IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE FOR ASIAN INDIAN WOMEN IN THE U.S.:

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the past century and across various cultures, the concept of marriage has significantly changed from being a union between two families to a union between two individuals. The change has penetrated South Asia, despite collectivism being the norm in Asian Indian culture. The current exploratory study was done to investigate an unexamined area of research namely, the pressure experienced by unmarried Asian Indian women in the United States. A qualitative research design combining ethnographic and grounded theory was used. Ten interviews were conducted with heterosexual, Asian Indian, Hindu women, above the age of 25, and raised in the United States. Four main research questions were addressed: (1) What pressures do family and community put on Asian Indian women to get married (2) What effect does remaining unmarried have on Asian Indian women (3) How do certain factors (i.e., past relationships, religion, skin color, and education) affect how desirable these women are to others, and how desirable they feel? and (4) What are Asian Indian women's perspectives on marriage? The interview data collected were analyzed to uncover qualitative themes. These themes included the following: the women interviewed felt that all Asian Indian women were born to be brides, that Asian Indian women did not go through a process of separation-individuation as defined in Western psychology, that parents experienced a great deal of shame if their daughters remained unmarried, that a great amount of interpersonal conflict with family and friends resulted from staying single, and that most women had felt that they needed to get married before the age of thirty. Although several of the women interviewed stated that they were ambivalent about the idea of marrying someone of Indian origin, the women felt that several factors affected how desirable they

were to other members of the Indian community. The findings of this study suggest

important implications for clinical psychology training for mental health clinicians. The

study suggests that therapists should have an increased understanding of the difference in

separation-individuation between Western and Asian Indian culture, the importance of an

Asian Indian woman's external presentation, and the extreme shame that these women

may experience by remaining single.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The role of women has been changing across the world, from rural India to cosmopolitan New York. Since the women's liberation movement in the 1970's, women in the U.S. have begun to have a wider range of options for how they would like to live their lives. In terms of marriage, some women choose to get married in their early twenties and have children, while many others make the decision to wait until later in life to wed or prefer to remain single. The emphasis on marital choice has become more prominent in this individualist, American culture.

As immigrants come to this country, each individual goes through varying levels of acculturation to the individualist culture of the U.S. As Asian Indians tend to be more collectivist, families who come here from India must struggle with integrating the two very different ways of life (Triandas, 1995). A key component of this collectivist culture is the family, and by extension, marriage. As Asian Indian girls are raised in America; however, there are increasing numbers of women who remain single in order to pursue education and career. As a result, many of these Asian Indian women do not marry as early as expected by their family members and their community. As more of these women present in various therapeutic settings, it becomes increasingly important to understand their experience of remaining single, while being part of a collectivist culture that values marriage.

There exists an overall dearth of research on the experience of Asian Indian women who live in the United States. Those studies that do exist have focused on the dating world of Asian Indian teens or the gender roles of Asian Indian women following marriage. For example, studies have found a great deal of conflict between parents and Asian Indian teens when the latter start entering the world of dating (Abraham, 2002; Dwyer, 2000). Research has also focused on the continued gender roles that Asian Indian women hold in their marriages (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). However, the majority of studies on Asian Indian women have been conducted with Muslim women or with women in the U.K. Additionally, the findings have been limited to understanding their dating or marriage experiences (Dwyer). Currently, no research exists examining the lives of Asian Indian women who remain single, whether or not by choice.

This exploratory study investigated various aspects of the lives of single, Asian Indian women in the U.S. Its purpose was to understand the impact that remaining single has on these women, while living within families, a community, and a culture that maintain the importance of marriage. The study examined the four major questions. First, it explored the pressure Asian Indian women face to get married. Second, it looked at the effects of remaining single has on Asian Indian women, including its psychological and social implications. Third, it examined mate selection, including the various factors that these women find important in a mate, as well as their beliefs regarding what they think members of the Indian community find desirable. Lastly, this study sought to shed light on these women's impressions of marriage in the Indian community and the role it plays in their lives. It was hypothesized that Asian Indian women raised in the U.S. face an extraordinary amount of pressure from their families and community to find a spouse,

resulting in a great deal stress for these women and their lives. Furthermore, it was expected that spouses would be chosen along caste and religious lines and that women would expect their community to treat them differently following marriage.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

Historical Overview of Marriage

The most common current conception of marriage in the Western world is that two individuals "must love each other deeply and choose each other unswayed by outside pressure" (Coontz, 2005). This egalitarian relationship is considered the center of the two individuals' worlds. Following marriage, prior relationships with parents, siblings, and friends are supposed to take a lower priority. The expectation is that the spouses should be "best friends, sharing their most intimate feelings and secrets" and easily expressing their frustrations. Furthermore it is assumed that they should maintain an intimate and monogamous sexual relationship throughout their life together (Coontz). Not only is this expectation of marriage rarely met in Western culture, but it is also not espoused by much of the rest of the world. In the past, cultures such as the Chinese discouraged women from telling their husbands about the trials of their day because the husband was not to be bothered with such mundane details (Coontz). The husband in turn, was not supposed to show affection because a demonstration of this nature was considered a weakness in character (Coontz). In other societies, such as some Native American cultures, the relationship between the individual and their family of origin was held in a higher regard than the individual's relationship with the spouse. The belief was held that a spouse could be replaced, but parents or siblings could not (Coontz). Over the past two centuries Western Europe and North America have developed a new, highly

idealistic, model of marriage (Coontz). This revised marital relationship is supposed to wholly fulfill the psychological and social needs that were previously dispersed between various people in the individual's family and community. Through modern technology, such as the Internet, T.V., and movies, this altered concept of marriage is spreading across the globe and changing the expectation of marriage around the world.

The Culture of India

Modern India, officially named the Republic of India or Bharat, is compromised of twenty-nine states, and within those states there are sixteen officially recognized languages (Walsh, 2006). Each state has its own unique personality that varies on characteristics including type of caste and sub-castes, food, music, dance, industry, religious beliefs, and the role of the family. In essence, each state has its own culture. The northern states include Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajastan. Gujarat, Maharastra, and Madhya Pradesh make up some of the states in central India. Lastly, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka comprise some of the states located in the south (Walsh). Given the diversity of states, it is important to remember that Asian Indian men and women "can be differentiated by region, language, religion, wealth, education and caste, as well the geographical area in which they…reside" (Chakrabart, Majumdar, & Sartori, 2007).

Despite the cultural variety of the country, Hinduism is the predominant religion observed by individuals living in India. According to the 2006 census, approximately eighty percent of India's population was comprised of Hindus (Walsh, 2006). One of the major impacts that Hinduism has had, is instilling the culture with the concept of Dharma, or duty (Desai & Krishnaraj, 1990). According to the Dharmasastras, Sanskrit moral-legal texts, marriage is viewed as a "set of normative rules and attitudes to be

pursued in order to achieve merit and engender social harmony" (Harlan & Courtright, 1995, p. 4).

Another thread common to the various Indian states is the caste system. The caste system is comprised of Varnas (i.e. classes) and Jatis (i.e. subclasses) (Wolpert, 2009). Varnas are categorized into four groups: Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras (Desai & Krishnaraj, 1990). The first three castes respectively, are to be served by the lowest caste, the Shudras. The Brahmans occupy the highest position of power and authority (Desai & Krishnaraj). The caste system in Indian has traditionally dominated societal structure. Until the recent past, most marriages occurred within the same caste level, with most people in lower castes getting married earlier due to their lower status (Sheela & Autdinaraya, 2003).

Collectivism in India

Collectivism comprises another large part of the Hindu tradition and has imbued Indian culture. Triandas (1995) writes that "the self is interdependent in collectivism and independent in individualism" (p. 43). The self in collectivist cultures attempts to preserve relationships even if this preservation comes at the expense of the self. Triandas (1995) further describes that "cognitions that focus on norms, obligations and duties guide much of social behavior in collectivist cultures" (pg. 44).

Talbani & Hasanali (2000) discuss the implications of collectivism on a community's marriage practices. If a group has a strong collectivistic culture, Talbani & Hasanali argue that there are greater chances of arranged or early marriages because the members focus on preserving the community's needs, rather than the development of the

individual. As a result, arranged marriages ensure economic, social and political stability (Talbani & Hasanali).

Historical Overview of Marriage and Women's Roles in India

Historically, most families in India followed a patriarchal family system (Sonawat, 2001). In patriarchal marriages the woman is considered inferior to the man (Sonawat). In these marriages, the man makes the decisions and is in charge of the household. Based on the patriarchal family structure, in the past the majority of Indian women were financially and socially dependent on men. The two known exceptions in India, which followed the matriarchal family system (based on a female run household), include certain castes in the southwest state of Kerala and the Garo and Khasi tribes in India (Sonawat).

The historical preference for males over females in India started with the birth of a child. Traditionally, a female child was not valued as much as a male child (Sonawat, 2001). Sons were prized because they would be able to take care of their parents when the parents were elderly. Daughters were viewed as a family burden because they were a financial liability (Bhopal, 1997). Females were considered costly because raising them, and getting them married, provided no social or financial benefit to their family of origin (Bhopal, 1997). Thus, women were often minimized and viewed as property (Jayankar, 1994). They were considered the property of their father until transferred to a husband (Sonawat). In a marriage, if the husband died before the wife, the woman became the property of her sons (Sonawat). Sati was a common religious practice where a woman would sacrifice herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Such a woman was considered to be a good wife (Harlan & Courtright, 1995). Widows who did not engage in sati were

not allowed to remarry because it was believed that a woman would meet her deceased husband in her next life (Caldwell, Reddy, & Caldwell, 1983). Although no longer outlawed, widows rarely remarry due to their cultural obligation to their deceased husband and his family.

In the past, Indian Hindu culture deemed that marriage was a union between two families rather than a relationship between two people (Lee, 2000). For this reason, the selection of a spouse was made by the elders in the family and planned when the child was very young (Pillari, 2005). Families looked to select spouses from people whom they knew to ensure that the marriage occurred within the same religion and caste (Sheela & Autdinaraya, 2003). Historically, in the South Indian culture this often resulted in a marriage that occurred between uncles and nieces (Sheela & Autdinaraya).

Love marriages, defined as marriages of choice in which the parents or community had no involvement in arranging, were considered deviant and dangerous (Harlan et al., 1995). Love as a method of selecting a spouse, was frowned upon because it was thought to indicate immoral or evil characteristics. It was advantageous to have an arranged marriage so that joint "family ideals, companionship, and co-parenthood could grow, leading to love" (Kurian, 1979, p. 171).

According to many Indians, marriage had an impact on the reputation of the family (Mueller, 2008). A women's marketability as a wife was based on her decorum as well as her ability to care for her future husband and family. Although an educated woman is considered an asset in modern day marriages, historically the woman, who was prized, was one who had the skills to maintain a household (Lee & Stanley, 2000). Other factors important in making the match included the couple's astrological pairing and the

woman's social etiquette. A common physical attribute noted in the choice of a woman, was the color of her skin (Jayankar, 1994). The lighter or fairer the girl's skin was, the more she was preferred. Dark skin was considered to be a sign of weakness and defect (Jayankar). Once the bride was selected, the bride's family would pay a dowry to the husband's family. The dowry often consisted of gold, silver, jewelry, household items, and anything that was valuable to the future husband's household (Fuller & Narasimhan). A larger dowry often ensured a more desirable husband (Johnson & Johnson, 2001). The terms of the dowry were negotiated between the families (Pardesi, 2002). In honorable families, the dowry was considered a means for the girl's family to ensure that their daughter was cared for if her husband died (Pardesi). In many cases; however, the dowry would be recycled for girls in the husband's family. In more disrespectable families, after the new bride lost her virginity, the husband's family would threaten divorce if the girl's family did not give them more dowry money (Pardesi). At the time that the bride's parents gave the dowry, they also gave up rights to their daughter (Sharma, 1981; Uberoi, 1994). A daughter sometimes moved a great distance from her parent's home to move in with her new husband and her husband's family (Edlund, 1999). This was often a very difficult time for the woman's family because she often was no longer able to communicate with or see her family again (Edlund).

Historically, the community not only condoned, but advocated that a girl be married before reaching puberty. According to ancient Hindu texts, the elder in the family should give away his daughter before she goes through puberty (Kapadia, 1966). It was thought that an early marriage would ensure that the child would marry according to caste and religion; whereas an unmarried adult would be more independent and have

higher chances of marrying outside the community (Kurian, 1979). Sheela &

Autdinaraya (2003) found that the age of menarche still plays a major factor in South

India. This was as a result of three factors: to fulfill the responsibility that parents felt, to

avoid any chance of pre-marital sex and to avoid the criticism of their community about

having an unmarried daughter. Furthermore, they found that the boy had to be older than

the girl.

Overall, there was a great importance placed on an Indian woman getting married

early. "Remaining single [meant] bringing disgrace [to the woman's] family. A woman

who doesn't marry is regarded as an object that has no use. There [was] no place for her"

(Johnson & Johnson, 2001, p. 1055). For this reason, girls were usually arranged to be

married at a young age (typically 12-14 years old) (Bhopal, 1997). Another reason

making it critical for an Indian girl to get married early was to maintain her virginity, and

by extension to preserve the family's *izzat* (i.e. honor) (Sonowat). There was concern

about pregnancy out of wedlock if girls were not married early enough (Caldwell et al.,

2005). The western style of dating, in which two individuals meet and get to know each

other over an extended period of time, was prohibited due to the fear of shame (Lee &

Stanley, 2000). Any shameful acts by a daughter (such as spending time with boys,

having sex, etc) ruined the family name. Future marriage prospects for this daughter and

other children in the family were destroyed. The family was socially ostracized and

would fall into financial ruin (Caldwell et al.).

A marriage prevented shame for the woman's family, but it did not enhance the

status of a woman. The only way to gain status as a female was to have male children and

become a mother-in-law (Bhopal, 1997). If the woman had a son, she was much more

respected than if she had a female child. A study by Bhopal (1998) found that mothers of

female children wanted their own daughters to have sons, because these mothers had had

such difficult lives because they had no male children. Women were also found to be

more protective of their female children because they knew that one day their daughters

would marry and no longer be part of their family. These mothers often expressed

wanting to protect their daughters for as long as possible before their child encountered

the same struggles they themselves faced in their in-law's home (Bhopal, 1998). These

perpetual struggles reinforced the belief that men were better than women. This belief

made women covet men's position and made men hold onto their positions of power even

more tightly. This elevated status of men has permeated Indian culture for thousands of

years.

Changing Role of Marriage and Women in India

New legislation passed by the Indian government and the influence of Western

culture, have both changed the concept of marriage and the role of women over the past

175 years. Laws have promoted the evolution of the "wife" role in Indian culture. In

1929 the Child Marriage Act (also known as the Sadra Act) imposed a minimum

marriage age of 14 for girls (Sonawat, 2001). In 1955, the Hindu Marriage Act changed

the minimum age to 15 for females and 18 for males. This act also allowed women to

divorce men who were deemed insane, and allowed for widows to remarry a widower

(Caldwell et al., 1983). The most recent regulation in 1961, the Dowry Prohibition,

stated that dowries were outlawed from being given or accepted (Sonoswat). Despite this

law, dowries are still often exchanged between families. This often occurs within rural

communities (Pardesi, 2002). In more contemporary families, they are usually given

informally out of custom and tradition and not mandated by the husband's family in order for the wedding to occur (Pardesi). Currently, there is generally a great variation in the type of arranged marriages, from community elders making the ultimate decision in isolation, to allowing children to make the decisions with parental consent (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000).

In modern times, the age of marriage in India seems to be increasing. Since a change in legislation in India, women are now typically married at a later age. In the 1950s, it was believed that the age of marriage was rising in India, but limited formalized surveys were conducted at the time to validate this hypothesis (Argarwala, 1957). A study done by Caldwell et al. (1983) examined the marriage age of women living in rural areas of Karnataka, a state in the south-west region of India. At the time it found that the median age for marriage for individuals in India was 24 for men and 18 for women. The study revealed that the age of marriage varied across socio-economic class. The higher socio-economic class, the older the average age was for the individual to marry (Caldwell et al.). Caldwell et al. found that Indian society was slowly becoming more accustomed to women remaining unmarried in their late teens. Sheela & Autdinaraya (2003) found as parents are increasingly involving their daughters on their marriage plans, daughters have increasingly requested for later marriages. The only other factor they found affecting the age of marriage was the payment of a dowry. Although not always necessary to be paid, the requirement often delayed the age of marriage because the woman's parents had to wait until they had the necessary amount (Sheela & Autdinaraya, 2003).

Education was also a factor for women getting married at a later age (Caldwell, 2005). Obtaining higher education delayed a woman's marriage. The value of education

appeared to be privileged over marriage in some Indian families (Caldwell et al., 1983). Despite this, there was still concern among families with daughters. Based on the history of early marriages (i.e. marriage prior to the age of 18), families worried about their unmarried daughters above the age of 20. Specifically, there was a fear about whether or not an older woman would maintain her virginity. Thus these women walked a fine line between preserving or ruining the family name (Caldwell et al., 1983). If the family name was caught in shame, it was difficult for subsequent marriages to be arranged for any younger daughters (Caldwell et al., 1983). Despite this fear, with increased exposure to the western values of education, individuality, and independence, strides were made for women in Indian towards getting married at a later age.

Despite this shift to marrying at a later age, the study done by Caldwell et al. (1983) found that there were still conflicting opinions amongst women as to whether or not late marriages were beneficial. When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of getting married at various ages, 71.3% of the women from the study, living in Bangladesh, a country neighboring India, said that there was no disadvantage to getting married at a later age (Caldwell et al.). Women indicated that there were disadvantages to pursuing an early marriage, including having more children than desired, the inability to pursue higher education, being too immature, and not knowing how to care for a family (Caldwell et al.). Some, however, still held a more traditional world view and thought that there were disadvantages to getting married later in life. Attempting a late marriage was associated with difficulty in finding a partner (Caldwell et al.). The traditional belief was that if a woman attempted to marry late, she would be picking from less desirable suitors, and therefore, would not get the best husband, or no husband at all

(Caldwell et al.). In rural communities, dowries were stated as another reason to get married earlier. The concern around dowries was that they typically needed to be higher for older women because no husband wanted an older bride (Caldwell et al.). Although this study was not conducted in India, it appears that women in this region are also starting to have conflicting opinions about marrying early.

Another study conducted by Caldwell (2007) found that the rising age of marriage was attributed to a shift in the responsibility of choosing a spouse. In South Asia, increasingly the burden is being moved from the family to the individual (Caldwell). The emphasis in spousal selection is now more on creating a good equal partnership between two individuals rather than a partnership between two families (Caldwell). Despite this change, the selection criteria often remain the same. Many Indian women still wanted to marry within their ethnicity to maintain a connection to their culture. One young woman said:

> "If I chose my own partner he would have to be from the same religion of course and would have to be definitely Indian." - Interview with a debt counselor in an Asian Women's Project, 1997 (Takhar, 2006, p.300).

In addition to the changing age of marriage in India, individuals are progressively looking outside their extended families and caste for potential spouses. Fuller and Narasimhan (2008a) found that in recent history, the Brahmans in the southern state of Tamil Nadu have migrated from the rural villages to towns and cities, in order to acquire new jobs in technology and to become part of the growing middle class in India. Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) studied a specific Brahman subcaste, labeled the Eighteen Village Vattima subcaste, and described that even in this traditional, small, rural

community of people, marriages within the subcaste were abandoned and people married

mostly outside of their community. The researchers found that some have given up the

old traditions of arranged marriages and that love marriages are now increasingly

common. Kurian (1974) found that "the increase in marriage age coupled with the

influence of movies, education and liberalism, is related almost in direct proportion to the

desire on the part of boys and girls to have a greater say in the choice of their marriage

partners" (p. 382). Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) had similar results when studying the

Vattima subcaste. First, they found ending pre-pubertal marriage for girls was a major

change for this sub-caste of Brahmans and mirrored the majority of other Brahman

subcastes that had already discarded the practice of child marriage much earlier. Second,

marriage arrangements were not as frequently based on caste, rather, "educational

qualifications and employment of individual men and women, and their potential

happiness as congenial partners, had become the principal criteria for selection" (Fuller &

Narasimhan, 2008, p. 737). There were also concerns that marrying within the caste

would cause inbreeding problems, such as congenital defects of the children. Lastly,

younger women stated that having a mother-in-law who was not within the same family

and caste meant that there was less pressure from their family of origin to sustain any

potential abuse from the mother-in-law or the husband (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008).

Immigration of Indians to U.S.

Over the past 150 years, many Indians have immigrated to the United States The

integration of American and Indian values presents problems for the acculturation of

many immigrants. In order to understand various acculturation processes, it is important

to first understand the multiple historical phases of immigration from India to the United

States. The first phase was in the late 1800s to the early 1900s when a group of Indians

immigrated to California (Pillari, 2005). Although some of the immigrants in this group

were professionals and students, most of them were illiterate and possessed agriculture or

military skills. The second wave of Indians to immigrate to the U.S. was mostly

compromised of the highly educated or the upper class (Pillari). They came in the 1960s

and early 1970s to attend American colleges and universities or to work for reputable

companies (Pillari). The third, and most recent wave of Indian immigrants, came here in

the late 1980s, mostly to work in the computer industry (Pillari). The majority of these

individuals were highly educated and settled in California, New York, New Jersey,

Massachusetts, and Illinois (Pillari). This last group of people is considered to be very

closely tied to India and travel back to their home country quite often (Pillari). About

two decades ago, the U.S. government passed the Family Reunification Act (Pillari). This

1990s act entitled many Indians to enter the United States through visa sponsorship by

their families. It is hypothesized that since this group of immigrants was not as educated,

they faced more challenges seeking services, developing social networks, and getting

settled in the U.S. (Pillari).

The different waves of immigrants from India to the U.S. have resulted in Indian

groups having a diverse set of values and varying levels of acculturation. Currently there

appears to be three distinct groups of Indians. The newest immigrants are classified into

one group, which is very tied to their Indian culture (Pillari, 2005). Their main purpose in

coming to the United States was to financially support their nuclear families in the U.S.

and to send money back to their extended families in India. The second group of Indians

is comprised of well-educated professionals who appear to fit in well within the U.S.

culture (Pillari). However, this group is mostly tied to the Indian cultural values and traditions in their own homes. They appear to lead a dual life where they accept the American culture at work, but preserve and value the Indian culture while at home. The third group of Indians consists of those who are mostly upper class (Pillari). While in India, they were often exposed to Western culture and the American way of life through movies and T.V. When they come to the United States, they wholly espouse the American culture and enjoy the American lifestyle.

Balancing Two Cultures

The children of Indian immigrants often struggle to balance the Western culture and the Indian culture (Poulsen, 2009). They have been nicknamed "American-Born Confused Desis" (Desis is slang for Indians) or ABCD's, to connote the difficulty they experience in integrating and resolving cultural conflict. In American culture, the choice of autonomy, socializing, and dating are emphasized (Poulsen). Many Indian parents have expectations; however, of prioritizing family, maintaining loyalty to their collectivist culture, selecting certain career paths (e.g. engineering and medicine), and choosing an Indian spouse to maintain these values in future generations (Poulsen). Indian cultural values are often imposed with children are not being allowed to date or stay out late with friends. Often Indian children find themselves conflicted over how to manage the demands of their parents, while trying to socialize in school settings and American social groups.

Indian Marriage in the U.S and Europe

A limited number of studies have been conducted outside of India to understand Indian women's experiences around marriage. In 2000, Dwyer conducted a study with

Muslim and Hindu female teenagers in the U.S. and Britain. Teenagers stated that their expectations had changed about their own roles in the process of finding a future spouse. Often times it was thought that the arranged marriage plays a central role in maintaining the subordinate role of women in society due to the lack of choice that women had in the process (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). These teenagers felt that females should be more involved and more active in the decision-making (Dwyer). As a result, arranged marriages were decreasing and parents played less of a role (Dwyer). However, there were conflicting views amongst the teenagers. Some Indian teenagers wanted to voice their opinions against arranged marriages and take a stand against their parents (Dwyer). Yet another group of teenagers felt compelled to fight the notion that all arranged marriages resulted in unhappy couples and advocated that their parents continue to set them up with a future spouse (Dwyer).

Another study done by Talbani & Hasanali (2000) examined the views of teenage Asian Indian girls living in Canada. All the girls were of Indian, Pakistani, or Bengladeshi origin. The investigators found that these girls felt as though they were treated differently from their male siblings. In the study, Saleema, a high school graduate, stated that her family had a liberal attitude towards dating, but stated that there was a difference between the way her parents treated her and the way they treated her brother. She stated,

> In my family, my parents don't mind if my brother goes out with a girl, but they will say ''no'' to me, if I want to go out with a boy—because [they argue] I am more vulnerable, because I am a girl. Then I would argue that if you let [my brother] go out, why not me? (Talbani & Hasanali, p. 620).

Another teenager stated that she felt that girls were married too early. She said that her parents were fairly liberal. They allowed her to go for her senior prom with her date. However, she said that when it comes to marriage, her parents might force her into an arranged marriage (Talbani & Hasanali). The study found that overall there was a differential treatment between boys and girls (Talbani & Hasanali). They also found girls were given less decision-making power. The girls said that they also experienced a greater amount of control when considering interacting and socializing with boys. They found that there were often unwritten and implicit community rules about how these girls were to interact with parents and members of the opposite sex (Talbani & Hasanali).

Das Gupta (1998) conducted a study with Indian immigrants who lived in the U.S., namely New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. The study investigated the values of both parents and children to see how much of their cultural values both generations had retained. Dating practices and gender equality were two key factors examined. It was found that Indian women, whose children were still young, were more traditional in their views regarding women's roles. It was speculated that when their children grew older, the mother's views would change to become more resonant with Western culture. The daughters were found to have extremely egalitarian views when compared to the mothers, fathers, and sons in these families (Das Gupta). In the same study, when Das Gupta looked at these familes' attitudes towards marriage practices, mothers were the most against dating, and sons were the most in favor of dating. Daughters and fathers were similar in their conflicted views. The mothers who accepted dating were the same ones who were most in support of gender equality. Twenty-five percent of daughters, on the other hand, restrained themselves from dating even when they wanted to do so. The

study also showed that mothers had more of an influence over both their sons and daughters views on dating and gender equality.

Another study, conducted by Bhopal (1998), examined the lives of Indian and Pakistani women living in Britain who had arranged marriages. Women often spoke about the challenges of living with their husband's family. One woman said,

> Because I live with my husband and his family, his mum is always there and so I have to do what she says…if she doesn't like me doing certain things with the child, then she tells me and I have to do what she says…I live with her and so it would be hard to ignore her (Kulwinder, married with two children) (Bhopal, 1998, p. 487).

This quote illustrates women's struggles that continue outside of India. In these women's views getting married as a result of an arrangement, equated to a loss of power. Not only did they feel disowned from their family of origin, but they were held to an extremely high standard by their mother-in-law and the rest of their husband's family. The position to which the women were relegated further reinforced the importance of being associated with the husband (i.e. a male). This cycle perpetuates the need for a woman to be married because she is not considered anything but an object unless she is married.

Overall, studies show that Asian Indian immigrant families in the United States and Canada have experienced a great deal of conflict between children and parents over topics such as dating and martial decisions (Abraham, 2002). The younger generations often have expressed that they want a greater amount of autonomy and choice, which has resulted in problems within the family (Netting, 2006; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). Netting (2006) examined the lives of Asian Indian youth who actively rebelled against

their parents and lived two lives (Netting).   Netting defined the phenomenon of two lives as the struggle Indian youth experienced attempting to manage the difference in the values of their family and their Western peers. The researchers stated that outside of India, this was the first generation to actively manage the conflict between a love marriage and an arranged marriage (Netting). Romantic love was historically discouraged in Indian society because it was considered to "disrupt smooth social functioning" which was of utmost importance within Indian ideals (Netting, p. 129). Netting interviewed men and women in their twenties about their views on marriage. The study found that Asian Indians were starting to either rebel or negotiate their way towards a love marriage.

The researchers also found that despite living two lives, participants still valued Indian traditions (Netting, 2006). Despite their wish for a love marriage, they often sought counsel from their parents and community members about who would be appropriate to marry. Almost unanimously, the participants stated that they wanted to pass on Indian values to their children. When selecting a partner to date, most individuals stayed close to their Indian tradition and chose to marry individuals of the same caste or religion. The few that did date non-Indians chose partners who would be supportive and accepting of Indian values (Netting). Furthermore, a recent study by Wickramasinghe (2008) found that marital satisfaction in Asian Indian families was significantly correlated to the family of origin's acceptance of the spouse. As a result, arranged marriages ensure that this criterion is met for the families.

Spouse Selection and Marriage Satisfaction

Currently there are many different ways that spouses are found and selected. Indian matrimonial ads are a common way that many individuals are introduced for an arranged or love marriage (Mueller, 2008). One example is through newspaper matrimonial ads. Ads appear in most Indian newspapers including the *Times of India*, a paper published in India, and *India Abroad*, a paper published in New York. An important note about the matrimonial ads is that often times the individual described in the ad has not posted or even known about the advertisement being published. Quite frequently the ads are posted by parents or other elders in the family (Mueller). Another increasingly common way of meeting someone is through Indian matrimonial websites, like Shaadi.com (shaadi translated from Hindi means marriage) or BharatMatrimonial.com. These online and print ads are used to describe the attributes of an individual. Interested parties can search for information on the region, caste, religion, astrological information and language of the desired spouse. Education is also a key attribute listed, along with the occupation and salary. For women, personal qualities are often included such as "soft-spoken," "cultured," and "caring" (Mueller). On Shaadi.com, one can search for how many siblings a person has, how many of these siblings are married, and for information about family. This website exemplifies the collectivist roots of Indian culture as it is not just the potential spouse that is of importance, but it is also their family that is critical (Mueller). Marriage bureaus are also used in India to find a mate. Here one fills out a questionnaire with their information and the criteria for their desired potential spouse. A worker from the marriage bureau

matches potential spouses and the families then meet for a limited number of times to see if the match is suitable (Mueller).

Not only do these methods differ between India and the U.S., the selection criteria is also different between the two countries. Siddiqi & Reeves (1986) investigated the difference between how mates were chosen in the United States and India. The investigators looked at matrimonial ads in *India Abroad*, a popular newspaper among Indians living in the U.S. and four newspapers in India, one for each major region studied. They found that personal income, caste, and religion were significantly more important to Indians in the U.S. than they were for Indians in India. There was also evidence indicating that Indians, despite living in the U.S., had retained their Indian value system.

Regardless of the various methods used to find a spouse, one study found that marital satisfaction was the same between love marriages and arranged marriages. Myers, Madathil, and Tingle (2005) conducted a study that examined the difference between marital satisfaction for Asian Indians between those who had arranged marriages in India and those who had love marriages in the United States. They found that there was no difference in marriage satisfaction between the two groups.

A recent study done by Thiagarajan (2008) examined the lives of Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. In interviewing these women, the investigator found multiple themes emerge. It was discovered that there was an "emphasis on education, [and] the level of gender role expectations in their families" and that their family members had certain expectations of whom the women would marry (Thiagarajan, p. i). The women stated that they had difficulty navigating their dating life because of the

reactions of their friends and family when dating and marrying someone outside of their community (Thiagarajan).

Limitations in the Current Body of Research

There is a scarcity of research on Asian Indians living in the United States. The literature that does exist mostly addresses issues related to immigration to the U.S. Beyond acculturation issues, there is limited literature addressing the values, needs, or experiences of Indians living in the United States. When studying the concept of marriage, the current body of scholarly literature almost exclusively refers to two aspects: (1) The cultural values of families still in India; or (2) The cultural values that Asian Indian immigrants have passed onto their children. There is an overall dearth of research on the experience of Asian Indian women in the U.S who have reached adulthood, and how their experiences may differ from those of women in India or that of their parents. Given the importance of marriage in Asian Indian society, the role of marriage in the lives of women who are raised or have lived in the U.S. for an extended period of time must be reexamined. This study explored the experience of single Asian Indian Hindu women above the age of 25 living in the United States. Given the cultural importance of marriage for Asian Indian women, the purpose of this study was to understand how these women's lives and perceptions of self and marriage were influenced by their families and the Indian community. This study also examined the factors that Asian Indian women believed were important to be considered as a spouse. It was anticipated that these women faced a great deal of cultural pressure to get married to a spouse with specific characteristics, and by a certain age. In addition, it was believed that these women's attributes (including skin color, caste, and education) would affect how marriageable they

believed themselves to be.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This study used a qualitative research method to understand the experience of unmarried, Asian Indian women over the age of twenty-five, living in United States. The use of a qualitative method allowed for the collection of rich interview data to elucidate the experience of these women. This chapter will discuss the use of qualitative methodology and describe in detail the characteristics of the participants, the interview questions, and the data analysis procedure.

Background on Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods have been utilized often in the social sciences. They frequently fill important gaps when quantitative research methodology cannot be employed. Qualitative research can be especially useful for understanding patterns of behavior. Quantitative methods can clarify the statistical significance of these patterns, but cannot elucidate the reasons behind the phenomenon. Morse and Richards (2007) state that qualitative methods help fill in the reasons for the behavior and allow the researcher to understand, "people's own account of their behavior" (p. 27). Qualitative research has become a necessary method of research in order to understand the nuances of people's subjective experiences.

There are multiple cases in which qualitative methods are better suited than quantitative methods (Morse & Richards, 2007). First, qualitative methods are called for

when little is known of a particular area and when the goal is to expand an understanding of that area. When there is no concrete hypothesis of what the researcher will find, using a qualitative methodology helps the researcher learn what research questions can be pulled from the data. Prematurely forcing a quantitative method on certain research questions can lead to the danger of leaving important areas unexplored. Second, qualitative methods should be used to understand complex situations without destroying the intricacies presented in the data. At times, using quantitative methods can be reductionist and result in a loss of the richness of the data. When using a qualitative method the researcher preserves the complexity of the data. Third, if the purpose of the study is to learn how participants make meaning of their experience, qualitative methods are not only recommended, but also are necessary to allow for the complexity of the data to be illustrated. Fourth, if the purpose of the research is to construct a theory or a framework, qualitative methods allow for the discovery of data which otherwise might be overlooked by a quantitative approach. Lastly, if the purpose of the study is to understand a trend or experience, the use of a qualitative method allows for a deep and in-depth exploration to discover central themes.

There were several reasons to use a qualitative approach for this exploratory study. First, there is a lack of research in the area of understanding unmarried, Asian Indian women's experiences within a collectivist culture. The limited data available to understand the pressures these women face, and their views of marriage, prevents the investigator from defining various constructs and or even examining which facets of these women's experiences can be generalized and compared between groups. If such data was present then such comparisons could be made quantitatively. However, it is

currently unclear how to concretize the single Asian Indian woman's experience as it

relates to the pressures they face from society versus their family. A qualitative method

is necessary because little is known about this area of Asian Indian women's experiences.

Second, as stated by McCracken (1988), the use of a qualitative research protocol,

specifically an interview, can "take us into the mental world of the individual…to see the

content and pattern of daily experience." This fits the criteria of when to use a qualitative

approach (i.e. the lack of prior research and the desire to get in depth information without

losing the nuance of the experiences reported). Third, implementing a quantitative

research protocol would limit exploration of various themes in the attempt to make the

experience measurable. In the present study, given the stage of research and the area

being examined, conducting a quantitative study would likely mean the loss of rich data

that is found through qualitative methods.

Overall, the two key reasons to work qualitatively as discussed by Morse and

Richards (2007) include 1) the research question requires the use of a qualitative method,

and 2) the data lends itself to being analyzed through a qualitative method. In this study,

both criteria were met. Therefore choosing a qualitative methodology was appropriate.

Using the qualitative method allowed for participants to give open-ended responses and

for the researcher to "observe and record the complexities of clinical situations that seem

to be denied by tidy reports of patient compliance" (Morse & Richards, p. 27). In

addition, the ultimate goal was to understand the themes that emerged from interviewing

these Asian Indian women and their experiences with pressures to be married. When the

data is gathered in such an interview format, and the goal is to, "isolate and define…

categories during the process of research" it is important to follow a qualitative method

(Morse & Richards, p. 27).   Based on this reasoning, the qualitative method was chosen

for this study.

The Long Interview Methodology

Within qualitative research there are several different methods (for example,

Phenomenology, Ethnography, and Grounded Theory) that can be used depending on the

nature of the exploration (Morse & Richards, 2007). In the Ethnography tradition, the

researcher explores cultural groups. A cultural group, in this case, is defined as an

"account for the beliefs, values, and behaviors of cohesive groups of people" (Morse &

Richards, p.28). Another tradition, grounded theory, examines the way reality is

constructed and changes over time. Reality is considered to be something that is

constantly changing and evolving (Morse & Richards). One emphasis of this theory is

that researchers should be aware of their own impact and involvement with the data in

order to create the theory, because of the circular process of data collection and analysis

(Morse & Richards).

The current exploratory study used McCracken's long interview method, which is

a combination of the Grounded Theory and Ethnography methods (1988). The long

interview, as described by McCracken (1988), allows for the collection of a rich, in-depth

look at the data. Given that the field of psychology is lacking a deep understanding of the

experience of unmarried Asian Indian women in the United States, using the long

interview allowed the researcher to drill into the women's experience and understand

them in a greater social and cultural framework, without losing the nuance of the

women's subjective experiences. This method is structured for data to be collected in a

way that fleshes out what numbers revealed through psychological measures cannot fully convey (McCracken, 1988).

McCracken's long interview methodology follows a four step method of inquiry. The first step of McCracken's method requires the interviewer to conduct an exhaustive review of the literature. The literature review allows the investigator to define the research questions and assess the existing data. More importantly, a comprehensive review of the literature allows for the discovery of counterexpecational data (McCracken, 1988). This phenomenon is defined as a situation where the investigator is so familiar with the data that they are surprised by a theme that they find while conducting the literature review. Counterexpectational data is important because it can signal an area of the literature that has been not thoroughly explored. The second purpose of a comprehensive literature review is to help in the creation of the interview. For this study, the comprehensive literature review indicated that there was a dearth of data in the current subject area and suggested that the study might discover new themes in the experience of these women's lives.

The second step, titled the review of cultural categories, is where investigators truly start to examine themselves as an instrument in this process. This involves the investigator exploring personal experience and how it intersects with the research topic. McCracken states that this stage calls the investigator to engage in "two processes: familiarization and defamiliarization" (McCracken, 1988, p. 33). This combination allows the investigator to listen for key themes they are familiar with, and at the same time to maintain a necessary distance from their own assumptions. This was an

important aspect of the process in this study as the principal investigator was an Asian Indian female and has personal familiarity with the topic.

The third stage is the construction of the actual interview. According to McCracken, the interviews should adhere to certain requirements. First, it is important that the interview cover the same information for all of the participants. Second, it is essential that the interview be crafted in a way that the questions and prompts are not leading. As McCracken (1988) and other qualitative researchers state, the investigator is part of the instrument used, and therefore, needs to take caution and manufacture the necessary distance between themselves and the participants. Third, the interview should be directive enough so as to not fall into the potential trap of open-ended interviews, where the discourse spirals to a place that is out of control and off topic. In order to establish this focus, the interview should open with a standard set of biographical questions. Subsequent questions should be open and nondirective, allowing the participants to respond freely. These latter questions are named "grand-tour" questions (McCracken, p. 35). Once the grand-tour questions have begun to elicit answers, the investigator is responsible for sustaining the dialogue. According to McCracken this is done through "floating prompts" which include nonverbal gestures like a raised eyebrow, or verbal prompts, such as restating the end of a participant's response (p. 35). For the entirety of the interview, the investigator should "keep as 'low' and unobtrusive a profile as possible" (McCracken, p. 34).

Data Analysis

The fourth and final stage of the long interview process is the analysis of the data collected. The purpose of this analysis was to identify themes common among the

women interviewed about their experiences being unmarried within a collectivist culture. The purpose of the analysis was to "determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the respondent's view of the world in general, and the topic in particular" (McCracken, 1988, p. 42). The analysis is conducted in five stages, moving from a high level of specificity to general themes (McCracken). After the interviews are recorded and then transcribed verbatim, the investigator analyzes the transcript data. The first stage involves looking at each "utterance" without examining its relationship to other parts of the interview (McCracken, p. 42). The second stage takes those utterances and explores them with respect to themselves, in relation to other parts of the interview, and in relationship to the existing literature. In the third stage, the focus shifts from the transcript to the observations noted in stage two. The goal of this stage is to understand the relationship between the observations themselves, and between the observations and the existing literature. In this stage, patterns and themes begin to emerge. The fourth stage is a "time of judgment" (McCracken, p. 46). At this stage, some of the themes are surrounded by data, others become redundant, and still others are eliminated. It is important at this stage to observe whether any of the themes contradict each other. Lastly, the fifth stage calls for a review of themes found in stage four. At this stage, the data is no longer speaking about individual participants or interviews, but rather talking about general themes and categories which can be ready for presentation.

The following study attempted to understand the potential pressure to get married faced by Asian Indian women over the age of 25 and living in the U.S. The study also investigated where the pressure comes from and how these women experience and understand the pressure put upon them. It was expected that these Asian Indian women

would have face pressures from their family and the Indian community and that this would contribute to shaping their identity. A qualitative study design using interview methods has been selected. The study proposed to explore four major questions relevant to single, Asian Indian women living in the U.S.:

1) What pressures do the family and the community put on Asian Indian women to get married?

2) What is the effect of being unmarried on Asian Indian women?

3) How do certain factors (past relationships, religion, skin color, and education) affect how desirable these women are to others, and how desirable they feel they are?

4) What are Asian Indian women's views of marriage?

Participants

     Selection criteria.

The inclusion criteria for this study were that women were heterosexual, aged 25 and older, and of Asian Indian descent. They were required to be single and could not engaged. Women in a committed dating relationship were allowed to participate in the study, but none were enrolled. All the participants were raised in the U.S. and had spent at least the past ten years in the United States.

     Recruitment.

In order to find a diverse sample, participants were recruited from various parts of the United States including New York; New Jersey; Washington, D.C., Illinois, and California. Individuals were recruited through a networking, snowball sample. Emails

were sent out to various Asian Indian females. Some participants were recruited through other participants who were asked to pass on information about the study.

   Demographics.

   Ten subjects were enrolled in the study. Information has been de-identified to protect the privacy of the participants. Ages may not match the data included in demographics table due to those changes.

Monica is a 36-year-old woman who works as a business development executive. She has a Masters in Business Administration. Her parents came to the U.S. from North India in the 1970's, and both hold graduate degrees. Her parents had an arranged marriage. Monica has one older sister. Monica prefers to marry someone who is African American.

Kalpana is a 25-year-old female physician. Her parents came to the United States in the 1970's from two different states in North India after having an arranged marriage. She has one older sister. She prefers to marry someone who is Hindu.

Rashmi is a 26-year-old female employed in marketing. Her parents came to Canada in the 1970's and moved to the U.S. shortly thereafter. Her parents had an arranged marriage and they came from North India. She has one older sister. She prefers to marry someone non-Indian.

Sushma is a 28-year-old woman who works as a graphic artist. She has a Masters in Fine Arts and Graphic Design. Her parents came to the United States in the 1960's from

North India. They had an arranged marriage. She has one younger brother. She prefers to marry someone non-Indian.

Sonia is a 33-year-old chemical engineer who works for a cosmetics firm. Her parents came to the United States in the 1960's from South India. They had an arranged marriage. She has one older brother and she prefers to marry someone Indian and Hindu.

Viddhi is a 36-year-old teacher. Her parents came to the United States from North India in the 1970's. Her parents had an arranged marriage. She has one older and one younger sister. She prefers to marry someone non-Indian.

Lata is a 31-year-old social worker. She has her Masters in Social Work. Her parents emigrated to the United Stated from North India in the 1970's. Her parents had an arranged marriage. She has one younger sister. She prefers to marry someone Indian and Hindu.

Reena is a 38-year-old physician. Her parents moved here after having an arranged marriage in North India. She has 4 siblings, 2 older brothers and 2 younger sisters. She prefers to marry someone non-Indian.

Meena is a 24-year-old woman who works for a large public relations firm. Her parents moved to Canada and then the United States in the 1970's after having an arranged

marriage in South India. She has one younger sister. She prefers to marry someone

Indian and Hindu.

Vandana is a 36-year-old lawyer. Her parents moved to the United States after having an

arranged married in North India in the 1970's. She has one younger sister. She prefers to

marry someone Indian and Hindu.

Table 1 Participant characteristics

Characteristic	N (%)
Age: Mean years (SD), Range (25–37)	31 (3.8)
Sex: Female	10 (100)
Birth Country	
India	2 (20)
Number of years in India: Mean years (SD), Range	(0.5 – 4): 2.25 (2.5)
United States	8 (80)
Indian State of Origin	
Andra Pradesh	1 (10)
Gujarat	2 (20)
Maharashtra	2 (20)
Uttar Pradesh	1 (10)
Tamil Nadu	2 (20)
Bi-state	2 (20)
Parents with arranged marriage	10 (100)
Siblings	10 (100)
Birth Order	
First Child	4 (40)
Second Child	5 (50)
Other	1 (10)
Highest Level of Education	
Bachelors Degree	4 (40)
Graduate Degree	6 (60)

Measures

Two collection methods were used to obtain data from the participants. The first

was a demographics sheet (see Appendix B). This questionnaire asked about the

participant's biological information such as age, level of education, number of siblings,

birth order, and relationship status. Participants were also asked how long they had lived

in the United States, and when each of their parents immigrated to the United States. They were also asked with what Indian state their father and mother identified.

Next, each participant was interviewed with a semi-structured interview (see Appendix C) developed by the principal investigator. This interview was comprised of open-ended queries regarding the women's experiences, thoughts, and opinions about marriage, self-perception related to being married, and the pressures put on them by their families and communities. Questions were designed to meet the definition of McCracken's ground-tour queries (McCracken, 1988).

Procedure

Interviews were conducted in either the participant's home or office. Participants first read and signed an informed consent (see Appendix A). Second, participants completed a demographics page (see Appendix B), which included biographical information, immigration information, and family information. This questionnaire took approximately two minutes to complete. Third, the participants were interviewed with a semi-structured interview (see Appendix C). The interview was comprised of non-intrusive, open-ended questions about their experiences being single and their thoughts and opinions on marriage in the Asian Indian community. The interview took, on average, approximately one and one-half hours, with the shortest interview being forty-five minutes and the longest lasting three and one-half hours. Participants were given the option to withdraw at any point in the study, but all ten completed the study protocol. No adverse effects were reported by any participants during or after the interview.

Each participant was assigned a case number. The case number was the only identification used on response materials. No identifying information was attached to the

transcriptions or audiotapes. Interviews were audio taped to contribute to the authenticity

of the study. The principal investigator and a professional transcriber transcribed

interviews. All identifying information was removed before audiotapes were given to the

transcriber. Consent forms were kept in a separate locked file from the interview data

collected. They were removed from any participants' responses in order to maintain

confidentiality. All audio recordings, interview transcripts, and other data collected from

the participants will be maintained in confidence by the investigator in a locked file

cabinet for seven years after the completion of the study. After seven years, the principal

investigator will destroy all research material.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Born to Be a Bride

Seventy percent (70%) of women interviewed expressed that the Indian

community had a strong expectation for them to get married. This belief was conveyed

in a number of ways. A number of participants stated that their families and communities

expected that women should be married because their culture did not allow for straying

from this prescribed path. They offered a contrast between women raised in the United

States of European descent. Meena stated,

> There's a lot more cultural need to get married. It's like the one path that's
> acceptable for women as they get older. I don't think every American woman
> feels the need that they have to get married. I mean I think it's harder to stay
> single, but it's accepted if you want to. That's not really accepted in the Indian
> community.

Another woman stated that it was difficult for her non-Indian friends to relate to

her even though they had grown up with her. She said it's hard for her Caucasian friends

to understand the pressure. Vandana offered,

> I have a lot of non-Indian friends from my college and they've been dating and
> stuff and there's literally been no pressure. Their parents may say something once
> or twice. But they're off the hook and they don't understand the pressures that I
> get and why. So they don't really understand why I would want to get married
> and why my parents are on my case, or my relatives would be on my case. It's
> just Indian culture – you live with it. My non-Indian friends don't understand.

In addition to feeling compelled to follow a cultural norm, many women expressed feeling like they did not have a narrative for what their lives would look like if they remained single. Fifty percent (50%) of women stated that some of their difficulty was based on the lack of single Indian women who could be role models. Monica offered,

> It's just an understanding. This is just what you need to do and as the age goes up and all your younger family members are getting married, you feel it. You just know. Because it's so engrained in your head. Because your parents might talk about other children, other people's children. You know that it applies to you as well. I have no idea what my life would look like as a single adult woman. I have no examples and nothing to look at. I have no idea what that would look like. It's just not an option. Indian women come out of the womb ready to be a bride. That is their goal in life. That is the Indian woman's role in life -- to become a bride. That is the only thing. That is the only thing for a woman. We just all have to get married. That's what your role is. Indian women were born… literally they were brought into this world to be brides. They were born to be brides.

Not only did other participants express this sentiment, they also reported that their parents felt that a woman's role in Indian society was to get married. Viddhi spoke about her mom,

> My mom, if I were married, would be like, "Oh she's normal or whatever." For them it's important that I'm married. That I fit into, "You're supposed to be married. She's like get married and then pursue your dreams. It's just this thing. It should be a priority – like that's what people do.

Another common thread in many of these women's stories was the limited choice they had in deciding what they wanted to do with their lives. Three women explicitly stated that after women obtained their degrees, their family and family friends often expect marriage as the next step in their development. Lata described the following situation with her family,

> My aunt said, "Oh! Well my daughter is finishing school next year. So I'm trying to find her a husband." And I looked and said, "She's 19." And my aunt had said

well she's finishing school next year so I need to start looking for a husband. Because she'll be done with her exams next year and basically within the year after that, it's like well she needs to get married. I don't see it as much anymore where girls are getting married straight out of high school or being pulled out of school. You know that happened to our grandmothers. But there is that you have to have your degree and you need to get a job or ability to get a job and do something. Because there is that, but still… Okay you have a degree and you have to get a job so now you have to get married… Like what more? What more could you want? You have a degree, you have a job. Now you get married and you have kids…. For my mom, it's that I'm the oldest and you have all these expectations for your child. They're going to grow up and they're going to have a good job and they're going to get married and they're going to have a family.

Reena echoed this sentiment by bluntly stating, "There seems to be very little tolerance of choice in general." The overall theme expressed by the majority of the women in this study was that their communities and families did not offer, nor allow, exploration of different lifestyles besides marriage.

Worry About Parents

The women interviewed did not appear as concerned about their own emotional and mental health as they did about their parents. Four out of the ten women expressed concern over their parents' wellbeing. They expressed various worries. One source of anxiety was if their parent knew that they had been in a relationship that ended. The participants stated that they felt breaking up with their boyfriend had a profound effect on their parents. Often the parents were devastated to find that their daughter was not going to get married to their boyfriend. Viddhi explained this by saying,

The second I bring someone up, they think I'm marrying them. So they start seeing me as a married woman. And I don't want to disappoint them in that if I'm going through these experiences in order to find the right person, to lead my parents on. In the same the way you might lead a guy on. To get their hopes high.

Two of the women specifically mentioned that they worried about getting their parents hopes up by telling them about a relationship, only to break up with the man and, in turn, hurt their parents. Rashmi echoed this sentiment,

> I just don't want to get [my mom's] hopes up. Because she's at that point now where she's wants to know everything, but she wants it to go somewhere too…I don't feel like getting [my parents'] hopes up by telling them everything that I've done with [the guys I've dated]. Like how many dates I've been on. I mean I also kinda don't want her to know about the actual number of guys that I've dated because I think that would start to worry her too. Not in the fact that I've dated so many guys, but like why isn't it going anywhere?

Although her parents accepted that Rashmi was dating, they had a very difficult time when a relationship ended instead of resulted in marriage. Rashmi's concern was that her parents would take this to mean that there was something wrong with her. She stated that it was difficult to feel that she was in a position where she was hurting her parents.

Another concern was regarding what community members would say to their parents if these women remained single. Their fear was that community members would further exacerbate the concern their parents had that there was something wrong with their unmarried daughters. Lata reported,

> I get worried that [my parents] think, "Oh, well she's 30 and she's not married. What's going on there? Like I don't want to go so far as to say "What's wrong with her?" But I do think that to some extent, most Indian aunties, have this expectation of the children of the community. It's like "She's this age and why isn't she married yet?" I hope to God that no one ever says to my mom, your daughter's 30. Why isn't she married yet? Oh what's wrong with her that she's not married yet?

The women interviewed voiced concern that their parents were going to be shamed in the community because of their unmarried status.

Three women stated that they had concerns about their parent's state of general discontentment because they were unmarried. They spoke about the difficulty in seeing their family hurt. Vandana stated,

> I think [my remaining single] just makes my parents really unhappy. [My relatives] probably [would feel] the same. They would be really unhappy. They would be unhappy, but also keep bothering my parents about it, and that's one thing I would definitely hate. They'll just get on my parents' case. You know your parents feel bad. And you never want your parents to feel bad because of you.

Overall, the women expressed concern and a desire to protect their parents from the impact of their romantic lives.

Parents' Success Equals Married Daughter

In addition to the concern the women expressed that their parents and the Indian community did not consider the "job" of the parent complete until they were married, ninety percent (90%) of women stated that their parents felt that they could not rest and relax until their children were married. Each one of these women lived alone, was employed, and was financially independent of her parents. Kalpana said,

> I think it's the culture and even though I'm self-sufficient and I support myself, they have it in their head. I think it will be a big relief when I get married. They've done their job. I'm married. They can exhale, relax.

When asked to explain their thoughts on why parents were bound to this duty, Monica expressed a cultural factor by saying, "That's how parents define their success in raising their children, if they can get them married off. It's so engrained in our culture."

According to some participants, their parents did not only wish that their job was complete, but they also hoped that someone else could soon take on the role of taking

care of their daughters. Parents' intentions were rooted in a desire for their daughter to

be taken care of after the parents had passed away. Viddhi offered,

> My mom constantly says "Ok this is not acceptable anymore. You must be
> married." It's November. December. Because I think my mom sees the end of
> the year like "Oh another year has passed and Viddhi hasn't been married. What
> am I going to do?" She panics. And it's pretty severe. I think marriage for my
> parents implies that someone's taking care of me. Weird to think that I can't take
> care of myself or to think that after marriage I am taken care of.

Separation-Individuation

Eighty percent (80%) of the participants reported that they felt getting married

would have a dramatic impact on how they were perceived and how they would be

treated. Many of these women were certain that only after getting married would they be

treated as an adult, which included getting more respect and having more autonomy.

Vandana conveyed this theme by speaking about a difference in making decisions after

marriage,

> I guess in a way they perceive you as an adult….You're making your own
> decisions more. I think it's actually from the relatives. So as soon as you
> marry…. You have your own house, so they'll be like "Oh we need to contact her.
> We can't go to the parents to ask something."

Some women stated that they would be considered more complete and therefore

respected after marriage. Rashmi said, "They're gonna treat me more as a whole."

Viddhi echoed this saying, "My family will treat me much better after I get married. My

family will respect me more."

Meena stated that the treatment would not only change on intangible items likes

autonomy and respect, but that the Indian culture was designed for life to start after

marriage. This was an inherent difference in the treatment of married and unmarried

woman. She stated,

In India it's even more that your life doesn't start until you get married. At least in my family. So yeah they all got married really young. They all were living at home and they didn't have as much of a life until they got married. For rituals and customs they do [treat unmarried women differently]. Like they're separate rituals for married women versus unmarried women."

The sentiment that life would "start" after marriage was echoed by multiple participants. Lata shared a story between her and her boss, also an Asian Indian woman, about not making a commitment to furniture before getting married.

[I said] I've ordered furniture or I'm ordering furniture so I need to go check something out. And she's like oh that's great what did you buy? Oh coffee table and dining table…. I'm not close to her. But she said something like don't spend too much on it. Because what if you meet someone soon and you get married and you move in together. Then what are you going to do with your really nice table?

Another theme that emerged was that these women still felt that their families treated them as children. Analogous to the way a parent would treat a young child, Reena often felt she was reprimanded for not doing what her parents asked. She stated that this would not be acceptable behavior if she were married. Reena shared a story when she was set up with a man without her knowledge,

So my parents as a result, they set me up on this date. I didn't know. I went to temple with them. They were like, "Don't get angry." I was like, "What am I not going to get angry about?" and they were like, "Ok this guy and his family are downstairs." I was such an asshole I refused to even go down there. My mother was so angry with me. And I was like, "You created this situation not me and I will not go down there and I will not talk to these people and you need to go down there and tell them the truth." And so my sisters were so angry. They were angry at me 'cause they were like, "You didn't behave yourself."

Not only was the situation charged because it involved a set up with a potential spouse, but the conflict arose as a result of Reena showing some separation and independent thought from her parents.

Another common complaint was that the women felt that their personal space was invaded. Monica stated her frustration stemmed from a boundary violation of personal space after her mom, unknown to her, set her up with a man. She spoke about the lack of separation allowed until she was married:

> I said, "Why do you think it's appropriate to give your friends my information and allow them to ask me about my personal life?" I go, "If this auntie had called you and asked about [my sister's] information because she heard that my sister and her husband were having marriage problems, would you give her her phone number?" And I was like no because that would be inappropriate. So why do you think it's appropriate to give your friend my number… and to pry into my personal life? My parents don't see this as a boundary thing. They think that you're a child until you get married. I told my mom that why do you think that….I go, "My personal life is that I'm single and just the way you respect that boundary for my sister because she's married you should for me. You know I'm an adult still."…. I just think that you're not considered an adult until you're married. You're not considered having your own life until you're married. You are still your parents' daughter. You're still a child. I mean you're not taken seriously. You're still connected to your parents. So you're not an individual self.

Other women stated that the invasion of personal space was not limited to parents or relatives. Often members of the Indian community would ask information or give advice that felt inappropriate to the participants interviewed. Viddhi offered,

> There's one woman who's like that and she's the lady who threads my eyebrows….I only met her once, but she was really into my business. Like, "You should be married. You should be married." At first it was, "You should be yourself. You should be yourself." And no one can really guess how old I am and then I told her and then she's like, "Oh well you should be getting married." She was just like "You should be married."

One woman, Lata, represented a minority opinion in this pool of participants. She had mixed emotions about the boundary violation. She stated,

> It's very flattering and very comforting to know that there's someone looking out for you… It really is parental in that sense and this is just what comes along with it. So it's really nice and I feel very loved. You're kinda frustrated because

you're like why are you meddling in my life or why do you want to do this? But I'm kinda like whatever…. There is a good feeling even though sometimes it's a little bit annoying.

Overall the participants reported that they felt that after marriage they would be perceived as calm, settled, and normal. They expressed that this would then in turn allow them to have a life separate from their parents as adults. Sushma represented this viewpoint,

> I'd think I'd be normal or sensible. In that I think people in my community would be like, "She's calmed down finally." I'm often told the expression or I've often been asked, "Are you done sowing your wild oats?" So yeah I would think they would think that I've finally calmed down. So that would be part of their reaction.

Conflict in Family Relationships

Eight of the ten participants stated that their unmarried status had created conflict for them in their relationships with their relatives and friends. Most of the conflict manifested itself in arguments between the participant and their respective parents. Reena said that a consequence of the focus on marriage was that conversations with her parents were limited to why she was not married and how to get her married. Often times she said that her parents were quite mean as a result of their frustration with the situation. She said,

> They sort of always say you need to get married. I'm telling you, you need to get married, but I was like whatever. I mean it's not like I'm financially dependent. It's more psychological. Mostly it's just verbal harassment. Never ending. My mom is more mean about it actually cause she's sort of like you're old. You're getting old. You don't look young anymore. You're getting fat. Like she'll say more personal things. More personalized things like that.

> Although not all women described the same level of verbal harassment, they stated that their relationships with their parents had the same focus on marriage. They

stated that it had become difficult to talk to their parents about anything else without the conversation becoming tense and devolving into an argument. Monica talked about wanting to involve herself in other activities, but stated that her parents felt that it was a distraction from getting married and then would get angry with her. Monica shared,

> Like when I would tell them that I was going to take a painting class again. My mom was like, "Nothing doing!! Now only thing you find is a husband." Like completely besides herself. Absolutely throwing up her arms. Like, "I don't know what else to do with this girl. She has to find a husband now." I finally told my parents that you if continue to behave like this and ask these questions and pry, it's going to end up straining our relationship. And I'm not going to want to come home, and I'm not going to want to be with you guys alone. And I'm not going to want to talk to you guys and I'm not going to want to see you. And we had a big blow out. They have their eruptions every now and then, when they can't contain themselves that they're so upset that I'm not married yet.

Four of the ten participants stated that often times the conflict was not always overt. Their parents and relatives would infuse them with guilt about getting married. Family members often would communicate their desire to have a wedding ceremony or the desire to attend one last ceremony before dying to induce this guilt. Lata spoke about an experience with her mother in which she felt pressure to get married out of guilt because she was keeping her mother from having these experiences:

> She'll say it in the typical, as now my friends refer to as the "Indian mother." Like it's all about them somehow. But I really want grandkids. I want to host your party or I want to do this. Not that I want to say that it's all about her but there's times when it is about her. "You're my daughter and I want to have this and this and this for you. Oh but I want to host this party for you in the backyard and… Or we're getting the house redone, so how am I going to do that?"

Sonia stated that she experienced guilt, not only from her immediate family but also her relatives in India. She expressed that death was often something that was hung over her to induce guilt. She stated,

My grandfather's like…he'll tell me like, so do you have any news for me? Or I'm waiting for some news. I'm waiting for you to tell me. And I think in his mind, alright well I'm getting older and I may die soon. You're really the only wedding I'm going to go to. Which is… which is hard. Because I'm close to my grandfather. And I understand where he's coming from. But I'm not going to get married because you want me to get married.

Every participant in the study stated that they had extremely heated arguments with their parents about being set up with a potential spouse. They expressed frustration on multiple levels. One source of frustration frequently expressed was that women were completely unaware of their contact information being distributed to community members, newspapers such as *India Abroad*, or dating websites like Shaadi.com. Sushma offered,

My dad wrote an ad in *India Abroad* when I just graduated from college. Imagine stating my height, my major, the year that I graduated from college and what town I'm from. In that kind of an ad, like, do you ever see any Indian girls my height majoring in journalism and art history from University of Connecticut? There were 7 people who graduated with that major my year. I mean it was like 'Are you crazy? Why would you do that?' A - Why would you do that? And B - why would you do that period without even talking to me? You know… yeah so I was 21 at the time and, "Are you completely out of your mind? There's no way I'm getting married right now. Like there's no way." So yeah it did cause a lot of conflict. My dad brought it up again. And then I like completely blew up again. And then my dad wrote, we exchanged a few emails. And there was the, "Do you want to be 72 living with 72 cats?" I was like, "You've got to be kidding me."

Not all parents would set their daughters up without their knowledge. However, ninety percent (90%) of the women were set up or forced to go out with someone. Eight of the ten participants often felt that they were being forced into a situation that did not make sense for them. Kalpana talked about wanting to date people that she met more organically, but that her mother wanted her to get married so she agreed to let her pass on her email. She expressed her frustration:

My mom recently she gave my email to some guy. And he emailed me and I googled him and I saw his picture and oh my god! And I emailed the picture to my mom and she didn't know what to say either. He lives in Boston, but still how am I supposed to go to coffee with a guy in Boston? And then my mom tried to justify …She's like you're being so superficial. Yeah maybe he's a nice guy and then it was horrible!

Another source of conflict between women and their parents arose from the

pressure to marry quickly after meeting a man. Two of the women who endorsed this

conflict stated that it came from their siblings and other relatives besides their parents.

Viddhi talked about the pressure she felt when she was dating someone:

It depends on the person. If they're not Indian, they're not pressuring me. And I haven't dated someone who's Indian more recently. But there is… there's pressure… Mostly just my parents… and my sisters also. Well less direct. But if I am dating someone, my older sister will get into that mode of… "So are you serious? You know if he's not serious, you should just let it go." Or, "if you know it's not going to work, just let it go." Or there's intensity of – I don't know.

Two out of ten women stated the only time there was not pressure to get married

was when they were involved in interracial relationships. The lack of pressure

communicated an implied message that interracial marriage was not an option. The two

women who experienced this stated that their parents made it very difficult when they

were dating someone who was not Indian. Sushma said,

[My father] made it a point to make [my Caucasian ex-boyfriend] really uncomfortable in the house. Which was not cool. He would have a serious problem. I just don't think he'd really acknowledge that person's existence much and be really rude and obnoxious.

Birth order, affecting when the women should get married, was another source of

tension between parents and the women. Sixty percent (60%) of women reported that the

order in which they were born was the order in which they should be married. Vandana

said that in her case, her younger sister had been dating someone and wanted to get

married first. She offered,

> My parents have always believed that the oldest daughter should always get
> married first. The fact that it came out that my sister was dating someone and she
> wanted to get married and my brother-in-law came over and asked for the hand in
> marriage. Before they said yes they asked me if I was okay with it. And I had
> given my okay a while ago. After she got married though, it was like now you're
> next in line. Or like now you don't have a choice, you have to get married.

Others echoed this message in saying that although there was an expectation

about following birth order, an allowance was made for younger siblings to get married if

they had found someone. However, after the younger sibling was married there was no

room left for the elder sister to remain unmarried. Viddhi stated,

> After my older sister got married it was a big deal. That was their whole
> confrontation with me – you should have a husband. You should have a big house
> and you should have kids. That's what you should have. And you shouldn't be
> participating in your hobbies. You should be thinking about marriage and
> whatever comes next, comes next. I think it's because I was next. I don't think
> my younger sister ever experienced the amount of pressure that I did. Like now
> I'm older and unmarried. And now my baby sister's married and I'm not. So for
> them it's like what are you doing with your life. I SHOULD be married was the
> idea...And there was no looking left or right from her. There was no why are you
> spending…It actually became literal. Like if you spend time going to your
> painting class then you won't be spending time towards getting married.

Despite the fact that eighty percent (80%) of the participants reported tension and

conflict between them and their parents as a result of being unmarried, most women

stated they felt the need to continue pursuing what they wanted. Viddhi expressed this

sentiment by saying,

> I still am carrying around some amount of the weight that comes with the guilt of
> not doing exactly what my parents want. And it's dramatically less because I've
> made a decision that I'm going to let myself be happy and I know that at the core
> my parents want me to be happy and that's enough for me to propel myself to do
> what I want. But there's a significance that I'm making my parents adjust. And I

have to say it's gotten a lot easier where I can see clearly what I'm doing and the decisions that I'm making. Which is light years better than it was, but I can't say my parents have a different life than me and it's fine. My parents have a different life than me and I hate that I have to disappoint them. I don't love that. It's a reality I'm willing to take. That I realize it's my doing but I also realize that there's no other way for me. It's like I'm not stepping on their world, but that's how it feels to them.

Conflict in Friendships

Forty percent (40%) of the women reported that having an unmarried status resulted in conflict between them and their friends. As with their parents, there were multiple sources of disagreement. Sonia stated that she experienced clashes with some of her friends when she was dating someone who was biracial, African American and Caucasian. She offered,

> She was a good friend. She was all about being with Indian people. I think it's your life. We were very close until I dated the half black, half white guy. We drifted apart. [She said] All you preached about was being Indian. Yeah, but I'm still American. My parents can play that role. She judged me and I don't judge people. Granted everyone has their opinion. She was like, "I just don't know who you are."

Forty percent (40%) also expressed that there was an unspoken distancing between them and their married friends. They expressed that they felt like a minority and lacked a common bond since their friends were in another social circle that no longer included them. Monica stated,

> It's just more that society is changing because all of my friends are settling down and getting married. It's its own pressure in that you become in the outgroup. Because all of sudden you're edged out, edged out. Like it's all of your friends, then half of your friends. And then you're seeing everybody else's like changing and going forward and getting married. And you realize that you're in the minority when you used to be in the majority. You're getting edged out. You're getting edged out. And other people's lives are progressing and you get pressure from that. A lot of pressure from that.

Two out of the four women who expressed some discord between their friends

also stated that their married friends were the worst offenders of criticism and, as a result,

a great number of friendships were being ruined. Reena shared,

> I think there is a lot of social pressure especially I realized as I've gotten into my
> 30's where people sort of judge you [being unmarried]. They're like, "Oh my
> god! You're so old. How come you're not with someone?" I think that surprised
> me - sort of as you are getting older people have a lot more judgment. I think
> when they find out how old I am there is always the, "How come you're not with
> someone? Aren't you worried about not being with someone?" It's really funny I
> actually find the most judgmental people to be married people - friends, more
> married friends.... And so to me I mostly I find my married friends are like oh
> you're getting older you need to get serious about finding someone you don't want
> to wind up alone. I actually find they are the people who are most annoying.

Cultural Differences between Dating and Arranged Marriages

Sixty percent (60%) of participants expressed that their parents did not understand

the process of dating and exploring the possibilities of different partners before settling

on marriage. Viddhi stated that the way spouses were selected in India, during her

parents' generation, and even currently, is very different. She explained half-jokingly,

> In India there's cell phone… They'll send you text messages of Biodata. My
> friend told me. It was like buy a phone and get free text service. Or it was related
> to the phone…like if you get a phone, you get free dating service. What an
> incentive! Bundle package – marriage and cell phone in one.

Other women spoke more seriously saying it was difficult that their parents had

been raised in a culture and time where people did not date. Monica reported that her

parents had difficulty understanding the purpose of dating. She expressed,

> Even if my parents know I'm dating someone, they don't know what that means.
> They don't know to the extent to what that is…They don't know how involved a
> boyfriend is in your day to day life. They don't know that when you're dating
> someone that practically means that you're living with them. And that it's like a
> marriage.

Along the same lines, Rashmi stated that it was difficult to talk to her parents about dating because of the cultural and generation gap. This sentiment was echoed by all the women. She stated that her parents often did not understand why relationships would end. She offered,

> There's like specific situations that she's not going to understand. This is why it didn't work or things like that that I can't tell her. Because what was I going to say? Because deep down I knew it wasn't real because you could tell if he wasn't committed to it, things like that. At the end, he ended up being… And finally one night at a bar, he went home with somebody else. Yeah so like that's how it ended. Yeah like so it's a story like that…. my mom would not like know how to react to that.

Sushma stated that it was equally awkward for her talking about dating with her parents now because it was taboo in her house growing up. She said,

> When I was in high school - it was not even a question for me to even possibly date anyone. It was just not happening at all. Like I don't even think they used the word dating. The terms boyfriend and girlfriend were forbidden in our house. We were not allowed to talk... like I couldn't even say my friend's boyfriend.

The combination of dating being taboo and parents not understanding dating relationships led women to have secret relationships. Ten out of ten (100%) of the women interviewed stated that they had had significant relationships that they had hidden from their parents because they felt their parents would not understand dating, pressure them to get married (if the man was Indian), or pressure them to break up (if the man did not meet the parents' standards). Kalpana stated that she did not want her parents to know that she was in a relationship. She expressed her reluctance,

> The only person they've known about was the guy that I was engaged to… I'm so happy that they didn't know...Yeah I think it was just that I just didn't want them to know. I think it was just a relief. Like for example, I went to Puerto Rico with my ex-fiancé, but like my parents didn't know at the time that I was dating anyone. But answering some questions like where would you be staying? I'll be staying, sharing a hotel room…things like that. I don't want them to know that I'll be sharing a room. I don't know what they would say. I don't know and I

don't want them to know either. It's mutual. I don't want them to know because it would be really awkward. And they still want me to get married relatively soon.

Like Kalpana, Sonia also stated that she did not want to be inundated with questions and comments about her relationships. She and the other women kept significant portions of their lives a secret because they were involved with a man. Nine of the ten women stated the motivation for keeping their dating relationships a secret was that they were uncertain about getting married. She stated it was especially important to keep things a secret if she felt unsure about marrying the man. Sonia shared an experience when she dated a biracial man that she was unsure about marrying:

> He was another biracial person - half black, half white… So we got into a relationship for a year. I did not tell my parents. I told my brother and sister-in-law. They met him. I couldn't tell my parents because I wasn't sure and I always thought if I was bringing home a man that wasn't Indian I need to be sure... So why if I'm unsure should I tell my parents? But he was also like if you don't introduce me to your parents as your man I'm not going to be sure. Then in 2008 before I turned 30 I met my last ex-boyfriend. And my parents knew about him immediately. If I was dating an Indian guy I'm like, "Oh I'm seeing so and so." I would tell them. If it was an Indian guy yes [I would tell my parents]. If it was a non-Indian guy, I did at times. So there were spurts in my life that I lived a double life. We went on vacation and I totally lied to my parents. We had gone to Mexico and I told my parents I was with my best girl friend. I think why have to fight? Why have to convince them if I'm not sure? [My dad] just doesn't understand. My family looks at horoscopes and stuff. They are about destiny and we can't control our destiny.

Vandana was the only women who stated that although she wanted to marry most of the men she had dated, she had hidden it from her parents because she was not permitted to date. She offered,

> Most Indian women, at least the ones that I know, aren't really allowed to tell their parents that they're dating. They can say they went to meet someone and can say I had one date or I met someone. But not that I'm openly dating someone for a couple years and I'm gonna go ahead. [In my past relationships,] if either

my parents or his parents would have known, we would have just been expected to get married and not get to know each other.

Despite the pressure these women faced, only two out of the ten of them stated that they considered an arranged marriage. One woman stated that her mother has considered the option, but she would never agree to an arranged marriage. Seventy percent (70%) of the women stated that their parents would not expect their daughters to marry someone they did not know. Vandana, one of two women who was considering an arranged marriage, stated that given her age was approaching forty she had plans to go to India to get an arranged marriage. She shared her past experience of working with a marriage bureau in India:

> We went to India – it wasn't for the sole purpose of it. It was actually for shopping for my sister's wedding. And in the midst of it, my dad was like let's just see if something could work out for you. And so they hooked it up through an Indian marriage bureau thing. But we didn't actually get to do anything 'cuz I just got sick. I've done in the past… I went to meet a bunch of guys either my parents and/or one of my parents and my uncle who lives in India would come with me. And then they would talk to the guy and then…You're sent to a separate room, sort of, type of thing. And then you chat with the guy. You have no more than 15 minutes tops. It's really limited. It's worse than speed dating because it's just like you're on this pressure because someone's watching you. Or like you know they're outside. So it's very limited. And if you say you want to meet the guy again, it's [with] family again. It's not like you can go out on a real date with the person. So then you would meet them again. And then at that point…the third time you would have an engagement. That's just how India works.

Effects of Age

Out of the ten participants interviewed, three of them were under the age of thirty. Each of the women under thirty stated that they hoped and planned to be married by thirty because of the implications of being unmarried past the age of thirty. Sushma referred to thirty as the "evil age." Kalpana stated that she anticipated her parents being

extremely worried if she was thirty and single because of what she had seen happen with

her other female friends. She shared,

> One family friend didn't get married until she was 35 and her family was pretty
> conservative and she actually married a Korean guy. And her dad, right when she
> hit 30 to 35, he started fasting.

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the women over thirty expressed concern about their

age being a limiting factor in meeting someone. Monica stated that the selection of men

left was limited, and her mother often said to her in her native tongue, "The sludge at the

bottom of a pot is what is remaining for my selection." Sonia echoed this and said that

she sometimes shared her father's concern:

> I am getting older. And the older I get the less pool of people there are. So I
> think [my father] doesn't want me to settle, but he's like you are getting older and
> it becomes harder. What are you going to do?

No one had stated that age had affected their expectations of what they wanted in

a spouse. However, seven of the ten women stated that as a result of their getting older

their parents had changed what they hoped for in a son-in-law. Three of the seven stated

that their parents were open to them marrying any male as long as they were not Muslim.

A fourth woman said that her parents were also open to anyone as long as they were not

Muslim or African-American. The fifth woman, Kalpana, stated that her parents had

originally wanted her to marry someone who was Indian, but after her sister's marriage to

an Indian male they are strongly encouraging her to marry someone who is not Indian

because of the perception that non-Indian families are less demanding. She stated,

> They're pretty open now because they don't want to deal with in-laws. They're
> pretty open now and one of our family friends married this German guy and she's
> just really happy and they see that. And my mom is like, she, our family friend,
> doesn't have to share her daughter during holidays because his parents don't care.

They're like, "Oh you can go to her place for the holidays." You know things like that. So family expectations are less if they're not Indian.

Two of the seven women's families came from the state of Gujarat. Both women stated that their families had eased up on the expectations of what they wanted, but that they were still fairly strict. Vandana and Viddhi stated that their parents had previously wanted them to marry someone Gujarati (i.e. someone whose family was from the state of Gujarat). Viddhi's mother, moreover, had initially wanted Viddhi to marry someone from four specific villages in Gujarat. Viddhi stated,

> What she did let go of, however, was that in our community you're supposed to marry someone from four specific villages. And so ever since we grew up, she and all the people in our villages have been talking about who are the suitable matches in those villages. The fact that she gave that up was a pretty BIG deal...First from the four villages, then Gujarati, then Indian. Then you're at a whole different level of existence. Then you risk someone not showing up at your wedding in fact.

Vandana explained that with her age her parents still want her to marry someone who is Hindu and Indian but no longer expect her to find someone Gujarati.

Three women's parents had not adjusted their expectations with age. Reena stated that, despite her age, her parents were still expecting her to marry someone from the Brahmin caste and a vegetarian. Lata also stated that her parents wanted her to marry someone Hindu and Indian, and they were still expecting her to do so. Sushma stated that her mother and father disagreed on the ethnicity, race and religion of her future spouse. She was the only one who stated that her parents disagreed. She stated,

> My mom doesn't want me to have wrinkles. So she wants me to marry someone who has a lot of money. Actually she'd prefer that they not be Indian. When I was in high school, I mean not high school, college, she emailed me an article, "Why Indian Men Make Awful Lovers." It was from a feminist magazine. It was about a woman who was providing her point of view about how she thought that

Indian guys were coddled, and not chivalrous, and not like selfless and giving. And instead used to seeing women as a caretaker. My dad, however, is very uncomfortable just… very very uncomfortable…with the idea of me not marrying someone Indian. He's just very uncomfortable.

Shame

A theme that emerged from fifty percent (50%) of these woman's stories was that there was a great deal of shame they, and their family, experienced as a result of them being unmarried. Parents tried to avoid or change the topic when community members or relatives asked why their daughter was not married. Monica stated,

I'll hear the family in India saying, "How's that going? Is she going to get married soon?" My mom will somewhat deflect the question because I'm sure it puts them in an embarrassing position too.

These women said that being unmarried goes against a cultural norm that affects the way the community sees their families. Reena said that although she does not want to get married she sees the difficulties that her parents face. She continued on to explain the emphasis that community appears to have on external appearances:

There was actually this period of time two years ago where I just felt so sorry for my parents that they were just so unhappy…. My mom was like I'm so shamed in the community that my girls aren't married. And everyone says I'm a bad mother. It just seems shallow. People, it seems to me, are more concerned about status. I feel like there is a lot of emphasis in the Indian community on class and status and how much money you're making and what type of job you have and things like that... My perception of marriage is it is a status thing. You have to invite everyone [to the wedding] and feed everyone and if not, they will talk about you. For my parents... they feel ashamed because they have unmarried children. It's very class oriented.

Fifty percent (50%) of the women reported that shame not only affected the perception of the family, but it created a great deal of internal pressure. Like the other women, Rashmi stated that she had internalized the shame and feels that she needs to get married now that others in her social circle are getting married. She expressed,

[I put] more pressure on myself. I think this is the first year I've seen people my age or close to me getting married. I think that's probably the biggest thing. Because up until now, we've always had people in relationships…you have a boyfriend or you don't have a boyfriend. Everybody goes back and forth. It's just finally seeing, yeah, people my age getting married…. So that's kind of something that puts pressure on it. I think more women put the pressure on themselves more than they actually get it from their parents.

Factors Affecting Desirability

Eighty percent (80%) of the women interviewed stated that they were told and felt that they were less likely to get married the older they were. Vandana spoke briefly about a man who speaks in the Indian community at conferences for young professionals. She referred to him as "Vijay Uncle, the coolest Desi uncle in America." According to her, Vijay Uncle encouraged women to ensure they were married before the age of thirty because he said that the likelihood of them getting married after thirty was close to zero. Part of this was related to the ability to have children. Reena stated,

Actually my parents have said to me that soon I'm not going to be marriageable. I guess when you're 39 the health risks increase for having a kid with genetic diseases so that's why. So they're like if your 39 no one is going to want to marry you because you're so old, and no one is going to want a kid with Down Syndrome.

Another common factor that emerged affecting how likely these women were to be married was what region of India they came from. Three out of the ten women stated that there was a significant cultural difference when they dated someone from a different state in India, or more generally, if they dated someone from the South when they were from the North or vice versa. Meena called out these differences by saying,

I think that makes a difference because of the language that I speak. And also my culture. I think – I'm Tamil – South Indian, so the culture is very different from North Indian people. I don't think it would matter to any guy because I'm not dating very traditional guys. But it's something that we discuss, because if he's

not Tamil then he won't speak my language. Things like that. It's language, culture, I think that comes up more because it's a very distinct culture and very distinct culture than any other part of India.

Another difference that arose as a result of coming from different states in India was whether or not the women were vegetarian. Three of the ten women reported that their relationships had been affected by the food they ate. Rashmi expressed,

> This sounds so stupid. But one guy was vegetarian. And like it's fine, but he just would get this face when I was eating meat. I'm like, "let me eat what I want to eat." And we were both fine with each other, as lifestyles. But it's kind of a big deal. I mean when you think about it, you eat every day with someone.

Education was also something that sixty percent (60%) of women believed to affect how seriously men considered them as potential spouses. Most women thought that education was a positive attribute, while two women reported that being too educated can cause conflict. Sonia relayed this by saying,

> Since I have a bachelor's degree, I don't think it is enough. I have dated enough guys where it is not enough. But education and profession I think is two prong…Like wow you're smart. But is she going to give it up when we have to have a family? I think being too educated can cause problems too.

Although every woman (100%) interviewed stated that she preferred to marry someone raised in the United States, two women stated that potential spouses from India likely looked at them favorably because they had U.S. citizenship. Reena, however, stated that being a U.S. citizen could negatively impact a woman's chances to get married:

> I have actually heard that in some cases where women are having arranged marriages here they don't want their sons to marry women who are US citizens. Because they think of them as being too independent…. My dad has actually said that to me, I don't want my son to marry an American woman because they would be like you girls.

Only two women stated that caste was a consideration in picking a match. However, the participants reported that their parents' occupation and financial status was the modern day replacement for caste. Fifty percent (50%) of women reported that their potential spouse cared about the woman's parents' status, as indicated by occupation and financial status. Rashmi stated,

> If a guy doesn't feel like they're up to [my parent's] status, or their parents aren't up to my parents' status, I've seen some hesitation, only when it's gotten more serious. It's obviously nothing when you've first started dating. But I've seen some hesitation before. I think it's more guy-girl. I think it's more the stereotype, the guy should be more.

Other minor issues included skin color, reported by twenty percent (20%), and parents' divorce, reported by one woman:

> He was asking about my parents. He literally stopped talking for a moment and took a sip of water. And I was like are you okay? And he was like, "I'm really surprised that you have this family situation." And he didn't know how to take it and in some way was like, 'you turned out okay' that type of thing, and was like I know friends whose parents are divorced and they're fine. And I was like I don't know what you think it would be like, like do you all of sudden have a different opinion of me because you found this out?

CHAPTER V

CASE STUDIES

In this chapter, three case studies are presented. The case studies describe the

lives of three women interviewed in this study. The case studies are reported following

the guidelines set forth by Yin (2003).   All names and identifying information has been

changed to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees and their families.

Case 1: Viddhi

Viddhi is a 36-year-old teacher who was raised in the United States. At the time

of the interview, Viddhi was single. Viddhi's parents were both raised in a village in

Gujarat. Viddhi's mother and father were married as a result of an arranged marriage by

Viddhi's grandparents. Her mother was married at the age of 10 to her father who was

17. Viddhi stated that the match was disputed due to a disparity between the levels of the

caste of her mother and father's caste level. She said that there was such a disagreement

that one side of the family stopped speaking to other and destroyed the mandap (the

Hindu equivalent of the altar where a couple is married). Her mother continued to live in

her parents' house until she turned 18 at which time she was sent to her husband's family

home.

Viddhi's parents moved to the U.S. shortly after she was born. Viddhi stated,

They came here for a better life. They weren't doing well financially in India and
my dad got the chance, by visa, to come to the U.S. Once he was able to collect
enough money for a plane ticket he took the chance and came. He borrowed
money after he came here for the rest of the family.

Viddhi stated that she was the second of three children. Although she was born in India, she lived in India for such a short time that she does not remember living there. Viddhi was raised in a small town in the Northeast. She stated that it was hard to for her growing up in a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood. She said she often felt like an outsider and wished that she had blonde hair and blue eyes like the other girls in her class.

When she got to an age where she was interested in boys and dating, she started to keep large parts of her life secret because her parents did not allow her to date. In hindsight, she said that her mother probably knew all along, but at the time she thought she was being sneaky and keeping it from her parents. Viddhi remembered meeting and dating her first boyfriend at Hindu camp at the age of 13. She had a couple of relationships in junior high and high school, but she did not date anyone seriously until college. At that time, she dated people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Some were Indian and Hindu, some were Indian and Christian, some were Caucasian. Viddhi spent a lot of time exploring different relationships, but never committed to a relationship for an extended period of time (i.e. longer than a couple of months).

After graduating college, Viddhi stated that she dated guys that were a mix of Indian and Caucasian. She reported that she continued to hide the specifics of the relationships from her parents and people in her community. She reflected that what her parents wanted of her was somewhat of a paradox. She offered,

> At first they were worried that I wasn't dating anyone. Like when I was in my 20's, mid to late 20's. They would assume I think that I was dating people. They would assume it, but not think about it in their conscious [*sic*]. It would be kind of in the back of their mind, something that they wouldn't really want to know about. In college technically I was not allowed to date. But now they're happy to

say, oh all your our friends' kids met their now husbands in college. Well great. [The paradox is] really funny.

Viddhi stated that unintentionally, her parents' prohibition of dating actually backfired. She did not have the experience of dating that she felt her peers had, and now that her parents want her to get married, she feels like she is not ready to settle on a partner because she does not feel that she was able to date the way others were.

Viddhi reflected that hiding parts of her life from her parents has been a very difficult part of their relationship, starting in high school. She commented that it may have been normative for a teenage girl to hide relationships from her parents, but she said unfortunately it has continued into adulthood. She offered,

> Dating was all done in private. My girlfriends and I had code names for my boyfriends while I was at home. So when we were talking on the phone, they had a girl's name. I'd drive, I'd go to the movies with him but I'd say I was to [sic] someone's birthday party. It was like this whole thing. And it still is now, even though I don't live with my parents. They didn't know about James, they didn't know about Vinod. They didn't know about Manoj and Sudeep for that matter. And these are all boyfriends that I had in my mid to late twenties and thirties!

Viddhi struggled with having a dual life for many years until recently she decided to confront her parents. She commented,

> I was hiding pieces of my life and it was like I was not being myself when I was talking to them. There was a point where all that was too hard for me. That's when I flew to my parent's house and it was my intervention to them I think. I said, "I might be dating people who are not Indian." It was more about that, but it was also that when I'm dating people I might be doing things or I might not be home. I wanted them to know that I'm not ignoring their phone calls. It was a lot easier after that. During that long conversation I had with my parents I said specifically, "There are going to be times when I'm with the person I'm dating and I might not be able to talk to you. Or there are times when you're asking questions and you may not want to hear about who I'm dating or what I'm doing, to be honest." And so that helped me feel like I could be myself. So when they call me and I'm at my boyfriend's house, I don't feel like, "Oh my god I have to go to the…." Cuz with Aaron, I have to say there were times when my parents would call and I spent a weekend with Aaron. I would go out to the backyard and

talk to them as if I wasn't there. And by then I was definitely in my 30's. So that just got to be too much.

Viddhi stated that she also struggled to manage a core conflict that emerged in many of her relationships. She wanted to date men and have the relationship develop, but at the same time she felt she could not fully integrate the men into her life and family because her parents would not approve of the non-Asian Indian men she was dating. What made the situation worse in her eyes was that her parents would try to set her up with men because they did not know she was in a committed relationship. Viddhi said that it was difficult to explain to her parents the importance of dating and spending time with a person. She was reluctant to tell them about men she was dating when they were Asian Indian because she knew they would her pester her to marry the man within weeks of meeting him.

Viddhi talked about being conflicted about getting married in general. She shared,

> I don't know [if] I want to get married. If I have to pick A or B, I want to get married. But do I want to get married now? I don't know. I don't know. I wish it were more clear so I can be out in this world and be like, "I'm getting married." And then the pieces of my life will fall together. But I'm not that person today. And I'm not unhappy about it actually. You know it happens to be where I am. I don't know why my emotional state is such that I'm ambivalent about marriage. I'm not ambivalent about the relationships that I do find myself in.

Despite being conflicted, Viddhi stated that she eventually wanted to get married. She stated that she hopes for a relationship slightly different than what she sees with her parents. She stated that she does not envision herself getting married through an arrangement as her parents did. She cannot imagine marrying someone within the Indian caste that her mother would like her to marry. She hopes for a more organic process:

So if I go on a date tomorrow, which I will, I'm going full force – with all of my heart. I wouldn't be dating otherwise. I wouldn't put my profile out there otherwise. Should I grow as a person, and the relationship grows as its own entity and this person I'm with also grows himself… and we all are in a place where I want to get married, the relationship wants to move up, and he wants to get married, then yes. That's the organic process that I dream of. And I have to admit when I am with my younger sister, husband and my parents –the five of us there [is] a point of real loneliness that something's missing in my life. But was it a sadness deep enough to warrant that I must get married? I don't believe I've reached that…because my life now is so fulfilling.

Viddhi reflected on the difference of what she hopes for in a marriage and what her parents have. She echoed many sentiments that are common among the Western culture of partnership, affection, and growth:

I feel like it's beyond a hope. It's a requirement that it has to be a loving relationship. I mean I'm really fortunate that my parents love each other in this day and age with divorces and things like that. But I still want something that's more loving, something that's even based on a deep respect of understanding where the other person is coming from and where they want to go and nourishing it…really feeding each other. That's important to me.

Case 2: Vandana

Vandana is a 38-year-old physician. At the time of the interview, she was eager to get married and was contemplating going to Indian and getting an arranged marriage through a marriage bureau.

Vandana's parents were married in India in the 1970's. Her father dreamt of coming to the U.S., but Vandana's paternal grandmother had told him that that he would have to be married before he left for the U.S. Her father and mother were married shortly thereafter and they both came to the U.S. in the late 1970s.

When reflecting on how she was raised, she said that her family tended to be a little stricter with her and her sister than the typical Asian Indian family. She offered,

They're probably more on the conservative side. It depends on the topic. Say like dating they're very conservative. If I was dating someone I couldn't openly tell them at any point. At this age I probably could to an extent, but it still

wouldn't be…I still couldn't say that I dating someone for a year and then I'm going to get married. It's just not talked about in my house. But say something like going out, staying out late or whatever, I think they've just gotten used to it. That's just how American life is. They're fine. If my sister or I come home at 3 o'clock in the morning they're not happy about it, but it's not like we get in trouble for it. That's what I mean [their level of conservatism] depends on the topic.

Vandana said that despite her parents' conservative attitude towards dating, she started dating in her early twenties. Vandana always dated Indian Hindu men because she was only interested in marrying someone who was Hindu and Indian. She elaborated that her parents wanted her to marry a Guajarati man, but she said that they have slowly started to accept that Vandana will likely marry someone who is Indian, not specifically Guajarati, and Hindu. She stated that she will never disclose to her parents, sister, or any member of her community that she has dated in the past. Vandana said that the expectation to marry someone after she starts dating someone is extremely strong in her community. She said this expectation pushes her to keep her dating life a secret. She said without this secret she would no longer have the freedom and flexibility to date and explore who she wants to marry. She added,

> My parents have always met the person that I've been dating, but they've never knew we were dating. They always thought we were friends. It's been not a problem, but the guys actually have the same issue. So the guys were not able to tell their parents either so it was actually really not a problem. If we were, if either my parents or his parents would have known, we would have just been expected to get married and not get to know each other. I think they know about it but they don't ask, so we don't tell them. They don't ask because that's not what they grew up with. It's sort of like if you don't know it, then you don't have to deal with it. Which doesn't make them bad parents, that's just how they were raised so why deal with it…Most Indian women, at least the ones that I know, aren't really allowed to tell their parents that they're dating. They can say they went to meet someone and can say I had one date or I met someone. But not "I'm openly dating someone for a couple years and then I'm gonna go ahead."

Vandana keeps her relationships a secret from both her family as well as her friends. She

said it is important to hide it from her friends because she and her ex-boyfriends haven't

wanted to involve their social circles in their relationship. Making a relationship public

would inevitably mean that others could get involved in their relationship, so she has

avoided not telling her friends. She explained another reason for keeping relationships a

secret:

> We didn't want all our friends to know we were dating. Because if they knew his
> parents or my parents, there's a possibility that it would get back to them. So in
> that sense and we also wanted to make sure we were serious before we
> announced, like we didn't want to say like, oh we've only met three times you
> know, whatever, and we need to tell everyone. We didn't think that was the case.
> We were just private and if he's not going to tell any of his friends, because he
> didn't want to tell any of his friends, I was like there's no way I could tell my
> girlfriends cause I wouldn't have them anymore.

> Vandana said many people would start to pressure her to get married if they knew

she was dating someone. Regardless, Vandana experiences a lot of pressure from her

family whether or not she is dating someone. She spoke about what her relative say:

> They pretty much outright say, "Why aren't you married? What are you doing to
> get married?" And if they don't say it directed to me, they direct it to my parents
> which I don't…I think that's wrong. My parents are trying, it's not like they're
> not. But eventually whenever it's going to happen, it's going to happen. Like I
> don't think anyone can really force it.

She said that it is even more frustrating because she has been hoping to find someone for

approximately fifteen years. She said that at times it is disheartening to think about what

she is really experiencing:

> You have your good days and your bad days. Your bad day is feeling negative,
> thinking that you really are too old. And especially living in a big city doesn't
> help. Basically in this city, the minute you hit 21, 25 whatever, there's basically 6
> major Indian organizations. They do a ton of singles events. So if you go out
> enough eventually you'll see the same people over and over and over. But
> eventually what basically ends up happening, and I think this ends up for both

guys and girls, I think they all think that there's too many options out there or they all think there's always something better. That seems to be the mentality. So even if you do meet someone, they'll be like maybe I'll find someone better so you can't really get into a serious relationship. And as you get older or times goes on, it's more so that way. Guys could always go younger. Like a 37-year-old guy, 38-year-old guy could date a 25 or 27-year-old. But a girl who's 37, 38 is not going to date a 27-year-old guy.

Vandana said that she feels bad about herself because of being single, but she also feels badly for her parents. Although her parents often pressure her about marriage, she said that there is a lot of support that they give her because they know that she's trying to get married and that she is quite depressed about being single. She said that they would probably pressure her more if she had not wanted to get married as much as she did. She said that she often feels a lot of guilt for putting her parents through such a hard experience. She said that it is trying during social events because she and her family feel that they have to justify why she is still single at such a late age. She reported,

> [The most difficult people are the ones where] either their kids are married or they're too young. So that's what it is. And especially the ones that are married. If their child dated someone and then got married, then they're like how come your daughter isn't married or she can't find someone? My parents will be like she is trying, or my mom will be like she's doing all this stuff and she's going out. It's not for lack of trying, but it's just it doesn't work out.

When talking about the pressure and its emotional consequence, she said she feels socially isolated because most of her Indian friends are married. There are a few that are single, but most of them are difficult to talk to because they are all in a depressed state. Her "American" (i.e. non Asian Indian) friends are mostly single, but it is difficult for her to feel supported by them because of the cultural difference. She stated,

> I have a lot of non-Indian friends from my college and stuff. And they've been dating and stuff and there's literally been no pressure. Their parents may say something once or twice but not that much. They're off the hook and they don't understand the pressures that I get and why I get the pressure. Why I would want

to get married, and why my parents are on my case or my relatives would be on my case. They don't really understand.

Vandana is hoping to be married in the next year or so. Vandana said that, at this point in her life, she wants to get married. When asked why, she said,

> It's time to settle down. I'm at a point in my career where I know my career is settled. Set. It would be nice to have someone to share your life with. Settle down and start a family. I'm getting too old. That's the main reason to get married.

She stated that she's been trying to meet people through social networks and all the Indian dating websites. She is also seriously considering going to India to get an arranged marriage through a marriage bureau. She said that she's ready to get married and wants to have children. Her description of what her and her parents wanted was different than what Viddhi reported. When asked who her parents wanted her to marry she said,

> They would be really happy with Indian, Hindu, Gujarati… like someone was who probably two or three years older than me. Professional, preferably a doctor but that's just because my dad's a doctor. In that it's not like other Indian parents who are just like "Oh no no no, our daughter or son has to marry someone who is a doctor." This is just because my dad is a doctor. So that's the ideal. With my mom, she is a little more open. She's like okay I can realistically understand if you marry someone who's non-Gujarati. See like with my dad it actually went into the subcaste of Gujarati. So like with my mom she was like all right, fine, ideally we'd like the guy to be Gujarati, but ideally at this age, it's fine. I think as I've gotten older it's been more lenient. Now they're just like we'll just be happy if you marry a guy who's Indian and Hindu. So I think they have gotten more open to the idea. Interracial marriages are not an option for me or my parents but I didn't expect the guy to be Gujarati. I've been like as long as the guy's Indian and Hindu I'm happy. I prefer North Indian to South Indian because that's just because I think most North Indians have the values and stuff, versus someone who's South Indian who may not speak Hindi and may not be able to communicate with my family and stuff like that.

When asked if remaining single for her was an option, Vandana's eyes welled up with tears. Her voice cracked as she said,

It's not something I want to think about. I'd really like to think that I won't be single for the rest of my life. Cuz I think it would just make me myself really unhappy and I definitely know that it would make my parents really unhappy. They would be really unhappy. My relatives would be unhappy, but also keep bothering my parents about it, and that's one thing I would definitely hate. I have to get married.

Case 3: Rashmi

The third case is of Rashmi, a 26-years-old female who is in marketing and has one older sister. At the time of the interview, Rashmi was not really interested in getting married, but planned and hoped to be married by the age of 30. She stated that it was important for her to focus on her career and go to graduate school before settling down.

According to Rashmi, her parents had had an arranged marriage. Although her parents' families had known each other, due to a large age difference, her parents never spent time together as children. When it came time for her father to get married, he was formally introduced to her mother. She said they went out three times and then decided that they wanted to be married. After they were married, her parents continued to live apart. Her father lived in the U.S. and her mother lived in India until she was able to obtain her visa to come to the U.S.

Rashmi said that she grew up with a strong cultural identity, but had to mix that with growing up in an extremely rural part of the United States. She stated that all of her peers were Caucasian, and she had to adapt because she grew up not being exposed to other Indian children, except for her trips to visit relatives.

Rashmi had some short-term high school boyfriends, but her serious relationships began in college. She described the beginning of her dating experience as:

I didn't really start dating Indian guys like maybe until the end of college. I dated a few non-Indians before then. My first like real serious boyfriend relationship, that was longer than 8 months, was after college. I do date a lot, just going out on couple times or dating for a month or two. I guess in college you don't date as

much because you don't know how to date. You're like let's go to the coffee shop or something like that. But more recently, in the past four years, I do tend to date a lot. Which I think in a big city it is easier to find people. I think in a smaller city it be would harder.

Rashmi tells her parents that she is dating, but she makes sure to never tell them about any details or when a relationship is beginning or ending. She stated that she has felt that her parents would like her to get married soon, but did not describe it as pressure. She feels like her mother's concern has grown recently that she's getting closer to thirty:

> My dad's big on schooling and work. He's big on the career type of stuff so no, I don't think it was an issue for them at this point. My mom sometimes… I think my mom's getting a little worried now. But even if I was in a relationship now, I wouldn't want to get married for another 3 – 4 years. I mean that's a lot of time. And so I usually calm myself down about it. And I actually do feel like very young, when I think in the perspective of stuff. It's so stupid but even people on T.V., or actors and actresses who's actually 25, and I'm like that's really young. You know really young. But I think it has to do with, you know, when you see other people your age that are at such different points of their life. It's not the point that you want to be at. But you just see them at different points. But that's what gets me a little nervous.

Rashmi said that she does not feel compelled to date and marry an Asian Indian man. She feels that this is because of her upbringing, and being exposed to so many non-Indians. She knows a number of her Asian Indian friends feel like they have to marry someone who is Indian. Although she does not feel the same way, she said that she can understand this attraction:

> I see how with being with an Indian guy makes it easier. Just that innate, like you know, they just understand some things over others, and I didn't really understand that as much when I was dating in high school or when I first started dating. Or even like most of college. I feel more connected to that more recently. I think it's more thinking about the future, that's more of what you start to think about…. How you raise your kids…

She said her sister marrying someone Caucasian has also made it easier for her to feel more comfortable to marry any ethnicity she wants. She offered thoughts on what she imagines her parents want for her:

> I think they would prefer Indian, but they would never, if I brought someone who wasn't Indian, I don't think they would ever object. I had my sister to sort of break that in too. But if they had any objection to my brother-in-law, they never told me or my sister about it. So I don't think they did. I think it's more that the guy definitely has gone to college, has a career, just has a good head on their shoulders. And someone that can take care of me.

She said that her relationship with her family will most likely stay the same after she is married. She said the biggest change she feels is that her parents will treat her more as a couple, and part of something, than just as their daughter. Her parents will also be less concerned about taking care of her because they will feel better knowing that her husband is looking out for her. She pondered the potential future change:

> I think my parents will still be there to help out. I don't think I'll be more independent. I think that's different because I've always lived away from home since college. I think that's not the same for a lot of people. A lot of people in college, they could still drive two hours to get home. I've been far enough away. So I've always been independent. So I think they're sort of prepared for that, that it'll kind of be the same that it'll be the same when I get married. I think it's more about me being happy and having someone to take care of me.

Rashmi echoed her parents wish to get married around the age of thirty. Rashmi said that if she was still single at the age of thirty-five, she and her parents would be extremely concerned. She commented,

> I think my parents would be very, very worried. I think they would start getting antsy. I know the conversation would come up a lot more than it does now. You know, setting up and that kind of stuff. I definitely would be worried too. But I think between that time, I myself will be a lot more open to other ways of dating, you know getting set up by friends or family or finding other ways to find people at that time too. Because I think it'll be a lot more of a priority in my life. Right now I have a lot of other things that I have that I'd like to concentrate on… other

things that make me really happy. Not that other things won't make me happy at that age either, but you know, I think it'll be something that I think about more at that point.

Despite the worries and concerns of her parents, Rashmi said that she would consider remaining single if she did not find the right person. She said that she thinks her parents would be supportive, but she is not certain of that fact:

> I think they would be worried. I think they'd talk to me a lot about it. But I think that in end they'd support me with it. I mean we have that type of relationship where I can explain things to them and they might not agree, but they will support me. I don't know though. My dad used to always brag to his friends "I let my kids do whatever they want." But I used to say, "Dad but we are all getting MBA's or going through medical school." Once I joked that I wanted to be an art history major and he just didn't say anything, didn't respond. "It's just convenient that we all ended up doing what you accept." So I don't know how they would react to me staying single.

Overall she has felt that people adjust and change, and she is hoping that she and her parents will change over time as well. She offered a story about a friend:

> One of my really good friends, she was really traditional and she dated an Indian guy for a while in college, and he cheated on her in the end. And it completely revamped her perspective on everything. And this guy was very traditional and very similar to her. It revamped her into thinking more about more of who [*sic*] she wants to be and that kind of stuff. And I've seen a lot of those same types of transitions just with girls my age, who have traditional parents, and their parents. So everyone has to learn to…adjust.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter discusses the themes that arose during the interviews with the Asian Indian participants. These themes included the roles that these women feel compelled to follow, and the concern for their parents that arises when they do not follow the traditional path. The discussion also explores the cultural belief that parental success depends on a daughter's marriage, and subsequent shame that the family faces when this does not happen. The conflict in interpersonal relationships, cultural differences between dating and arranged marriage, and personal attributes that can affect suitability for a marriage are also examined. Limitations of the study are described, as well as directions for future research. Lastly, implications of this research for training and clinicians are discussed. Due to the limited sample size of this exploratory study, the reader is cautioned against generalizing these results to a larger population of Asian Indian women.

Born To Be A Bride: Women's Perspectives on Marriage

The majority of the women interviewed stated that they felt they had no option other than to follow the typical cultural developmental trajectory of becoming a wife. These women were all daughters of parents that immigrated to the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For these families, these women were the first generation to be born or raised in the U.S. Based on the literature, when minorities emigrate, they go

through various phases of acculturation after reaching the new country (Almeida, 2005).

In the case of marriage, the women interviewed experience a cultural clash between

Asian Indian expectations, prioritizing family and tradition, and Western norms, valuing

individuality and choice.

The findings of this study corroborate the existing literature. The role of the adult

Indian women as a wife has been well documented (Bhopal, 1997; Jayankar, 1994;

Sonoswat, 2001). The assumption that women will follow this path is rooted in cultural

and historical precedent. Until recently, women did not have the choice of the different

lifestyles that are available in Western culture. Women were not asked how they would

like their life to unfold, and were given little choice in how they would like to go about

achieving that life. Parents, would make the decision to marry their daughters at a

designated age, without their daughters' assent. The historical implications remained the

same for the participants interviewed. The absence of choice was echoed in the women's

responses. There was a clear prohibition of any role that deviated from the norm.

Not only were there historical and cultural expectations voiced by the participants,

but also the results indicate that the lack of role models adds another dimension of

difficulty for these women in making different life choices. The participants conveyed

they felt they were stepping into a world that was not accepted by their culture. Similar

to other minority groups, they expressed feeling discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion.

As a result each of these women often felt anxiety about their unfulfilled role.

Often they spoke about their non-Indian peers as a means for comparison. They

cited that their "American" peers had more support from their parents to choose any path

that made them happy. Seeing this comparison made them feel isolated and alone.

Seeing the families of their American peers valuing the individual over the collective, likely exacerbates these women's negative experiences. Many of the women stated that they wanted to get married, but did not feel that they wanted to do so immediately. Instead, many felt that their desire to get married stemmed from their wish to fulfill the role their parents expected them to have.

The alienation that the participants reported has not been specifically addressed in the literature. The reason for this is that this group of women is likely the first cohort of Asian Indian women to resist marriage to such a degree, and for such an extended period of time. As a result, it would be important for future studies to investigate the new roles that Asian Indian women adopt while remaining single.

Separation-Individuation

Over three quarters of the participants expressed that they felt they were still treated like children by their parents. The women interviewed believed that they had not been able to define themselves as separate from their parents, despite their social, educational, and professional accomplishments. Although constantly evolving, the average separation-individuation phase in the U.S. typically occurs around the age when children leave for college or get their first job. However, for the women interviewed, the individuation process was not described in the same manner. In fact, the majority of these women stated that they did not imagine having a relationship with their parents that followed the characteristics of the "individuated self." They did not see themselves garnering respect from their family and community members until they had a spouse.

The literature echoes the present findings. Specifically, it has been found that in Asian Indian culture, unmarried women do not hold their own individual importance; and

therefore, are subject to their parents' decisions until they are married (Bhopal, 1997). As stated in the literature, the Asian Indian female daughter is of the lowest importance in the family hierarchy. Her value in society escalates only when she is married and following that, when she has a male child (Bhopal, 1998). It is important to note then that the implications of marriage, in combination with collectivist values, are that these women do not undergo the same separation-individuation process of their Western female peers. This difference is made obvious in Asian Indian traditions. One participant spoke to this difference when she said that there are separate religious customs and special places in ceremonies for married Indian women. In this way, the community and culture publicly recognize an individual woman's contribution to her community once she is married. Single women are not allowed to participate in these customs, because they are seen as still being their family's responsibility, are required to defer to their parents, and thus cannot yet contribute to their community in the way that is expected (i.e. as a wife and mother). Another aspect that may explain the prolonged time until the separation-individuation phase is that historically, Asian Indian children have lived at home until they are married. In this environment, many women continue to be treated as children.

A common theme expressed by these women was that the high level of enmeshment between their family members and themselves. All of these women had graduated college, some with doctorates, and held professional jobs. However, when it came to their personal lives, the women spoke about the lack of boundaries between themselves, their families, and the Indian community. These women communicated that until they were married, they were considered to be young children, despite their age,

educational status, achievement in other personal endeavors, and even long-term romantic relationships. These women would only be seen as whole and complete individuals by their community, after they were married. Since they were not married, they were treated as children by their parents. One woman conveyed that this high level of enmeshment made her feel cared for even though it felt intrusive and child-like at times. The difference between Western and Asian Indian culture then, is that the child in Indian culture is not launched until they are marriage; whereas American child is launched a more specific age and stage. In the current study, not only did the parents intrude in the women's lives, but also the women did not seem to be able to put up boundaries with their parents. This likely is due to the values of their collectivist culture in that the enmeshment makes it hard to pull apart and define a self separate from one's parents. As it is, these women already spoke to feelings of alienation. Putting up boundaries with their families would most likely only induce fears of further isolation.

Several participants conveyed this experience by stating that their "life would begin after marriage." Only following marriage would they be considered a valued member of society and would their opinions be respected and considered. They also stated that once they became a wife, they would be able to make their own decisions, and community members would not assume that their parents could speak for them. In the case of the women interviewed, many had espoused identities similar to Western women, but expressed their own achievements (e.g. living alone, having a job, etc) as secondary or trivial as compared to the accomplishment of marriage.

An important caveat to this finding is that the selection criteria for this study required women to be unmarried to participate. There may have been a self-selection

bias, in that the women who remain single may be those who have been reluctant to separate and individuate from their parents. Women who have otherwise individuated from their families may have gone on to get married, and therefore were not eligible for this study. Despite this possible bias, it is important to note that despite the autonomy and independence that these women project in their social and professional circles, the majority are still very attached to their parents, and do not see themselves separating from their families until they are married.

Parents' Success and Shame

Many of the women stated that they wanted to get married, but felt a greater sense of urgency for the sake of their parents. All but one of the participants expressed that their parents feel that they had not completed the job of raising their daughter until their child was married. Many of the women stated that the success of parents was based on whether or not their child was married. The participants said this often came from a sense that they needed to have someone take care of their daughter before they passed away. An aspect of care-taking emerged in these women's responses. Historically, women were considered weaker and unable to care for themselves (Bhopal, 1997). Families were concerned about their daughter's well being, which was only secured if they were married. The participants interviewed still felt that their parents believed that they needed someone to look after and provide for their daughters, despite their daughter's level of education and occupation. The historical context provides a framework in which there is evidence of an older and different cultural way of thinking. In years past, a woman was not able to have her own voice in society. Instead she would have to defer to her father, brother, or husband. In the current study, the parents' worry

was similar. Parents were concerned about passing away and leaving their daughter unmarried. Daughter's stated that the parents' fears were that a single woman would have no place in a community. Therefore, it was important for a parent to make sure that this set up is arranged when the woman is of marriageable age. The participants interviewed were able to acknowledge that their parents were using an old cultural framework.

The origins of this sense of failure, ironically, comes from the strengths of a collectivist culture, that includes unity, loyalty, and the communal raising of families. The consequence; however, of a collectivist culture is that many of the boundaries that are present and expected in Western society are not there (Triandas, 1995). This lack of boundaries also makes all strengths and shortcomings of a family visible to the community. In essence, it becomes a narcissistically oriented society in which what you present to the world is what you are. Narcissistic, in this context, is not an inflated sense of self, rather it is defined in the psychodynamic tradition as being concerned about how individuals are viewed by others (McWilliams, 1994). Many of the women that were interviewed stated that having a married daughter was a status symbol. A socially desirable daughter was often married first, whereas as socially undesirable daughter might remain unmarried. Multiple women stated they felt the impact of the narcissistic and class-oriented nature of some members of their community. They felt that remaining single created shame for them and their family. Not all women endorsed the class impact. However, some women simply said that it was difficult to see their parents shamed by their community.

The women who participated in this study were greatly concerned with shaming their families and specifically their parents. They knew that their parents were embarrassed by their daughter's unmarried status because of the way their parents avoided the topics with relatives. Women stated that they felt an internal pressure to make their parents happy. Several felt a great deal of internal pressure because of the shame they believed they had brought onto their family. This feeling of shame could also be attributed to the lack of boundaries between family members. As stated before, most of these women talked about the lack of separation between their parents and themselves. As a result many of them may have internalized the shame that their parents felt, further perpetuating the lack of separation and individuation described above.

The women were not just concerned about their parents, because they were unmarried, but many of them stated that they had concerns about their parents' well being if they told their parents about a relationship that had ended. Purity, or izzat, is one of the most important virtues a woman can have and offer to a husband in traditional, conservative Indian society (Sonoswat, 2001). When these women state publicly that they have had a relationship with a man that has not resulted in marriage it can be greatly shameful to the family as it implies that there was something wrong with the woman that she was not wanted by the man. Moreover, there is a sense of the woman being "tainted goods." Although these women did not say anything explicitly in this regard, they did worry about the impact ending a relationship would have on their parents because of its connotation. An element of shame was clearly conveyed by these women. If the number of men these women had dated was made public within their parents' social circle, it would then bring even greater shame to the family. So for many of these women, dating

and ending a relationship were not just fraught with the typical grieving process, but also were accompanied by a shame and guilt associated with ending a relationship and its consequences for their family.

Often times, the women stated that in order to avoid this situation, they would hide the relationships from their parents. This was described in the existing research as a phenomenon occurring often in first and second generation youth (Netting, 2006). In this study, this secrecy and dishonesty can be interpreted in many ways. In this context, it appears that the women were trying to protect themselves from difficult conversations with their parents. They were also trying to save their parents and themselves from the shame they would face from members of their society.

Conflict in Interpersonal Relationships

The majority of the women interviewed stated remaining single had been very difficult and put a great strain on their relationships, specifically with family and friends. The conflict with their parents was often talked about the most in these interviews. The women stated that since there was not an explicit dependence on their parents (financial, household, etc), often the conflict presented itself in the form of a sort of verbal harassment and psychological pressure.

A number of the women interviewed stated that the pressure and conflict was deeply tied to the role that women had to take in society. Their parents were often frustrated that they had not fulfilled their roles as a "good parent" in getting their daughters married. The responsibility these parents felt was often expressed in the form of demands. Most of these women stated that the relationships with their parents were greatly strained due to the focus on marriage. Sometimes these women did not feel the

pressure through verbal harassment; rather they felt it through guilt. Guilt was an indirect way to communicate a desire without the parent explicitly stating their desire. Most of the pressure that these women faced was a consequence of the shame their parents faced. The shame was then passed from parent to child.

Another factor that caused arguments within the family was the set ups with men that parents would arrange without their daughter's knowledge. Historically, in arranged marriages the daughter would come home and find out that a potential spouse's family was going to come over to discuss a suitable match (Lee & Stanley, 2000). This was often done without the child's knowledge. However, due to acculturation, a conflict now arises when parents try to follow this normative cultural path, as often their daughters find this experience to be a very foreign. Since all of these women wanted to voice their opinion regarding their future spouse and how they would be married, a unknown set up was reported to be greatly traumatic, and resulted in a great deal of fighting.

In addition to acculturation, a large part of the conflict also seemed to be connected to the process of separation-individuation. As the family still considers their daughter a child, the family easily invades the personal boundaries that are often observed in Western families within U.S. culture. In contrast, the women interviewed, and most of the U.S. society with whom they interact, consider them to be adults. Within Western culture, they feel that they are separated and able to make their own decisions. Within their own families, it is feels like a foreign concept to be treated like a child. This struggle to be an adult in the eyes of parents who views them as children is a central part of the conflict these women face.

Another reason for the stress faced by these women was interracial marriages. Many women were not only expected to marry Indian men, but women stated that they were expected to marry men within the same state, caste, and religion. Traditionally in India, families sought to marry their children within the caste. As has been the case in bi-racial couples, who have faced a great deal of social pressure to not marry, there are many Indian families who still insist on their children marrying within the caste or state of origin. The literature corroborates this finding (Siddiqi & Reeves, 1986). The majority of the women experienced an expectation to marry an Asian Indian. Most faced a great deal of anger from their families when dating Caucasian or African American men. It appeared that there was a hierarchy of what would be accepted in the family. If the women were to marry outside of their caste or state, Caucasian seemed to be preferred, followed by African American. The one consensus that the women stated was that marrying someone who was Muslim would be greatly controversial and not accepted, even in the more liberal families. The reason for the unanimity in rejecting Muslim spouses is likely due to the ongoing conflict between India, which is mostly Hindu, and Pakistan, which is primarily Muslim. The tension between these countries dates back to their partition, which caused much bloodshed between Hindus and Muslims.

Another element that caused conflict between parents and their daughters was the wish that they would marry quickly. The parents did not seem to understand the process of dating and getting to know a person before marriage. A clear cultural difference was evident in the young women's answers. There was frustration about the urgency with which their parents wanted a union to be decided. The parents were coming from a

culture in which the criteria for marriage was more Eastern, based on whether the potential match would be a good provider, came from a good family, etc. (Sheela & Autdinaraya, 2003; Siddiqi & Reeves, 1986). The women in this study; however, were looking at it from the perspective of romance, friendship, and an egalitarian partnership.

In the same way that the parents felt that daughters should marry quickly, there was a sense that they should follow a birth order. This likely comes from the belief that marriage is not about choice or romantic ideals; it is about a union that should happen at a certain time. Not all women stated that their parents felt strongly about them getting married according to birth order. However, some did state that once a younger sibling was married, there was an increased pressure placed on them which resulted in more conflict with their parents.

Interestingly, the women in this study reported that not only did they experience pressure from their parents, but also that their friends, both married and unmarried, were harsh critics of their single status. There was an overall theme that indicated there was a certain level of isolation that occurred when other friends were married. As echoed by certain participants, it appeared that there was an element of status to being married. Once that goal was achieved, these women would be accepted into a different social circle, not only by their parents but also by their peers. Furthermore, it seemed that like these women's parents, some of their friends also espoused the belief that these women should not date and marry non-Indian men. It appeared that what these women were facing was a conflict in the level of acculturation of their friends. Some of these women may have become more acculturated, while their friends may have been less so. This was an important finding in the present study, as there is limited literature examining how

friendships are impacted by dating and marriage in the Asian Indian community. Although there needs to be further research done on this topic, it may be that the friends in the present study who were married and were more critical, were the same friends that were less acculturated. Therefore these friends may have accepted and valued the beliefs of their culture, regarding early marriage to an equally matched Indian partner, more highly than the female participants interviewed. In essence, this led many women to speak of a phenomenon of feeling isolated, left out, and a minority amongst their previously close friends.

Effects of Age

A significant theme that emerged was the dichotomy between the experiences of participants who were above thirty, and those below thirty. The women below the age of thirty presented a less pressured view on needing to get married. They described feeling pressure from their family and community members, but stated that they also felt they still had "time." They echoed those who were over thirty, by saying that being over the age of thirty and single would be very difficult for everyone involved (i.e. the self, family, and community). Women were consistently told that being single after the age of thirty would indicate that there was something wrong with their personality. It is unclear why the age of thirty is such a tipping point. The literature shows that in parts of rural India, women are to be married by the age of 18, but there is no evidence in the literature that thirty is a particularly significant age (Caldwell et. al, 1983). The women who were above the age of 30 voiced a theme of feeling that they were too old to get married. This was reinforced by their peers and people of their parents' generation. The thought was that the suitable matches would not be available if one waited too long.

The literature does corroborate the belief that individuals who are too old will not be able to find suitable matches (Caldwell, 2005; Lee & Stanley, 2000; Sonoswat, 2001). Historically it has been documented that women were more or less marriageable based on the innate characteristics they had to offer, such as youth, caste, etc. The belief was that the older the woman was, the less youth she had to offer a spouse. Additionally, the older the woman was, the fewer the men her age would be available for marriage. Therefore, there was a rush to get married before all the eligible men their age would be taken. The new finding in this study is that this age appears to have shifted in the U.S. due to two factors: education and acculturation. However, it is difficult to know why thirty is such an important age. More research needs to be done to explore the importance of the shift in age to thirty.

Each woman reported that her parents had expected that her spouse have certain attributes. Most of these parents had changed what they wanted out of the spouses as the women got older. The majority of women stated that the parents wanted their future spouse to come from the same background as the family. An interesting finding was that individuals from the state of Gujarat tended to be more specific and particular about what they wanted. Often the women of Gujarati descent had parents who wanted their daughters' spouses to be Gujarati. Women from other Indian states did not report the same level of expectation from their parents. The existing literature does not have data to support or negate this finding. It is a possibility that Gujaratis place more value on their being tied to others in their community, but this is speculation and needs to be investigated further.

Factors Affecting the Match

The participants conveyed that various attributes contributed to how "marriageable" they considered themselves to be within their Asian Indian community. Marriageable here is defined as how desirable a woman was within Asian Indian society. Most women stated that they believed that cultural factors that used to play a role, would no longer matter when considering the type of spouse they would want to marry. These factors included whether or not the woman was vegetarian, her level of education, citizenship, caste, and whether or not her parents were divorced. However, they did say that there was a perception that many members of Indian society would consider them suitable or unsuitable based on certain characteristics.

In all of these cases, the participants often spoke about the fact that the community wanted a woman who was highly educated, with an intact family, and who was a U.S. citizen. From the results, it appears that these women had the perception that the community places a great importance on their outward appearances and their ability to enhance the family name. This was not explicitly stated, but the emphasis on these external attributes calls out the fact there is some residue of the historical value of a woman being valued for the honor she can bring to her family and her spouse's family as well as what she can contribute to the household. Personality was identified as being important to some women, but these women stated that this was more of a factor when considering a spouse outside the Indian community or an Indian spouse who was more acculturated. The women stated that personality characteristics were often not as important to people of their parents' generation, besides being respectful to elders. This corroborates other findings in this study and existing research about the need for the

family to present themselves well in the community (Siddiqi & Reeves, 1986).

Furthermore, the incoming spouse has the ability to enhance or diminish the family honor because they become a reflection of that family. This also underscores the importance of finding a spouse from the same community. For example, one woman stated that she was a non-vegetarian and her boyfriend was bothered by this. Finding a spouse outside of the norm may feel foreign and uncomfortable for families, not only due to the unfamiliarity but also the image that the family could not find someone within their caste.

Although the literature shows that women who were desired for marriage fit the characteristics of the husband's family, there is no literature reporting what the Asian Indian society values in this new generation of daughters (Mueller, 2008; Siddiqi & Reeves, 1986). In a sense, these women spoke about what they anticipated their parents and other older community members would say. However, more research needs to be done to understand the attributes and characteristics that Asian Indian society does value in today's U.S. society, and how it differs from Indians living in India, in both the past and present.

Cultural Differences in Dating and Arranged Marriages

A majority of the women interviewed stated that they felt that dating was a foreign, taboo concept that their parents struggled to accept. This often led to the women feeling that they were misunderstood, and at times, led to them feeling that they had to hide their relationships. In Indian culture past relationships have been thought to taint a person. In the Asian Indian culture there is a need for purity, both in body and spirit, which one should bring to the marriage. Therefore, the need for exploration in dating was unnecessary and prohibited. As these women grew into adulthood, they said their

parents had accepted that their daughter would date to find a partner. The parents did not accept, and had a great deal of difficulty with, their daughters dating someone for a long period of time. Many of these women felt that the process of dating allowed the individual to understand what they liked, wanted, and hoped for in a partner. This pathway allows for an exploration of the self. Their parents, however, struggled against this practice because of the taboo against the loss of purity. Several women cited that their parents were influenced by their religious beliefs, and stated that their parents believed marriages were destined. Many parents wanted to use horoscopes to match their children, without considering individual preferences and choice. Moreover, these women conveyed that their parents did not appreciate this process of exploration of one's self and understanding the nuances of what different partners could offer. The theme underscored here is that marriage is not the result of a choice, rather it is a duty undertaken and accepted for the sake of the family. Parents placed a value on evaluating the basic "biodata" factors (e.g. occupation, salary, virtues of the family of origin, etc.) and that it was important to make the marriage work regardless of the issues that arose. There is limited literature discussing the taboo of dating in the South Asian community. The findings in this study do corroborate past literature on the taboo (Abraham, 2002). However, this study found an additional theme of the impact of choice and individuality on women's views of dating, and should be explored with future research.

Limitations of Qualitative Methods and this Research Study

Although there are great strengths to the qualitative research methodology, there are certain limitations. In this type of research, the researcher has a limited amount of control over understanding the impact of the various variables. In this study there was no

ability to understand how factors, such as education, Indian state of origin, or family dynamics, affect the overall themes. The design of this study also prevents the results from being generalized to a larger population. The perceptions of these individuals are limited to their lives and cannot be generalized to others in their community or be representative of all Asian Indian females. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, there was no control group to compare these women's experiences, and the sample size was quite small. The research study was designed to be qualitative, and therefore, did not confirm or deny other research about the experience of unmarried Asian Indian women. The primary investigator conducted all the interviews, thus the study had the potential for researcher bias. The sample that was recruited was through a networking sample, which also could have lead to selection bias. This bias was evident in that all the women interviewed were college graduates, employed, and financially independent. The sample was also limited in that all the parents of these women came to the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and therefore, came during a particular immigration wave. Although there are limitations, the use of this method allows for a rich report of the individuals' internal experiences and how the study participants exist in the world as unmarried Asian Indian females. The wealth of data collected lends itself to be further examined in future research studies.

Implications for Future Research

A large amount of important data that was collected during this exploratory study. However, future research is still needed to understand many aspects of the experience of these Asian Indian women. Understanding more in depth the themes of shame, separation-individuation, and individuality and acculturation are key aspects of these

Asian Indian women's experience. Additionally, research is warranted in exploring the psychological consequences for these women. It would be important to understand how these women attempt to resolve the conflict that they face and if they seek psychotherapy. Additionally, it would be important to examine the experience of the parents who have "older" unmarried children and how they understand and attempt to resolve that cultural conflict. Asian Indian men should also be interviewed to understand whether their experience is significantly different from the women interviewed and if so, why?

Implications for Clinicians and Training

Although there was a great amount of variability between these women's reports, there are some key themes that clinicians can use for training and clinical purposes. When sitting with an Asian Indian woman who states that she is the first generation of her family raised in the U.S., it is important to understand what state in India her family emigrated from, because different parts of India may connote different cultural values. It was found in this study that most women and families no longer expected their child to have an arranged marriage. Family is still very significant, and therefore marriage is a very important part of their lives. Each woman seemed to handle this in different ways. It is important to understand the conflict that comes up for the individual between them and their family, their friends, and members of their community and extended family.

It is also valuable to become familiar with the ideals that this woman has decided to espouse, and how acculturated she is to U.S. society. Important values that were raised for families were whether dating was allowed or not, if their parents expected Indian or non-Indian spouses, how enmeshed the family system was, and how much the daughter felt obligated to care for her parents. Clinicians can understand the shame a patients feels

based on factors such as whether they were allowed to date of not, and how they dated (the secrecy involved, the length of relationships). It is vital to consider the amount of shame that the individual might feel as a result of their dating relationships.

Some individuals may not have dated, and as a result, it is important to understand that they might not have a nuanced view of romantic relationships. This may be also because this is not something that was valued between their parents. Often the women described the parents' marriages based on a necessary partnership rather than on love and attraction. A relationship that values intimacy in a different manner may or may not be something that the woman is striving towards.

It is important to understand the transference that may arise. The transference reaction that a woman may have is that she has to hide aspects of her relationship (e.g. amount of people she dated, slept with, etc.). This may be particularly important for Asian Indian therapists to be wary of, as the therapeutic relationship may more quickly ignite transferential reactions due a similarity in ethnicity.

It is also imperative to understand that because this person is coming from a collectivistic culture which may value the external attributes necessary to get a daughter married, the individual may be more narcissistically oriented or have narcissistic traits. It is important to understand that the origins of this is protective; in order to make a daughter more marriageable in the culture, historically, these families needed to be concerned about external attributes in order to ensure the survival of their daughters.

Many clinicians in the Western tradition of psychotherapy place a great deal of importance on the process of separation and individuation. It is essential to recognize that many of these women voiced that separation and individuation is not a process that

happens until after marriage. Clinicians should recognize the cultural importance of the family, and the struggles that women might be facing to individuate. It is critical to recognize that autonomy and choice may not be something that parents fostered or raised their children to value. A therapist should be aware of and note the intrapsychic conflict that may occur within a client in which they struggle between autonomy and individuality and family and collectivism.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Marriage has historically been an important part and distinct phase of the Asian Indian culture. However, researchers have found that the expectation of marriage is slowly changing within this community. Many in the U.S. are not aware of the dual roles Asian Indian women manage. They possess one identity for their social and work environments and another for their family and community. In the psychology literature, limited studies have been done to understand the experience of these women. In this study, participants were able to provide insight into remaining a single woman in a culture where marriage is the norm.

This study found that marriage remained a hope in many of these women's lives. However, the majority stated that they faced an extreme amount of pressure to get married because of the Asian Indian belief that women were "born to be brides." The study revealed that these Asian Indian women's lives were still heavily influenced by the collectivist culture in which they were raised. Implications of this upbringing were that many women did not experience the separation-individuation process in the same manner typical of women in the western world. There was also a large component of shame that marred these women and their family's lives because of their single status. Women who were seeking mates differed, from typical American women, in the manner in which they searched for their potential mate, as well as how they thought of themselves as a mate.

Several key themes emerged including how these women dated in secret and how they managed dual lives both inside and outside their family.

There are several implications for therapists as a result of this study. It is not only important to be culturally aware, but also to understand the variety of experiences an Asian Indian woman can have with her family. It is also important to understand that the goals of psychotherapy may be different depending on how much the woman has acculturated to the American lifestyle. Moreover, it is important to understand the great amount of shame that can be a part of these women's experiences, and the resulting pressure they may face from their families.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Agreement

Importance of Marriage for East Indian Women in the U.S.: An Exploratory Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions, ask the investigator. You should be satisfied with the answers before you agree to be in the study.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores the potential pressure to get married faced by South Asian women, of Indian origin, over the age of 25 and living in the U.S. The study wants to understand your experience, thoughts and feelings around marriage and how it may be influenced by your culture. The study seeks to document your thoughts whether you feel pressure from your family or community. A doctoral student at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University is conducting this study as a fulfillment of dissertation and doctoral requirements. It is anticipated that 10 – 20 individuals will participate in this study.

Study Procedures:
You will be interviewed about your experiences, thoughts and opinions in regards marriage, self-identity as related to being married, and pressure put on you by your family or community. The interview will take about one and one half hours.

Interviews will be audio taped to contribute to the authenticity of the study. Interviews will be transcribed and tapes will be destroyed after transcription. Any tape recordings, transcripts of interviews, or other data collected from you will be maintained in confidence by the investigator in a locked file cabinet and destroyed at the end of the study.

Risks: The interview focuses on your current experiences as a single Indian female. It is my hope that the interview will be a positive experience for you. However, recalling some unpleasant memories may cause discomfort for you. If you experience distress related to the study, please contact the researcher and discuss this with her, so that she can assist you and help provide you with referrals as necessary.

Benefits: Your experience and knowledge have tremendous value to understanding the issues affecting women of Indian origin around the topic of marriage. In addition, the opportunity to share your experience and expertise in working with this population may be valuable to you.

Confidentiality: All records will be stored in locked files and will be kept **confidential** to the extent permitted by law. The data about your interview will be stored on an electronic data file in

the researcher's personal computer in order to keep it confidential. The data will be available only to the research team and no identifying information will be disclosed. Audiotapes and other paper work will be assigned a case number.

Your responses will be grouped with other participants' responses and analyzed collectively. All common identifying information will be disguised to protect your confidentiality. This will include changing your name and other demographic information (i.e. birth order, education level).

Research Standards and Rights of Participants: Your participation in this research is **VOLUNTARY**. If you decide not to participate, or if you decide later to stop participating, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Also, if you refer other individuals for participation in this study, your name may be used as the referral source only with your permission

I understand that I may contact the investigator or the investigator's dissertation chairperson at any time at the addresses, telephone numbers or emails listed below if I have any questions, concerns or comments regarding my participation in this study.

Snigdha Rathor (Investigator)   Karen Riggs Skean, Psy.D. (Chairperson)
Rutgers University   Rutgers University
GSAPP   GSAPP
152 Frelinghuysen Rd   152 Frelinghuysen Rd
Piscataway, NJ 08854-8085   Piscataway, NJ 08854-8085
Telephone: 425.922.6776   Telephone: 732.445.2000
Email: snigdhar@eden.rutgers.edu   Email: kskean@aol.com

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

I have read and understood the contents of this consent form and have received a copy of it for my files. I consent to participate in this research project.

Participant Signature _____   Date _____

Investigator Signature _____   Date _____

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled, Importance of Marriage for East Indian Women in the U.S.: An Exploratory Study conducted by Snigdha Rathor. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape (make a sound recording) as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by Ms. Rathor.

The recording(s) will be distinguished from one another by an identifying case number not your name.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet by identifying number not by name or other information that might disclose your identity. The tapes will be retained until the project is completed and the dissertation has been successfully defended. It is expected that the tape will be destroyed within three years after your interview.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

Demographic Form

Today's Date: _____

Age: _____

Were you born in the U.S.? yes no

   If no, how many years have you been in the U.S.: _____

Birth Place: _____

Year father immigrated to U.S.: _____

Year mother immigrated to U.S.: _____

From which Indian state did your family immigrate? (e.g. Punjab, Gujarat, etc)

      _____

Number of Siblings: _____

    Where are you in the birth order?   1 2 3 4 5 6;   other _____

      (1 = Eldest)

Do you have brothers? yes no

Do you have sisters? yes no

Highest Level of Education Completed:

___   High School

___   Associate Degree

___   Bachelors Degree

___   Graduate Degree; please specify: _____

Are you currently dating someone? yes no

How long have you been dating them? _____

APPENDIX C

Interview

General Questions
1) What is your family's immigration story?

2) How would you define an arranged marriage?

3) Where do would you place your "Indian" values on the range of being conservative/traditional or liberal? What about your family?

Thoughts on Marriage
1) What is your parent's marriage story?

2) Have you dated in the past?

    a) If yes, does your family and/or community know?

    b) Many South Asian women say that they have "dated in secret" and lived another life with their significant other. Have you done this? How have you balanced this with your family life?

    c) Has this impacted your "marriage potential"?

    d) When you were dating, were there pressures on you to get married? How were they communicated?

3) At this point in your life, do you want to get married?

4) What are your thoughts and hopes about getting married?

5) Do you feel pressure to get married now or sometime soon?

    If yes,
    a) Where do you feel this pressure is coming from?

    b) What do people say?

    c) At what age did your parents or others start pressuring you about marriage?

    d) Do you feel a difference in pressure between your mother and father?

     e) Do you have extended family in India? Do you feel a difference from the pressure that your family in India puts on you versus your family in the United States?

     f) Do you feel the pressure for you is different than:
          a. Indian men the same age?
          b. Indian females in India?

     If no,
     a) What do you think makes it so that you don't feel pressure from your family to get married?

6) Have your parents or other community members or family members done anything specific to set you up to get married?

7) Do you feel like your family has compromised on what in a son-in-law in order for you to get married?

8) Would you or your family consider an arranged marriage?

9) What are your parent's expectations of who you should marry? Are interracial marriages an option?

10) How does birth order affect the pressure put on you to get married (e.g. Does being the oldest put more pressure on you?)

11) When thinking about your ideal match, how does religion (Hindu, Jain, Muslim) factor into your decision?

Thoughts on Self and Others

12) Do you feel like you live in two worlds with respect to dating and your family?

13) Do you feel like you are perceived differently, by your family or community members, when compared to married Indian women your age? How?

14) Has being unmarried caused any conflict for you? (Between you and your family, between you and your single or married friends)?

15) What are your observations of other Indian women in terms of being married versus being single?

16) Will others look at and treat you differently after you get married? If yes, how?

17) What are the implications on your family if you are not married in the next 10 years?

18) Is remaining single an option? What would that look like? How would your (nuclear & extended) family, here and in India, react?

Factors affecting Marriage

19) Do you think the following factors have an affect on how desirable you feel that you are to potential spouses? If yes, how?
   a) Age?

   b) Lightness or darkness of your skin color?

   c) Caste (Bhramin, Kstritriya, etc.)?

   d) Indian region of your family's origin (being Marati, Gujarati, Punjabi, etc)

   e) Your immigration status (U.S. citizenship, green card, etc)?

   f) Education level? Do you think you think that being "too educated" can hurt you?

   g) Your parent's occupation?

   h) Your parent's financial status?

   i) Your values?

   j) Your personality?

   k) Anything else that I haven't mentioned?

20) Is there anything else that you think might be helpful for me to know about that I haven't asked?