

A Currency of Love: Illuminating Motherhood Across Immigrant, Cultural, and Socioeconomic Lines During COVID-19

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Abstract

The school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the work and home lives of families. Drawing on data from 19 interviews with Brazilian and non-Brazilian mothers in one urban elementary school, we explore how mothers negotiated their roles as caregivers, breadwinners, and teachers during this unprecedented time. Braiding Oliveira's concept of the currency of love with Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth, we argue that mothers across immigrant, cultural, and socioeconomic lines enacted similar care practices to sustain their children's learning. This study advances the literature by illuminating the sometimes invisible efforts of mothers to nurture their children's schooling.

Keywords

latinx < identity, elementary school < programs, qualitative < scale construction, parental involvement < social, immigrant students < urban education

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The school closures in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the work and home life for families. For months, parents felt trapped by the pandemic with children to raise, jobs to attend, and housework to finish. Mothers, in particular, were stretched thin as they enacted newfound roles as caregivers, teachers, and earners in the home amid mandated remote learning (Forbes et al., 2022). Surely, mother-child relationships have changed due to the extensive schooling that occurred in the home, and yet, those dynamics have been hard to comprehend given the varied ways that COVID-19 impacted each family (Ghiso et al., 2022).

Backdropped by this socio-historic moment in the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown, this article sheds light on mothers across immigrant, cultural, and socioeconomic lines and their efforts to care for their children during the unprecedented health pandemic and unparalleled education disruption. Specifically, we illuminate mothers' rationales for their actions, and the resources they were able to muster in one urban elementary school community with a recent increase of Brazilian immigrant families. Although mothers from varying backgrounds are centered in this article, we draw special attention to the commitment and agency of Brazilian mothers to care for their children's schooling, alongside the limitations imposed on them by financial and linguistic constraints.

Moreover, since the start of the pandemic, the American media has promulgated narratives about the "learning loss" of youth, particularly youth of Color, calling into question how parents supported their children during widespread school closures (Kane & Reardon, 2023; Petrilli, 2023). Entangled in these conversations are negative assumptions about mothers who historically have taken on the bulk of the labor to nurture their children's education (Forbes et al., 2022; Penna et al., 2023). Of critical importance, both in this moment and in this article, we join the growing scholarship that highlights how mothers across diverse backgrounds sustained their children's learning. Braiding together Oliveira's (2018) concept of the currency of love with Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth, we illuminate the complexity of care as Brazilian and non-Brazilian¹ mothers nurtured their elementary children's schooling across multiple dimensions. This study asks, *how do Brazilian and non-Brazilian mothers conceptualize and enact care during remote schooling?*

The Currency of Love and Community Cultural Wealth

Our work is rooted in Oliveira's (2020) concept of "the currency of love" and Yosso's (2005) concept of "community cultural wealth." In this section, we detail these two powerful concepts as a lens into understanding the complex ways that mothers advocated for their children to access the resources required for learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Education as the Currency of Love

This study is grounded in Oliveira's (2020) concept of the currency of love. In her work with immigrant Mexican mothers, participants defined the role of a mother as the person who gives birth, and enacts care for her children by providing them with the best possible education. According to Oliveira, a mother's everyday nurturing of a child's education becomes a vital aspect of her caregiving. In her ethnography, Oliveira (2018) traced the emotional labor of immigrant Mexican mothers as they attended to the mundane details of their children's education by ensuring homework completion, extracurricular activities, respect for teachers, and cleaned uniforms even when parenting transnationally. Additionally, we draw on Oliveira's notion of education as it is understood in Spanish and Portuguese carrying a range of connotations including children's schoolwork, etiquette, personal hygiene, and social connections (Boston College Libraries, 2018). For the mothers in her study, education symbolized not just the key to their children's upward mobility, but the hope that their sacrifices to leave their children behind in the home country was well worth it. These immigrant mothers relied on communication technologies to convey high expectations to their children that they excel in school. While fathers and teachers had sporadic roles in their children's education, Oliveira found that mothers consistently played the primary role as the decision maker on the many issues regarding schooling even at a physical distance. As such, education became the currency of love, a metaphor signaling the valued medium of exchange in which immigrant mothers cared for their children's schooling on a daily basis as a way of showing love and concern.

In this article, we extend Oliveira's conceptualization of the currency of love to Brazilian and non-Brazilian mothers in the context of mandated remote schooling in the United States. In direct contrast to the women in Oliveira's study who parented from afar, the women in our study parented in extreme proximity during the COVID-19 quarantine. However, in both studies, the mothers found themselves in new contexts negotiating their roles as caregivers, breadwinners, and educators. Recognizing the social, economic, legal, and linguistic differences between the participants in Oliveira's ethnography and our own, we advance this concept to highlight some of the similar ways in which mothers in a variety of contexts place themselves in positions of power regarding their children's schooling during a time of global upheaval and familial isolation. We use this metaphor of education as the currency of love to signal the distinct maternal caregiving practices around children's schooling during the pandemic.

Community Cultural Wealth

Taking seriously the precarity of the COVID-19 context for newly arrived immigrants who were also living under the draconian immigration policies of the Trump era, it was inevitable that the immigrant mothers in our study encountered distinct challenges to their caregiving practices (Hong & DaSilva Iddings, 2022; Oliveira & Segel, 2022). To theorize the specific successes and struggles of the Brazilian participants in nurturing their children's education during the pandemic, our analysis weaves in Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) framework, which draws from Critical Race Theory and outlines six forms of capital that communities of Color do possess. As one of the six facets of Yosso's CCW framework, *navigational capital* can be understood as the skills of maneuvering through social institutions that were not designed with communities of Color in mind. For example, Budhai and Grant (2023) discuss a group of Black parents connecting with one another to navigate "different channels that participants could access" to more effectively advocate for their children (p. 379).

Another facet, *social capital*, refers to the networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through institutions (see Stanton-Salazar, 2001). For example, drawing on social contacts and community resources may help a student identify and attain a college scholarship (Yosso, 2005). This example signals the importance of the cultural knowledge nurtured among families and employed by students to gain better economic standing and social positioning. These navigational and social capitals are rooted in a particular history, memory, and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005). Looking through a CCW lens means questioning deficit theorizing that emphasizes deprivation in immigrant communities and emphasizing instead the knowledge that communities of Color maintain. In this paper, we focus not just on the operationalization of these capitals, but how they were leveraged in the service of love and commitment to children. By joining Oliveira's concept of the currency of love with Yosso's concept of CCW, we highlight maternal caregiving practices, experienced agency and structural obstacles that came into place during this unprecedented time.

Literature Review

In this section, we detail three strands of scholarship. First, we describe the literature that documents how educators conceptualize the "right" kinds of parental involvement, and then we explore the research that examines

immigrant families' experiences in their children's school. Lastly, we trace the scholarship that conceptualizes urban schooling for immigrant families from Latin America.

The "Right" Kinds of Parental Involvement

"Parental involvement" is stressed by policy makers and school administrators as necessary in the work of educating children, and parents of all backgrounds are reminded regularly that the work they do at home is integral to their children's academic trajectories (Lightfoot, 2004; Shuffelton, 2017). Implicit in these claims is that any parents who do not enact middle-class child-raising practices, that have become mainstream expectations for all families, are not engaging in the "right" kinds of caregiving around education, and thus bear responsibility for difficulties their children face at school. Mapp and Bergman (2021) examine what kinds of parental involvement is considered ideal, and therefore, whose parenting style is appreciated and leads to their child's academic success. In the U.S., the family-school partnership is praised when parents attend school-based activities and fulfill an appointed role in the partnership (Johnson, 2015). This type of parental involvement is often shown in the upper-middle-class community.

Moreover, the notion of "parental involvement" ignores the gendered dimensions of the work with mostly mothers carrying out the lion's share of the relational and emotional labor done to support children's education (Lehner-Mear, 2021; Shuffelton, 2017; U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). Once educators acknowledge that parental involvement is a "repackaging" of mostly mothers' relations with children and schools, they can begin to see how it is subjected to the same moralizing as motherhood, idealized, and then blamed as the cause of far more than mothers can achieve (Shuffelton, 2017, p. 24). This can result in mothers feeling inadequate in their ability to care for their children and attend to their learning needs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, mothers' feelings of inadequacy only heightened according to Lehner-Mear (2021) who documented the increased pressure on parents to behave "appropriately" around their children's schooling as outlined by district-wide policies. These policies, she argued, led to a rigid conceptualization of what "good" mothers did to enact care during the pandemic to foster their children's schooling. As a result, the policies dismissed the strains faced by mothers who worked outside the home and underestimated the emotional challenges faced by parents who took on the parent-as-educator role. When researchers fail to acknowledge the emotional labor of this role, they neglect what Hutchison (2012) dubs the "anxiety and guilt" that so many mothers experience in relation to their children's

education. In this study, we attempt to cut through the idealizations of maternal involvement to examine more closely how mothers care for their children amid mandated remote learning during the pandemic.

Immigrant Parents' School Involvement

Much of the literature surrounding Latinx families' involvement in school is rife with deficit-based perspectives. Some scholarship outlines parents' "weak" language skills, characterized by simple vocabulary and syntactic structures, as a hindrance to their ability to support their children's schoolwork (Fernald et al., 2013; Huttenlocher et al., 2010). Other scholarship describes the home learning environments of Latinx families as lacking in resources and emphasizes parents' (mis)behavior, inability to afford sufficient materials to stimulate learning, and general apathy toward their children's homework due to lack of knowledge, skills, and time (Chazen-Cohen et al., 2009; Hwang & Connor, 2020; Mistry et al., 2010). Indeed, immigrant parents' involvement in schools has long been misunderstood and disregarded by educators and researchers alike (Antony-Newman, 2019). In the Oliveira et al.'s (2021) study, they documented educators who regularly described Brazilian families as lacking in stability, citizenship, and knowledge to provide their children with the skills needed to be prepared to learn in the early grades. Various other scholars have found that low-income Latinx parents, whose work schedules conflict with school, cannot participate in classroom and school-wide events (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Ramirez, 2003; Rivera & Lavan, 2012).

This study stands shoulder to shoulder with the scholarship that widens the lens of immigrant maternal involvement in schools (Auerbach, 2007). For instance, López-Robertson (2017) uncovered the various ways that four Latinx mothers strategized with one another to navigate through unfamiliar school systems such as parent-teacher associations, meetings with principals, and after-school clubs. Similarly, Cuevas (2019) highlighted the sacrifices that ten Latinx mothers and five fathers made—such as giving up expensive medication to afford a child's SAT preparation class—to support their children's schooling.

As COVID-19 swept across the globe, immigrant mothers had to find a new way to continue to support their children's education (Bruhn, 2022; Chen, 2021; Oliveira & Segel, 2022). Some mothers had to choose between a job with little flexibility to work from home and childcare at home due to remote learning. Bhamani et al. (2020) found that many parents were not equipped with enough reliable computers to support each of their children's online learning alongside their own work they needed to

complete. Despite the multiple layers of obstacles immigrant parents faced, they adopted strategies to care for their children's schooling. Delgado (2023) presented a case study where 20 immigrant mothers from Latin America confronted the challenges their families faced when schools pivoted to remote instruction by engaging in local advocacy organizations. They leveraged their connection to the civic organization to secure appropriate technologies for remote learning, learned how to use technology, accessed school district updates, and expressed demands for services at their children's school. Segel (2023) traced the lengths twelve Black and Latinx mothers, and two fathers, went to urge their sons to read during mandated remote learning by making home libraries, providing physical and emotional closeness, and monitoring their digital technologies. Our study adds to the growing body of literature that critiques narrow notions of parental involvement in schools by making visible the nuanced ways mothers care for their children's education at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Urban Education for Immigrant Families

Following Coles (2023), we define urban education as the schooling of students of Color, particularly Black and Latinx, within a city, "which are often characterized by the larger social complexities of racial segregation and varying levels of poverty" (p. 1185). In the face of neoliberal reforms — school choice policies, charter proliferation, and high-stakes testing — urban schools struggle to foster a sense of belonging for Latinx youth and their families, especially language learning populations such as the immigrant families in the present study (Cammarota, 2011; Rodriguez, 2020). Additionally, the word, "urban" may be used as a code to describe communities of Color from lower socioeconomic strata (Milner, 2012). Milner (2012) reflects on how educators may classify a school as "urban" just because of their perceived shortcomings of students and caregivers without acknowledging their rich array of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). In so doing, he sheds light on the ways school leaders often blamed students of Color and their parents for all the "urban" problems in a school or district, thereby locating the problem within the families themselves, rather than the policies or instructional practices.

Much of the research regarding the education of immigrant students from Latin America has focused on urban schools, as the majority of Latinx families in the United States lives in cities (López & Irizarry, 2022). While research on the educational experiences of Latinx students is crucial to inform the work of educators and policy makers, much of the literature treats students as a monolithic entity, focusing predominantly on children

with origins in Spanish-speaking countries (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Rodriguez, 2020). To date, little is known about the aspirations, resources, and constraints faced by Latinx immigrants from Brazil who speak Portuguese. Our study addresses this gap by centering the perspectives of Brazilian mothers, and how their unique identities, histories, and experiences inform and shape their experiences in an urban school.

We build on previous scholarship (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Shuffelton, 2017) in arguing that all mothers, regardless of their cultural and economic backgrounds, advocate for their children's education in multifaceted ways. We believe that learning about the ways Brazilian mothers are similar to and distinct from their non-Brazilian counterparts can facilitate a pathway to more humanizing urban schooling environments, characterized by relationships of care and dignity (Paris, 2011). Ultimately, the goal is to deepen understanding about maternal involvement to bolster home and school partnerships and better support all children academically.

Methods and Data Analysis

This study draws on data generated from a larger four-year ethnographic research project that focused on how children, parents, and teachers navigated the cultural complexities related to Brazilian im/migration within a public elementary school. For this article, we draw on interviews with 19 mothers about their experiences with their children during mandated remote learning during the last academic year of the study (September 2020 to June 2021). A multiphase project, this study incorporated an explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2015). Below, we detail the school context, participants, study design, and analytic methods.

School Context and Participants

Pine Elementary (all names are pseudonyms), a school that Milner (2012) would call "urban emergent," is a K-5th grade school located in a northeastern city in the U.S. with the highest percentage of Brazilians in the state (Lotufo, 2017; Siqueira & Lourenço, 2006). Brazilian families came to this city with the hope of finding social mobility through better job opportunities and schooling for their children (Oliveira et al., 2020). Since 2016, the school saw a significant increase in Brazilian immigrants who were drawn to the school for its number of bilingual (Portuguese-English) teachers and its already established Portuguese-speaking community (Lima Becker & Oliveira, 2023). From its almost 500 students total, about 200 were classified

as English language learners (ELLs). Over 80% of the latter group of students were recently arrived immigrants from Brazil.

At the time of the study, the majority of Brazilian families at Pine Elementary School met the threshold of the poverty line, as evidenced by their children's qualification for free and reduced lunch programs. Many Brazilian parents were employed in working-class jobs. For example, one parent worked six days a week at a supermarket and coffee shop, averaging between 8–14 hours a day, as reported by one of our research team members (Becker, 2021). Conversely, none of the non-Brazilian participants' children was eligible for free or reduced lunch at school. Their families most likely fell into middle and upper class socioeconomic brackets given what they shared about their lives in interviews and the city's median household income of \$90,638 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Thus, the population of the families at Pine Elementary mirrored the financial disparity of the city based on what the interview participants of this project shared about their lived experiences.

Research Context

Our larger ethnographic research project traced the implementation of the first Portuguese-English Two-Way Immersion (TWI) program at Pine Elementary from fall of 2018 to spring of 2021 after a 15-year ban on bilingual education in the state. The larger study focused on the TWI program in two kindergartens and two first-grade classrooms, with plans to expand the program up through fifth grade in the following years. Data sources in the larger project include ethnographic field notes (Emerson et al., 2011) from weekly classroom visits (600 h); qualitative semi-structured interviews (Weiss, 1995) with eight bilingual classroom teachers and nine other school staff members; home visits (12 times); student academic achievement data; artifacts from in-class activities (e.g., drawings, written compositions); and three quantitative surveys.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, classes at Pine Elementary stopped in the second week of March 2020, and resumed virtually a few weeks later. During this spring semester in 2020, the school provided Google Chromebooks, books, and other materials to facilitate the transition to online learning. Teachers maintained participation through various activities, ranging from read alouds and guided practice to worksheets and home scavenger hunts. For those students enrolled in the TWI program, instruction was delivered both in Portuguese and English. However, parents and teachers alike reported that its implementation was far less effective, as many of the English and Portuguese speaking parents barely spoke the other language, and therefore, could not provide linguistic support to their children. Since March of 2020, our research team continually observed online classes and organized play dates over Zoom. We kept

in touch with parents, students, and teachers via Zoom, phone, and social media. Then, as of April 2021, Pine Elementary resumed in-person classes for all students after 13 months of remote and hybrid learning.

Positionalities. This study was conducted by a team of researchers who have engaged with immigrant populations from Latin America for nearly a decade. Marisa is a White, Jewish doctoral student, former middle grades teacher, and mother who conducted the interviews in English with non-Brazilian mothers. Eunhye is a professor, Korean immigrant, and former teacher who developed survey instruments and analyzed survey data with Haylea. Haylea is a White doctoral student with a background in survey design and roots in the northeastern region where the research was conducted. Gabrielle is a White Brazilian immigrant, professor, and mother who conducted and translated all of the interviews with Brazilian mothers. Our different backgrounds—covering important aspects of the entanglement of motherhood, education, career, and immigration— help us to provide a nuanced interpretation as to how our participants nurtured their children’s learning during the COVID-19 quarantine in ways that are often invisible or taken for granted. As ethnography is a fundamentally relational endeavor, we write as researchers who care about the mothers and their children in this study, having built relationships with them for four years at Pine Elementary (Patel, 2016).

Despite our intentions and due to our limited perspectives, lived experiences and epistemologies, we realize that our interpretations could cause harm or perpetuate negative stereotypes. As such, as a researcher team, we challenged ourselves in the field and during analysis to address the “dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen,” and reflected on ways to prevent the “othering” of immigrant families that are often construed in research (Milner, 2007). Recognizing these shortcomings, we contemplated ways to not reproduce oppression and engaged with the work of scholars of Color to complete this study (Cuevas, 2019; Delgado, 2023; Yosso, 2005).

Study Design

This study incorporated an explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2015) in which we first administered a survey to parents and then followed up with particular participants for interviews.

Phase 1: Parent Survey. The first data source for this study includes an annual survey emailed to caregivers across the Pine Elementary community in the fall of 2020, and not just to the families from the TWI program. The parent survey was in English and Portuguese, and included eight distinct sections

including parent perceptions of the impact of the COVID-19 on student learning. For the current study, we chose a total of six survey items to answer our research questions, which focused on the household changes made as a result of COVID-19, such as parents' roles and support provided by schools. Table 1 presented the survey items used for this study consisting of four multiple-choice items and two open-ended items.

The initial survey directly guided our sampling procedures for the interviews, allowing us to ask only the participants who indicated they would be willing to interview with our team. Among 63 survey respondents, 25 respondents agreed to subsequent interviews, all of whom were mothers.

Phase 2: Interviews with Mothers. We followed up with 19 participants from the surveys for semi-structured interviews over Zoom lasting 15–90 min (45 min on average) from October 2020 to June 2021. Because of the ongoing data collection before and throughout the pandemic, the research team was able to capture the experiences and emotions during the transition from in-school learning to home-learning for families. As a result of the two field researchers' fluency in English and Portuguese, regular presence in the school building and rapport with staff and families, mothers felt

Table 1. Survey Items.

Topic	Items
Parents' Role	1. To what extent COVID-19 has changed your role as a parent/guardian? [Multiple-choice item]
	2. Please describe in more detail how your role (e.g., as a mother, father, caregiver) has changed (or not) as a result of COVID-19. [Open-ended item]
Support	1. How effective is the support you are receiving from the following sources? ^a [Multiple choice item]
	2. Were there any other sources of support that you have experienced? [Open-ended item]
Language	1. Did you receive information from your child's school in a language that you are most comfortable speaking? ^b [Multiple choice item]
	2. What is your preferred language that you want school to communicate with you? ^c [Multiple choice item]

Note. ^aThe response options of this multiple choice item: (1) bilingual teachers; (2) district officials; (3) language department; (4) peers; (5) parent-teacher association (PTA); (6) school administrative staff; (7) school administrators; (8) your child's teacher.

^bThe response options of this multiple choice item: (1) yes; (2) no.

^cThe response options of this multiple choice item: (1) English; (2) Portuguese; (3) other-specify.

familiarity with our research team during interviews about their experiences at home during COVID-19. Table 2 provides a list of the interview questions.

Eight Brazilian and eleven non-Brazilian mothers participated. We distinguish between Brazilian and non-Brazilian mothers to better understand how mothers across this school community conceptualized and enacted care while also examining the palpable ways that systemic inequality influenced caregiving for immigrant mothers during mandated remote instruction. These two groups had strikingly different socio-economic, immigrant, linguistic, and cultural experiences and orientations toward the school which made for excellent contrasting samples for this research inquiry. These differences also complicated our understanding of how COVID-19 affected various groups in distinct ways (Table 3). As we only have data from mothers who responded to the initial round of surveys and agreed to subsequent interviews, this article addresses maternal practices of care surrounding their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic while acknowledging that other caregivers played integral roles in children's academic lives as well.

Data Analysis

Data analysis combined inductive and deductive coding (Maxwell, 2012) through cross-case comparison, a search for discrepant data, and an emphasis on recurring patterns (Schensul & LeCompte, 2012). Inductive codes derived from the survey questions included to what extent parents' roles have changed, how they perceived the degree of support that they received, and whether they received information in

Table 2. Interview Protocols.

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1. Background information: Name, Race, Ethnicity, Languages spoken, Country of Origin, Profession
 2. Describe a typical day for you and your family. Can you talk about what it felt like from March-summer (remote schooling) and then the fall (in-person schooling)?
 3. How has your experience been with you child's school this year?
 - a. How are you feeling as a parent in this pandemic?
 - b. How has your workload increased and why?
 4. How has the school helped/hindered your child's schooling experience? (school principal, teachers, other parents, school district etc.)
 5. What are the things that you wish the school could do better to support parents and students?
 6. How is your child doing through these transitions from in-person schooling to remote schooling?
 7. What are you hoping for in terms of schooling and why?
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Table 3. Participant Description and Self-Identification.

#	Name	Race/nationality	Eligibility for free-reduced lunch	Language spoken during the interview	Number of children in the school	Work status during the pandemic
1	Julie	White American	Not eligible	English	1	In home
2	Grace	White American	Not eligible	English	3	Outside of the home
3	Sarah	White American	Not eligible	English	2	In home
4	Hannah	White American	Not eligible	English	2	In home
5	Breanne	White American	Not eligible	English	2	In home
6	Mawusi	Black Ghanaian	Not eligible	English	3	Outside of the home
7	Alexandra	White American	Not eligible	English	2	Outside of the home
8	Juliana	White American	Not eligible	English	2	In home
9	Abby	White American	Not eligible	English	3	Stay-at-home mother
10	Jenny	White American	Not eligible	English	2	Stay-at-home mother
11	Sharon	White American	Not eligible	English	1	Outside of the home
12	Elida	White Brazilian	Eligible	Portuguese	2	Outside of the home
13	Silvia	White Brazilian	Eligible	Portuguese	1	Outside of the home
14	Amelia	White Brazilian	Eligible	Portuguese	1	Outside of the home
15	Della	White Brazilian	Eligible	Portuguese	1	Outside of the home
16	Evelyn	White Brazilian	Eligible	Portuguese	1	Outside of the home
17	Jamila	White Brazilian	Eligible	Portuguese	2	Outside of the home
18	Fernanda	White Brazilian	Eligible	Portuguese	1	Outside of the home
19	Karla	White Brazilian	Eligible	Portuguese	1	Outside of the home

their preferred language. In order to find the overall perception of these survey items, we calculated the descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage. Through this analysis, we learned that 77% of the surveyed parents ($n=30$) reported a large increase in their role. 75% of the parents indicated that the support from their child's teacher was effective ($n=33$). Also, most of the parents who answered felt they received information in their preferred language (98%, $n=57$). With these initial findings from the survey, we shaped the interview protocol to get a deeper understanding of 'why' and 'how' they felt their role had increased and whether they felt supported by school personnel.

Deductive codes were derived from the interview questions. Data from eight interviews conducted in Portuguese was coded using Excel by one research team member fluent in Portuguese and English. The remaining 11 interviews, conducted in English, were coded in Excel by three English-speaking team members. The open descriptive codes that were generated from this deductive approach included "mothers' advocacy", "awareness of COVID-19", "other school approaches to remote learning", "emotional reflections", "networks and resources", "defending the school's best efforts," and "feelings of guilt." The literature review presented in this article was used to validate the plausibility of these codes.

After an open-coding process, the theoretical framework of this study was revisited to compare whether Oliveira's (2018) "currency of love" concept held true for our data sources. We noticed that the mothers' care practices from our data typically did not fall into Brazilian versus non-Brazilian groups. Rather, both the low-income immigrant mother group and middle/upper class non-immigrant mother group advocated for their children to find and access the resources needed for learning during the mandated remoted instruction period. To acknowledge that both sets of mothers actively engaged in supporting their children, we incorporated Yosso's theoretical framework of community cultural wealth (2005). Particularly, we found that two capitals - navigational capital and social capital - were noticeably present in our data. Therefore, we used these two kinds of capital to further organize the codes within the three care practices found: Simulating classroom, Advocacy, and Outsourcing.

Illuminating the Care Practices of Brazilian and non-Brazilian Mothers

This article traces how Brazilian and non-Brazilian mothers nurtured their children's learning in similar ways amid the COVID-19 pandemic while negotiating multiple roles as caregivers, breadwinners, and teachers in the home. In the following subsections, we highlight our participants' currency of love through three distinct care practices— Simulating the classroom,

Advocacy, and Outsourcing. While mothers enacted all of these dimensions of care long before the COVID-19 lockdown, their attempts to care for their children became sharply into focus, and higher stakes, when families were quarantined and children were forced to be remote for school. Entangled within these subsections below are expressions of pride, stress and guilt about not doing enough to support their children as these mothers reported to carry the mental and emotional labor of mediating their children's schooling. These declarations of emotions are essential to grasp how mothers conceptualized what it meant to be a "good" mother during the pandemic.

Simulating the Classroom

This practice of care exemplifies the agency, creativity and resourcefulness of mothers from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds who attempted to simulate aspects of traditional school in their homes— by recreating a typical school schedule, redesigning their home spaces to look like classrooms or mimicking the roles of teachers in their homes during quarantine. This dimension of the currency of love was evidenced in nine of the nineteen mothers interviewed— five Brazilian mothers and four non-Brazilian mothers.

Jenny, who self-identified as a "stay-at-home" mom, White and non-Brazilian, exemplified this practice of care most strongly. She explained,

I made them a classroom. I thought, okay, we're gonna get out of the bedroom. We're gonna make a classroom. We're gonna get dressed every day. This is school. So I made them a classroom. I was obviously more excited than they were because it was like playing school, and I was the teacher. (Interview, March 29, 2021)

Here, Jenny described her attempts to simulate a traditional school day, a structure she believed was integral to her sons' learning. Similarly, Karla, a Brazilian mother, took on the role of a teacher with her son by modeling strong Portuguese language skills, nudging him to complete assignments, and demanding he articulate himself in English even when she herself did not understand. Karla lamented,

I had to intervene a lot to prevent Abel from missing assignments. We know the difficulties that my child has. Even if I speak, have him read a text, or sometimes, how many times have I had to say, "Abel, say this in English," and he didn't know, do you understand? (*Entendeu? Então eu acho que o pai também deveria ter a nota, tipo assim, e falar. "Não, eu acho que sim, eu*

acho que não.” Que a gente convive, a gente sabe as dificuldades que a criança tem. Até mesmo se eu falar, mandar ele ler um texto, ou às vezes, quantas vezes eu já precisei falar, “Arthur fala isso em inglês,” e ele não saber, você tá entendendo? (Interview, December 5, 2020)

In this example, Karla enacts her role as a teacher at home by demanding her child practice both his Portuguese and English skills and by holding him accountable for completing his assignments. In this way, Karla mimicked the form of a traditional teacher’s authoritative stance toward a student in a classroom.

Conversely, Jamila, a Brazilian mother, mourned that she was not able to re-construct a classroom-esque space for her students. She commented,

It was very hard because we rented a room in a house. So, we had to keep the kids in one room on one computer. I thought (the pandemic) would go by fast. But then it became this big thing. It was complicated because we also lived in a room. We didn’t live in a house. Then, it was more complicated to keep the kids inside the room, right? It was very stressful. For them and for us. (Sim, eu achei que ia passar rápido, né? Mais aí virou essa. Essa coisa grande, né, que nem tá hoje. Aí. Foi complicado, né, porque nós morava também em quarto. Nós não morava em casa. Aí ficou mais complicado ainda ter que manter as crianças dentro do quarto, né? Foi muito estressante. Tanto pra eles quanto pra gente também.) (Interview, January 5, 2021)

In this case, Jamila referred to a constrained financial capital where her own infrastructure constituted a barrier to her children’s everyday learning experiences. In comparison with the room she lived in with her children, the school represented a larger space of possibilities. Jamila described the pandemic as a ‘stressful’ moment for everyone in her family. A similar expression of stress was evident among both Brazilian and non-Brazilian mothers with children on Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)s who mourned the limits of their efforts to recreate classroom spaces that were conducive to their children’s learning. These mothers, in particular, longed for the “specials,” the paraprofessionals, occupational therapists, and individualized attention their children received from specialists during the traditional school day.

Amelia, another Brazilian mother, articulated how she enacted her new-found role as a teacher in the home after having recently arrived in this country only to be met with the COVID-19 pandemic. She highlighted how her daughter felt excluded by the teacher and students because the lessons over Zoom were completely taught in English with no special language instructors in place to support her. Amelia explained,

She felt very excluded because she didn't know anyone in the group and English was also very difficult for her. And then she would cry, she would leave the computer talking to herself, go to her room, and cry, cry. Not now, now she interacts more, she imposes herself more, she already made friends with some people like that... And then the class ends, she continues talking to a few more classmates, privately, and I let her. I let her talk, let her make friends. (*Demais, porque... ela, ela se sentia muito excluída, porque ela não conhecia ninguém na turminha e o inglês também era muito difícil pra ela. E aí ela chorava, ela largava o computador falando sozinho, ia pro quarto e chorava, chorava. Agora não, agora ela já interage mais, ela já se impõe mais, ela já fez amizade com algumas pessoas assim. Com todos ela tem muito carinho, mas criança sempre tem alguém de que tem mais afinidade. E aí acaba a aula, ela continua conversando com alguns mais coleguinhas, no particular, e eu deixo. Deixo conversar, deixo fazer amizade.*)

In Amelia's case, she took on the role of teacher by allowing her daughter additional time to interact socially with her peers. Like a teacher would determine when her students have structured and unstructured learning time, Amelia carved out space for her child outside of a lesson to socialize with peers. Here, Amelia expresses her care by urging her daughter to create friendships in a new school in a new country during the otherwise isolating time of the pandemic.

One counter example consists of Elida, a Brazilian mother, whose daughter translated for her and helped watch her baby sister during the breaks of her online schooling schedule. For Elida, her daughter became a teacher who helped her to develop her English speaking skills during the Quarantine. Elida explained how her daughter translated for her and taught her new words, "Now [her daughter] makes sure she tells me. Sometimes I go by her [lesson on the computer] and the teacher is speaking in English. She then goes, 'Look the teacher is saying this and that.'" Elida's example shifts the traditional teacher-student or parent-child hierarchy by emphasizing the two-way flow of the currency of love which created a more symbiotic relationship of care and learning in the home.

By mimicking the physical space of the classroom or creating time for unstructured play throughout the day for children to socialize, mothers cultivated what they believed to be rich learning environments with many of the same materials, schedules, and child-adult hierarchies found in school. In so doing, they re-imagined their maternal roles as teachers during the pandemic, even when they were in spaces once defined by their roles as caregivers. In this way, mothers conveyed their care through the time and energy they invested in recreating traditional classroom spaces, schedules, and teacher-

student dynamics in their homes, aspects of school they believed were integral to promoting academic skills.

This practice of simulating school at home underscores how Brazilian and non-Brazilian mothers alike believed they needed to mimic traditional school to ensure their children's academic progress. This dimension of the currency of love highlights how mothers, like Jamila with limitations of space and finances, and how mothers with children on IEPs, experienced stress when they could not fully simulate the classroom experience in their homes. The participants' heightened emotions of stress about not being able to provide enough traditional schooling for their children (be it space, social time, or expertise) point to a shared Brazilian and non-Brazilian conceptualization that a "good" mother can reconstruct traditional school in the context of her home during the quarantine.

Advocating

The advocating dimension of the currency of love consisted of mothers relying on their social and navigational capitals to connect electronically with friends, families, and school personnel to address concerns about their children's learning during remote school. All nineteen of the mothers, regardless of socioeconomic or immigrant status, interviewed spoke of new information or opportunities they learned when depending on the wisdom of people in their networks.

Elida, who had just arrived in the U.S. at the start of the pandemic, corresponded with other Brazilian locals and her sister-in-law to gather information about all the district's elementary schools to determine which school her second grader should attend. In this way, Elida relied on her social capital to advocate to find the best school for her child. Similarly, Fernanda, a former school teacher in Brazil, was particularly concerned about her daughter's mathematical skills. Using her navigational capital, she reached out to her child's teacher to ensure her child would get the support she needed. She described the email she sent the teachers,

I wrote, 'Laura is having difficulties in mathematics, even as I work with her, help her at home, and follow up her work, she still has a lot of difficulties in learning mathematics.' Her teacher said she would work with her (Laura) and try to formulate other things there, abilities, to be helping Laura. (*Falei.. "A Laura tá com dificuldade na matemática, mesmo eu trabalhando com ela, ajudando ela em casa, e acompanhando ela, ela ainda tá com muita dificuldade com a matemática."* E aí ela falou que ia trabalhar e tentar formular outras coisas lá, habilidades, pra estar ajudando a Laura.) (Interview, April 19, 2021)

Later, she expressed her frustration about trying to dialogue with the teacher,

No, it was very difficult. I put it in the translator, copied, and pasted it. Wow, I cried, it was very difficult. Wow, my God. It's very... to this day I feel very sad about certain things. For example, sometimes the teacher calls to talk, and then there has to be a translator to be... you know, talking to us because I still don't know how to communicate with her. *Não, foi muito difícil. Eu colocava no tradutor, copio, colo. Nossa, cheguei a chorar, foi muito difícil, nossa, meu Deus. É muito... até hoje eu tenho uma tristeza muito grande em certas coisas. Por exemplo, às vezes a professora liga e pra falar, e aí tem que ter um tradutor pra estar... né, conversando com a gente porque ainda não sei comunicar com ela.* (Interview, April 19, 2021)

Here, Fernanda addresses her frustration of trying to advocate for her daughter at school but feeling unable to due to language barriers. Fernanda's experience aligns with previous scholarship that underscores common challenges for immigrant parents such as limited English proficiency, finances, and familiarity with the educational system in the USA that make it harder to advocate for their children (Cooper et al., 1999; Coll & Marks, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Still, Fernanda relied on her navigational capital to support her child's learning. Using a translating service, she found a way to advocate for Laura so that her daughter could access the kind of math support she needed.

Another example of the advocacy practice of care is in the case of Hannah, a non-Brazilian mother, whose son had just been diagnosed with Autism in early March 2020. Recognizing that her son would struggle during online lessons, she reached out to his new teachers during the summer months before the new (remote) school year began.

Can we [Hannah and her son, Daniel] just come meet you one morning for like 10 min? I just want Daniel to know you aren't just like a floating head [on Zoom] and that you have a body and that you're a person.' The teacher was like, "Absolutely." So before daycare we went over there for 10 min just to meet. Because I know him and having already met [his teachers] and then seeing them on the screen, he's gonna make that connection. It's gonna lessen the anxiety. (Interview, March 17, 2021)

Hannah conveyed her care by advocating for her son's emotional needs to see the teacher in person. By reaching out to the teacher in advance of the school year, Hannah provided the care she believed Daniel needed to thrive in remote learning during the pandemic.

All participating mothers relied on their social networks and navigational capital to advocate for their children's education. Though mothers have long been the primary advocates for their children's schooling, they needed to adapt their currency of love during the pandemic when advocacy required knowledge of email, Zoom, and translation services. As such, mothers re-conceptualized what it meant to be a "good" mother during the pandemic by advocating electronically through email, google translate, Zoom for their children's academic needs to be met in school.

Outsourcing

The third dimension of the currency of love involved mothers who outsourced or hired external support to further their children's schooling during mandated remote learning. For instance, seven of the nineteen mothers interviewed spoke about the after-school programs, tutors, specialists, and teachers from the school they paid to come to their homes and teach their children individually or in smaller pods of children in an effort to supplement the everyday remote learning happening over Zoom. All seven of these mothers who enacted this outsourcing practice of care were non-Brazilians.

Mawusi, a Ghanaian doctor, explained that she was disappointed by the lack of "rigor" of remote schooling. Acutely aware of what other children were receiving at a local private school, she felt an urgent need to supplement her children's curriculum. As such, she hired a medical student at a local university to tutor her daughters in English and Math throughout the pandemic. She explained,

Like their English and their math. That was one thing that I was worried about in the spring session [of 2020], and I think that's what prompted me to look at other ways to supplement. That's no reflection of the school at all. It's just my concern with them being competitive with their peers throughout the world. (Interview, Dec. 11, 2020)

Mawusi expressed her care for her daughters by hiring a tutor when she could not fulfil the role of a teacher in the home due to the high demands on her as a doctor during the quarantine.

Some non-Brazilian mothers were concerned specifically that their children would not further their second language skills in Portuguese during remote instruction since they themselves did not speak the language, and could therefore, not fulfill the role as a language teacher. Though Julianna hired a general tutor at the start of the pandemic for her kindergartner and second grader, she worried that the tutor did not speak any Portuguese.

Eventually, Juliana hired one of the Brazilian teachers from Pine Elementary to come to the house and facilitate a small pod in her home with four families (three kindergartners and two-second graders). Juliana spoke proudly of this little pod she organized,

“And Ms. Sousa was a teacher by training. She knew Kevin from Kindergarten. She was a native Portuguese speaker from Brazil and she would come from 9 am–12 pm every day. And she communicated very well with Kevin’s teachers. You know, just to coordinate lesson plans. And she did a really good job.”
(Interview, March 30, 2021)

Juliana expressed her *care* by outsourcing an actual teacher from the school to come into their home and practice the Portuguese language skills with her children. Juliana’s pride was rooted in her successful delivery of care—that she found a bonafide teacher to come to her home, teach her children, and then coordinate their learning with their school teachers. In this way, Juliana fulfilled her perceived duties as a mother in the home by outsourcing the academic support.

Conversely, two Brazilian mothers expressed that they could not outsource their children’s schooling due to a lack of financial capital. Delia commented that she did not opt for summer school in 2020, because it was simply too expensive. Instead, she had to take her daughter to work with her during those months. Another mother, Silvia, described trying to get her daughter into a summer program for additional learning but that the logistics were too hard with one car. One non-Brazilian and White mother, Breanne, reported that there were no Brazilian families in her daughter’s parent-child baking program hosted by the school in the summer months of 2020. She wondered why Brazilian families were not notified and believed it was probably just an oversight. In these instances, the school excluded Brazilian families by hosting extracurricular programs that were not easily accessible or affordable. In contrast to the previous themes of *Care—Simulating the classroom* and *Advocating—*the practice of *Outsourcing* was not a form of care that the Brazilian mothers were able to enact.

Of the three practices, this dimension of the currency of love required actual currency as only the parents who could afford to outsource their care, did so in the spirit of their children getting ahead or, as Mawusi, Ghanaian mother, so aptly stated, “to be competitive with their peers.” They pushed their children to get ahead by enhancing the rigor of daily school materials or pushing a second language, a desired commodity in their upper-middle class socioeconomic circle.

Many parents who outsourced their care through paid specialists also expressed deep guilt and sadness about not being able to do so themselves or not doing enough for their children because they needed to attend to their own work during the day or did not have the Portuguese language skills to teach it themselves. Mawusi said,

We had to figure out how to make sure they were learning something. I didn't do a good job because at that same time, I still had to work. Every day, even now, I feel like I'm not doing enough for the kids every day, every day, I'm like, oh, I should be doing Singapore math with my kids every day, you know, keeping them on target to keep up with everybody else.

Similarly, Alexandra, a non-Brazilian mother, said, "It's been disappointing because I feel like we failed her. I feel like we should have pulled her from public school much earlier. I'm questioning like, is it because we're both working full time?" (Interview, Dec 17, 2020). These mothers who outsourced their children's schooling articulated a sense of guilt about not doing enough to care for their children's education. In so doing, they construct what a "good" mother does to care for her child while suppressing any personal or professional obligations outside of their children. Hays (1996), in her work with American mothers, explains that women who are working mothers struggle with the demands on their time and also with how they are supposed to behave given that they are expected to take on a career and child-rearing full time. She calls this ideology intensive mothering and discusses how children become sacred and mothers become the primary responsible parties.

The outsourcing practice of care is an example in which economic capital provides opportunities to non-Brazilian children that are not available to Brazilian children despite their mothers' efforts and agency. Significantly, the Brazilian mothers in this study conceptualized care in similar ways as the non-Brazilian mothers, however, they could not operationalize these supplemental services because they lacked the economic resources. This finding is in direct contrast to the literature that underscores that immigrant parents are not involved in their children's schooling due to limited English proficiency, time, investment or knowledge about how to best support their children (Chazen-Cohen et al., 2009; Fernald et al., 2013; Huttenlocher et al., 2010; Hwang & Connor, 2020; Mistry et al., 2010). This dimension of the currency of love highlights the real challenges for Brazilian mothers due to socioeconomic inequities despite the CCW available to their families. The outsourcing of care shows the nuanced ways systemic inequities and privileges operated within this school community.

Discussion

We began this article by asking how Brazilian and non-Brazilian mothers conceptualize and enact care during remote schooling. We approached this question by exploring Brazilian and non-Brazilian mothers' reflections on their caregiving practices during mandated remote learning through the lenses of Oliveira's (2018) concept of the currency of love and Yosso's (2005) concept of CCW.

Conceptualizing Care

Our findings demonstrate how women from varied backgrounds conceptualized care and constructed similar ideals around motherhood during the pandemic. In our study, mothers attached meanings to the idea of a "good" mother by expressing stress about not having enough resources to recreate a traditional classroom experience for their children, feeling guilty about working full time or by questioning the extent of their sacrifice ("I *should* be doing Singapore math with my kids"). By adapting to their intensified roles as teachers and advocates, they shifted what mothers during the pandemic considered to be "good" and "caring" mothers— one that simulates the classroom, advocates and outsources for their children within the confines of their homes. Oliveira (2018, 2020) addresses this dualism of "good" and "bad" mother as part of the narrative of women, however the reality appears to be more nuanced.

Enacting Care

Across the findings, mothers sustained their children's education throughout the pandemic. While Brazilian and non-Brazilian participants varied across cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic demographics, they were similar in how they engaged in a currency of love or the everyday decisions and daily practices that centered around their children's education. This currency of love was exemplified in the ways they fought for their children to access the resources they deemed necessary for school during mandated remote learning during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mobilizing Yosso's (2005) concept of CCW, we found that Brazilian mothers, in particular, relied on Yosso's concepts of "social" and "navigational capital" to advocate for support for their children, communicate with teachers (sometimes using a translation service), fight for accommodations, and connect with a broader peer group to find the best opportunities for their children. While some Brazilian mothers reported feeling unprepared to

help their children with specific skill-building tasks, they also explained how they fully leaned into teacher roles by demanding that their children practice speaking in English, complete homework assignments, improve their math skills and engage with peers outside of class time over Zoom. These findings contrast with previous scholarship contending that mothers with limited education and fewer economic resources tend to feel less efficacious in helping their children with schoolwork or interacting with school personnel than do more advantaged parents (Coleman & Karraker, 1998; Lareau, 2000; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

At times, Brazilian mothers felt stymied in their caregiving practices due to a lack of economic resources available to them. Some Brazilian mothers reported that they did not have enough space or that they could not afford supplemental programs in school. As such, the economic aspect of their currency of love became particularly salient in achieving some educational goals for their children. Still, however, these mothers persisted through pragmatic educational expectations for their children. The mothers enacted their agency by simulating traditional schooling in the home and advocating using their network even when up against the school's failure to provide equitable opportunities for their children. All the caregiving and familial sacrifices notwithstanding, this study underscores the challenges for immigrant families to become upwardly mobile when systemic inequality within a school community is reproduced in ways that limit their children's academic possibilities.

Certainly, the participants enacted numerous practices of care related to their children's education. It is likely, for instance, that mothers provided their children with unstructured spaces for exploration (Lareau, 2003) or more opportunities to acquire familial and cultural capital as passed down through relatives (Yosso, 2005). However, during the interviews, our participants shared the care practices that were meaningful to them, and we do not have evidence of other forms of caregiving in our data. Additionally, we continue to wonder how being locked in for so many months thwarted some of the community systems available to Brazilian children, which may have impacted the ways mothers leveraged CCW through fictive and biological family networks. This cultural capital, which was historically available to immigrant mothers, we suspect became more limited as families needed to rely more on households without the full affordances of community. More information is needed to understand the varied ways Brazilian mothers' caregiving practices around their children's education were shaped by the physical isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What this study contributes to the research literature are the perspectives of Brazilian and non-Brazilian mothers as an anti-deficit approach to

gaining deeper insight into how mothers nurture their children's learning in ways that are often misunderstood or ignored by school personnel (Hochschild, 2013; Oliveira et al., 2021; Shuffelton, 2017). Making visible the often invisible dimensions of a mother's efforts to sustain her children's schooling is critical to children's academic trajectories as researchers have documented that teachers treat students differently based on their perceptions of parental involvement (Dumais, 2006; Lareau, 2000; Lehner-Mear, 2021). We use the metaphor of education as the currency of love to widen the lens of how maternal involvement in school has been studied and to dispute rigid perceptions of "good" mothering.

Conclusion

The historic event of the COVID-19 pandemic reconfigured the role of mothers in the home who felt they could no longer rely on teachers to provide the support they believed their children needed to thrive in school. Because the current study examined 19 mothers with children attending one urban school, the size, and context of the study are limitations. Future research on caregivers should continue to take anti-deficit approaches to examine the currency of love within families, with a specific focus on the ways in which Brazilian immigrant mothers care for and manage their children's schooling. This might also include exploring in greater detail the specific types of localized barriers that schools create for families and their school-based involvement (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). It might also include an in-depth investigation into the complex ways other caregivers nurtured their children's schooling during the pandemic.

As negative assumptions about immigrant parents' involvement continue to influence urban districts' family engagement initiatives, it is increasingly critical to examine how mother-child relationships, education expectations, love, and care unfold within the home. For home and school partnerships in urban schools, this implies the need for educators to change their attitudes toward families so conversations no longer center on the shortcomings of immigrant mothers, but rather, on their rich array of capital and their often invisibilized efforts to nurture their children's schooling (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Rodriguez, 2020). This implies the need to understand the multiple roles and relationships mothers navigate inside their families and social networks for teaching and learning. When educators acknowledge the oftentimes hidden currency of love that mothers generate with their children, they might challenge themselves to think about mothers' fundamental roles in supporting students in and outside of the classroom.


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Note

1. We use the terms “Brazilian” and “non-Brazilian” to refer to the participants in the study. The terms “Brazilian” refers to participants who were immigrants to the United States who spoke Portuguese in the home and whose children qualified for free and reduced lunch. The term “non-Brazilian” captures a predominantly White group of mothers, with the exception of one Ghanaian mother. The “non-Brazilian” participants spoke English in the home and could be characterized by middle-upper class socioeconomic demographic. Thus, we are intentional about these terms as they hold national, racial, linguistic and socioeconomic implications in this article.

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