SINGLE AND OVER 25! SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN AND MARRIAGE

by

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Abstract

For South Asian women marriage, within a normative period, is a given. Traditionally, rates for marriage have been very high, with very few women remaining unmarried, especially from choice. More and more women are delaying or rejecting marriage in North America, including within the ethnic communities. These women are facing pressure to marry from the family, community and often themselves. This research used in-depth interviews with ten South Asian single women to explore both the nature of the pressure and how they are dealing with it. Respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions around their experiences, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes around the pressure to marry by a certain age. Questions also focused on family background and lifestyle, looking for commonalities within the group. Following the philosophy and methodology of hermeneutic inquiry, results from this study yielded four categories of themes: a description of the pressures faced, strategies used to deal with the pressure, factors that increase or decrease the amount of pressure, and other-themes (i.e. attitudinal beliefs around marriage and family structure). Using qualitative verification procedures the results were shared both with the participants and a collaborative interpreter. The findings are discussed in relation to implications for counselling theory and practice, as well as future research.

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been conducted without your willingness to share. I have learnt much from each of you

and will keep that with me as I move through my life's journeys.

Preface

In order to situate myself in this research, and in accordance with the methodology of this study, I will start by writing a brief description of my own journey. I am a first generation Canadian of South Asian descent, whose parents immigrated to Canada from India. I have personally navigated through the conflict that arises with a clash of values. While I was born in Canada, I lived a significant part of my childhood in India and was greatly shaped by that experience. Knowing and understanding what the expectations and cultural norms are, I found, does not make it any easier when facing them yourself! With the move to India and then back again, I experienced dislocation and a sense of not fitting into either world, though externally I was managing to hide that quite well.

After finishing an Undergraduate degree, disappointingly, not in Science, at the age of twenty-three I needed to figure out what came next. I knew it would be more school, not marriage, though I took a circuitous route and started Grad school at 28 after some years gaining work and life experience. I did not feel much pressure at this point, due to many of the reasons listed by the women in this study, including: family norms, expectations around school, decreased contact with extended family and having an older unmarried sibling.

When I began the Master's program I knew the pressure would increase as my mom often stated, 'finish school, and get married before you are thirty". It made sense, though life does not always happen as planned, perhaps that would explain the use of strategy 10-Fate, by some of the women interviewed. While pondering thesis topics, my first inclination was to examine inter-cultural conflict as a whole and help uncover some

ways young people have successfully dealt with it. It was not until later, (having spent one year researching that topic) that I realized I wanted to look at a specific conflict that was both relevant and timely in my life. Being a single, and at that time thirty year old, South Asian woman, I was a part of this very group on which I wanted to research. As stated, I started the research when I was thirty and, in my experience, qualitatively the pressure increases exponentially with each year! I became aware that more and more women are facing this issue, women I know or have worked with, and most tended to use particular strategies. These included having friends in similar situations and just talking about the pressure in a humorous way, often telling each other the latest anecdotes. This is when I started to look at the literature, which was very limited, and started planning how I wanted to proceed with this inquiry.

I started by looking at my own experience with marriage, or lack of experience I should say. Within my family dating was a big 'NO' and during my school years I accepted that. It also helped that I was quite shy and would literally and metaphorically 'run away' as my friends called it, from any prospective 'suitor'. When I was twenty-five I experienced my first arranged set-up. Until then my family had dealt with and dispatched all the 'unsuitable' boys that came my way. My family obviously had criteria. So, at 25, I found myself sitting in a restaurant, with four escorts and I didn't say a word. On second thought I did say 'Hi'. Needless to say the guy told his family, "we didn't click". The little known fact that I was suffering from a bad case of food poisoning and looked like I was going to throw-up any second may have had some impact on his decision. The 'not clicking' proceeded through a number of other set-ups, sometimes it was him, sometimes me and sometimes it was the families. I eventually decided 'no more

set-ups' after dealing with a particular interesting surprise set-up. A family just showed up at my uncle's house to 'see me' while pretending they were in the area for a visit. While frustrated, similar to the girls in this study, I understood the pressure the family's face as well and the intentions always seemed to be coming from a good place. During this time I noted however, that if the guy said no, it was too bad and something to get over, but, if I said no-that was always more problematic. I was being picky, choosy and needed to provide an explanation. Explanations must make sense, if you say; 'we didn't click' that didn't count if the guy clicked with me. Criteria for not accepting, I quickly learned, were gender specific.

How did my family deal with my single hood? My mother was supportive, she did not want to 'just throw me out' but she did lament occasionally about my kismet. My mom had dreams; 'tall, smart, handsome, dashing like a military officer (that would be an Indian Army officer), no alcohol, no drugs, and even-tempered'. I think I could live with that. My dad, however, had his heart set on an old family friend's son who happened to own land beside some railway line. This factor was supposed to sway my decision. A few years later, on a trip to India I did pass by the railway land-it unfortunately would not have helped my decision in any way. Of course, the man is married now, but my dad always remembers what I foolishly passed up!

Interestingly, during the program I did meet someone; however, except for very close family and friends, that has been a well kept secret. In this culture, there is a 'just in case' maxim and I see myself abiding by it. The man I ended up choosing is in the process of passing my family's test and I his. I don't know how it will turn out but at the age of 32 I think my family is heading towards complete panic. Perhaps, I myself am

starting to panic. By the way, I noticed how the sample stops at 32. Where are the single women over that age? …perhaps they all got married, or disappeared in some other way. I feel like I really need to find out.

While conducting research being an insider, (i.e., being a part of the culture one is researching) has been described as both a privilege and a burden (Gupta, 1999). On the one hand, the population is more accessible and in many ways more open to share with you. On the other hand, there are some built in expectations around how the research is to be conducted and presented as well as some implied, implicit understanding often characterized by the statement, 'you know how it is in our culture.' In this case, many of the women related to me because I was single and coming from a similar background. I had made the same choices they had or as the women in this study put it, been unable to meet the right guy. In qualitative research, ethnic origin along with gender and experience plays a role in the research conducted. It cannot be easily disconnected and according to sociological theorists (Smith, 1974), should not be. Rather, it allows for the research to be both situated and reflexive (Srivastava & Ames, 1993). This research was based in part on my own experience- that is where I started-where I ended up was with the experiences of ten women.

My primary assumption was that most South Asian young adults face some form of pressure. For some it would be greater and others less, based on family expectations, norms, education levels and level of acculturation. Further, I thought that there was more pressure on women than men. I expected to find some women who had internalized the pressure, accepted the belief that they should be married and hence there must be something wrong with them, and others that completed rejected this idea.. I also expected

some women to be depressed, down, anxious about being single, just as I expected some to be happy and freely making this choice. While reflecting on the future, I expected some women to say they did not plan on ever getting married while others actively pursued finding a 'suitable boy'. What I found in the study was some of what I expected and some of what I didn't. It was however, always interesting, insightful and allowed for a deeper more meaningful understanding of the state of being single for this group.

Chapter I: Introduction

*From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived; to woman he is engaged and married. Woman becomes his friend; through woman, the future generations come. When his woman dies, he seeks another woman; to woman he is bound. **So why call her bad?** From her, kings are born. From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all. O Nanak, only the True Lord is without a woman.*

(Guru Nanak, excerpt from Sri Guru Granth Sahib, pg 1)

This was written over 400 years ago in the Sikh holy book the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The religion itself advocates equality for women, which can be cited both in the writings and practice of the Gurus in their lives (Pandher, 1982). Women were encouraged by the Gurus to participate in all religious activities including the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib. In particular, the practices of Sati (widow burning), female infanticide, and purdah (veil) were condemned by Guru Amar Das, the fourth Guru, and later forbidden by the tenth Guru (Cole, 1994; Singh, 2001). He also advocated for the re-marriage of widowed women. A woman is an individual in her own right and a Sikh woman does not have to take her husband's name and is given the name Kaur until her death. Can we say the Sikh community in Canada exemplifies this equality? A very different reality exists both within the Sikh and South Asian community in general. The reality is one of a community, like many others, which still allows for the oppression of women. This is evident in many of the practices including: a preference for male offspring, differential treatment based on gender and domestic violence rates. Older cultural norms, handed down for generations, need first to be examined in order to understand the current roles and norms for women.

Women within the Hindu culture can best be described in a duality; that is, the mother, one that is worshipped and revered, and that of the *pativratta* or husband worshipper, one that in

all ways is subordinate to the wishes of her husband (Wadley, 1986). Over 2000 years ago, Manu, the Brahman law codifier, described the role of women as ever faithful and dependant upon her father, husband or son. He further described women as full of malice, bad conduct, wrath and impure desires and thus must be protected and guarded at all times (Bumiller, 1990; Chitnis, 1988).

While the times may have changed, the reality of many South Asian women is still steeped in this tradition. From the day a female child is born she is treated differently from her male counterpart. In an article in *India Today* (Aug. 17, 2001) the apparent results of female infanticide and foeticide are now being seen as the male to female ratio steadily increases resulting in the phenomenon of 'bride sharing' in parts of Rajasthan, India. The depiction of women in classical literature as well as popular Indian Cinema still very much parallels the view of a dependant, virtuous, faithful wife who must be protected from outsiders (Chitnis, 1999). While the women's movement in India has brought about reforms from social oppression in areas such as: sati, widow remarriage, polygamy, child marriage, and women's property rights, there is still much work to be done.

Similarly, South Asian women in Canada suffer from the disadvantages of repression according to race, ethnicity and class (Naidoo & Davis, 1988). While the overall climate is different, many women, by choice or necessity, still find themselves living within established cultural boundaries. In a cross-generational study done by Khosla (1981), the older generation defined themselves in the context of the family while the second generation vocalized a complex duality in their identity. That is, they saw themselves as traditional in some aspects (e.g.; marriage and family) and concerned with self-development (e.g.; career and academic and social achievement) in others. This duality has been confirmed in a study by Naidoo & Davis (1988) in

which South Asian women saw themselves as 'traditional' in respect to marriage, family and religion and 'contemporary' in respect to education and careers outside the home.

It has been postulated that this dualistic outlook has contributed to conflict within the home (Dasgupta, 1998; Naidoo & Davis, 1988). The nature of trying to balance the traditional and the contemporary is not an easy task. There is a rise in the reported level of domestic abuse, which has been argued is partially due to the women's pursuit of education and careers and the males' expectations of the maintenance of traditional roles (Tee, 1996). Further, as the second generation questions the issues of dating, arranged marriages and gender inequality, an increasing gap is forming between the two generations. It is when the very norms (e.g., the expectation of marriage by a certain age) are questioned that hierarchies and defined roles begin to crumble. It is in this newly defined space that young South Asian women are making a place for themselves.

Rationale for the Study

The most obvious reason to conduct this research is the apparent lack of research done with South Asian groups in contrast to the growing population of this minority. In the 1996 Census, 600,000 people identified themselves as South Asian in origin and the corresponding number in British Columbian was 141,750 (Statistics Canada, 1996). South Asian is an umbrella term used for people coming from the Indian subcontinent. The seven countries of South Asia are: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The broader term, South Asian Diaspora, refers to people of South Asian origin scattered around the world. These include populations in Fiji, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom among others. There are more than 2 million South Asians in the United States (Saja, 2002).

In addition to the new immigrant, first and second generation South Asians also continue to face a reality that is different from what they or their parents once knew. With migration from such vastly differing cultures, not only is the migrant facing a difference in climate, customs and language but also in religion, values and societal organization on the whole (Beiser et al., 1988).

While more studies are now exploring intergenerational issues with Indo-Americans (Pettys & Balgopal, 1998; Sadowsky & Carey, 1987), there is relatively little research conducted with South Asians in Canada. It is important to remember that within the South Asian population there is a great deal of variability that affects the rate of acculturation. These factors include education, class, caste, family size, economic support, connections to their culture, religion and migration history (Almeida, 1996). Thus, a few studies of South Asians, conducted mostly in the U.S., are not sufficient for the research required in this area. To paraphrase the sociologist Dorothy Smith (1974), we must take a theoretical perspective that is situated in Canada and its unique multicultural society rather than importing one from the United States without modification.

There is a general lack of material on South Asian women as women have traditionally been overlooked while the *his*tory of man is focused upon (Srivastava & Ames, 1993). Further, according to Gupta (1999), in South Asian society, as in many other societies, a woman was only recognized in the role of being a daughter, wife or mother, while traditional research has focused on historical, demographic and economic data, often leaving out the voice of women. Srivastava and Ames (1993) go on to critique three of the major works on South Asian Canadian women and state that there is still a persistence of the ideology of patriarchal sociology whether that is in a call for objectivity or a lack of one's own description and perspective about the particular group being studied.

Additionally, much of the Canadian research has been conducted in the East and Atlantic Canada, unaccompanied by corresponding research in British Columbia. The make-up of the South Asian population is different on these two coasts in terms of religious affiliation (i.e., the significantly larger Sikh population in British Columbia and conversely the larger Hindu population in Central and Atlantic Canada) labour trends and industry (Statistics Canada, 1991).

And finally, a growing trend of delaying or rejecting marriage is being seen in North America for both men and women (Wu, 1997). Traditionally, marriage rates have been high for women, especially Asian women, who coming from a culture advocating arranged marriages, patrilocal households and family as the central focal unit, had relatively few other roles to fulfill (Ferguson, 2000). Thus, more information regarding the experience of women who are navigating this new sociological phenomenon is needed. One generation back, single women in this age group would have been a rarity and the South Asian community would ascribe reasons, mostly negative, to the phenomenon. Terminology such as spinster has been used universally to describe single women bringing with it many negative connotations. Thus an understanding of how the pressure is felt by these women and what they, in turn, do to deal with it is essential. Does this pressure get internalized? Is it viewed as legitimate? Are there patterns of responses that the women have in common? Do the women themselves have characteristics in common? As one mother of a single daughter once so succinctly summarized her thoughts: "Are you girl's friends because you are all single?", "Or are you single because you are all friends?" A question worth looking into!

Focus of the Study

The focus of this study is to identify strategies developed by South Asian women in dealing with the pressure to marry and to examine whether the roles and identity of these women are affected by their single status.

Identification of Strategies

While intergenerational conflict over the issue of marriage has been identified in a number of studies (Almeida, 1996; Dasgupta, 1998; Pettys & Balgopal, 1999, Wakil et. al., 1981) there is no corresponding research on how South Asian women have dealt with this pressure. Anecdotal accounts of South Asian women increasing the number of years pursuing post-secondary education and focusing on their careers are abound in the community.

Coping strategies refer to the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events. The pressure to marry, in this case, can be seen as the stressor and how the women deal with it - the strategy. Two general categories of coping strategies have been distinguished in the research; problem-solving strategies are efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful circumstances, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies involve efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful events. Research indicates that people use both types of strategies to combat most stressful events (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). What types of strategies are the women in this study using? Also, is there a continuum of strategies or some that are more positive than others? Are the strategies used different for women at different points of the acculturation or ethnic identity process? Further, are the strategies different for women at different ages?

Identity and Roles

From the moment a girl is born into an Indian family, preparation for marriage and motherhood are abound (Kakar, 1981). Her place in her family is seen as transitional with her marital home described as her permanent and real home. As the daughter grows, she realizes there is a difference between herself and her brothers and that she must conform to a patriarchal view of femininity and gender roles. She is destined to be a 'good' daughter, wife and mother (Kakar) noting that she is defined in relation to others. Her identity crystallizes when she enters motherhood. If this is the general view of the female what then happens to the woman who chooses a different path? Who is she within her community, family and even to herself? What is her role within the family?

Purpose of the Study

In this study, qualitative methods of interviewing and interpretation, steeped in the feminist and hermeneutic tradition, will be employed to gain a better understanding of the experience of South Asian women facing the pressure to marry by a normative age. Ten single, (i.e. never-married), heterosexual, South Asian women, aged 25 to 35 will give voice to their personal experiences of dealing with the pressures to marry by a certain age and the how they view their identity and role at this time. Specifically, the research question to be addressed is, **'what strategies do South Asian women employ to deal with the pressures to marry and how does being single past the normative age affect their identity and role?'** The participants will describe ways in which they have adapted to or dealt with the expectations to marry by a certain age, as well as how their choices have affected their identity and personal roles. By adding to existing research and building upon it, increased understanding and perspectives will inform us about a relatively new phenomenon. In addition to learning about the reactions and

solutions to the pressures to marry, this research allows the participants to tell their stories, their difficulties and successes and hopefully allow the readers to gain some understanding of the process through the eyes of the participants.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

To understand the issues being faced by the first and second generation South Asians in Canada, one must first look at the general make-up of the traditional Indian family and the views on roles and responsibilities, especially those defined for the females, followed by the experience of being a South Asian immigrant and the changing roles and expectations of those caught between two cultures.

Traditional Roles within the South Asian Family

South Asians traditionally come from collectivist cultures which "organize their subjective experiences, values, and behavioral mores around one or more collectives, such as the family, the caste, the religious group, or the country" (Pettys & Balgopal, 1998, p.412). While individualistic cultures, like the United States and Canada, value independence, privacy and personal fulfillment; collectivist cultures stress group harmony, obedience and strict hierarchical relationships (Triandis, 1995). For Asian clients in general, the family is an important part of one's cultural identity, and for Asian Indians the family arguably is central to identity formation (Bhattacharya, 1998; Sodowsky & Lai, 1997). There are clearly defined roles for every relationship "including husband and wife, father and children, elderly and young, in-laws and the bride, teacher and student" and in this way hierarchies are maintained and distance kept between generations and the less and more powerful (Sodowsky & Carey, 1987, p. 131). Within the collectivist family, the father is the head of the household, and sex roles are clearly defined with the men having greater power and status than women (Triandis, 1995).

> Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and her
> sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence.

(The Laws of Manu translated by Buhler, G. Sacred Books of the East p.328)

The South Asian Female

Asian Indians tend to problem solve with the maxim, "father knows best' and 'mothers and daughters should obey (Hines et al., 1992). The South Asian girl enters the world at a lower status than her male counterparts as she is seen as the ultimate possession of another family, 'Ammanat' and only a temporary resident of her own. The male child is seen as the future caretaker of the parents and thus carries the aspirations of the family (Ahmed, 1999). Interestingly, in contrast, it is the female child who carries the family honour, *'izzat'*, the most prized of possessions. The daughters in this manner, are taught how to act and behave, and are expected to carry out actions that are beyond reproach. Impropriety may be inferred from such actions as, "talking too much, laughing loudly...or failing to be appropriately demure" (Ahmed).

Indian society as indicated is highly hierarchical and these hierarchies have been maintained by custom, functionality and religious belief (Chitnis, 1988). Although the women's movement in India has done much to raise the status of women, most will argue the position of the Indian female is still far below the male in the hierarchical status. When reading classical Indian literature, the theme of men controlling women and their power is evident throughout. The ideal woman, as represented by the ever devoted Goddess Sita in the epic *Ramayan*, is an image very much cherished within the culture. The majority of literature produced by South Asian writers has represented women who continue this ideal of suffering devotion (Wadley, 1986). However, more recently, South Asian women writers have moved away from depicting the traditional enduring and self-sacrificing women towards a more conflicted female searching for her identity.

The concept of equality for women was introduced by the western world and was later incorporated into the Indian constitution (Chitnis, 1988). However, the current status of women in India can be seen through a multitude of demographic indicators including the female to male ratio of 933:1000, the low literacy rate for women, and the poor representation of women in the work force. Other indicators include the practices of female infanticide, Sati (bride burning), and child marriage. Such practices are still fairly evident in rural India though there are laws in place to prevent them. Newer forms of female oppression such as the use of amniocentesis for sex selection can be viewed as the upgraded face of female infanticide (Chitnis, 1988).

South Asians in Canada

In order to understand South Asian immigrants to Canada a closer look at the experiences and history of the early immigrants is necessary. Each generation carries with it their experiences and these help shape the legacy they pass on to the next.

History of South Asian Immigration to Canada

The first visitors from India came to British Columbia more than a hundred years ago. They were Sikh soldiers who passed through the province on their way home to India after participating in Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (Jain, 1971). South Asians first began to immigrate to Canada in the early 1900s. By 1908, about 5000 South Asians had entered Canada and most of these men obtained jobs in the lumber, railway and farming industries (Ramcharan, 1984). Soon after, the first migrants settled in Canada, societal sentiment against South Asians turned hostile and measures were enacted in order to curtail the number of migrants entering the country (Jain, 1971). In particular, in the city of Vancouver, anti-migrant riots took place and the *Asiatic Exclusion League* was formed (Johnston, 1988; Sampat-Mehta, 1984). The numbers of migrants from the Indian sub-continent remained low until the post World War II period. In

addition, during this time immigrants from South Asia were predominately male and were discouraged from bringing along their families. While policy was changed earlier, in practicality, it was not until 1967 that South Asians were "accepted on a basis of equality" with other immigrants. It was then that the Immigration Act was amended and the introduction of a 'point system' was implemented. With the new system, immigrants qualified on merit based on health, education, and skills qualification. During the 1960s, there was increased immigration for the reasons of better economic status, professional growth, better standard of living, better educational facilities for children and increased material comfort (Qureshi, 1994).

Most of the new immigrants at this time moved into large urban centers such as Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Calgary, Edmonton and Winnipeg (Ramcharan, 1984). According to the 1996 census, there were approximately 600,000 South Asians in Canada, out of which around 150,000 are living in British Columbia (Statistics Canada, 1996). This number has steadily grown over the last few years and will be reflected in the data, once analyzed, of the 2001 census. Presently, the largest majority of South Asians in Canada practice the Sikh faith. There are also a significant number of Hindus, Muslims and Christians of South Asian descent.

Sikhism

There are approximately 20 million Sikhs worldwide making it the fifth largest religion in the world. The majority of Sikhs live in the state of Punjab in India and it is from here that they have migrated around the world.

> *"There is but One God Whose name is Truth*
> *The creator, unborn, self-existent, without fear or hatred.*
> *He was in the beginning; He was in the primal age.*
> *The True one is, was, O Nanak and shall ever be."*
> *(Japji Sahib, Guru Granth Sahib, pg. 473)*

Sikhism was founded around 500 years ago with Guru Nanak the first Guru (or teacher) of the Sikhs. Sikhism was a movement that emerged out of the *Bhakti* and *Sufi* movements of Hinduism and Islam (Singh, 2001). Many have placed and described Sikhism as a sect of Hinduism, one that still follows Hindu rituals and beliefs. The new faith, however, was unique as it challenged many of these very rituals of both the Muslim and Hindu faiths (Cole, 1994). Guru Nanak preached equality of 'Man' and opposed distinctions based on caste. He also felt that one did not need to abandon worldly things in order to attain spiritual enlightenment. The Ten Gurus of the Sikhs carried on the teachings and traditions and in 1699, the tenth Guru created the Khalsa. Historically, at this time the Sikhs were involved in military campaigns against the Mughal rulers and the Khalsa embodied a militant brotherhood dedicated to the defence of the faith (Singh, 2001). While the Khalsa (or pure) is a symbol of meditation and power, it also solidified the Sikh people as a collective. The baptized Sikh adheres to the Panj Kakaars (five k's) as well as reciting prayers during specified times of the day. Thus Sikhism is "…a code of conduct, a way of life, or self-discipline coupled with a belief in the unity of God, equality of man, faith in the guru's word and love for all" (Pandher, 1982, p. 12).

Adaptation

A look at Canadian Immigration policies would show that migration historically opened up when Canada needed labour, and was closed down when unemployment rates rose. The immigrant in these times of economic hardship was blamed for the unemployment and made into 'scapegoats'). Thus it can be argued that the "unfriendly reception which they (early immigrants) received…made them extremely conscious of their minority status and insecure in a white society (Ramcharan, 1984, p. 37). These immigrants were convinced that without a strong community organization and unity, their survival would be in jeopardy. It was these very beliefs

that produced a cohesive, self-preserving community that wanted desperately to maintain its traditional family structures. In North America, in both large metropolitan areas as well as smaller communities South Asians have created social institutions which provide structure and a sense of community to the immigrant population (Das & Kemp, 1997). In contrast, a second generation emerged that wanted to integrate into the new country in a more substantial way. These differences have led to conflict within families and the re-defining of familial roles.

Acculturation. There has been a steady stream of research on the acculturation process (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Beiser et al., 1989; Berry, 1997; Westermeyer, 1989). In the model proposed by John Berry there are two critical questions. Firstly, does the acculturating individual value maintaining his/her own cultural identity and characteristics? And secondly, does the acculturating individual value maintaining relationships with the larger society (Aycan & Berry, 1996).

Based on these questions, Berry (1997) has outlined four types of acculturation strategies: (a) Assimilation, (b) Separation, (c) Integration, and (d) Marginalization. Assimilation occurs when the individual does not wish to maintain his/her cultural identity and seeks daily interaction with other cultures. Separation occurs when the individual maintains his/her own culture and wishes to avoid interaction with others. Integration occurs when a part of one's own culture is retained and a wish to participate in the larger social system is exhibited. Finally, Marginalization is when the individual has little interest in either home or host cultures. When the adaptation is not optimal, a sense of cultural dislocation can occur. That is, the experience of a lack of validation of self, leads to cultural uprootedness and homesickness, as well as an undervaluation of one's cultural distinctiveness (Ishiyama, 1995).

The acculturation framework is extremely complex affected by factors in the society of

origin, society of settlement as well as moderating factors prior and during acculturation, as well as the acculturation experience itself, the appraisal of this experience, and coping strategies employed, all eventually leading to adaptation (Berry, 1997).

The context under which the immigrant comes is of great importance. Two main points to note are the cultural distance between the home and host societies and whether the move was voluntary (Berry, 1997; Beiser et al., 1988). Those who are involved in the process voluntarily (e.g., immigrants) may experience less difficulty than those with little choice (e.g., refugees). Temporary residents (e.g., sojourners) may experience more mental health problems because they do not seek out or develop large social networks in the host society (Beiser et al., 1987).

The reception by the host society affects settlement equally. What is the orientation of the citizens towards immigration? Canada's governmental policies foster multiculturalism and social integration rather than assimilation (Beiser et al., 1988; Westermeyer, 1989). However, there is still a belief that "Canada's culture-perceived as deriving from Northern Europe- is in danger of being overwhelmed by non-European immigrants unwilling to assimilate"(Beiser et al., 1988, p.12).

Factors existing prior to migration include age, gender, education, cultural distance, and personality traits including introversion/extroversion, locus of control and self efficacy (Berry, 1996; Moghaddam et al., 1990; Searle & Ward, 1990). All of these factors play a role in how well the migrant will adapt to the new environment. The developmental stage at which the individual migrates is of extreme importance because there is a vast difference in the psychological and developmental tasks and adaptations at the differing ages (Schonpflug, 1997).

Although the acculturation model as outlined by Berry is sophisticated, complex and well supported by research, it has been criticized for being too general (Lazarus, 1997), and being too

rigid, with each part fitting into the other (Pick, 1997) leading to much of the diversity of the individual being lost. It is thereby important when looking at an individual to factor in as much of the individual's personal and cultural history as possible when making a statement of their acculturation process.

Biculturalism. For an immigrant, developing a bicultural identity has been described as the most desirable of outcomes (Aycan & Kanungo, 1998). It is the desire one has to maintain both an ethnic identity and acculturate to the host society that leads to the creation of a bi-cultural or dual identity. In a multicultural nations like Canada this is perhaps more accepted and thus easier to integrate than in a nation with a 'melting pot' outlook. It is the children of the immigrant however, who are more fully socialized into two cultures.

A study by Aycan and Kanungo (1998) showed that integration was the predominant choice for Indo-Canadians and they attributed this to the multiculturalism policy which allows for the maintenance of one's cultural heritage. While seeking full participation in the host society it was further found that there is a relationship between the parents' acculturation attitudes and the attitudes of their children. Thus parents who embrace integration are more likely to have children who do the same. Conversely, the children's influence on parents is seen as they are the carrier of host norms and values into the family.

Between Two Cultures

Changes are often met with resistance and one of the major areas of conflict lies around the structure of the family, including established gender roles, social mores and most particularly courtship and marital traditions (Gupta, 1999).

Intergenerational conflict

Intergenerational conflict is a well-documented phenomenon that exists across cultures (Kibria, 1990; Wakil, Siddique, & Wakil, 1981). Intergenerational conflict is conflict between the generations which goes beyond the colloquial "generation gap". It is conflict among groups within society based, to some extent, on the attitudes and perceptions that older, middle-aged and younger people have of each other and on the social values which shape and inhibit intergenerational relations (Ashfield, 1994).

In a cross-cultural context, the problem is further complicated as the effects of the new culture threaten the values of the old. The source of intergenerational conflict within the immigrant family can be traced to the different rates of acculturation between the parents and the children. The greater the acculturation gap between parent and children, the greater the conflict between them. The magnitude of intergenerational conflict has been found to be highest between first-generation immigrants and their second-generation children, especially where the home culture is "distant" from the host culture (Bhattacharya, 1998). Thus migration and the ensuing resettlement have been identified in the literature as factors influencing parent-teen conflict (Drachman et. al., 1996; Rosenthal et. al., 1996). Youth have to face the additional stress of identity formation that is trying to adjust not only to the bi-cultural world around them but to their changing self as well.

In a study done by Kibria (1990), of immigrant Vietnamese-American families, it was found that immigrants felt that migration had enhanced intergenerational tensions as family generations grew apart and the authority of family elders eroded. This seems more evident with women as their roles are changing more rapidly, creating a divide between the traditional roles their mothers held and new opportunities in the new country (Gupta, 1999).

Intergenerational Conflict within the South Asian community. The South Asian immigrant has been described, by some researchers, as a marginal person (Sodowsky & Carey, 1987), not fitting well into either the home or host country. Children or the second-generation immigrants, tend to become more assimilated into the Western culture than their parents which can readily lead to conflict in the family. Second generation South Asians may feel this uncertainty even more as they feel neither Indian nor Canadian leading to greater confusion about their role and identity. In this population, this marginality may even lead to denial of their ethnicity and alienation from the ethnic group (Sodowsky & Carey, 1987).

In Canada, two early studies were carried out that looked at changes in the parent-child relationships (Kurian & Ghosh, 1978; Siddique, 1977). Both found that children were encouraged to take more initiative when compared with their counterparts in most parts of India. Further, more freedom was granted to the children in allowing them to make their own choices.

A study by Pettys & Balgopal (1998) looked at adolescents, parents and grandparents and identified a number of areas where conflict arose. These areas include gender roles, respect, power shifts, life cycle changes, bicultural identity, child rearing, triangulation amongst family members and Westernization. Conflicts often arise around which family values will be maintained and how. These tended to be around areas such as marriage, language and religion. Similarly, a study by Eldering & Knorth (1998) found conflict arising in schooling, friendships, and marriage. Conflicts around sex role development, associations with members of the opposite sex, dating and marriage have been singled out in other studies as predominant (Wakil, Siddique, & Wakil, 1981). In the end the families may eventually settle with a middle ground approach where they land somewhere "between collectivistic India and individualistic America" (Petty & Balgopal, 1998, p. 421). Studies have found parents tend to compromise more on superficial

changes, like clothing, rather than core cultural values, such as dating (de Leon Siantz, 1997). It seems that most South Asians accommodate to the work ethic and value of education but they maintain their ties to the ideas of marriage, child rearing, parenting and sharing of economic resources (Almeida, 1996). Asian Indian immigrants have generally been considered to be at an intermediate level of integration. It is not as common to marry across cultures as it is for Chinese and Japanese Americans or Canadians (Sodowsky & Carey, 1987). Thus, Indo-American immigrant groups may strive for cultural pluralism and structural assimilation (Pettys & Balgopal, 1998).

Female Ethnic Identity

Identity. The formation of one's identity is the major developmental task of adolescence according to Erikson (1968). This generally has been believed to be the time of life when concerns about the self are at maximal. It is at this time that the issues of sexuality and independence come to the forefront. This sense of an 'inner core', started in adolescence, carries with it parts taken from parents, background and ascribed roles as well as distinctness from these (Goodenow & Espin, 1993). The way in which an adolescent navigates this 'crisis' can lead to a number of identity status', those being (a) Identity Diffusion, (b) Foreclosure, (c) Moratorium, and (d) Identity Achievement as suggested by Marcia (1976). A Diffused identity would be one that is not clear at all and a Foreclosed one that is based on rigid, unexamined beliefs towards a particular way of life. Consequently, an identity status described as in Moratorium is one that is currently undergoing changes and examination which may lead to an Achieved identity where one reaches a coherent identity where subjectively one feels important, central and valued (Goodenow & Espin, 1993).

Female Identity. Early work on identity formation had focused primarily on males. The work of Carol Gilligan (1982) looked at the differences of the female experience. During adolescence, females are taught how to play the part of the 'good woman'. With this comes an expectation around the woman being quiet, unassuming and lacking in strong opinions that may place her in conflict with others. Gilligan refers to this losing of confidence and freedom possessed in childhood as the 'loss of voice.'

Further, the emphasis placed on vocational choice as a determinant of a stable, committed identity once again put females at a loss because they tended to make these decisions at a later age than men. Females, however, did reach a more serious understanding of sex roles and family-career balance before males of the same age (Goodenow & Espin, 1993). Can the immigrant and especially the immigrant female be adequately defined within these categories?

Ethnic Identity. Ethnic identity can be described as a part of self-concept that consciously anchors an individual to a particular ethnic group. Along with the belonging comes a commitment to the group's values, beliefs, conventions and customs (Dasgupta, 1998). For minority group members, a way to establish a positive ethnic identity is to maintain distinct in-group behaviours. The strength of an ethnic identity differs from person to person depending on the devotion to the home culture and the degree to which one identifies with the dominant culture. Sue& Sue (1997) developed a model of ethnic identity in which one of four categories apply. These categories are based on a dimension of internalization of the dominant cultural norms. The *Traditionalist* who adheres to ethnic features to the exclusion of the dominant cultural norms; the *Assimilationist* who adopts dominant group norms and rejects ethnic characteristics; the *Bicultural*, who amalgamates both ethnic and dominant group features; and the *Marginal*, who feels alienated from both ethnic and dominant group features.

Phinney (1996) describes the process of ethnic identity development in a three-step model. The first stage is one of an *uninspected* ethnic identity, one in which the group unquestioningly conforms to its own values and norms. The second *exploration* phase is one in which the group explores its relationship with the dominant culture. And the third *consolidation* phase is where a merging of both cultures may occur while unique individual characteristics are exhibited.

South Asian Females and Identity. During adolescence, young girls are reminded they must cultivate 'sharam' or shame, which helps to safeguard the family name (Ahmed, 1999). The venue in which this is emphasized the most is in the girl's marital future where she can ideally state that she completely trusts in her parent's choice and does not need to be involved in the selection of her future husband. As the girl grows, she is expected to take on the roles of the 'good' daughter, wife and mother; thus, it is when entering motherhood that her identity finally crystallizes (Kakar, 1981).

In contrast, the South Asian girl born or raised in North America will feel the pressure to conform to both realities; those of the mainstream America and those of her parents. Dating during the adolescent years is a part of the reality of mainstream North America. The process itself is seen as integral to the development of an adult identity. While the adolescent boy may be mildly chastised for dating, the girls are closely guarded (Aafreen, 1999). So what does the South Asian girl do? She is caught between the two worlds trying to find some balance. She may compartmentalize and try to live two separate lives (Ahmed, 1999) and this may lead to a sense of guilt as one is caught up in never revealing their whole self. The adolescent may also gravitate to one extreme being either the dutiful and obedient daughter or the rebel having a lot of parent-teen conflict.

For girls of any culture there is a great deal of pressure to conform to standards of beauty that are unattainable. Within the South Asian culture, the colour of the skin is a measure of beauty. In essence, the lighter the skin colour the more beautiful the individual. This can be viewed as a type of internalized racism, a colonial remnant, that is imposed not from the dominant culture but from within the community (Ahmed, 1999). The American media also plays a role in this as it teaches girls that "white is beautiful and Indian is ugly" (Aafreen, 1999). The impact of internalized negative attitudes or internalized racism is one that has not been explored adequately in psychological research (Tee, 1996).

The South Asian girl in North America is given confused messages. From the mainstream culture, she learns that physical attractiveness should be emphasized and promoted, while from the South Asian culture, she learns that her body is something dangerous and should be hidden and concealed (Ahmed, 1999). The contradictory messages again are something the adolescent has to work through and integrate.

It has been found that if the adolescent can integrate both the South Asian and the American identity they have a higher sense of self-esteem. While the North American society views adolescence as a time when the young person becomes increasingly self-reliant in order to eventually move away or 'emancipate' oneself from the family, South Asian society views it as the time when the young person increasingly becomes more prepared to take on the roles and responsibilities of one's family and culture (Ahmed, 1999).

Women in Transition: The Changing Roles for South Asian Women

Both second generation and first generation women are reconstructing their traditional roles and expectations. There seems to be a movement towards combining both traditional and contemporary values, described as wanting "the best of both worlds" (Naidoo & Davis, 1988). In

a study conducted by Beck in 1979, metaphors were used to describe the relationship between a husband and wife. Indians in the home country predominately chose the metaphor 'a tall tree to a plant', while Indo-Canadians chose 'a driver to a car' and 'host' Canadians chose 'a foot to a shoe.' These metaphors describe the quality of the husband –wife relationship respectively as: protection of wife, functional and complementary, and equality and sameness. (as cited in Naidoo & Davis, 1988).Thus, even as far back as 1979, the Indo-Canadian woman can be seen as making gradual adjustments in their concepts about family life bringing them closer to host Canadian norms.

In the study by Naidoo & Davis (1988), South Asian women were shown to acculturate on a selective basis. Areas such as education, achievement and success are falling into a "contemporary" pattern while areas such as family, religion and marriage still fall under "traditional" patterns. Naidoo argues that this complementary style may be best suited for Indo-Canadian women at this time.

Second generation women are monitored more closely than sons as they are seen as maintainers of the traditions and identity of the culture. The fear of "Americanization" plays a large role in the restrictions placed on women, which eventually can lead to conflict or a sense of repression (Dasgupta, 1999).

Tee (1996) interviewed 51 first and second generation women in B.C. on such diverse areas as spousal roles, relationships in the family and women and acculturation. Most women in this study, both first and second generation, struggled with prescribed gender roles, resisting traditional assumptions and spoke out against sexism in their community.

A women's identity has traditionally always been defined on the basis of her relationship to men. This is clearly seen in the Hindu legal code as stated in the Laws of Manu. These

expectations are similar in other patriarchal cultures including Vietnamese and Chinese (Gupta, 1999). It is due to these very beliefs that there have been few opportunities in which a woman can express herself as an individual separate from her familial roles. While this has worked for the most part in the past, with migration and globalization the women of the second generation do not always cooperate. Thus a feeling of unease and rebellion within the second-generation women can be seen. Gupta has found, in her interviews with females in their 20s and 30s, that there are feelings of unrest and confusion regarding their role in society. The bi-cultural identity and changing roles of women are creating conflict within the parental home.

Dating itself is neither an accepted nor recognized part of the South Asian culture. It is therefore only a recent addition to the issues with which the community is dealing. It is, however, a growing concern and one which has been singled out as the number one cause of conflict and stress between parents and their adult children according to a recent study conducted by the School of Public Health at the University of California (Gupta, 1999). According to a study by Agarwal a 'good Indian girl' is one who does not date, is shy and delicate and marries an Indian man of her parents' choosing (Dasgupta, 1999). While the constraints against women dating are heavy, studies have found that a majority of South Asian women do date in North America while this is usually done with great secrecy. It also seems that dating is a cause for conflict in other immigrant communities as well, including the Vietnamese and Mexican American (Gupta 1999; Kibria 1990).

While the parents feel a great deal of stress dealing with the fact that there children may be dating, the second generation daughters deal with the stress of trying to hide and maintain these relationships against the wishes of their parents. Sexual intimacy before marriage, from an Indian cultural point of view, is not permissible (Dasgupta, 1999) and it is this very fear that

parents are trying to alleviate by placing restrictions on daughters. Interestingly, Gupta (1999) documented that relationships proceed at a slower pace than mainstream North American norms, and sexual involvement is not a casual 'next-step' for young South Asians. In Gupta's study however, one out of four respondents was or had been sexually active and she regards that there would be a great deal of under-reporting because of the cultural taboo around this issue. In this regard, once the family becomes aware of a dating relationship there is usually a great deal of pressure to legitimize the relationship into marriage. This has its own areas of concern as the couple may not be ready to take that step or they may not be compatible but have not had the time to find this out. In an attempt to avoid this situation, many second-generation women would not acknowledge their dating relationships in the early stages.

Single Women and Marriage

It is necessary at some point for every family with a son to acquire a daughter in law. This girl who is to marry the son of the house must come from a good family. She must have a pleasant personality. Her character must be decent and not shameless and bold. This girl should keep her eyes lowered and, because she is humble and shy, she should keep her head bowed as well. Nobody wants a girl who stares people right in the face with big froggy eyes. She should be fair-complexioned, but if she is dark the dowry should include at least one of the following items: a television set, a refrigerator, a Godrej steel cupboard and maybe even a scooter... When she sings her voice must be honey-sweet and bring tears of joy to the eyes. When she dances people should exclaim "Wah!" in astounded pleasure. It should be made clear that she will not dance and sing after marriage and shame the family... She must not be lame. She must walk a few steps, delicately, feet small beneath her sari. She must not stride or kick up her legs like a horse. She must sit quietly, with knees together. She should talk just a little to show she can but she should not talk too much... Her mother should urge: 'Eat something. Eat a laddoo. My daughter made these with her own hands.' And these laddoos must not be recognizable as coming from the sweetmeat shop down the road. The embroidery on the cushion covers the prospective in-laws lean against, and the paintings on the walls opposite, should also be the work of her own hands. She should not be fat. She should be pleasantly plump, with large hips and breasts but a small waist...Talk of husband and children should so overcome her with shyness and embarrassment that she should hide her face, pink as a rosebud in the fold of her sari.

(Kiran Desai, excerpt from *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard,* 1997, p. 57-58)

There has been an increasing trend in delaying or rejecting marriage. The average age of marriage for men in Canada in 1991 was 27.7 and for women 25.7 (Wu, 1997) marking a steady rise in age in the last few decades. Statistics in the U.S. reflect comparable numbers of 25.0 for women and 26.8 for men (U.S. Census Bureau, 1996). There have been a number of explanations for the increase in single people, both male and female, including: the increasing trend of cohabitation, loss of economic independence, supply of eligible men, and increased school enrolment (Wu, 1997). There are relatively few studies of the never married, and less even of those of different racial and ethnic groups, examining the causes and consequences of these choices (Ferguson, 2000).

In the world, there is in general a decline in the social stigma attached to not being married. In more traditional cultures, while there is similar movement, it would not necessarily reflect at the same level. Traditionally, marriage rates have been high for women, especially Asian women who come from a culture advocating arranged marriages, patrilocal households and family as the central focal unit with relatively few other roles for women (Ferguson, 2000). Ferguson looked at never married Chinese and Japanese-American women and cited the reasons for the delay in marriage as: educational attainment, career aspirations, familial demands on the daughter around work or caring for elderly parents as well as a hesitation to marry men who are seen as traditional.

The pressures to marry

The pressure to marry is felt by single people universally. Traditionally, marriage was a given and there was social, cultural and religious pressure to marry (Fraser, 2001) As Fraser states, women who did not marry were considered eccentric at best, pathetic or problematic at worst.

South Asian women feel tremendous pressure to marry and this pressure comes from parents, extended family, significant others, and friends. Marriage is seen as a very significant and serious institution, one which the woman associates with added responsibility and a loss of independence and freedom (Narain, 1999). Arranged marriages are the norm in India as well as the adopted country. A great deal of conflict can arise when the daughter chooses education over marriage or asserts her personal right to chose a partner over the parents' choice (Hines et al., 1992). South Asian parents expect their daughters to be married between the ages of 18 and 22 and sons to be married between the ages of 22 and 26 (Hines et al., 1992). This trend seems to be changing here in North America, as more women choose higher education and, thereby, later marriages.

> *ALLIANCE INVITED for good-looking Jat Sikh boy 26/ 5`11`` Computer Engineer, working in U.S.A from beautiful Jat Sikh Girl, 18-26, Computer Graduates/ Engineers willing to settle in USA– send biodata, horoscope to Box 96187*
>
> (The Tribune, May 16, 2000)

South Asian parents have for generations screened marriage partners for caste, social-class, regional and religious similarities as well as family background (Gupta, 1999). In more recent times, and here in North America, education and financial stability are also screened. In contrast, individual traits have not been emphasized as the pair, particularly the bride, is expected to adjust to one another. Further, young South Asians are not considered adults until they are married and therefore the parental generation is considered the best judge of potential partners, negating the need for input by the young adults (Gupta, 1999). Further, parents generally want their children to marry within their own ethnic group as they see these unions as more harmonious and stable (Das & Kemp, 1997). While there has been some relaxing of this tradition, parents still prefer a partner from within the community rather than from the

mainstream society (Wakil, Siddique, & Wakil, 1981). A quick scan of the internet produced over 100 sites devoted to 'matrimonial alliances' within the South Asian community, most describing the profession, age, height and caste of the individual.

Parental expectations of second generation women to maintain cultural ideals of behaviour put a great deal of pressure on these women. These expectations are often ones brought with them at the time of migration, which may be outdated in the homeland but are preserved in a 'time capsule' in the new country (Gupta, 1999). Many Indian women find it difficult to combine the submissive, obedient and demure role expected of them with the independent and assertive qualities necessary to achieve success in a competitive world (Gupta, 1999).

The Ideal Man

The ideal man, as seen by second generation, differs in many ways from what the parental generation looks for. In the study conducted by Gupta (1999), she found that 40% of the respondents were willing to date a non Indian-American but only 26% were willing to marry one. It seems that, when considering marriage, similar cultural beliefs and religious beliefs are seen as vital. This propensity to marry within one's ethnic group is found in most communities as found in a nationwide study in the U.S. (Gupta, 1999). Gupta further found that caste, regional origin and language were not important considerations for the second generation women. Additionally, it was found that there were certain personality traits that women looked for including kindness, integrity, intelligence and the ability to communicate as well as someone who believes in equality between the sexes (Gupta, 1999). Sayantani and Shamita Dasgupta (1996) use the term 'female exogamy' to refer to the fact that more and more young women in the Indian community complain that they are unable to find a partner within the community, one

who encourages their independence, assertiveness and ambition. Tee (1996) noted that second generation women expressed that love, its presence or absence, was the primary consideration for being or staying married. This is in contrast to the more traditional notion that 'love will grow out of marriage'.

South Asian Male Perspective on Marriage

One young male in a study conducted by Subramanyan (1999) stated his preference for a wife as follows, 'In my case, my parents will stay with me, I am the only son…Well, if she is not going to be able to get along with my parents, I don't think I am going to marry her, that's straight…' While on the whole, both male and female participants in the above quoted study felt that women and men are equal their definitions often varied. The women saw themselves as individuals who should be independent and self-confident and the men saw the ideal woman more in connection to their husbands, children and families. In assessing the role of women in general, the respondents accepted 'women as workers' as a part of their identity, but maintained that family was not to be neglected in any way. One subject in this study was quoted as saying if a woman was too educated he would not marry her as she would likely spend too much time away from the home. Interestingly, anthropologist Maria Mies (as cited in Subrahmanyan, 1999) makes the assertion that the social ideal of women has not undergone any radical change in India, but has been polished up and made modern. Some Indian males have stated they prefer women who are 20-22 as they are more adaptable and their personalities are not completely set (Gupta, 1999). Further, as more men continue to return to their parents' homeland to find a bride, a growing divide termed a "no-confidence vote" is being cast between the genders of the second generation (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996).

Motherhood

There is an interesting paradox between the female as reviled and deified. While on the one hand women are viewed as inferior, in need of protection and to be controlled, on the other hand the role of the mother is one greatly venerated. It is only once a female becomes a mother that her position is consolidated within the family (Chitnis, 1988). The mother is revered and respected for her status and children are taught that the highest respect must be paid to their mothers. Mothers of male children are even further respected as they allow the lineage to carry on (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997). Thus, even the birth order of children plays an important role in the family. While overt power is in the hands of men, the women exert power within the household and thereby further maintain hierarchies. It goes without saying that if the female role is wrapped up within marriage and motherhood, the pressures to marry are multifold and complex both externally and internally.

In summary, this chapter focused on detailing the research on both the traditional South Asian culture with its roles and hierarchies as well as the experience of the South Asian immigrant in Canada. In turn, South Asian women in Canada must be seen within the complexity of the traditional as well as the new niche they are carving out for themselves in between two worlds. While there is a growing voice of Indo-American researchers looking at issues that concern South Asian women, there still is a lack of studies conducted in Canada, as well as, studies particularly focusing on marriage, or more particularly its absence.

Chapter III: Method

This study explores the pressure to marry by a certain age on the South Asian woman and how she deals with these pressures. The methodology proposed for this study was qualitative in nature. It involved the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews to both gain understanding and provide an opportunity for these young women to give voice to their experience.

This research builds upon previous exploratory works which have found South Asian women are not easily explained or compartmentalized by existing theory (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997; Naidoo & Davis, 1988; Tee, 1996). This research is inspired by both the feminist tradition (Oleson, 1994; Reinharz, 1992) and classic hermeneutic theory (Dilthey, 1976; Kvale, 1996; Ricoeur, 1979) both of which allow for an interpretive method that is non-reductionistic in nature.

While this research was inspired by the hermeneutic tradition, described below there are a number of important variants from a classical phenomenological design which would theoretically be more in line with hermeneutic interpretation. When looking through that lens the interview questions would seem unnecessarily leading and the direction influenced by the researcher. The original study by Tee (1996) also contained a lengthy questionnaire (Family Roles Interview) from which a transcript was created. It was the interpretation of this transcript, on one level reading simply for the themes but then on a more complex level reading for voices (different distinct voices each containing characteristics and ways of negotiating the world), that was embedded in the hermeneutic circle. Similarly, this study as originally envisioned did not look for the answers to the questions as the ultimate goal but rather a starting point to read more deeply for themes and voices. I thought there would clearly be voices that echoed and honoured the 'traditional' beliefs, voices that broke new ground and voices that rejected all that was seen

as traditional or old. Additionally, I envisioned that there would be women that internalized the pressure and its effects compared to others that did not. Instead the surprise was the uniformity in the views all the women in the sample held. They seemed to speak with one voice a strong sure voice that accepted there was pressure but felt certain that they had made the right choices. The results in a way moved this study from a hermeneutic interpretation to more of a semi-structured qualitative interview study.

In keeping the research culturally relevant I also felt that a question simply asking about the lived experience of being single would not have been appropriate. After speaking to some practitioners in the field and from my own experience of working with South Asian individuals and families, it was clear that the interview would require some structure to it. Interestingly, when asked the second question of this study, "what does this pressure look like or sound like", about half of the women asked me what that meant. Throughout the interviews prompting and examples were necessary.

Feminist Tradition

There are as many definitions of what makes feminist research as there are feminist researchers. And perhaps it is this very plurality and diversity that allows this research tradition to capture the richness of its subject matter. While the different perspectives may each emphasize a different point they share the outlook that it is, "important to center and make problematic women's diverse situations, and the institutions and frames that influence those situations, and in turn frame this into a theoretical, political or action framework that realizes social justice for women" (Oleson, 1994, p. 158).

It was in the 1970s that the absence of women or their invisibility became more noticeable and research began to redress these inequities. Whether it was the work of Carol

Gilligan (1982), which proved frameworks that were based on the lives of young men were inadequate on which to compare women, or the work of African American scholars stating that Black women faced a very different past and present (i.e., one impacted by slavery) the face of feminist research began to emerge. Over the years, 'Third World' feminists have critiqued the framework of western feminist writing as have feminist researchers studying the stigmas of disability or non-heterosexuality (Oleson, 1994). This all points to the fact that the feminist research field is continually changing and re-defining itself in a fluid process as more and more voices are added or heard. Many feminist researchers have written that "finding one's voice" is a central part of their research and writing (Reinharz, 1992). And, in turn, this allows them to assist others to present their voices to the outside world.

One of the central tenets of feminist research is the critique that it is impossible for research in the social sciences to be value-free and for the scientist to be objective, neutral and uninvolved (Gergen, 1988). To address this issue, one of the first steps involves recognizing false assumptions and making them explicit. This is done by acknowledging the interdependence of the researcher and participant as well as accepting that the researcher has values and biases. In turn, these values and beliefs influence the research and their effects must be identified (Gergen, 1988).

To fully make the reader aware of the researcher's biases and assumptions, the researcher can start by providing information on their own social location, that is, their gender, ethnicity, class, culture, sexual orientation or any other relevant information. It is this very situating of the researcher within the social frame that makes her or his assumptions explicit (Harding, 1971).

Feminist tradition does not specify one particular methodology but rather supports methods that are appropriate for understanding the lives of women (Oleson, 1994). Brown and

Gillian (1992) moved towards this method due to discontent with the strict empirical tradition for both gathering and analyzing data. The key point is to start from the women's lives rather than just including women in a study as a participant. This means starting with the lives of women of a particular class, culture, race or sexuality (Harding, 1991). The point is to make the voice of the woman clearly audible and the hermeneutic methodology described below allows this.

Hermeneutical Interpretation

Hermeneutics, as a general science of interpretation, can be traced back to the ancient Greeks' study of literature and in ancient Biblical exegesis. As the study of the interpretation of texts, the point was to obtain a common understanding of the meaning of a text. Thus the central question of hermeneutics has been described as-What is the meaning of this text? (Radnitzsky, 1970). The word *hermeneutics* was coined in the 17th century on the basis of the Greek *hermeneuein*, "to interpret," which signified "equally a declamation of a text, an explanation of a situation or a translation from a foreign tongue" (Woolfolk et al., 1988).

The works of Schleiermacher and Dilthey raised hermeneutics to a mode of analysis compared to an underlying philosophy (Woolfolk et al., 1988). Schleiermacher in his early work noted that beyond understanding due to a shared language, the listener can recognize intentions behind the words by being in the same situation and sharing a common human nature with the speaker. Schleiermacher's concept of understanding thus includes empathy or projective introspection, (i.e., the interpreter's self projection into the author's space). Dilthey, building upon this work, claimed that texts, verbal utterances, art and action were all meaningful expressions whose "mental contents" or intentions needed to be understood (1976). Dilthey further postulated that the author's world-view reflects an historical period and social context and thus the methodology involves the tracing of a circle from the text to the author's biography

and historical circumstances and back again if necessary. In other words, to understand the text, reconstruction of the world in which it was produced and placement of the text in that world is necessary. Therefore, proximity in temporal and cultural distance in this model, as in this study, would increase the reliability of the interpretation (Dilthey, 1976).

Although this methodology was originally used in the interpretation of classical texts, it is now being used to study the research interview which can be viewed as an oral discourse transformed into texts to be interpreted (Kvale, 1996). In the humanities, this is done by studying human cultural activity as texts and then interpreting them to find the intended or expressed meaning and coming to a co-understanding. It is a method which allows for the oral tradition of dialogue to continue and deepen.

The Hermeneutical Circle

The understanding of the text occurs by a process in which the meaning of separate parts is determined by the global meaning of the text. By taking a closer look at the separate parts the meaning of the total may change and in this way once again influence the separate parts. Thus the interpretation procedure is circular, that is a spiral of deeper and deeper understanding (Kvale, 1996). In theory, this circle or process would continue infinitely while, in reality, once a sensible, coherent meaning is obtained the process stops.

The interpretation begins at some level by subjectively guessing the meaning of the text. Gadamer (1989) suggested that it is not possible to determine a way to proceed without being guided by the topic. At the beginning of interpretive work, there is necessarily a deliberate showing of questionableness, intentionally allowing the topic to guide the direction of the character of the work. This questionableness, however, does not mean that we respond tentatively, but rather that we proceed attentively. The hypothesis thus developed is then

validated through rational argument (Ricouer, 1974). Ricoeur furthers that once objective meaning is gained from the subjective intentions of the author then multiple acceptable interpretations become possible. Thus the meaning is construed according to the author's world view as well as its significance in the reader's world view.

The wide range of hypothesis formation means that possible interpretations may be reached through many paths. Explanation thus becomes a process of validating informed guesses. As Hirsch (1976) notes, this model may lead into a dilemma of self-confirmability when hypotheses that cannot be validated are proposed. Since it is possible for a number of interpretations to be reached through a variety of paths the hypothesis is then examined using the notion of 'falsifiability' which looks at internal coherence and plausibility (Hirsch, 1976).

Research Design

Participants

The participants within this study included 10 South Asian women. Due to the immense diversity in South Asians (religion, culture, origin, acculturation), the participants were chosen from one segment of the community. All ten women were affiliated with the Punjabi Sikh community, the largest portion of the South Asian community in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The women thus shared a common culture, religion and language. Studies have shown that different attitudes and issues emerge based on the country of origin and religion (Pettys & Balgopal, 1998) within the community which would lead to a picture that was not as clear. While generalizability is not a key component of this methodology, providing detailed description about the group studied allows for the clearer notion of transferability (Woolfolk et al., 1988).

The sampling method used was a non-probabalistic-purposive type, also known as "snowballing" (Palys, 1997). In this type of sampling, people or places are intentionally sought out because they meet some type of criteria for inclusion in the study. Thus, there is a heavy reliance on previously identified acquaintances to help identify further participants for the study.

The sample consisted of ten females. Within the sample there were two distinct age groups, one with participants between the ages of 25 to 29; and the other 30 to 35. The pressure was postulated as starting at 25 and becoming increasingly stronger at 30.

Participants were required to meet the following criteria:

1) must be female between 25 and 35 years of age.

2) must be Sikh or were born into a Sikh family

3) must be of South Asian ethnicity

4) must be single and have never been married

5) must identify themselves as heterosexual

6) must have experienced and can identify pressure to marry by self, family or community.

7) must be willing to reflect on the pressure and its effects and discuss these experiences with the interviewer.

The participants all voluntarily self reported that they had faced pressure to marry and can comment on how this has shaped their identity or role.

There were two research components employed in this study- a semi-structured interview and a demographic questionnaire.

Interview

An initial individual semi-structured interview and a follow-up interview were conducted with each participant. The questions for the interview were open-ended, allowing for

expansion and further probing of ideas. The interview was designed more to elicit information rather than to get answers to the particular questions. Thus, there was deviation from the set questions as required. This approach is consistent with the hermeneutic circle, with each new interview adding to what was gained in the previous.

The basis for the interview questions was the previous work of authors studying South Asian Women (Pettys & Balgopal, 1998; Tee, 1996) the researcher's own experience as a single South Asian women, as well as a thorough reading of the literature both fiction and non-fiction related to this topic. Please see Appendix E for a list of related fictional literature.

Examples of questions used during the interview process are listed below. For a complete list of the open-ended interview questions please see Appendix A.

1. Do you face any pressure around marriage in the home?

2. At what age did this begin?

3. How have you dealt with the pressures you have faced?

4. Have you developed any strategies to deal with the pressure?

5. How do you perceive the outside community views you?

6. How do you view yourself?

7. If the primary role of a woman, as defined in the culture, is as a wife, daughter-in-law or mother how do you define your current role?

8. What role do you see marriage as playing in defining you now? In the future?

9. If asked, "Why aren't you married?" How do or would you typically respond

The interviews were conducted in the language preferred by the participant. In all ten cases, the interviews were predominately conducted in English, though the women interspersed them with sayings and words in Punjabi.

The follow-up interview was conducted within about three months of the initial interview. The second interview was done either in person or over the telephone as per convenience of the participant. During the second interview, themes that emerged in each individual's transcript were discussed with them. Additionally, any notable themes that emerged in the whole sample were also discussed as these may elicit further responses and comments. This process acted as both a validation tool as well as a way to deepen the hermeneutic circle as each participant could respond to what they said or the meaning the interpreter made of it as well as responding to what other participants said.

Demographic Information

The Demographic Information form (see Appendix B) provided data on all participants pertaining to information such as age, place of birth, number of years in Canada, occupation and education. This form allowed the researcher to produce a profile of the participants as well as screen that the participant meets the criteria of being a single, heterosexual South Asian female between the ages of 25 and 35. The demographic information is summarized in the results section.

Procedures

The procedures for the interview were as follows:

Step 1: Recruitment. Participants were recruited through word of mouth as well as placing advertisements (see Appendix C) at UBC, local multicultural agencies and women's centers. Screening information was provided on the poster as well as some screening questions were asked on the phone prior to the interview. The purpose of the study was also explained in general terms at this time.

Step 2: Consent and Purpose. At this time, the purpose and procedures of the study were explained including confidentiality and withdrawal from the study. Participants were given a consent form (Appendix D) at the beginning of the initial interview which stated the purpose and the criteria for participant selection and information regarding confidentiality. The aim of the study was made explicit to the participants and each was told the following: "*The purpose of this study is to find out how single, South Asian women deal with the pressures to marry by a certain age and how they incorporate being single past 25 into their identity and role. By talking about your personal experience I would hope that we can gain a better understanding of this experience as well as provide you with the opportunity to have your voice heard. I want to thank you for your participation and appreciate your willingness to share your personal experiences.*"

Step 3: Demographic Information Form. The demographic form which was a number of questions (Appendix B) verbally asked of the participants, was next filled out by the researcher. This form was crucial in helping the interviewer establish rapport with the participants. These initial stages of the interview took about 20 minutes.

Step 4: Interview. This part of the interview proceeded with the open-ended questions. The participants were told, "I *am now going to ask you a series of questions. Please ask me for clarification for any of the questions if required. You are free to choose not to answer a particular question or discontinue from further participation and withdraw from the study at any time*". Throughout this part the interviewer used active listening skills to probe and gain a better understanding of the participant's view. The interviews were audio taped and later transcribed for data analysis. This portion of the interview took between one to two hours.

Step 5: Analysis. The transcripts were then individually analyzed (see data analysis below) for themes.

Step 6: Second Interview. A summary of the interview including themes was next discussed with the participants either in person or by telephone allowing the participant to give feedback and make changes. This is an integral part of the qualitative process which allows the participant to remain involved and add to the narrative.

Data Analysis

The process for analysis includes multiple readings of the narrative text, each time looking from a different standpoint. Based upon the hermeneutical circle (Hirsch, 1967; Ricoeur, 1979) and previous research with South Asian women (Tee, 1996), a framework to interpret was formed. It lays down a method of four readings, adopted and changed to suit this particular research. Themes can be identified by noting, among other things, repetition within and across transcripts, level of affect and contradictions in thoughts and behaviours (Love, 1992).

First Reading. With the transcript as a guide, the taped narrative was listened to, looking at it as a whole. The narrative was read in its entirety. Using a summary sheet, any notable themes, images and metaphors were recorded and returned to on a subsequent reading. A record of the interpreter's reactions was also kept which allowed for the noting of one's own values, judgments and assumptions.

Second Reading. The transcripts were read again looking for earlier noted themes from the summary sheet. Notes were made about areas of interest and contradictions.

Third Reading. A summary sheet was distilled from the three readings with themes categorized into strategies and other notable themes. Key quotations to be used to illustrate themes in the results section were also marked at this time.

Fourth Reading. This final reading allowed for a complete reading of themes, while keeping in mind any notes, thoughts, or contradictions. This reading allowed for all the parts to emerge back into a whole. At this reading, any inconsistencies, or missed information was noted.

Collaborative Interpretation

A number of the interviews were analyzed using an independent interpreter. In addition to the researcher, a second interpreter looked at every third transcript. This interpreter, a graduate student in psychology, S. Jaswal, was given information to read on the hermeneutic process and provided with a copy of this proposal to familiarize herself with the topic. The independent rater is herself South Asian, single and currently conducting cross-cultural research and was thereby familiar with many of the issues discussed in the interviews.

During this process, the interpreters independently arrived at the themes in the transcript and then looked for agreement between the two interpretations. When there was disagreement, a discussion ensued until consensus was reached. There are some potential limitations to this method as there is no empirical basis to judge the collaborative work. In this regard, one interpreter, particularly the primary researcher, could sway all the findings and consensus easily reached. However, if the interpreters are both knowledgeable in the field of study, as in this case, this is less likely to occur.

Products of the Research

The final stage is the reporting of the findings. This study yielded a number of themes which were categorized as follows: (a) the definition of pressure, (b) strategies to deal with the pressure, (c) factors that increase or decrease the pressure, and (d) other themes (including sociological, attitudinal and personal characteristics of the group).

Chapter IV: Results

The results flowing from this qualitative inquiry are primarily thematic in content. The results consist of three main sections. The first section provides a profile of the participants in terms of demographic characteristics. The next section presents the themes and is sub-divided into four sections: the definition of pressure, strategies to deal with the pressure, factors that increase or decrease the pressure and other themes related to attitudinal views and personal characteristics of the participants. The final section includes the validation process of the results.

While the results were originally conceived to be presented in a format allowing the reader to follow the narrative of each participant, this was changed to protect anonymity. Due to the relatively small sample of a relatively small population (single women over 25 in the South Asian community), it was decided after some discussion not to name the individuals even with a substituted name as they could be identified by picking out pieces of information and putting them together. For the sake of confidentiality, the themes will be presented in an anonymous format.

Participant Profile

As per the eligibility criteria for the study, all of the participants were single, never been married and were born to Sikh families. They all identified themselves as heterosexual.

Age. The age range of the women in this study is 26 to 32 years. Five of the participants range from 26 to 29 years of age and the other five range from 30 to 32 years.

Birthplace. Of the ten women interviewed, five were born in India (Punjab), four in Canada (BC), and one in England.

Years in Canada. Of the six women born outside of Canada, all have been living here more than 10 years. The range was from 11 to 26 years, with the majority being here more than 20 years. Except for two, these women have been living in Canada for most of their lives.

After recruitment began, it became evident that the purposive sampling technique was leading to a group of women who were either born in Canada or had been in the country for a number of years (on average over ten). At this point I spoke with two individuals: Dr. Hans, a psychologist who works with South Asian immigrants, and Debbie Nijjer, an immigrant support worker. I explained the purpose and procedure of the study and asked for their assistance in recruitment. Dr. Hans made a number of calls to community members but was not able to find any women who fit the criteria and had been in the country for a fewer number of years. Dr. Hans stated that women who were over 25 were mostly married and it was next to impossible to find participants who fit the criteria. This was the feedback he received from the community members he contacted. Debbie also had difficulty finding anyone who fit the criteria. This led to the question: Do women who are more recent immigrants not fit this pattern? Or, are they not as connected to service providers, the traditional route to get participants?

Language. All of the women chose to conduct the interviews in English. Interspersed throughout the interviews, however, many of the women used Punjabi words, sayings and metaphors. Eight of the women were fluent in Punjabi and the other two stated they could understand Punjabi and speak it in a limited capacity.

When doing cross-cultural research the ability to conduct the interview in the language of preference reduces a certain amount of biases and interpretations and added meaning may be avoided (Fontana & Frey, 1994). A number of the women checked to see if I understood Punjabi and then would go on to exemplify a point using the language. For example, it was important in

this study to be able to understand when the women were quoting family members in Punjabi to gain a deeper understanding of that viewpoint and to immediately follow-up with a question or response if necessary.

Education. Just as research by Estable has shown that immigrant women are more educated than Canadians born in Canada (Tee, 1997), so too, appears the distribution in this sample. All of the women had at least a Grade 12 education. Three of the women had completed a post-secondary certificate/diploma. Two of the women had a Bachelor's degree and five of the women had post Bachelor's or multiple Bachelor's degrees. While the average in British Columbia is 12.7 years, the average of this sample was well above that.

Self Rating Acculturation Scale. A 10-point Likert scale with Indian on one extreme and Canadian on the other was a part of the demographic data collected. Most of the women found this easy to respond to and circled a number quickly. Five out of the ten women circled in the middle indicating they were a blend of both worlds. One woman circled closer to the Indian side and three closer to the Canadian side. The remaining participant had a hard time choosing where to circle, and she explained it as follows:

> Well for me Indian is being interested in the culture and learning more about it, wanting to marry Indian, that's a part of it but it's not necessarily all of it. Canadian to me is none of that but at the same time now that I have thought about it, I always call myself Canadian I don't like Indo-Canadian or whatever, my allegiance is to Canada because this is where I live, but I am interested in Indian culture. Value wise and interests that's Indian, but I'm Canadian.

Thematic Content

Pressure: A Definition.

In an attempt to quantify the pressure, it was important to first establish what the pressure for the women looked and felt like and this was qualitatively different for each person asked. All of the women interviewed responded that they faced pressure. When asked this

question many of the women looked slightly surprised at the obviousness of the question and would responded, "oh, yes...definitely". To some it was so obvious and I got the feeling they thought I should just know about it as one women said, "Oh, you want me to say something more about it!"

The definitions of pressure, as stated, varied for each individual and below are a few examples of what the women said. According to one participant who rated her own pressure as low to moderate was as follows:

> A pressure would be... comparing it to other people I know, pressure would be constantly hearing about it, 'oh, you're not married, oh I'm worried, oh you're getting old, oh my God, all the nice guys are gone' sort of thing, hearing that day in and day out, hearing it day in and day out that I'm a burden would be pressure, they would be much happier if I was married would be a pressure, it would make them happy, yes, but to feel that somehow I am making them unhappy would be a pressure...

Another 31-year old described her pressure in the following way:

> the pressure comes both from my parents as well as relatives; (my relatives) are pressuring my parents you know 'Why isn't she married? She should get married! She is getting older in age and nobody is going to marry her by the time she reaches this age! When is she going to have kids?' and so on...

In another case the pressure was described more as a feeling.

> I think it's a guilt pressure from my mom. In a round about way she would sometimes come out with it and there is always the feeling. She drops hints all the time, like you know 'what are you doing with your life? Where are you going from here? You should save some money'. And then it goes more dramatic to 'I think it's time for you to get married!'

To gain a clearer understanding of the pressure, as defined by the women, below it has been broken down into the flowing categories: source, start, level and nature of the pressure.

Sources of pressure. In addition to the external sources of pressure (i.e., family, friends, and community), the majority of the women identified internal pressure as another source. This

pressure was described as an internal need or emptiness which resulted in personal pressure to be married. As the youngest member of the group described it,

> I see it more as, maybe, cultural conditioning. Call it whatever it may be, but I personally feel that I want to get married. I can't really say whether I feel that because I really want to get married or because it's the cultural thing, probably both, because you get so conditioned to wanting to get married by this age.

A 29-year old woman also shared this sentiment,

> I would be satisfied if I was married, because I feel a sort of emptiness. You know as a child you are conditioned to have the house, have the husband and the kids when you're married, so that's my dream. I think as a woman I feel like I want children.

> Another woman, who described the pressure from external sources, reflects here on how

it has transformed to a more introspective source.

> After the age of about 28 or so, you feel it all the more, not even because of the family, but because it's something you want or because it's something that I became more ready for. It's something that I considered- that's where I should be in my life right now- and now that I've hit 30, I am definitely feeling not the pressure but almost the need, or the want to be in that place myself, but at the same time I am not willing to just get married for the sake of getting married to anybody and fortunately my family feels the same way, so that pressure is not there, so if it's not the right person, it's not going to happen and I don't feel the pressure that they feel that I'm doing something wrong or that I'm not open enough, because I am open enough and if it's not happening that's, whether it's *kismet* or whatever you want to call it and that's the way they (my parents) feel as well.

> Most of the women expressed the view that it is a legitimate concern the parents have.

There was a clear delineation that family members could feel this way, but not outsiders. One of the women described this difference between what her family looks for and what extended family and others keep in mind.

> Parents look for a common foundation, not initially they didn't, but once they kind of figured out what we are looking for. Now they say okay, if this person is educated they are looking for somebody who is educated or has a similar value system, whereas for relatives it just means marriage... 'what do you mean he has to..., he makes good money that's good enough for you right, so what if you guys can't have a conversation.'

Another woman, who faces a great deal of pressure at home and felt frustrated with it, could still see that it came from a place of concern.

> My father says, 'your bio-data is good then what is going wrong; the height is good, the education is good…you are gold'. My family is very concerned.

Similarly, another woman could place herself in her parent's position and empathize with the changes that they are keeping a pace with.

> I mean I think change has been moving incredibly quickly, but I think that's why a lot of parents and a lot of particularly parents of my generation have a tough time dealing with things, the changes have just grown exponentially. It's incredible, but I think there was a lot of pressure back then and, it was rare for any of the kids to have gone off to any sort of post secondary and not sort of left school at 16 and started working, and be married within a couple of years.

> ***Start of the pressure.*** The women described the marital pressure as starting from

their early 20s, 20 till around 26, though as one participant said,

> …it is always there…women are sort of conditioned from way back to ensure that they'll be good mothers and good wives…there is a lot of that going on and I think it goes on everywhere, it goes on in the media, it goes on in homes, it goes on in schools.

Most of the women, however, emphasized the age around 25 as when they really started to notice the pressure and this often coincided with the finishing of the post-secondary school years. Here one young woman, who went to school for over 6 years, describes when she first felt the pressure:

> I think through the early 20s up to age 25, it was never a concern simply because I was much more career oriented and my family knew that and even to them I don't think it was as much a concern because career was first priority for both my parents, but after the age of 25 it became more of a concern, the fear that you are getting older, you won't be able to find somebody if you get older, the family relatives, extended family,' oh when is she going to get married?' sort of thing. So that's when I think it became more of a reality that marriage is something I should be thinking about. Until then it wasn't even an issue.

Some of the younger women interviewed described their experience with pressure as different from the women who were 30 or older. As one 26 year old stated:

> Right now, even at 26, I don't feel like 'oh it's a big deal', but in the next few years from 26-30 that I see as a time for me to find someone, to get to know someone and you know settle down, so by 29-30 I would feel more like 'oh shoot, I need to get married,' but at 26 I'm still pretty relaxed about it.

As illustrated above there is a difference, both internally and externally perceived, between the two groups of women interviewed. Similarly, another woman differentiated between being on either side of 30.

> I'm only 28 and at this point I think how others perceive me will be different from say in two years time. The number 30 changes the perception. I have many friends that are older than me and I use them as my defence mechanisms too, thankfully. 'Look at them and they are not married and they are whatever, whatever. I think it goes towards a little bit more of a negative evaluation of a person. At 28, I am still closer to 25 than at 30.

Level of pressure. In describing the level of pressure personally felt, the women were asked to compare the intensity, as they judged it, to other women they knew or had heard of. Eight of the women used terms such as minimal, low, or below average. Only two used moderate or high to describe the pressure they felt. Yet all of the women interviewed felt strongly about the issue and its effect.

One 28-year old described her pressure as being "less than them (other women's) because I have communicated to my mom and made her understand what I want and what I don't want…but I think if there was someone of my age, single, then their parents would try a lot harder". Similarly, a 26-year old described hers as minimal, but qualified it with an explanation of the source of the pressure being central in her opinion.

> … minimal, minimal because you're cocooned essentially by your family and if the main pressure is coming from the society not from your family, then it's minimal pressure, but, if the main pressure is coming from the family then you are

in trouble right away, so in my case because the family pressure is not so daunting- it's okay.

As this self-description is not quantifiable, what one woman described as minimal may be described as high by another?

One woman, who labeled her pressure as moderate to high, also felt that most of her friends were facing about the same level of pressure. If, according to this participant, most people she knows are facing similarly high levels of pressure, why was that this study simply did not access these individuals? As stated above, in this sample most of the women described their pressure as minimal compared to others. Perhaps a larger sampling of women would reveal a more equal distribution. Or, perhaps a different sampling technique would be more appropriate. As the women in this study passed on possible contacts there may be similarities, both sociological and coping, between these friends and acquaintances. It may also be that the women who face high levels of pressure do not want to be interviewed. This was exemplified in one instance while searching for recruits for this study. One participant who told a friend about the study relayed that her friend had stated she did not want to participate as the pressure she was currently facing was very high and made it difficult to talk about.

Nature of the Pressure (Passive or Active). Most of the women described the pressure they faced as passive in nature. That is indirect talk of others getting married or jokes and questions about finding someone. In one case, a young woman provided a humorous recital of how her grandmother is constantly questioning her about getting married in the following way:

> ...she'll say to me 'you should get married, you should get married, you should get married, have you found somebody, do you know anybody', you know it's constant but it's not like 'Okay, well, I've found somebody for you, so now I want you to marry this person'...

Another young woman described how her parents may bring up the topic in a subtle way by

saying "so and so is getting married in (town X) this many years younger than you, hint hint".

And yet another woman described what subtle pressure looked like in her family.

> When I say subtle, it's usually just my mom just casually starting up a
> conversation about someone else's girl has gotten married or it's time for me to
> get married because I have got a job now, because I have some financial stability
> plus you know it's that right age to get married if you wait too long you might not
> find what you are looking for because you have missed so many of the years that
> you can use to get to know someone then. Or my mom would say okay if you wait
> too long then you will have a shorter period of time to get to know someone and
> you might rush into something, so maybe it's a good idea to get to know someone
> and then wait a few years and then get married, so that's what I call subtle, it's not
> like you better get married now in the next two years, it was never like that it's
> been very subtle and it has always been that we support you that whenever you
> are ready, we'll be there for you, but they are starting to make me think about it.

A few of the women described more active pressure where parents had put in

advertisements in a newspaper or set-up a meeting with a prospective partner without informing

the woman herself. These women who described the pressure as more intense also attached

stronger feelings and stronger effects associated with it. A 31-year old describes how she feels

about the pressure in the following way:

> It's depressing, I think, even like talking about it is depressing, because you know
> that you are causing them pain, that you really care about this person (mother) and
> then they start crying or whatever and it is because I know relatives have kind of
> ruined her evening because they keep on bringing it up that you know their
> daughter got married...

A 28-year old, who also described the pressure as high and active in nature, described self-

esteem as being central in her ability to not let the pressure overwhelm her in the following way:

> First and foremost for me has been self-esteem. I am very thankful that in my
> development, I have been lucky to develop self-esteem as I was growing up. If I
> did not have self-esteem, I would be so crushed as a person as a result of the
> pressure.

Strategies to Deal with the Pressure

The women who participated in this interview could all describe some strategies they have employed, developed or things that have simply helped. The strategies could be categorized as those that were positive, negative or simply avoidant at times, but because the women themselves did not describe them in this manner, they will be presented below in one list. Table 1 lists the 12 strategies described by the women and the frequency of usage amongst the women for each strategy.

A number of the women could identify strategy usage quite clearly, while others employed strategies but had never been aware of them as such. Still others had difficulty in describing any as they had not ever thought of them in a conscious way. Interestingly, the women that described their pressure as more intense also had developed more detailed or numerous strategies. Others mentioned that these strategies had changed and evolved as the individual experienced growth.

Table 1: List of Strategies and Frequency of Usage Rate

Strategy Name	Frequency Percentage (#and % of participants using each strategy)	
1. Peer Group Confidantes	7	70 %
2. Temporary Release Mechanisms	6	60 %
3. Cognitive Strategies: Externalizing, Compartmentalizing, Rationalizing	6	60 %
4. Direct Communication with Parents	5	50 %
5. Emotional and Physical Distance	5	50 %
6. School/Career as focus, buffer or excuse	5	50 %
7. Humour as deflection, distraction	4	40 %
8. Narrowing Eligibility Criteria for Partners	3	30 %
9. Fate	3	30 %
10. Faith/Spirituality	2	20 %
11. Relaxation Strategies	2	20 %
12. Dating/ Involvement with Boyfriend	1	10 %

Strategy 1: Peer group confidantes. Almost all the women, seven out of ten, described confiding their feelings in peers going through the same situation or having an understanding of it as helpful. They felt that due to the commonality, they could best understand each other and offer support, in turn, normalizing the situation and the feelings. As one 28-year old who had listed numerous strategies, stated that a peer group helped her in the following way:

> I realize I am not a weird anomaly, and having someone I can touch base with and share my ideas, share my frustrations with. Feelings that are unexpressed in

situations where I don't think it will make any difference (with parents); you can take these feelings and express them with the peer group.

Talking to friends was the most common and often the first strategy identified by the women. Thus to many of these women, who mostly had friends who were in similar situations, the idea of being anything but the norm had never arisen. As another 28-year old put it: "I have lived with single people, I go out with single people, and it's just a normal part of my world to be single."

Strategy 2: Temporary releases of pressure. A number of the women described techniques designed or circumstances that release pressure temporarily. For example, one 28-year old described occasionally agreeing to meet a potential set-up, even though she knew it would not work out. She exemplified with an instance where a good family friend's feelings were at stake and hence, her family was quite insistent. In these cases, it is easier to just meet the person rather than refuse.

> They will come up to us, 'well so and so was asking' and sometimes it does end up being no, so you occasionally feel the pressure just to meet the person to quiet these relatives.

Another woman related an incident where her grandmother was quite insistent she meet a certain prospect. However, after the woman agreed to everything, the grandmother herself scrutinized the suitor more closely and felt it was not a suitable partnership.

> When my grandmother found somebody for me and she wanted me to marry him and you know at first I was like I'll think about it. The pressure was there, so I said to her, 'okay, whatever pleases you, whatever pleases you, fine I will marry this person'. So what happened is that she found out about this guy and found out that he was lying and then she said, 'no you're not going to get my daughter'. After that she hasn't really tried to set me up, I think once I said yes to her then she backed off. It's like because I said yes to her; that was the whole point, she wanted me to say okay, yes, fine, I'll do what you want me to do. So I said, 'okay, fine, I'll do what you want me to do,' then that kind of stopped her from asking again and again.

Interestingly, in this case, the family did not just marry the woman off when she had finally said

'yes'; instead, they went on to check the details of the potential match and found him unsuitable.

This is another instance where the family once again wants the daughter to be married but not at

all costs.

In another variation of a temporary strategy, a 27-year old woman, who had lived most of

her life away from home, remembered a time when she lied to her mother about whom she had

been dating, substituting a more 'acceptable' person into the role. In this case, the mother seemed

to have an understanding that her daughter would likely choose someone on her own, and

thereby while she would not actively set the daughter up she would still exert pressure on her to

meet someone. It became clear to the young woman that her mother would exert less pressure

when she knew her daughter was dating someone 'suitable' hopefully moving towards marriage.

> Well I kind of lied to her this one time when she asked me who I was dating. At
> that time I was dating somebody that was totally by her standards, inappropriate
> as a suitable whatever, so I just didn't bother telling her, so she asked me if I was
> seeing somebody, I divulged the information to her and I said, 'yes, I am dating
> somebody from work'. I told my work friend later that I told my mom I was
> dating him and he was like, 'oh, okay, no problem'.

Strategy 3: Cognitive strategies of externalizing, rationalizing, compartmentalizing. A

number of the women used cognitive strategies such as externalizing the problem, distraction or

rationalizing their choices. As one woman described the pressure and a method for not letting it

overwhelm her, she stated she has, "... just sort of taken that and made it an external issue so it's

not something that I'm fighting within myself". Similarly, another woman described how she

makes sense of the pressure and tries not to internalize or ruminate on it.

> I, basically, sort of in my mind, in my thoughts know, I'm not wrong. I know I'm
> not wrong in a sense that I'm not just going to go and put myself in a situation

where I'm going to be miserable for the rest of my life kind of thing so when I
hear 'get married' I just put it aside and distract myself....

A few of the women described using comparisons to other women as a strategy. As one woman described using older friends as a "defence mechanism" making statements like, "look at them, they are not married, they are happy" thereby rationalizing being single to both herself and her family.

Strategy 4: Direct communication with parents. Communication was described by half of the women as a strategy that helps them deal with the pressure and the topic of marriage in general. In particular, communication around expectations and goals around marriage and marriage partner, as well as explaining where they were at the time seemed helpful. One 28-year old woman described her surprise in being able to talk openly with her parents, stating:

> I have been able to really talk to my parents, they are amazingly open-minded. I didn't think they were going to be and I just tell them that 'Mom I can't get married just for the sake of getting married!'

Another articulate young woman described the communication in her family in the following terms:

> Within our family, I think we have done a lot of talking about marriage and about expectations and it's been a bit of a pill for my folks to swallow but, I think they are now at the point where they don't really bother with it. You know it's not in the forefront of their minds as much as it was when I was in my late 20s. The fact that they have come to a point where they can realize and they can see that you know women and their kids can take care of themselves, they can do all the things and that you don't necessarily have to be married to be happy, it would be ideal and then coming from their sort of values it fits the ideal but it's not necessarily the only way. So there has been a lot of going back and forth between what our values are and what their values are... a lot of talking back and forth. I've had conversations with my dad where my dad is like 'okay where do you see your life going? If you don't want to get married what are you doing? you know and you sort of sit there and you say 'well this is what I'm doing and you know it's not what I want right now and it might happen in the future and it might not and I'm okay with either of those, I just don't want to do it for the wrong reason, I didn't do a degree, become bright to have you marry me off to the first guy, and if that's

what you wanted you should have thought long and hard before you sent me to university' and so he kind of sits there and goes 'oh right!'

And yet another 28-year old described being able to stand up for herself was important and she uses strong words such as "advocating for myself…with parents and family friends, defending myself and validating to some degree my situation" to describe the process.

Two of the women in the group stated that talking to parents did not help as the views held by both parties were too disparate. One woman who had felt a high level of pressure stated,

> talking about it with my Mom doesn't help at all. She doesn't understand, I think, that I actually like being single, the freedom to do whatever you want, to pick up and go….

Strategy 5: Use of school or career as a focus. School or career was a focus in many of the women's lives and, in some regards, were described both as a buffer and a focus that helped deal with the pressure. A few of the women used school more as an excuse, stating that they would need to concentrate on and finish school before meeting someone or even thinking of marriage. In this way, the time frame for marriage is pushed back, at least temporarily. One young woman who had used school as an excuse with her mother said the following:

> The main reason I tell them that I am not ready is because I am focused on school 100% and I don't want to take that focus off school, I want to focus just on that and I don't want to have any relationships or anything like that.

When I further questioned whether that is the main reason or just what you tell them, she stated, "it's what I tell them, the main reason is I don't want to marry an East Indian guy, that's the main reason". Thus, in the above example, school is clearly being used as an excuse at this time.

At the same time, another 28-year old described school in another manner. To her, it was a focus, one that she saw as crucially timed, and she used answering the question 'why aren't you married?' to illustrate this.

I think when I was younger and less confident I probably would have gotten a lot
more emotional about it and seen it as some sort of not working right on my part
or you know maybe there was something wrong with me, but I think, I honestly
think, doing a degree protects you from a lot of that because your focus is
elsewhere. So, I think at the times when that question probably would have
crushed me, I was kind of protected a little bit because my focus was something
completely different: I think what it does is it puts you in a different frame of
mind, it makes you think about different things, whether it's the career at the end
of it or whether you're doing a degree for the sake of learning or whatever, you're
doing something different with your life right there and then and there is a goal at
the end of it. I think that when people ask questions like that you're able to put
those off because of your focus and I think when you're in your late teens and
early 20's and that's when you're not as confident and you're still struggling to
find your place in the world, being a student defines your place in the world.

Strategy 6: Emotional and physical distancing. Distancing oneself emotionally and

physically was a coping mechanism described by half of the women. This may come in the form

of moving away from home, or in some cases, not communicating with either immediate or

extended family. Though distancing was more commonly seen with extended family as opposed

to immediate family, there were a few women who had relatively minimal contact with their

parents and siblings as well.

One woman described how living away from home has helped her in comparison to what

she pictured still living at home would be like.

(At home) there would be a constant pressure everyday, marriage would be
brought up because right now I see them maybe once a month, and at that time
it's always brought up, but because it's once a month I can just live with it, talk to
them and it's over but if it was everyday, I don't know if I could handle that or
how I would handle that. Maybe I would have to suggest moving out and it's
something you would have to tell them that 'if this is such a big problem for you,
(my not being married) I won't live with you', hopefully then it would get better.

Another 30-year old, who has no contact with most of her immediate family, felt that having as

little contact with her parents as possible has been the only thing that truly decreased the

pressure.

> Well staying away period, like I don't go over very often, I kind of just keep to myself, the less contact is the only way that you can really avoid pressure from your family.

Strategy 7: Humour. The use of humour to distract, deflect and lighten the pressure was a strategy described by four of the participants. It was used as a barrier or distancing method at times which allowed a woman to answer an inquiry while still keeping feelings private. All of the women interviewed used humour in talking about the topic with me and it was inter-woven into their examples, speech and responses.

One 28-year old provided an illustration of her usage of humour whenever her family mentions a new guy to meet.

> I joke around a lot, especially with the three main people that have the pressures of getting me married, my mom and my parent's best friends, and they are always mentioning guys here and there and I make the jokes, 'yeah he's probably a geek, he's probably ugly', they say he's nice, I say back 'that means dog' ...

Similarly, a woman who described her grandmother as constantly asking her the same question around marriage would use humour to deflect in the following way:

> My grandmother says to me 'Why don't you want to get married? What's wrong with you? What's wrong with you? And I say, 'I don't want to. I'm not ready' and she'll say, 'When are you going to be ready, when you're 50?' I say, 'yeah, I'm going to marry when I'm 50! She is always saying you know my health isn't all that great, I'm getting older and you're not getting any younger either. You know I'm not going to be here for ever and blah blah blah and I say you're not going anywhere...

Strategy 8: Narrowing the eligibility criteria for potential partners. Three of the women in the study described how the criteria of what they are looking for can be used to rule out many unwanted potential introductions. One of the women, in particular, actually did not want any family set –ups and used this strategy, illustrated in the following conversation between herself and her family, to rule out any potential partners:

> Well, I think it's just basically when they always say: 'there is this guy, do you want to meet him?' I ask them what the guy is all about. What does he do? What is his family like? Does he live in a house full of people?' And if they say 'yes', then I say, 'no way.'

She went on further to describe how a conversation would play out with her mother, in each step narrowing what she is looking for.

> Or, I'm like 'well that's fine, he's got a good job and he is the right age and he is this and that and the qualities are okay' and I'm like:
> **Question:** So does he live with his parents?
> **Answer:** Yes...
> **Q:** Okay fine. Brothers and sisters?
> **A:** Yes
> **Q:** How many?
> **A:** Like four
> **Q:** Like no.
> It's not going to happen, and they will pester me and say what's wrong with that and I'll say, it's not going to happen. I use my personality to defend myself saying I can't get along with a house full of eight people, that's not going to happen because I couldn't do it... I could, but I try to convince them that I couldn't!

In a variation of this theme, one woman described that since she and her siblings had gone through numerous set-ups and had said 'no' a number of times, that at this point relatives are suggesting introductions less often.

> Now that they (relatives) have failed so many times, we have said no to their proposals so many times, they don't even bother they just say, 'let's see what they find!' And I think once in a while if they bring it up they think we are going to say no anyways, even if other people ask them, 'who's that person?' or whatever they'll just answer no themselves.

This may have been an unintended effect of being particular about whom you finally marry. In this case, the pressure has decreased though it was not a pre-conceived strategy.

Strategy 9: Fate as a belief. The idea that your destiny is pre-ordained is a common tenet in eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Sikhism, and cultures. Many people use fate to explain both positive (i.e. wealth, happiness and a good marriage) and negative events (i.e., death, poverty, bad marriages or being single) in their lives. These women were using the

concept of fate more as an explanation (i.e., the timing is not yet right and it will happen) rather than a mechanism that can lead to self-blame or powerlessness.

Three of the women described fate as something both the family and they themselves used when talking about marriage. Two of the women used it in terms of a rationale and one used it as a strategy to answer back to family members. One 31-year old woman, who was introspective by nature, made the following philosophical remark:

> If it was meant to turn out well, it would have happened. Or, if it was meant to happen it would have happened and the fact that it hasn't happened is likely for the best, and when it does happen, hopefully it will be for the best and sometimes it's just that some things are worth waiting for and I mean things don't always necessarily work in our own (defined) time.

Another 31-year old responded similarly to her mother, the very person she had learned this response from, in turn letting her know that marriage would happen someday giving her some solace in this:

> My mom when she is talking about other people's marriages will often say, 'sada din kadon auna?' (when will it be our turn) and I say, "don't worry it's going to happen". Sometimes my dad too will say, "look at my house, it's a mess', and then my mom's reaction always will be, she's quite religious, so she'll say, "jidhan likhiya" (it will be as it is written). But, of course it bothers her, she is always crying with her sisters and stuff.

Strategy 10: Faith. Two of the participants described themselves as spiritual and this was an extremely important aspect of their lives, helping them to feel at peace with where they are at. Faith in these cases was more than a concept but rather a way of being, a way of accepting oneself and finding the means to do this. One young woman described her spirituality as giving her some grounding:

> I am a fairly spiritual person. Dealing with the pressure, believing God has a plan and obviously my time is not now. Which is fine because there is a plan.

Another woman, who recently turned 31, articulated how spirituality helps both herself and her family make meaning.

> I'm a very spiritual person, so my vice is to turn to some sort of spirituality or something other, something greater then where we are and sort of look for support from that end and not expect that it's something that has to be done. Things happen in their own time, when they are meant to happen and when they do happen they happen for the best, so sort of just accept that I am happy where I am at, I am exactly where I was meant to be at this point and knowing that if something had happened before hand it may not have worked out, and my family is very spiritual as well, so in that sense it helps, it really does.

When asked if this was the same as fate, this young woman felt it was qualitatively different. She described fate as a part of it but faith as far more.

Strategy 11: Relaxation and stress management strategies. Two of the women described using strategies such as exercise, going for a walk or engaging in activities that are relaxing when feeling the pressure or stress. As one of the women put it after being reminded constantly about being single, by her family, "I listen (to them) and then I feel like so stressed out that I'll just go sit in my room, listen to music, watch TV, go for a walk or exercise to relax."

Strategy 12: Dating: Involvement with a boyfriend. Involvement with significant others was interestingly only talked about by two of the women. During the second interview, I mentioned this to all of the women who unanimously seemed to think this was an area that they would feel unsafe talking about or could see others feeling unsafe talking about, due to the possibility that someone may identify them. As one young woman put it, there would be a fear of the "potential passing on of information". It leaves one wondering whether some of the women simply omitted talking about dating relationships and how these may have impacted the pressure they felt.

One of the women who did talk about being in a relationship, described that while dating someone, she did not put pressure on herself. However, when things did not work out she suddenly found herself on the wrong side of 30:

> I didn't feel it (the pressure) and I mean a lot of it may be because of my own issues: people I was seeing or just not ready or thinking it was going to work with somebody else, that it didn't work with in the end, anyways so just emotionally not opening myself up to the concept of marriage with anybody else because I figured it would work, but it didn't so, so that sort of left me stranded almost. Maybe at a younger age it's something I had in the back of my mind but it was more directed towards one person as I figured it would happen with that one person, not concerning somebody else with it, and sort of just playing along with that little role of life but when all those things ended that's when I really felt that I it's something I need to do for myself because I actually found myself alone and I guess that's when the pressure that I put upon myself more than anybody else started.

She went on to describe that she would have felt more external pressure, if her family had known about the relationship.

> I thought if they knew the pressure would be greater because they would see somebody right there and it's like well if you're not going to get married then what's the point, but the fact that they didn't know actually made it easier because I always used other excuses, I still have to do this degree, I have to do that, I want to finish this and so they were in the dark but I think it worked more to my advantage because I don't think I would have tolerated the pressure of them knowing, and pressuring me to do something that I guess we weren't ready for at the end of the day and if that pressure had happened life would have turned out much differently and if that marriage or whatever happened and it didn't work out in the end anyways I think I would be in a much worse situation than I am now.

This is in contrast to the other woman who earlier described having her mother believe she is dating someone 'suitable' decreased the pressure.

Factors that Increase or Decrease the Pressure

The women interviewed identified a number of themes which, when pulled together, consist of factors that either increase or decrease the amount of pressure. In each of the cases, examples

were given as if these factors worked on a continuum of either decreasing or increasing the pressure.

Table 2: List of Factors Effecting Level of Pressure and Frequency Cited

Factor Name	Frequency	Percentage
		(# and % of women citing each factor)
1. Contact with Family and Community	8	80 %
2. Birth Order	6	60 %
3. Living in a Small Town	5	50 %
4. Family Norms	3	30 %

1. Contact with extended family and or community. The majority, eight out of ten, of the women described that having limited association with extended family decreased the amount of pressure. There may be multiple reasons for this. It may just decrease the number of people who will bring up the topic, thus decreasing the frequency with which it is addressed. Secondly, pressure may be kept at bay as the family is not pressured from the outside world, in turn decreasing their pressure on the individual. Much of the pressure comes from relatives or outsiders as compared to immediate family. As one woman described the community pressuring the family and the filter effect it produces:

> I think some of the judgment actually goes not on me, it's more on my parents like how could you be keeping her or why are you keeping her around? It's almost like you're not doing your job, your job is to ensure this and if your kids not saying yeah or nah, it's up to you to do this. The pressure is not necessarily as much on me as it is on my parents from the community, it filters down through them.

Similarly, another of the women described the pressure in terms of this step wise process.

> My mom feels pressure from within the East Indian community because she is
> more connected, mom's in a small town, she's got people all over and so she feels
> pressure and it's almost like it, then it comes to us. You can almost tell who she
> has been talking to... The pressure is like a domino effect.

And yet another woman described that she has limited contact with the extended family but once

again you can note that members of the family or community still continue to exert pressure on

her mother.

> Yeah, I really don't care what my extended family thinks of me, I'm not really
> close with any of them and if they have some kind of opinion, then they will tell
> my mom and my mom pretty much knows not to tell me, cause she knows I'll get
> upset, or not upset, I'll just get pissed off, cause it's not, I feel it's not their place.
> Because we have been away, separated from my family for quite a few years, my
> mom's side lives out of the country and on my dad's side we just don't talk to
> them, so the extended family really doesn't matter, it's more so who I respect and
> who respects me, like my mom and my family friends.

> *2. Birth order.* Birth order was another factor, described by six of the women, that

seemed to affect the amount of pressure experienced by the women. If one was the eldest, she

may find herself with the added responsibility of "holding up the line" as described by one

woman in a scene, oft-repeated in her home.

> We have your younger sisters to be married off. We can't get them married till
> you get married or we can't get your brother married till you're married because
> you're older.

Similarly, another woman made a similar statement about how her being the eldest and female

increases the amount of pressure.

> ... there is more pressure because the eldest sets the pattern and (my family feels)
> the younger ones will look up to you. If it was a guy in my situation it would be a
> bit different, I think, looking at society.

> Conversely, if one was the youngest or had elder unmarried siblings then some of the

pressure decreases, as the focus is on the eldest. In Indian tradition, children are married by birth

order as skipping out of order may cause the community to question whether something is wrong

with that child. This is especially true for daughters, while males may still marry out of order and at an older age. It is crucial to get the daughters married by a certain age. If there is an older sibling in the family, this reduces and re-directs the pressure. During the second interview, one of the women who had an older sibling who was now seriously attached noted she may feel more direct pressure as a consequence-something she would have to wait and see.

3. Living in a small town. Living in a small town or smaller community increases the pressure placed both on the woman and her family because most residents know each other. This, in some regards, may simulate what the pressure in a small town or village in India may look like where everyone knows each other and people are typically involved in each other's lives. Five of the women discussed the effects of living in a small town or the differences they have noted since moving from one. One woman describes the different attitude about being single she has noted between community members of a small town compared to the big city:

> In smaller communities, however, like Z...., I think it's a bigger problem. I didn't quite realize how big but they think of it as being really odd that you're not married and they view it this way because a lot of the kids there go to high school, maybe spend a couple years in college, and they are married by the time they are 20 or 21. So, to them it's really like 'how come you're not married?'

And she elaborated further that this difference may be because,

> ... possibly also they know everybody, they have a lot of people to talk about and compare kids with, whereas here you really don't know that many people in terms of friends. Most of your relatives and your parents know your friends, their kids friends who are also single, so they don't think it's such an odd thing because look, 'it's not just my daughter, all of her friends are single too,' whereas if I go to Z.... it's just their daughter, and I'm single right and that the neighbors' daughter is not single, so that's probably why there is a lot more room for comparison.

Another woman describes that the limited choices and freedom she felt in a small town may have led her into a very different direction if she had not moved away.

Escape, to be honest, if I had not gone to university, I'm from X…. originally, I would have got married at 20, just to get out of the house. I have no doubts about that thinking back now.

4. Family norm. Each family has its own set of norms, own set of experiences they base their expectations on and similarly with marriage what has passed before helps to determine what will pass hence. Three of the women described that family norm plays a role as to whether marriage is expected early or late. In turn, the pressure would be greater on women whose family norm it is to marry early as illustrated by a woman who explains why her and her siblings may have stayed single longer than her cousins.

> My brothers and sisters and I were the only ones that went to university, the other ones didn't, they might have done a college education type of thing and also we were in Canada the longest I think, other than my cousins in England, so that when they came from India, the girls themselves, I think, wanted to get married at an early age. All my cousins got married in their early 20s, so I don't think any of them married later. I am the only one not married…

On the other hand, in a family where it is not expected or there is past precedent that normalizes a later marriage, the pressure was considerably decreased. Here a young woman explains what the norm in her family is.

> I come from a family where my aunts got married in their late 20s and they are from India, born in India, raised in India and they got married at 25 or 26 so it's not a new thing for them to see me be 26 and not married because they themselves got married in their mid- 20s. My mother got married when she was 23 so it's, in terms of family culture, we as a family don't really see that girls should be married in their early 20s anyways, so it's kind of normal for them to see me still unmarried but they do want to see me married soon.

Another of the women espoused similar thoughts about age and even some expectations about marrying out of culture.

> I mean, compared to my brother and my cousins, it's not that late, I think that's the other reason I don't feel the same pressure because if I had members of my family that were married at age 21 and all my cousins etc married at 20, 21, 22 and I'm still single at 28, 29, 30 it would be a lot harder but because those closest to me were still single and were 5-6 years older than me, I was still the baby of

the family, so it wasn't as big an issue or concern. Overall, I think it certainly helped that they were all older- I grew up with cousins who are half white, so they got married at a later age, one of them is 37 and getting married in a few months. I think that they (the extended family) saw me closer to those cousins because we all grew up together, so to them I'm almost like them. The family thinks I may actually end up marrying somebody white or not Indian or that I'm dating somebody on the side.

Other Themes

There was a number of very important themes that emerged which did not fit into a strategy or factor that increased pressure but rather was more descriptive in nature. These included such sociological aspects as factors similar amongst this group of participants, or views they held about marriage in general that have been compiled in the following section.

Change in family structure and roles. One of the key findings revolved around family structure. Eight out of the ten women interviewed, there was some key difference as compared to the traditional South Asian nuclear family which has a mother and father, children and possibly grandparents living together. The women interviewed in this study had a number of differing factors including: elderly parents, illness or disability, single parent families, absence of parents and distant parents, both physically and emotionally. In particular, it is the role of the father that seems to be crucial, and in many of these cases, missing. As this was not an anticipated factor, there were limited questions about this. However, in the follow-up interviews each of the cases was confirmed and most of the women noted it was a very important discovery.

Marriage is often a role that falls within the discharge of the mother. She would be the one finding out suitable matches and talking to the daughter about what she is looking for. However, the father would need to approve the match. It was not surprising that a number of the women indicated that they do not directly talk with their fathers about marriage, as indicated in the following quote:

my dad usually stays out of it, he doesn't really talk to me directly about it, he occasionally will say something, but he won't say too much to me. My dad is not as vocal with me; I think he just feels a little uncomfortable. I guess with the whole situation and because of the topic of marriage. It's more my mom, she'll bitch and complain, and then my mom of course gets stressed out. She is always complaining to me, my mom always says, 'you know your not going to get everything' and my dad's latest thing is 'the older you get the worse the guys are'. Thanks.

When questioned further whether her dad is someone she could talk to if she was feeling a lot of pressure or was upset about it. The interviewee answered simply: 'No, never.'

In other cases, the children were beginning to reverse the roles by taking care of their parents and the household. One woman, whose parents were elderly, described her role as a caretaker and discussed what that involves.

...one of the things is they are getting older and I am the one that is sort of around and takes care of things, so you know if they marry me off and push me off what are they going to do. ...I live at home with my folks, my youngest sister lives there as well, there is all the day to day running of the house and so all of those things that a wife and mother and a daughter- in- law would do I do. I just don't do them for a husband and I don't do them for children, I do them for my parents and I do them for myself.

Similarly another of the women described how she finds herself taking care of her parents needs more often than needing them to take care of her.

I think with my parents being in their 60s, now I am more concerned about their health concerns. Usually daughters take much more of a role than their brothers do in making sure they go to the doctor or meetings and being involved in those kinds of things. As adults, we are more worried about them than my parents worry about us, they really don't worry much about us.

And another woman, who was raised by a single mom, talked about the difference that may be present in comparison to a two parent family in a patriarchal society.

I think it has to do with the family issues because my mother is a single mother, she has had to raise us from a very young age, she was doing it on her own, so basically what she told me was she wanted us to have everything, all the freedom that she didn't have. But in a way that's where the double standard comes in since she's giving us so much freedom but she doesn't want us to really have it!

This double standard of giving the daughters freedom and then rescinding it may come from external pressure the mother herself felt from within the small town community.

Choosing to be single. Most of the women did not describe choice as a reason they are not married. Rather most of the women described it as fate, chance or luck. It seemed that these women were saying they would be married if the right person just came along. Thus, it was described as more of a sociological phenomenon of the right person not existing. One of the women described how her parents view someone who is older and unmarried, in this case the person being talked about was forty and had never been married: "...Wrong. It's just wrong to be single and forty. To say being single is a choice would take a very strong person".

However, after deeper perusal of the interviews and questioning during the second interview, choice seems to be a very big part of the decision- a part that many of the women did not initially state or recognize. Only one of the women described her decision as choice and here describes a factor that leads to her remaining single.

> Oh absolutely, there is a lot of choice. Marriage for its own sake that you could still do, you know even at 30 you could still do that if you really wanted to. (I'm not married) probably because I don't want to, I think I don't want to right now and I also think that the mechanisms within sort of the Indian world aren't necessarily there and not deemed appropriate by all involved and so for me it's just better to stay out of that whole thing. The mechanism for finding a partner is very different than the way that I would want to find a partner. I think it's changing, I think it's changing very slowly but I don't think there is that mechanism for open dating. You know where you go out with somebody for a number of months to determine whether they are a suitable match or not to you and then if they're not, then just move on. I don't think that mechanism is there, I think rather it's seen as okay to date somebody if you have already decided that you are going to get married to them then its okay for you to go out and have coffee and go to the movies or do whatever, but not before then. I think if you say no after that, if you get to know somebody and you say, 'uh un' there, I think there is huge fall-out still.

She went on to elaborate what would be necessary and sufficient for her to want to marry

at this stage.

> ...if I sort of really, really sat down and was very, very honest with myself and said would I want to get married tomorrow there would be a whole list of things that would have to be right and if it's right then yes, but if it's not then no, it's not like I feel I need to do it just because. I need to do it because it's the right circumstances and the right circumstances for me may not be the right circumstances for you know the next girl on the street, and that's the way I look at it, if it's going to happen it's going to happen in a manner and you know with a person that I think that I can build a life with not just because I need to be married because I'm 30 years old or I need to be married because it'll relieve everybody's burden or I need to be married because it's the thing to do, I'm strong enough now that that's not the deciding factor anymore.

Fears. There are a number of fears listed by the women, including a fear of the loss of

independence, fear of failure in the shape of divorce and, in some cases, fear of being single.

Four of the women used strong words to describe this fear and the question arises of how this

would motivate or not motivate an individual to look towards marriage as a viable and positive

option. One 30-year old described her fears around being a wife in these strong words:

> ...honestly being a wife scares me to death...just a lot of fears, I mean look at now a days, marriages don't last that long, there are so many divorces in our community, it's a scary thing, marriage scares me, it really, really scares me not only like in that sense but also it's a give and take and to lose a lot of things I do now- I probably wouldn't be able to do (them) if I was married.

Another woman described the source of her fears partially due to the growing statistic of divorce

in the community:

> ... being scared you know when you hear stories about a marriage that didn't last maybe 3 months or 2 months, or this is what happened with that couple it puts in your mind a lot of thoughts. What is the person that I'm going to get married to be like? I think you don't know that person till you actually live with that person. I mean you know you might date a guy for 6 months and say hey I know this guy but you actually don't know them so I guess being scared would be the thing sort of backing me up.

And another woman describes the changes she feels she would have to make and questions

whether she feels she could or would want to make these:

> I think I would have to be a lot more mellower, sometimes I frighten myself-can I
> handle that, I'm so set in my ways and doing things I mean one would disservice
> probably as that I didn't want to live with my parents and I don't have to answer
> to anybody, how am I going to handle all of a sudden another person constantly,
> but that, I think it's going to be a huge challenge and yes of course it will redefine
> me in terms of that I will have to adjust myself and to, I have to make more
> compromises it's not all about what I want and when I want it and I'm aware of
> that but they do scare me a little bit because I'm not sure if I'm prepared for that.
> (I wonder) has it been too long for me doing my own thing?

View of single women by the community. The understanding of these women is that

single South Asian women are viewed in a negative manner. They described both themselves

and other women using such adjectives as picky, stubborn, lesbian, or bad, in the eyes of the

community. Additionally, there is a notion that there must be something wrong with them. As

one woman describes this sentiment here:

> I think that the South Asian community views women that are my age as if
> something is wrong with them, there has got to be something wrong. Why aren't
> they married?

And yet another woman described what she felt the difference between women who are single

longer and those who are married earlier, or at least what she perceives the community thinks the

difference is.

> I think they are afraid of them, I think that they see them as very assertive, very
> open minded, women who know what they want and our community in general is
> not open to those kind of woman or those kind of things, that kind of thinking.
> They think if the women is more educated and has had more experiences in life
> on her own, then she would be less willing to settle down and take all the negative
> that our society has to dole out. Whereas a woman who has kind of given into the
> marriage and the whole societal stuff at a younger age she is seen as more willing
> to put up with it. A woman who has stayed single and had kind of gotten her own
> identity she would be less willing to perpetuate those old patriarchal roles that

And another described how a woman is viewed if she says no to a particular set-up:

> ... they just think that you don't think anybody is good enough for you, they don't know the facts, they want to set you up with these guys that you have nothing in common with and if you refuse you are picky. ...and picky is bad, you think too highly of yourself or whatever never mind the fact that you have to have some common foundation, they don't care about that.

This prompted a number of the women to exclaim that they did not care for the opinion of the community. Interestingly, the idea that there is something wrong with them or they were picky, stubborn etc., was one that was not internalized by this group. While there was some soul-searching and times of self-doubt, overall the women described themselves as strong, capable and independent individuals. In turn, a number of women identified that it took strength to stand up for what they wanted instead of buckling to the pressure. One young woman, who helps organize a local social group, noted of both herself and the women she meets:

> ...if I look at them collectively as a group, I see educated, strong, confident women. And I have to question if that is a reason why we are single, or is it chance circumstance. Independent is a key word. I see nothing wrong with these women unless in the Indian culture to be independent and strong is intimidating for Indian men and hence we are single.

Yet another woman echoed this thought, that the ability to withstand the pressure takes a great deal of strength,

> ...the pressure, I think it takes good strength of character on everybody's part not to succumb and that's a global thing I don't think that that's just necessarily being Indian or South Asian or whatever the title is. I think that anytime as individuals you do something that goes against the grain, you know you have to have a bit of strength to stand up to what you're going against or else it's easy to succumb...

Another woman described herself in the dual role of still being a daughter that is cared for and an independent woman in her own right.

> ...being the child, the youngest child, being daddy's little girl all those things, but at the same time I think it has grown because I'm not that child, I have a career, I'm financially secure, stable, all those things so I'm independent so the growth I guess that I have experienced over time mentally, emotionally I think has sort of expanded that role and I see myself not just as the child but also as an independent

person who is capable of doing things on my own, I know my father sees me in the same way. It's something that I know he has always wanted that I be strong enough, that I be able to stand on my own two feet because you don't know what to expect when you're in the world out there, whether you are married you still need to be strong enough to handle yourself and I guess compromising enough and flexible enough but at the same time strong enough that should, if anything bad happens, land on your own two feet, so I think that's where the growth comes in, knowing that I am still a child to them but they also know that I'm somebody that could, that's strong enough to be able to help myself and not need I guess anyone else if push came to shove.

Role of the wife. The role of the wife and questions around this area yielded some

fascinating views. First of all, seven out of the ten women described the role as the traditional

role their mothers may have espoused. This was a role they did not see themselves fitting into

very well. A few of the women saw the role as a more complementary one to what they have

already become. However, on the whole, the disparity between what these women wanted and

what they think is out there was easily evident. A somewhat conflicting view existed between

what the woman wants and what she believes men and their families want. One woman describes

here what she thinks makes for a suitable wife:

> One thing is that she comes from a respectful home and she is a virgin of course. A respectable family is a big thing - what about her family, what are her roots, what is her background, Also, does the girl know how to do things, does she know how to cook, does she know how to do the things that a wife needs to do, cook and clean. I don't know if financial issues ever come in, I think the parents normally find somebody in their same realm.

What the family looks for in a wife was described more ironically by one young woman:

> ... you could check any of the matrimonial section and you'll know. The one that really gets me is she (the wife) has to be educated and homely, but those are conflicting ideas, how could one be highly educated and have his or her own mind and be homely like those two things don't go together. I think it's a lot of idealistic ideas, that people have just created this woman in their mind who does not exist- she has to be fair- if you're South Asian you know so okay yeah there are fair skinned people in our community but the majority are brown skinned so you should be looking for the norm not for the exception. She has to be tall, okay fine you know if your boy is 6'2" it would look kind of funny to have a little woman like me but you know you have to kind of judge okay your guy's 5'10"

so the woman should be 5' that's okay it's not that big of a deal. There's a really old saying that my mom always says, 'look under your own bed before you judge others', and that kind of saying goes for the marriage. A lot of times you see a mother, a potential mother in law who is herself 5 feet, very dark, very plump and she wants the movie bride without the dancing and the acting and all that…

While of the whole the women tended to believe the community is still looking for the 'traditional' daughter-in-law, they also conceded that many of the men are changing with the times. As one young woman reports, there are men out there who are changing in their expectations, but the traditional roles still prevail while new expectations of careers are added on.

> To my own surprise I find there is a lot of guys these days who do have respect for the gender, but some of them still surprisingly, even though they are young and educated, hold on to so many traditional values and I think maybe women have moved much further than that, faster than men and it's a little bit difficult to see your life with someone who still thinks la certain way. Even though they are nice people who respect women and everything, they still see women in the traditional role as a wife, they expect her to have a career and have the traditional role of wife and my idea is I'm not a superwoman. I am not going to fool anybody by saying I can do both, why should I and it's very open, like I'm not going to try to pretend (I can carry) double, a career and a family and this and that because my life is important to me and I want to enjoy it. So, that is a challenge.

And this sentiment is echoed in an explanation one woman gave, as to how the men learn to treat their wives

> …they have seen how their parents treated their sisters, a lot of their ideas of what a woman should be is formed by how their mothers were treated by their fathers or how their sisters were treated by their parents and they see that that's how women should be treated. If those women were treated with respect in their own household then they would do the same for their wives, but if they did not see that you know in their own families but then I would say it's highly unlikely that they would treat their wives like that.

And further what she would want in a husband:

> I personally want someone who is above all very understanding of the role of the women today that I don't want somebody who is looking for an alternative for his mom, because a lot of them have been raised with that idea that women are there to take care of the family and it's okay to think that way and women should take care of their families but not in a sense that the man has all the freedom to do what he wants and all the responsibility is put on the woman to take care of the

children, to take care of the household chores right, so I want someone who understands that the challenges that the women face today and be understanding of that and to appreciate that

Others saw the role, while still traditional, very misleading as one woman explained there is a lot of respect and underlying power that the women in the family hold.

In the Indian community, I think there are many roles you have to be. Basically, you have to be the mother, that's exactly it; you have to be the good daughter-in-law, the good daughter. And yet I see the roles as contradictory because I think that women in general do a lot more than they say. I think it's an honor, like you know to be the grandma because we all respect and love our grandma and they kind of keep the family together so there is a high place for women and a lot of respect as well.

And yet another woman saw it as a positive and complementary role-one that would help her grow and broaden. She also explains how becoming independent before marriage may make the transition more meaningful.

I'm not shifting from child to wife, I would be shifting from child to independent person to wife and daughter in law and everything else and mother because I have had that time to grow on my own. While it's not necessarily independent in a physical sense but definitely in the mental, emotional sense and I think those roles would add on to who I am and I think because I have waited, whether intentionally or not it would complement who I am, it wouldn't take away from who I am and it would if anything better and expand and help me to grow into areas that I guess I haven't touched on yet because I am not in those situations.

On an interesting note, many of the women could not describe their current roles. It was almost as if they got stuck as to what to term it. Most of the women, after prompting, described themselves as daughters, a relational role to the family. Very few of the women described their role as independent women, though this is often the very thing they are.

The future: five years from now. One of the last questions asked of the participants was where they saw themselves five years hence. I think the curiosity lay in whether they would all say, 'married'. Interestingly, six of the women indicated marriage as the direction or goal while another four talked about their career aspirations. Marriage is a prime concern for these women.

It is both a personal and societal concern and while some of the women may not see this as

fitting where they are at this time, it is still an issue that they contend with everyday. As echoed

below in this response:

> where would I like to see myself 5 years from now, um married, I'm not sure with
> or without children. I'm not sure at this point, I think that is pretty much the only
> thing, I mean career wise I am settled and I'm secure and yeah I'd like to advance
> there as well but those are sort of, those are just givens as far as I'm concerned, I
> mean I am in a career that I enjoy and advancement in that is just it's just a part of
> life and growth and stuff but the only thing different that I would see is to be
> married and settled.

On a final note, two of the women laughed about their approach to finding a partner or

lack thereof:

> so we can argue that we don't really put much work into it; it's such an important
> part of your life so if we want a job we go out and look for one and do we
> necessarily go out and look for a husband, not really, we sit there and talk about
> how there is no right guys out there, so maybe you can put more effort into it but I
> don't somehow see myself doing that.

And another said,

> ...you sort of question what the hell's wrong with me, why haven't I found Mr.
> Right but on the other hand I sort of think well you know I'm not really doing a
> whole hell of a lot to look for him, so I can't really sit here and say well you know
> where is my knight in shining armor when I'm not you know holding a sign that
> says, **'where is my knight in shining armor?'**

Verification Procedures: Credibility and Transferability

Qualitative verification procedures are inherently different from the empirical validation

used in positivist traditions. Wolcott (1990) questioned validity's utility in qualitative research,

stating:

> ...our efforts at understanding are neither underwritten with, nor guaranteed by,
> the accumulation of some predetermined level of verified facts. I do not go about
> trying to discover a ready-made world; rather, I seek to understand a social world
> we are continuously in the process of constructing. . . . Validity stands to lure me
> from my purpose by inviting me to attend to facts capable of verification, ignoring
> the fact that for the most part the facts are already in" (p. 147).

Thereby Wolcott positioned himself and qualitative inquiry, in general, as participants in interpreting and constructing social worlds rather than as recorders of verified data.

This, however, does not mean that all interpretations are equal and cannot be critically analyzed. Qualitative research employs a number of techniques that help establish credible, 'trustworthy' and transferable work. Triangulation, in the form of member checks and collaborative interpretation are two of the methods incorporated into this study to help minimize bias and the potential for 'self-confirmibility (Hirsch, 1967). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described triangulation as an ongoing means of verifying what one learns. As the study progresses and data is collected steps to validate this against at least one other source (for example, a second interview) and/or a second method (for example, an observation in addition to an interview) should be used.

Participant Verification: Member Checks

Credibility in qualitative research can take the form of consulting participants and asking for validation of the constructions of the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocated this negotiating of the interpretation of data with participants. They explained:

> because it is their constructions of reality that the inquirer seeks to reconstruct; because inquiry outcomes depend upon the nature and quality of the interaction between the knower and the known, epitomized in negotiations about the meaning of data; because the specific working hypotheses that might apply in a given context are best verified and confirmed by the people who inhabit that context; because respondents are in a better position to interpret the complex mutual interactions—shapings—that enter into what is observed; and because respondents can best understand and interpret the influence of local value patterns. (p. 41)

Their call to consult with participants exemplifies non-exploitive research practices, consistent with feminist research ideals, as well as reminds researchers to honour the ways in which participants tell their story. Respect for participants becomes evident with verification through

member checks, which allows the researcher to purport that his or her reconstructions are recognizable to participants as adequate representations of their own realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This verification of data is integral to producing "trustworthy" research; that is research that is found credible by the consumer or reader of the report.

The member check can allow for clarification, explanation, or extension of questions and ideas, just as it can offer important insights into participants' understandings of self and context. After the interpretation process and distilling of themes, this information was taken back to the participants for validation. All ten women interviewed participated in this process. The interviewer went over the themes from each individual's own interview and presented the findings for clarification, feedback, additions or changes. A number of the women discussed differing interpretations of a particular theme and this was taken into account for the final findings presented. After the individual results, a general theme list from all the transcripts was discussed allowing for the individual to further immerse themselves in the hermeneutic circle. This process yielded some further discussion and often led the women to make additions to what they had said or had failed to say. Many of the women were clearly interested in what others had said, which is another normalizing process and, in some ways, a further learning experience for them.

Collaborative Interpretations

Another method used to relay creditability is to have another reader interpret the same data. The second reader is not there to offer an expert evaluation of "truth," but to help open up the interpretations from the narrowness of one's vision, prejudices, and focus. In recognition that hermeneutics honours that all things can be answered differently, the call to different readers is a call to this generative nature of interpretation. In this study, a co-interpreter was used who went

over a set number of transcripts and reached consensus with the primary interpreter. The co-interpreter was a M.A candidate who is familiar both with the content (South Asian women) and methodology of this thesis. The co-interpreter went over every third transcript and then went over the themes from each one. Discussion ensued until consensus was agreed upon for 100% of the themes for each of the transcripts collaboratively interpreted.

Transferability

Transferability, rather than generalizability, corresponds to the notion that the interpretations of the research can fit into contexts outside the study situation and the audience views the findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences. (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). It thus refers to the degree to which what is learned about one context may apply to another. Transferability assumes that researchers cannot make claims beyond their specific cases and instead must represent the specific through thick description. Writers, then, have a responsibility to offer detailed description, while readers have a responsibility to attend to the uniqueness of two contexts in order to find similarities that allow for application. By providing a description of the women studied in the form of detailed demographics as well as using their own words to flesh out the themes, the writer, in this case, provides a rich context that the reader can keep in mind while perusing the results. The use of lengthy quotations allows the reader to understand from the women's perspective, to 'listen' to parts of her story and form a deeper understanding. While the entire transcripts are not presented here the reader can still develop a relationship with the women and their stories.

Chapter V: Discussion

In this study, ten interviews were conducted with participants who reflected on marriage and the pressures they face around this. Four different categories of themes emerged as follows: (a) Definition of the pressure (b) Strategies to deal with the pressure, (c) Factors that increase or decrease the pressure and (d) Other themes that included characteristics and general views held by the group. This chapter will focus on a summary of the general findings, implications for counselling theory and practice, limitations and strengths of the study and future research directions.

General Findings

This research was originally patterned after a previously conducted broad study of South Asian women in Canada and the challenges they face between two cultures (Tee, 1996). The original study looked at two generations of South Asian women, focusing on their values and beliefs around family and gender roles. This study, in comparison, is a closer snapshot of one aspect of that picture: how single South Asian women deal with the pressures to marry while living within two cultures. The results as originally envisioned would have included women who navigated this arena well and others who had faced and continued to face struggles. Additionally, it was postulated that women would either internalize the pressure and its effects or reject the idea that a women needs to be married by a particular age. The results were, in some ways, surprising. The participants as a group rejected the idea that a woman should be married by a certain age and were quite successful in dealing with the ensuing pressure. Intuitively this fits, in that if someone greatly felt this pressure to marry, they would be more likely to accept and seek potential marital prospects, something these women were not doing indiscriminately. The South Asian marriage system is designed in such a way that almost anyone willing to marry can be

found a partner. Thus, it logically follows that if you really wanted to be married for its own sake, you could be in a fortnight. Why then, are these women single? The answer lies in a variety of areas including: (a) what they are looking for in a marriage partner (b) what are their thoughts and feelings around marriage (c) as well as personal and family history.

Definition of Pressure

On the first level of analysis, a definition of the pressure faced was elicited. This included the level, nature, source and form of the pressure. In this group of women, the level of pressure was mostly defined as in the low to moderate range. The women felt that the pressure other women dealing with a similar situation faced was much greater than their own. This may be true, or it may be that the women when hearing anecdotal evidence of pressure felt it was greater than their own. In popular Indian cinema and literature women face a great deal of pressure to marry and are often forced into unwanted marriages. Perhaps it is this image that lives in the minds of many South Asian women as to pressure and how it would look. It would be useful to find and interview a larger percentage of women that felt their pressure was high. Whether there exists a sample of women who would rate their pressure as high remains to be discovered. Perhaps as stated earlier, women who face tremendous amounts of pressure are more likely to succumb to the pressure. It may also be that the women simply do not want to participate in a study dealing with a self-described stressful issue.

The pressure was defined further as mostly passive in nature and the sources of the pressure were equally intrinsic as extrinsic. While there are cases of active forms of pressure in this study the majority of women clearly felt an underlying, unsaid, constant pressure compared to the more dramatic forms they may have envisioned facing.

Most of the women confirmed the idea that the pressure started around 25 which was the age they finished their post-secondary education. As noted in the demographics details, the women in this study had a considerably higher level of post-secondary education than the Canadian average. The pressure tends to start once a woman finishes school and has found a job since marriage is seen as the next logical step. This follows the notion-'you are set...now have a family'. Thus, the age of the start of pressure as described by the participants is consistent with this idea. In turn, women one generation ago would have felt the pressure at a younger age as higher educational attainment was not the norm among other variables.

Strategies to Deal with the Pressure

A list of strategies employed by the women to deal with the pressure was produced. A total of 12 strategies were elicited from the interviews: see Table 1 p. . Within the strategies identified there were clearly more positive strategies than negative ones. It may be postulated that this sample was in a way more homogenous than intended and these were the women who had successfully navigated the system. They were also the women who were, on the whole, still in contact with their families and shared close relationships with them. Many of the strategies listed in this study have been previously described as categories in coping studies including: seeking social support, self-control, distancing, positive appraisal, accepting responsibility, and escape/avoidance (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980)

Both the younger and older cohort described an almost equal number of strategies (24 for the older and 25 identified by the younger). In terms of differences in the type of strategies employed, the distribution was quite even between the two groups with the exception of one – Fate. Fate was described by a total of three women, all of whom were in the older cohort. While

this may simply be chance it may also be a "when all else fails" mechanism, as using fate as a strategy gave the women both an answer for others and solace for themselves.

There was also a definite difference between the younger age group and the older in terms of how their age is perceived by outsiders in the community. The cut-off to marry has shifted arbitrarily in the community to 30 and the younger group was cognizant of this generally accepted age. Many found solace in being below that number or having friends who were older and single. A number of women used this as a cognitive strategy when dealing with their parents.

Factors that Increase or Decrease the Pressure

The next level of analysis produced four factors that either increased or decreased the amount of pressure exerted or felt. These included biological factors such as birth order which has also been found to be a factor in previous studies (Ferguson, 2000), sociological factors such as living in a small town, amount of contact with extended family and familial norms around marriage. Living with parents was also found to have an effect on decreased independence in the study by Ferguson (2000).

Other Themes

And finally, a number of themes emerged that related to attitudes and beliefs around roles and lifestyle choices, including the way in which the women viewed marriage, themselves, and how they felt others viewed them. One of the noteworthy findings from this section was the role-reversal many of these women were currently facing as they played more care-giving and nurturing roles for their parents. A number of the women described families that were not the traditional two-parent South Asian families with the parents as the decision-makers. In a similar study of never-married Japanese and Chinese Americans, it was found that this caring role decreases the amount of time available to have a relationship (Ferguson, 2000).

The changes in family structure were particularly interesting when looking more closely at the role of the father. The father in eight of the families was either absent (due to death/divorce), distant (physically or emotionally) or in a 'sick-role' (suffering from a prolonged illness).This struck me as I was reflecting on the question, 'Is there any similarities within this group?' I came to think about my own situation and realized that there were two important mitigating factors to my single hood. The first being that we were not living in India, the place where most of my father's connections (i.e. people he would traditionally have looked to for marriage prospects) are. And secondly, my father has been in a 'sick-role' for the past twenty years leaving him with little time or energy to worry about my marriage. The role of the father in setting up a marriage remains to be clarified. But, I realize that direct pressure from my father would have magnified the pressure I have felt immensely.

Wakil, Siddique, and Wakil (1981) found that second generation Indians take more of a between-cultures stance and that was evident from the beliefs the women had around marriage. While on the one hand the women did not want to get married for the sake of it they still very much understood the significance to the family and even accepted that the pressure was normal. These women also did not clearly state that they chose to be single but almost uniformly talked about circumstances, timing and fate though, in reality, they were exercising choice constantly. Thus the thoughts and the behaviour in this case were at odds with each other. It seems that it may be easier to simply place the 'blame' somewhere as the community does not accept the notion of single by choice. Single by choice equals a rebel, single because of a reason means one still buys into the notion and importance of marriage. The stock answer becomes, "I haven't met the right person'. It is also a quick, easy answer when you don't want to get into all the details on your personal life story.

The women in this study talked about compatibility, equality and respect as critical components they look for in a prospective partner, which is consistent with the findings of Gupta (1999). Parents, however, may be looking for different characteristics like caste, social-class, regional and religious similarities as well as family and educational background. This was described by one participant who felt that immediate family "still looks for compatibility but extended family just wants to marry you off. Individual traits have not been emphasized traditionally as the pair, particularly the bride, is expected to adjust to one another after marriage (Gupta, 1999). The women in this study clearly trusted their family, who they felt knew them internally, versus the traditional 'aunties' that suggest prospective partners. Parents, in the roles of 'matchmakers,' may not have the connections to help arrange suitable introductions. This in of itself may limit the chances of a woman meeting many potential suitors and finding one that fits. As a friend once stated "on one hand my parents didn't allow us to go anywhere and meet anyone when we were younger, and then they don't know anyone suitable themselves and now they keep asking me haven't you met anyone. And, I'm thinking where am I supposed to meet someone."

As reported by Narain (1999), marriage is seen as a very significant and serious institution, one which the woman associates with added responsibility and a loss of independence and freedom. This was evident in the interviews both in the fears expressed around a loss of independence and the greater adjustments which the women feared they would have to make compared to their husbands. This was consistent with the fact that most of the women held traditional views of what would be expected of them in their role as wives. If the women expect that marriage will be a traditional bound institution one in which they lose their freedom, where then is the incentive to enter such a state. To remain single with a companion would seem a

logical choice but the bounds of the community would not support that option either. Thus the women are left with the choice of remaining single (perhaps with a secret companion) in a society that sees little place for you, or entering a marriage where they feel they will lose a part of themselves. Not an easy choice it would seem.

Overall, women in this study perceived themselves as strong, independent minded and critical thinkers. They have been able to find that fine balance between the traditions and expectations of the family and their personal development. This ability to navigate between the two successfully comes with conflict and being able to develop strategies to deal with this. The issue of marriage is one that arises early in the life of South Asian women and thus by their 20s and 30s have had a long history of learning to deal with it. It was interesting to note if any changes in thought had occurred in the months between the initial and follow-up interviews. In most cases the views held strong; however, if a follow-up was conducted years later, developmental processes may shift the perspective of the individuals.

Implications for Theory

To date there has been considerable research on the acculturation process (Berry, 1994, 1996) which outlines the various ways immigrants navigate and adjust to a new culture. While integration and biculturalism has been signaled as the most advantageous form of adaptation, there has not been a lot of research on what this may look like in specific groups dealing with specific issues. This research shows us one aspect, marriage in one group, and how the bicultural or integrated individual would deal with it. Integration occurs when a part of one's own culture is retained and a wish to participate in the larger social system is exhibited. Most of the women in this study termed themselves a mixture of both cultures and how they deal with the issues around marriage clearly reflect this. These women have come up with a compromise and are thereby

functioning still within the culture in the face of challenging and hard-set traditions. This study confirms the notion of 'duality' described by Naidoo and Davis (1988) in which women valued some aspects of the 'traditional' values of family and marriage while still pursuing education and careers and demanding equality in relationships.

Gupta (1999) has found in her interviews with females in their 20s and 30s that there are feelings of unrest and confusion regarding their role in society. The bi-cultural identity and changing roles of women are creating conflict within the parental home. This was evidenced by the inability of most of the women to describe their current roles, though they obviously were filling a great many roles. Perhaps, this generation of women that is breaking ground for the next just has not come to name their position in society.

Counselling Implications

With the number of new immigrants from Asian countries steadily increasing each year there is a definite need for a better understanding of both the individual and the counselling needs of this group. While there has recently been more research on the intergenerational conflict and the areas around which conflict occurs, there is still relatively little information on how this conflict affects the second generation and how they deal with it. There are a number of agencies that work with new immigrants but there are relatively few practitioners that focus on the issues of the second generation. The second-generation Canadian of South Asian descent does not fit well with the immigrant serving agencies and they have unique cultural experiences that must be taken into account when working from a mainstream perspective. Many young South Asian youth feel there are no culturally relevant services for them. This research also shows that this generation is forging new ground by combining both the home and the host cultures. This phenomenon also generalizes across other ethnic youth facing similar cultural conflict.

The current study also offers insight and information that may be helpful to professionals working with South Asian women. The topic of pressure to marry by a certain age may be a universal phenomenon but the nature of the pressure; how and who exerts it, holds many unique commonalities within the South Asian community. Thus, dealing with women from within this community requires an understanding of the qualitative nature of their experience not just statistics that women within this culture face pressure.

Another way in which this research could be utilized in a counselling setting would be to talk about the strategies identified here with other women in a therapeutic setting. In particular, sharing what has worked for other women in similar situations with a client. Sharing the examples could help normalize the thoughts and feelings that other women may be undergoing. This effect was already noted in this study when sharing preliminary results with the women in the second interview. There was keen interest in finding out how others in the study had dealt with the pressure as well as a search for deeper understanding of the issue itself exhibited. In doing so there was recognition of similarities as well as differences in the amount of pressure and varying strategies that were used. All of the women requested a copy of the final paper and seemed interested in learning from each other. Some of the women in the study indicated they would benefit from a support group where women in the midst of dealing with these issues could seek support from one another, as well as offering mentoring to younger women that may just be entering the folds of the issue.

Finally, the notion of confidentiality was also critical given the example of the reluctance of the women to talk about past boyfriends or partners as this information could be potentially harmful if leaked. When working with South Asian clients it is critical to emphasize this point especially if you are seen as having contact with the community.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations within this study. The sample size for this study was quite small. With just 10 interviews conducted, five in each age range, it may be postulated that with more participants the number of categories would increase or more patterns, such as similarities between the participants, would become more evident. However, it should be noted that as there was considerable overlap of themes within this sample, this may not be a critical limitation.

The sample of this study was limited to a very specific group and, as noted earlier, the South Asian community is vast and diverse and caution should be taken when generalizing even within this community.

A third limitation of the study is the homogeneity of the group in terms of the level of pressure felt and possibly acculturation status. This group clearly self-identified as mostly experiencing low to moderate levels of pressure. Where then are the women who face high levels of pressure and how do we reach them to include their voice in this process?

Finally, there are some methodological limitations in this study. The qualitative methodology employed requires one be aware of prejudices and biases and my being an 'insider' in itself led to a greater challenge of not directing the work. While in many ways it was helpful to have a thorough understanding of the topic area, an 'outsider' to the group may have interpreted the material in a very different way. This subjectivity of interpretation, however, is consistent with the hermeneutic method which, in itself, states that multiple meanings should be applicable as there is no one truth. The assumptions, biases and judgments that I brought with me into this study may have moved the study towards 'self-confirmability'. As the hermeneutic and feminist research literature both address this potential issue, the built-in criteria for evaluating the rigour

of the study has also provided a check. These include writing or prefacing the research by placing myself in context to this research, in other words making my place explicit in the research. Additionally, the use of co-interpreters and member checks was critical.

Strengths of the Study

While a number of limitations are listed above, there were also a number of strengths to this study. One of the strengths of the study was the ability of the interviewer/author to speak Punjabi. While almost the entire interview for each participant was conducted in English there were still crucial sayings and words used and concepts that were deemed self-explanatory by the participants that would have lost meaning if the researcher did not understand the culture and the language.

Another key strength was that all the women in this study were aware that I myself am not married and this was important to them as most made some mention of this. In this manner, they may have simply felt that I would not or could not judge their choice as perhaps a married South Asian researcher might. They also generally felt I understood the challenges having likely faced them myself. There was an ease and an understanding on my part that often did not require a lot of explanation of cultural expectations.

Thirdly, the qualitative nature of the study allowed for a more fully developed picture to emerge. By reading the actual words of the women, one gets a glimpse into what these women are feeling and thinking. In this way just by asking the women to talk about their experience of being single at this time, some unexpected issues or points were uncovered (e.g., the role of the father in bringing about the marriage) which the author would not have anticipated. This one point in itself, the role of the father, in my mind is important enough to warrant further research.

Implications for Further Research

While this study focused on the experience of these ten women there is a need for research on a larger scale both within this group as well as other sub-groups within the South Asian Diaspora. Additional research on other ethnic groups, as well as women in general, facing this growing trend is also necessary.

A number of areas for future research can be identified based on this research. Some of these areas are listed below.

With the role of the father becoming evident as perhaps a crucial point in this study, further research into what and how different family members play roles and their effects on the individual should be studied. In the current study, family was viewed as a unit whereas it may be beneficial to break the family down into individual members and look at these roles more closely.

One obvious follow-up study would be conducting similar research on males facing the same issues. The research could help identify if the pressure is qualitatively and quantitatively different. Males have traditionally had less pressure exerted on them to marry early and thus may view the topic from a very different perspective.

Similarly a study focusing on lesbian South Asian women's experience would reveal important findings. More specifically how does the pressure differ for women that are out versus those that have not come out?

Leading out of the above listed topic, a number of women in the study identified they would want to know how single men perceive single women over a certain age. They were interested to find out if these men held the same traditional views they perceived the community

at-large to hold. It seemed the women almost wanted a check on their perceptions as to how the world sees them.

One of the themes that had emerged was the idea of the pressure being different in smaller towns and the home country. A study conducted in either of these places may include more of the women that deal with a high degree of pressure and the importance in knowing how they are coping or not coping would be worthwhile.

And finally, a longitudinal study with the same group may be helpful in fully seeing if views change as the women get older. Do they change their strategies as they proceed through life? What impact does getting married eventually have on the woman? And, how do they interact with their daughters on this issue?

Conclusion

This study, which looked at the experience of ten South Asian women who are single and facing pressure to marry, provides a first glimpse into a new and complicated phenomenon. Just one generation ago, South Asian women would have not had this choice to make and even now likely have to contend with names such as spinster, but the choice to remain single past a societal norm is becoming more acceptable. The women in this study saw themselves as strong, independent and were self-accepting though they clearly understood that the society around them saw them as quite different, even someone to be feared. As young men continue to marry women that are significantly younger or go back home to India to marry will this cohort of women truly become the 'lost generation' as one woman dubbed her social group. Or, perhaps these women are the ones who have 'found' themselves in the midst of all the roles a woman is supposed to play. They have chosen to just be and accept themselves, requiring no roles or names to define themselves.

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Appendix A

Interview Question List

1. Do you face any pressure around marriage in the home?

2. What does this pressure look, sound like?

3. At what age did this begin?

4. How have you dealt with the pressures you have faced?

5. Describe an incident or situation where you felt pressure and how you handled it?

6. Have you developed any strategies to deal with the pressure?

Being that you are not married and facing pressure around this:

7. How do you perceive that your family views you?

8. How do you perceive the outside community views you?

9. How do you view yourself?

10. How do you perceive other single SA women? How does the community view them?

11. How close are your connections with the family? Community?

12. Compared to other you know relatively how much pressure do you think you face?

13. If the primary role of an adult woman is 'as a wife, daughter-in-law or mother within the community' how do you define your current role?

14. What role do you see marriage as playing in defining you?

15. If asked, "Why are you not married?" what do you or would you respond?

16. How would or does a question like that make you feel?

17. What would you look for in a marriage partner?

18. In the South Asian community what do you believe is ideally looked for in a wife?

19. Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?

Appendix B

Demographic Information

To be filled out by the interviewer at time of interview.

Age:_____   Gender:____   **Participant Code:**_____

Religious Affiliation/ Background_____   Sexual Orientation:_____

Place of birth:_____

Length of residence in Canada:_____

Level of Education:_____

Current Occupation:_____

Where were your parents originally from?_____

When did your parents immigrate to Canada?_____

How many siblings in your family?_____   Male_____   Female_____

Identity/ Acculturation

Where would you rate yourself on the following scale?

        1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____10
    Indian   Canadian

Explain: _____

Further
Comments?_____

_____

Appendix E

List of literature about South Asian Women dealing with marriage pressure and expectations, roles, identity and family.

1. *A Bend in the River* by V.S. Naipaul
2. *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry
3. *A House for Mr. Biswas* by V.S. Naipaul
4. *A River Sutra* by Gita Mehta
5. *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth
6. *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje
7. *Anita and Me* by Merra Syal
8. *Arranged Marriage* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
9. *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mooto
10. *Cinnamon Gardens* by Shyam Selvadurai
11. *Desirable Daughters* by Bharti Mukherjee
12. *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai
13. *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai
14. *Half a Life* by V.S. Naipaul
15. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* by Kiran Desai
16. *Ice Candy Man* (a.k.a. *Cracking India*) by Bapsi Sidhwa
17. *In Custody* by Anita Desai
18. *Jasmine* by Bharti Mukherjee
19. *Junglee Girl* by Ginu Kamani
20. *Life isn't all Ha Ha Hee Hee* by Meera Syal
21. *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie
22. *Raj* by Gita Mehta
23. *Shame* by Salman Rushdie
24. *Shame (Lajja)* by Taslima Nasrin
25. *Such a Long Journey* by Rohinton Mistry
26. *Tamarind Mem* by Anita Rau Badami
27. *The Blue Bedspread* by Raj Kamal Jha
28. *The Book of Secrets* by M.G. Vassanji
29. *The Glass Palace* by Amitav Ghosh
30. *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy
31. *The Guide* by R.K. Narayan
32. *The Hero's Walk* by Anita Rau Badami
33. *The Moor's Last Sigh* by Salman Rushdie
34. *The Mystic Masseur* by V.S. Naipaul
35. *The Wedding by Imram Coovadia*
36. *What the Body Remembers* by Shauna Singh Baldwin