A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE MEANING OF WIDOWHOOD IN THE HINDU-CANADIAN COMMUNITY

By

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B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1985

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Counselling Psychology

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

APRIL, 1999

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ABSTRACT

The research literature documents the relative disadvantage of widows in coping with grief, both in a greater vulnerability themselves for mortality or ill health, but also for a sudden loss of resources from losing a spouse. Moreover, widowhood in the Canadian cultural communities may be an additional burden if met with service from mainstream care professionals and agencies at variance with their culturally-appropriate grieving practices and assumptions. Specifically, the meaning(s) of bereavement and grief for Hindu-Canadian widows are not well understood, and the goal of this study is to enhance transcultural understanding of this population in counselling and beyond.

An inductive, descriptive qualitative method focusing on the subjective, lived experience of key co-researchers, using selective and nonprobability sampling was utilized to maximize the relatively small sample size typical of a phenomenological approach. This was used to describe and explain the meanings and experiences of grief for five older Hindu-Canadian widows within the context of their own cultural setting and world view. Data were collected from five female members of the Hindu-Canadian communities. An additional triangulation method of a general class of culturally-informed co-researchers was used to help corroborate the obtained themes. The co-researcher's responses were the data for this study, and a method of "constant comparative analysis" (Leininger, 1985) was utilized in a search for themes through a process of higher abstraction. Data analysis of the verbatim transcripts occurred simultaneously with data collection and, guided by Leininger's (1990) "Phases of Analysis for Qualitative Data," the process unfolded with: (a) collecting and documenting raw data; (b) identification of descriptors; (c) pattern analysis; and (d) theme formulation.

Ultimately six themes were abstracted from forty-five sub-categories as a portrait of the meanings and experiences of widowhood for this group of Hindu-Canadian widows. Themes for this group of key co-researchers are as follows: First, status transition from wife to widow meant

resignation to the husband's death, rather than acceptance through discrete stages of recovery: Second, meanings and expressions of grief centered on beliefs about the enduring and eternal quality of the husband's life force as intrinsic and essential to the widow's own lifeways: Third, the transition from wife to widow entailed a double affliction in status loss as well as in the personal domain of intimacy and partnership: Fourth, the meanings and expressions of both grief phenomena and status transition reflect an ethic of collective good and duty-based interpersonal morality, but with acculturation causing a nascent and generational transition in such moral orientation: Fifth, status transition can entail a degree of liminality, out of bicultural dislocation and transformational variables such as education: Finally, a fundamental meaning of their Hindu-Canadian widowhood experience is its spiritual opportunity. Despite some diversity in their Hindu diaspora and sect, the explicated themes illustrate a common experience and meaning attendant on widowhood for the co-researchers. This study investigated a portion of the underlying cultural logic of widowhood and grief phenomena for these constituents of Hinduism, and highlighted their cultural constructions of meaning and experience, allowing us to improve our transcultural knowledge and understanding of the unique needs of this population in the field of Counselling and beyond.

As a phenomenological study, themes and suppositions abstracted from this relatively small sample are limited beyond the precisely-defined context of its five co-researchers. Nevertheless, a counsellor might well benefit from the potential offered here for finer-grained assessments and therapeutic relationships with widows in our Hindu communities.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to the women who participated in this study by gifting me with their stories and trust, and to the many people who also participated in their contributions as culturally-informed co-researchers, advisors and contacts. I am also grateful for the guidance of the priests, officials and volunteers in the many temples who kindly assisted me in better understanding their cultural ways and means, and in directing me to fruitful sources of knowledge and recruitment.

I would also like to express my respect and appreciation to the members of my committee for their mentorship, support, constructive feedback and not least for their patience in my pursuit of this research project: Dr. Ishu Ishiyama, thesis supervisor, Dr. Jim White, and Dr. Marv Westwood. I am also indebted to friends, classmates and colleagues for their encouragement and support.

Finally, I am grateful beyond measure to my parents, for their love, unflagging support and faith in me. Their example of hard work, vision and humor are a daily tonic. To Liz and her husband Doug, I am also greatly appreciative, as the love and technical support of my sister made my task infinitely more manageable.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Death, talking about it, is not morbid. It is part of our life. From childhood maybe

until we actually die, there is always this dreadful fear of dying... We have put it as far

away as possible. So let us enquire together what is that extraordinary thing that we

call death.

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1986).

Double Affliction for Hindu-Canadian Widows: Introductory Notes

In general., bereaved people are themselves at greater risk of mortality, and widows may be the

most vulnerable to a sudden loss of resources and status from losing a spouse. Moreover, cross-

cultural widowhood may be a double affliction if culturally-appropriate grieving practices and

assumptions are at variance with those offered by mainstream care professionals and institutions.

Specifically, the meaning(s) of bereavement and grief held by Hindu-Canadian widows are not well

understood, and the goal of this study is to enhance the transcultural understanding of this population

in counselling and beyond.

In theoretical terms, treatment plans may typically operationalize a conception of "an

autonomous, bounded, abstract individual existing free of society yet living in society" (Shweder, 1981,

p. 190). However, many studies of identity development in India have found that the "man-in-society"

there is not necessarily an autonomous individual (Geertz, 1984; Hoare, 1991; Shweder, 1981).

On the contrary, the cultural context of India and Hinduism seem to shape a conception of

shared destiny, in a relatively relational., future-oriented construction of identity, with the individual

impinged upon by fairly rigid "rules of interdependence that are context-dependent and particularistic,"

rules that order all manner of social exchange, such as in giving or receiving services, in behaviour

toward kin, in marriage and birth, as well as in death (Shweder, 1981).

If, as Shweder (1991; p. 23) stated, "When people live in the world differently, it may be that they live in different worlds," it would seem incumbent on counsellors to seek access to those worlds in the service of enhanced care, which this study intends.

Background to the Problem

The cultural context of Canada today reflects a richer and more diverse mosaic than ever before, with new or well-established ethnic and cultural communities being created or deepened as immigration patterns evolve. Cultural groups in the provinces of Canada are said to have maintained their distinct identities within the larger social web (Palmer, 1975, p. 2).

Established Asian communities and new immigrants represent a significant share of an expanding Canadian population, and Thompson (1989) notes that 32 percent of the total immigrant population has been Asian after 1970, with a large contribution of individuals coming from the area of India (Canada Year Book, 1985). For example, individuals claiming Indo-Pakistani languages as their mother tongue more than doubled in the years between 1976 and 1981 (Thompson, 1989). As well, the Asian-born representation of all immigrants living in Canada who came here in the period between 1978 and 1986 rose to a proportion of 40 percent overall (DeSantis, 1990).

As a general portrait of recent facts and trends in our diversifying mosaic, it was reported that there were 548,000 East Indians in Canada in the 1996 census, of which 310,300 lived in Ontario, with the second largest provincial population of 141,370 living in B.C., of whom 107,175 were concentrated in the Greater Vancouver region (Canada Year Book, 1999). In terms of mother tongue, Canada Year Book (1999) figures for some of the specific ethnicities from the Indian subcontinent show a steady increase in B.C. from 1991 to 1996: Hindi (12,615 to 15,900), Gujarati (5,055 to 6,035), Sindhi (*not reported in '91, but now listed at 1,660), Dravidian (925 to 1625), Tamil (530 to 1,135), Bengali (230 to 640), and Marathi (95 to 125). It is also reported that some 74,360 immigrants have arrived in B.C. from India since 1961, with rates of arrival remaining fairly steady in

each of the last three reporting eras: 21,660 from 1971-80; 21,030 from 1981-90; and 21,725 from 1991-96, according to the Canada Year Book (1999).

In terms of language maintenance, the Canada Year Book (1999) also indicates that 154,485 individuals in Canada claim Punjabi as their "home language," whereas only 23,235 claim Hindi, but with the additional presence of such ethnic groups as 26,670 Gujurati. In Ontario, the figures for "home language" are 58,570 Punjabi, and 9,842 Hindi, whereas in B.C., some 74,015 are of Punjabi, and 8,995 of Hindi (Canada Year Book, 1999). This may indicate something about the relative stability of each linguistic group's usage in the home. What such statistics do not indicate is the larger picture of Hinduism in Canada and B.C., with the further contribution of smaller diasporic contributions to it's creative ferment, often from far flung parts of the world (usually of British colonial origins, such as that of Fiji). Perhaps more telling for the purposes of this study are the figures reported in 1991 for "religious adherence," an aspect of cultural experience not collected for the 1996 census. For Canada overall, it was reported that 157,010 people claimed Hinduism as their religious affiliation, and 147,440 claimed that of Sikhism (Canada Year Book, 1999). This represents a significant increase from 1981, where the figures for each were 69,505 and 67,715 respectively (Canada Year Book, 1999). These latter figures also reveal a relative dominance of Hindus in Canada as a whole, even though this demographic is not reflected in the significant predominance of Sikhism in B.C.

In fact, the first South Asian immigrants to Canada were mostly Sikhs who arrived in B.C. around 1900, but because of racist legislation in place from 1909 to 1947, only some 6,000 South Asians lived in Canada by 1942 (Waxler-Morrison, Anderson & Richardson, 1990, p. 142). There are now over 300,000 South Asians living in Canada, mostly in urban settings (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992) reflecting the larger fact, then, of past and increasing immigration affecting both the composition of the Canadian population and Canadian health services (Splane, 1984; Thompson, 1989).

In provincial immigration, figures published in the Canada Year Book (1999) for India

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remained relatively constant as a percentage of overall immigration, from 11.1% (3513 persons) in 1991 to 12% (6048) in 1996, and from a low of 9% (3176) in 1992 to a high of 13.4% (6036) in 1993. Only Hong Kong and Taiwan have exceeded India as a source of new immigrants during this period, with an increase (in absolute terms) of Indian settlement (relative to percentages) reflecting a significant rise in immigration to our province overall, particularly from Hong Kong (i.e., from 23,433 in 1991 to 40,239 in 1996).

Why Indo-Canadian Research?

Not only does B. C. (at over 20 percent) have the second largest percentage of immigrants among provincial populations (DeSantis, 1990), but it is also second only to Ontario in its Indo-Canadian population, as indicated by aforementioned statistics from the 1996 census. People from the Indian subcontinent remain as one of the significant participants in the life of our province, exceeded only by immigrant groups of European, Dutch, and Chinese ancestry (Thompson, 1989). More recently, only immigration from Hong Kong has had a higher rate of entry to B. C. than that from the Indian subcontinent (Canada Year Book, 1999; Thompson, 1989).

As mentioned, the Indo-Canadian population in B. C. is predominately Sikh, with relatively fewer Hindus and Pakistanis, as Sikhs from northern India, particularly the Punjab region, are its largest community (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992). The greatest concentration of Sikhs is in the lower mainland, and in Victoria, Nanaimo, and Duncan on Vancouver Island, as well as significant communities in Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Edmonton (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992).

The Sikhs who came to Canada were mostly sponsored farmers or landowners of relative prosperity by Indian standards, but typically were not highly educated. Many have found work often in the lumber industries, construction, and as farm workers, janitors, and taxi drivers, with the majority of Sikh women working outside the home, often in similar positions or in canneries. (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992). As well, educated Sikhs from urban settings are working in a number of professional and

technological fields (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992).

Members of the Hindu community, on the other hand, generally were of a well educated and middle to upper class background, who also originated mostly from northern India, many coming to Canada as part of a large influx of South Asian professionals in the mid-1960's (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992). Although caste affiliation has not been an area of statistical interest for such newcomers, much of this Hindu community arrived in Canada as students from the U. S., and most were independent immigrants without relatives to sponsor them (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992). An additional Hindu community came as a smaller group of immigrants from south India, along with some who were of the Christian faith (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992).

Thompson (1989) notes that the predominance of Sikhs in B.C.'s Indo-Canadian population is not a pattern reflected in the rest of Canada. To answer questions of Hinduism here, one must also include a consideration of Hindu immigrants to B.C from countries such as Fiji, British Guyana, Mauritius and elsewhere. In sum, the significant presence of the many Indo-Canadian communities, with their distinct cultural (and intracultural) assumptions and practices, certainly make Indo-Canadian research pertinent to the goal of improved understanding and practice in health care and counselling.

Shortcomings in the Literature

Little transcultural research investigating Indo-Canadian health care issues has been apparent in the literature, with much of what examination there is of this population focusing either on earlier issues of arrival and adjustment such as that discussed in a B. C. Public Service Bulletin of 1928 (Thompson, 1989), or more recent accounts of their historical, statistical, social-psychological, and immigration characteristics (Thompson, 1989).

In nursing, Anderson's (1985, 1987) studies on the health of Indo-Canadian and Greek-Canadian immigrant women, Majumdar and Carpio's (1988) study of various ethnic conceptions of health, and case studies of specific illnesses in the Indo-Canadian population, are positive exceptions

noted in Thompson (1989). Her own phenomenological study on Hindu perceptions of health and a recent handbook for cross-cultural caring in Western Canada (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992) form part of a more transcultural body of knowledge about this population.

Further Scarcity in Hindu-Canadian Research

Thompson (1989) observes that the relative lack of research material on the Indo-Canadian population is compounded by an apparent bias in the literature toward study of the more prominent Sikh community, confirmed also in the literature review for this research study. For example, Struser (1985) focused exclusively on Sikh women from the Punjab for a study on their experience of childbirth. A number of medical studies of Indian immigrants also focus mostly on the Sikh community (Thompson, 1989).

There seems to have been an historical pattern of bias towards Sikh study in B. C. and Canada due, perhaps, to stereotypes of homogeneity amongst the Indo-Canadian community, or to relative numbers from which to gain study data for each community, but this oversight has left Hindu communities at an even greater disadvantage for having health care that knowledgeably assists with the stabilization of their unique health-related traditions.

Some Essential Features of Hindu Culture

Hinduism, or "Sanatana Dharma" ("eternal faith") is really a community of religions that congregates around the binding authority of sacred texts, which are together known as the "Vedas" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). These provide a source of ultimate knowledge that is all-encompassing for the lives of its billion, disparate adherents. This Hindu community is comprised of four major sects, each upholding a different focus in its larger constellation of deities:

(a) Saivism; (b) Saktism; (c) Vaishnavism; and (d) Smartism (Subramuniyaswami, 1993).

Saivism has been called the world's oldest religion (a tracery of some 8,000 years), the "precursor of the many-faceted religion" now known as Hinduism, and is comprised of six main

expressions which worship all-pervasive "Siva, the compassionate one" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). It has been described as a practical perspective, yet with a progressive sense of our place in the cosmos and a temple system of deeply mystical character (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). It is a culture of the devout, dedicated to the "atman's" (eternal soul) long journey through "samsara" (this-worldly realm of rebirths) to ultimate "moksa," or spiritual release from the world of temporal cares (Knipe, 1991).

Sakta Hinduism emerged in India as a coherent faith somewhere around the fifth century, one of reverence for the divine in its' feminine cosmic form and "kundalini" energy, which Knipe (1991) describes as a "feminine serpent power coiled at the base of the spine," a worship which focuses on the many forms of the goddess "Sakti" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). It is a sect of four chief schools, which in their various rites invoke either the power of the savage "Kali" form of Sakti (a bloodthirsty destroyer and provider of life), or the divine favour of "Parvati" ("goddess-daughter of the mountain, chaste wife and passionate lover of Siva"), a gentle form of Sakti (Knipe, 1991). Saktism as a whole is said to be essentially "advaitic, defining the soul's destiny" as being that of fusion with Siva, the "universal soul" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993).

Vaishnavism is a faith in which the goal of god and soul are eternal distinction, not fusion, for which the soul's path to salvation is to be found in "bhakti" or "devotion to a deity" (Knipe, 1991), in this case to "Vishnu" and his many incarnations of a masculine cosmic energy such as the epic hero and model of male virtue, "Rama" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). In Vedic mythology, Vishnu is connected to an all-pervasive cosmic center and creative force (Knipe, 1991), and the five subdivisions of Vaishnavism closely follow his festivals and temple worship, upholding a range of commitment to a pure dualism of god and soul (Subramuniyaswami, 1993).

Smartism is described as a liberal and more recent (ninth century) reformation of an older Hindu perspective, one that in worshipping six forms of god tends to be "monistic, nonsectarian, meditative and philosophical" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). Its adherents revere the organic whole of

"Smriti," what Knipe (1991) defines as "tradition, memory, the total human recall of spiritual values." It's reforming founder, the monk-philosopher Adi Sankara, sought to integrate the Hindu religions of the ninth century under an advaitic (nondualistic) system of one god, six faces, from which followers may choose their "preferred deity" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). The universalistic quality of Smartism is embodied in the following quote from Adi Sankara: "It is the one Reality which appears to our ignorance as a manifold universe of names and forms and changes. Like the gold of which many ornaments are made, it remains in itself unchanged. Such is Brahman [ultimate reality], and That art Thou" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). Alongside profound diversity in expression, the presence of this latter quality too, in what it is to be Hindu anywhere, will come to the fore in later discussions of its many underlying continuities and shared beliefs.

These four major Hindu denominations diverge in their beliefs to such an extent that they are fully autonomous in their own right, each defined by a myriad complex of religious leaders, priesthoods, "guru" ancestries, schools, monasteries, pilgrimages, temples, dialects and customs (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). Greater complexity still is to be found in local evocation of the Hindu theme of unity and diversity, wherein each village, temple or hilltop asserts its "continuities with the grand subcontinental picture," while also being "quick to promote its uniqueness, its Hinduism-found-nowhere-elseness" (Knipe, 1991). For those of the Hindu diaspora, too, root and branch converse further in their own experience of an acculturative particular.

Nevertheless, they are bound by an underlying and generatively "vast heritage of culture and belief," such as Vedic scriptural authority and sacraments, reincarnation, karma, "dharma" (spiritual duty), temple worship, guru practice, a multitude of gods, and an all-pervasive presence of the sacred (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). The nature of dharma, for example, is a shared Hindu philosophy of personal development, in theory if not always in practice, for the "natural expression and maturing of the body, mind and emotions through four progressive stages of earthly life: student, householder,

elder advisor and religious solitaire" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). Vedic scriptures admonish as follows: "Pursuit of the duties of the stage of life to which one belongs - that, verily, is the rule! Others are like branches of a stem. With this, one tends upwards; otherwise, downwards" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993).

Despite these variations in the way in which the Hindu faith is observed in diverse Hindu communities, often with different dialects and customs, a central feature common to Hindu culture has been its tolerance of diversity in the other faiths and practices that it has encountered and borrowed from (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992). Another is the inseparability of body and spirit in its concept of the unity of life, such that birth and death are considered simply karmic and perpetual transformations of form in a cycle of rebirth in death (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992).

Hindu Caste Structure

A person's condition in life is thought to be a fated consequence of past (mis)deeds, with one's behavior having direct implications for future incarnations of the soul. Death is not an ending, nor is it hidden, but is a transition to another life. Associated with the notion of rebirth is the Hindu organization of society into a stratification of social class, or caste, into which one is born (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992). These castes each have a prescriptive set of strict rules for social interaction and intracaste behavior, with intercaste marriage, for example, being largely forbidden, a prohibition that remains strong even in Canada (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992), just as "isogamy" (same caste marriage) is still the rule in parts of India (Milner, 1988).

To be specific, Hinduism as a social organization seems to represent an ancient blend of two systems of "hierarchical and occupational specialization," comprised of the Vedic-affiliated "varna" system (classes of humans) of idealized social groups, and the locally-applied "jati" system of hierarchy and intracaste affiliation (Kinsley, 1982). Together, they correspond in theory to a corresponding class of traditional "occupational" role.

The varna system is composed of four varna castes: "Brahmins" are said to be priests and scholars; "Kshatriyas" are characterized as warriors and kings; "Vaishyas" are those in business and skilled labour; and "Shudras" are characterized as a peasant class whose duty is to provide for the three varna groups above them (Kinsley, 1982). The first three groups are described as "twice born," as only they are allowed to study the holy scriptures and to enact the Vedic "sacred-thread" ritual of initiation, by which the person is said to be reborn (Kinsley, 1982). The point of the varna system is order, and the maintenance thereby of stability in the cosmos, each varna group nourishing that above them, with Brahmins in their turn charged with responsibility for nourishing the gods who govern it (Kinsley, 1982). As implied earlier, the varnas are closed groups, and interrelationships highly regulated. In addition, a fifth varna referred to in the Vedic books of law is that of the "untouchable" class, inferior even to the servant class of Shudras.

The "jati" system, intermingled with that of the Vedic varna classes, are the true castes of birth, and are "geographically and linguistically limited" (Kinsley, 1982). There are thought to be some two thousand "jatis" in India alone, each of which functions on the village level as an autonomous semi-kinship group, typically distinguished by its own customs, clothing or dietary habits (Kinsley, 1982). Jatis describe the "Hinduism-found-nowhere-elseness" (Knipe, 1991) of diversity in India and beyond, while varnas uphold the larger unifying community of Hindu continuity and cultural tradition for the many jatis within them.

It must be remembered that the lowest caste members, the "untouchables," are still the reviled portion of Indian society, considered by many "to be inherently inferior and polluting regardless of their socio-economic status or personal habits" (Vincentnathan, 1993), consistent with the shared internal logic of a caste system. For example, most Hindus will consume food that has been prepared by fellow caste members or above, with high caste Brahmins often restricted to cooking the meals of their own members only (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992).

Distinct from Sikh rejection of caste (in theory), Hindu death rituals also depend on a conception of caste or "occupational class" (varna) for the duration of mourning periods of death "impurity," with membership in the highest class permitting the shortest period of "incapacitation" (Mines, D.P., 1989). However, Mines (1989) notes the general cultural view of death in India also as an opportunity, as with birth and marriage, for "reshaping personal and social relations" in defence of societal cohesion.

Commitment and proximity to aforementioned orthodoxy may affect their salience in everyday life, as in the acculturative pressures of modernity in Canada. In fact, it has been observed that for modern India itself the raison d'être of Hinduism may increasingly be that of a "secular, cultural., political ...mission: to form a strong modern nation-state" (Klostermaier, 1989).

Status in Marital Alliance

On this topic, Milner (1988) observes that while little is known about the origins of caste, or of its initial features, it is a highly complex system, of which only a relative uniformity can be said to exist in its often disparate contemporary manifestations. Central to it now is some level of "status homogeneity and (caste) endogamy" in traditional (arranged) marital alliances (Milner, 1988).

Nevertheless, regions and castes do flavour these socially-endorsed expressions of correct status relations in a manner that, in marriage-embodied, institutionalized definitions, may vary in ways great or subtle (Milner, 1988). Contradictions manage to coexist within more orthodox readings of the Vedic "dharmasastra" tradition of isogamy (Trautmann, 1981) for establishing alliance. Worth consideration here are four features and variations identified by Milner (1988) as significant in his "general theory" model for explaining Indian status relations, as well as the abandonment of isogamy in certain contexts. For the purposes of this proposal, how a woman enters marriage may relate directly to her relative value and resources in later widowhood.

One difference in such practice is the relative dominance in the "Dravidian" south of isogamy

(bride of equal status to groom), from that of the rest of India (Milner, 1988). In the north, hypergamy (bride of inferior status) tends to prevail along with isogamy, but with the former frequently upheld as "ideal" (Milner, 1988). A secondary departure is the tendency for upper caste groups to be more hypergamous than that of lower (Milner, 1988). Thirdly, a feature common for most all regions and castes is the relative proscription of hypogamy (groom of inferior status). Lastly, groups for whom descent, alliance and residence are reckoned through female line are acknowledged by Milner (1988) as offering patterns of (apparent) difference. These differences, however, are thought to commonly reflect underlying dynamics of status relations, even in disparate traditions which honor the spirit, if not the letter of Hindu alliance orthodoxies (Milner, 1988).

Milner (1988) states how marital alliances in India take place largely in the asymmetrical context of the "kanyadan" ideology ("the gift of a virgin"), which demands "that daughters must be given up (anuloma) rather than down (pratiloma). It is this rich concept that opposes hypergamy to the (dharmasastra) ideal of isogamy" (Trautmann, 1981), which is to be found more often in the south. The patriarchal features which Milner (1988) identifies in kanyadan, and in Hindu society generally, also figure in the above-mentioned taboo of hypogamy.

Milner (1988) describes this system as having become strongly influenced toward asymmetry through the historical evolution and ascendance of high-caste (Brahman) thought, an evolution that ran counter to notions of reciprocity in marital exchange. Adilakshmi (1987) notes that widows in India enjoyed more flexibility in their status prior to 300 B. C., with the option of remarriage or even children in the "Niyoga Practice" custom of levirate (in her compulsory marriage to a childless brother-in-law). A widow's position deteriorated after 300 B. C., with this gradual ascendancy in high caste values, including tendencies toward a diminished woman and a lowered widow (Adilakshmi, 1987). In Hindu India, this was reflected in the "Manu Smriti" code of conduct underlying Hindu society at that time, derived from the genesis of caste in its "Varnashrama" philosophy (Halakatti, 1987).

An inferiority is therefore imposed on kanyadan "wife-givers" who are not only required to proffer large dowries and (for some castes) ongoing gifts, but are also prohibited from accepting in return a monetary contribution or woman from the groom's family (Milner, 1988). What is said to motivate the wife-givers in such alliances is the implicit elevation in their status resulting from "being on intimate terms with superiors" (Milner, 1988), one of the covert incentives supporting the status quo in caste. For wife and widow, then, it is significant that this form of exchange is thought to be characteristic of "certain forms of worship, and in Hindu culture kanyadan is a form of worship in which the groom is specifically conceived of as a deity" (Milner, 1988).

The Dravidian contrast refers to the largely southern (often upper caste) practice of isogamy in cross-cousin marriage within an extended kinship system, one that implies "equality and quid pro quo exchange" (Milner, 1988). Trautmann (1981, p24) observes that "Dravidian marriage always has the character of an exchange," a practice that manages to wed the isogamy of the dharmasastra ideology with the contradictions inherent to kanyadan by alternating the roles of wife-giver and wife-taker (Milner, 1988). Over time, a family line is insulated from asymmetries accruing in marital alliance through a formalization of reciprocal connection ("my sister marries you and I marry your sister...etc.") in which inequality is reflected only in the micro-alliance of the moment (Milner, 1988).

How Milner (1988) attempts to reconcile these varying constituents and tensions within his general theory of status relations, or why they developed so, are less salient for this proposal than in their contribution to a finer-grained understanding of the experiential gradations possible for Hindu widowhood in later life. These gradations occur within a general context of patriarchy. As Stein (1988) observes, for most Hindu girls the supportive ties to family of birth are severed at the moment of her marriage, with transposition to the patrilineal embrace of her husband's family. Their position is precarious, however, for at her spouse's death, many widows may find themselves considered burdensome to their in-laws, as an impediment in matters of inheritance and in the allegiance of her

children (Stein, 1988).

Moreover, an article discussing the continued practice of mass child marriages in parts of India, documented the recent wedding of hundreds of three and five year old boys and girls on "Akha Teej," a May holy day for Hindus that took place in Rajasthan in western India (Bedi, 1997). Such infant brides, largely impoverished and low-caste "Rajputs," are returned to their natal families until age fifteen, typically then entering their husband's home after the traditional "muklava" ceremony of consummation (Bedi, 1997). Although social activists in such regions have sought to increase options for women by, for example, trying to delay the muklava until after they are eighteen, persistent illiteracy, traditions of paternalism, and economic deprivations (for lower castes in particular) tend to sustain this practice (Bedi, 1997). Such practices reflect a continuing dilemma for many Hindu women and their families, in which these sorts of economic disincentive and cultural imperative serve to perpetuate gender and marital iniquities that may be of relevance to women in this study.

Differences in Hindu Moral Codes

In a study of cultural diversity in the morality of caring, Miller (1994) found differences between American and Hindu Indian populations in the attainment of moral codes. The Hindu Indians that Miller (1994) studied were children and adults drawn from middle and lower classes in southern India thought to maintain traditional Hindu "social beliefs and practices," while the American populations were of "relatively liberal" European extraction drawn from the Connecticut area. In her conclusions, Miller (1994) states that Kohlberg's individualistic ("Gessellschaft") perspective and Gilligan's collectivist ("Gemeinschaft") one were in fact both stressing aspects of the same individualistic cultural presumption thought typical of the West, and in their further assumptions of universality, were themselves culture bound.

Whereas the Hindu sense of interpersonal responsibility was found to reflect a "duty-based" moral code, one that emphasized "broad and socially enforceable interpersonal obligations, the

importance of contextual sensitivity, and a monistic view of individual motivation," a strongly individualistic moral code of personal autonomy and responsibility was indeed found to develop among Americans, emphasizing "freedom of choice and a dualistic view of individual motivation" (Miller, 1994). Contrast arises out of the Hindu conception of self, for whom personhood is thought inherently social., rather than in the more bounded person acting autonomously in the Western modernity (Miller, 1994).

At the core of the open Hindu self is "dharma," a concept which embodies "moral duty, code for conduct, right action, and inherent character," for which the satisfaction of largely paternalistic social demands is inseparable from the realization of one's essence and the attainment of spiritual favor (Miller, 1994). However, this Hindu sense of duty is also inseparable from an interdependent social context, embodied by one's caste and role (i.e., widow) in a more rigidly regulatory society (Miller, 1994). The author does reflect on the possibility of intracultural variation in the expression of interpersonal moral codes dependent on the cultural proximity of traditional Hindu values in the process of acculturation, for example (Miller, 1994).

There are qualities of both vertical hierarchy and horizontal egalitarianism in Indian conceptions of personhood, but researchers must be aware of the likelihood of diversity in caste and individual behavior and conceptions of personhood. There is some evidence of untouchables shifting between egalitarian and hierarchical conceptions of self, also observed in higher caste groups (Vincentnathan, 1993), as the effect of culture is not monolithic.

These culturally constructed themes do impinge on behavior and social interactions, but they can also be understood as "instrumental measures" for the attainment of various social or psychological needs, which can alter or switch dependent on situational factors such as power, self-esteem, hunger, and other variables (Vincentnathan, 1993). Derne (1992) would concur with this notion of cultural relativity, acknowledging "culture's powerful causal significance while also recognizing that individuals

are not 'cultural dopes,' but are actively involved in negotiating and contesting cultural norms and meanings."

Westernized education and modern industrial life, along with level of acculturation in Canada, also affect the relevance, availability, or commitment to such themes (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992). In addition, Mines (1988) offers the admonition that a scholarly consensus of hierarchy in discussions of Indian society has largely obscured the frequency of egocentric explanations of autonomy and motivation. Mines (1988) states that Indians often do "depict themselves as active agents, pursuing private goals and making personal decisions that affect the outcome of their lives," in balance to more constrained assumptions and practices that arise out of sociocentric cultural norms for the achievement of goals.

The traditional Indian family structure reinforces the hierarchical nature of social life, with the family being its most important unit (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992), in a construction of identity that many researchers have found to be relational in nature, in contrast to Western assumptions of a universally individualized and autonomous self (Hoare, 1991; Kakar, 1979; Shweder & Miller, 1991).

A study by Gratton and Wilson (1988) offers cautions to health care professionals and policy-makers about any undue reliance they might place upon the families of the elderly minority client who is widowed or otherwise single. The study states that social workers and counsellors should be sensitive to the risk of strains and impoverishments in tapping the depth or flexibility of assistance available from minority family networks.

Other evidence cited in Webb-Johnson (1991) reveals that the Western stereotype of the extended Indian family lending support for problems in the family such as marital discord are often harmful myths, which allow health care practitioners to absolve themselves of the system's responsibility to offer more culturally relevant services. In any case, a study by Brown (1984) discovered that only 16 percent of "Asian households" in Britain are extended families.

Ayurvedic Traditions

In the area of medical beliefs, Lambert (1992) discussed several Hindu conceptions of health that are thought to be characteristic of the culture, such as its emphasis on achieving a balance between "heat" and "cold" in a holistic mind-body system, in the three bodily humors (bile, wind, and phlegm), and in the emotions. Folk treatment of illness proceeds with the aim of restoring balance, with a headache explained possibly as a result of eating too many eggs, which are thought to be (over)"heating" foods (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992).

Derived from the ancient Indian system of Ayurvedic medicine, all foods are classified as being "hot," "cold," or "neutral" in their effect on the bodily system, and all medical conditions were "categorized by lay villagers as illnesses of heat (garmi ki bimari) or of cold (sardi ki bimari) in rural areas where Lambert's (1992) fieldwork was carried out. Ayurveda is Sanskrit for "science of life", and its practitioners (vaidyas) utilize conceptions of a blended self called "doshas" as maps to personality and health (Wigood, 1997). The "kapha" type is thought "earthy, round and jolly"; the "pitta" type is thought "hard-driving and incisive"; and the "vata" type is thought "thin, ethereal and creative" (Wigood, 1997). Vaidyas use techniques such as "pulse diagnosis" to pinpoint imbalance in a person's unique mix of dosha tendency, and prescribe compensatory changes in lifestyle habits and diet (Svoboda, 1992).

This system offers layers of complexity in categorizing seasons, weather, times of day, and age groups into doshas (Wigood, 1997) as well as foods. For example, Svoboda (1992) notes that yoghurt, "being creamy, smooth and soft is the very image of kapha and adds to the body's kapha when eaten." Attention paid to these and other Hindu cultural understandings of health and personality is meant to foster sensitivity to a Hindu widow's implementation of seemingly idiosyncratic yet deeply cultural lifeways in her response to bereavement, unique and shared.

The central feature of Ayurvedic medicine is its holistic view of the person as being uniquely

greater than the sum of his or her parts, and in taking a preventative approach to what vaidyas conceive of as the "six stages of disease: accumulation, aggravation, dissemination, relocation, manifestation and disruption" (Wigood, 1997). The approach teaches a proactive self-monitoring, for early-stage symptom recognition and management, before disease can develop. Ayurveda is also said to strongly encourage some form of spiritual technique (e.g., meditation) to maximize one's potential., with additional common-sensical elements of its daily regimen including "rising early, eating simple foods, making lunch the main meal of the day, taking short walks to aid digestion, and going to bed early" (Wigood, 1997). Greater knowledge about such personal regimens, and their relative value to the bereaved, might assist their stabilization in the aftermath of widowhood.

As discussed by Thompson (1989), urban setting, higher education, or level of acculturation are likely to affect the degree to which such traditional health conceptions and practices are adhered to (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992), with geographic variations also shaping their flavor (Lambert, 1992).

In terms of cognitive differences, it is thought that Hinduism tends to promote a predominance of future-oriented thinking, in that the Bhagavad-Gita, for example, "teaches that planning for the future is an essential part of one's duty," even as one must also be aloof from the consequences of events in futurity (Altarriba, 1993).

However, a predominance of future-oriented thinking in Hinduism over past or present-oriented thinking (which are thought to characterize the West) has also been found susceptible, for example, to the pressures of prolonged economic or ecological deprivation (Agarwal & Tripathi, 1984). In other words, a Hindu cultural heritage may provide the foundations for future-oriented thinking, but only to the extent that contextual features or living conditions permit it (Altarriba, 1993). Care should take account of this cognitive tendency in treatment plans and counselling.

Women and Widows in the Hindu Community

In traditional Hindu ideals, the woman is seen as devoted to her husband, and she is taught to adopt this subordinate position. This flows from what was discussed previously about "kanyadan" in Hindu culture as a form of worship "in which the groom is specifically conceived of as a deity" (Milner, 1988). As being born a woman is ascribed to misdeeds in a previous karmic incarnation, sex roles in traditional Hindu society are well-defined in asymmetrical deference to the man as the primary decision-maker (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992). Marriages are usually arranged by parents, and along with household duties, the woman's traditional responsibility is the nurturance of children and husband. They are thought to carry the family honor in their fidelity to the "purity" of traditional behavior (Chandra, 1987; Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992).

The Hindu concept of the divine feminine, pregnant with "auspiciousness," and symbolized in uterine red, is fully bestowed only upon the married woman, who wears a red sari as token of her capacity for motherhood, while the "inauspicious" widow is required to wear only a white sari, denoting her transition to a newly bestowed social condition of nongenerative and sexually abstinent identity (Samanta, 1992). Typically, then, a Hindu widow does not remarry, although, if she is under thirty, her in-laws or parents may nowadays arrange another marriage (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992).

A Widow's Bed of Stones

Orthodox Hinduism still perceives women to be saturated with greater energy than men, but of an untamed and dangerous character, thereby requiring the containment of union to men in marriage (Stein, 1988). The marital couple is conceived of as a single entity, in which the wifely component is described as a "half-body" (ardhangi), and to which she contributes her "shakti," or disproportionate energy supply (Stein, 1988). However, for the man who loses a wife, recompense of energy in remarriage is a logical necessity, whereas for the wife who loses a husband, a socially-bestowed condition of impurity renders her irredeemable beyond a sharply constrained status of chaste widow

(Stein, 1988). The following quote imparts something of traditional Hindu perceptions of the widow as both a depleted and polluting presence in the community, particularly in south Indian beliefs, but shared with or influential in other Indian regions:

> Sacred power clings to a woman and, as long as it is under control, lends to her life and to that of her husband auspiciousness and sacred correctness. But it is a power which must be kept firmly under control, lest it wreak havoc. Thus women must carefully observe chastity... After the death of her husband, she is especially dangerous and must shave her head, cake it with mud, sleep on a bed of stones... If a widow is chaste and young, she is so infected with magic power that she must take her own life (Stein, 1988).

The historical view of women in Hinduism as "objects of use" is reflected in a reference that Stein (1988) culled from a commentary of 1889:

> The thing called women is the crowning piece of all the objects of enjoyment in this world, and being subject to the special power of the husband, is not like a house, etc., capable of being enjoyed by the husband's relations. How much more incapable must she then be of being fit for remarriage and enjoyment by a stranger. Like a dining leaf used previously by another person, she is unfit to be enjoyed by another person.

Regional and caste variations in commitment to such doctrinal beliefs are noted by Stein (1988), who also observes that this viral impression of a depleted widow is present too in western culture.

The traditionally authoritative role of the elderly within the extended family to counsel the young or to arrange marriages is often put at risk when arriving in the Canadian context in a dependent, sponsored role. They may not know the language or culture, and/or may lose their domestic expertise where their married children are in charge of the home (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992).

Responsibility for the welfare of the elderly in general., and of the widow in particular, falls on the eldest son(s), but it was not so long ago that the practice of sati, or widow-burning, could await the bereaved Hindu widow, as a final duty in her commitment to her husband's lifeways, giving some indication of the depleted value ascribed to widowhood in traditional Hindu society (Ullrich, 1988). In Hindu orthodoxy, the sati (or the "woman who is immolated"), was set in relation to her husband as to a god (Stein, 1988). The origins of sati ritual derive from the goddess myth of the same name (Sanskrit for "truth"), one of several divine models for wifely perfection, a figure who "disrupted a ceremony conducted by her father by burning herself in the sacrificial fire out of pique that her husband, the god Shiva, had not been invited to attend" (Stein, 1988).

The concept, practice and ideal of sati were to denote an unwavering devotion of wife to husband, although even at its height, for all castes it was "important for its social and religious meaning, rather than for its actual prevalence" (Stein, 1988). In addition to this symbolic concentration, the practice of sati historically was highest in Bengal (Calcutta, especially), although it was to be found in most regions and castes of India, except in areas of the southwest where matrilineal castes were more in evidence (Stein, 1988). An important distinction also exists between religious rhetoric and lay practice, as there were variations in the extent to which doctrinal authority influenced the majority of Hindus who were not Brahman (Stein, 1988).

Cultural assumptions are such that the wife is endowed with life-preserving qualities, making rational the marriage of a young girl to an older man, yet imposing a widow's role of permanent atonement for the death of her husband (Ullrich, 1988). She must bear the symbols and carry out the rituals of her new status, as societal punishment for her "failure" in this regard, and "for her implicit contradiction of the cultural value that a devoted wife predeceases her husband" (Ullrich, 1988). A Hindu widow's lot was inescapable in that a husband's death implied unchastity, and thus responsibility on her part, if not in this life than in a previous one (Stein, 1988).

Stein (1988) quotes Harvard economist Amartya Sen's estimates that some 28 million women are missing from the population of India, the direct result of "selective abortion and excess death rates throughout life," in discussing the persistence of punitive attitudes toward women in modern India. Stein (1988) states that the practice of dowry has continued to grow despite being banned in the sixties, that domestic abuse remains in spite of antiviolence campaigns since the seventies, and, more ominously, that there have even been "attempts to reestablish sati as a justifiable practice" in the eighties. Underlying these phenomena are the persistence in the social context of traditional Hindu ideals whereby "marriage was the only approved status for women" (Stein, 1988).

A study examining deaths among immigrants with an Indian ethnic identification in Britain found that suicides were significantly higher than in other comparison groups, and that these high rates among Indians were particularly striking for younger women (Paris, 1993). Moreover, an unusually high proportion of suicide by self-immolation, the traditional form of suicide in South Asian cultures, was also found (20% of total suicides among Indian women), compared to only 2 percent for all women (Paris, 1993).

The study points to the "rigidly defined roles for young women in Indian society" as factors related to this elevated risk of suicide for Indian women (Paris, 1993). It is suggested that Indians in host countries have succeeded in better preserving their traditional family structures over several generations than have other more rapidly acculturated immigrant groups. The effects of these cultural restrictions include conflicts over arranged marriages and dowries, expectations of deference to males and elders, and isolation in marital or family conflicts (Paris, 1993).

Improvements in the status of women in Canada through acculturation, higher educational opportunities, marriage later in life, and increased control and vigilance by women in their own lives, both here and in India, have dramatically improved the condition of widows and women in general (Ullrich, 1988; Waxler-Morrison et al 1992). Nevertheless, counsellors and other health care workers

must be aware of the often disenfranchised history of women in traditional Indian society when assisting Hindu-Canadian widows.

A Transcultural Imperative

A number of government manifestos on health care (i.e., Epp's Framework for Health Promotion, 1986) that uphold "equity of health for all" as their goal have been noted in Thompson (1989). Despite this pluralistic rhetoric, the "culture" and structure of Canadian health care systems are mainstream and white middle class in origin (Thompson, 1989), shaping the manner in which various dimensions of health care are provided to clients whose socio-cultural frameworks for health are disparate, a fact that is not sufficiently recognized in institutional practice (Coburn et al., 1987).

A study on unreported stress among Indians in Britain (Cullen & Fernando, 1989) found that they were more often encountered in the mental health system as in-patients than as consumers of preventative or "after-care" services. This study indicates that such hospitalization may be the result of hassles and traumas in this Asian community going undetected (because unreported) until a point of crisis is reached (Cullen & Fernando, 1989).

It has been reported in Webb-Johnson (1991) that the most prevalent diagnosis among Indians in Britain is depression, with Beliappa's (1991) research suggesting that a combination of variables such as problems with marital and family relationship, racism, housing and low socioeconomic status may account for this prevalence. Moreover, evidence noted in Webb-Johnson (1991) suggests that levels of distress among Indian communities in Britain is rising (i.e., Khan, 1983) at a particularly high level among the women of these communities due often to social isolation (Jervis, 1986).

Clients of Indian origin in Britain and elsewhere in the West are less likely to be referred to counselling or psychotherapy as a result of the frequent professional perception that they think of distress only in somatic or spiritual terms, and are lacking in a level of sophistication sufficient for psychological insight (Webb-Johnson, 1991), to which one white British psychotherapist had the

following reaction:

> People say that psychotherapy isn't appropriate for some cultures because of the level
>
> of sophistication involved. You have to be able to deal with the concepts being used.
>
> This is a racist assumption. It is a total myth to say that, for example, Asian culture is
>
> 'simpler.' Look at the richness of history, culture, philosophies, etc. This is also used
>
> as a class issue; 'working class people can't deal with the concepts.' In our experience,
>
> we've found that working class people are infinitely capable of forming concepts and
>
> benefitting from psychotherapy.

The problem of unreported stress among Indo-Canadian and immigrant populations here and in other Western countries is directly due to a lack of culturally-appropriate services and sensitivity in mainstream health care for the cross-cultural client (Sue & Sue, 1990; Webb-Johnson, 1991).

Yet, health care professionals in counselling, nursing and beyond are still largely unaware of, or indifferent to, the cross-cultural diversity of their clients (Leininger, 1984; Thompson, 1989). It would be naive to think that health professionals in this country do not themselves reflect a dominant Western "culture of medicine" that is often at variance with many of these communities (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1990). As a result, the health care system in Canada frequently fails to accommodate the needs of clients whose socio-cultural backgrounds differ from that of this mainstream culture (Anderson, 1985).

For the purposes of this study, imposing Western concepts of what is either "normative" or "pathological" in grief counselling, or conceiving of a time-table for resolving grief may do great harm, or may simply perpetuate the high premature termination rates reported in Sue and Sue (1990) among cross-cultural clients (a termination rate of 50% for cross-cultural clients after only one session versus a 30% dropout rate for white clients).

Wright (1991) makes the argument that many of the assumptions of the Western counselling

tradition are too often disempowering for cultural minorities, and that efforts must be made to provide a form of "authentic helping" that recognizes individuals in their cultural setting, but also flexibly responds to the person beyond that setting.

In the opinion of Leininger (1984), such clients in Canada are asserting their right to culturally-appropriate health care. In the nursing field and beyond, they have begun "to speak of 'cultural rights' and expect to be looked at within their own cultural patterns" (Leininger, 1984).

Therapists must be aware of the biases supporting these harmful attitudes for the treatment of death and grief, and of the inevitably corrosive effect that such massively disseminated and institutionally coercive (i.e., hospitals) attitudes have on traditional values in the process of acculturation. A brief consideration of Western attitudes toward death follows. What voice for grief (which forms the acculturative context for the Hindu experience of widowhood) do Western values sanction?

A Deritualization of Death in Western Colonization

Tradition Giving Voice to Grief

The discrepancy between more traditional perspectives and modern attitudes has been described in terms of their respective communicative potentials: the one characterized by "speech" and the other by "silence" (Parry & Bloch, 1982). The redemptive and binding explanatory powers of the traditional perspectives flow from their affirming vision of death as an aspect of life, a transcendent recovery of death sanctifying life and which, in terms of individual and cultural autonomy, "suggests some degree of mastery over the arbitrariness of the biological occurrence" (Parry & Bloch, 1982).

The death and mourning practices, rituals, or rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960) of a particular culture seek to modulate the depth and length of the "crisis presented by death," to manage and dissipate the individual and social disorganization attendant on this crisis through methods akin to

those in its heritage used to manage the living, while at the same time informing its constituents with the essence and unique detail of its own worldview (Counts & Counts, 1991).

It is thought that "variations in mortuary patterns may, consciously or unconsciously, embody elements of a society's social structure" (Ramsden, 1991). Consistent with this notion is the observation mentioned earlier by Mines (1989) that Hindu death rituals do often depend on a conception of caste or "occupational class" (varna) for the duration of mourning periods of death "impurity," with vertical level of caste said to determine the length of horizontal "incapacitation."

<u>Tracing a Barren Lineage in the Western Host</u>

Death in the West offers a more barren vision, having been thoroughly medicalized and removed from view, yet not mastered by the technology of science, dislodging the experience into one of taboo and denial., isolating the terminally ill and the bereaved both from one another and from their own emotions, as well as from the dignity of autonomy in dying (Madan, 1992). As Illich (1975) bluntly observes, "increasingly pain-killing turns people into unfeeling spectators of their own decaying themselves."

In the opinion of Aries (1981), Western modernity began as early as the eleventh century in parallel with the emergence of the individual and its consequent diminishment of the community. This led to an increasing concentration on the self, and the death of the self, coming to full flower in the Enlightenment. By the nineteenth century, notions of death were characterized fully in terms of separation, disaster, and sorrow in a manner that allowed little in the way of relief in transcendent mourning (Madan, 1992).

One intellectual current underlying this failure to adequately conceive of death was the shifting of seventeenth century Western individuals' "intellectual inquisitiveness and libido from theology to science" (Feifel, 1990). Our spiritual and/or transcendent resources were thus sapped and dispersed, transmuting death into an impenetrable wall, the end of all things, as a door no longer to other

dimensions of experience or wisdom (Feifel, 1990).

The secularized perspective of the Enlightenment consigned the idea of limits in human capacities to the intellectual dustbin of historical irrelevance (Madan, 1992). A further alteration of Western consciousness developed out of the primacy of the physician and the emergent medicalization of death, which could then be put off, pushed back, denied (Aries, 1981). Ordinary family and friends "think they need to be thanatologists to understand" the experience and needs of a bereaved or dying person (Counts & Counts, 1991).

As a result, Western death became an object of repression and embarrassed censorship, even to the extent of seeming indecent and unnatural (Madan, 1992), and attitudes evolved such that "death has ceased to be accepted as a natural., necessary phenomenon. Death is a failure, a `business lost'" (Aries, 1981), removing human dignity from this encounter.

<u>Erosion of Community in Meaning-Making</u>

Feifel (1990) describes several additional circumstances underlying our discomfort in dealing with death and bereavement such as a gradual transformation of rooted communities and kinship groups, and their shared value systems ("Gemeinschaft"), into an increasingly fragmented, individual existence of dismantled connections ("Gessellschaft"), largely depriving us of the socioemotional resources previously available for making sense of death.

A concomitant deritualization of death has also occurred, eroding supportive communities, values, and relationships through the corrosive effect of a modern sociomedical culture upon alternative attitudes, for example, amongst cross-cultural minorities. These are seen as impediments to therapeutic efficiency, and exploitive of those emotions which modernity dare not evoke in this admission of its defeat. Disabled in our discomfort with relentless death:

> We ignore the existence of a scandal that we have been unable to prevent; we act as if
>
> it did not exist, and thus mercilessly force the bereaved to say nothing. A heavy silence

has fallen over the subject of death. When this silence is broken... it is to reduce death to the insignificance of an ordinary event that is mentioned with feigned indifference (Aries, 1981, p. 106).

Consequently, death and the diversity of mourning tend to invoke societal hostility and rejection, undermining an already fragile process in its normative potential for meaning and dignity.

An Acculturative Contagion

Through excessive rationalization, the West breeds a contagion of meaninglessness, to which psychology has also been confederate, infecting a "disenchantment of the world" in a cultural colonization of other countries and perspectives with legitimate meaning systems of time-honoured sturdiness, usurping ultimate values with instrumental ones (Madan, 1992). It makes of death "the ultimate form of consumer resistance: natural death is now that point at which the human organism refuses any further input of treatment" (Illich, 1975).

Lendrum and Syme (1992) also emphasize how, whereas in earlier times, the setting (and psychological space) for death and bereavement nestled within the family circle, and often within the single, shared family space, they have now become marginalized, exiled to an institutional setting where death is managed, and bereavement, at best, is scheduled. Even where it does occur in the home, the process of dying is confined to a single room, compartmentalized away from life, "rather than in the bosom of the family" (Lendrum & Syme, 1992).

Death, obviously, is universal in common for all, but it is not universally understood in common. Cultural attitudes toward death and the grief of bereavement vary profoundly in providing a modulating lens through which their implications are resolved in the individual, the loved ones, and the larger community.

Statement of the Problem

Knowledge of the meanings and needs attached to the experience of death in the Indo-Canadian Hindu community are not sufficiently understood by most health care professionals in the counselling, nursing, social work or anthropological fields. Specifically, the experience and meaning of widowhood is virtually unstudied in the context of Hindu women in Canada. A discrepancy may exist between their unique health care perspective and that of the health perspective applied by "professionals" in the health care system to assist them through the process of grief.

Where such discrepancy is present in this encounter, the likelihood of culturally-appropriate care or sensitivity is remote. Provision of counselling or other therapeutic care is not possible unless a particular client's unique cultural worldview is actively understood and recognized as a guide to treatment goals and practice.

These worldviews may also be in transition, evolving in a form of cultural individuation out of acculturation in Canada. The constant press of intercultural contact in a plural society does have consequences, reflected in Levy's (1973) argument that "in a steady state system people tend to fit smoothly into familiar contexts; shame and embarrassment have to do with presenting self in conformity with a smoothly functioning society." While it has been argued elsewhere (Paris, 1993) that Indians may have better preserved their traditional customs and practices in the West than more rapidly integrated groups, previous research has not adequately met the goal of improved transcultural understanding of widowhood for Hindu-Canadians.

Conceptual Framework

The choice of a qualitative method for this investigation of meaning flows from the difference between conceptual understanding and lived experience, for as Cochran and Claspell (1987) put it, "there is little assurance that the former charts the latter well." More exactly, the qualitative approach is a paradigm for research that involves a repertoire of "methods and techniques of observing,

documenting, analyzing, and interpreting attributes, patterns, characteristics, and meanings of specific contextual or gestaltic features of phenomena under study" (Leininger, 1985). By way of contrast, the quantitative paradigm shifts to the "empirical and objective analysis of discrete and preselected variables that have been derived a priori as theoretical statements in order to determine causal and measurable relationships among the variables under study" (Leininger, 1985).

"The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know," said Blaise Pascal.. An individual life or sheltering community organized in particular ways will respond to the traumas and disruptions they encounter in ways furnished for reorganization by their holding culture(s). Widowhood is just such a trauma for the widow and her community, but to even consider the notion of disruption "requires a perspective of that which is disrupted, but this does not eliminate the possibility that what is disruptive in one way is also very meaningful and organized in another way. An understanding of that meaning can help to balance, challenge, correct, refine, broaden, or appropriately revise current" knowledge about this lived experience (Cochran & Claspell, 1987).

Accordingly, a qualitative approach to Hindu-Canadian widowhood is also limited in its implications beyond the world of the "co-researchers" themselves, striving to uncover only "essences, meanings, and interpretations about the phenomena as known and experienced by the informants" (Leininger, 1990). The "domain of enquiry" being researched is to be probed from "subjective, objective, spiritual, philosophical and other viewpoints" tapped for the purpose of knowing it to the fullest extent possible (Leininger, 1990).

This study proposes research in a framework shaped by the theoretical contributions of Leininger (1988), Kleinman (1984), and van Gennep (1960). From the field of nursing, Leininger's (1988) theory of "cultural care diversity and universality" emphasizes the necessity of "care" to human growth and survival, and to a sense of well-being. Leininger was the founder of transcultural nursing and is an advocate of human care theory (Cohen, 1991). She holds that beyond the universal

expression of care, it is the spectacles of a given world view (the unique aspects of a given social network, language, and environment) that forms the context which influences the particularity of mourning practices and meanings that lead to health, culturally defined (Leininger, 1988).

Leininger (1988) proposed three ways in which health care professionals can act to enhance a client's recovery from traumas such as widowhood: "cultural care preservation" which preserves or stabilizes the client's particular cultural practices; cultural care "accommodation" which accommodates either the client's or the worker's practices, and "repatterning" or the restructuring of either party's cultural care practices (Rosenbaum, 1991).

Kleinman's (1984) explanatory model is based upon cross-cultural research, and asserts a diversity of "meaning contexts" in illness and care. It conceptualizes the interaction of three structural domains of health care, "popular," "folk," and "professional.," and directly focuses on the "discrepancy between lay and professional perspectives" on the trauma or illness (Thompson, 1989).

Each of these health care domains is thought to represent "a sociocultural system with its own beliefs, values and norms and its own explanatory model of health and illness" (Kleinman and Chrisman, 1983). The "popular" sphere includes the influence of family, social network, and community (Thompson, 1989). The "folk" sphere encompasses community experts or non-professional healers, and the "professional" sphere refers to health care professionals whose practices are the expression of "complex professional health cultures" (Anderson, 1985).

Finally, van Gennep (1960) outlined the universal expression of rituals for various life transitions or "rites of passage", which assist people through such stages as birth and death to a new station in the life cycle, in diverse ways. In the case of widowhood, Rosenbaum (1991) notes three functions of such rituals: (a) "rites of separation" for detaching the widow from her deceased husband and her previous station in life; (b) "rites of transition" for facilitating her shift from wife to widow; and (c) "rites of incorporation" for her (re)integration into her community as widow.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>General Risk Factors</u>

In general., widows are among the most vulnerable to a sudden deprivation of resources from spousal death, with one study of widows of all ages identifying a range of common problems that includes lack of opportunity to grieve, absence of emotional support networks, loneliness, inadequate support for children, financial difficulties, and lack of vocational (re)training (Lopata, 1979). Increased risk factors for illness and death in widowhood have also been demonstrated in numerous studies of both general and culture-specific populations (Parkes, 1975/96; Potocky, 1993; Shuchter and Zisook, 1986; Stroebe, 1994; Ullrich, 1988).

A study of older widows in Bangladesh revealed that they were subject to a significantly higher mortality rate than their married counterparts, with this disparity reduced somewhat where the widow is designated head of the household, or in the presence there of adult sons (Rahman et al., 1992).

<u>Widowhood in Modernity</u>

A discussion of the widow in North America, interwoven with data specific to Canada, is intended to flesh out a relief of larger context for Hindu-Canadian widowhood, out of which significant patterns, overlap, or distinctions may emerge. Data from other Canadian ethnicities will also be introduced.

A symbolic interactionist approach by Lopata (1996) to current widowhood deals with the general issue of support systems for women making the transition from wife to widow. It examines the various conditions moving her through a relatively short-lived role of widow into what the author describes as a "pervasive identity of widowed woman", one that intrudes on all other social roles (Lopata, 1996). However, a defining theme of modern widowhood is that there is no permanent status to this role of widow in (North) American society (Lopata, 1996). Factors behind variation in the reorganization of a widow's role map, social universe and personal identity may unfold invisibly in

some spheres, as there is no "institutionalized role of widow" in modernity, nor formal rituals of transition as there are in many traditional societies (Lopata, 1996).

A consequence of this erosion of ritual in modern widowhood is its uncertain conclusion (Lopata, 1996). The network of support buoying the "woman as widow may dissolve before she is ready. On the other hand, the circle may insist on treating her as a widow long after she wishes to give up that role" (Lopata, 1996). The wisdom of ritual can provide a consensual understanding of the mystery and reorganization contingencies attendant on such crises as widowhood, a potential richness that modern understanding of widowhood may lack.

As we live in significantly de-institutionalized times, with the guidance of often deritualized life transitions, "frequently, contradictory myths and stereotypes are fused into broad misconceptions" about the experience of widowhood (Lopata, 1996). One such myth is the persistent stereotype of Hindu women and widows availing themselves of extended family support networks, which has been disproved in India and here, with the additional reality that most "live in nuclear households" (Lopata, 1996). Widowhood in the West, then, has been found to reflect the heterogeneity of the world around us, and the varying rural/urban, class and education dichotomies, as well as the uneven but "increasing complexity in structure, culture and individual life" that flavour modern plural societies, even in the melting pot (Lopata, 1996).

Nevertheless, a signal theme of women in North America is the perception that the widow is entering "a natural chapter in the life of a woman" (Amelkar, 1987), and for whom societies in the West generally sanction a fresh start in her (self-directed) adjustment to this new circumstance. Participation in public and religious life, along with the possibility of remarriage, are little discouraged in the West (Lopata, 1996).

Moreover, a study of older mid-American women by Pellman (1992) found that widows in this group were just as integrated into their community as were married women, "and experienced no more

stress and daily hassles than non-widows." The author also found that widows perceived their support systems as "no less supportive, and they sought no more social support" than did their married counterparts (Pellman, 1992). In this North American study, education and age served as better predictors of those who sought out social support than did widowhood (Pellman, 1992).

In the opinion of Lopata (1996), the modern married woman is becoming less financially reliant on her spouse, as changes in demographics, life span, education and other dynamics have begun to break down old stereotypes about gender, race or age. Studies cited by Lopata (1996) indicate that women are not only living longer, but are also living as independent widows longer. In other words, there seems to be a relative decrease in dependency by widows who, "in rapidly increasing numbers, have been able to lead flexible, multidimensional lives at any stage of their life course and to learn new means of social engagement as old ones become unavailable or unacceptable" (Lopata, 1996).

Studies in Western contexts, as well as in other cultures (i.e., the Philippines) have revealed a sex difference in filial provision of support to widowed mothers, with a tendency for adult daughters to be more involved (Lopata, 1987). Also, such studies indicate that widows in the West tend to function independently of their families significantly more than is the case in traditional., interdependent (i.e., Hindu) cultures and families (Lopata, 1987).

In a Canadian context, data discussed by Anne Martin Matthews (1991) suggests that stereotypes, for example, of more extended kinship networks, and more immersion in them, by ethnic widows (and widowers) is overstated. In fact, evidence supports the view that widows at "greatest 'ethnic distance' from the mainstream" suffer from greater psychological pains (Martin Matthews, 1991), and the position "that ethnic enclaves may be less effective in old age for buffering stress" (McCallum & Shadbolt, 1989).

Lopata (1996) makes the point that the strongest effect for a widow in North America seems to be a personal one (i.e., in losses of partnership, emotional and financial), rather than a loss of status

and of role (i.e., as in the tradition-enforced Hindu identity of "inauspicious" and penitent widow). Interestingly, a current unknown about modern widowhood is the issue of remarriage, upon which there is a variety of opinion from a variety of widows, differing for the same widows over time, and usually relating to the salience of personal independence (Lopata, 1996). In any case, significant in the self-attributions of Western widows is that "many of the women are aware of themselves as a resource to supply supports" (Martin Matthews, 1991).

Related to this issue, however, is the possible experience of modern widowhood as liberation for some, after the "heavy grief work" is done. A study of elderly Chinese widows in Montreal's Chinatown discovered that, rather than increasing their dependency on family networks due to the loss, "the death of their husbands seemed to have intensified their desire to move out on their own, preferably in areas with a substantial Chinese population" (Chan, 1983). While it had been thought that women who identify with a traditional widow role would be immersed in kinship networks after their loss (Martin Matthews, 1991), in stereotypes of ethnicity (Lopata, 1996), Chan (1983) found instead that while they immersed themselves in their culture, these women reduced their dependence on family "and the family's second-generation norms and values."

Much depends on the ability of the widow to move easily between the private and public realms of social interaction, related to financial independence, presence of children, subsequent or prior isolation, ethnicity and acculturation, education, and other resources (Lopata, 1996). However, the modern experience of widowhood for some may contain the seeds of opportunity for significant personal growth, as outlined by Lopata (1975):

> What may be happening, although there are not many indications as yet of an overwhelming trend, is that women freed from the controls of the family institution through widowhood may be purposely disrupting the vestiges of their prior role clusters after the 'grief work' is done and entering roles and lifestyles that they never

would have considered in girlhood and wifehood, becoming independent functioning units rather than being dependent upon passive acceptance of membership in units dominated by others (p. 233).

Although Lopata (1975) was not referring directly to widowhood in cultural communities, an awareness of this possibility seems appropriate for acculturative adaptations such as those identified by Chan (1983), or for widows of abusive husbands, perhaps.

Martin Matthews (1991) suggests that widowhood in Canada and America has "better-established norms and self-expectations for behaviour," relative to divorce, as well as more consistent other- expectations. This consensus provides the basis of what may be greater social support for widows here than is the case for divorced women (Martin Matthews, 1991).

Another variable that may distinguish North American divorce from widowhood in later life is the issue of stigma, which seems to adhere to the divorced woman more than to the widow (Martin Matthews, 1991). While "widowhood is more likely to be seen as a sad experience, divorce is considered as a sinful or shameful one" (Martin Matthews, 1991). This socially-bestowed condition here of disproportionate stigma for divorced women seems to be in contrast with aforementioned Hindu orthodoxy in particularly stigmatizing widows, with the "greater clarity of the widowed role" in North American society perhaps easing their adjustment and counselling tasks in ways that elude divorcees (Martin Matthews, 1991).

These may include better self-esteem and friendship networks, as well as relative advantage in social support and finances (Martin Matthews, 1991). Whereas widows and divorcees may share a number of features in their post-event grieving, it seems that the social consequences in North America for each status significantly diverge, and "in every case the divorcees' attitudes reflect a greater sense of restriction and isolation from others than do the widows" (Martin Matthews, 1991).

Divorce for traditional Indians is described as "still very much an alien concept for women" (Dandvate, Kumari & Verghese, 1989), although dowry remarriage (and related female-directed violence or even murder) by men is common in certain socioeconomic contexts (Kumari, 1989). Stigma for divorced women is also present as a social limitation for generally disenfranchised Hindu women, although this is somewhat less true for lower caste (working) women (Kumari, 1989). A relative rarity, divorce seems more a cultural "inconceivability" for women in India, rather than (purely) a social dishonor (Kumari, 1989).

General themes of grieving are discussed by Cochran and Claspell (1987) as fluid and interwoven categories of the meaning of bereavement for the non-ethnic (gender balanced) co-researchers in this study. One theme of grieving, for example, was a sense of loss that was experienced as a "central condition of existence," often unrecognized until the object of loss was gone (Cochran & Claspell, 1987). Another was the "spread of loss," re-experienced in more and deeper associations, or the existential "experience of a void," variously described as a "hollowness" or "nothingness" to life (Cochran and Claspell, 1987). Other studies on the experience of widows in the West report similar themes of impaired identity, with one woman describing "a great emptiness," and "I feel as if half of myself was missing," said another (Parkes, 1996). Other common themes of grief found were an "intensity of pain," involving a longing to reclaim the object of loss, as well as a "numbed involvement in the world" where "while the world is locked out... the person is locked in" (Cochran & Claspell, 1987).

Given aforementioned features of Hindu widowhood atonement, and their possibly precarious patrilineal context, themes of grief found for this Canadian sample such as "anger at the injustice of loss," "fear of the unfamiliar" or "concern for the future," "isolation and loneliness," and "sense of strain in relations with others" (Cochran & Claspell, 1987), might be experienced differently by Hindu-Canadian widows, who may be somewhat conditioned for isolation and passivity by the Hindu

seclusion practice of "purdah" (Lopata, 1987).

Another theme for this sample was "culminating experience," said to be one that "marks a transformation, and from then on, the person lives differently" (Cochran & Claspell, 1987). This transformation is more or less institutionalized and defined for widows in traditional Hindu doctrine, and in a theme of "sense of changing," for example, contact by counsellors must be aware of sometimes punitive and rigid role expectations possible for Hindu-Canadian widows processing such themes.

Counselling the Bereaved

D'Ardenne and Mahtani (1989) describe the counselling field in North America as generally inadequate in meeting the needs of women in ethnic communities, with Smith (1985) lamenting the lack of instruction or manuals for counselling black or minority women, even though they experience rates of alcoholism and suicide as high as that for black men and white women, respectively. In Smith's (1985) opinion, research indicates, for example, that "counsellors tend to avoid accepting black women as clients because so many of their problems are environmentally caused, and are, it is presumed, not subject to any direct influence by the counselling process."

As a result, d'Ardenne and Mahtani (1989) suggest that such women are turning more and more often to each other for assistance and self-help in their own cultural communities, as in the shared coalition of support groups. Where a woman's isolation is high, d'Ardenne and Mahtani (1989) quote data that "self-help, advocacy and liaison may still provide the first, and for some the only, counselling contact." Highly rigid role expectations for Hindu women, and for widows in particular, may serve to further limit their access to counselling and other resources.

Moreover, this predicament of incongruent, remote or inadequate Counselling for many ethnic women is compounded for those who are elderly, with much of the available resources and opportunities for employment and education being set up for the young (d'Ardenne and Mahtani,

1989). The counselling tasks of the elderly are often doubly neglected, too, by diminishments of cultural., economic or acculturative-related influence in the home, and by assumptions of mainstream societies that a given culture takes care of its own (d'Ardenne & Mahtani, 1989).

Although responsibility for the welfare of Hindu elderly (particularly of the widow) falls on the oldest son(s), traditional orthodoxy may be at odds with optimal care for many widows, especially in situations of seclusionary tradition or isolative family conflict. It has also been suggested earlier that Indians in host countries have better succeeded in preserving their traditional family structures over several generations than have other more rapidly acculturated immigrant groups (Paris, 1993). Fated invisibility as a persistent aspect of a Hindu widow's cultural condition in the West may be one effect of this success. In any case, studies (Brown, 1984; Gratton & Wilson, 1991; Webb-Johnson, 1991) have been noted on the danger of relying on stereotypes concerning the viability of family support in issues crucial to Hindu widowhood.

Problems and Process in Grief Work

Although one study (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1991) on the value of grief work was inconclusive, a content analysis of the literature for bereaved spouses by Potocky (1993) found that planned brief interventions can be effective in reducing "morbid" grief among high risk spouses. However, defining morbidity in grief in our context of increasing human diversity, was recognized as an area requiring greater ecological investigation and sensitivity in bereavement practice (Potocky, 1993).

Indeed, Zisook and Shuchter (1986) found that "there is no prescription for how to grieve properly for a lost spouse, and no research-validated guideposts for what is normal versus deviant mourning." In their study, a majority of the widows did not feel that they had made an "excellent" adjustment even after four years.

Florian and Krulik (1991) also document the loneliness of mothers trying to raise children resulting from a critical lack of social support. In addition, the marginalized economic position of older

women who are widowed (or divorced) is evident in statistics that some 25 percent of such women over sixty are living below the poverty line, with many others hovering just above it (Choi, 1992).

Moss and Moss (1984/85) suggest that "themes of caring, intimacy, family feeling, reciprocal identity, support and a sense of home" are those which may provide the continuity of care essential to the grieving widow after spousal death. Using a "grounded theory" approach, Wambach (1985/86) found that assistance offered in the form of widow support groups was more helpful and more utilized if it emphasized grief as a process, rather than as a timetable for the step by step achievement of discrete stages.

Meaning-Making in Adjustment to Widowhood

Brock (1984) examined a number of variables necessary to widowhood adjustment in a correlation study of psychological well-being. After the loss, life change, social participation, lifestyle and education were found to account for 15 percent of the variance for this quality, although its conclusions were limited by a lack of cultural analysis (Brock, 1984). A study by Pellman (1992) confirmed that widows who were more integrated into their particular community would experience less stress than those who were not.

Significantly, a study by Reker and Wong (1988) on the positive relationship between psychological well-being and meaning in life found them to be closely linked. They define this quality and goal of meaning as "the cognizance of order, coherence, and purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment."

Cancelmo, Millan and Vazquez (1990) have documented the buffering contribution of culture to a stable sense of meaning in life, in that culture, as the framework for perception of reality, shapes both "the inner conflict and symptom presentation" of its constituents in the experience, for example, of bereavement.

The Challenge of Diversity in Grief

The psychiatric research literature tends to pathologize diversity in expressions of grief extending beyond a "normative" point along a continuum between "health" and "illness" (Rosenbaum, 1991). Of several general studies on widowhood in Canada, one study by Vachon, Lyall, Rogers, Freedman-Letofsky and Freeman (1980) found that the course of adaptation unfolded over a longer period of time than the literature described as normal., in contrast to classic psychiatric models (Lindemann, 1944) of grief resolution wherein acute grief is thought to conclude in mere weeks.

No cultural dimensions were reported in this study, except in the observation that Greek, Italian and Maltese widows had greater problems in adjusting to their new position due to a lack of social support and to a delegation of lower status as family baby-sitter (Vachon et al., 1980). This experience of redelegation to a lower status position and such duties as baby-sitting has also been noted in Waxler-Morrison et al.'s (1992) description of the difficulties often facing the Indo-Canadian elderly and bereaved.

A long-term study by Glick, Weiss and Parkes (1974) of both male and female bereavement (45 years old or younger after one year from loss) also rejected Lindemann's (1944) conclusions of quick and invariant grief resolution, finding evidence for a prolonged experience of grief, with episodes of crisis over many years.

A quantitative study by Gass (1987) of the relationships between grief, coping strategies, resources and other variables, included "religious beliefs and practices" among helpful resources found for older Catholic widows, and found that resources were more influential for rebalancing health than were coping strategies.

Bolton and Camp (1989) documented the crucial importance of post-funeral rituals, in a (general population) study that also focused on the facilitation of such rituals as "an active part of the grief adjustment process." Culture forms the context for such ritual leave-taking, highlighting the

importance of stabilizing the diverse cultural features of clients undergoing the bereavement process.

<u>Cultural Difference and Acculturative Isolation</u>

Culture has been defined as the "values, beliefs, rules of behaviour, and lifestyle practices that guide a designated group in their thinking and actions in patterned ways" (Lawson, 1990). The experience of loss is often complicated further when a cross-cultural element exists, where the nurturance of such sociocultural practices and beliefs in the home country may be either a hindrance to subsequent adjustment or insupportable through acculturative isolation in the host country (Lock, 1990).

Rosenblatt, Walsh, and Jackson (1976) studied seventy-eight cultures and concluded that, although members of all cultures experienced emotional distress at the loss of their long term love relationships, they processed the loss in a manner shaped by their particular culture. Yet there have been only a few studies in the literatures of various disciplines that have explored the experience and meanings of spousal loss in the context of specific cultures (i.e., Rosenbaum, 1991).

Danforth and Tsiaras (1982) examined rural death rituals in Greece, and concluded that death-specific practices such as displaying the body, eating special foods, and memorial services assisted both the bereaved and the community in confronting the death. An early cross-cultural study of widowhood grief by Mathison (1970) pointed out the presence in ritual of social controls to shape the expression of grief phenomena after a death, before the cohesion of a community is threatened.

She suggests that one function of diverse widowhood rites, as in marriage, is to (re)bind the community, and to channel or contain various instabilities or vulnerabilities which various cultures see as inherent to unmarried women and widows, before they can be turned to malevolent purpose in the community (Mathison, 1970).

Such is the case in Samanta's (1992) discussion of the concept of a widow's polluting "inauspiciousness" in traditional Hindu society, which is symbolized in her socially-prescribed adherence to various penitent practices and badges of a lowered status. Similarly, in a study on health

and illness in the experience of psychiatric affliction in India, Skultans (1991) found that women seem "to absorb stigma more readily than do men."

From Mathison's (1970) perspective, grief phenomena can be viewed as culturally-defined means for widowhood separation (van Gennep, 1960) or detachment from the deceased, which are manifested, for example, in the wearing of special clothing or in such anger releasing behaviors as self-mutilation or cutting off hair (Mathison, 1970).

The Ebb and Flow of Grief

Rosenbaum's (1991) study of Greek-Canadian widowhood found that the meanings and experiences of their transition from wife to widowhood also differed from assumptions in the psychiatric literature about grief resolving itself either in a linear and "timely" fashion, or in full acceptance of the death.

Rather, it was found that "grief ebbed and flowed as waves of sorrow that abated but did not terminate," and that this older widowhood group expressed a culturally-influenced pattern of resignation to the loss of their spouse, with active and continuing evocations of his "lifeways" (Rosenbaum, 1991). This notion of grief as an ongoing, life-long process rather than as a crisis to be resolved was also upheld in Zisook and Shuchter's (1986) general widowhood study.

Revisiting the Deceased

In contrast to conclusions in the psychiatric literature that any sensing of the departed husband's presence is pathological (Clayton et al., 1968), this study and numerous others have attested to the fact (and value) of cultural variety in grief phenomena, in that these widows reported that they took solace from their belief in their spouse's spiritual presence.

Similarly, in an examination of depression among Hopi Indian women, hallucinatory visitations by recently deceased family members during bouts of grief were reported in Matchett (1972) as a comfort to the bereaved. In a study of Japanese widows, Yamamoto, Okanogi, Iwasaki and

Yoshimura (1969) reported that the mourning practice of ancestor worship assisted the widows in their adaptation to loss, their deceased husbands acquiring a tangible presence in this way for the widows to communicate with and care for in ongoing relationship.

A recent study by Pang (1991), of elderly Korean women in the U. S., also found that the Korean ancestor worship tradition expresses a belief that the souls of ones ancestors communicate with the living "and maintain an interdependent relationship." In addition, the practice of visiting dead ancestors through a shamanistic interpretation of religious tradition in many cultures has been examined by Steadman and Palmer (1994) in terms of its guidance-value to a society for its current sense of "proper" behavior.

Hindu Health Meanings

Thompson (1989) investigated the meaning of health to the Hindu-Canadian community in general., and found that "doing normal activities" associated with culturally-defined roles and responsibilities was central to this meaning, and that their health conception was a holistic construction of mind and body, in line with aforementioned sociocultural traditions.

The Ayurvedic rituals discussed in an earlier section, which are still prominent in the health traditions and beliefs of many Hindu communities, are particularistic and individualized, and are likely a salve of comforting routine and meaning for many Hindu widows struggling to reorient themselves in the aftermath of bereavement. Hindu widows could well benefit from stabilization or enhancement of these lifeways, and representatives of mainstream health systems might look to educate themselves in such importances to assist in this process.

Acculturative level, economic position, and higher education were also found significant in contributing to intracultural variability in views on health (Thompson, 1989). This study has the implication that assistance to Hindu-Canadian widows could involve a sensitivity to the reestablishment of a life pattern defined as "normal activity" in the transitional aftermath of bereavement, such as in the

finding that older people endow their home environments with deeply personal meaning (Rubenstein, 1989).

The Plight of the Hindu Widow

Modernization for the widow of India has proceeded more on paper than in practice, in that, as has been said by Goode (1964), "the real meaning of death is social not biological." The persistent social context for Indian women seems to be one of community ambivalence about those who exist outside of two acceptable culturally-defined roles, for Hindu women, in particular. These are devotion to men in marriage for the younger woman, and devotion to motherhood and wifely practice for the older woman. For many such housewives, it has been said that "she has no separate identity nor does she specially wish to" (Kitchlu, 1993), and once bereaved, she may have none outside of the shunned penitent.

With some violations (Bedi, 1997), sati has not been permitted in India for generations, but continues to loom over widows who now find themselves "lifted from the pyre but left in the cremation ground," a severity of isolation in which remarriage is still anathema even to a majority of the widows themselves (Kitchlu, 1993). The act of sati was made illegal with Regulation number XVII of 1829, followed by more legislation for protecting and empowering Indian women such as the Hindu widow Remarriage Act of 1856 (Kitchlu, 1993). However, little changed in their aftermath, such that a formal "Note to the Government.. on Enforced Widowhood" was sent to the authorities in 1884, requesting action on improving their status in society (Kitchlu, 1993).

Since independence from Britain, further legislative acts have altered the broader social consciousness of India, and along with the spread of modernity in the mass media, greater education, urbanization, and the pressures of acculturation in the West, attitudes toward women have become somewhat more flexible (Kitchlu, 1993). The All India Society for the Welfare of Widows and their Children was founded in 1977 to advocate for widows nationwide, and yet the cultural bias against

remarriage has proven remarkably resistant to change (Kitchlu, 1993). Although the other major faiths of India, Islam and Christianity, do allow remarriage, an "overwhelming majority" of Indian widows feel that this is "against their religion" (Kitchlu, 1993). Most Muslim widows uphold this taboo, as do some Christian widows, but this is particularly the case for Hindus (Kitchlu, 1993).

Ullrich (1988) examined the experience of widows in south India, and concluded that "the plight of the widow is pitiable." Despite considerable improvement in the treatment of women, due largely to their seizing increased control over their lives, the prevalence of extended depression(s) after widowhood there was not considered pathological but was, in fact, appropriate to a society that viewed the husbands death as a failure of devotion, and their unmarried sexuality as a threat (Ullrich, 1988).

Nevertheless, the study also found that women in this society have taken a leading role in improving the widow's lot by decreasing her "stigmata," which has had the result of reducing the level of depression among Indian women generally and among widows in particular (Ullrich, 1988).

A study by Vlassoff (1990) discussed the apparently "pervasive" reality in rural India of widows continuing to value sons over daughters regardless of any diminished economic incentives to do so. Although the presence of sons in widowed households in Bangladesh was found to mitigate disproportionately high mortality rates for widows there (Rahman et al., 1992), this Indian finding was thought to be more related to "deeply rooted cultural" preferences for "proper" gender roles, duties and obligations, such as for decision-making and lineal continuity through the son(s) (Vlassof, 1990).

In areas where economic conditions are improving, it does seem that desired family size is declining significantly, in increased awareness of the strains associated with large families. However, Vlassoff (1990) predicts that the cultural priority attached to gender obligations will continue to supercede considerations of equitable treatment or economics for the foreseeable future, even in the minds of marginalized widows.

An issue identified from Indo-Canadian input in a B. C. report to the Canadian Council on Multicultural Health (1991) was that cross-cultural conflicts of values can result in a loss of status for both men and women, and distressing role reversals for women in particular. This report (C.C.M.H., 1991) also identified social pressures on (primarily female) members of immigrant families to uphold the "honor of the family" where the cultural supports for traditional roles and practices are in direct conflict with those imposed by the host society.

Similarly, Lock's (1990) study of Greek-Canadian immigration found that values which were essential to female identity in the home country "can become a liability" in the host country, and that Greek identity in this country is a "fluid category" that can experience repeated transformations dependent on class and gender, as well as ethnicity.

Caution: Intracultural Heterogeneity

In Canada, the existence of inadequacies in mental health services for the cross-cultural client, and the complexity of the immigrant process itself, may be somewhat disguised by the official rhetoric of a "benign" Canadian mosaic, since new and artificial impediments are created out of stereotypes about ethnicity (Lock, 1990). As Lock (1990) suggests, there is certainly room for greater recognition of (and sensitivity to) the reality that conventional boundaries of national and community identities, or occupational and gender roles, are regularly transcended, shifted, and reformed anew, with enormous implications for bereavement and grief counselling.

In terms of the differences possible between first and second generation acculturation in a host country, Webb-Johnson (1991) reports that the general under-utilization of mental health services in Britain by older first generation Indians is less apparent for an increasing number of younger second generation Indians, who are more often making use of such services as self-referrals. Moreover, Rosenbaum (1991) found that younger, second generation Greek-Canadian widows may be more willing to make use of such services as group counselling, but may also be more restrained in emotional

expression than older, less acculturated widows.

It is clear from this survey of the bereavement literature, and of the reported Hindu-Canadian experience in particular, that while grief phenomena exist in every society, they are diversely experienced and expressed in a manner shaped by particular sociocultural contexts. In the case of widows in the Hindu community living in Canada, greater understanding of their context(s) here will be necessary before the goal of improved cultural care for this population can be realized.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

<u>Definitions</u>

1.   "Hindu-Canadians" - Of the greater Indo-Canadian diaspora(s) of arrival, the specific group

referred to here is that of the Hindu community, consisting of persons who were born in

Canada or who immigrated to Canada, and who identify with the Hindu culture.

2.   "Grief phenomena" refers to those culture-characteristic expressions of emotion and sorrow,

and the "values, beliefs, rules of behaviour, and lifestyle practices that guide a designated group

in their thinking and actions in patterned ways" (Lawson, 1990) after the death of a significant

other.

3.   "Grief" is subsumed under this general definition to refer both to those expressions of sorrow

and to their meanings to the Hindu widow.

4.   "Mourning" here refers to the culture-characteristic practices which are performed following

spousal death (Parkes, 1975; Rosenbaum, 1991).

<u>Rationale</u>

Studying the meaning of widowhood for older Indo-Canadian widows in the Hindu community

is intended to redress inadequacies in a number of health care dimensions, particularly in the area of

counselling practice and other care. In theoretical terms, treatment plans may typically operationalize a

conception of "an autonomous, bounded, abstract individual existing free of society yet living in

society" (Shweder, 1981; p. 190). However, many studies of identity development in India have found

that the "man-in-society" there is not necessarily an autonomous individual (Geertz, 1984; Hoare,

1991; Shweder, 1981).

On the contrary, the cultural context of India seems to shape a conception of shared destiny, in

a relational., future-oriented construction of identity, with the individual impinged upon by fairly rigid "rules of interdependence that are context-specific and particularistic," rules that order all manner of social exchange, such as in giving or receiving services, in behavior toward kin, or in marriage and birth as well as in death (Shweder, 1981). Additional factors to consider are possible, such as a duty-based moral code (Miller, 1994), and variation in marital alliance (Milner, 1988) discussed in earlier sections.

On the other hand, Mines (1988) has found that theorists have neglected the presence of egocentric-motivated behavior along with behavior arising out of a more sociocentric worldview, and it would be prudent for practitioners to be aware of variation within a given culture, dependent on context, level of acculturation or other variables already mentioned (Lock, 1990).

Nevertheless, for the purposes of counselling practice, widows in the Hindu-Canadian community may tend to express a sociocentric construction of identity, and any therapeutic presumptions of self-interest and autonomy may be at odds with their crucial supports and explanatory systems. Many other ethnic constituents of our multicultural fabric (Asian, Japanese, or Native) might also define therapeutic success, in death as in life, in terms of enhanced interdependence within the family constellation, "rather than emancipation from it" (Beiser, 1985).

Therefore, this study assumes a possible contrast between relatively "egocentric" (Western individualism) and "sociocentric" (traditional) self-organizations (Kakar, 1991), and which may be present in this population as a relative factor mediating the experience of grief, dependent on degree of acculturation and other factors noted.

<u>Questions</u>

The following two main research questions were asked for this study:

1. What are the meanings and experiences of grief for older Hindu-Canadian widows in their many community's?

2. What are the meanings and experiences of their transition from wife to widow?

Assumptions

The following four assumptions were made in regards to this study:

1. That the subjective experience and meaning of widowhood is cross-culturally variable.

2. That widowhood phenomena reflect a state which can be described verbally.

3. That the key and general co-researchers in this research sample were able to provide a subjective account of their individual perception of Hindu-Canadian widowhood.

4. That a verbal report obtained from the co-researchers on audiotape will be an authentic representation of their perceptions in this regard.

Delimitations

In terms of the sample population for this study, co-researchers had to be reasonably fluent in English in order for me to conduct all of the interviews and transcriptions myself. As a result, prospective co-researchers who could not communicate in English were excluded, which leaves the meaning of their widowhood experience unexamined.

Based on prior informal feedback from various sources, I was confirmed in believing that key co-researchers would be available through personal and professional contacts, mixed seniors' organizations, and specifically Indo-Canadian seniors' and womens' groups that exist in the lower mainland of British Columbia. The possibility of having to approach some prospective key co-researchers through male family members, with the potential, then, for family influence in a co-researcher's interview data, was not encountered as a factor in this study.

Justification

If, as Shweder (1991) stated, "When people live in the world differently, it may be that they live in different worlds" (p. 23), it would seem incumbent on health professionals to seek access to those worlds in the service of enhanced care. This study proposes to enter aspects of one such world, in a B.C. community that has not been well researched, in which widows may be particularly vulnerable,

and which also represents very clearly an example of cultural difference in a relatively relational construction of world view and identity. Specifically, in attempting to explore the experience and meanings of Hindu widowhood, such concrete information about this group may assist this enhancement.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

A Qualitative Method

As stated earlier, this is a qualitative study on the experience and meaning of widowhood for older Hindu-Canadian widows, with no interest in testing theory, and an inductive, descriptive phenomenological method was used to focus on the subjective experience of "key" co-researchers, using selective and nonprobability sampling (Polit & Hungler, 1987; Rosenbaum, 1991).

Phenomenology has been described as a method which concerns itself with the study of "phenomena as experienced and lived by people" (Giorgi, 1970). Since this study explored aspects of the lived experience of key co-researchers, the choice of a phenomenological methodology for accessing and describing the distilled meaning of Hindu-Canadian widowhood for these women was an appropriate one.

Selective and nonprobability sampling was intended to maximize the meaningfulness of data for a relatively small sample size typical of qualitative investigation, on the assumption that "all actors in a setting are not equally informed about the knowledge sought by the researcher" (Morse, 1986), and that some are also more receptive to being interviewed. I obtained more indigenous information to make better informed judgments about what was to constitute "knowledgeability" when recruiting for "key" co-researchers. "Key" here refers to the five widows who met the selection criteria and agreed to participate in this study by providing me with informed narratives about their experiences of widowhood. Morse (1986) emphasizes the importance of this quality:

> Because the researcher is interested in meaning, understanding a concept, and making
>
> sense of the setting, and the object is to obtain data that are comprehensive, relevant, and
>
> detailed, the voluminous verbatim notes, in bulk alone, limits the sample size. Thus,
>
> because of the small sample size and the time and effort required to collect data, it is
>
> essential that the researcher maximize opportunities to obtain the most meaningful data

possible.

Descriptions of the widow's experiences were acquired through the guidance of Leininger's (1985) "Life History Health Care Protocol," a self-disclosure method that provides a "chronological sequence of an individual's ideas and experiences from their particular [emic] viewpoint" in a process of "prolonged contact" with the key co-researcher, which is a quality noted in Krefting (1991) as essential to the credibility of a qualitative approach to the criterion of "truth value," and which also likely enhanced the desired collaborative nature of the study. These co-researchers' descriptions constituted a form of "theoretical sample" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), wherein each interview was analyzed into meaningful units before going on to the next (Cochran & Claspell, 1987). Saturation was reached when no new information was being added to the list of themes abstracted from the sample.

The qualities of reliability and validity in quantitative research are vested here in the qualitative criteria of truthfulness, credibility, auditability, and confirmability (Krefting, 1991). This was achieved through an ongoing assessment of verbal and audiotranscribed content with the key co-researchers, "getting at truths," and using material provided by them and by "informed" others. Qualitative trustworthiness of data was achieved through a continual process of validation of information with key co-researchers, a "rephrasing of questions," empathic probing, and the utilization of corroborative or elaborative material from the various co-researchers (Leininger, 1985). Feedback and clarification of data were employed to enhance validity and reliability because a researcher can "never assume that s/he understands the meaning of the phenomenon" (Thompson, 1989).

I included the contributions of a general class of co-researchers in my overall assessment, in addition to a primary focus on the experiences and meanings of Hindu widowhood expressed by "key" co-researchers. Therefore, along with five (5) key co-researchers who matched the selection criteria for Hindu "knowledgeability" and identification, widowhood status, age, etc., I also interviewed some 20 culturally-informed others to reflect on meanings expressed by the key co-researchers, such as their

family and friends, other widows, Hindu community and spiritual leaders, ethnohistorians, etc. This was a triangulation method of converging a number of perspectives to confirm the data, described in Krefting (1991) as "a powerful strategy for enhancing the... credibility" and overall quality of a study. The particular triangulation method utilized here was a "triangulation of data sources," optimizing the scope by involving the perspectives of different groups of culturally-informed people (Krefting, 1991).

Steps were taken to protect both key and general co-researchers from possibly hurtful knowledge of another key co-researcher's observations, a preventative measure in light of literature on the submissive and disenfranchised history of women in traditional Hindu culture, particularly in the case of widows.

The interviews themselves were conducted typically in the key co-researcher's homes through use of "trigger questions" (Thompson, 1989) in semi-structured and open-ended statement guides; see Appendix C. A qualitative technique called "member checking" (Krefting, 1991) was utilized to confirm the accuracy and fullness of obtained meanings and observations on an ongoing basis with both key and general co-researchers to enhance the study's credibility. By inclusion of ethnohistorians in the member check, I hoped the study would benefit from a form of "peer examination" to "keep [me] honest" (Krefting, 1991).

I used a field journal to record observer and co-researcher data, and to "bracket" off my own preconceptions about the phenomena being observed, as an example of a "reflexivity" strategy for enhancing credibility in this kind of interdependent observer-as-co-researcher study (Krefting, 1991). This measure became an indispensable resource for me in corroborating my own impressions of an interview experience with the recorded data.

I prefaced the full research project with an initial pilot study on a small scale with a widow from the Sikh community, in order to demystify what seemed an intimidating prospect, to test out some of the assumptions and methods proposed for this study, and to get up to speed on its sensitive

application, this for the benefit of both (the eventual) co-researchers and myself. This was a very helpful introduction to qualitative research.

Acculturation Ratings

Berry's (1984) model of acculturation modes has been used in previous studies, and such ethnomethodology was used to facilitate a finer-grained assessment of the acculturation of co-researchers who are first generation widows. This step was taken to be necessary in that transcultural researchers such as Padillo (1980) have suggested that acculturation may be typified by a three-phase adaptation profile of contact, conflict, and adjustment, in which "the first is necessary, the second is probable, and the third is inevitable."

The notion of "acculturative stress" refers to a number of problems associated with group and individual acclimatization to a host society, such as "lowered mental health status [confusion, anxiety, depression], feelings of marginality, alienation... heightened psychosomatic symptom level, and identity confusion" (Berry, Kim & Boski, 1988). Although it has been found that the preferred mode of acculturation across all cultural variations in Canada is that of "integration," a mode that favors both retained cultural integrity and full participation in the larger social context, some reduction in normal functioning is usually incurred until a new adaptive relationship with the host environment is achieved (Berry et al., 1988).

In terms of personal meaning-making, the acculturative process may be analogous to Kegan's (1982) notion of "embeddedness cultures" in cognitive development (or Winnicott's 1965 "holding environments"), a notion used to convey the experience of discrepancy and distress (as prior, and essential to, remade meaning) inherent to participation in a holding culture. The oscillation between distress and (re)newed comfort for the recent immigrant is central to what Ivey, Ivey and Simek-Morgan (1993) call the interactional "coconstruct reality," of relation with the host environment.

For it's relative simplicity, I utilized Berry's (1984) model as a powerful scale which

necessitates only two questions for gauging four modes of acculturation: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization (Berry, Kim & Boski, 1988). This format takes the position that assimilation is not the only outcome of acculturation, just as adjustment may not be its only strategy (Berry et al., 1988).

The two questions posed were: "Issue 1 - Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?; and Issue 2 - Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with other groups?" (Berry et al., 1988). Simple "yes" or "no" answers to each question generate options that Berry et al. (1988) state are available to all persons who live in multicultural societies, and which are said to each represent both a "strategy and a result" of acculturation. The four modes of acculturation possible in this formulation are as follows: (a) "integration," if "yes" to issue 1 and 2; (b) "separation," if "yes" to issue 1 and "no" to issue 2; (c) "assimilation," if "no" to issue 1 and "yes" to issue 2; and (d) "marginalization," if "no" to both issues 1 and 2.

Considerable research (Berry et al., 1987) supports the models' adherence to the guidance of Krefting (1991) and Guba (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for upholding the "qualitative evaluation criteria of credibility, confirmability, meanings-in-context and saturation" noted in Rosenbaum (1991).

Population Criteria and Sampling Procedures

The following participant selection criteria were used for the present study: (a) widows who identified with the Hindu culture, (b) 50 years of age or older, (c) widowed for at least six months, (d) able to speak and understand English, (e) residence of five years or more in Canada, and (f) willing to share their experiences with me in the study. Deciding to focus on widows aged 50 years or older was in concert with other studies (Chan, 1983; Rosenbaum, 1991; Thompson, 1989), and was also intended to maximize the variety of acculturation levels. Sources of prospective co-researchers were indeed to be found through contacts with Hindu cultural, women's and widow's groups, but it was primarily through the establishment of respectful relationships and trust with the priests and officials at

various Hindu temples that fruitful assistance was gained toward recruiting the eventual key co-researchers. Newspapers and magazines (i.e., "Indo-Canadian Voice," "Link," "Mehfil"), as well as a number of lower mainland hospitals, immigrant societies, mixed senior's/women's centres were also consulted with for advice and assistance.

Due to assumptions mentioned earlier, the purposeful character of selective and nonprobability sampling was used to maximize the data obtained in this sort of phenomenological study, and given the emotive nature of the experience being studied.

For the purpose of clarity, I note again that the (5) widows who participated in this study are to be referred to as "key co-researchers" in discussion of their attributes and experiences, whereas only a corroborative class of culturally-informed participants will be referred to as "general co-researchers."

Data Collection

The co-researchers' responses were the data of this study, with the researcher and co-researchers together exploring the experience of widowhood in order to construct a fundamental description of it. Data were collected, triangulated, and validated through interviews with both key co-researchers and corroborative general co-researchers, using semi-structured and open-ended statements, as well as a field journal for the researcher's perceptions, recorded observations and validated meanings.

Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded through a search for themes. The method of "Constant Comparative Analysis" meant that analysis began as soon as data was collected. Although data collection and data analysis are described as separate events, the reality is that "analytical and observational activities run concurrently [and] there is temporal overlapping of observational and analytical work. The final stage of analysis [occurring after observation has ceased] becomes, then, a period for bringing final order into previously developed ideas" (Lofland, 1971, p. 118).

Following this method, each interview was audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim, with the transcripts digested several times in order to provide a fuller grasp of the key co-researcher's description of widowhood (Thompson, 1989). Significant statements were then sought and extracted from the digested interview data as "meaningful units" (Polit & Hungler, 1987). Through "creative insight," these units were then refined repeatedly to a maturity of meaningful fidelity to the original material, the co-researcher's own words being retained as much as possible (Thompson, 1989).

This process was repeated and units compared from transcript to transcript until a point of saturation was reached, where no new information was being added to the description of the (Hindu widowhood) phenomenon (Rosenbaum, 1991). These units were then clustered into themes that are taken to describe the meaning of their Hindu-Canadian widowhood, and which were then validated by referral back to the original transcripts, and to the widows in second interviews. This saturated whole is thought to comprise a theoretical sample (Cochran & Claspell, 1987), obtained at a point where no new information was being added. Thompson (1989) notes that any contradictory themes are to be "recognized as real and valid, and the data retained."

Finally, the "non-redundant clusters of themes" were integrated into a full and complete description of the experience and meaning of widowhood for this Hindu-Canadian sample. This larger understanding was validated with the key co-researchers during the second interview by asking if the analysis matches their experience (Thompson, 1989). The reporting of major themes was fully documented with accompanying "verbatim descriptors" to additionally authenticate them as being representative of the widowhood experience for this group.

As noted earlier, the qualities of reliability and validity in qualitative research are vested in the nonquantitative criteria of truthfulness, credibility, auditability and confirmability (Krefting, 1991). To satisfy these criteria, the data must be faithful to the reported experience of the key co-researcher's, and the researcher's "decision trail" must be unambiguous to those who are following its line of reasoning

(Sandelowski, 1986).

In carrying out this qualitative study, I collected the data myself, and its veracity depended upon my ability to enter the key co-researcher's world view, while also bracketing my own preconceptions about the experience throughout the process of discovery (i.e., labeled in the field journal).

Leininger's (1990) "Phases of Analysis for Qualitative Data" outlines this systematic progression through four phases of higher abstraction as follows: (a) collection and documentation of raw data; (b) identification of descriptors; (c) pattern analysis; and (d) formulation of themes (Rosenbaum, 1991).

<u>Methodological Limitations</u>

The qualitative method is not without its share of problems, limitations and potential biases, although it might also be said that its weaknesses from the point of view of the quantitative literature in particular, are in fact a source of great vitality. Some of these weaknesses are its vulnerability to researcher bias contaminating the authenticity of results obtained in an observer-as-participant form of phenomenological study (Leininger, 1985). It is also more difficult to replicate a descriptive study, and I therefore make clear instruction as to the limits of any conclusions obtained in this study as to their generalizability beyond its precisely defined context.

There are no uniform procedural guidelines for this sort of research, although considerable qualitative tradition and authoritative guidance (Krefting, 1991) now exist for the phenomenological researcher.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Findings

The verbal data obtained in interviews with the five key co-researchers was analyzed according to Leininger's aforementioned *Phases of Analysis for Qualitative Data* (1990), proceeding in a systematic fashion through four phases of higher abstraction. These phases were: collecting and documenting the raw data; identification of descriptors; pattern analysis; and a final theme formulation.

From pattern analysis to theme formulation, commonalities in the grief phenomena of the key co-researchers are laid out with accompanying verbatim descriptors, so as to lend authenticity and detail to these distilled meanings, and to assist the reader in navigating the investigator's decision trail.

Before discussing the central themes of this study, I first provide a brief summary of each co-researcher's rich experience, in order to help familiarize the reader with the story that is unique to each, remarkable for their diversity as much as for that which is shared. In fact, a paradoxical diversity within universality, and stability within change, seem to be defining characteristics of Hinduism, with its adherents in B.C., for example, often expressing a cultural "speciation" out of two or more diasporas. In the experiences of these co-researchers, then, it might even be said that as many Hinduism's exist as there are Hindus. Yet I have also been witness to what all of these women perceive as it's capacity for transcendent union, a rich, flexible and common essence central to their struggle for remade self and meaning after widowhood.

A Summary Table of Key Co-Researcher Attributes

	Mrs. A (T3)	Mrs. B (T0)	Mrs. C (T2)	Mrs. D (T4)	Mrs. E (T1)
Country of Origin	Fiji	Punjab (India)	British Guyana	Punjab (India)	Fiji
Age	55	68	53	79	76
Year she came to Canada	1974	1980 (to Quebec) 1991 (to B.C.)	1985	1975 (in Punjab '82-85) 1985	1976 *She looked after daughter's kids while husband went back and forth
Country of Loss	Canada	India	Guyana	India	Fiji
Years Widowed	13	22	28*	13	6
Remarried	No	No	13 years*	No	No
Hinduism	Arya Samaj (liberal)	Sanatan (orthodox)	Arya Samaj	Sanatan	Sanatan
Caste	Twice Born	Twice Born	Twice Born	Twice Born	Thakuring (Twice Born)
Education	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	No Formal* Education
Work History	Teacher	Social Services	University Admin.	Housewife & Mother	Housewife & Mother
Work Here	Keypunch (*Retired)	Shop Owner (*Retired)	Day Care, Housewife	(*Retired)	(*Retired)
Current Activity	Volunteer: in cultural media, & p/t teacher; kids	Volunteer: in Indo-Canadian senior's centre; grandchildren	Day care owner Volunteer: in temple groups; mother	Volunteer: in Indo-Canadian senior's group; grandchildren	Attends Fiji senior's group once/2 weeks; grandchildren
Financial Resource Control	Pension, Savings & Property (Yes)	Pension, Savings & Property (Shared)	Pension, Savings & Property (Shared)	Pension, Savings & Property (Shared)	Pension* (Family)
Generation	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
Family Status	In her house, & daughter's family (*no sons)	With son's family	Remarried, with her 2 daughters *(no sons)	With son's family	With daughter's* family (*has no son's here)
Berry et al.'s Scale Rating	Integration	Integration	Integration	Integration	Separation
Validation Interviews	Agreed 1 - 6	Agreed 1 - 6	Agreed 1 - 6	Agreed 1 - 6	Agreed 1-4, 6

<u>Description of the Five Key Co-researchers</u>:

<div align="center"><u>Mrs. A</u></div>

Mrs. A is a 55-year old widow from Fiji. She was born into a twice-born caste, into the embrace of her family's Arya Samaj Hinduism, and was encouraged in her interest and ability in education. She fondly remembers an upbringing that framed all of her subsequent experience: "Even in a small farm life, and here with love and enthusiasm redeemed the family, and the initiative of the parents though being very poor we have this kind of life that we have now that was all created from the parents. All the love and care that they gave us makes us so strong now to carry on and be the way we are. I must not forget my parents." Her husband was the first person she met on the first day for them both at a training college there, and for her, then, "my life began like a flower because I was blooming." A consensual marriage was soon approved by their parents, and they were "very happily married" for 21 years, though emigrating to Canada in 1974 due in part to political strife in Fiji.

"That was when the real hell for life began," as professional and financial stability's were badly affected here during this time, although she and her husband succeeded in making new careers for themselves by the time he died in an accident in 1985. She has since found solace and purpose primarily in her children, along with considerable support from her co-workers of that time, having retired just last year.

She is also heavily involved in the life of her Vedic community, having taken on a role in a cultural media for the promulgation of Hindu issues and to improve inter-faith understanding. She gains satisfaction from these activities, expressly honoring her husband's memory and example in this way, but feels she has never overcome her loss or yearning for a time of greater happiness with him. For her, "it heals in some extent, it does, but it is not complete healing. It is healing

over your own power. The way you take it. I try to heal myself but the real healing has not yet taken place. I tried my best, but it comes back."

Her faith has allowed her significant adjustment to her husband's death, in a manner particular to Hinduism, even though some of its heritage has often been a source of discomfort: "I used to be so depressed and I used to think: 'Why am I still here? Why don't I go away?' They wrote a book on it believing that the widows used to die when the husbands died and then going into the fires [Sati]. Yes, even in churches and temples when they read the scriptures, once in awhile they read, but they are reading those scriptures, so it does make you feel a little guilty, why you are here." She takes comfort in her belief in reincarnation, that his spirit occupies another body in another karmic cycle, and that "maybe he has a better home somewhere." By Berry, Kim and Boski's (1988) scale, Mrs. A's acculturative quality is one of "integration."

Mrs. B

Mrs. B is a 68-year old twice-born orthodox widow, with 7 sisters from a family farming context of comparative wealth in the Punjab. She stated immediately in the story of her life that: "I was an educated lady and I was working so that makes all the difference... because an educated lady who is working doesn't have any financial stress." She wished to draw my attention to this because, in her early experience, "education was not important in a Hindu woman's life, they are almost all housewives." Such a woman, she believed, was vulnerable to deprivation and dependence if she were widowed, and had to rely on the uncertain support of in-laws or others. She had seen that "most of the widows at my time were not really educated, and they have gone through a lot, but for me I lost my husband. But otherwise, I could take care of my children very well. I was not obliged to do what other widows do."

Her consciousness in this was stirred by the mentoring she received from a widowed grandmother, who, by virtue of her financial independence and force of character, was accorded great respect in her village community. She occupied what seems to be an optimal role for the Hindu elder in the traditional family constellation, that of respected repository of acquired wisdom and example (and, as a woman, a financial independent), and it was she who supported Mrs. B. in her thirst for education over the objections of her father.

Her arranged marriage was marked by both love and difficulty, to a husband hampered by ill health, but one who supported her completion of a degree and subsequent career in the social services. Because her parents had lost two sons, and the extended family was otherwise without male children, her father adopted their first child, a boy, who then became her brother, as it is very important in India that inheritance go through the male, "even if the law doesn't say that but it goes on like that."

This marriage was a union she accounts a success despite the circumstances of his ill health and untimely death, having been widowed now for twenty-two years. She too, has found recovery to be an elusive prospect, having chosen not only to leave her job and town in Punjab, but to emigrate to Canada within two years of her bereavement. She had felt haunted and tormented at the time by her impression that: "Wherever I go he was there. Wherever I would go he was there. It was so difficult."

Her choice, as with all the widows, was to immerse herself in the duty she felt towards their sons, and to find a circumstance that would allow her to "take care of my children as I would like to." She moved to Canada and ran a business back east for many years, before accompanying her sons out West in semi-retirement. However, her emotional experience now is that: "I don't think that I can be without his memories anymore. I just bury them for some time. I just bury

them, I am not thinking about you anymore! No, when you are free, when you have done your duties, they are quite with you, they are more alive than before!"

And yet, she has been resigned to the fact that "everything goes on. Life goes on with or without him, similarly." Her struggle now (as then) is to find new sources of validation and affiliation that will sustain her in this new phase of life. She takes great solace in her prayers and mantras, which are steeped also in a typically Hindu attitude of preparing for a peaceful death, and the life to come after. And more tangibly, she has found an Indo-Canadian senior's centre that is very satisfying. For her, "it is really good, because I am not alone now." Mrs. B's acculturative quality is also one of "integration."

Mrs. C

Mrs. C is a 53-year old Arya Samaj Hindu, of twice-born caste, from British Guyana, well educated (also at the behest of grandparents) and careerist, and married by consensus arrangement to a husband who left her widowed there 28 years ago. He died young due to his lifestyle difficulties, an unhappy circumstance that, along with her witnessing of parental strife, and the influence of traditional Hindu taboos, affirmed her exclusive focus on her children and the financial independence and validation that a continued career in a Guyanan university provided. Education was again accounted to be critical to her lot in life, in the belief that "this was my tool for survival and also for personal development, and not getting married."

Nevertheless, she's the only widow in this study to do so, moving to Canada 13 years ago in a second, completely arranged marriage to an ex-patriate Guyanan widower who lived and worked here in the medical professions. This has been a marriage of great understanding and love, but also of occasional regret and disappointment. She sometimes feels she has lost one

possible future, as a previously single woman who could follow her own inclinations more in, for example, an opportunity she had to decline for graduate work back in British Guyana.

Her transition has also been marred in her eyes by the reluctance of some of her new family to accept her and her daughters, although she is pleased beyond expectation by her new husband's treatment of her girls. This latter point is one of the rationales for the Hindu prohibition against remarriage, that being child protection, implemented by a widow whose energies are focused exclusively on their welfare.

Interestingly, she finds herself retaining some of the core self-concept altered by her previous widowhood status. This residue of culturally-mediated "inauspiciousness" remains capable of "contagion," for which she abstains from certain social contexts. For example, she still declines from participation in what would otherwise be the normal rites of a married woman in a new bride's public ceremony. Mrs. C is in an acculturative state of "integration."

Mrs. D

Mrs. D is a 79-year old twice-born orthodox widow, well educated, from a comparatively wealthy farming family in the Punjab, wed by family arrangement to a professional man, and widowed there 13 years ago. She too describes the altered destiny experienced by the other widows, and the socio-economic disability her status can entail. "Some people don't like it," she says of the presence of the widow: "She came to our house and our son died. It not a good omen."

Nevertheless, she has had the benefit of education, work and financial independence with which to negotiate greater participation and respect in her community, through her activities as a volunteer translator and assistant for the other women in her senior's group at a local community

centre. This experience provides her with a great sense of satisfaction and belonging, fulfilling a need for validation and competence, as well as a dharmic sense of duty instilled by her mother and grandmother that one must "do." Mrs. D's acculturative state is one of "integration."

Mrs. E

Mrs. E is another widow from Fiji, of orthodox faith and Thakuring (twice born) caste, uneducated, from a large and extended farming family. She is 76 years old and has been widowed for 6 years, but her experience of death has also been one of compounded loss, her mother having died when she was 11, her father when she was 12, and having suffered a recent sequence of family deaths that culminated in the loss of her eldest son a year ago.

In her first years as an orphan, she was taken in by her grandmother, who was "a very powerful woman. She was a big woman, very influential., everything [under her] control." It was she who carried out the duty of arranging her marriage at 15, providing the strong grandparental (usually female) example of strength in adversity that was experienced by the other widows.

However, Mrs. E's primary affiliation is to the Fiji of her birth, even though she first arrived here in 1976, and she has occupied a helper role with grandkids and housework in her working daughter's household since that time, due to the return of her husband and eldest son to Fiji. Her sense of duty to husband and family were such that she strove to satisfy both, seeing her very traditional husband only when he came to visit Canada, or when she could get away to Fiji.

A potent source of strength and comfort for her has been the reading of Hindu scripture such as the Gita in particular, and the repetition of a mantra from the Vedas called "Gayatry." This latter is utilized by the other widows too, and is usually paired with rosary-like beads called "mala," in an effort to rehearse a state of serenity for day to day living and for the eventuality of

their own deaths.

It must be said that Mrs. E lives in a relatively isolated and diminished state of dependence on the good will of family, partaking of a Fiji community centre senior's group only once every two weeks or so, enduring recent traumas and a weakened physical condition with dignity. By Berry et al.'s (1988) scale, her acculturation level here is still one of "separation."

Summary Table of Six Abstracted Themes and Forty-five Sub-Categories

Major Thematic Summaries	Thematic Subcategories
Theme 1: • Status transition from wife to widow meant *resignation* to the husband's death, as *the data did not support either definitive stages of grief, nor a linear process of recovery.* • Rather, grief unfolded in an experience of recurring waves of sorrow that did not terminate over time, described as only abating in some areas, or worsening in others. • This resignation seems founded in the belief that, in spite of their loss, "everything goes on," and in a cultural residue of bestowed social disability & atonement in a felt status reduction.	a) No definitive stages of grief. b) Resignation to his death. c) Health declines as widow. d) Life goes on/positive adapt. e) First generational discomfort with public revelation or display of grief
Theme 2: • Meanings and expressions of grief centered on beliefs about the *enduring and eternal quality of the husband's life force as an intrinsic and essential part of their own cultural care lifeways.* • This was expressed in a flavour of worshipful memory for the husband, and in a carrying on of his lifeways through prayer, celibacy, doing good works, continuing his habits and customs, keeping his memory alive with grandchildren, and, above all, by dedicating themselves to the welfare of their kids. • Their practicing of spiritual proximity to him is achieved by inhabiting the cultural means for doing so, in what may seem a form of self-abnegation for some. Yet 4 of the 5 widows also struggled to live their lives more fully than tradition would foretell, in honor to their deceased husbands.	a) Fate/hidden reasons in loss b) Sources of care c) Culturally mediated coping strategies d) Remarriage prohibition e) Culture as buffer for making sense of loss f) Solace in children/family g) Flavour of worshipful memory for husband h) Sensing his presence i) Carrying on his lifeways j) A good death

Major Thematic Summaries	Thematic Subcategories
Theme 3: • The transition from wife to widow entailed a *double affliction, in status loss* as well as *in personal domain.* The role of widow is institutionalized, and offers a rich cultural reservoir for grief understanding and practice, with a relative consensus in roles, rites and duration for both widow and community in her bereavement. It also denotes a constraint of emotions, desires and aspirations in the cultural badges of a newly altered status. • These analogues of status loss are ascetic in character, and can be discomfiting in the acculturative consequence of a now eroding consensus and diluting mileu, though still largely embodied by these women as inherent to their natures, particularly in their value as an effective system of *prioritizing attention to child protection,* and in limiting public exposure to what is still a viral impression of a socially-destabilizing and polluting "inauspiciousness," embodied in the widow's own attributions.	a) Community vigilance: support and/or pressure b) Protecting one's reputation c) Internal prejudices d) Not being a burden e) Constraint of social., religious participation f) How widow is identified g) Flavour of life-long atonement in relative seclusion of purdah h) Institutionalized role/status of widow i) Widow's loss as doubly traumatic
Theme 4: • The meanings and expressions of both grief phenomena and status transition embody an *ethic of collective good* and *duty-based interpersonal moral codes,* rather than an individually oriented interpersonal morality. This confirms what is said to be a fundamental contrast between a typically Hindu conception of the self as inherently relational., and that of a more Western autonomous self, wherein duty is often portrayed as an unnatural restriction on this freedom. • The descriptions and views of these key co-researchers do not conform to the latter interpersonal codex, although their experiences also make clear that an acculturative engine is driving *an incipient and generational transition in such moral codes.* • Nevertheless, the notion of a "glad concurrence" (O'Flaherty & Derrett, 1978) between duty and one's inherent nature is not only upheld but intensified in the aesthetic of adjustment described here.	a) Acculturative pressures and adjustments b) Deference and duty: obligation c) Hindu-Canadian widowhood embodying ethic of collective good and duty-based moral codes d) Sociocentric functioning and importance of eldest sons in filial support e) Loss of community in eroded cultural values f) Loss/erosion of traditional roles and authority of widows and elderly g) Ambivalance over Western values/freedoms h) Responsibility/duty, for welfare of children and family i) Involvements/engagement

Major Thematic Summaries	Thematic Subcategories
Theme 5: • The status transition of these co-researchers suggests a subtle *degree of liminality*, in their descriptions of a *bicultural dislocation* between the consensual song lines of a "high context" founding culture, and the relatively uncharted (and unmoored) predicaments of the host culture. • This seems particularly so for the four widows in whom the experience of "transformational learning" (Banks, 1993), in the relative rarity of their educations (and other variables), has also induced a shift in areas of cultural paradigm. Received truths about identity, gender and purpose now coexist (or are felt to be dissonant) with new canons of self-in-society that challenge or expand the old. This is a shift toward greater aspiration, and though often uncomfortable, may be in the direction of a more indigenous sensibility of Hinduism here. A sense of personal agency was a key ameliorative variable in optimal adjustment and resource (fullness).	a) Diasporic communities evolving out of founding traditions b) Self-directed or prescribed adjustment c) Opportunity vs foreclosure d) Aware of herself as resource in creating supports e) Personal agency as key adaptive variable f) Generational change g) In contrast to Sikhism, less centralized entity and less emphasis on schools/language h) Aspiration for more i) Liminality in bicultural dislocation
Theme 6: • A fundamental meaning of this status transition was a sense of its *spiritual opportunity*, in the comfort of both immediate and ongoing prayer and grief practice, and in the provision of meaning and ethical guidance over the years of subsequent adjustment. • The cultural expectations of the older widow, an aesthetic of the ascetic, also coincide with a time of spiritual preparation for all Hindus in their seniority, a natural chapter in the life of the devout of either gender. This is said to be a time of maximizing one's karmic assets in good works, prayer and practiced serenity, this as a necessary precursor to spiritual ascendancy in the next life. • For purpose of dharmic culmination, Hinduism offers prescription in prayer, readings, mantras, mala, good works and other measures of spiritual maturation, this despite a felt erosion in previous grandparental roles and authority in founding contexts of culture and extended family.	a) Future orientation/karma b) Spiritual detachment actively sought c) Importance of a good death d) Spirituality as source of meaning, comfort and guidance

Theme 1: Resignation to the Husband's Death

For these Hindu-Canadian widows, the experience of status transition from wife to "widhwa" did not mean a full recovery from the death of the husband. Rather than acceptance, their adjustment entailed a resignation to the husband's death. Grief unfolded in an experience of recurrent waves of sorrow that did not terminate over time, and described as only abating in some areas, or even worsening in others. This resignation seemed founded in the belief that, in spite of their loss, "everything goes on, everything goes on with or without him, similarly," and that "there is no use going back." A potent devotion to duty, and a cultural residue of bestowed social disability and atonement, in a felt status reduction, further influenced a resigned composure. This belief was expressed in a flavour of worshipful memory for him, and in active remembrances of his lifeways and care values.

From 28 years to 6, the length of widowhood in this sample did not seem to alter their common experience of ongoing or renewed periods of grief that were felt and articulated in a number of ways. These included crying, yearning, missing, loneliness, hurt, distrust, guilt, a flooding of memories and talking about their husbands. Other than in the early experience of crying, disbelief and numbness, however, the data in this study did not yield evidence of definitive or progressive stages of grief, in contrast to Western stage models of grief resolution (Engel, 1964; Kubler-Ross, 1960), and/or views of extended grief as being pathological in traditional psychiatry (Lindemann, 1944).

A key co-researcher who had been widowed for 22 years said: "I don't think that I can be without his memories anymore. I just bury them for some time. I just bury them, I am not thinking about you anymore! No, when you are free, when you have done your duties, they are quite with you, they are more alive than before!" In an erupting candor, of great emotion and tears, she declared: (that they are) "more alive, the memories, because before you didn't have any

time, and now you can think of this, and maybe, sometimes it's painful. But sometimes it gets..

too!.. that you have been doing this, and you just relive it sometimes, you just relive it!" Another

key co-researcher, widowed 13 years, described her sense of marginal improvements poignantly:

> No, I will never recover. So far I have not recovered. It doesn't seem like I will
>
> recover from it.. They say after so many years, you do, like, you know, heal. But
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> to me it seems like it is worse. It heals in some extent, it does, but it is not
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> complete healing. It is healing over your own power. The way you take it. I try
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> to heal myself but the real healing has not yet taken place. I tried my best, but it
>
> comes back! If I had him I would have,.. you know how the expectations are.
>
> Other than that I can to some extent, it has become less annoying to me. But
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> before I used to get mad,.. Yes, why!? My daughters used to question why. It
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> was hard on me, but now the understanding has come a little bit more than it was.
>
> I can talk about it, but the healing part is a little bit better, for sure, but it is not a
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> complete healing.

It was often the case that grief would reemerge during special occasions or happy

experiences, such as a graduation, a family birthday, or a day of significance to his memory. One

widow talked about this emotive aspect of such occasions, solicited or unintentional:

> We have a place where his ashes were taken away, but sometimes I just go there
>
> on his birthday or Father's Day, something like that. I don't want to keep going
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> because that is going into more hurting and your feelings are more revived. But
>
> the pictures don't do much, but if you go and think of all the ashes, then you are
>
> deep drawn to it and then you are getting everything awakened again. On his
>
> birthday, my grandson says, or somebody says, I try not to. Father's Day is one
>
> day because everyone is talking about it. You hear this and it makes you a little

uneasy. Other than that I really don't want to go to the,.. even to the place where he was cremated. I stay away from it, it makes me worse.

A common sentiment was their wish that the deceased husband could be there to see how well their children are doing, or to help her with the harder times. The key co-researchers sometimes expressed conflicting beliefs about the value of crying, such as in the following description of one widow's struggle for balance in managing her emotions, not to mention her well-meaning friends:

> When we went to another city it was a bit easier for me, to take care of myself, but unless I stayed in that wide city, it was really sometimes intolerable... What to do, what to say, especially the people they come and visit you and they make you miserable, they make you miserable... Because they were: 'Oh no, what you must be doing!,' and this and that. They were too sympathetic, you know, to tolerate, and I used to feel they shouldn't come. Let me be what I am, you know? They just used to announce the feelings, and, in one way it was good but in other ways it was bad. Good because I could cry, I could feel myself a bit lighter. Then I was under the strain again and again and again. I was reliving those very bad moments, those very sad moments. That was not good. You want to get out sometimes. You are living in the same house and at the same time others are coming and making you relive in the same time... It's really very, very difficult, I think.

This was the agony of a widow who was already used to the degree of independence that came with her education, an established career and role as primary breadwinner (given her husband's history of ill health), and the "transformational" aspirations (Banks, 1993) these stirred in her for more than what she thought a life in her town (or country) could offer her and their children, as well as a means of eluding his memory:

> ... I tried, ok, but it was very difficult, very difficult, because I was living in the same house and all the memories were there. I was living in the same city. Wherever I go he was there. Wherever I would go he was there. It was so difficult. The first thing, after a year, I think, I get myself transferred from that place, so that I am away from all the memories, and at the same time I tried to leave the country [she laughs, in seeming wonder at the lengths she went to]. I applied for Canadian citizenship, because I thought that in India it is difficult for me to take care of my children as I would like.

What she experienced as her community's over-investment in her grief process (and its traditionally penitent aspect for the widow), then, sometimes conflicted with her felt sense of relief in only limited mourning, and often seemed a distraction from her orientation toward maximizing a dutiful future for her kids, and the personal comfort she found through immersion in this goal.

> From her close relatives, however, care was more congruent with her needs:
>
> No, my relatives, they were very sensible. They were really very sensible. And especially my sisters. My mother, she is a great lady. She lives still [laughs fondly]. She never talked about things, never, unless, I started something, but she never did... She just wanted me to be happy, that's it. You know, even if sometimes I used to cry, she would look at, the other fellow: 'How sad she is.'

Another widow articulated a common belief about the need to restrain themselves from crying, saying: "I think that [restraint] everybody has to do. I think that it is in every human mind. You can't mourn for a lifetime, and then everybody has a responsibility. And if one doesn't have the responsibility, you can just keep your memories all the time with you. But otherwise so difficult, I think." Yet these widows also said that they did still cry periodically, even years later.

Often, in fact, emotions were experienced in greater intensity than before, even for those who had managed to immerse themselves dutifully for a considerable time in the relative insulation of career, child-rearing and emigration, as with this key co-researcher: "..No, when you are free, when you have done your duties, they are quite with you, they are more alive than before!.." Or a widow's yearning for her deceased husband can intensify, becoming: (worse in) "The age. The missing part of it. Yes (loneliness). You know you need your companion and all that.. that kind of situation... And the confinement, you know, and the trust. It is not there that I could trust anybody. Sometimes like early in the morning when you want to say something to somebody you can't just phone and say: 'This is how I feel and this is what I want to do,' right? When two people are together, they are not two people anymore, they become one.."

However, it may also be the case that a widow's initial grief reactions are more modulated for the death of a husband due to what many co-researchers state is a cultural prizing of public stoicism and endurance (particularly for a widow); a residue still of implied blame "for her implicit contradiction of the cultural value that a devoted wife predeceases her husband" (Ullrich, 1988), conferring a degree of diminished status and social invisibility (and disability); the nature of old age in Hinduism, wherein the elder is already preparing for the next life in practiced detachment; and the quality of unfettered loss, perhaps, for a younger death, in its untimely nature and blameless implication for the widow, relative to that of a husband's.

These forces may tend to make of grief a private matter, with implications for help-seeking behaviors in a status transition of increased isolation and social vigilance. For example, not one of these key co-researchers had sought or received counselling for their grief at any time since their loss, despite considerable reported distress. Nor had they engaged in any group therapy or widow group contexts. More often, these key co-researchers were finding support in senior's groups for women in their Vedic temples , or in those sponsored by local community centres. On the

question of separate women's groups, however, one widow observed: "No, it's usually together. We don't have too many women groups. It is usually with the men's groups. Like if we have a temple, so women are there together. Though you have a women body, separate, but it's not registered separate. It is within that main body." Cross-cultural studies of widows and women seniors from other groups (i.e., d'Ardenne and Mahtani, 1989) indicate that such women have also been turning increasingly to one another for social support and self-help in their own cultural communities, although the shared coalition of widow-specific support groups were reported as nonexistent in this Hindu-Canadian population. The self-help expressed here took the form of informal networks of shared experience and whispered support or commiseration, often in gender-separated senior's groups. One widow remarked on what she saw as the greater share of commitments and responsibilities born by women in her community, which further limited their ability to meet:

> Yes, some, but very seldom [do women meet separately]. But Fiji Canada Association, I think, through the Canada Association, seniors have a women's group. We have one but it's not that we can get together that much, so it is not going to be worth trying something like this. Usually the men are together, so we don't have too many women's groups by itself. We end up together anyway, separated as women. It doesn't work that way. So much commitments, so women find it hard to get out. But they are the ones doing the most work at the moment.

There seems also to be a discomfort with public display or revelation of difficulties for this group of women, related to generational as well as cultural antipathies for putting one's personal and family reputation at risk. The daughter of one key co-researcher remarked on this tendency in her mother: "She doesn't,... uhm,... she never talks about what's wrong, with someone new. She likes

to talk about that, and other,.. with friends."

One widow describes what she sees as a larger cycle of denial in the Vedic communities,

one perpetuating beliefs about the widow that:

> Oh yeah, she is here, she is fine, she is happy, no problem, let's all enjoy together.
>
> They don't realize the emptiness with widows and widowers. Yes! It is a
>
> complete denial., or ignorance. They don't realize what is happening within the
>
> person and this is what they need. But when it comes to them, it's too late, then
>
> you suffer [in their turn]. No one is there to help, so it just continues.

As a matter of social priority, many co-researchers describe a lack of both resource and will in the

challenge of responding to the needs of seniors, and specifically that of widows, as one key co-

researcher observes:

> The way we are at the moment, we are stuck, because we have to open, as you
>
> said, join other widows or organizations, but it is not going to help you in that
>
> portion of the community directly. It is going to help that person indirectly, or
>
> probably directly, you should say. But how are you going to let society know that
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> this is what is needed? For example, at one point, I know, they wanted to build
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> this big community centre where all the women and all the men, who are widows
>
> and widowers, could live here. I know in other organizations they have got places
>
> like that, but in,.. [Hindu communities] there is hardly anything that I know where
>
> old people could go. But the suggestions have come and what they do is start
>
> fighting over petty matters.

As a result, she believes that misconceptions are perpetuated about the plight of the widow in

stereotypes of kinship support and traditional roles in the home, even within the Vedic

communities themselves.

Another grief pattern expressed by key co-researchers was a sense of disbelief about the husband's death, usually in the immediate aftermath of loss, as one widow described: "..Yes, because while the body is there, you feel that he is there, though he is not there. But when the body is gone everything is gone. You can't have, see him anymore.." This impression could also last for many years afterward for some, as a key co-researcher widowed 22 years said: "Nowadays even, back when you think of the relationship, it is hard accepting [that he is gone]."

Anger was little expressed by the key co-researchers, except in one widow's recollection of earlier in her process of resignation : ".. I tried my best but it comes back. If I had him I would have.. you know how the expectations are. Other than that I can to some extent, it has become less annoying to me. Before I used to get mad... Yes, why! My daughters used to question why. It was hard on me.." Anger was also implied in the gestural language of some of their remembrances, often in relation to the experience of frustration in four (of the five) key co-researchers whose "transformative assets" (i.e., education, work) fueled a degree of personal aspiration beyond what traditional cultural expectations of widowhood would have foretold. There was a visible stiffening of body and determination in manner when these four described experiences of community or family vigilance for violations of status reduction or role, as much as was evident in all of their descriptions of loss in the more personal domain of intimacy and partnership, such as: "Everything had gone. I am left with nothing." But a typical example of the upset, loneliness and guilt aspects of this status frustration is also expressed by one of these four widows:

> They wrote a book on it believing that the widows used to die when the husbands
>
> died and then going into the fires [i.e., Sati]. Yes, even in churches and temples
>
> when they read the scriptures, once in awhile they read, but they are reading those
>
> scriptures, so it does make you feel a little guilty, why you are here. But in my

> consciousness, I'm here because I want to be here, I didn't want to go. Otherwise
>
> if I was,.. I mean I love my husband and everything, but I did not want to die, and
>
> it was not time for me to go.

A consequence of the status transition for these four key co-researchers, then, were the additional demands of feeling they had to negotiate access to nontraditional contexts, in the making of subtle and evolving distinctions between traditional and modern roles. This point will be returned to in discussion of theme five.

Several widows tended also to idealize or diminish any negative aspects of their married life with the deceased, as in one widows remembrance: ".. My husband, he never worked seriously, and he had so many expensive hobbies. But he was a very loving husband and he did well as a partnership..," or in this widow's fond yearning:

> ...He was the only one for you, and you shared everything, every moment. All the
>
> sorrows you could talk to him, anything. There was nothing that you had to hide.
>
> From others and even from my son, I think: 'I can't tell this to him, I can't tell this
>
> to my parents, I can't tell this to my friends, but between a husband and wife there
>
> is nothing you want to hide, you share everything. I can't get it anymore!

Another key co-researcher echoed this sense of yearning: "I miss everything about him.. That's what I miss, talk, talk.. You can tell your husband or wife something you could never tell anyone else." Her daughter's interjection at this point may implicate a further quality of self-censure or grief modulation for the sake of the children's equanimity or disapproval: "She's never talked about him. Until today. I've never heard her talk about him like this!" The daughter may have seemed so surprised that her mother had such fond memories of him because to the eyes of her acculturated generation, he might have appeared a bit of a "lord."

Without exception, the key co-researchers found the embrace of Hinduism and family

(particularly in their children) offered them motivational care to stir the courage and additional will needed to endure. Spirituality was a crucial component of their adjustment, with this aspect of their culture felt as a buffer for absorbing some of the loss, in patterned ways, and as a form of semi-permeable membrane for relating self to the wider world. Similarly, the place of family was experienced as a nourishing repository of care, and as a ethic of purposeful duty (i.e., for the welfare of children) that flowed from the cultural setting of placement in a larger stream of family and collective life. One key co-researcher said:

> We have been a very close family and I think that is why I have taken this part in
> my life of family and it was love that gave me voice... I had a very loving family
> and we grew up in a very loving way. That has really helped me to take up this
> part that I have been into ever since the death of my husband... with all the love
> and happiness around we had been put into positions where we could go to school
> and get our best education, which was an honour and privilege to the family. Even
> in a small farm life, and here, with love and enthusiasm redeemed the family, and
> the initiative of the parents, though being very poor, we have this kind of life that
> we have now that was all created from the parents. All the love and care that they
> gave us makes us so strong now to carry on and be the way we are.

Spirituality as a culturally-mediated coping strategy for these key co-researchers was relied upon highly for managing the immediate period of crisis in their status transition from wife to widow, and was very much incorporated into the fabric of their subsequent adjustment. The prayers and hymns offered during the funerary period embodied a consensual spiritual richness and opportunity, through which to express (and regulate) their grief, with the permission and shared support of their family, friends and community, as one key co-researcher describes in glowing terms:

Because the law of karma, it encompasses every aspect of a person's life. So the law of karma is very important, in anyone's life, and all the 'bhajams' [hymns], the songs that is sung, it sees, relates to life and to God and to what has happened. That type of hymn... Yes, and they would all sing, from the time of the death until the 13 days when you have that function, every night, and they sing and they have a prayer service then. This is one way of coping with grief. Where you have,.. it is not you alone going through it. But it is shared! And not only your family, your friends, your neighbours. Everybody would come together!

There is also the belief that in singing the bhajams and in practicing the ceremonies, the passage of the deceased and the quality of his rebirth will be assisted, although not every widow endorses this entirely: "In Hinduism they believe that, if you do this, they,.. the person will get a safer journey, but I don't ascribe to that. I feel that when I am alive, what I have done, this is what I will get, and nobody else can do it for me."

Simultaneously, however, this reliance also seems to be undergoing some transition for several of these widows, such as in an aforementioned discomfort with scriptures that impute to widowhood a pejorative or punitive consequence: Another common sentiment was a seeking for an essence of serenity and comfort beyond specific Hindu rites and practices alone, as in this widow's report of struggle for a faith of greater personal relevance in subsequent adjustment:

As I said before, nobody has seen God. If we go and do all these rituals and forms and then you are more confused. There is a lot of confusion there and I can see in the communities there is so much disagreement. So I really think it doesn't help anybody. If you come to the understanding, it doesn't give you comfort, it is not what you want. Because as soon as you go into physical elements then your attachment is going to stay there, and if you want to go beyond it you have to get

out of these needs. To me, I want to go beyond it so I can get real inner

happiness. This is for myself. I am not doing it for anybody. This is for myself, so

that I can really go into happiness and stay in it for that moment. But then I have

to go on the ritual side because that is where I belong. It is not something that I

can break away from easily. It is going to be hard.

Another widow echoed this sense of dissatisfaction with the demands of form, and a covert

manufacture of more personal understandings:

It's Krishna, Lord Rama. So much worship, so much demand, so much custom,

you have to know this scripture, you have to know that scripture, so much

demands. Acceptance of this and acceptance of that. It's not enough, it is not

what I am looking for. Inner peace, like I have said before, that is what I am

looking for. I found a portion of it. I have got it.

Tensions between tradition and modernity, the collective and the personal., duty and aspiration,

are manifest in these descriptions of feeling bound to some of the traditional roles and means for

comfort in widowhood, particularly for those key co-researchers whose life experience and

acculturation level have incurred a significant degree of transformational challenge to aspects of

old cultural paradigms for their identities as Hindu widows.

Nevertheless, each key co-researcher maintained a profound attachment to those

scriptures and ritual practices that they saw as defining of Hinduism in their wisdom, depth

and kindness, a spirituality distinct and valued by them over all others. Generally

speaking, for example, orthodox Sanatan Hindus are said to read from the Bhagavad Gita

(or Ramayan and other doctrinal texts), whereas Arya Samaj Hindus tend to read from the

four Vedas, although there is much overlap in choice of sacred texts. A mantra (prayer)

from the Vedas called the "Gayatry mantra" is utilized by all five key co-researchers as a

daily source of spiritual comfort and guidance in their identities as widow, usually paired with rosary-like beads called "mala" by the more devout, regardless of diasporic community. As one widow defined it, Gayatry mantra is:

A few words that means a lot. [And] What do you call? The strength with so many beads? It's like a rosary. I like that. I do that a lot... I don't know in Christianity what does it means but in my rosary I say that mantra and I remember the meaning of that mantra, and I repeat it, I repeat it, I repeat it. That is: *'God. You are so powerful. You are light. You are the giver of everything. I pray to you, give me the wisdom to know, what is wrong and what is right'* (italics added). That is what it means. So this is what I repeat again and again. The same thing. Give me that wisdom so that I shouldn't do anything wrong. Yes, a spiritual guide. To me, yes... Maybe not for the young girls now, but the women of my age, we do a lot. Men as well, but mostly women because whatsoever is religion is mostly in a women's head, I think.. Yeah. I really love it. I love it... This is called the Gayatry mantra, it is in one of the Vedas. We call that this mantra is the mother of all the four Vedas. I mean, this is the supreme.

This practice is often accompanied by a "jhara," a downward-sweeping motion of symbolic symptom dissipation or transference, deriving from Hindu notions of "sickness" (broadly conceived), as normally moving downward through the body. This has application both to particular illness manifestations (e.g., migraine), and to states of being such as in the emotional consequence of widowhood, which, as has been noted, has traditionally been thought "inauspicious" and disabling.

Not surprisingly, all of the key co-researchers did experience health declines in widowhood, with some effects being more temporary, in the immediate aftermath of widowhood, some being of a more long-term nature, or still others thought delayed or recent (but ascribed to

the original loss). One widow described typical difficulties with headache: "Yes, I have not been too great. But I have been struggling with migraines." Another widow found explanation of difficulty in a cumulative degree of self-neglect, a condition she believed was inherent to single motherhood, but also to the status loss and seclusionary restrictions and duties which she saw in Hindu widowhood: "The migraines keep coming up. I have been all alone and a full-time worker until 1996. A full-time community worker and so I didn't care much for myself. I neglected myself. Now that I have a little bit of time, I do spend it for myself." Status deprivations imposed in social controls such as "purdah" in the aftermath of widowhood may have real consequence to the physical health of widows, as well as value in reorganizing the community, and reorienting the widow through incorporative rites and duties, if validation for traditional roles and competencies is no longer viable in the context of an acculturated family or community.

The key co-researchers resignation to their respective husbands' deaths flowed from culturally-mediated beliefs about how "everything goes on" in spite of their loss, a submission tempered, however, by Hindu assumptions of a soul's reincarnation, and the operations of fate or "hidden reasons" behind his death. Said one widow: "It is really difficult to lose one's husband when you love him so much and he loves you so much. But everything goes on [she softly, sadly laughs]. Life goes on with or without him, similarly." "There is no use going back," said another, as these widows also began to shelter under the redemptive possibility in Hinduism of framing their husbands loss in destiny. A typical understanding was:

> But there has to be destruction taking place. You have to get into this before you
>
> start to understand it. It has to come one day anyway, but the hard thing was it
>
> came too early. But then I think of him... We believe in reincarnation too, so
>
> maybe he has a better home somewhere. Maybe this is not the right place.

Another of the key co-researchers took some comfort in this too: "You see, this is where my

realization has come, no matter what, the parting comes, whether it is by death or by separation, at some point it comes. It was meant to be that way." Often, this process of resigning herself to his death took a process of many years, as with a key co-researcher whose loss 13 years ago was sudden and unexpected: "So the realization has come to me that he never suffered. It could have been worse. I have just taken it in,... now I can say it, I couldn't say it five years earlier. But now I feel it was good for him and then, like I said, I don't look at these negative side of... Maybe that was the best thing for him to have happen."

One key co-researcher and her daughter talked about the comfort they took from his deathbed visions: "Yes, he,... for the longest time, he keeps seeing a little girl... And a lot of people's feeling is, somebody dies, when,.. putting a soul in a children (to be born), you die, they receive you? And he kept talking about this little girl,.. could be a vessel waiting for him." Traditionally, the elderly sick were venerated for being closer to God than the rest of society, offering a veracity to his "reportage" that seemed subjective confirmation of the divine for this widow and her daughter.

This group of key co-researchers believed that they must carry on with life, and were motivated to do so by inculcated values of obligation and responsibility, in looking to an inheritance of children, reputation ("Izaat") and other cultural lifeways created in marriage with the deceased husband. These they tended to further, and his memory honor, in "prayer for their next life," by immersing themselves in family, in a more sharply-defined involvement in their Vedic temple, in celibacy, by keeping his memory alive with grandchildren, by making decisions in tune with his perceived example, and above all, by dutifully tending to the welfare of their children.

One widow described this in how: "I am left with nothing, but then, when you look at your responsibilities you get up, and when you get up and get yourself busy, nothing comes in your way.." These widows also commented on their husbands as an ongoing source of inspiration

in this larger task: "He's a guidance, that's how I remember him, he is my light." The key co-researchers here practiced a spiritual proximity to the departed husband, transforming the present in a striving for enhanced endurance. One widow stated:

> He was next to like... You know how the Indians believe in gurus? Some of us don't believe in these things. But I think to have that kinds of people in your life makes you carry on because they have been so lovable and so concerned about others that when you look back you start thinking about this and you say: 'Why can't I do these things?' Because they have been a real moral support in those times, so if you want to be born, you have to rely on something because God we haven't seen. It's the people that we have seen and if you have seen something good and you can develop it within yourself, I think it is most comforting... The most important thing I have said before was my husband. He was only [x] years old when he died and he was a very sociable person. He was well known, not for his capabilities, but just for his attitude, his nature, his sociable ways and just being the person he was. The very nature. That is what always reminds me.

However, acculturative pressures and variables of personal agency were present in the willingness of four of the key co-researchers to expand the horizon of acceptable role behaviour for a Hindu widow, and to feel that his memory was also served in the gifts of her greater aspiration.

Nevertheless, only one of the five key co-researchers had remarried in their effort to carry on, and none of the other general class of co-researchers. Only one of the remaining key co-researchers considered remarriage to be an option for herself, but thought it highly unlikely. She describes her experience of her community's bestowed consensus:

> Yes. To be very honest, people were looking very high on me because of what they had for my husband, but in that case their expectations I have already felt it.

It is very high that I will not do a thing like that, right? I will not remarry. So: 'Not to bother her,' and stuff like that. But I am very open, and probably people will think I will not do something like that but if it comes to me, then I will break any boundaries and there won't be anything in between stopping me. Because I have my own understanding [laughs]. Although I a very cultural person, with my culture and traditions, but I am ready to break anything if it has to be. So far I haven't really.

She describes herself as vulnerable to loneliness, fears for the future and occasional depression, her yearning for the deceased husband still strong. Yet she fears the salve of new relationship, too, in a society of acculturated difference in priority: "No! It is not the love! It could be just for a few moments enjoyments or feelings for the person, but not for the sake of love. To me, the love is the most important. If I could share that with someone, then yes [laughs]. Unless the love comes then that would change. But that's a big if."

Three others were adamant in their disinterest, but all of them upheld remarriage as a right for the modern widow, but were guarded in assessing it's potential for damage to the children in a practice described as more prevalent in their younger generation(s). Said one:

Now in India, everything is changing. I am talking about 20 years back, 25 years back. But the time has changed now. Now there are so many widows that are getting married, and I am happy for them. Because it is not important if the husband is gone, though I do feel for the children. You know, the system was made for the children, to protect the children, and if any widow gets married and the second husband is not that good to the children, what is the plight of the children? I think with these feelings.. Those systems for me, again I will say, it depends upon the individual., how she feels. How she feels to protect her children,

and how she feels to have her own happiness.

She describes an often difficult balance for the widow between traditional assumptions prizing community integrity, a husband's honor and stability for the children, and Western assumptions prizing individual happiness. Indeed, one widow describes what she sees as a need for balance in modern bereavement:

> It is also not proper to kill her happiness because of the children. These are two different things and it deals with humans, not with the system. You make a system, ok, you go with this? No, that is not good [i.e., to blindly follow]. So there are so many awkward things also in every system, wherever the society is. We need those rules for the good, but when it comes to the extreme, then it is difficult, that is bad.

For their generation, however, most suggested that they had married for life. According to one key co-researcher, this is because: "In the whole universe nobody is like him." Most of them sought to convey a pragmatic sense of what was achieved in their arranged or consensually arranged marriages, a blend of authorship and fated encounter, profoundly valued. An interview with a widower co-researcher revealed that Hindu-Canadian men do also uphold a prohibition of remarriage, although the key co-researchers state that this is a relatively rare event. This gentleman was also motivated by a desire to protect the emotional welfare of his children, but he too wished to honor and embody his wife's spiritual and cultural care lifeways in his own.

Even the one widow who did remarry described her post-bereavement continuation of education in part as a means of preserving an affiliation with portions of the old paradigm (albeit of a more liberal Arya Samaj Hinduism), and with some of the cultural care lifeways established with her deceased husband. She had a celibate life mapped out for herself, in which she "never, ever thought of getting married." For her:

The reason why I pursued knowledge was because I am a firm believer in acquisition of knowledge, ok? I thought this was my tool for survival and also for personal development and not getting married. If I am educated I have the earning capacity, I'll be independent, I'll look after my girls, I'll send them to school and I will see that they go off to university, and probably get them a match, and get them a good marriage later on, you know?

This was a woman raised in a relatively progressive atmosphere, for example, of gender equality in education, and yet: "..although I was brought up in a Arya Samaj environment, we think more liberated, our thinking was more liberated, you know, in our thinking,.. [but] our thinking is also influenced by the orthodox Hindus." Only in the relative youth of her bereavement (she was widowed at 25, by far the youngest of the key co-researchers), in the more permissive context of her faith and diaspora, in her sense of having honored her duty to her children, in submitting herself to the cultural sanction of a fully arranged marriage a decade later (as opposed to the consensual arrangement of the first), in joining her new husband in the relatively unfettered context of Canada, and in a dawning awareness of her own loneliness, can she now account for her decision. Even then, she still felt she had to satisfy a relational imperative of gaining her daughters approval of what has turned out to be a very satisfying relationship.

Interestingly, for this key co-researcher, widowhood has remained an enduring feature of current life: "In my mind, it's always there despite remarriage." For example, at a recent Hindu wedding, she was asked to participate in the marriage rites, normal to her own wedded status (of 13 years), wherein the bridegroom and then five married women are to put red henna (Sindur) in the part of the new bride's hair. But she feels she "could never do that." Her original status transition from wife to widow outweighs in her mind the restorative status changes of remarriage, in this residual., yet pervasive aspect of "polluting" identity. Though a woman of considerable

education, professional experience and more permissive cultural origins, she says she has accepted this about herself, not bothered by a degree of social and self-imposed cultural disability in Vedic affairs.

All of the key and culturally-informed co-researchers remarked on the importance of a peaceful death, out of simple humanity of course, but also as a qualitative index of how one has lived a life, and is likely to begin the next. The key co-researchers also expressed the hope that they themselves would experience a peaceful death, in part to ease the burden on their families, as in this exchange from one key co-researcher and her daughter: "She wants to die,.. overnight."… "I don't want to go to bed, and be a burden to anybody."… "That's why she prays everyday."… "Yes,.. Yeah, I want less suffering. I think it's really lucky when people have that kind of death." To this end, the key co-researchers all believed that: "You prepare yourself for death… Yes, [by] learning to be peaceful," in assumptions of a subsequent karmic rebirth that can be made susceptible to the quality of this preparation.

However, in a point to be discussed further in theme three, the question of burden in widowhood is said to be one of great significance by all of the key co-researchers in the treatment of Hindu-Canadian women. The presence of education, work and other assets of personal efficacy are declared as crucial to the quality of her subsequent adjustment. One widow acknowledges the kindness of her relatives in the aftermath of bereavement, but says: "So everyone was very good to me and, one thing has to be considered, that is I was not a burden to anyone. If I was not a burden financially or otherwise. If I was a burden, the treatment would not be the same." A balance of accounts is suggested in determining the precariousness of widowhood, consisting of variables of agency in the giving and receiving of respect. The widow without the transformative assets of education, work, financial control, English skills or a history of (usually grandmaternal) mentoring otherwise is said to be at risk for being marginalized in an

acculturated mileu of little authority, and her children with her. The transition from wife to widow can have the meaning of a double affliction, then, in both status and in personal domain.

Ultimately, a lesson of the widowhood narratives in this study is that theirs was an experience of recurrent and ongoing grief, in which a process of gradual yielding to resignation was defining, rather than a resolution of full acceptance in the emotional expressions of their loss.

Theme 2: The Husband's Life Spirit being Intrinsic to a Widow's Ongoing Care Lifeways, Embodied in her Cultural Grief Phenomena and Meanings

Hindu-Canadian meanings and expressions of grief for the widows in this study centered on beliefs about the enduring and eternal quality of their deceased husband's life force as an intrinsic and essential part of their own cultural care lifeways. These beliefs reflect a distinct focus in Hinduism on the unfolding purpose of the life of the soul through many lives, notwithstanding the diversity of this decentralized faith in heterogeneous inflections of orthodoxy, region, language, and deity.

This was expressed in a flavour of worshipful memory for the husband, and in a carrying on of his lifeways through such active remembrances as prayer, celibacy, doing good works, continuing his customs and ethics, keeping his memory alive with grandchildren, and above all, by dedicating themselves to the welfare of their kids. Their practice of spiritual proximity to him was achieved by inhabiting the cultural means available for doing so, in what may seem a form of self-abnegation for some. In this study, four out of the five key co-researchers strove to live their lives more fully than a traditional paradigm might foretell, yet implemented as much in honor to him as to what will later be suggested as transformative changes in self-concept.

It should be noted at this point that discussions of each theme are meant to form an overall composite of distilled meanings and experiences for describing these constituents of Hindu-

Canadian widowhood, with each theme intended to inform and interweave with understandings of the next in comprising the whole.

Specifically, the soul in Hinduism is thought to participate in the eternal through the concepts of "karma" and "reincarnation." Karma is the notion of consequence to action, the sum of right and wrong in a life lived, determining the fate or quality of its future incarnations. Reincarnation is the notion of karmic cycles, the soul's passage through refining stages of embodiment, toward an ultimate goal of spiritual perfection or "moksa," contingent on "right behaviour" in this life. Underlying all in personal realization is thought to be the driving force of "dharma," the Hindu notion of inherent mutual accord in the self fulfilling an expressly social order.

The reality of death transformed these women from wife ("putney") to "widhwa," the Hindi word for widow. Commonality as well as nuance in grief beliefs, practices and emotional expressions all had direct influence on the widow's subsequent life adjustment and expressions of care.

Numerous grief care practices were described. Widow co-researchers reported that family, friends and community offered comfort and support immediately after being told of their bereavement. All of the co-researchers recounted how, in the early days after their husbands died, these supporters brought food, visited and gave them encouragement to endure. One widow said:

It is like that, that family members come to your place, well, they cook, they do everything. But for the first two days mostly. Because for the first two days that is a very difficult period. You can't cook, we don't cook at home, neighbours, friends, they send you something for four days. After that, I started cooking my own food...

All of the widows reported crying, some more, some less. Yet all of them said they eventually attempted to restrain themselves, too, reflecting an aforementioned Hindu value of public stoicism and endurance in the face of loss or deprivation, particularly so for widows. As one widow had said: "I think that (restraint) everybody has to do. I think that it is in every human mind. You can't mourn for a lifetime.." As all five co-researchers in this study were first generation widows, differences between first and second generation experience cannot be directly assessed, other than in the observations of key and general co-researchers that emotional expression for younger widows seemed to be more acculturated here in a greater willingness to risk public display of grief, despite what is also said to be a greater cultural ambivalence with the younger widow. She is still thought to be more socially destabilizing, but there seems also to be more consensus now in favour of her right to remarry.

Interestingly, however, cultural location of actual widowhood had a prominent effect on the nature and sources of care. Widowhood being experienced: in the country of Hindu origin seems to be associated with a greater family presence and role in the offering and felt appropriateness of care, often in the context of an extended family, and of well understood rules governing transactions with the larger community.

In contrast, widowhood being experienced: in the host culture of Canada seems associated with a greater role for co-workers and friends, and with a corresponding ebb in offered care from that of family and community, but with less certainty in duration of support and felt appropriateness, as well as a greater sense of isolation (personal., because cultural). This is often in the context of a more dispersed (or nuclear) family, and of an acculturated erosion of previously understood rules for community engagement. One widow describes this difference in reference to her own remembered care:

...And the support you get from Guyana, and also in India, I don't know, in fact, I

have never lived in India, I was never born there, but the support we got at home, the community support, I can't find it here. Like they said, 'It takes a village to raise a child.' That is exactly what happened there,.. So it is not only me raising these two girls, I also have the support of my family and my community,.. It is very comforting, but here everybody grieves alone.

Co-workers were a major source of care here for those who were working at the time. In regards to this dimension of care, one widow (who returned to work after six weeks) said: "I adore it in my heart," and described her co-workers as offering "more care," and it "lasting longer," relative to that received from her Vedic community here. She and other widows working at the time describe a "vast difference" or disparity between work care and community care, and for that matter, implicate a qualitative reduction in felt support and closeness from some of their family members here.

Moreover, in terms of consensus in the Vedic communities on matters of current widowhood adjustment in Canada, the key co-researchers widowed here, and many general co-researchers, describe care being available in the immediate aftermath of bereavement, but which has been falling away with the passage of time, and which has been largely nonexistent for issues of understanding in areas of change, such as role and gender dissatisfaction, aspiration and confusion. Indeed, to the question of sources of meaning, one widow acknowledges children, family, her husband (then and now), but states: "Nothing from my society [with slightly bitter laugh]. But I have from my work."

All of these widows said that they did not like to be called a widow. They preferred to be called by their usual name, or referred to as "grandmother." One widow said: "No, always by my name. It is just if you have to tell somebody, otherwise there is no difference. I am the same, not like here, that I become Ms." An affiliation and respect to the dead husband's memory remains in

this quality of naming. For another widow, to the question of considering herself primarily a grandmother or a widow, she replied: "A grandmother! .. There is children there, that's all that I can do. The grandchildren important." It must be remembered that the specificity of language in familial identity and relationship in Hinduism is as central and comprehensive as references to snow are said to be in the Inuit universe. As a widow describes: "You know, in Indian system, words are respect. To call the older person by the name is unheard of. My girls call everyone aunty or uncle." Individuals are to be referred to in terms of their place in the family constellation (or the social order), not as free-standing entities bereft of social significance. Typical of all the widows is the following explanation of the nature of Hindi's socially laden naming:

> No, [the daughter of a daughter should have called her] something other than my name. And I don't like that [disrespect], but it is not my choice. Because the father told her that she should not call me that, but she said no, she would call me that. That's her choice. What I told him, I said that when my girls get their children they would not call you [his name], they would call him grandfather. In Hindi, it is Nana [maternal grandfather] and paternal is Aja... You see, In Indian relationships, if I say my Chacha, you know who I mean. If I say my Nana, you would know exactly who I mean. But in the English system if you say uncle you don't know which uncle, it could be a stranger, but if I say Nana you know it is my mother's father, and if I say Aja then I know it is my father's father, and if I say Chacha, I know it is my father's brother, and if I say Mana, you know it is my mother's brother.

The widows have all experienced an acculturative and generational erosion in this and other aspects of cultural embeddedness, one that seems to mark a greater emergence of the individual here in matters of social transaction and interpersonal morality, particularly for the young.

Said one key co-researcher on the forces at work:

I think a difference in our times but the country too. You can't just say the times. Wherever you live you take something from that society. You look at the children, they are just Canadians, they are no more Indians. Their thinking, their feeling, even their food, it is changing. I see it even in my own place. My grandchildren like Canadian food. They don't like that Indian food.

These widows see their culture evolving around them and feel the ground shifting beneath their feet, a sometimes disorienting experience, and something of a Faustian bargain for them in accommodating to the new.

A culturally-informed Hindu couple in the general class of co-researchers suggested that Hinduism suffers in this from what are also thought to be it's strengths. In contrast to Sikhism or the varieties of Christianity, Hinduism has no formal priesthood colleges, and is said to be less strict and didactic. They describe Sikhism in Canada as being more prescriptive, with a greater emphasis placed on language, tradition, and the central authority of a (Vatican-like) founding institution in Amritsar (in the Punjab). Exposure to Hindu faith is thought to be more a process of osmosis than instruction, with little attention paid to a growing problem of language loss. These and many other cultural informants identify linguistic erosion as a major obstacle to the younger generation in (re)entering the culture, in view of what they also see as an attendance pattern at the temples of mostly the older and the very young. I found this to be true of the temples I visited, and Hindi classes (i.e., at the University of British Columbia) are said to be poorly attended.

There is the Hinduism of Indian nationality, but also the heterogeneous Hinduism of region and subsequent diaspora, the Hinduism of tongue and jati, of rural and urban, and of any number of dichotomies and flavours. Hindu communities in Edmonton and Calgary are also reported to be experiencing similar difficulties with culture loss, as the strength of Hinduism's

accommodating flexibility is also it's decentralized vulnerability to dilution. They describe the force of Hinduism, in what are smaller communities here, relative to Sikhism, being dissipated in the very heterogeny of it's languages, regions and sects, when in the larger acculturating context of Canada.

In any case, all of the key co-researchers reported experiencing a numbing "emptiness" upon losing their husbands. A typical recollection by a key co-researcher was: "Yes, very empty, very empty. That is one thing, you depend so much, you talk so much, then you feel dismissal and for so many years I couldn't talk about anything with anyone. I was so hurt… At least now I am opening up, I can talk, and I still find I am very empty inside because it is something I always attend to it…"

Grief practices were recorded in interviews, and in the field journal after attending a funeral led by one of the general co-researchers, a Hindu priest or "pandit." The standard Hindu funerary period is 13 days, particularly for orthodox Hindus ("Sanatans"), although for another major, more permissive school of Hinduism ("Arya Samaj"), the funerary period may only be 3 days. A common prayer service, or "Kria Karam," is conducted by the pandit one or two days after death. In India, and in some of the other diasporic countries of origin, the funeral involves an outdoor cremation pyre, lit by the eldest son, who then wears his father's ceremonial "pagari" turban, symbolizing his assumption of the father's status and responsibilities.

This cremation ceremony in Canada takes place in a conventional funeral home, but with rites performed, and the eldest son to push the furnace button. Ashes are then scattered in a river here (i.e., the Fraser), or returned to the Ganges River in India, depending on particular diaspora and/or degree of acculturation. Traditional funerary rites are reduced here, while still honoring much of their form and intention (i.e., in the eldest son's leading role). The daughter of a key co-researcher described a modern funeral:

Yeah. We cremated him here. You know, and,.. the ambulance brought him to the cremation,.. you know, and, by the book...The eldest son pushes the button. We, we light candles for this. We put 'Kapur' on, in the cup, and on, inside the fire. ...Yeah, it starts the fire.. ... it's just like, ah, a little like incense, but it's not incense,.. wax-like thing. ...You light it, my brother lit that,.. in the box. ...Oh yeah, it doesn't go out. ...In the kapur mug,.. and then next in the box, in the,.. chamber or whatever you call it. And then press the button. ...But over here, they just, you get it in the same package.. you're not trying to do the,.. ...We put it, put it in the river... They'd put it in the Fraser river.

A widow traditionally has no role in the funeral service, other than to bear witness, and to bear also the ancient Hindu prejudice of implied blame and atonement, a stigma potent enough to adhere to the Hindu widow still, though in more subtle fashion than in years past. For example, a widow describes how in some traditional funerals the widow must endure a ceremony symbolically reversing that performed by the husband when they were married. The red henna powder ("Sindur") in the part of her hair, having marked her married status, is now pulled down by the sister of the deceased, guiding her dead brother's finger. After the cremation, a portion of ground charcoal is then taken by the sister, who rubs it on the widow's part in order to efface any of the remaining Sindur, "..and that is one of the cultural acts that says: this woman is now a widow and that is the end of her life."

This attitude was implemented in the residual practice of "purdah," an orthodox tradition of extensive seclusion after widowhood, not unique to Hinduism, but one implying social disability, atonement and a diminished status at home and beyond for some in the Hindu communities. The widows in this study state that this practice is less overt in Canada than in India, and than it was in the past, and suggest that a Hindu-Canadian widow is significantly

insulated from the effects of purdah in her extent of education, work status, English skills, financial independence and other variables.

Nevertheless, the cultural accoutrements of her previously married status must be removed by the widow, and they are extensive. Arm bangles called "choodi," a toe ring called "bichhia," the aforementioned sindur, the red forehead dot called a "bindi," a beautiful neck chain of black beads called the "mangal-sootra," all must be shed like old skin. Even her clothing, formerly of bright colours or "auspicious" red, are supposed to be exchanged for "inauspicious" whites, signifying the end of passion and fruitfulness, as one key co-researcher will endorse:

And those white clothes keep your emotions under control. This is how I feel. It is a purity. You know it, this is very pure. The meaning of this is to keep your purity, and if you are not supposed to do that thing, and you don't want to, I think, there has to be some discipline in one's life to keep you this way.. Otherwise, I am dressing myself like anything, wearing lipstick and putting on good clothes, this and that, and I am young. It is very difficult to control my emotions and my feelings. But when you are having nothing, just white, plain clothes, your emotions are under control. Those systems were not bad really. But we just thought that if she has to wear this, ok, she has to just wear this. We have to see what type of individual she is. If she wants to get into another relationship or something, we didn't see that. That is really a very bad thing in our system. Otherwise, if someone is willing, and somebody wants to just take care of her children, then that is enough [for her to remarry], that is the life for her. I think these systems are very good.

By tradition, there are also "Ayurvedic" restrictions on the diet of a widow, with its classification of foods into three types. "Tamsic" items are sour, spicy, fatty and not fresh, a class

of food that is thought to incur greater stimulus to the passions, which a widow is supposed to avoid due to their potential for distraction from the priority of children, duty and celibacy. "Satvik" and "rasic" food are fresh, vegetarian, bland and thus ok to eat. However, the restrictions on food are now generally observed only for the 13 day funerary period, although a vegetarian diet is typical of a devout (and older) Hindu, with some variation depending on particular diaspora. One of the key co-researchers describes the cultural rationale for this dietary proscription:

> ..the widow is not allowed to take spicy food. She has to take some boiled vegetables, and roti, and not very spicy, and not very fatty. And there too, I feel there is a reason they started this system. Because if she wants to be a widow, whatever it takes, it protects her for it. It protects her emotionally. For a widow, if you think she can't go into another marriage, or she can't go to another romance or relationship, but, she was not allowed spicy foods. She is not supposed to, I should say. Just to restrict her emotions and feelings, as with the clothes.

After the funeral itself, unless the family applies a simpler three day funerary period (as with some Arya Samaj Hindus), the process continues in the temple and in the home for the full thirteen days. The 18 chapters of the "Bhagavad Gita," a work of Hindu literature documenting its perspective on the full spiritual struggle of the soul, are read a few chapters at a time over this period, dramatizing in its poetics a refining human journey through temporal cares to the getting of wisdom, serenity and fullest spiritual liberation. It was also reported that the deceased's memory is traditionally revisited in a series of attenuating ceremonies, one occurring six months later in a half-year anniversary called "charimaasi," and (usually the last) in a yearly anniversary called "barsi."

"Bhajams" are hymns of solace that are sung by the widow, family and friends throughout

the 13 day period, as a means of comfort, and of both sharing and dissipating grief. The end of the 13 day period is closed by a purification ritual called "havan" (a small place of fire often burning near the altar of a Hindu temple), in which incense and herbs are mixed with clarified butter ("ghee") and special firewood (often of the mango) and burned. The importance of purification and fire in Hinduism is very prominent, as one widow noted: "Yeah. In the Hindu families, fire has a great role, whatever we do, we do it with the fire. Even when we pray."

All of the key co-researchers took comfort in the honor accorded their husbands in the quality and attendance of his funeral. To them, sadness and large attendance here indicated something about the respect with which he had been regarded, with consequence for a more peaceful death, and the karmic value of his old life to a new incarnation. For example, in reference to the death of a favored son, one widow said:

> You mentioned my son, and his peaceful dying. The priest, too. My son was never selfish, never greedy, always giving other people. Whatever, whatever he had, it doesn't matter! You know? And, I remember, 1960, someone got married, there [Fiji], and they were short of food, money, this and that. Most people I see, when there is a need, they run and hide. My son was never like that. And when he die, everybody was sad. Because of that, it was a peaceful death.

As with many life transitions, funeral ceremonies can be conceived of as ritual., as universal "rites of passage" for all parties to the loss, serving both to "incorporate the deceased into the world of the dead," and to reestablish equilibrium in the family and community setting left behind (van Genep, 1960). All of the funeral customs and grief practices described here serve three functions. "Rites of separation" detach the widow from her deceased husband and her previous status, such as the solemn reversal of the Sindur ceremony, or the removing of other marital symbols. "Rites of transition" serve to facilitate her shift from wife to widow in a

temporary state of liminality, as in the in-laws or eldest son's assumption of authority for her welfare (for some), the (now typically short-lived) avoidance of (passion-inducing) "tamsic" foods or of clothing other than white. "Rites of incorporation," are said to complete the circle of (re)integration into her community as widow. In the case of Hindu-Canadian widowhood, the hallmarks of a post-liminal adjustment may be difficult for some to achieve in the acculturative erosion of a viable socio-cultural mileu with which to sustain its roles. Grief practices described by key co-researchers also seemed to serve paradoxical functions of both tie-breaking and attachment. A widow tends to engage in active memorials to the dead husband, even though she has also reworked a palimpsest of status transition in the many rituals of foreclosure on most outward symptoms of her marriage.

In the issue of a peaceful death, however, all of the key co-researchers highly prize this quality of closure. One widow said: "Yes, for instance, if someone just goes, you just slip away and you die, then that is seen as a very good death, you know? But if someone is sick and had cancer and is suffering or, whatever, you always pity that person." Beyond simple compassion, the Hindu belief system always contains a future orientation in its evaluation of all aspects of human experience. Past, present and future are here joined at the moment of death. As one widow defines it, a peaceful death is instrumental., then, to the living:

> Because what is important, is that at that precise moment when life is leaving your
>
> body, is your frame of mind, and that frame of mind, that peaceful state can only
>
> come if you have practiced that during your lifetime. Because you cannot say:
>
> 'Ok, when I die I want to be peaceful.' At that split moment when your breath is
>
> leaving this body, if you want to be peaceful then, therefore, my philosophy is, you
>
> have to be peaceful all the time.

Even for the husband whose lifestyle had contributed to his early demise, redemption is possible.

In his case, a peaceful death ("he just slipped away") was described as having helped expiate his sins and enhanced his prospects for the next life. Prayers in his name were also said to ease his spiritual progress.

For the elderly Hindu, then, and particularly for the bereaved (widow or widower), serenity in a "good death" is thought essential on three dimensions: (a) as a statement on the quality of a life lived, and; (b) as a last contribution to the quality of a life next, but also; (c) as an object or marker of greater concentration now in preparing for one's own end. As one widow explains:

> You prepare yourself for death…Yes, learning to be peaceful, and not only for death, for life after death. For after you have died, this body, what happens to your soul? Because I am a firm believer of law of karma and I believe that this body is not my only body. I am,.. this is not my only time that I make this trip. My soul was already there and it will be there. And I believe in the evolution of the soul, from lower to high, and you can only achieve that,.. so if I want to evolve as a higher soul, therefore in this life I have to do those things which I feel will be able to elevate my soul…

From this perspective, widowhood or mature bereavement is also an opportunity both to participate in the eternal., and to prepare for it.

All of the key co-researchers reported that prayers continue to sustain them as sources of care from God. Beyond the specifics of prayer, one key co-researcher noted how her faith influenced her view of the world in general: "My spirituality too. The way I look at things. Everything is so beautiful, the country is so beautiful, you have so many facilities, so many physical things we have we can make use of and it's so wonderful.." The Arya Samaj widows made daily use of the "Gayatry Mantra," the mother of all mantras from the four Veda works, a

recitation which for the devout is to accompany the 108 beads of the "mala," the Hindu rosary.

This is said to be typical of the devout widow and (mostly female) elder, which is as follows:

> God. You are so powerful. You are light. You are the giver of everything. I
>
> pray to you, give me the wisdom to know, what is wrong and what is right.

> [or in it's more formal meaning]:
>
> Oh God, the Giver of life, Remover of pain and sorrows, Bestower of
>
> happiness, and Creator of the Universe, thou art most luminous, pure &
>
> adorable, we meditate on thee. May thou inspire and guide our intellect in
>
> the right direction.

Generally speaking, orthodox Sanatan read from the Gita (or Ramayan and other classical texts), whereas the Arya Samaj tend to read from the four Vedas (i.e., the Gayatry mantra), although there is much overlap. Both are read for ongoing solace and for spiritual "positioning." One of the older widows describes the prayerful rhythm of a typical day for her:

> Early in the morning, yes. When I get up I just think. After the daily routine, I
>
> just sit down quietly. Sometimes I don't do anything, I just sit down. Sometimes
>
> with this rosary, and I take my time, two hours sometimes. And sometimes, I have
>
> a room, it is, after I take my bath, I just want to sit there, and that gives me great
>
> peace. When you are thinking.. you are not thinking of anything, you are just
>
> sitting. Nothing comes in your mind. That is the blissful time, for anybody. Early
>
> morning, if you can experience that. And once you taste it, you would like to stay
>
> in it. You can call it meditation. So that is the best time.

For her and the other key co-researchers, widowhood is a time for the getting of wisdom, harvested the more consciously in a greater appreciation of serenity, particularly evident in those who are older. One widow describes what she sees as an unfolding circle of generations and

understanding:

> With your family to some extent you can talk but other things you can't talk, you know? They can't understand. There is a certain age when you start understanding these things, what I want to talk about,.. you call it anything [i.e., wisdom]. I have gone through so much so I now understand better than those women do. Because I remember, when I was young, I couldn't understand what my mother-in-law was saying. I couldn't understand the meaning of what she was saying. But now I understand. In the morning when I used to hear the radio she used to say: 'Oh, leave it.' I used to think: 'It's a lovely sound, it's a nice music, why doesn't she want to listen?' But now I understand. Because I don't want to listen to any music in the morning. I want it to be peaceful. So this is how you learn and I think my daughter-in-laws and I couldn't understand my mother-in-law. They also don't understand me, my sons, because their views are maybe something different.

Additional spiritual proximity's for the widow exist in the possibility of pilgrimages to holy sites in the motherland, each of which represent an opportunity for further karmic maturation, and which the devout and those of Indian diaspora are more likely to pursue. Some of the key co-researchers also intend to intensify their schedule of prayer as the other duties of family fade with age. One widow laments her state of unmet goals in this:

> Yes. That is my prayers. Sometimes I feel I don't give that much time, with my prayers, and I should. I don't complete my rosary as many times as I should. Actually, I have a friend and she is a very religious woman. She is extremely in the religious mind. She thinks everything.. You can't imagine how many rosaries she completes, 50 to 60 in one day with a big mantra. She spends about 8, sometimes 9 hours. She has

got nothing much to do at home… We used to be very fast friends in [back east] and sometimes I do feel that I am missing that part.

Most of the key co-researchers shared beliefs about the enduring presence of the husband's life force in their lives as an ongoing source of companionship and care, and at one time or another, a few believed that they were able to "see" their husband. One widow describes these visitations, and his presence in dreams, too, particularly when she was under stress, but as a now attenuating phenomena of care:

> Yes, I do. Yeah. Laughing, smiling… Mostly, from him, and sometimes I will have dreams too. The dreams were more frequent, they are fading away now. His physical look, his smile, a joke or something. Other than that I don't really see him much. As you said, there can be a moment when I am distressed and I have to have a few tears. There were good times, you know?.. It was a good experience, because he was a very consoling personality. He had a nature that could make you feel happy. So I will think about how nice it is, and the differences, how things could be, how things are,.. so difficult.

Another widow experienced this only earlier in her transition to widow: "Wherever I go he was there. Wherever I would go he was there.." Although she no longer "sees" him in this way, her and other key co-researchers do maintain their husbands life force has an ongoing role in directing their cultural care priorities in ways large or subtle.

In sum, it can be said that certain practices in Hinduism are designed to distance elders, of this generation in particular, from the material world (i.e., tie-breaking), through daily acts of atonement, forgiveness and a widow's evocation of her husband's lifeways; through dress, diet and a relative seclusion; through a dedication to their children, and a reluctance to remarry; through a withdrawal from ritual occasion in deference to bestowed and self-attributed quality of

"inauspicious," and; through prayer (and/or pilgrimages to India) as well, to redirect her energies toward the benefit of increased serenity to one's karmic possibility in the next life.

These key co-researchers go about their lives in a manner that seems creative and courageous to me, in the predicament of never fully accepting their status (nor the remarried widow fully comfortable in hers), yet continuing to honor their husband's life force and care values in their own cultural care lifeways. Four of the five widows in this study also engage in active remembrances of what he seems to embody about a cultural specificity of "homeness," an intangibility of setting that does not fully and completely resonate for them here, nor there (i.e., in their respective diasporic present). They have made satisfying lives for themselves and their children, but I infer that they are aware too, of feeling vaguely unsettled by a state, perhaps ,of functional liminality, or of what Ishiyama (1995) refers to as bicultural dislocation. The fifth widow has a lifestyle of comfort in the embrace of a supportive daughter's home, but she too is troubled both by (compounded) "lossful" yearnings, and the consequence of an acculturation level still of "isolation" (Berry et al., 1988). A solution for each has been found in the cultural buffer of a flexible Hinduism, in the ways and means for achieving a remade self and meaning available, or manufactured, from this cloth.

Theme 3: A Double Affliction in Hindu-Canadian Widowhood,of Personal and Status Domains

For this sample of Hindu-Canadian widows, the status transition from wife to widow ("putney" to "widhwa") was doubly traumatic, entailing bestowed losses in status as well as in the personal domain of intimacy and partnership. For the widow in the most traditional marriage of this sample, who had no experience of formal education, she describes the ongoing blow of bereavement to her own sense of identity (even in the bounds of what she described as a "Victorian" marriage): "I miss what was familiar. I knew who I was. But relations with my

husband, were more,.. formal. He used to control me." This dimension of core damage to cultural self in their transition from wife to widow is exacerbated in the flavour of atonement, diminished role and community or family surveillance found in all of the key co-researcher's descriptions of status transition and subsequent adjustment.

The role of the Hindu widow is institutionalized, offering a rich cultural reservoir for grief understanding and practice, with a relative consensus in roles, rites and duration for both widow and community in her bereavement. It also denotes a constraint of personal emotions, desires and aspirations in the cultural badges and social controls of a newly altered status. As in one key co-researcher's exclamation about the extent of change: "Everything! There's more respect, you keep more to yourself, that sort of thing." These analogues of status loss are ascetic in character, and can be discomfiting for widows in the acculturative consequence of what these key co-researchers identify as an eroding and diluting mileu. Many previously rewarded competencies and roles in Hindu widowhood are no longer viable or are lost for some, or are less available as sources of validation and incorporative (re)integration. However, these cultural analogues of badge and attribution are still much embodied in these women as being inherent to a Hindu woman's dharmic nature, particularly in their value as an effective means of prioritizing attention to child protection. On the other side of the ledger, it has been reported that abuse can result from the precariousness of a status reduction, with many widows (and elders) said to be reduced to virtual penury and servitude in the case of dependence on an unsupportive family. One key co-researcher described how women suffering such conditions often feel they have few options: "They say: 'Oh, what will people say? What will people say about my son with whom I am living?' They bury it on themselves. They don't want to tell anybody."

However, four of the five key co-researchers also described a number of variables they believed were crucial to their achieving an optimal level of adaptation. Education was accounted

the most significant asset in potentiating a sense of personal agency. What Banks (1993) defined as "transformative learning," the revelation of new perspectives on received truths, seemed to allow these women some challenge to traditional conceptions of behavior and role for Hindu widowhood, without entirely compromising their standing in their respective cultural communities. In the initial period of aftermath, for example, as one widow put it: "I was an educated lady and I was working so that makes all the difference." This point will be considered further in discussion of theme 5.

These four key co-researchers identify themselves as unusual in their educational attainments, relative to their contemporaries, and in their ability to inspire a sometimes grudging respect in their respective communities for the resource(fullness) that allowed for a greater independence. Their improved status is in contrast with those whom they see as more dependent, having lacked one or more variables of personal agency, or in their sponsored status, and therefore being more vulnerable to the potential of abuse by their families, usually their inlaws. As one widow observed about the plight of many of her contemporaries: "Yes, because most of them, they are not educated, especially ladies. They were not educated as I was and I thank my stars that God gave me the wisdom to say that I want my education [laughs], otherwise it would have been very hard, I could see."

Many of the sponsored elderly and widows, or those who are otherwise in a dependent position, are reported to find conditions here intolerable, and many have decided to return home rather than put up with the indignities of unexpectedly usurped role expectations.

To the question of what would follow for a widow without benefit of job or education, one widow declared:

> I would have to go to my parents house and do all the odd jobs as I see others do,
>
> and my children wouldn't get that respect because they would be feeding me, you

know, the difference? Now if they come I could feed them, so I was almost equal. I was not down there, that they are doing me some favours. I was earning my own living, for myself and my children. That is the difference for any human being, even in Canadian society or Indian society or whatever country's society, if you are not earning you can't get much respect, and if you are earning, they know. I can give them something. I don't ask them to give me something. That is in the head of every human being, maybe less or more, but it is there.

This she saw as a universal tendency in human affairs, if perhaps accentuated in Hindu practice, and in the acculturative erosion of what might otherwise be appropriately incorporative roles for the elderly widowed here in Canada. Said another: "Women and children, they are not respected, unless she has a hold of her own life. If she is dependent upon,.. even her parents!.. The parents attitude changes." A double affliction is inherent to any pattern of chronic invalidation for previously rewarded competencies, then, in the context of these varying degrees of status deprivation.

As mentioned, all of the key co-researchers experienced health declines in widowhood, with some effects being of a more temporary nature, some being more long-term, and still others emerging more recently or thought delayed, but assigned by them to the original loss. One widow ascribed her ill health to the demands of single motherhood and employment (i.e., ".. and so I didn't care much for myself. I neglected myself."). But she and the other key co-researchers point also to the additional psychic demands on time and energy, relative to previous generations, of managing in an acculturated and accelerated present (i.e., ".. Here we have exposure to the whole world, and we are in a different country, we are in a different society, cross-cultural. They never had all this. Our awareness has to be so vast so that we can live with the life that we have now..").

Moreover, the four felt they had also to monitor their movements across context, negotiating access to nontraditional roles before then restoring their visible fidelities to a cultural familiar. One of the four key co-researchers articulated their common experience of occupying multiple roles. This was felt to be a necessary means of preserving her participation in nontraditional sources of validation (e.g., of volunteer work in a community media role), while still managing to embody traditions of celibacy and decorum in a compartmentalism of her secular, personal and religious lives:

> To be very honest, they still have that thinking, that a widow can't remarry, she should be wearing.. [white]. What happens is they think women should be doing all these cosmetics, for example, for your husband. That is what the tradition and the culture says. But if you're going into too much cosmetics then you are just showing off to the world. But when you are exposed to the television and these things, then that is what is needed. But when you go to the temple, your cultural things, then you are playing a double role. Here you are on TV, and here you are in your own organization doing your own cultural activities, and you are in temple. That understanding.

The literature on North American norms of widowhood suggest that a Western widow is who she is smoothly across contexts (i.e., Lopata, 1996), and is able to act more independently in providing support for herself (Martin Matthews, 1991), whereas it seems that these Hindu-Canadian widows have to negotiate access to nontraditional contexts on the strength of such transformational assets as education, work, resource or English skills, and adjust themselves accordingly.

In fact, four of these key co-researchers suggest that many of their contemporaries (without benefit of these assets) may have even less latitude, having to adapt to a greater

contextual reductionism and status permeation in their transition from wife to widow. This seems to be reflected in the higher level of categorical determinism in the subsequent life experience of the fifth key co-researcher, whereas a contrasting norm for North American widows is that there is no permanent status to this role of widow (Lopata, 1996).

The portrait provided by this group of key co-researchers is the making of subtle and evolving distinctions between traditional and modern roles, preserving the spirit of the past while incorporating the demands of the present in a manner that is a struggle to honor the predicament of the widow, who feels she must seek validation in the different contexts which the revelation of choice has made for her.

For many of the widows, a common coping strategy of immersion in work, distractive activity, and, primarily, the welfare of their children, is reported to risk the deleterious effects of "overdoing it." At the point of retirement, some of them are awakening to the possibility of satisfying more personal needs, delayed grief work, and a thirst for new sources of validation: "I neglected myself. Now that I have a little bit of time, I do spend it for myself." Some of them were only now reorienting themselves to the tasks of conscious personal adjustment, and two were experiencing symptoms of renewed and vivid loss that seemed retraumatizing in their intensity.

In the case of other widows without a job or financial resource, these four widows describe them as more "vulnerable" and "dependent" after widowhood, in the greater precariousness of having to rely upon the generous attitude of the deceased husband's family, and for some, in having to endure a new servant role as baby-sitter and housekeeper. As one widow observed: "Widows and children, they are not respected, unless she has a hold of her own life. If she is dependent upon,.. even her parents! The parents attitude changes." Aforementioned beliefs also persist in treating widows as objects of ill omen, further reducing her range of motion, a

defining characteristic of purdah. Ancient tropes, myths and assumptions about the widow's dangerous instability persist in the cultural subconscious, perpetuated, for example, in the popular filmic entertainments of movies such as "Premrogue," which constantly refilter the Veda legends. This particular movie focuses on the presumed "dangerousness" of the young widow to the stability of the larger community.

One key co-researcher described feeling "blocked" from doing what she would like to try of "so much else in life," by what she experiences as her families "close watch on me." She feels they want to keep her a "toad in a pond," because of what she sees as a tradition-bound sense of family and personal reputation ("Izaat"). In this she is "mad" that she's "not trusted" by (mostly male) members of her family to uphold their honor. Her and other key co-researchers made it quite clear that this quality of "Izaat" is crucial to one's place in Hindu society. "Maan" is the Sanskrit word for respect (and "Atomaan" the word for disrespect), and you must have the one to have the other. In Hindi, the comparable term for honor and respect is "Aadar," and all of the key co-researchers state that these qualities are always at stake for the Hindu-Canadian widow in particular, and must be protected at all times in her transactions with society. She otherwise risks community isolation.

In their experience of bereavement, these key co-researchers described the imposition of a number of social controls for maintaining fairly rigid role expectations in their subsequent adjustment, as in this recollection:

And because, you know, in Guyana, being in a third world country, you thought that, like, everybody around knew you and if you were, in any way having an affair with this person or that person, the whole village would blackmail you, or, and you're going to be on a black list, you know, that sort of thing. And then also, because I was involved with a religious organization, and reading and all that, I

thought: 'Oh, I want to be a good girl!' [She laughs, claps her hands]. I think that

is what happened.

Yet some significant transitions are also said to be occurring in the Hindu-Canadian communities

which serve to challenge the old customs and controls, and make it easier for the resource(full) to

assert themselves in an expanded mobility. One key co-researcher explained a process of

expansion typical of four of the widows:

> Yes, mostly all their lives they are supposed to wear white but now it is changed.
>
> And nowadays, it is not that important, but when I became a widow it was really
>
> very important. All my relatives, they wanted me to be clad in white. So I think
>
> maybe more than a year, for two years, I wore white, and when I came to Canada,
>
> actually when I first came to Canada I wore something pale, and I could see the
>
> stares from my relatives. Because I didn't want to come here in my white sari. I
>
> didn't want to change it in the plane. I wanted them to know that I am changing.

This key co-researcher made subtle but assertive use of alterations in outward manifestations of

traditional role status, in this case, to declare her aspiration for greater role flexibility, a language

of cultural gesture. Nevertheless, she made this statement as much for the practical purpose of

ensuring a smoother transition into new work in a new country. Another key co-researcher noted

that she is willing to assert her right to adapt as she sees fit, in as much as she also upholds many

of the social imperatives that her potential critics do, finding unspoken, common cause with some

of the more liberal members of her acculturating community:

> Some people have it but not everybody. This leaves a little bit of clash over there.
>
> You are on TV, you are different, and if you are with your community lectures
>
> you are with simple clothing. That is how you explain to them, if the questions
>
> come you have to fight it. I have not really been in a situation where I have to

fight for it but this is where my answer is. If ever that situation comes, this is my explanation. So, it's not really something that is bothering me. I am not into having cosmetics anyway. But I like to have my own style, and if I go on TV I want to look like.. it's nature. Those kinds of situations, if it comes, I will fight for it. I don't know how else to explain to you. It is a modern society now... These are so many,.. specially being in such a community where there is so much happening, right? And like, Indian community is, when you go deep into it, is very complicated.

An additional dimension of the heterogeneous Hindu-Canadian constellation of diasporas and sects is the suggestion by some of the key co-researchers that there are areas of disynchrony in the cultural attitudes they each purvey. Two of the (three) widows who came from outside continental India have the impression that there has been a slower evolution in diaspora communities (i.e., Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana, here too*) than has been the case in India itself. Their feeling is that cultural baggage is heaviest when carried, that for people who are uprooted and transplanted, cultural practice at the time of the move becomes a security blanket. Such peoples, these two believe, develop out of the attitude that: "This is all I have," and "I will hold onto this." In matters of crisis such as widowhood, then, everything that was done in India "kicks in," with reported consequence for status adjustments here. For example, one of these two women reports:

Well, what happens was the, people were brought, from uhm, where were they brought?, from India. These people, like the Hindus are very, very strict there. But these kids were far from home, and they took them from the villages, children for work. And they could be teenagers, 13, 14, 12. So whatever they remembered, they hold onto here. You know what I'm saying, you now? What children brought with them, that's what they started in Fiji. So we're not

replicating,... a whole bunch of,... background like in India. But we turned it up a bit,...

This key co-researcher's grandfather was an overseer, and she was actually born on the plantation where he worked, and the community there as a whole has suffered from subsequent deprivations in the form most recently of a military coup by indigenous forces opposed to Indian influence. This may have reinforced what she observes to be a conservative tendency, although another Fijian key co-researcher attributes liberal tendencies to the Hindu population there.

However, a key co-researcher seems to confirm the former opinion of possible diasporic conservatism:

Because that is what they are brought up in. So they came to Canada, and it isn't either, because you have moved from one country to the next you leave it behind. Whatever cultural traditions and whatever you have, you take them along as baggage's with you. And that is why the way we were brought up in Guyana is similar to how my grandparents were brought up in India, right? So whatever we did there is similar to whatever they did there. And more so, I have been to India twice, I have discovered when I look at the whole system, with Guyana, and the things that they did in Guyana and the way things are, and even here with my husband's people that they do here, it is still,... They have not evolved! The people in India, they have evolved. Like, they want to dress like Michael Jackson and Spice Girls [she laughs]. But the people who have come from India have been uprooted during the British era, and even some of them here, even some of them over here, some of them, such as the Punjabi, wouldn't learn English.

She seems to implicate the potential of relative disadvantage in areas of status transition for Hindu-Canadian widows who originate from these uprooted communities.

One key co-researcher introduces the additional variable in widowhood affliction of internal prejudices. For example, the darker skinned person is said to be subject to diminishment:

You must be on the lookout for that. They are always, a girl with a lighter complexion takes precedence over a girl with a darker complexion. For instance, even in my family, my sister is very fair, and I am dark, and I was always referred to as 'the black one.'.. It is still true, even today. Have you ever looked at the ads in the paper? Read the ads in the 'Link' newspapers. The girl they want is still tall, fair. In the 'Link' newspaper, look in the marriage matrimonial column or even in the 'Voice' newspaper, look in the advertisements and they are asking for girls. The girl has to be slim, tall and fair.

These narratives also suggest reason for caution in assumptions about the viability of family support systems for the widow here. Even the presumed responsibility of (elder) sons in providing filial support does not always hold true, as in the observation by a key co-researcher that it may often be the son's wife who now greatly determines a widow's vulnerability in status transition: "Not the sons, more the daughter-in-laws. Sometimes sons not counted at all. To my knowledge, it's more the women. I am saying that, usually the women, they don't go for it, they don't want their in-laws. In the society, we don't have a place where they can go."

Another key co-researcher elaborates further on what she sees as a current cultural lapse in offering support to those who are in need:

Because they don't really... if you are ok, you're fine, you have money, you can stand, you can socialize, you can do things, [then] you are happy. [But] As soon as you are not able to, for some reason, they turn their backs on you. This is something that I am very honest about, and I am very open about my society. This is something I would like to help Hindus towards. So far there seems there is no

way we can help. We have to come out more in the media on a bigger level than

just on our cultural level.

It is this impression of potential cultural abandonment, and an aforementioned lack of senior's

services and homes, that may contribute to common admissions of "vulnerability" and "worry"

where consideration of the future is invoked.

Theme 4: Hindu-Canadian Widowhood Embodying an Ethic of Collective Good

and Duty-Based Interpersonal Codes

The meanings and expressions of both grief phenomena and status transition in this study

were found to embody an ethic of collective good and duty-based interpersonal codes, rather than

an individually-oriented interpersonal morality. This seems to confirm what has been said

elsewhere (i.e., Shweder & Miller,1991; Miller, 1994), that of a fundamental contrast said to exist

between a typically Hindu conception of the self as inherently relational., and that of a more

Western autonomous self on whose behalf duty is typically portrayed as an unnatural restriction

on this freedom.

The descriptions and views of these key co-researchers do not conform to the latter

interpersonal codex, although their articulated experiences and meanings also make clear that an

acculturative engine is driving a nascent and generational evolution in the collective purpose and

dutiful flavour of the Hindu-Canadian ethos. Nevertheless, the notion of a "glad concurrence"

(O'Flaherty and Derrett, 1978) between duty and one's inherent nature is not only upheld but

intensified in the aesthetic of adjustment described here for older Hindu-Canadian widows. For

example, one of the key co-researchers describes a conception of self-sacrifice that, in her

devotion to her children, is typical of them all: "Yeah, but I think that is not only sacrifice, I saw

that as my duty, I didn't see the sacrifice. I saw it as my duty towards them, and not a sacrifice. I

didn't sacrifice for anything."

Other studies of cultural diversity in the morality of caring have found differences between American and Hindu populations in the development of moral codes. Miller (1994) described a Hindu sense of interpersonal responsibility reflective of what she also concluded was a devotional moral code, one that emphasized "broad and socially enforceable interpersonal obligations, the importance of contextual sensitivity, and a monistic view of individual motivation," whereas a strongly individualistic moral code of personal autonomy and responsibility was indeed found developmentally-typical of Americans, one emphasizing "freedom of choice and a dualistic view of individual motivation" (Miller, 1994).

It must be remembered, however, that while these culturally constructed themes do impinge on behaviour and social interactions, they can also be understood as "instrumental measures" for the attainment of various social or psychological needs, which can alter or switch dependent on situational factors such as those identified by Vincentnathan (1993) as power, self-esteem, hunger, and other variables. Derne (1992) would concur with this notion of cultural relativity, acknowledging "culture's powerful causal significance while also recognizing that individuals are not 'cultural dopes,' but are actively involved in negotiating and contesting cultural norms and meanings." Given aforementioned limits to generalizability, this study is nevertheless suggestive of the twin possibility of a bicultural contesting of norms and meanings, impelled by the presence of "transformational learning" (Bank, 1993) in certain variables of life experience. This is a topic I will return to in discussion of theme five, but a hallmark of what Ishiyama (1995) refers to as "bicultural dislocation" is an ambivalent dissonance with both poles of the cross-cultural experience. In this study, all of the key co-researchers claim an appreciation of Canadian advantages in the status of women, but an equal disapprobrium for what they see as the excesses of material pursuits and undisciplined individualism, such as this common assertion on the

seeming nature of Western relationships: "But here there is separation and all those kinds of things. You can't agree. There is so much happening: 'I want this,' 'You want that,' 'She wants this,' there is no understanding anywhere. There is no compromise."

Equally, however, a clear orientation of the key and general co-researchers involved in this study, regardless of origin in the various Hindu-Canadian communities, is that of a profound investment in the relational., in an underlying dharmic motivation of "right behaviour" toward a goal of socially-defined fulfillment. One of the key co-researchers declares a fundamental divide between Hinduism and host priorities:

> Yes, and it is not 'I, I,' but it is 'we and them,' 'us and our.' And there is too
> much emphasis in this society towards individualism. Yes, it's only 'I, I,' but when
> a girl, when a boy marries, like my younger girl and the older one too, she wants
> her children to know her grandmother and grandfather and have a relationship with
> them. But now, when they're 18 they are moving out, and I think that's a sad
> situation. Because why should children move out at 18, move out of the parent's
> home? I don't understand, and I will never understand.

The traditional Indian family structure reinforces the hierarchical quality of a social life, with the family being its most important unit (Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992), and in a construction of identity that many researchers have also found to be in relational contrast to the Western assumption of a universally autonomous partisan of self (Hoare, 1991; Kakar, 1979; Shweder & Miller, 1991).

The social contract in Hinduism here remains potent in the defining of it's adherents conceptions of "self-in-society," but it's consensus is also seen to be eroding in the acculturative contagion of materialism and a more nuclear family structure that are said to be squeezing out the traditional roles that have sustained the authority and self-validations of the old. All of the key

co-researcher's confirmed and lamented this cultural erosion, with one asserting:

> That's right, that's it! That is a major factor [in widow and elder diminishments]... I don't think they have any role. The parents or the children, they ask them to come here. They fill out the papers, they do everything, and then they think that they have done their duties. No! They are there to take care of the home: to do the dishes, to do the cleaning, cooking. Especially the ladies, to take care of the grandchildren. Yeah!... All the hard labour and no respect. And they have no choice, you know?

This I infer to be a felt erosion of the contribution of culture, then, to a stable sense of meaning.

Theme 5: Functional Liminality out of Bicultural Dislocation and Potentiating Transformative Assets

To begin with, the notion of liminality in this study refers to a relative state of "threshold," to a lived experience of cultural and existential "apartness," wherein the key co-researcher struggles with a feeling of not being wholly or completely at home in the embrace of either culture. It is intended as an evocation of descriptions here of an isolative disquiet, but also of an emboldening and creative sense of borders and boundaries both separating and joining genders and cultures.

In terms of identity development, the status transitions of the key co-researchers in this study suggest a significant degree of liminality in their descriptions of what Ishiyama (1995) has termed a "bicultural dislocation" between the consensual song lines of a "high context" founding culture, and the relatively uncharted (and unmoored) predicaments of the host culture. This seems particularly so in the case of the four widows in whose life experience exposure to potentiating variables of "transformational learning" (Banks, 1993), especially that of education,

has incurred a shift in the cultural paradigms they hold for themselves.

Received truths about identity, gender and purpose now seem to coexist (or are felt to be dissonant) with new canons of "self-in-society" that challenge or expand the old. On the other hand, however, time-honoured cultural values and assumptions still highly prized by these older, 1st generation widows are reported to be lost or at risk of abandonment in the acculturative contagion of modern individualism seen to be at work in their young, both here, and in the founding diasporic context(s). Although these four key co-researchers must, by any standard, be considered skilled and mobile participants in the cultures of host and hearth, they also report varying degrees of what I infer to be existential conflicts of bicultural dislocation.

In a discussion of such conflict, Ishiyama (1995) proposes a framework of four typologies for describing an individual's state of cultural discord, of which its account of bicultural conflict seems relevant to the multi-dimensional ambivalences expressed in this study. These individuals are "poised between," not fully endorsing of certain aspects of both the acculturative host, and the founding culture. In a covert elaboration years in the making, they have become invested in a more personalized system of ethics and interpersonal values than the latter would predict or affirm, yet more relational and spiritual than the former would recognize or reward. Overall, this is less of an overt phenomenon in the experiences of these four key co-researchers. However, two of them in particular were troubled by questions of identity. One has described a sense of existential uncertainty: "Like where do you belong? In which hand are you going to be? You've worked so hard, you've got your family, but do you have a future? Sometimes it hits me.." In looking to the future, another asks: "What am I going to do?, and what for?" These descriptions of dislocation in identity are said to be hallmarks of a state of bicultural conflict, evident, to varying degree, in the four key co-researcher's intimations of a disquieting internal dissonance (Ishiyama, 1995).

Earlier theme discussion has documented how Hindu traditions provided the key co-researchers with prescriptively clear transitions and rites of passage for their experience of widowhood, but they also experience a cultural surround in Canada that is increasingly hollow and dissonant for them in it's supportive capacity. They all expressed some reluctance to share their pains, hassles and aspirations within community groups, in fear of damage to their reputations, in traditional emphasis on self-reliance, and in the residual emotional containment's of purdah, although all of these widows did have much to say about the state of themselves and their culture here, and a certain eagerness with which to say it.

These key co-researchers embrace many perceived advantages of Western freedoms, but also express a discomfort or antipathy for other facets of life here that are considered excessive, immoral or misdirected, as in this widow's ambivalence over the state of modern relationships: "But here there is separation and all those kinds of things. You can't agree. There is so much happening: "I want this,' 'You want that,' She wants this,' there is no understanding anywhere. There is no compromise.." Another key co-researcher decries her status as a widow, but acknowledges a typical impression that: "It is better for my generation because we have privileges. And our awareness is better to deal with in situations like this [i.e., widowhood], and maybe for them [i.e., her mother's generation] would have been even more difficult."

The ambivalences expressed by these key co-researchers, four in particular, are also directed at their own cultural community's acculturating and generational priorities, which to their minds represent an abandonment of much that they themselves hold dear. Neither cultural entity can now entirely satisfy their own unique moral elaboration. For example, on the topic of power relations between the sexes, one key co-searcher describes what she sees as a misperception of the younger generation:

Yes! Especially in Canada. They are become very liberated, really, and sometimes

I feel sorry for them because they don't understand the true meaning of liberated women. Here people come from the religious and men are quite, they are very strong, and there is some abuse too. But the younger generation, they are coming up with very strong views. That they are very independent, they don't care what anybody.. This is not balanced! Before, the men. Still they are very strong, they abuse. Now the younger generation, they think they are superior and they can pounce on the men. So, either this side is up or this side is up, it is not balanced. I don't know what is going to be in the future, because wherever the excess is, is wrong. You have to have balance too. You have some rights, you have some duties! You have some rights, you have some duties, you go on very well. If you think about your rights only, you forget your duties. That is wrong. If you just think about your duties and you feel you have no rights, that is wrong too. That is also wrong. It has to be balanced. This is unbalanced now, on both sides. Maybe they are not mature enough to know what freedom is... They have freedom in everything. If you have freedom in everything, you can't be a success. If you have duties in everything, you can't be a success. It is very important that you have to tell men that you have rights too, but don't forget your duties. But for the younger generation I think this is what is happening here. They know their rights but they forget their duties. And men, they are very strong but they are abusive too. That is also wrong. So maybe one day they will be balanced and they will know each other better and they will know the meaning of freedom.

These four key co-researchers all point to their upbringing and the experience therein of certain critical variables of transformative opportunity, to account for their altered perspective and consequently greater sense of efficacy. These include education (primarily), work, financial

control, English skills, the presence in their youth of a strong grandparental (usually female) mentor, diasporic origins and degree of orthodoxy. This is an efficacy filtered through strongly held cultural imperatives, though, in an attitude of ambivalence with both poles of the acculturated present:

> Of course, I don't believe in women's lib. My views about women's lib is that
>
> women are already liberated. Who says they are not liberated, right? [she laughs].
>
> I believe that women are always liberated, but they have to take it into their own
>
> and say: 'Yes, I am liberated.' And we don't have to fight with men to say: 'Ok,
>
> we are not liberated,' right? Who's going to liberate us? The men will liberate us?
>
> We have to liberate ourselves, right? I see this as education playing a major role
>
> in this.

In other words, their view is that Hindu women may need only the catalyst of a consciousness-raising education to create for themselves the transformative conditions of an internal liberation.

All of these women also experienced an early exposure to an indomitable female figure in their family, typically a grandmother, who encouraged them in independence, education, self-reliance and moral development. To the question of where she got her independent nature, one key co-researcher replied:

> That is my grandmother, I think. She was a very independent woman, and my
>
> mother is not,...and my father too, but my grandmother was, as I recollect now,
>
> was a very independent lady. She was a widow. She took hold of everything, she
>
> wasn't educated but she did very well in her life. Because I was the first born I
>
> had some time to spend with her. I was about 15 or 16 years old when she died.
>
> I enjoyed her company. I used to admire her a lot. She was the leader of the
>
> locality. When everyone had problems, they used to come to her and ask her

advice and she was a very kind lady. If somebody needed something my grandmother never said no to anyone. That is what I admired. She had to manage everything in the locality.

This vignette illustrates not only the influential mentorship present in the formative years of most of the key co-researchers, but also, I think, suggests something about the means of transmitting cultural imperatives and ethical lessons in traditional Hinduism. Subramuniyaswami (1993) too, has alluded to a mentor role of later life in keeping with that described as a natural stage of "elder advisor" in Vedic scripture. In the narratives of this study, I infer that this was a moral office occupied by the grandparents in the family constellation, but a role more and more dislodged for widows and the elderly in a more nuclear family, and by a seeming parental tendency to more often expect the duties of a servant class.

Linguistic difficulties are also said to contribute to an erosion of vitality in culture, to the extent that much of it's decentralized, osmotic character relies on the wisdom and availability of the older generation. Nowadays, however, grandparents are relied upon more in the actual raising of kids, which can entail a breakdown in communication, cultural transmission and respect for elders if the parents are absent (working), and the grandparents have insufficient English skills or energy. A key co-researcher eloquently defines the problem as follows:

I think it depends on the grandparents. If they are very much attached and they are willing to work a lot, the grandchildren, they become attached to the grandparents. But most of the grandparents, unlike their children, they are not educated, especially in Surrey, they come from the villages... Sometimes there is no relationship like a grandfather or grandmother for the grandchildren. Because they can't communicate properly, because of the language barriers. And when you can't communicate properly, how can you be intimate? Because you don't

understand. Their attitudes to life very different than the grandchildren, and you know, you can't come together. It's so difficult. The children from what I have seen, what I have observed, the children, they don't respect the grandparents. It is a human psychology. You respect a person who you think she or he is great, only them respect. When you feel that those people, the grandparents, they are not up to their standards, you can't respect them. Just love, can't make them together. There is no point of love, there has to be some respect, there has to be some communication, there has to be some understanding, and when there is no understanding how can you expect the grandchildren to get very close to the grandparents? So this is what is happening in Canada in our community.

She very directly implicates a progressive erosion in, and incompatibilities of, language(s) between generations, which for her, along with an apparently increasing parental withdrawal from child-rearing duties, means an erosion in the Hindu-Canadian community's capacity for sustaining its cultural integrity, intergenerational relations and the transmission of ethical principle, along with traditional elder and widow roles. Earlier statistical discussion revealed a significant difference between the Sikh community and the Hindu communities in their respective ability to maintain linguistic integrity, with subsequent key and general co-researcher confirmations of Hinduisms' relative lack of success in promoting its language amongst the young. In this respect, however, other cross-cultural research suggests that widows at "greatest 'ethnic distance' from the mainstream" suffer from greater psychological pains (Martin Matthews, 1991), and the position "that ethnic enclaves may be less effective in old age for buffering stress" (McCallum & Shadbolt, 1989). It may be a difficult question of balance, then, in a culture protecting itself as a source of stable meaning, while also reducing any isolative risks for its most vulnerable constituents in particular. After all, Cancelmo, Millan and Vazquez (1990) have documented the buffering effect

of culture to a stable sense of meaning in life, in that culture, as the framework for perception of reality, shapes both "the inner conflict and symptom presentation" of its constituents in the experience of widowhood and other traumas.

Other transformational variables contributed to a greater "awareness of themselves as a resource for creating supports" (Martin Matthews, 1991), as in this key co-researcher's declaration of internal fortitude: "You know, circumstances that make you a lot more of what you are. You have to fight your way, otherwise, just sitting where you are, you can't go. I think circumstances make a great deal of difference in anybody's life. Anybody's!" As in descriptions of an optimal stabilization of a bicultural conflict state (Ishiyama, 1995), the experiences of some of the key co-researchers indicate that their functional liminality has the potential to move from manufacturing dissent, in the ambivalence of covert challenge to paradigms both old and new, to a more intrinsic fusion in a stable transcultural self. In the meantime, the functional liminality of four of the key co-researchers suggests a creative ability for such "transformationally-armed" women to covertly subvert many of the traditional status restrictions on (their expanded) social participation.

This seems to be a shift toward a greater aspiration voiced in the personhood of the Hindu-Canadian widows in this study, and though often experienced as uncomfortable by these key co-researchers, may be in the service of forming a more indigenous sensibility of Hinduism here.

Theme 6: Spiritual Opportunity in Widowhood

A fundamental meaning of widowhood expressed by these key co-researchers was a sense of it's spiritual opportunity, a time of maximizing one's karmic assets in good works and practiced serenity, this as a necessary precursor to a spiritual ascendancy in the next life. For this

end, Hinduism offers a prescription:

> You prepare yourself for death... Yes, learning to be peaceful, and not only for
>
> death, for life after death. For after you have died, this body, what happens to
>
> your soul? Because I am a firm believer of law of karma and I believe that this
>
> body is not my only body. I am,.. this is not my only time that I make this trip.
>
> My souls was already there and it will be there. And I believe in the evolution of
>
> the soul, from lower to high, and you can only achieve that,.. so if I want my soul
>
> to evolve as a higher soul, therefore in this life I have to do those things which I
>
> feel will be able to elevate my soul.

As with the progression of increasingly spiritual teachings in the Gita, the transition from
wife to older widow tends to coincide with what is a natural chapter in the life of the Hindu
elderly, that of increasing detachment from the cares of the material world in preparation for
death's release, and a subsequent karmic rebirth that can be made susceptible to the quality of this
preparation. As described in earlier discussion, the nature of dharma as a shared Hindu
philosophy of personal development, is a theory of the "natural expression and maturing of the
body, mind and emotions through four stages of earthly life: student, householder, elder advisor
and religious solitaire" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). For the older widow's time of life, as with all
others, the Vedic scriptures prescribe: "Pursuit of the duties of the stage of life to which one
belongs - that, verily, is the rule! Others are like branches of a stem. With this, one tends
upwards; otherwise, downwards" (Subramuniyaswami, 1993). It is in this light that one widow
describes what she sees as the duties of her age:

> That is why I have to live my life. I have to do my meditation, I have to do my
>
> reading. And you know, in Hinduism, they give you.. they prescribe.. you have a
>
> plan, you should do your meditation, you should do your prayers. Read

philosophical books, be kind, don't take everything. You want everything, [but] you should be giving to others and to the unfortunate, and all that. So all these are qualities that one can inculcate in one's life.

And it is in this sense that four of these key co-researchers wished also to be free in the seniority of their widowhood to pursue and exhaust the additional opportunities for karmic reward (and honor to husband), which their expanded transformational "self-in-society" made available. So too did the fifth key co-researcher from her more traditional perspective.

They all five, however, share satisfaction in many of the age-old means of achieving serenity and reputation in the old paradigms of Hindu widowhood and advancing years. One key co-researcher described a common pleasure found in various cultural familiars, including a marked tendency for immersion in musical expression:

> Other than meditation, spa, yoga and reading scriptures, playing music. I love music but sometimes I am too tired, overdoing things, but that is one thing I really enjoy. I sometimes can sit for hours and hours and just listen to the music. That is very soothing. I have a harmonium. I have other little instruments. I am not a singer or anything but I just keep myself going that way, there is a lot of happiness around.

It must be remembered that Ayurvedic traditions also contribute to the way in which these key co-researchers experience many symptoms of distress, as well as the manner in which they seek to alleviate them in preventative health measures and relaxation. Ayurdedic practitioners ("vaidyas") use techniques such as "pulse diagnosis" to isolate what is thought to be imbalance in a person's unique blend of character type (dosha), and prescribe compensatory changes in lifestyle habits and diet. (Svoboda, 1992). This latter step is reflected in much of what these key co-researchers do to help alleviate

the stress of grief and isolation. These Ayurvedic practitioners and beliefs represent what Kleinman (1984) refers to as the "folk" sphere of influence in his larger model of three health care domains: popular, folk and professional. Each of these domains is said to embody "a sociocultural system with its own beliefs, values and norms and its own explanatory model of health and illness" (Kleinman & Chrisman, 1983). As its own "meaning context" of care, Kleinman's (1984) folk sphere encompasses community experts or nonprofessional healers such as the "vaidyas" of Ayurvedic lore. Closer attention paid to Hindu-specific understandings of health and personality would facilitate sensitivity to a Hindu-Canadian widow's implementation of seemingly idiosyncratic yet deeply-held cultural lifeways in her response to bereavement.

For example, a central feature of Ayurvedic medicine is its holistic view of the person as being uniquely greater than the sum of his or her parts, and its strongly preventative approach to illness (Wigood, 1997). This orientation to health teaches a proactive self-monitoring, for early-stage symptom recognition and management, before disease can develop. It has also been confirmed by key and general co-researchers that Ayurveda strongly encourages various forms of spiritual technique such as meditation, mantras, yoga or prayer to maximize one's potential and to insulate against stress, with additional common-sensical elements for a daily regimen including "rising early, eating simple foods, making lunch the main meal of the day, taking short walks to aid digestion, and going to bed early (Wigood, 1997). Without exception, the key co-researchers in this study followed such Ayurvedic recommendations to the letter, with the playing or enjoyment of various Indian musical instruments being an additional source of comfort and release. It has been suggested (i.e., Thompson, 1989) that urban setting, higher education or level of acculturation are likely to affect the degree to which such traditional health

conceptions and practices are adhered to (i.e., Waxler-Morrison et al., 1992), with geographic variations also shaping their flavour (Lambert, 1992). However, the data in this study suggests that, although education in particular proved critical in other areas of key co-researcher adjustment, their allegiance to these folk and common-sense (Kleinman, 1984) remedies were little affected by such dichotomies.

In more general terms, though, these key co-researchers describe their experience of a felt erosion in the previous grandparental or elder role of being authoritative in the extended or nuclear family. After a lifetime of experience, and in the supporting ecological context of country of origin, they had been respected for this, for being meaning full, wisdom full, a living repository for, and embodiment of, all that Hinduism intends, a matured personhood.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

<u>Discussion</u>

The status transition from wife to widow was a process of grief that did not follow a linear progression of discrete stages, nor was recovery the central meaning of their experience of loss. Rather, grief unfolded in a pattern of unpredictable recurrence, with waves of sorrow that did not culminate, described as only abating in some areas or even worsening in others.

Although a majority of Western literature on grief would indicate a conclusion to mourning in a final state of acceptance, this assumption was not supported in the data of this study. Instead of full acceptance of their husband's death, these key co-researchers acknowledged their new status of widowhood with a transition of gradual resignation.

This resigned composure has also been identified in other studies which treated core themes of grief (i.e., Carter, 1989; Cochran & Claspell, 1987). The notion of grief as an unfolding process of years rather than as a crisis to be resolved was supported in Zisook and Schuchter's (1986) study of a general population of widows, although this is at variance with traditional Western and psychiatric notions of grief recovery.

These key co-researchers felt comforted by the belief that their husband's life force was still at work as an intrinsic part of their own cultural care lifeways. Similar conclusions were reported in Rosenbaum's (1991) study of Greek-Canadian widows, whose culturally-influenced pattern of gradual submission to the loss of their spouse was also founded in active and continuing evocations of his lifeways.

In contrast to conclusions in the psychiatric literature that any sensing of the departed husband's presence is pathological (i.e., Clayton et al., 1968), several key co-researchers in this study reported sensing their husband's spiritual presence, attesting to the fact and value of cultural variety in grief phenomena. This seems to be one way for such widows to revisit core sources of

guidance, as well as care.

A double affliction seemed to follow the death of their husbands, in a transition from wife to widow that entailed losses in both the personal domain of intimacy and partnership, and in the social domain of status and role. Social controls were instituted to enforce an implicit reduction in community and religious participation, and in the maintenance of more sharply defined roles in the transactions described by these key co-researchers. In contrast, a defining theme of modern widowhood is that there is no permanent status to this role of widow in North America (Lopata, 1996),

A great number of grief care practices were observed to ease the transition from widhwa to putney for this sample of Hindu-Canadian widows, such as the bringing of food, offering encouragement's and visiting. Many other grief care practices fulfilled the function of detaching the wife from her departed spouse, while at the same time furthering a particular quality of attachment to his memory in the wife's absorption of his core cultural care lifeways. Meanings and expressions of grief centered on beliefs about the enduring and eternal nature of the husband's life force as an intrinsic and essential part of the widow's own cultural care lifeways.

The rites of separation were defining of a transitional period of specific cultural mourning, involving a typically 13 day funeral period, and a subsequently declining schedule of half yearly ("charimaasi") and annual ("barsi") anniversaries of the spouses death. The 13 day funeral period itself was marked by rites and practices which allowed the widow to share her grief with family, friends and the larger community. These rites of passage of the Hindu-Canadian culture as described in this study seek to modulate the depth and length of the "crisis presented by death," to manage and dissipate the individual and social disorganization attendant on this trauma through methods akin to those in its heritage used also to manage the living, while at the same time informing its constituents with the essence and unique detail of its own worldview (Counts &

Counts, 1991). The experiences of the key co-researchers in this study reflect the belief that "variations in mortuary patterns may, consciously or unconsciously, embody elements of a society's social structure" (Ramsden, 1991).

Various rites of passage also sought to prescribe a narrowly-defined incorporative identity of the penitent widow, in the seclusionary traditions of "purdah," an outcome found wanting for much of this sample as either a hindrance to subsequent adjustment, particularly for the four transformationally-liminal key co-researchers, or increasingly untenable through acculturative isolation in Canada.

Their belief that "everything goes on" despite the gravity of their loss was a significant feature of their resigned composure, and was expressed in active and ongoing evocations of the departed husband. These features are in accord with Leininger's (1988) prediction that a culture's world view, social structure, language and ecological context will strongly influence the cultural care practices and expressions that promote adaptation.

Similarly, the notion of a "glad concurrence" (O'Flaherty & Derrett, 1978) was not only upheld but intensified in these widow's embrace of dutiful activity in their family and community networks, evidencing the ethic of collective good and duty-based interpersonal moral codex that was also central to their meanings and experiences of widowhood adjustment. Immersion in the welfare of their children was not perceived as self-sacrifice, but as a natural source of personal fulfillment in duty, both to them and to their spouses memory. The influence of family, along with social networks and community, comprises a central portion of the "meaning context" of what Kleinman (1984) refers to as the "popular" sphere for conceiving of health and care. This too, is in interaction with two other structural domains of meaning, "folk" and "professional," in his larger explanatory model of trauma and wellness in respective cultures (Kleinman, 1984). Hinduism can be said to embody a unique balance of influence in these domains, but delicately so

in the acculturative press of life in Canada.

A supposition of liminality in this study is founded on the description of varying degrees of bicultural tension, or dissonant ambivalence, on the part of four of the key co-researchers. What Ishiyama (1995) has described as "bicultural dislocation," is here referred to as both a result of acculturative pressures and a consequence of what I identify as transformational variables, or "assets" in the creative use to which they have often been put. Accounted of greatest significance is the presence of education in the life experience of a Hindu widow, in its potential for incurring a shift in the very nature of her thinking, in her perspective on the world, and her place in it. The "transformational learning" (Banks, 1993) that causes challenge to old paradigms of widowhood can fuel a bicultural disquiet with aspects of the culture of departure, alongside an equal ambivalence for aspects of the culture of arrival., this incurred by strongly held founding principles, and by other variables of transformation more embedded in the founding fabric of Hindu tradition. These latter variables of embedded assertion might include the example of an indomitable and respected grandmaternal figure, or an upbringing in a more permissive branch of Hinduism, such as Arja Samaj.

In the themes of Hindu-Canadian meanings and experiences discussed here, common ground exists with general themes of grieving such as that identified by Cochran and Claspell (1987) for a North American sample. Similarly, these are discussed as fluid and interwoven categories of bereavement meanings, with one theme of grieving, for example, being described as a sense of loss that was experienced as a "central condition of existence," often unrecognized until the object of loss was gone (Cochran & Claspell, 1987). Another was the "spread of loss," re-experienced in more and deeper associations, or the existential "experience of a void," variously described as a "hollowness" or "nothingness" to life (Cochran & Claspell, 1987).

These indicate a direct kinship to themes of loss and desolation in the narratives of key co-

researchers here, even in women who embody very different moral orientations and relational perspectives. Other studies on the experience of widows in the West report similar themes of impaired identity (Parkes, 1996), while additional themes of grief found in the West were an "intensity of pain," involving a longing to reclaim the object of loss, as well as a "numbed involvement in the world" where "while the world is locked out... the person is locked in" (Cochran & Claspell, 1987). There are evident similarities between such Western themes of loss, and that of themes described here for Hindu-Canadian key co-researchers in the personal domain of intimacy and emotional partnership. But in the double affliction of status loss and role permanence, there seems to be much less kinship between host and this acculturated sample of Hindu-Canadian widows.

However, given aforementioned features of Hindu widowhood atonement, and reports in this study of a more precarious patrilineal context, themes of grief found for this North American sample such as "fear of the unfamiliar" or "concern for the future," "isolation and loneliness," and "sense of strain in relations with others" (Cochran & Claspell, 1987), may well have been experienced somewhat differently by these key co-researchers, along a more relational dimension of greater impairment to identity (i.e., "I knew who I was.."), and in a subtly greater expectation of isolation and passivity that may have been conditioned in the Hindu seclusionary practice of purdah.

A fundamental meaning of status transition abstracted from the narratives of these key co-researchers was a strong sense of its spiritual opportunity, in the comfort of both immediate and on-going culture-specific prayer and grief practice, and in the provision of meaning and ethical guidance over the years of subsequent adjustment.

Moreover, the cultural expectations of older Hindu widowhood in this study are an aesthetic of the ascetic, in assumptions still of atonement and seclusion, but which coincide with

what is considered a natural chapter of spiritual preparation for all Hindus in their seniority, of either gender. Observation and conversation with the key co-researchers and other general co-researchers confirmed that a preoccupation of the elderly is in just this maximizing of spiritual potential or karmic value, and seems to assist these key co-researchers in solace for their loss, in active evocations of their spouse, in providing new sources of self-validation and reward for competencies of higher concentration, and in enhancing the serenity and sense of cultural integrity for buffering against stress. A tendency toward a future orientation was inferred from a sense of investment in their spiritual ascendancy presumed in the next life, and in the one after that. For this end, Hinduism offers a vast array of prescription in prayer, readings, celibacy, mantras, malas, Ayurvedic practices, good works and other measures of spiritual and personal maturation, notwithstanding what they all described as a felt erosion in previous grandparental roles and authority remembered in founding contexts of culture and extended family.

One other conclusion of this study is a caution about categorizing grief expressions into Western assumptions of "pathological" and "normal.," without a prior exploration and understanding of culture-specific care beliefs, practices and values. Additional studies of widows from the many Canadian cultural communities would assist in the creation of a larger body of transcultural comparative data for the purpose of better defining commonalities as well as differences in the meanings and experiences of widowhood.

Implications for Counselling

In this sample, the counselling tasks of the older Hindu-Canadian widow are revealed to be complex and problematic, and the provision of culturally congruent service must be a central goal of planning for this encounter.

The literature suggests that counsellors frequently recommend or refer to group counselling and issue-specific self-help groups when dealing with widows (i.e., Rosenbaum, 1991). Yet for Hindu-

Canadians, and for 1ˢᵗ generation widows in particular, public display or revelation of negative feelings in the process of ventilating their emotions of grief would not be culturally congruent with what has been observed of practice and preference for this group of key co-researchers. They also report the second-hand impression that 2ⁿᵈ generation Hindu widows might be more amenable to such intervention, and may even be less restrained in emotional expression than older, less acculturated widows, although it is also suggested by many key and general co-researchers that social sanctions may be even more dire for the younger Hindu widow. In any case, a consideration of generational diversities should be a part of treatment planning. Language barriers also present a likely barrier for participation in this sort of setting, in their reports of a great number of older widows for whom English is difficult or unknown. These latter women are also likely to be at an even greater remove from the cultural mainstream in their preferences and vulnerability to conservative family pressures, further reducing the relevance of group or self-help assistance for their counselling tasks.

While self-help in informal gatherings of women seniors has been reported as the sole outlet for counsel and commiseration in this sample, echoed in data quoted in d'Ardenne and Mahtani (1989) that "self-help, advocacy and liaison may still provide the first, and for some the only, counselling contact," this assistance has nevertheless taken the form of a highly constrained or "whispered" outlet. Evidence of highly rigid role expectations for Hindu women, and for widows in particular, seems to further discourage their access to counselling and other resources. Hindu women still seem to absorb stigma more easily than do men, and a cultural imperative of maintaining public reputation ("Izaat") at all costs seems to contribute to reduced or constrained help-seeking behaviors in this sample.

A number of studies (i.e., Gratton & Wilson, 1988; Pellman, 1992) offer cautions to counsellors and other health care professionals about the wisdom of placing any undue reliance upon the families of the elderly minority client who is widowed or otherwise single. Such studies indicate that professionals should be sensitive to the risk of strains and impoverishments in tapping the depth or

flexibility of assistance available from minority family networks. Additional evidence cited in Webb-Johnson (1991) confirms that Western stereotypes of the extended Indian family lending support for problems in the family such as marital discord are often harmful myths, which allow health care professionals to absolve themselves of the system's responsibility to offer more culturally relevant services. In any case, another study by Brown (1984) discovered that only 16 percent of Indian and Asian households are extended families. Closer to home, the present study indicates a sample of relatively cohesive but still reduced and increasingly isolated family structures. As noted earlier, little literature exists on this population, but all of the key co-researchers described an under-availability of community support here, and most implicated a sense of reduced or vulnerable family resource.

In terms of "cultural care preservation" (Leininger, 1988), older Hindu-Canadian widows may benefit from a stabilization of their cultural care lifeways, with due consideration of the presence of extended family, transformative assets, religious affiliation and level of acculturation. Enhanced family and religious ties may serve them well, and it might be wise to include the family in treatment planning. Counsellors should not assume that filial support is provided by the sons. Nor should they assume that it is adequate, as indications from this study are that some widows are cared for by their daughters, although most live with their sons, and that daughters-in-law may have more influence than sons in provision of care. For enhancing the widow's sources of self-validation (Ishiyama, 1995), all of the key co-researchers in this study claim benefit from "doing good works," for reasons of productive activity, self-worth and karmic value.

"Cultural care accommodation" (Leininger, 1988) might entail an awareness by Counsellors both of the prayerful attachments many Hindu-Canadian widows have for such culture-specific practices as mantra and mala, as well as of certain cultural sensitivities about public reputation ("Izaat"), for which respect is recommended in dealing with any reluctance on their part to disclose feelings that they adjudge likely to cause dishonor.

More indigenously, I have found that there are a significant number of women volunteers in the various community centres around the lower mainland where Indo-Canadian populations are concentrated, and that they are quietly involved in organizing or supporting ongoing women's group for senior's, and sometimes even groups for senior men, in a seeming preponderance of women in the general corps of Hindu volunteerism. These are also generally in settings apart from the actual temple. The groups themselves are generally mixed groups of Hindu, Sikh or other Indian women seniors, and so far none of them are specifically oriented to widowhood issues. They generally offer advocacy and translation services, but they do not serve as agents of referral for counsel. Mental health outreach to these informal groups, volunteers, and their community centre staff sponsors, many of whom are hired from the cultural communities, might be a fruitful avenue of encouraging therapeutic contacts or workshops through such trusted figures, as some of the key co-researchers have suggested a greater awareness be brought to bear on the issues of grief and disability for widows and the elderly. It is to be hoped this might also be occasion for such public health agencies to commit themselves to further (and ongoing) education on the particular health care needs of the Hindu communities and beyond.

Unfortunately, it has been the case that clients of Indian origin in Britain and elsewhere in the West have been less likely to be referred to counselling or psychotherapy as a result of the frequent professional perception that they think of distress only in somatic or spiritual terms, and are lacking in a level of sophistication sufficient for psychological insight, which is patent nonsense (Webb-Johnson, 1991). A relative prevalence of Ayurvedic thinking and practical strategies on preventative health, confirmed also in this study, are influential but not uncomplimentary to an educated psychotherapy. For the purposes of congruent counselling practice, widows in the Hindu-Canadian communities may tend to express a sociocentric construction of identity, and any therapeutic presumptions of self-interest and autonomy may be at odds with many of the crucial supports and explanatory systems identified in this study. Many other ethnic constituents of our multicultural fabric (i.e., Native, Japanese or Asian)

might also define therapeutic success, in death as in life, in terms of enhanced interdependence within the family constellation, "rather than emancipation from it" (Beiser, 1985).

On the other hand, the liminal condition postulated for four of the key co-researchers in this study may resonate with aspects of a trend identified in the Western experience of widowhood. For some, the modern experience of being widowed may contain the seeds of opportunity for significant personal growth and the assertion of new roles, as suggested early on by Lopata (1975):

> What may be happening, although there are not many indications as yet of an overwhelming trend, is that women freed from the controls of the family institution through widowhood may be purposely disrupting the vestiges of their prior role clusters after the 'grief work' is done and entering roles and lifestyles that they never would have considered in girlhood and wifehood, becoming independent functioning units rather than being dependent upon passive acceptance of membership in units dominated by others (p. 233).

Although Lopata (1975) was not referring directly to widowhood in cultural communities, nor is it the case that the key co-researchers in this study are desirous of fully autonomous functioning, an awareness of possible expansions in "prior role clusters," or of transformational assets, seems appropriate in considering the acculturative predicaments of widows from all cultural communities.

Nevertheless, it has been noted earlier that a signal theme of women in North America is the perception that the widow is entering "a natural chapter in the life of a woman" (Amelkar, 1987), and for whom Western societies generally sanction a fresh start in a self-directed adjustment to her new circumstance. Participation in public and religious life, along with the possibility of remarriage, are little discouraged in the West (Lopata, 1996). This has not been one of the central meanings of widowhood adjustment for this group of key co-researchers.

Older Hindu-Canadian widows may wish to preserve many of their cultural lifeways, including

the incorporative roles of mentorship in transmitting to the young the moral qualities of essential Hinduism. Bonds within family constellations may be less viable as sources of validation, as acculturated family systems are reported to offer reduced opportunities for affirmation in previously rewarded competencies (Ishiyama, 1995).

Finally, counsellors might attempt what Leininger (1988) has referred to as a "repatterning" of any tendency toward diagnosing pathological grief in Hindu-Canadian widows who articulate their experience of recurrent waves of sorrow over many years. With benefit of further research in this area, counsellors might come to an understanding that a culturally normative pattern of grief expression for these widows is an emotional undulation that may only abate over time but not fully or completely cease.

A further "repatterning" might be assisted by the counsellor in the additional grief work entailed by possible bicultural conflict (Ishiyama, 1995), such as for those identified in this study as being functionally liminal. They might be faced with the additional counselling tasks of both grieving home and hearth, but aided through the initialing of a more personal construction of self-in society, in what might be conceived of as a transcultural self-identity dialectically astride the contributions of both (Ishiyama, 1995). Optimal adjustment to widowhood might well be tied to successful growth in both arenas of identity.

Ultimately, an essential implication for the counselling field is to seek ways and means of fostering an enhanced sense of self-validation for widows, in the assumption that all individuals are inherently purposive in this regard, and that many dimensions of self may be affected by such loss. A holistic regrouping from bereavement trauma, taking into account, in this case, the complications and unique features of their Hindu-Canadian experience, might proceed through the creative and participative elaboration's of a methodology such as the validationgram (Ishiyama, 1995). It is intended as a means to articulate a client's particular universe of means and associations, in an effort to

organize and galvanize a response of new or restored sources of validation after a life transition or trauma such as widowhood (Ishiyama, 1995). It is specifically a collaboration between client and counsellor, entailing a willingness and responsibility on the part of the therapist to enter the world of the client, rather than simply to direct or observe from outside the process. A collaborative approach to counselling would seem appropriate to the relational and collective tendencies identified in this sample of older Hindu-Canadian widows.

Implications for Future Research

The intention of this study is to increase knowledge about aspects of the Canadian cross-cultural experience in general., and of the experience and meanings of widowhood to Hindu-Canadian women in particular. It is intended to offer a starting point for further work with this population to confirm and enlarge professional knowledge of the characteristic health care needs of a dynamic constituent of our multicultural mosaic, for consideration and comparison with the unique features and needs of other traditional cultures undergoing acculturation, and for the transcultural evolution of currently inadequate philosophies and practice in Western health care systems.

It must be said that this study, in the tradition of the qualitative method, and in its relatively small sample size, cannot be considered authoritative beyond the immediate and limited context of the key co-researchers themselves. The observations, suppositions and suggestions arising from this research are intended only as useful starting points for further investigations with this population and beyond in the cultural communities of B.C and Canada.

For example, indications are that Hindu-Canadian widows who do not speak English may be disadvantaged relative to those who participated in this study, and their experiences and meanings of widowhood may well differ from those discussed here. A fertile topic of subsequent research would be to further elaborate on this area of transcultural understanding with the Hindu-Canadian community's. This would likely entail the involvement of Hindi-speaking researchers, or perhaps the innovative

challenges of working meticulously and sensitively through trained interpreters.

In terms of counselling practice, the tentative conclusions represented in this study's elaboration of six themes of Hindu-Canadian widowhood might be usefully adapted to a sensitizing of therapeutic encounter with this population. For example, Ishiyama's (1995) multi-dimensional self-validation model suggests that "identity" comprises only one of five spheres of potential (in)validation. From this perspective, marginalizations or deprivations in "meaning," "self-worth," "competence" or "security" (Ishiyama, 1995) may also deleteriously impinge upon a Hindu-Canadian widow's sense of self. Their corrollaries in feelings of meaninglessness, unworthiness, incompetence and insecurity will have their say in the internal dialogue of constructing self. Indeed, what this study documents about eroded or lost cultural familiars, status loss, and in socio-cultural reinforcements for previously rewarded competencies, may incur self-damage to a degree greater for an entity so steeped in the relational.

Moreover, invalidation's in one or more of these areas may undermine any one of what Ishiyama (1989) conceives of as a person's five "selves:" (a) the "physical"; (b) the "familial"; (c) the "socio-cultural"; (d) the "transcultural" and; (e) the "transpersonal" self. For example, then, residual influences of purdah in reduced social and religious participation might foster a reduced sense of self-worth and personal meaning in the "socio-cultural self," just as diminishments in elder roles and mentorship may occasion damage in the "familial self." On another dimension, the priority of vegetarian or Ayurvedic-influenced foods noted in this study, if discouraged or unavailable, might entail feelings of loss or anxiety in the "physical self." The suggestion of a degree of liminality in this study's specific context, might have direct implication in considering the "transcultural self."

Of course, Ishiyama (1989) intends a holistic portrait of how these conceptions of self are experienced phenomenologically. Nevertheless, future research might usefully pursue finer-grained improvements in our transcultural understanding of Hindu-Canadian populations both through this

multi-dimensional perspective on self-(in)validation, as well as through the suggestive thematic richness obtained from this limited qualitative sample.

This study might also assist in encouraging the likelihood of help-seeking behaviors for those needing assistance in the various Hindu communities, should individual counsellors or agencies avail themselves of its' context-specific and conditional implications for sensitivity, tact and resource in reaching out to the Hindu-Canadian communities.

CHAPTER 7: EPILOGUE

A Personal Journey

I began this project with great optimism and curiosity, yet burdened somewhat with predictions of an inaccessible population, and of difficulties ahead in my obtaining the necessary female co-researchers, given my status both as male and white. Not least, in proposing a study on the meaning and experiences of widowhood for a sample of the Hindu-Canadian population, I little knew how subsequent life experience would have me write my own share of meaning into a number of life transitions.

With the assistance of many colleagues, fellow students and professors, I have been privileged to complete this research study, buoyed by an enormous sense of welcome and trust from the women whose narratives are central to its purpose, and from the enveloping communities in which they find solace, strength, and occasional pain. I have learned much in the process, about resilience, about the nature of identity and knowledge, and about the paradoxical value of remaining true to oneself while being equally receptive to other ways of being.

I do not kid myself, this has been the most difficult and most rewarding challenge of my Master of Arts experience. Intimidating and draining, it has also been an opportunity for considerable personal growth, and I am encouraged by my ability to overcome obstacles real and exaggerated in proving the viability of both transcultural and transgender communication and understanding in some small measure that I can call my own. I have been moved by the trust implicit in the confidences shared with me by these five key co-researchers, and by the many other general co-researchers who offered invaluable assistance and insight along the way. One key co-researcher described the "golden ears" of anyone in my role as cultural investigator, from which I leave this study with a higher sense of responsibility and personal aspiration, and I step out fortified for the next challenges to be set for myself.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF CONTACT

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF CONSENT

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE QUESTIONS – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

SAMPLE QUESTIONS – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

A Qualitative Study on the Meaning of Widowhood for Hindu-Canadians

Procedures:

"Before we begin, I'll explain to you the procedures that I am required to follow."

"I'm taping this interview so that I can listen to it again and write down the main ideas from our conversation. No one else will listen to the tape and I will erase it after this study is complete."

"You can withdraw your participation from this study at any time, or decline to answer any of my questions. I know that talking about yourself as a widow may sometimes feel uncomfortable, so if you ever decide that you don't want to continue, just let me know and I'll stop the session."

Introduction

A number of interview approaches will be used to get at the meanings and features of a co-researcher's experience of widowhood. They will range from broad, open-ended, exploratory statements such as "Tell me about..." or "I would like to learn more about...". One might be: "I am interested to learn more about the meaning of widowhood in your culture. Could you tell me your beliefs about widowhood as you know them?" Or: "You define widowhood as...?"

Another technique will be the use of "lead-in" statements for the co-researcher to complete, such as: "Becoming a widow for Hindu-Canadian women means...?" The specifics of a particular remembrance might be educed through "focused-in" statements such as: "Could you give me some specific examples? I would like to focus in on what you mean by 'changed identity' after you became a widow."

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS
A Qualitative Study on the Meaning of Widowhood for Hindu-Canadians

Use of "experience questions" would draw on a co-researcher's life experience, such as: "When you spoke of family gatherings (or religious events), how did you experience family care for you as a widow?"

A useful technique mentioned often in the literature is to ask co-researchers if they could describe what a typical days or situation was like for them in the their typical "lifeways", which can reveal various patterns and terms for better understanding their condition of widowhood. It has also been instructive to obtain contrasts in experiences from context to context, which might provide clues as to the (culturally-influenced) rules that may guide or govern the widowhood phenomena. One such question might be: "What do you see as the differences between widowhood for your generation and for that of your mother's?"

I will also be sensitive to incorporating the co-researcher's own use of phrases, terms, home objects, rites, and descriptions in order to better enter into their world, and to foster greater comfort on their part, for example, in not having to struggle with my terms.

In any case, the first interview could open with another clarification that is also an invitation: "What I hope to do in this study is to find out more about what widowhood might mean to a woman who is Hindu-Canadian. I can best do this by having you tell me in detail about what your experiences were when you lost your husband, and when you then began life as widow."

"Maybe we could start first with you remembering what it was like to you to be married, before your husband died. What did it mean for you to be a married woman?..."