage in ritual bathing to re-incorporate ritual purity. Although bathing with water is the most widespread method of removing ritual impurity among devout Hindus (Dumont 1972), biological cleanliness is not identical to ritual cleanliness. For example, ritual purification of the home can involve the urine and dung of cows (Mehta and Belk 1991), considered pure because they emanate from cows which are sacred to Hindus (Korom 2000). Sacrifice can involve “giving up” or “giving away” (Sherry 1996). An obvious example is abstaining from sexual relations in order to maintain chastity or celibacy. Sacrifice purifies by avoiding substances and practices that are polluting. Sacrifice can also purify because it signifies the ritual death of the polluted entity, permitting a rebirth of a pure entity. Both negative and positive contamination (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) can inform an examination of purification. Purification requires the avoidance and/or removal of negative contaminants, and the approach and/or incorporation of positive contaminants.

A concern with auspiciousness, which is a favorable state believed to please Hindu gods and generate positive outcomes, systematically pervades Hindu society (Fernandez, Veer, and Lastovicka 2007). Almost every creature, person, act, or event can be described in Hindu discourse as either auspicious or inauspicious. Anything that predisposes the gods to favor a human undertaking is auspicious. People, events, objects, words, numbers, and points in time can be more or less auspicious. For example, odd numbers are auspicious while even numbers are not. Similarly, pregnant women are auspicious, while widows are not. Hindus’ shared understanding of auspiciousness means that rituals are more likely to be publicly employed in India, as compared to the West.

Das (1982) points out that among Hindus, marriage and other rituals pertaining to life are regarded as auspicious while cremation and other rituals pertaining to death are viewed as inauspicious. Consequently in her view, auspiciousness pertains to life and inauspiciousness pertains to death. Every married Hindu woman, during her husband’s lifetime, is perceived to be the concrete embodiment of temporal auspiciousness, as shown in her colorful attire, jewelry, and the red dot on her forehead (Carman 1985). But, as soon as she becomes a widow, she is viewed as inauspicious, and generally avoided (Srinivas 1952).

Gold in Hindu wedding ritual

Shukla (2008) notes that people who are highly religious tend to be more symbolically oriented, making a study of signs and symbolic communication through body attire

particularly relevant in India. This suggests to us that a prospective bride must be transformed into a visual representation of a daughter of the groom's family. As we shall demonstrate, the giving of gold, and the gold given, both play a critical role in the creation of this visual representation. The role played by gold in the ritual purification of the bride stems from ancient Hindu beliefs. One term for gold is "hiranya," from the Sanskrit root "hri" which means imperishable. Gold continues to be associated with creation, life, and prosperity (Mathur 2002). The purest form of gold (designated 24 carat gold) is difficult to fashion into jewelry because it is extremely soft and can be easily damaged. Thus gold is usually used in conjunction with other metals to form harder gold alloys before being fashioned into jewelry. The most desired type of gold jewelry in India is 22 carats (91.7% gold content). This is in contrast to gold jewelry that is sold in North America, which usually ranges from 10 carats (41.6% gold content) to 18 carats (75% gold content).

In most Indian communities, gold forms an indispensable part of the jewelry that bedecks a Hindu bride (Mathur 2002) as she undergoes the rituals that will incorporate her into her groom's family. The purifying power of gold is evident throughout the transition from outsider fiancée to insider daughter. For example, *before* the wedding, many Hindu brides are massaged and bathed with turmeric (Kolenda 1984). This golden-colored spice which is prized for its antiseptic properties in India, also imparts a much-favored golden-yellow tone to the bride's skin. *During* the wedding, the "Hawan" (the fire which the couple will circle seven times) is made sacred by pouring "ghee" (clarified butter) into it. The ability of the golden-colored ghee to infuse the Hawan with sacredness stems from its status as the purest distilled essence of milk from the cow, which in turn is sacred for Hindus. *After* the wedding, specific gold jewelry may be worn to deflect evil and misfortune away from the wearer's husband (Shukla 2008).

We recognize that the rituals of any particular family are strongly influenced by their ethnicity, caste, and sub-caste, and do not profess to offer a comprehensive explanation of the use of gold jewelry that is applicable to every Hindu wedding. However, we believe that we are able to show that while the use of jewelry in Hindu weddings may resemble the use of jewelry in Western-style "white" weddings in some outward respects, a different underlying cultural code shapes the meanings inherent in its ritualistic use. Furthermore, we believe we will demonstrate that the use of gold jewelry in the weddings of diasporic Hindus both shapes and is shaped by, their collective identity as interdependent selves.

Methodology

Research team

Our bi-gender, multicultural research team collected data using depth interviews and participant observation from 2003 to 2009. One researcher was *born* into a diasporic Hindu family, a second author had formerly been *married* into a diasporic Hindu family, and a third author had *no* kinship connections to Hindu or diasporic families of any kind. This enabled our interpretations to benefit from a diversity of perspectives with varying levels of familiarity with the context of interest.

Research sample

We conducted 40 in-depth interviews with 25 informants. We interviewed people from three generations of three different extended Hindu families as part of our study. Our

three focal families were the Patels (a working-class Gujarati family), the Kumars (a middle-class Telugu family), and the Singhs (a well-to-do upper-class Jat family). A detailed description of each of our three focal Hindu families, noting in particular their acculturation strategies (Berry 1997) can be found in Appendix 1. All our informants had undergone a traditional Hindu wedding before or during our data collection period. Except for the two Caucasian brides that married into Hindu families within the data collection period, all our informants were raised as Hindus. Four Hindu informants were born in New Zealand, two were born in Africa, and the rest of the Hindu informants were born in India. All of our Indian-born informants had emigrated to New Zealand, except for Nani Singh (80) who has never left India. At least one author participated in and/or observed multiple wedding ceremonies enacted by each of these three family groups. Our prolonged engagement with these three families provided depth to our study. Additional interviews with seven un-related individuals added further breadth to our study. The 40 in-depth interviews generated over 500 pages of transcripts and fieldnotes, which together with photographs and videotapes formed the data set to be analyzed.

Analysis and interpretation

Our informants' identities and other identifiers in this paper have been disguised. The trustworthiness of our data and interpretations were examined via triangulation of informants, interviews, methods, and interviewers, as well as the use of peer debriefing in person and via memoing. We employed the constant comparative method of analysis, engaging in open and axial coding of interview transcripts and fieldnotes and developing interpretations after each wave of data collection. Our interpretations after each phase of data collection were informed by the relevant literature as suggested by Venkatesh (1994). Our emergent insights then informed and directed our subsequent data collection. The relevant literature included consumer research, and anthropological and sociological studies of Hindus. In developing and reporting our interpretations, we tacked between the literature and the data, and between the parts of each transcript and the whole body of transcripts. A fuller description of the ethno-consumerism research process can be found in Meamber and Venkatesh (2000).

Findings

We organize our findings to depict the incremental processes by which an outsider fiancée crosses the boundary of the extended family to become an insider daughter. In particular, we focus on the relationships tangibilized by the pure, auspicious, and heavy gold which are used to create the bride into an aesthetic subject that visually represents a daughter of the extended family. In doing so, we answer each of our two research questions in turn. We now turn to our first research question which asked "How do diasporic Hindus utilize the material object symbolism of gold to transform an outsider (the fiancée) into an insider (a daughter of the extended family)?"

Utilizing gold to transform

Jewelry and gold seem virtually synonymous for our Hindu informants, who all listed items that were wholly or largely made of gold when asked to talk about their jewelry. When asked what jewelry means in Gujarat, Reena, a married Gujarati (IF 60s) replied,

“... golden jewelry, which includes bangles, necklace or chains, then the chain in the middle part [of the hair] ... something to wear on the five fingers ... and a waistband.” Later in the interview, Reena summed up the Hindu attitude towards gold when she declared “We believe in gold.” Reena’s belief in gold was echoed by Anu (IF 30s) who explained, “... in terms of the materialistic things that one owns, it [the gold she received at her wedding] is probably the only thing that will survive the test of time ... if it’s not artificial and it’s pure gold or whatever ...” Anu and her husband, like a number of other informants, were adamant that their gold would only be sold if they were in dire circumstances, suggesting that gold is viewed as a store of personal and family wealth. Our informants explained that given the lack of a government safety net in India, extended family has historically depended on each other and their assets in times of difficulty. As Anu’s comment above also illustrates, our informants commonly referred to the highest quality of gold jewelry as “pure” gold, even though it is not pure gold in a chemical sense.

Pure gold

Hindu consumers’ strong preference for “pure” gold reflects more than the increased value of “pure” gold – it also reflects Hindus’ perennial concern with purity. The Hindu word for major life rituals – *samskara* – means to “purify” (Inden and Nicholas 1977). A prospective bride, being an outsider, must be purified (Inden and Nicholas 1977) before she can become viewed as a worthy daughter of the family, and a successful carrier of the groom’s family’s biological immortality. As we shall demonstrate, gold, and the symbolism of gold, play critical roles in her purification and transformation from fiancée to daughter.

Cleansing and contamination. Much as consumers groom themselves daily to re-incorporate cultural meanings (Rook 1985), devout Hindus engage in ritual bathing to re-incorporate ritual purity. Although bathing with water does effect biological cleansing, it is actually ritual cleansing (removal of polluting elements) that is being sought. Cleansing may also serve a second function of purifying via contamination by the positive. For instance, for a number of days preceding a Hindu wedding, the prospective bride is ritually bathed with water and massaged with turmeric. This golden-colored spice, prized for its antiseptic properties in India, is believed to purify the recipient (Srinivas 1952). Anjali (IF 45) recalled how, every day for a week before her wedding:

my close female relatives and friends prepared me for my wedding by rubbing turmeric paste on me. I wore only my white petticoat and blouse, and they dipped their hands into a large bowl of turmeric [powder mixed with water to form a golden yellow paste] and put the paste on my body. They rubbed it into me to make my skin fairer so ... I would be ready for Sham [the groom].

Anjali’s comment regarding being “ready” referred to the golden-yellow tone that turmeric imparts to the recipient’s skin, temporarily making it lighter in color. (Hindus, like other South Asians traditionally view “fairness” as a criterion by which to judge physical attractiveness.) Decades later, Anjali performed a similar purification ceremony on Anna, her son’s Caucasian fiancée (depicted in Figure 1). A similar pre-wedding ceremony was observed where Vikas (IM 24), dressed in white clothes was rubbed with turmeric by *his* female relatives, in preparation for his wedding. At the conclusion of this ceremony, every visible part of his body was literally stained bright yellow.

(a)



(b)



Figure 1. The transformative power of gold in use: (a) initiating the transformation: Mrs Kumar, massaging turmeric paste onto her son's Caucasian fiancée Anna; (b) completing the transformation: Anna presented visually as a daughter of the Kumar family (photographs have been edited as required to protect our informants' anonymity).

We noted that the groom, like the bride, was purified by female relatives rather than male relatives, supporting Pearson's view (2001) that Hindu women act as the guardians, reproducers, and transmitters of the sacred. Massaging the prospective bride or groom with turmeric purifies him or her on multiple levels. On a biological level,

the antiseptic turmeric cleanses and removes pollution from his or her skin. Some turmeric remains on the skin, thus forming a barrier against further pollution (Inden and Nicholas 1977). Some turmeric also permeates the skin, and since it is viewed as a pure substance, this contact is believed to make the recipient purer. The prospective bride and groom are given new clothes to wear, which are traditionally made of “pure” materials such as new, unwashed cotton or silk. They also are given the emically termed “pure” gold to wear. The bride (and to a lesser extent, the groom) is given new and used “pure” gold jewelry from her biological family, in-laws, and friends on the occasion of her wedding and this gold positively contaminates her, resulting in ritual purification.

Gifts of gold. Soon after her engagement to Sanjay Singh (IM 20), Lisa (WF 20) received the first of what was to be a succession of gifts of traditional Indian jewelry from her fiancé’s mother, Dipani. Lisa recollected that these items were not purchased new for the occasion but “. . . were out of her own jewelry. She [her fiancé’s mother] sat down with literally a box full of jewelry . . . narrowed it down to two jewelry sets³ and I chose . . . they’re solid gold.” We would learn later that this practice of daughters-in-law receiving gifts of the mother-in-law’s personal jewelry was customary in the groom’s family. As Reena (another Gujarati informant) explained, the groom’s family customarily gave their future daughter-in-law a jewelry set to be worn on her wedding day. If the family was wealthy, they might give a second jewelry set to her. However, she continued, “if the mother in law is very happy then they give lots of things!” We surmise from Reena’s comments that the quality and quantity of the gold that Lisa received from her mother in law signified her acceptance of Lisa into the family.

Members of the extended family are obligated to give an expected value of gold, even if they are financially constrained. Fieldnotes made after Sanjay and Lisa Singh’s wedding in India provide evidence of the importance of the value of the jewelry to gaining and maintaining “face” (the respect of others in the extended family):

At one point an uncle and aunt (who were relatively less well off compared to the groom’s family) . . . purchased two small earrings and a thin chain [of 22 carat gold to give the bride]; however, after seeing all the jewelry she was wearing when she appeared . . . four of the sisters left to buy all new jewelry [to give her], at extreme expense to the family budget. This was done [as] . . . the family felt that they should “rise to the occasion” and not dishonour the [extended] family. [Fieldnotes, Lisa’s Indian Wedding]

However, we learned that those outside the family were not subject to the same constraints. When Reena was asked about her perceptions of nine carat gold, she replied, “We will never give as a gift, you know. But to distant friends and relatives, you know, we will buy gold plated [with] 22 carat gold, not pure 22 carat gold.” Reena’s observation about the acceptability of giving gold plated jewelry to distant friends and relatives indicates that Hindus appear to make distinctions between immediate extended family and those less closely connected. This resembles the distinctions made by Hong Kong Chinese when selecting gifts for “close friends,” “good friends,” and “hi-bye” friends (Joy 2001). If it is not possible to give 22 carat gold to these more distant kith and kin (due to economic constraints), then it is more important to give the appearance of 22 carat gold, even though 22 carat gold plated jewelry will have less economic value and be less durable than something made wholly of nine carat gold. Our informants also explained that only extended family and family friends are expected to give gold jewelry as a wedding gift – more distant friends are expected to give gifts of money instead.

Inherent in this view is the perspective of gold as an iconic representation of the extended family values of connectedness (Heisley and Cours 2007). The gold given serves to demarcate boundaries existing between friends, “family friends,”⁴ and family. When gold is given, its relative value (in terms of weight and relative purity) reflects both the giver’s economic status and the closeness of their relationship with the recipient’s family. Another informant, Latha Patel (IF 47), told us about a story that illustrated the broken ties that can arise, should a giver not meet his obligations to give gold that iconically resembles the expected “pure” or 22 carat gold:

My cousin’s wife, the parents got divorced, on the daughter’s wedding day the father did show up and he gave a gold [jewelry] set to the daughter and they couldn’t believe it! They had it checked and it was a *fake* [emphasis in original] one. [Int: Fake?] Yes, nine carat. [Int: An Indian woman would consider nine carat gold to be fake?] Oh yes. But the thing is, the outer family will think he gave a gold set. [Int: Why do you think he did it?] Just to show everyone that he has given her the right thing. But since that day she [his daughter] has never spoken to her father again, *never* [emphasis in original].

Auspicious gold

Many Hindu marriages involve the tying of a sacred necklace made of gold and black beads, called a Manghal Sutra⁵ (literally “auspicious thread”) around the bride’s neck. When Anjali Kumar (IF 45) was asked about her Manghal Sutra she told the interviewer that she was planning to buy a bigger and more expensive one when she made her next trip to India. This more elaborate Manghal Sutra was to be purchased to serve as evidence of her now improved financial status. When asked how she would dispose of the old one, she reacted in surprise, “Oh you can *never* [emphasis in original] sell it, you have to melt the old one and use the gold to help make the new one. If not the new one will not be genuine . . . it will not be auspicious.” It appears that Anjali views the sacred powers contained in the Manghal Sutra as residing in the gold and black beads it is made of, and thus retainable by incorporating them into another necklace.

Anjali’s comments uncovered another cultural category that is critical to understanding Hindu consumption. Auspicious times, places, persons, colors, and objects seem to be valued by Hindus because they attract the benevolence of cosmic powers (Fernandez, Veer, and Lastovicka 2007). Our informants found it easy to list objects, times, or places that are auspicious and those which are inauspicious. We learned that Hindu women’s responsibilities extend beyond the Western notion of women ensuring their husbands’ good health by managing their nutrition and medical care. Hindu women are also expected to pray, fast, and wear auspicious symbols, such as the auspicious gold Manghal Sutra, in order to ensure their husbands’ longevity. This “sub-contracting” of auspiciousness-generation to the women of the family begins at marriage. The bride’s new auspicious jewelry serves as a sentimental symbol to remind her of connectedness to the groom, and her expected focus on his well-being. As Tara Singh (IF 42) explained:

These glass bangles . . . are rings of glass with a bit of silver. They are a symbol for matrimony . . . in India, glass bangles are a must for every married woman. And you must be very careful that you don’t break them . . . glass bangles give long life to your husband . . . The toe rings as such, that is also part of married . . . uh . . . uniform that you have to wear . . . this Manghal Sutra [pointing to the gold necklace she was wearing] is another thing that every Indian woman wears, these black beads are what we call a symbol of marriage. Every married woman wears these . . . also for her husband’s longevity.

The new bride is adorned by the groom's family with pure and auspicious jewelry to anchor her to her new identity as the groom's wife or "half-body" – understood as literally transforming biologically into a member of the groom's family (Inden and Nicholas 1977). This new identity is created during the main wedding ceremony. In traditional Hindu belief, the bride and groom ascend to a temporary elevated state, and are believed to be the embodiment of deities (in the case of Brahmins) or royalty (in the case of non-Brahmins) during the marriage ceremony (Dumont 1972). Situating a ritual performance in an auspicious space and time while employing the use of auspicious artifacts facilitates this movement between liminal and bounded states (Das 1982), permitting the bride and groom to become one entity.

Having discussed how the Hindus in our study viewed and utilized gold that is pure gold (in solid, plated, or hollow forms) to transform the fiancée into a bride, and auspicious gold to safely facilitate her transformation from bride to wife, we now turn to a very unique type of gold that, in linking her to the mothers of the extended family, transforms her from a wife to their daughter.

Heavy gold

As mentioned earlier, Lisa received a succession of gifts of traditional Indian jewelry from Dipani, her future mother-in-law. Dipani later told us that much of the jewelry she had given Lisa during the engagement had been given to Dipani by her own mother-in-law. As will be demonstrated, because of the jewelry's indexical links to prior generations of her new family, Lisa's acceptance and wearing of these gifts authenticated her as a replica of past brides. Nani (IF 80), Sanjay Singh's maternal grandmother, explained the family tradition:

I, like every mother-in-law, gave my jewelry to my daughters-in-law ... and, for my daughters I bought all new. The tradition of the family is the mother-in-law's jewelry goes to the daughters-in-law so that's why we buy the new jewelry for the daughters and give some of the old ... jewelry to the daughters-in-law. [Int: Why is this tradition important?] Must give to daughters-in-law, not daughters, since they [the daughters-in-law] must take [the jewelry] and take care of it for their whole lives, for the generations. [holding up the various items of jewelry one by one] that's my mother[-in-law], that's my mother[-in-law]'s mother[-in-law]... It's like a chain... I have some from my mother [-in-law], which was her mother[-in-law]'s, which was her mother[-in-law]'s ... mostly over 100 years old.

The gifting of the family jewelry to the prospective daughter-in-law serves to bring her into the family (Curasi, Price, and Arnold 2004). This practice resonates with observations that women nurture and preserve family relationships by creating intergenerational emblems of family (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989; Curasi, Price, and Arnold 2004). Further questioning revealed that the women Nani referred to as "mothers" were actually what would be termed "mothers-in-law" in the West. Nani's use of the term "mother," rather than "mother-in-law," reflects the Hindu perspective that when a bride marries the groom she is perceived as literally transforming biologically into a member of the groom's family (Inden and Nicholas 1977). Nani's referral to an item of jewelry as her "mother" rather than as her "mother's" reflects the inalienability of the mother-in-law's jewelry from previous owners. The inalienable jewelry thus circulates within the family by gifting, which preserves the purity of social relations.

This emically termed "heavy" jewelry, is older, traditionally styled gold jewelry that literally weighs more and is usually locked away and brought out to be used on very

special occasions, such as weddings (Shukla 2008). Nani, the groom's grandmother, explained the distinct roles played by the different types of gold jewelry, when she stated "some jewelry is for everyday and some is for weddings . . . the heavy, heavy jewelry is for the occasions, the weddings." The heavy gold is stored in what our informants termed a "locker" – a strong box that is normally kept under a bed or in a bank vault. When asked if damaged or disliked items of gold jewelry could be melted down and remade into new pieces, Nani replied:

Small things yes, if they're broken – the rings and chains – if they're broken then I can melt and make new jewelry [out of the gold]. Not the heavy jewelry of the antique jewelry. If it breaks then you repair and repair and put [back] in the locker.

Other comments indicated that although most gold was individual property and hence could be sold if an individual was in extreme need, the "heavy" gold was family property, and could only be sold if the entire family was in dire circumstances, echoing Curasi, Price, and Arnold's observation (2004) that inalienable wealth may be possessed but not owned, and can only be sold if group survival is threatened. Thus, the high indexical properties of "heavy" gold qualifies it as inalienable wealth and its sacred status is reflected in the distinctive way it is stored and used, and the "never sell" rules it is subject to (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989).

We observed that the heavy jewelry brought out for the wedding in India was not cleaned before or after it was used, though it often lay unused in storage for lengthy periods of time. On the surface, this seems unusual, given the Hindu view that death and the dead are extremely polluting (Douglas 1966). Nani explained "[There is] no need to clean [the heavy jewelry]. Because the jewelry you wear is very rare and we occasionally put it on and then put [it back] in the box. Yes, it feels like passing on some more." This comment, coupled with Nani's earlier comments about the gold embodying her female ancestors, leads us to infer that she is passing on more than the gold given. This is because the gold, while indeed contaminated, is not polluted, but purified by that contamination. The heavy gold is figuratively "heavy" with the positive contamination from the bodies and selves (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) of the generations of now-sacred women who have worn it in the past and serves to further purify the wearers in anticipation of the wedding ceremony. In addition, the contamination carried by the gold connects the bride to women of the groom's family.

We note that both Lisa and Dipani recollected very clearly the nature and origins of the specific gold jewelry given to Lisa during the engagement, suggesting that giver and the gold gifted during the engagement co-created indexical links that establish and tangibilize personal bonds between giver and receiver. When we asked Dipani Singh (more than two years later) how Lisa wearing Dipani's heavy jewelry at the wedding in India made Dipani feel, she exclaimed:

Wonderful! It was like she was mine . . . it just made me proud to see her dressed as I would have dressed, as I would have dressed her . . . It's about status. You need to tell everyone where she's come from. If you've come in without any splendor then you're not seen as part of a wealthy family. This way she came in looking beautiful and part of our family and part of our group – *us* [emphasis in original]. If you let someone wear your jewelry, you must love her a lot. [Int: How do you mean?] The jewelry she wore was passed down from many other people, my mother-in-law and so on, and it's wonderful to see her [Lisa] wearing all the jewelry that her [conjugal] family had worn

... jewelry you can keep and cherish ... you can remember your family that way as well
 ... you can remember who has shown you such love to give you something that we love,
 who was given it by someone who loved them ...

The mother-in-laws' jewelry, having been worn by one or more generations of the groom's female ancestors, is corporally and temporally indexed (Grayson and Shulman 2000) to those female ancestors. Being given, it is not alienated from the giver, as it would have been if it were bought and sold. The presence of the owners' essence in the object given (Curasi, Price, and Arnold 2004) creates the enduring bond between the previous owners and the receiver (Parry 1986).

Just as a religious relic's "contiguity with ... a saint functions to make present that holy figure" (Clarke 1992, 52), the indexical items of gold jewelry are secular relics that embody brides from prior generations, with the locker functioning as a reliquary – a container for relics of a sacred person (Clarke 1992). When the bride subsequently wears her mother-in-law's jewelry, she transcends the boundary from liminal bride to insider daughter. The groom's female relatives indexify the iconic bride to permit the juxtaposition of tangible presence and the desired intangible ideal, thus co-creating a visual representation (Schroeder 2002) for the consuming audience. Hence the bride, in addition to being uniquely able to carry memories, as suggested by Grayson and Shulman (2000, 19), becomes a worthy daughter and carrier of the extended family's biological immortality. When Lisa accepted the jewelry given to her from her groom's female ancestors, Lisa became more than herself. Her guardianship of the relics, by indexing her to generations of previous brides, authenticated her as daughter and future mother of the family.

There is no limit to the icons or images of the sacred original that can be manufactured, but there are finite numbers of true indexical links to the sacred original. Thus, even though the iconic representation of past brides serves an important representational function that presents the bride as a family bride in appearance, the indexical traces of past brides serve a crucial evidentiary function (Curasi, Price, and Arnold 2004). By abolishing spatio-temporal distance between sacred and signifier (Clarke 1992; Curasi, Price, and Arnold 2004), the relics manifest the sacred original within the replica, thus presenting the bride as a family bride in essence. Thus, the iconic and indexical properties work in tandem to create a potent visual representation of the bride.

Having answered our first research question, we now turn to our second question. This asked, "How do diasporic Hindus enact the cultural code of gold to shape and reaffirm their collective identity?"

Enacting the cultural code in the diaspora

In the findings thus presented, the meaning of the gold given arises from a shared cultural code that is easily deciphered by first-generation members of the diasporic families. As Suria Patel (IF 49) put it, "straight away, any Indian lady will know, what kind of gold it is." However, enacting that cultural code is more difficult than deciphering it. Mrs Patel told the interviewer that enacting her son's purification ceremony was very stressful, in the absence of older female relatives to tell her what to do. Her assertion is supported below by an excerpt from fieldnotes made immediately after observing the ceremony:

As the start of Vikas Patel's *pithi* [pre-wedding purification with turmeric] ceremony neared, nobody seemed to know exactly what to do. There were at least a hundred

traditionally dressed men and women standing around in front of the house. I could see his mother [Suria] getting more and more tense, anxiously conferring with a couple of other women, also in their mid forties. A bevy of young Hindu women in their late teens stood around in colorful saris, chatting and – most incongruously, given their traditional attire – texting on their cellphones. A car pulled up the driveway, and as an elderly lady alighted, Suria's relief was palpable. I later learned that this lady, a grand-aunt of one of the young women [i.e., a family friend], had flown in from another city but her plane had been delayed. As soon as she arrived, she issued a stream of instructions in Gujarati and the women [mothers and daughters] rushed around doing her bidding.

This episode demonstrates that traditional knowledge can degrade, as an immigrant's sojourn away from their homeland lengthens. The need to be seen as correctly recreating the traditional cultural code for the diasporic community, while lacking the knowledge to do so, causes extreme stress for diasporic Hindus. Family friends however, may step forward to take the place of "family" in maintaining and perpetuating cultural knowledge.

Although the giving of the pure, auspicious, and heavy jewelry occurs in both India and in diasporic communities, we learned of some differences that influence the market. For example, Mrs Patel relied on family or friends who visited India to procure the "correct" 22 carat gold. Mrs Kumar bought gold for future gifting, on trips to India "just in case." Even when the community is large enough to warrant one or more jewelers that provide 22 carat gold close to their new home, the gold designs may be seen as unfashionably out-of-date, or the gold too expensive. Thus Mrs Singh was part of a thriving secondary market of Hindu women who bring gold back from trips to India to sell to friends and relatives. Furthermore, diasporic families that have family members still back in India or who have immigrated elsewhere, have to rely more on family friends to help with the roles traditionally played by family back home. Thus the gifting of gold by family friends augments the gifting by family to a greater extent than in the home country.

The shared cultural code may be put to an even stronger test, in the case of cross-cultural marriages, which our informants emically termed "mixed marriages." Not surprisingly, mixed marriages are more common among second-generation diasporic Hindus than they would be in traditional communities in the home country. As the summary background information on the three focal families in Appendix 1 indicates, in two out of three cases, second-generation sons chose to marry Caucasian brides from Christian families. Both families employed spatio-temporal separation strategies to deal with the cross-cultural ambivalence arising from the mixed marriages (Nelson and Otnes 2005). They staged both Christian and Hindu wedding ceremonies, but held these at discrete times and in separate locations. The Singhs, with greater financial resources, and more key family members living in India, staged the Christian wedding in New Zealand and the Hindu wedding in their ancestral city in India. The Kumars, with more moderate resources and most of their key family members living in New Zealand, staged the Christian wedding in the bride's hometown in New Zealand and the Hindu wedding in the groom's hometown in New Zealand.

However, this spatio-temporal separation strategy did not address a similar problem faced by families – the family patriarch disapproved of the mixed marriage. In the Kumars' case, Mr Kumar, the patriarch of his family, avoided both weddings by leaving on a trip to visit his widowed mother in India the day before the first wedding. The extended family residing in New Zealand and their "family friends" knew of his disapproval and correctly interpreted his departure as a sign of his

displeasure. However, our observations and interviews revealed that less connected friends, who did not know this insider information, used the shared cultural code to impute another meaning to his departure – they decided that Mr Kumar could only have missed the wedding because his mother was seriously ill. Anjali Kumar, the mother of the groom, told the interviewer that she was grateful that family and family friends maintained this polite fiction, allowing her to “save face” in a difficult situation. Mr Kumar’s violation of the cultural code (by missing his son’s wedding) threatened collective identity. However, family and family friends used another viable interpretation of his act (a sick mother) that was consistent with the cultural code, to protectively perpetuate collective identity.

In the case of the Singhs, the patriarch, Mr Singh’s older brother (the groom’s uncle) lived in the ancestral home in India, and so, could not plausibly avoid the Hindu ceremony being held there. However, he utilized the shared cultural code of gold to communicate his public acceptance and private displeasure simultaneously. He gave the couple what we etically term “hollow” gold at the lavish wedding reception in India. The patriarch very publicly and ceremoniously gave the groom a signet ring and the bride a toe ring. Both rings were made of 22 carat gold, and were exceptionally large and ornate [the groom described the signet ring as “big as an egg”]. However, these rings turned out to be made of 22 carat gold that resembled the gold that would ideally be given, but that weighed and cost much less because the interiors of the two items were literally hollow, instead of being made from solid gold. The groom, Sanjay Singh, told the interviewer: “I initially thought they were poor, they couldn’t afford anything else but . . .” The bride, Lisa, interjected:

but the way they did it was as if they were giving us precious, *precious* [emphasis in original] gold. You know, the way it was done . . . I mean, I wondered later, maybe [they were communicating] “outwardly we accept you” so here’s some jewelry, but inwardly we don’t . . .

Given that this was the only time we had encountered a gift of “hollow” gold, and given Sanjay’s uncertainty regarding the underlying motives of the gifts of “hollow” gold, we asked subsequent informants about this phenomenon. Rachna (IF 45) agreed that “oh yes, people *do* [emphasis in original] do that, they must have done it because she [the bride] was a white girl.” Suria Patel (IF 49) agreed that “they were saying we don’t want to spoil the family relationships but secretly you are not worth it to us.” Suria’s husband added that “It’s not the fact that they couldn’t afford it, it’s the fact that they were not happy with the bride.” Our interpretation of these comments are that although Sanjay, as a second-generation immigrant was unsure of the cultural code being enacted in the wedding “back home,” members of the older generation “back home” and first-generation immigrants overseas were able to decode the code of the hollow gold quite clearly. We also note that although Sanjay’s mother and aunt made fun of the hollow rings in private [pretending to blow them around the room and referring to them as being “as light as feathers”], they did not breach the cultural code in public. The patriarch had given gold that appeared to be a prestige marker (Heisley and Cours 2007) that validated Lisa’s status as an appropriate wife-to-be. But since he showed his displeasure in a private manner that had not embarrassed the Singhs publicly, he had avoided threatening the kinship structure of the extended family. So Sanjay’s parents in return were able to engage in a polite fiction, ignoring the slight in the interest of perpetuating collective identity. We now discuss our findings.

Discussion and conclusion

Our first research question asked how diasporic Hindus utilize the material symbolism of gold to help transform an outsider fiancée into an insider daughter. We found that this incremental transformative process (depicted in Figure 2) takes place over a period of time. Before and during the liminal multi-day and multi-ceremony wedding period, the fiancée receives gifts of pure gold by family. The giving of pure gold continues during the liminal wedding period, and includes more pure gold given by family and “family friends.” The gold given signifies the relationships between the givers and the receivers in a tangible manner. This signification becomes particularly potent when the gold has shared a long history with the giver. Because straightened circumstances permit the giving of gold that only *appears* to be pure (e.g., lower quality gold that is plated with 22 carat gold) we conclude that it is the visible signification of support rather than the gold itself, that both elevates the fiancée to the position of bride and tangibilizes her new identity. The pure gold is given over a number of occasions, suggesting that it is the repetitious nature of the gold-giving ritual that elevates the bride to insider status.

During the liminal wedding period, the bride is given new auspicious gold and other auspicious jewelry to wear for the well-being of her new husband. The women in the

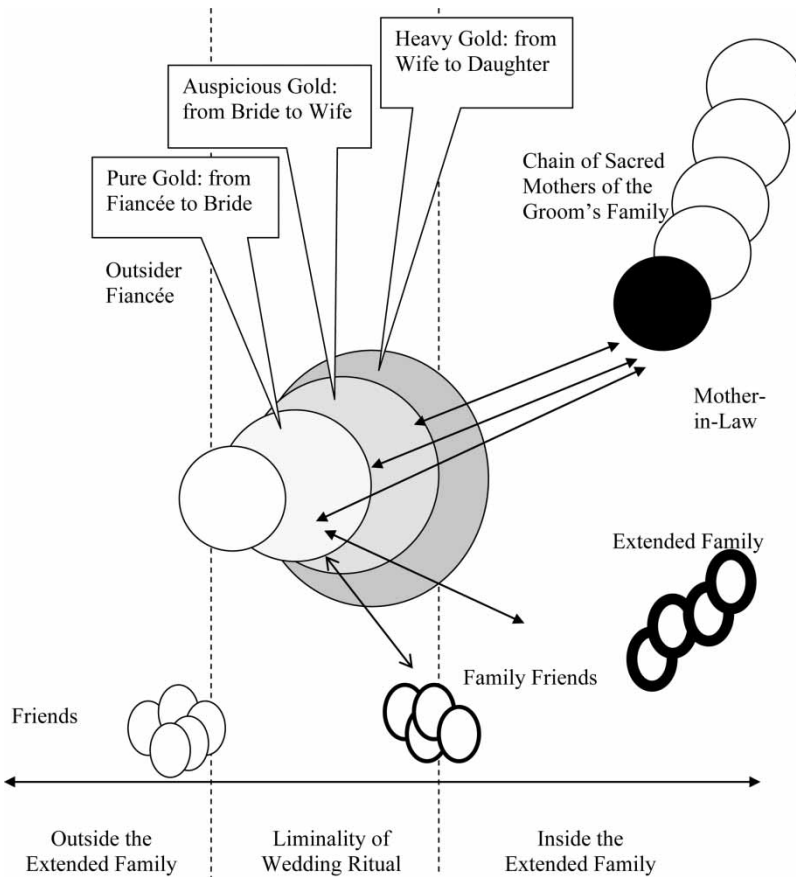


Figure 2. The transformation process co-created by gold and givers.

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groom's family, by giving her the auspicious jewelry, are extending to the bride far more than the value of the gold given – they are also extending to her the duty to promote the well-being of the extended family. These auspicious symbols tangibilize her new status as a married woman – a wife. However, the final and most important stage is the gifting of the “heavy” gold that indisputably connects the wife of the groom to the matriarchs of her conjugal extended family, thus making her their “daughter.” Although this gifting may start before the wedding, it intensifies during the final stages of the wedding period, culminating when the bride is displayed to all present as an unequivocal daughter of their family. Once again, it is the visible support of the givers, even more than the gifts given, that collectively creates the bride into more than a wife, for the gold given confirms her status as a valued daughter.

Our second research question asked how diasporic Hindus enact the cultural code of gold to shape and reaffirm their collective identity. Figure 2 depicts our finding that extended family, “family friends,” and friends all play their parts in perpetuating the cultural code. The heavier the boxes, the greater the role played. In particular, “family friends,” who straddle the boundary between friends outside the family and people inside the family, appear to play a more important gifting role within diasporic communities than they do in the home country. This suggests that in some situations and groups, friends may play significant roles in what has hitherto been seen by researchers as family-only territory. For example, consumer researchers may find that building on our findings and that of Joy (2001) to consider the influences of various categories of friends on family decision-making will move the field forward.

Our research concurs with Lindquist, Hogg, and Shah (2004) in finding that that tension arises because second-generation family members acculturate differently compared to their first-generation parents. However, we go beyond this prior research to uncover the tension that can occur when members of the same generation of a family pursue different acculturation strategies. A community ritual such as a wedding tends to attenuate the already existing stress, because the need to maintain appearances in front of the diasporic community means that different parties become even more determined that their wishes be followed. Two out of our three focal families had to cope with the additional stress of cross-cultural marriages – a finding that is not surprising, given the increasing global trend towards cross-cultural marriages. We believe it is imperative for consumer researchers to further examine the phenomenon of cross-cultural marriages by building on our findings and those of Nelson and Otnes (2005).

We have built on, and extended Belk's insightful discussion of boundary crossings (1997). Boundaries separate, demarcate, and protect the people and objects inside from the people and objects outside. We have shown that family boundaries can be complex and that crossing boundaries may require successive incremental transformations. Only select outsiders can be permitted to cross a boundary – and crossings must be made in a prescribed, ritualized manner. Like the lockable front door that serves as a portal permitting controlled access to the interior of the home, family rituals serve as portals that allow outsiders to access the family in a controlled manner. Our examination of gold, a material object category central to Hindus, allowed us to develop an understanding of how religious beliefs and practices influence consumption among diasporic Hindus. We suggest that other culturally critical material object categories (e.g., batik cloth or brass ornaments) may similarly offer a portal that facilitates understanding ritual consumption in other cultures. In showing how diasporic Hindus use gold to signify, cross, protect, and perpetuate

the boundaries of the extended family, we have uncovered how immigrants utilize and consume the material object symbolism of gold to resourcefully create the golden ties that bind.

Notes

1. We use “daughter” instead of the Western term “daughter-in-law” deliberately. As we will explain later, once assimilated into the groom’s family as the groom’s half-body (Inden and Nicholas 1977), the bride is viewed literally as a biological daughter of the conjugal family.
2. Traditionally in most Hindu groups, the bulk of the wedding expenses were paid for by the bride’s family, but mirroring Western trends, the groom’s family and even the couple themselves, may now opt to pay for some of the expenses.
3. A Gujarati informant, Latha, explained that the emic term “jewelry set” referred to a matching necklace and ear-rings, with the possible addition of a matching ring, and if the recipient was particularly fortunate, a bangle (all made of 22 carat gold).
4. An emic term for extremely close friends who are “like” family.
5. The Manghal Sutra is called a tali in South India.

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Appendix 1. Description of key families

The *Patels* are a working-class Gujarati family who have lived in New Zealand for 30 years. Manoj Patel (52) is employed as a mid-level manager and his wife Suria (49) operates a small catering business out of her home. Suria (now 49) who had migrated from India to South Africa, married Manoj (now 52) who had migrated from India to New Zealand, when both were visiting family in India with a view to finding a spouse. Suria still speaks very little English, relying on her daughter to translate some of our questions and her replies. This, her vegetarianism, and her solely Gujarati network, together suggest to us that Suria's mode of acculturation is separation (Berry 1997; Mehta and Belk 1991) from the host society. We followed this family over two years, as Vikas, their elder son, got engaged to, and married a New Zealand-born Gujarati girl who was from their sub-caste.

The *Kumars* are a middle-class Telugu family who are financially secure in New Zealand because of Anjali's income as a dentist. Anjali (now 45) underwent a traditional arranged marriage to Sham (now 50) in India 25 years ago. The couple has lived in New Zealand for 10 years. Anjali and the three young adult children have integrated relatively easily into New Zealand culture. In contrast, Sham, now a bus driver, has become increasingly marginalized as he struggles to adapt to the loss of the social status he had enjoyed as a state official in India. During the five years we interacted with the Kumar family, their middle son (Shekar 22) started dating a Caucasian dental student (Anna 21), got engaged, had a church wedding in the bride's hometown in New Zealand, and then, a week later, had a traditional Hindu wedding in the Kumars' hometown in New Zealand. Anjali formed a warm relationship with Anna and Anna's family, showered Anna with gold jewelry, participated in the church wedding paid for by the bride's parents, and put on a lavish Hindu wedding for the couple, a week later. Sham boycotted both the weddings.

The *Singhs*, a well-to-do, upper-class Jat family, have lived in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand for two decades. The father, Raja (50) is a scientist, and the mother, Dipani (40) is a home-maker. The couple appear to value their Hindu culture and connections greatly, while also being able to move easily within their host cultures. Thus we surmise that the Singh parents, like the well-educated first-generation immigrants in Mehta and Belk's study (1991), are following an acculturation path of integration. We engaged with the Singh family for a period of five years, from the time the middle of their three sons, Sanjay (20), started dating a Caucasian girl, Lisa (20). We followed the young couple through their engagement, church wedding in New Zealand, Hindu wedding in Sanjay's family's ancestral village in India, and the subsequent birth of their two daughters in New Zealand.