

## Book Notes

RACE, CLASS, PARENTING AND CHILDREN'S LEISURE: CHILDREN'S LEISURESCAPES AND PARENTING IN MIDDLE-CLASS BRITISH INDIAN FAMILIES

by Utsa Mukherjee

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The opening pages of *Race, Class, Parenting and Children's Leisure: Children's Leisurescapes and Parenting in Middle-Class British Indian Families* introduce readers to three children from a British Indian middle-class family and the many organized activities that make up their after-school hours. Meghna (age 13) attends classes in netball, drama, and Bollywood dancing. Suraj (age 11) has a personal guitar tutor and receives coaching for football, hockey, and cricket. Amol (age 4) is learning to play the drums. Readers familiar with research on social class and family likely recognize the siblings' participation in multiple structured leisure activities as a component of "concerted cultivation," a term coined by Lareau (2011) to encapsulate the constellation of middle-class parenting strategies. Lareau is among many scholars who have uncovered the substantial parental investments of time, energy, and money that enable children to fit into institutions that value middle-class ways of being. This literature has had relatively less to say about how middle-class child-rearing strategies are shaped by race and how children themselves think about and coconstruct these strategies. What do we make of Meghna's participation in Bollywood dance classes? Or the fact that Suraj plays cricket, a sport introduced through colonialism that is now understood as quintessentially Indian? And what do Meghna and Suraj think about their participation in these and other leisure activities? Author Utsa Mukherjee offers an accessible, engaging, and thought-provoking exploration of such questions.

Middle-class British Indian children's leisure and, notably, children's agency in relation to their own leisure represent novel subjects for advancing the study of childhood, family, social class, and race and ethnicity. *Race, Class, Parenting and Children's Leisure* focuses on children and parents from ten middle-class British Indian families who live in affluent urban neighborhoods in and around London. Most of the parents interviewed for this study hold university degrees and well-paying professional jobs. A researcher from a middle-class family in India, Mukherjee describes how these immigrant and UK-born Indian parents came to view him as a trusted confidante and as a

protective older sibling figure for their children. To reciprocate this trust, he strove to steer readers clear of simplistic conclusions and harmful stereotypes about parenting and leisure among racialized minorities. Beginning with an acknowledgment that the families in this study occupy an “ambivalent and complex social location characterized by middle-class privilege and racial disadvantage” (11), the book documents the meanings and functions of children’s leisure at this intersection of “privilege” and “disadvantage.”

Mukherjee’s study of this underexplored empirical terrain offers valuable conceptual and methodological guidance for readers who want to build their toolkit for critical, child-centric research. The introductory chapters provide an accessible primer to key themes in the sociology of childhood and leisure. Synthesizing insights from this scholarship, the author proposes a “critical sociology of children’s leisure” that corrects for the adultcentrism of leisure studies and the limited engagement with leisure in childhood studies, while also attending to the salience of social class *and* race in children’s leisurescapes. He provides in chapter 1 clear and useful guidance for interviewing and conducting participatory drawing activities with children. The tripartite framework outlined in chapter 2 is a roadmap for navigating three “genres” of middle-class children’s leisure, namely, adult-supervised, structured, and paid activities; activities orchestrated by parents; and children’s casual, on- and offline “alone time” and recreation with friends. The empirical chapters 3–6 invite readers to understand the “relational” nature of children’s agency by examining how middle-class children’s rich and multigenre leisurescapes are produced through their interaction with their parents, grandparents, extended family, other children, and the growing market for leisure pursuits.

The salience of race in middle-class child-rearing strategies is made evident through Mukherjee’s analysis of how parents choose leisure activities for their children (chapter 3) and allocate time across different genres of leisure (chapter 5). Parents in this study chose activities with a view to cultivating the cultural capital rewarded in a society and knowledge-based economy that privilege white, middle-class ways of being. Lessons in football, swimming, speech and drama, piano, and ballroom dancing represent means for developing the confidence and other soft skills that are valued by prospective college admissions committees and employers. And like other studies of child-rearing among immigrant-origin parents, the parents in this study also strove to develop positive racial and ethnic identities through leisure activities that transmit familial or ethnic traditions—or “ethnic cultural capital” (Lan, 2018). These activities included lessons in heritage languages, dedicated blocks of time for family viewings of Bollywood movies, and structured or casual introductions to cricket. Mukherjee traces how this two-pronged approach of cultivating dominant and ethnic cultural capital is shaped by the everyday manifestations of structural racism, which include the invisibilization of racialized minorities’ cultural heritage in formal education and Indian children’s experiences of interpersonal racial discrimination in schools and spaces of leisure.

The book's careful attention to middle-class British Indian children's reflexivity and agency in curating their leisure affords important insights into how children negotiate the balance of autonomy and constraint in parent-child relationships and make sense of their social locations (chapters 4 and 5). While parents prioritize pedagogical benefits and instrumental gains in their decision-making about children's leisure, children think of these activities more as spaces for fun, for building friendships, and escaping what they find boring. The children in the study seemed comfortable expressing their leisure preferences to their parents and foregrounding joy and pleasure as criteria for adding or removing activities from their busy weekly schedules. These children also coconstructed intergenerational and transnational cultural linkages through their leisure pursuits, as evidenced by Jasleen's (age 8) enthusiasm for Punjabi language lessons and Suraj's interest in content created by Canadian Indian vlogger Lilly Singh. While prior research suggests that strategies of "concerted cultivation" engender a robust sense of entitlement to middle-class privileges (Lareau, 2011), the emergent sense of entitlement among children in this study appears to be somewhat tempered by an awareness of their elevated class position and their status as racialized minorities.

Beyond the role of leisure in class reproduction and racial-ethnic socialization of British Indian middle-class children, *Race, Class, Parenting and Children's Leisure* also sensitizes readers to the broader political role of leisure. For instance, Mukherjee notes how the popularity of cricket among the Indian diaspora may be seen as a "decolonisation" and "reappropriation" of colonial legacies (57). He also draws attention to how parents' understandings of Indianness are imbued with dominant class, caste, and gender normative meanings, as illustrated by the parent who viewed lessons in Bharatanatyam—a classical dance form that is popular among urban, middle-class, and upper-caste Indian women—as an important way for his daughter to internalize Indianness (56). The role of leisure in disrupting—and potentially reinforcing—racialized, classed, and caste-based power hierarchies comes into sharp relief in the author's account of Diwali celebrations organized by British Indians in the heart of London (chapter 6). Mukherjee describes how this one-day event serves as a site of "place-making" wherein British Indians celebrate and share their culture and assert their claim (albeit briefly) to a city enriched by colonialism. He also notes how such community leisure events are typically helmed by dominant class and caste Hindus who project their cultural mores and practices as representative of a transnational Indian national or regional identity. While the book largely focuses on leisure's role as a foil for racial and ethnic stigmatization, I appreciated its attention to leisure as a site where middle-class British Indians manufacture representations of India that are most familiar to themselves, to the possible exclusion of the cultural wealth of nondominant or oppressed social groups.

As an Indian immigrant in the United States, I recognize the motivation to use leisure to both fit into white-dominated spaces and center my own version

of Indian-ness. This book also helped me reflect on the considerable class and caste privileges that bolster this dual leisure strategy. As such, I wanted to see a more extended discussion on the structural and institutional factors that shape how culture is dynamically produced among middle-class British Indians. Such a discussion could touch on how their experiences of migration and incorporation are mediated by generational wealth, caste networks, cultural capital like English-language proficiency and educational credentials, and policies in India and the UK. Considered a vanguard of postcolonial modernity and India's chief export to the global knowledge economy, the technical professional Non-Resident Indian is a politically and morally potent figure. Further discussion of how this constituency is understood by policy makers, media, industry, and other key social actors in the UK today would help generalist readers better understand the versions of Indian-ness that middle-class British Indians seek to live up to or transcend through their leisure practices.

Aside from these minor criticisms, *Race, Class, Parenting and Children's Leisure* is a welcome contribution to the study of social class, race, and family. Education researchers and practitioners like me will benefit greatly from its invitation to view children's leisure—including and beyond structured, adult-supervised activities—as an important site for apprehending how social inequalities are reproduced and contested.

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