"IT'S A GIRL...WE WILL HAVE TO GET HER MARRIED ONE DAY."

EXPERIENCES OF SINGLE, SECOND GENERATION SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN IN RELATION TO THE CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS TO MARRY

by

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Abstract

This qualitative, grounded theory study examined the experiences of single, second generation South Asian women in relation to the cultural expectations to marry. Personal experience brought me to identify the significance of this social issue. The theoretical framework included feminist, acculturation, and multigenerational family theories. In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with seven South Asian women between the ages of 20 – 35 from the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia, Canada. Six women were from Punjabi, Sikh ethnocultural background while one was of Hindu heritage. Five major themes emerged from the findings: pervasive pressures to marry; conflicting expectations; effects on the women; women’s ways of coping; and, women’s suggestions for change.

Tensions between social expectations and personal expectations were discussed as well as the interlocking oppressions of race, gender and class experienced by South Asian women. Social work implications for theory, policy, practice and research were also explored. The importance of delivering culturally sensitive service was emphasized. By becoming cognizant of South Asian ideologies such as izzat, amanat, jaat (caste), dharm, karm, kismat and sanjog, a practitioner can begin to honour the world views, values and cultural contexts of the women and their families.
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Dedication

For my sister and brother.

I hope you gain meaningful knowledge and deep wisdom from my experience.
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First, I would like to thank the greater universal power within us all for bringing me to where I am today and guiding me on my spiritual journeys.

Secondly, my heartfelt gratitude goes out to my mother, father, brother and sister who have loved me and always wanted the best for me. Next, many thanks to my close relatives and friends. I hope this thesis will help all of you to further understand my experience.

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My heartfelt gratitude goes out to all the women I interviewed. Without your participation this research would not have been possible. Perhaps together we can make a difference in the lives of others. Thank you.

Lastly, I wish to thank my own inner spiritual self for providing me with determination, courage, support and guidance.

With love,
Sarb Basra
INTRODUCTION
Healing Conversations

Healing conversations are opportunities for us to sit with each other in new ways. It is similar to the Native Healing Circle. It is an occasion for us to tell stories about our self, the world and our struggles, by making public to those we trust that we are struggling with inside our heads. Story telling can be very healing. We each need a safe place to externalize our inner narratives. As we hear ourselves reveal an emotional event from the past we are beginning the process of separating our self from our internal dialogue. In this way we are starting to let go of the emotional hold our old stories have on us.

(Freeman, 1999, p.2)
Introduction

I would have never guessed that one day I would be writing about what it means to be an unmarried, single South Asian woman. Why is it that so many South Asian women experience challenges regarding marriage, especially in the areas of finding a marriage partner?

South Asian women are becoming increasingly physically, psychologically, financially, politically and socially independent. A growing number of us now demand that our happiness be just as important, if not more, than that of our families, cultures and society. We now have greater expectations of not just ourselves, but also those who we desire as partners. But, how do our, our families’ and culture’s expectations to marry affect us?

What single, second generation South Asian women endure as a result of the quest for marriage has not been a topic for research until now. Since this topic has been very personal for me, my perceptions certainly colour my understanding of this social issue. My intention is not to provide a stereotypical view of South Asian women and their families. Some women may not be able to relate to the experiences shared in this study; however, the personal stories of many South Asian women continue to be unacknowledged or misunderstood. As a result of my experience, I decided to bring some of those stories to our attention. I will begin by sharing my story in detail.
My Story

I realize that by telling my story, I may be risking my and my family’s public images. Others, especially those who know me or who are of South Asian background, will likely make judgements of my character. I am aware that by being truthful I will be making myself very vulnerable to public scrutiny. By sharing my story, I hope to make a difference in the lives of others.

My parents were born in agricultural villages of rural Punjab, a north-west state in India. Their families raised them with conservative values. Although their upbringing included financial and familial struggles, they acquired the basic education available to them in their villages. Their marriage was arranged when my mother was in her late teens and my father was in his early twenties. I was also born in Punjab and immigrated to Canada at the age of six and a half in the late 1970s. I have now turned thirty.

My first language is Punjabi. Although Sikh, I am not a practicing Sikh. I am of Jat caste, traditionally an agricultural middle class in India. In Canada, we belong to an upper working class. I grew up in a small city outside of the Lower Mainland area where many South Asian families continue to follow conservative values. I am the eldest of three siblings. I have a younger brother and sister who were born in Canada and are about ten years younger than me. I grew up in a mixed world of Punjabi, Jat, Sikh and Canadian cultures. I had a semi-conservative upbringing: I was allowed to wear shorts, dresses, make-up, cut my hair, but was also expected to be well-mannered and
disciplined. My values and beliefs are probably more Western than Eastern, although I have had to balance the two.

Expectations to Marry

My parents have always wanted the best for me according to their understanding and experience. Living in a small conservative town, it was not acceptable for me to socialize with males outside of family, let alone date. Saving face in the South Asian community was highly emphasized. I was afraid to even look at “Indian” men for fear of being as a “bad girl”. Like many South Asian women, I was brought up with the cultural expectations to marry since childhood. Concerns were expressed by such comments as, “What would your mother-in-law say if you do not know how to cook? Your in-laws will say your mother did not teach you anything. You need to learn how to be respectful or else you will have problems in your marriage. Once you are married, you can do whatever you want. You need to be patient, less reactive and more submissive, or else your marriage will end up in a divorce. Once you are married that will be your new home and you are not to come back regardless of what happens in your marriage.”

I was advised that once I got an education and a good job, marriage would be the natural next step. After I finished high school my father asked me if I wanted to get married or continue with post-secondary education. Knowing that I had to take care of myself if my marriage “failed”, I decided to pursue an education and a career since I would then be more marketable for a “successful” potential partner. I always sensed the
pressure of time: I needed to be educated and have a career before I became “too old for marriage”.

I was informed that if I “found” someone during my college and university years, my parents would only accept my choice if he was of Jat caste. My father advised me to “talk to your mother if you like anyone”. It was very clear that my father wanted to have his children marry into the same caste to keep face amongst the relatives and the South Asian community. He told me on several occasions that if his children married outside of Jat caste he would not have any contact with them.

In my early twenties, I had a few harmless crushes, but was usually nervous in social settings which included men. My parents continued to ask me when I wanted to marry throughout my university years. At the age of twenty-five, a year after completing my Bachelor of Social Work (B.S.W.) degree, I gave my consent to my parents to help me look for a husband. At the same time, I was angry that I had to ask my parents and relatives to assist me since I wanted to “find” someone on my own. I began to plan all the details for the inevitable wedding.

Through my parents, relatives and their friends, I was introduced to a few men, but the experiences were extremely discouraging. Many times the men and their families wanted a photo of me to assess whether I met their standards of physical attractiveness. At first, I co-operated with these requests, but then found myself becoming angry that strangers were accepting me or refusing me based on my looks. Sometimes, the
"boy's”\(^1\) mother or sister insisted on viewing me before I even spoke with the man, but I refused; they were not going to have the power to decide if I was good enough for their son or brother. I dreaded meeting the families of these men, since their presence increased the pressures to marry. Our families would sit in one room while the “boy” and I sat in another trying to assess in an hour if we wanted to marry each other. I began to refuse meeting the men with their families, but then met my “blind dates” for coffee or spoke to them over the phone. I hated putting on a show, pretending to be happy, strong, superficial and trying to sell myself. I was afraid that my anger against the whole process would seep out during these introductory dates.

Many of the men did not meet my expectations, nor I theirs. At times, I forced myself to become interested in men who I knew would be acceptable to my parents. My parents and relatives told me that it was my choice (as long as he was the same caste), yet I was also told to stop being too particular and to become more realistic. My parents and relatives became frustrated with my inability to “choose” someone. I believed my parents and relatives were forcing me to accept just about anyone without any consideration of my desires. As long as the person was of the same caste, from a different village, was not related to my father’s or mother’s maternal families (\(gōt/gōtra\)^2\), had a university education and a job, my parents could not understand why I had a problem saying yes to marriage.

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\(^1\) Men are often called “boys” and women are often called “girls” until they marry.

\(^2\) \(gōt/gōtra\): family clan
I however, wanted to feel attracted to, in love with and emotionally connected with my partner. I did not wish to live with in-laws who would jeopardize our privacy and independence. I wanted a man who was a professional, university educated, career minded, never married, spiritual but not religious and respectful. I desired someone emotionally available, physically fit, tall and handsome. My husband was to be financially secure, but modest. He was to be trustworthy, confident, friendly, responsible and egalitarian. I dreamed of a partner who was intellectual, supportive, non-abusive, willing to share housework, older than me and able to get along with my family. I wanted a man who would prioritize our relationship despite any family struggles. I also did not wish to relocate outside of the Greater Vancouver area.

I was frustrated with my relatives and parents for not understanding my need to find that "chemistry". My parents told me that love usually grows after marriage, but I wanted to be in love before and after marriage. My mother and other female relatives advised that I could "train" my husband to be who I wanted him to be after marriage.

Having no success through family or friends, I was encouraged to advertise in the matrimonial advertisements of the South Asian papers. But, I refused. I believed I would be putting myself on sale by doing so. My relatives often joked that I should wander around at the university with a picket sign advertising for a husband. My mother distributed my pictures to her contacts and mere strangers in hopes that a match would be found. She became extremely excited when someone told her of a potential match, especially if the parents were well established. At times, inches were added to my height,
my ability to cook was emphasized and my university education and professional career were promoted.

Since both of my parents were experiencing health problems, the pressures greatly increased as I passed my mid-twenties. They wanted to see me married “before anything happened” to them. The townspeople spread rumours that my parents became stressed and sick, because I was unable to find a “boy”. In my frenzy to keep the reputation of my family intact, I became extremely desperate. I contacted everyone I knew to let them know I was looking for a partner. I made every effort to increase my opportunity to meet someone. Throughout this time, I was sad, full of anger, fearful and desperate. I experienced high anxiety, extreme panic and sleeping problems.

I became greatly critical of my appearance and felt emotionally fragile. I did not wish to be left behind. I was afraid of being alone and lonely. I did not want to prolong the stress and heartache of my family. I believed that my parents were more interested in getting “the weight off their shoulders”, than about me. I was a burden on my parents. It was all up to me to save the family and myself from further harm.

Marriage seemed to be the solution to everyone’s anxieties. Sometimes, I was ready to “settle for less” although I knew I would be unhappy. The happiness and the izzat\(^3\) of my family took priority over my own. Even though the men were not meeting my expectations, I blamed myself for not finding someone. I decided that even if I had

\(^3\) izzat/izzet: family honour, family reputation
to marry someone I did not love, I would eventually divorce and then make my own decisions. I could then blame my parents for forcing me into an unhappy marriage. My parents continued to worry about what the Indian community would say about us. They were worried that we would not be able to find a "boy" as I grew older.

In frustration, my mother told me that I must marry within the next year or two, but I was just as strong-willed in voicing my frustrations. How was it that all my life I was not allowed to even look at "boys", and now they wanted me to just go out and "find" someone? Where was I supposed to go to "find" a man? How did they expect me to "find" someone if they did not think it was proper for me to go out with a various men? I did not care if I got a "bad reputation" for being seen with a man in public. I was caught in a struggle between my own needs and those of my parents and culture.

I, too was tired of being alone. I was disheartened that everyone around me seemed to have a partner. I felt very lonely and mourned for not being able to meet Mr. Right, especially on special occasions such as Valentine Day, Christmas, New Year's Eve, birthdays, weddings, bridal showers, engagements, ladies' parties\(^4\), or other social gatherings. I believed my life was stagnant. These feelings were very private and painful.

As the next few years passed, my parents' anxieties increased greatly as did mine. My parents would ask me, "Who do you think you are anyway, that an average man is

\(^4\text{ladies' parties: parties held for and by women in celebration of the on-coming of a wedding}\)
not good enough for you? Everyone else’s daughters are married and have children. Why can’t you just settle down? Why are you being so picky? ‘Girls’ cannot survive without a man. ‘Girls’ cannot remain single for the rest of their lives. You are not being a good role model for your siblings. Love-marriages do not last anyway, so why are you being so particular? You are lucky that you have a choice of who you want to marry. We didn’t even have such choices.” I replied by noting that arranged marriages were not perfect either and that there were no guarantees in life.

Paradoxically, even though I could not find a partner of my choice I blamed myself for not being good enough to be chosen as a wife. Why were we not able to find someone for me? Why was I having such difficulty? Was it my petite size? Was it my social work career which is often disrespected by many South Asian families? Was I not educated enough? Did my feminist values scare men away? Was I not attractive? Was I not as marketable as I believed myself to be? Were men looking for younger women? Why was it highly educated men chose “girls” who were very attractive, but were less educated than me? It seemed that the “bad girls” were able to “find” husbands and the “good girls” were being penalized for doing as we were told.

My parents had their own theories. My mother believed I was asking too many questions when I met the men and that my “assertiveness” augured badly for marriage. She advised that I should grow my hair longer to please men who desired a more traditional look. She believed I was too domineering and needed to be quieter and passive. My father thought that men generally sought taller and prettier women, so I
should settle for an "average looking", shorter and less educated man. He agreed that I was probably considered to be a "troublemaker" by many men who wanted a more family oriented girl. I was doomed to stay single unless I changed myself and my desires. I refused to give in.

As time went on, I was informed I should go to India and England to find an educated husband. However, my pride would not allow me to "drop" to a "lower grade" of potential partners. Many men outside of Canada would have likely been more interested in immigration than in me. Besides, getting someone settled in Canada was going to be an additional burden. I was told that if I did not lower my expectations and marry someone "average" I would likely end up being an unmarried old woman, or have the option of marrying someone old or divorced. Again, I refused to compromise.

I began to use my career as a refuge from my problems. My co-workers and non-South Asian friends advised me that I was still quite young and had plenty of time to marry. They told me not to rush into anything and to do what made me happy. Since I could not trust my parents or relatives to choose a "decent" partner for me, I had to resort to my own efforts.

With my own efforts, I met a man who was not from the Jat caste. This relationship did work out for many reasons, but it left me feeling extremely hurt and disappointed. I cut all ties with my "ex-friend" and any mutual friends we shared. Within a couple of months, he was married to someone who appeared to be more
educated, outgoing, intelligent, taller than me and who was graciously accepted by him and his family. Once again, I blamed myself for not measuring up.

For the next two and half years, my life became a dark hole. I was emotionally torn, psychologically traumatized, mentally depressed, physically exhausted and spiritually dead. I felt rejected and believed I was a failure. I was not good enough, not pretty enough, not tall enough, not educated enough, not thin enough, not attractive enough, not fair enough, not Western enough, not “Indian” enough, not outgoing enough, not domestic enough, not emotionally strong enough, not, not, not.... I hated every essence of my existence. I hated listening to love songs, reading material about relationships or watching romantic movies.

Although I grew-up being proud of my heritage and promoted antiracism and multiculturalism practice in my profession, I now began to hate my own “East Indian” culture. Ethically and morally I knew it was wrong for me to feel so, but my anger superseded all other rationalizations. I distanced myself from these “culturally sensitive” projects. I hated the smells, tastes, appearance and sounds of all South Asian cultures, especially my own. I hated the music, clothes, cultural functions, television or radio programs, Indian movies, or literature. I hated being a woman in the “Indian” culture. I hated the selfish, egocentric and abusive “Indian” men and their controlling and pretentious “Indian” families. I hated the authoritarian and violent “Indian” religions. I no longer wished to live near, or associate with those barbarians. I was not one of
them. I did not fit into the “Canadian world” or the “Indian world”. I became angry at being controlled, submissive, powerless, passive and a “good little girl”.

I began to critically revamp every aspect of myself to appear more desirable. I began to work out vigorously at the gym; I changed my job; I took night classes to advance my education; I considered cosmetic surgery; I read books on relationships, self-development and spirituality; I shopped obsessively for clothes, shoes, make-up and jewelry. I spent thousands of dollars to fill the inner emptiness. I tried to change myself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually so the old me would die.

Although I changed my outward appearance, inside the wounds still bled. I was exhausted from trying so hard to change myself, but I did not know how to get the pain of my previous relationship to leave me. Concurrently, I became extremely angry with my parents for not supporting me. My close relatives judged me for being too stubborn, egocentric, rebellious and explosive. I received little or no support.

I became unsure of what I wanted. I no longer wanted to marry, especially an “East Indian”. I thought I would not be able to find a partner within my culture. I believed I would not be able to meet men outside of my culture because of racist and discriminatory barriers against “East Indians”. I wanted to be in a caring relationship and yet feared being hurt once again and dealing with familial tension. I began to mourn the possibility that I may be single, “relationshipless” and childless for the rest of my life.
For a two year period, I suffered a major clinical depression. I had numerous colds, coughs, infections and a depleted immune system. I could not function on a daily basis. I had no energy to do even the basic tasks. I turned to food for comfort and gained weight. I did not take any medication to relieve the distress, since I would only mask my inner pain and might have become dependent on prescriptive drugs.

Although I was in agony, I was too embarrassed and emotionally fragile to seek out professional counselling. I did not wish to see a South Asian therapist in order to protect my privacy, especially as a professional social worker. I believed that South Asian counsellors would make derogatory judgements about me and that they did not have the professional skills that I required. I feared that both South Asian and non-South Asian practitioners would undermine my experience, or not be able to relate to it. I expected to be advised to live my life for me alone, or to be encouraged to go along with the family’s expectations. I continued to feel alienated, traumatized, exhausted and angry. What was my pain telling me?

Reflections

For most people, this event would not have been so tragic, but for me my whole life depended on whether I got married in a “timely” fashion. Everything that my parents once told me to pursue for a “successful” life and “what should have been” seemed to be a lie. Initially, I wanted to marry someone I had chosen and someone I was in love with, but now questioned the many fantasies about romantic love and marriage. Reality was a lot different.
Currently, my parents continue to plea that I marry a “suitable boy” as soon as possible. They continue to get pressure from our relatives and their friends that I should have been married long time ago and that we are now “too late”. My mother states perhaps it is written in my kismat/kismet\(^5\) that I am not to be married yet. My relatives and she believe that whomever my sanjög/sunjög\(^6\) is with, I will marry that person. They believe that my destiny has been pre-written and my future is predetermined: “whatever God has written will happen”.

Through my experience, I encountered the many struggles of unmarried, single South Asian women and my own issues with my family and myself. Slowly, I began to explore my own anxieties, emotional pain, losses and the need for mourning, healing and intimacy. Did I have such a fragile sense of self that I was trying to make up for what I lacked through another person? Why did I need to blame, torture and recreate myself to get the approval of others? What was I really searching for and how was I going to get it? How did I plan on creating a more secure and an independent self? Was this a larger systemic social issue rather than just a personal one? I began to question, challenge, analyze and demystify my experience.

Later, I began to notice there were many South Asian women who were living out the similar scenarios with their partners and families. Like mine, their stories were kept silent. Thus, I decided to pursue my Master of Social Work Degree by exploring

\(^5\) kismat/kismet: destiny, luck, fortune  
\(^6\) sanjög/sunjög: kismat, destiny, meeting of two or more destinies
the stories of single, second generation South Asian women in relation to the cultural expectations to marry. Perhaps by sharing this study we can create strategies to help other women in similar circumstances.

**Chapter Preview**

**Chapter 1** introduces the theoretical framework. First, the feminist framework critiques the institution of marriage and the oppression women. Secondly, acculturation theory illustrates the different patterns of cultural adaptation that a group or an individual may experience. Thirdly, multigenerational family theory illustrates a family systems approach to analyzing women's experiences and their familial dynamics.

**Chapter 2** presents the cultural context of South Asian women by providing background information on arranged marriages and acculturation studies. Then, a comprehensive literature review focuses on the past and present studies regarding Western and South Asian single women. The Jewish marriage imperative offers another cultural example of the pressure to marry. Since, there is very little information available on single, second generation South Asian women and their experiences, the need for this study is proposed.

**Chapter 3** outlines the methodology of this study. Design, data collection, research questions and information about the participants is noted in detail. Data is analyzed by categorization. Personal assumptions, biases, study limitations and ethical issues are given consideration.
Chapter 4 reports the findings from the seven interviews. Five major themes emerged: pervasive pressures to marry; conflicting expectations; effects on the women; women's way's of coping; and, women's suggestions for change. Each major theme includes a number of many subthemes (see Appendix 10 for a general outline of findings).

Chapter 5 covers the discussion and theoretical implications. Conflicts between social and personal expectations are discussed. The over-emphasis on marriage in most cultures is mentioned as well as the on-going changes within the South Asian cultures. The interlocking oppressions of race, gender and class for South Asian women contribute to the implications for feminist theory.

Chapter 6 suggests policy, practice and research implications for social work practice. Culturally sensitive service delivery which honours the cultural contexts, world views, realties and values of South Asian women is recommended. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes my views on the social issue and ends with my current journey as a single, second generation South Asian woman.
CHAPTER 1

Theoretical Framework
Unfinished Business

Unfinished Business is the carrying and transmitting of unresolved emotional issues from one generation to the next. It is a reactive response shaped by a strong emotional feeling from the past. It restricts a person's ability to behave in a creative, thoughtful manner.

(Freeman, 1998b, p.1)
Theoretical Framework

Feminist, acculturation, and multigenerational family theories will act as the theoretical foundations for this study. Each theory provides a unique understanding of the social issues experienced by single, second generation South Asian women, and their families. A brief description of each theory follows.

Feminist Theory

Conway-Turner and Cherrin (1998) summarized feminism as “a number of perspectives which are guided by the belief that women are equal to men and their experiences are as important as men’s experiences”. (p. 226) Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (cited in Baber & Allen, 1992) defined a feminist perspective as “1) a belief that women are exploited and oppressed as subordinates in a hierarchical system that affords privilege to more valued groups; 2) a commitment to empower women and change the conditions of their lives; 3) an acknowledgement of women’s experiences, values, and activities as meaningful and important.” (p.9)

While social pressure and economic necessity have encouraged both sexes to marry, different connotations have been placed on the importance of marriage for men and women. (Baker, 1990). Wedlock is seen as natural and necessary if women are to reach their “full development” (Ward, 1998). In many cultures, marriage is the unquestioned, socially orthodox course for adults of marriageable age; marriage is regarded as inevitable, a natural part of the progression through life (Austrom, & Hanel, 1985). Often in both Western and Eastern societies, unmarried women continue to be seen as defective in personality (Ward, 1998). Nadelson and Notman (1981) noted that
Western women were also under considerable pressure to marry until only recently and that marriage was considered a necessity in order for them to feel desirable and socially acceptable. Currently, women are brought up to think of their life in terms of marriage (Charvet, 1982). Smart (1984) indicated that “marriage is significant to the unmarried as to the married because it is the prescribed form of relationship against which all else is measured, and in comparison to which all else is usually found wanting”. (p.143) Often, a woman’s status, power and value in society are measured by her marital status.

Although marriage appears to be obligatory, many feminists have critiqued the institution of marriage as being detrimental to women. Traditional marriages encourage women to put the needs of husbands and children before their own (Ward, 1998). Marriage and the family continue to provide a regulation of sexual intercourse and the procreation of children (Smart, 1984). Women have been economically, emotionally, and physically oppressed in the interests of family (Conway, 1997). Marriage is a patriarchal system which exploits the needs and rights of women; it has been created for the benefits of men, children and the family system (Conway, 1997), rather than for the betterment of women’s quality of life. Marriage is a legal, social and cultural institution which marginalizes women.

Emma Goldman, a feminist in the early twentieth century, also viewed marriage as a major form of women’s oppression. She stated, “Marriage and love have nothing in common; they are as far apart as the poles; are, in fact, antagonistic to each other” (cited in Hinding, 1986, p.120). She noted that the average girl is told that marriage is her ultimate goal; her training and education are also directed towards that end. In her view, marriage is primarily an economic arrangement: “The institution of marriage makes a
parasite of women, an absolute dependant. It incapacitates her for life’s struggle, annihilates her social consciousness, paralyzes her imagination, and then imposes its gracious protection, which is in reality a snare, a travesty on human character” (cited in Hinding, 1986, p. 121).

Germaine Greer further argued that a woman can be fulfilled in marriage only if she believes that marriage is a pact between equals, and if she does not relinquish responsibility for her own happiness (Hinding, 1986). Cronan (1973) suggested that marriage was a male invention equivalent to slavery and that marriage is the model for all other forms of discrimination against women. Feminists critiqued marriage as being an enemy of women’s rights and well-being. The feminist theory of marriage offers a general understanding of the gender inequalities women experience in a marital contract. Feminist theory can also help us to understand some of the issues experienced by single, second generation South Asian women and the cultural expectations to marry.

**Acculturation Theory**

Acculturation theory offers an understanding of how immigration to a new country can present personal, familial, community, and cultural challenges. ITP Nelson Canadian Dictionary (1997) defined acculturation as “1) the modification of the culture of a group or an individual as a result of contact with a different culture; 2) the process by which the culture of a particular society is instilled in a human being from infancy onward”. (p.9) Redfield, Linton and Herskovits stated that acculturation happens when two independent cultural groups (e.g.: Canadian and South Asian) come into continuous first-hand contact over an extended period of time (cited in Berry, 1989). Acculturation as a process always involves contact, often involves conflict, and usually results in some
form of adaptation by the individual and group; moreover, changes often occur within both the groups in contact (Berry, 1994).

For this thesis, the acculturation model presented by Berry (Berry, 1990; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989) will be utilized (see Appendix 7 for diagram). Two questions concerning the identification and behaviour toward one's own culture and the host culture are answered either "yes" or "no" (Sayegh & Lasry, 1993). The first question asks, "Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?" The second queries, "Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with other groups?"

Depending on whether the answer is yes or no to each question, the responses create four possible outcomes for ethnocultural groups and their individual members: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization (Berry et al, 1987; Berry, 1994). Assimilation is defined as a process by which an ethnocultural group disappears by absorption; the individual relinquishes her/his cultural identity and moves into the host society (e.g., the "melting pot" concept). Integration is a process by which an ethnocultural group establishes itself distinctively as an integral component of a pluralistic society; it implies the maintenance of cultural integrity as well as becoming part of the larger host society (e.g., the "Canadian cultural mosaic" concept). Separation is a process by which an ethnocultural group sets out on its own; it involves the maintenance of ethnic identity and traditions, and no positive relations with the host society (e.g., ghettos or extreme ethnocentrism). Marginalization is a process by which an ethnocultural group becomes personally and socially alienated and its members become demoralized; it occurs when cultural and psychological contact with both one's
own culture and host cultures are lost (e.g., hating both South Asian and Canadian cultures). Acculturative stress resulting from living in more than one culture may produce identity confusion, feelings of marginality, depression, and anxiety. It can reduce the physical, psychological and social health of individuals (Berry et al, 1987, Berry, 1994). The acculturation theory can contribute to our understanding of the immigration and cultural transitions which occur between second generation women and their parents and communities.

Multigenerational Family Theory

Multigenerational family theory presents a family systems approach to understanding the expectations to marry. Freeman (1992 &1998a) outlined the dynamics of a family system: the family is a multigenerational emotional system; the family as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Family systems become more complex and organized over time. A family member’s problem is reinforced or diminished by the other family member’s responses to it. Significant changes in the extended family tend to influence the functioning of the nuclear family. Change is not sustained in a family unless the most powerful members of the family are willing to maintain it. Functional families find a balance between individual autonomy issues and family solidarity concerns. People’s familial and social relationships are shaped by their family stories. Freeman (1998a) states that individuals are never totally free of their family involvements and that children emerge from their families-of-origin with a certain degree of emotional unfinished business. He noted that relationship problems are a reflection of unfinished business, not an indication of lack of commitment, caring or love: one cannot give emotionally to another what one has not received (Freeman, 1992 & 1998a).
A multigenerational family perspective sees the family as composed of structural, functional and developmental systems (Freeman, 1992). The subsystems of a family (parent/child, husband/wife, brother/sister, grandparent/grandchild, etc.) provide structure to the family (Freeman, 1992). The functional workings of a family are closely interconnected with the family's structural development. The way the family chooses to organize its life will influence how it chooses to relate within its intrafamilial systems and its extrafamilial systems:

"The family must be seen in the context of the extended family and the community as a whole. It can also be seen as the middle system, situated between the internal needs and expectations of its members on the one hand and societal demands on the other. The most powerful subsystem with a family is usually the parental unit. The parents bring important lessons from their own families that they try to put into operation in their new family. A blending of three family influences results: the husband's family-of-origin, the wife's family-of-origin, and the synthesis of these two. The success with which the differences, as well as the similarities, are integrated in the new unit will determine the overall balance of the family". (Freeman, 1992, pp.32-33)

The individual, nuclear family and extended family evolve through various developmental stages or systems as noted above by Freeman (1992). When issues are unresolved in one generation, patterns of relating are transmitted from one generation to the next through emotional triangling. In this process when a conflict cannot be resolved between two people, it gets detoured through a third person, issue, or object as a tension-reducing maneuver. For example, the third can be a person, such as child or lover, or an experience, such as work, substance abuse, or the expectations to marry. The concept of differentiation describes a process of defining a self in a family system: an individual and the family try to balance both a separateness and togetherness or connection with one another. The patterns of interaction that are transmitted across generations (vertical
movement) through emotional triangles are also shaped by the process of the family development (horizontal movement). The tasks and transitions of an individual affect the family system and vice versa. In addition, family anxieties are transmitted through the emotional system of the family both within the immediate family system and across generations (Freeman, 1992; Schartzberg, Berliner, & Jacob, 1995).

Freeman (1992) remarked that how well the individual has made peace with the losses within a family will determine how freely he or she is able to move on in his or her life. Issues of loyalty or debt to one's own family have an influence over one's decision-making. The ability to be intimate with another adult is partially determined by how well the person has worked through his or her original attachment and separation issues with his or her parents. The stronger a sense of self, the less a person will require another to provide emotional support. The weaker the self, the greater the tendency to enter into a fused relationship. The multigenerational theory can help us understand the unique personal and familial circumstances of the women. Each woman's relationship with her family can help or hinder her situation as it relates to the pressures to marry. Let us now look at what is known academically about the subject matter.
CHAPTER 2

Cultural Context and Literature Review
The Guide

A guide is a person who helps us go back in time to revisit old fears and emotions in a new way. The guide understands the principle that when we have strong judgments about an emotional event in our life, we are revisiting yesterdays hurts. During these revisiting moments we need to think about our emotions in a new way. Symbols, metaphors and trigger events are all reminders of past pain. The guide gently reminds us of the significance of the event, as a revisiting and assists us in reworking the event.

Guides help us go back to our original family where we can begin to learn the lessons that are awaiting us there. In the presence of our family we have the opportunity to learn how to embrace anxiety and be open to the special emotional gifts various family members have to offer us.

(Freeman, 1999, p.3)
Cultural Context and Literature Review

A comprehensive literature review reveals that there are very few studies which solely research the expectations to marry and the effects of those expectations on women. There are very few which focus on the experiences of people of South Asian descent. Before reviewing the relevant literature, it is important to understand the cultural context of South Asian women.

Cultural Context of South Asian Women

South Asians are defined as persons with cultural origins from the Indian subcontinent which is composed of such countries as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, etc. (Assanand, Dias, Richardson, Waxler-Morrison, 1990). Many South Asians live in countries such as Canada, United States, Britain, Germany, Fiji, East Africa, Australia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Trinidad, etc. South Asians come from vastly different traditions, geographic backgrounds, levels of education, subcultures, religions and world views (Assanand et al, 1990; Naidoo, 1994). In Canada, South Asians have also been known as East Indians, Indo-Canadians and Indians.

Chatterji observed that, “In the Indian society where a woman’s existence is only that of an appendage to a man, whether she is a daughter, a wife, or a mother, any deviation from this pattern (of being an appendage to man) is considered unclean, evil or diseased” (cited in Krishnakumari, 1987, p. v). Mane and Gandevia (1993) also commented that, “since marriage and motherhood are the primary status roles affecting an [Indian] woman’s identity development, their absence, suspension or disruption in any form may cause serious threats for a woman’s mental health”. (p.134) Thus, marriage
and being associated to a man are the ultimate criteria which may determine how others judge a South Asian women and how they perceive themselves.

In order to understand this culturally distinct social issue, the historical and religious origins of *dharm/dharma* (Gupta, 1976; Almeida, 1990; McGoldrick, Giordano & Pearce, 1996) must be addressed. Noss (cited in Naidoo, 1985) notes that the *Code of Manu*, "a collection of rules of life composed by Hindu Brahmin priests in 200 B.C., set out the injunction: In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband and when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent". (p.338) Traditionally, the father was responsible if he did not give his daughter in marriage at the proper time and it was believed that a woman who was not married would be denied admission into heaven (Krishnakumari, 1987). Marriage was considered a religious bond, a sacrament. In order for a Hindu male to attain *moksha*\(^8\), he had to get his children married (Ramanamma & Bambawale, 1978). Hindu beliefs of *karma*\(^9\), *dharma*, caste, self-sacrifice and purity have influenced many South Asian religions, including Sikhism and Islam. Thus, from the moment many South Asian parents and the extended family learn the expected child is a female, she may be labeled and treated as *amanat*\(^{10}\) (Tee, 1996).

In South Asian cultures, the family is the most important social unit (Assanand et al, 1990). The extended family provides the identity of the individual as well as economic and emotional security. Interdependence is valued highly and the lifestyle is

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7 *dharm/dharma*: obligations to family, community, society, religious duty

8 *moksha*: freedom from the cycle of births and deaths

9 *karma/karm*: destiny, deeds carried out in a previous birth, outcome of deeds

10 *amanat*: held in trust, liability
collective rather than individualistic. Extended family continues to be a close-knit, interdependent unit. Traditional South Asian culture is male-dominated and sex roles are well-defined. A woman is seen as her husband’s possession. She is taught to be domestic, submissive, passive and to obey her husband and elders, including her in-laws, extended family and her parents. Social status is gained by age and position in the larger family structure. Therefore, parents, in-laws, grandparents and older brothers and sisters are expected to be given greater respect.

In most South Asian cultures, males are continued to be prized as assets, while females are often considered burdens. Males are expected to provide for the family, protect the children, care for the elders and continue the family name, while the women are expected to incur significant financial and psychological debt to the family through the costly ritual of marriage. South Asian women come from different social, economic, caste, religious, cultural and geographical backgrounds (Naidoo, 1985; Tee, 1996; Bhopal, 1997), but the importance of marriage continues to be ingrained into most of them.

Most South Asian women are socialized to marry once they become of “marriageable age”. The early arrangement of marriage is seen as a way of maintaining the values of the community (Gill, 1982). Modern dowries can be very rich in value, including such items as clothing, jewelry, home furnishings and appliances, cars, houses, vacations, education and cash. Dowries are often burdens for the fathers and brothers (McGoldrick, Giordano & Pearce, 1996). South Asian women who do not marry are an anomaly (Almeida, 1990). An unmarried daughter is considered a spinster in her late twenties who brings shame onto the family (Mathur, 1997). At marriage, the
“girl” is given to her husband and his family as permanent member of their family (Assanand et al, 1990).

Parents may become disheartened if a marriageable daughter is still unmarried in her late twenties or older. They may believe that their family has unfortunate kismat/kismet or have carried out punishable karm/karma (Almeida, 1996; Hines, Garcia-Preto, McGoldrick, Almeida & Welman, 1992). They may worry that they are being irresponsible for not completing their dharm. (Almeida, 1996; McGoldrick et al, 1996). It is their wish to colour the daughter’s hands with mehndi\textsuperscript{11} and send her away in her dōlli\textsuperscript{12}. After all, a daughter is an amanat.

Further, second generation South Asian women in Canada must negotiate their way between Eastern and Western values, socialization and cultures, but may not get the understanding or support from either. Perhaps the women do not want to marry; maybe they cannot find the Mr. Right who meets their expectations, or maybe the person they wish to marry is not acceptable to their families. Differences between the two cultures can lead to familial and personal discord. Conflicting intergenerational and intragenerational beliefs and practices of marriage may produce a great deal of stress. In order to further understand this cultural phenomenon, it may be helpful to revisit the reasons for and functional criteria of an Indian arranged marriage.

\textsuperscript{11}mehndi: intricate henna patterns

\textsuperscript{12}dōlli: traditionally a palanquin in which the bride left for the groom’s home
Arranged Marriages

The forms which mate selection take are closely related to the values and traditions of the societies of which they are part (Ward, 1998). Each region, area, caste, religion and class may have different strategies of arranging marriage, but the general principles are similar. In the traditional Indian cultures, mates are selected by the parents or by other older relatives (Joyti, 1983; Naidoo, 1985; Sinha, 1985). Close extended family members are usually consulted before final arrangements are made. Some South Asian religions, especially Hinduism, continue to encourage the use of horoscopes and priests to create matches. Gupta (1976) notes that in the process of an arranged marriage, individuals come to believe that their life mate is predestined, that fate is preordained and that they are helpless as far as choice is concerned and, therefore must succumb to the celestial forces of the universe.

The main purposes of an arranged marriage are to establish a family, to produce children, to further the family’s economic and social position (Gupta, 1976) and to maintain family lineage (Sinha, 1984). Arranged marriage was originally intended to promote family unity since it is families who marry, not just individuals (Petty & Balgopal, 1998).

Bhopal (1997) reported that the arranged marriage in India has been shown to reveal the following characteristics: it helps maintain the social stratification system in the society (particularly by caste); it gives parents control over the family members; it enhances the chances to preserve and continue the ancestral line; it provides opportunities to strengthen the kinship group; it allows the consolidation and extension of family property; and it enables the elders to preserve the principle of endogamy.
Arranged marriages take place within one's own class, caste and religion; inter-caste marriage is uncommon (Basran, 1993; Bhopal, 1997; Joyti, 1983). Marriage is based upon village and got/gotra exogamy (Gupta, 1976) and regional, cultural and caste endogamy. Generally, marriage is sacramental for Sikhs and Hindus, but is primarily contractual for Muslims (Bhopal, 1997).

Nanda (cited in Baker & Dryden, 1993) stated that in arranged marriages, more importance is placed on extended family solidarity, financial security and potential heirs than on personal gratification and feelings of love between the young people. Generally love is considered a weak basis for an arranged marriage because its presence is thought to overshadow suitable qualities in spouses (Gupta, 1976). Marital partners are urged to respect their family’s wishes and each other and it is hoped that love will develop after they have married and shared a home (Baker & Dryden, 1993; Ward, 1998).

Acculturation

While arranged marriage continues to be practiced by many South Asians, particularly in Eastern countries, marriage trends are becoming more contemporary in Westernized countries. While transition is naturally stressful on a family, immigration produces additional conflicts (Petty & Balgopal, 1998). First generation parents and their more Westernized second generation children may have different values regarding marriage which may lead to clashes between the two.

Wakil, Siddique & Wakil (1981) reported that most Indo-Pakistani parents were extremely reluctant to allow their children to go out socially or to allow them to mix with
the opposite sex. While some of the parents were willing to allow their sons to date and associate with the girls with little or no supervision, daughters were not allowed the same freedom. Basran (1993) found that professional Indo-Canadian families were more tolerant of their children’s dating and marriage behaviours than working class Indo-Canadian families. However, male children were given more freedom than females (Drury, 1991). Diva (cited in Gupta, 1994) reported on a Toronto survey which indicated that some South Asian women were dating without the knowledge of their parents or against the will of their parents. These women suffered a great deal of tension, depression and suicidal feelings because they could not practice dating openly, like other adolescents, with their parents’ support.

Most parents would prefer to continue with their traditional systems of arranged marriage (Ghuman, 1994), but Tee (1996) reported that second generation South Asian women, many of whom dated openly or secretly, either refused to participate in the arranged marriage system or finally accepted their family’s introductions. Bhopal (1997) also found that highly educated South Asian women, mainly second generation who had attained high positions in the labour market, rejected arranged marriages as being disadvantageous for women.

Indian arranged marriages tend to focus on the benefits to each party from the union, while Western free choice tends to emphasize love and companionship (Ward, 1998). There are profound differences between arranged marriages and the Western notions of ‘free’ marriage. In the West, individuals retain the right to autonomy and personal responsibility for their lives, including marriage.
Back in 1974, Srivastava observed that sometimes Canadian-born Indian men and women accepted their parents searching for their mates in India because, if they did not comply they could risk being disowned. In 1991, Drury also found South Asian women between the ages of 16-20 in Britain preferred to have a “love marriage”, but they would reluctantly agree to have an arranged marriage, in order not to hurt their parents by ruining the family’s izzat.

In addition, a study of marriage across eleven cultures shows that love is most valued for establishing a marriage in the Western and Westernized nations and least important in the four underdeveloped Eastern Nations, including India (Levine, Sato, Hashimoto & Verma, 1995). This study found a high correlation between individualism and the desire for love in the establishment of a marriage. Most Western nations are based on individualism whereas most Eastern nations are based on collectivism.

Wakil, Siddique & Wakil (1981) also noted that Canadian-born South Asians were quite unwilling to accept the traditional idea that love will grow after marriage; they wanted it to be present before marriage. Canadian-born children were intent upon having a greater say in decisions relating to marriage. Even when families do not arrange marriages, there can be extreme pressure on children of new Canadians to marry within their ethnic group, religion, caste and region (Basran, 1993). The potential for conflict is high, as the young people often want to follow customs they have learned in Canada instead of those of their ethnic group (Ward, 1998). Some of the second generation secretly date even though the Indian culture prohibits them from doing so; however, some young men and women may resort to arranged marriages or “introduction marriages” in
their final selection of a life partner (Gupta, 1994; Tee, 1996). Some may also try their luck with "love marriages" (MacQueen, 1998).

Sinha (1984) commented that considerations of endogamy, family status and dowry are gradually being replaced by personal happiness, level of education, physical attractiveness and personality characteristics, especially for girls. For many South Asian families, mate selection seems to be moving more into the Western style. Bhachu (1991) reported that currently in Britain, as well as in Canada, there is a demand for educated women in both the marriage and job markets. Hines, Garcia-Preto, McGoldrick, Almeida, & Weltman (1992) confirmed that parents often try to encourage their daughters to pursue further education to make them more marketable for marriage. Since people now tend to choose partners with a similar level of education, the education of "girls" has become more important (Bhachu, 1991). As they become more educated, they also become more independent. Independent women want more freedom to choose their own partners, viewing arranged marriages and dowries as being disadvantageous for women (Bhopal, 1996).

Vaidyanathan & Naidoo (1990) reported the emerging pattern for many educated South Asian families seems to be a marriage which is entered by a couple on their own with the consent of parents. They found two main trends in contemporary attitudes for South Asians in Canada: "(1) More flexibility in parental authority in the host country and 2) An increase in independence and decision making power for the second generation." (p. 48). The changing trend in mate selection in second generation is also noted by Joyti (1983): earlier traditional marriages emphasized religion, individual and
family character, physical beauty, skin colour and caste whereas contemporary marriage includes personal and physical charm, attractiveness, intelligence and education.

**Literature Review on Single Women**

Another perspective which aids to illustrate the challenges for single, second generation South Asian women is the research on single women. In Western countries too, single women were frequently called old maids, or spinsters only until recently. Stein (1981), introduced the terms “voluntary and involuntary singles” and observed that “singles have often been regarded as a somewhat deviant group, different from ‘normal’ married adults. Until very recently, they have been avoided as subjects of serious research”. (p.1) After a very comprehensive search, I managed to find the following few studies on singles.

In Etaugh & Malstrom’s (1981) study, 168 college students evaluated married individuals more favorably than all groups of unmarried individuals and widowed people were evaluated more favorably than either divorced or never-married people: the not married were seen as less attractive and less sociable, than persons of all other marital status categories.

Frazier, Arikian, Benson, Losoff & Maurer (1996) surveyed 217 unmarried adults aged over 30 years. They discovered that men desired marriage more than women and that the never-married wanted to marry more than the divorced. Their analysis suggested that men had more desire to marry than women because they had less social support. The never-married individuals seemed to have lower self-esteem, more desire for marriage and lower life satisfaction than divorced individuals.
In a study of the psychological issues of single life, Asutrom & Hanel (1985) found that many of the single female respondents believed that they were still single because their expectations of a marriage partner were high. Due to the feminist movement, increased financial independence of women and the concomitant decreased dependence on marriage, women in contemporary society may be seeking more from a marriage partner than they did in previous times. If they are unable to meet these standards, they may decide to remain single. Respondents who believed that they were single by deliberate choice were the most satisfied with their marital status; those who attributed their singleness to circumstances beyond their control were least satisfied. Results suggested that satisfaction with single life was influenced by the amount of social support received, especially in the areas of friendship and community life and to a lesser degree, in family, romantic and sexual relationships.

Davies (1992) also compared the psychological distress of single men and single women. Findings indicated that never-married men had lower stress levels of distress than never-married women. An exception to this pattern was found among single women aged between 45-64 years, who experienced significantly less distress than their male counterparts. The relationship between gender and distress varied by age and living circumstances. Some women were more likely to feel their lives would be better if they were married. In another study, Davies (1995) compared never-married and married individuals aged 18-64, but did not support the hypothesis that single women may have more economic and psychosocial resources than men and thus lower levels of distress.
Gordon (1994a; 1994b) interviewed women between the ages of 35-69 in Finland, U.S.A. and Britain to determine whether single women were marginalized because of their single status. In this study many women accepted their single status and were comfortable with their lifestyles. For many, singlehood was not a serious issue.

In contrast, Lieberman (1991), a psychoanalyst, founded the “singles syndrome”. The study reported the symptoms of single women over thirty years of age: chronic depression, eating disorders, obsessing that they must stay thin in order to attract men, low self-esteem, poor body image, vulnerability to shame and humiliation, loneliness, alienation, envy and psychosomatic complaints. The women also reported polar extremes of behaviour such as either frantic “man-hunting” or social withdrawal, either promiscuity or frigidity and either workaholism or work inhibition.

Lewis and Moon (1997) inquired about single women between the ages of 30-65 for a phenomenological research study. The most salient theme that emerged was that single women had unresolved or unrecognized ambivalences about being single. “The overarching theme was supported by three subsections: (a) single women are aware of both the advantages and the drawbacks of being single; (b) single women are ambivalent about the reasons for their singleness; (c) although content with being single, many women simultaneously experience feelings of loss and grief”. (p.115) The most frequently mentioned drawbacks to not being married were the absence of feeling special to a man, need for touch, the longing for children, the lack of ready companionship and sadness about growing old alone. They reported that many single women experienced social pressure to be married, whereas married women had no similar pressure to be
Some women believed that while they had control over looking for an appropriate partner, they had no control over finding one.

Lewis and Moon (1997) further noted that ambivalence about reasons for singleness was related to locus of control, with women seemingly unaware that they switched between internalizing and externalizing the blame. Self-blaming explanations for being single fell into four categories: some women blamed their physical appearance; some faulted their personality; some alluded to psychological factors; and, others believed their cognitive ability was too much or too little.

Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan (1998) reviewed a 1989 survey in Southern California of single African American, Latina and White women. They measured perceived marital and psychological well-being while looking at depression, anxiety, loneliness, life satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. The findings indicated that when the perception of the choice of mate was viewed as individually rooted and driven (as for Latina and White women), mental health was negatively affected. When the availability of mates was viewed as a systemic feature of the environment over which one has little control, as for Black women, mental health was not affected.

Indian Single Women

We now pass from Western single women to single women in India. Khanna (1970) advised that, whereas a man remains marriageable for many years, the woman’s chances begin to shrink very noticeably after her early twenties. He stated that the longer a girl has to wait, the fewer men she will have to choose from and the smaller will be her chances of finding the right mate or getting married. Sethi (cited in Neshla,
1992) noted that for unmarried Indian women, “Every single day of delay in their marriage gives them a nagging feeling of being a burden on their family. It lowers their self-image and they lose confidence in their own self. Because of these factors their interpersonal relations become stressful. It is observed that they may also suffer from psychosomatic ailments”. (p.16)

Kurian’s (1974) study of 240 families in Kerala revealed that the major qualities considered in a girl for marriage were good character, obedience, ability to manage the home and cook, activity in social and political affairs, education, religious, willingness to depend upon husband for major decisions, fair complexion, companionship for the husband’s intellectual interests and beauty. The critique for a boy were his appearance, charm, social and economic status of his family, education and earning potential.

Ramanamma & Bambawale (1978) reported from their study that not only did educated, employed, Indian women want companionship and equality, they also wanted their husbands to be superior to them: they preferred husbands who were more educated and with higher incomes. The findings indicated that women wanted to “marry-up” where economic status was concerned.

Krishnakumari (1987) found that single women in India, whether spinsters, widows, divorced or separated, had problems in many areas of their lives. They might experience emotions of loneliness and depression. On a practical level, they were anxious about their financial security. At work, they were exploited or harassed. Within their families, they might be treated as a burden or given more responsibilities than other family members. Outside the home, they were seen as morally loose.
In another Indian study, Jethani (1994) noticed that although single women felt independent and had fewer responsibilities than married women, the absence of a marital relationship made them extremely vulnerable to social, psychological, economic and sexual problems (Jethani, 1994). In India too, many educated women have high expectations for their spouse and hence may not be able to find a match suitable to their aspirations. While waiting for a suitable match, sometimes they passed the marriageable age and had to remain single. The main causes for remaining single in this study were financial inability to raise a dowry, family obligations, such as caring for relatives, disillusionment after an unsuccessful past relationship, not being physically attractive, and personal choice to focus on career aspirations rather than marriage.

More recently, Vlassoff (1996) investigated the relationship among female schooling, greater autonomy and lower fertility in a village in Maharashtra India during 1975-76 and 1987. The data did not support a causal association possibly because by 1987, female schooling had become a prerequisite for marriage, making schooling more important in terms of buying power in marriage than in its relationship to female autonomy.

Jewish Marriage Imperative

The available literature on single women, except for the few mentioned above, often does not address cultural influences. However, South Asian women are not alone in their extreme pressures to marry. For instance, the Jewish culture emphasizes the importance of marriage in their communities as well.
Levitz (1992) described the mating selection and the marriageability of Jewish children and their families. Many of the effects of "mating anxiety" are very similar to those which may be experienced by South Asian women and their families. The Torah, the doctrine of Jewish faith, commands parents to marry their children and the intensity of this pressure may cause great distress for many of these parents. Jewish parents may choose particular schools, communities and even vacations to increase their children’s chances of meeting someone from the same cultural and religious background. They may get the aid of family and community to assess the eligibility of the potential mates for their children. Conventional dating as in the Western culture may also be practiced. The pressures of marriage usually begin at an earlier age as parents and their children begin to fear that the child may remain single; mating anxiety may start in the mid-teens, or even earlier for girls. Family conflicts between the parents and children often arise due to these stresses.

Many families may not seek professional help in order to protect the family’s reputation. Levitz suggests the anxiety of the parents to marry off their children may leave them feeling responsible, but not in control. Jewish adult children may decide to marry in defiance of parental control and experience guilt and self-doubt, or they may marry to satisfy their parents. Orthodox Jewish men and women live in two worlds of conflicting values and may experience an identity crisis if they are not married. Many single people may experience rejection, a sense of failure and a diminution of self-worth when they fail to meet the cultural expectations of their communities.
Need for Study

Studies regarding singlehood and other marriage related studies report a mixture of both positive and negative effects on single women. The emphasis on negative effects may also show a potential negative bias from the part of the researchers. However, as indicated by the above studies, currently there is very limited literature on the experiences of single, second generation South Asian women and the cultural expectations to marry. Therefore, there is a great need for the proposed study as it would contribute to our understanding of the expectations to marry and it could lead to culturally sensitive social work theories, policies, practice and research. I hope that this study will act as an impetus for further interest and academic research into the lives of single, South Asian women living in Canada. The methodology of the study is presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology
Emotional Ambivalence

Ambivalence, to some degree, is present in most relationships and contributes to couples feeling emotionally frustrated. It represents emotional confusion in that, either, we consciously desire something, but unconsciously are unsure about it being right or proper for us to have, or when we feel we don’t deserve something we want, for example, love or success, we still unconsciously hope for it.

When we are ambivalent about change it is quite difficult to bring a new or unique reaction to an emotionally charged situation. Considering that change represents uncertainty, the thought of it, usually unleashes old feelings, memories and fears which stir up emotional anxiety and dread.

When an individual is feeling ambivalent about a situation he/she will usually send out confused messages and will transfer responsibility to others for decision making. Rather than being clear about one’s position or desire, an ambivalent individual will defer to another and then become upset with the outcome.

It is important to note that when ambivalence takes us over we are not immediately conscious of it and it only becomes apparent after we have engaged in some sort of conflict over the way a situation has worked or not worked out.

(Freeman, 1999, p.3)
Methodology

The methodology section of this qualitative, grounded theory study explains the design, data collection methods and research questions. A general description of the background of the participants is provided. Data analysis, personal biases, limitations and ethical issues are outlined in detail.

Design and Data Collection

This study was conducted using a grounded theory research approach. Cresswell (1998) defined a grounded theory study as that when, “the researcher generates an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, a theory that explains some action, interaction, or process.” (p. 241) In a grounded theory approach, a theory is developed, but is usually not tested. A theoretical understanding of the social issue will be presented in the discussion section (Chapter 5).

For recruitment, I initially approached several South Asian women's organizations such as the India Mahila Association, Indo-Canadian Women’s Organization and South Asian Women’s Centre, but I did not receive a positive response. I then decided to recruit people through snow-ball sampling, starting off with some of my contacts who informed other women of this study. Once the interviewees contacted me, or once I was given consent by the interviewee to contact her, full details of the study were explained. If the participants decided to proceed with the research process, an interview was arranged at a private and safe place.
In most of the situations, I did not have a previous relationship with the women and so I took additional time to initiate an exchange about ourselves. About half an hour was spent building a comfortable atmosphere by having tea or coffee and having an "informal" conversation. Once the women felt they were ready to continue, I took about fifteen to twenty minutes sharing my personal experience. Not all the in-depth fine points of my story were shared as described in this thesis, but a general description of my experience was shared so the women could understand my journey and reasons for completing the study. I tried to maintain as much confidentiality in my story as possible. The women often had questions and so I took additional time to respond to them. Normally, a researcher does not take too much time describing his/her personal involvement with the subject, but since I was interviewing women from my own ethnocultural background and I did not have a previous rapport with most of them, I had to take extra time to allow them to feel at ease with me. I believed by doing so, I would make it easier for them to share their stories since the subject area is often very private and shameful. After creating a comfortable setting, I clarified the study recruitment form (see Appendix 2), interview process, consents (see Appendix 3), interview guide (see Appendix 4), counselling services (see Appendix 6), issues of confidentiality and use of the findings.

One-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 4) were carried out for about an hour in which the women discussed their experiences, challenges, coping styles and ideas of what would help them. The participants were asked to note their age, caste, religion, profession, language spoken at home, country of birth and age of
immigration to Canada, if applicable, in order to get a descriptive summary of the participants (see Appendix 9).

During the interviews, I made field notes on my personal observations (see Appendix 5). I transcribed the audio taped interviews, asking the women to edit them or provide any additional feedback. I offered them a chance to meet with me a second time, or to contact me if any questions or concerns arose and guaranteed to provide them a summary of the findings. Full confidentiality was and will be maintained throughout the study.

Research Question and Subquestions

The main research question was:

What are the experiences of single, second generation South Asian women in relation to the cultural expectations to marry?

The following subquestions were also considered:

What are the challenges for the women?  
How do they cope with their experiences?  
How can they be helped?

Participants

A homogenous criterion (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 1996) sample, of seven single, second generation South Asian women between the ages of twenty to thirty-five (20 – 35) participated in this study. Initially, I wanted to recruit women who were struggling with their experiences, instead of women who were content in their situations, but I had difficulty in recruitment. For example, there were about four women who I
knew we were going through some challenging issues and were told of the study by a third party; unfortunately, they did not wish to participate in the study. Thus, I had to expand my sample to include women who may or may not have been experiencing challenges. Since I was not sure how many women would be interested in participating in this study, I did not specify any particular subculture such as Sikh, Hindu, or Muslim.

The participants provided a brief demographic summary (see Appendix 9). In total, there were six Sikh women and one Hindu woman. Five were of Jat caste, one was of Chamaar caste and another from Kayasta caste. Their ages were 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 28 and 34. Their professions were varied and included a research assistant, an engineer, a nurse, a research analyst, a student, a sales representative and an administrator. All of the women had some form of post-secondary education. All spoke English in and out of the home; Punjabi was the additional language spoken at home for six women and Hindi for one. Six women were born in Canada, while one was born in India, but had immigrated at the age of two. Most of the women lived with their parents, while two had lived on and off with their parents for post-secondary education. Two of the women had just met men who were likely to be their future marriage partners; one was currently in an inter-racial relationship; and four were still searching for a partner; one of these had experienced a few interracial relationships.

Data Analysis

Creswell (1998) provided an excellent summary on how to analyze a grounded theory study. Open coding is used to first examine the data collected for salient categories of information supported by the text. This process is called categorization or
content analysis. A constant comparative approach is used to make sure categories are “saturated”, to make sure all themes and categories are identified until new categories cannot be found. These categories are further composed of subcategories called properties. These properties are further dimensionalized whereby the database is reduced to smaller themes or categories. The next step is to identify a single category as the central phenomenon of interest, then to explore interrelationships of the categories. This process of axial coding consists of the reasons and effects of the phenomenon. Then a theoretical model is created to portray the interrelationship of the main themes from the axial codings. Usually, such a process leads to the creation of a diagram which helps to visualize the conditions and consequences related to the central phenomenon (Cresswell, 1998). A diagram may be used, but it is not essential.

**Verification and Reliability**

I used several methods to verify the data. Since my own biases certainly coloured my interpretations and approach to the study, I attempted to identify my own biases within the research, a process known as *clarifying researcher bias*. By reviewing my field notes, I discovered additional personal biases. The method of *triangulation* ensured that several methods were used to verify data such as feedback from my peers and my research advisor assisted me to identify various perspectives and gaps in my research process and findings. I also considered the stories which opposed my perceptions and biases, thus incorporating the method of *negative case analysis*; and, finally by checking in with the women of the reliability of the previously collected data, the process of *member checks* was incorporated (Cresswell, 1998).
Underlying Assumptions and Biases of Study

Underlying this study was a number of personal assumptions. I started with the assumption that most second generation South Asian women experience pressures to marry and, that these pervasive pressures negatively affect them. It was also assumed that in South Asian cultures, the needs of the families and culture often outweighed the desires of the women. I presumed that the women were marginalized, since their life choices were limited by those more dominant in their lives. I expected that acculturation influenced how South Asian women and their families perceived and coped with their experiences. Second generation women living in Canada were expected to have different meanings, ideas and expectations of marriage than their families. Traditional values of the Indian culture likely impeded the women's experiences of finding a partner. I also suspected that women were affected in many aspects of their lives: personal, familial, and social. I believed that many of the women's stories remained silent because of shame and fear of public scrutiny.

Limitations of Study

Since, this qualitative research looked at the experiences of seven single, second generation South Asian women between the ages of twenty to thirty-five (20-35) in the Greater Vancouver area, I did not have the opportunity to explore a wide selection of South Asian subcultures, classes, religions, castes, ages, or sexual orientations. The sample of women was predominantly from a somewhat liberal, middle-class, Jat, non-practicing Sikh background. I did not have the opportunity to speak with women who were from more conservative, or extremely Westernized families.
I chose to explore the experiences of never-married single South Asian women, rather than separated or divorced single women. I did not have the opportunity to speak with women who were physically or mentally disabled. The women interviewed were between the ages of twenty to thirty-five (20-35); thus, the experiences of women younger or older from this age group were not studied. All of the women presented themselves as being heterosexual; therefore, the experiences of homosexual or bisexual women are not considered in this study. Since all the women but one were born in Canada, experiences of women who had immigrated to Canada after ten of age did not figure in the data. The women were from the Greater Vancouver area and thus may not necessarily represent the experiences of women living elsewhere. Challenges for the second generation were emphasized rather than issues for the first generation. South Asian men's experiences might be similar, but were not explored in this study. The main emphasis was on the women's issues, although some mention of parental and familial experiences was included.

Since the subject may be shameful, I encountered difficulty recruiting enough participants, especially those who were in extreme struggles. I guaranteed confidentiality, but some women likely felt uncomfortable discussing their personal issues with a stranger. Since I was from the same or similar ethnocultural background, some women might have been cautious about which stories and details they shared, for fear of being judged, or misunderstood. Some of the women may have been slightly intimidated by the interviewing process, as this was their first time being audiotaped for
an interview. And, some may have felt some hesitation and discomfort in openly recounting their experiences.

The brief interview, about an hour long, may not have allowed in-depth discussions about a variety of unexplored topics, particularly details of personal and family issues. Moreover, one woman whom I knew before and who knew something of the research study may have provided information that she thought I wanted to hear. By sharing my story before interviewing, some women may have felt they needed to “measure up” to my story, or they have in fact may have undermined their own experience. Lastly, my own experience undoubtedly shaped my questions and understanding of this social issue, skewing my efforts to maintain full “objectivity”.

**Ethical Issues**

Participants were respected throughout this research. First, consent from the Ethics Review Committee was initially received (see Appendix 1) to ensure there was no mistreatment of any kind. The women were “legally competent” (i.e. not mentally challenged) to participate in the study. Before being interviewed, they signed consent forms and they were given the choice to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences. The data was locked in a filing cabinet. Full confidentiality was and will be maintained throughout the study: names of the participants were and will not be used in the transcribed interviews, or in the final thesis. The audio tapes will be erased and any personal identifying information will be disposed of by December 31/1999.
It appeared that the interview process allowed some women the relief of venting and airing their perspectives. Although none of the women showed any emotional distress, I provided a list of local counselling agencies (see Appendix 6). Many women seemed to appreciate that I was near their age group, particularly those close to their thirties, when they talked about age-related issues. I addressed their concerns about confidentiality and how the data was going to be utilized.

Personally, I felt uncomfortable about my role in taking data from these women even though I would provide them with their transcripts and the eventual findings. Not all of the participants chose to accept this offer of the research material. I tried to keep an open mind, but at times was challenged as my own judgments and questions seeped into our conversations. I took a great risk in sharing my personal story with them and this example may have set the precedent for how much to share in the interviews. In situations where I judged some of the women to be "oppressed", they did not necessarily see themselves as such. I realized I was looking at the issue from my experience and that other women's experiences were not like mine. The women may not have seen the limitations of their situations, whereas I may have looked for them. As Josselson (1996) points out, my interpretation of their events may have been very different from their own.

I did not wish to ask any women to share more than they wanted to, but they may have felt some pressure to express personal details. I tried to honour their privacy as well as their need to share their stories. For instance, one woman wanted to consult with me. I tried to be an active listener and supporter, provided my opinion, but told her that she
must decide what was in her best interest. Because of my privileged role as a researcher, a power imbalance may have existed between the women and me; some women may have seen me as being somewhat of an “expert”, although I tried to make the relationship as egalitarian as possible.
CHAPTER 4

Findings
Safe Witness

A safe witness offers an individual an opportunity to have a relationship with him/her self as a way to better understand one's losses while discovering his/her truer self.

The bringing of stories that represent pain and sorrow to another person and having those accounts properly witnessed, allows for the subtle shift of feeling alone and misunderstood. In the presence of the witness an individual begins the process of having a relationship with his/her own emotions while in relationship with the witness. In that safe atmosphere or safe haven the self begins the journey back in time to earlier periods of loss, fear, sadness and sorrow. The process of revisiting earlier traumatic events and becoming reflective about them can help ease emotional pain.

This process is usually initiated after an individual has a strong emotional reaction to a current event that is symbolic of a previous loss. This revisiting by an individual of past emotional losses in the present is potentially the beginning of emotional healing.

(Freeman, 1999, p. 2)
Findings

The findings of this study are presented in major themes, subthemes and their subcategories. Five major themes emerged from the data: pervasive pressures to marry; conflicting expectations; women’s ways of coping; and, women’s suggestions for change. For a general outline of the findings, please refer to Appendix 10.

I) Pervasive Pressures to Marry

Under the major theme of pervasive pressures, three subthemes emerged: the context of the pressures, realities of looking for a mate, and the influence of family. The context of pressures illustrates when and how the pressures are felt and some extreme cases are illustrated. Next, the section on the realities of looking for a mate discusses the dynamics of mate selection. Thirdly, the family’s involvement and influence describe how members contribute to the prevailing pressures to marry.

A) Context of Pressures

Generally, pressures to marry were felt from a variety of sources including Indian programs and movies, parents, siblings, extended family, other relatives, South Asian friends, or newly immigrated friends of the family. Women recognized that marriage is seen to be the norm in society for both men and women, but women received more pressure to marry.

Three out of the seven women felt strong pressure to marry, and four felt medium to mild pressure. Women who were approaching their thirties or who were over
thirty believed their parents would like to see them married, but they did not feel that they were severely affected by the pressures to marry.

_I have my bad days here and there where you think, you know, it really would be nice to have somebody and everybody around you is getting married, but it sort of comes and goes. So, I can’t say it’s been a huge impact on me. It’s just, you go through your periods where you’re not happy with it. I can’t say it’s been debilitating to the point that it’s sort of taken away from my life._

Another woman described that despite the pressures, she was determined to not worry about marriage.

_There is pressure. It does tick me off. I wanna do my own thing and not worry about marriage. I’m not ready for marriage today, never been [for] about two years. And, I don’t really care... ‘You’re almost thirty,’ and you know, people are going to say, ‘Something is wrong with you,’ you know. You want me to go out and have babies? I could do that, but that’s not what I want right now._

**Judged by Single Status.** One of the women mentioned that marriage is so important in the South Asian community that women are often judged as being insignificant if they continue to have a single status.

_You are nothing when you are single, but you are something when you’re married. They don’t care how many degrees you have and how successful you are in your career. They couldn’t care less. If you’re not married, you don’t have that ring on your finger, you are nothing. It’s a bonus if you got all this great education and you’re married. But, most importantly, marriage is the most important thing. That’s how you make your mark in life._

**Marriageable Age.** Many of the women believed that a South Asian woman is expected to marry by her mid-twenties, with some flexibility of a couple of years younger or
older. The women who were twenty-five or younger appeared confident that they would be able to find a partner “before it got too late”. As women reached their late twenties and grew older, concerns were expressed by others that they were passing the marriageable age.

If I can point to an ideal age for a South Asian [woman] to get married, [it would] probably be about 25. Older than 25, then you know, probably [she would have] some problems there in terms of finding someone. The pressures definitely I’m sure, increase from there on.

Pressure to Marry During or after Post-Secondary Education. One woman admitted that in order to avoid the familial pressure of marriage she used school as an excuse to escape from the stress. Other women mentioned that it is generally expected that if a woman has not “found” anyone during her educational years, she is expected to marry soon after she finishes her post-secondary education. Often, there is a rush to become educated if a woman is to marry within a “timely fashion”.

I remember when I was in university and I just started. And, obviously we’ve all dated before then, but you know my father comes to me and says, ‘Ok, [I] just wanted to get this off my chest. You can do whatever you want to and date whomever because now it’s up to you. Right? And so I went, ‘Ok, sure. No problem.’ I come home the next day and he goes, ‘So, do you have a boyfriend?’ and I’m like, ‘Dad! Wow! I can’t find someone like that!’

Once you are done your education, you have your credentials, and [then] you’re suitable to marry an educated boy…. Seems to me that once you’re graduated the pressure increases that it’s time to become an adult.

Parental Consent to Date May Equate Expectation to Marry. Some women were given parental consent to date, but usually only for the goal of marriage. Parents may encourage their daughters to “find” someone on their own, but their expectations of how quickly a partner can be found may not be realistic.
Oh, they want us to date. Yah, go out and do whatever you want to do and date. But they always say, 'You guys go out so much and how come you can't find anybody?' Right? Like, we'll go out for coffee with girlfriends and stuff and we're not always on the prowl. I've never been on the prowl. I don't go to a mall and start looking or it's not [like] buying a pair of shoes you know. Things just happen. They don't understand. 'Ask your friends.' So, I call my friend and say, 'Do you [know of] anyone I should marry?' And, you know it becomes a big joke right? And, that's not the way we function.

You know, if you get that (pressure to marry) everyday or every time you walk out the door, your mom says, 'Oh, make sure you look for somebody,' you know. Or, you go out and a bunch of girls get together, it's always mentioned. You know whenever they can throw it in there. They just throw it in there.

Insufficient Time to Assess Partner. Parents often had difficulty understanding why the women wanted sufficient time to assess whether they were interested in their partner. Parents became more impatient if the daughter had dated someone for a while, but was still unsure if she wanted to marry.

I have no trouble dating, but as long they're Jat, Sikh, you know, good job and the whole [thing]. It meets my mom's criteria, you know. She's wondering why, for example, the one guy that I met through [an] arranged introduction, [and I] dated for a month. She's wondering why? Basically, this guy wanted to marry me and I just couldn't do it. Couldn't do it! So, my mom was wondering, 'Well, you were with him for a month. Where were you going with that?' I go, 'I was trying to figure out.' But, that whole month when I was dating that was the only thing. Do I want to marry him? Do I or don't I? It wasn't like I was enjoying the month. It was awful! It wasn't even dating!

Once a woman meets a suitable partner there is often a lot of pressure on the couple to marry very quickly. The parents, relatives and even the couple themselves may wish to hasten the arrangement of a wedding ceremony to avoid any change of mind.
They're (her parents) just so happy that I've met someone and they just want this thing to work out so badly that they are willing to overstep asking what I'm feeling. It's very anxiety-provoking. It's causing me to not think clearly. Everything is distorted. I can't be objective about this anymore. For them (her parents), marriage is the biggest thing in the world. For them that's the only way you are established. I need time to make sure I'm connecting with this guy in all different levels, and time is very essential. [But] again [for] my parents and the community, for them, you met the guy once and you get married to him, what's the big idea? You've had three weeks now!

B) Realities of Looking for a Mate

Trends of Meeting Partners. Most women met men through their families, extended families, relatives, friends, work and school environments. Some women met men through the matrimonials in the South Asian newspapers and telephone dating services. Some women kept in contact with men through the internet and by electronic mail (e-mail). There were a few examples of women meeting men with their parents. Usually, one family would visit another family while the man and woman talked separately to determine whether they were interested in each other. The women preferred to meet the men through their friends who they believed had a clearer understanding of the qualities they were searching for in a mate.

Although some of the women had met potential partners on their own, with or without the consent of the parents, most of the women consulted with their parents to ensure that the partners met particular requirements requested by the parents, such as caste, family lineage, and religion. However, for many families who were becoming more Western, but still maintain some traditional values, there was greater acceptance of women meeting men on their own, either over the telephone or on blind dates.
Dating is a little bit more open than before. I would say like as opposed to the 80's... [I've] seen changes in ten years. My dad will say here's her number, or he'll give me his number and just the two of [us] will connect. So, it's totally outside of a family and so they've taken that pressure off. Whereas in the early twenties it would be going to somebody's house. They'd have dinner prepared or whatever. I just remember feeling a lot of pressure then. Even though parents would say, 'Oh just check him out and if you like him fine. You know if you don't, it's totally ok.' But, you sort of knew that it wasn't totally ok because it would be another person you'd be saying 'no' to.

When I was, you know, 17 and my cousins were like in their 20's, late 20's, 30's. They would talk on the phone, have the whole family there. Now, no families are involved. It's just the guy and girl. These are my personal experiences. They just talk on the phone and meet whereas 15-16 years ago, they used to have the whole family involved.

Arranged Marriage not Expected. None of the women expected to have an arranged marriage, instead they were encouraged to have an “introduced marriage”, in which they were acquainted to men by their family and friends. The decision to date, marry, or dissolve the meeting was made solely by both the women and men without any interference from their families. The parents generally consented to their daughters “finding” someone on their own, but that did not necessarily mean they were given the freedom to date in an “openly” fashion.

Through the generations as your parents change they realize that maybe it's a better idea for our daughters to meet somebody on their own, because that way we are not gonna feel the pressures of doing that and that way they're happy. And, if something happens we won't be held responsible.

Parents’ Expectations of a Partner for their Daughters. Parents often desired that their daughters marry someone from the same South Asian cultural background, caste, class and religion as their own. Usually, they looked for someone a little older than the female, and for someone who was able to speak the traditional language. Other qualities
included whether the male was family oriented, had an established job/career, had a university education, and was from a reputable family. Each family’s specific preferences differed depending on their values and circumstances.

You know, security, caste, the image, what the guy looks like, is very important to them (parents). Whether he comes from a good family...
They look at if the guy’s got a good job... or they look at education, [and] age.

They (parents) are looking for a religion. They don’t believe in castes. Nor do I believe in castes. So, religion is a hard thing.

For a match to be considered “successful”, many parents put great emphasis on the man’s education and financial earning ability, especially if their daughter was well educated herself.

You want your son or daughter to be married to another educated person and be successful in that monetary sense. That’s important to have, to carry their prestige I think. If your child is educated then they’re more likely to marry an educated person and they’re more likely to gain that prestige and be viewed as successful and you as parents will be viewed [as] successful for matching [them].

Although not all South Asian subcultures look for somebody outside of their clan (got/gotra), many Punjabi parents try to find someone who does not have blood ties with the maternal families of both parents. Although only one of the women mentioned the concept of looking for “good genes” in potential partners, she seemed to be referring to the family’s clan or ancestral lineage.

It goes back to the family name, you see. Does he come from a good family? Does he have enough money from their family? You know, incest is a big thing, right? Like, incest is huge. You know, it’s so huge that you know that we search the woman’s maiden name and the man’s name. They want to sift through everything! That’s what I mean when I talk
about 'genes'. [If he] comes from a good upbringing, good wholesome traits, [and has good] characteristics.

Since most of the population in the Greater Vancouver area is made up of South Asians from a Jat, Sikh ethnocultural background, families who did not match this criteria had additional barriers in finding a marriage partner for their daughters. Although the Sikh religion preaches not to discriminate against caste, many families continue to practice the Hindu tradition of caste selection. Thus, caste discrimination further limited the pool of potential partners the women could choose from.

It's not an issue for my family actually to be with somebody with a different caste, but there is definitely a lot of discrimination of what caste you are. You see it in the papers all the time. People refer to it (her caste) as a swear word and stuff like that and or when they say, 'Oh my God!, You're that caste! Oh, my God! You guys are pretty white! You guys are educated and stuff like that. You know, you aren't like these people who used to pick garbage and had broken skin and were very dark and stuff like that.' So, you know caste is definitely a big, big issue.

One woman reported that in her situation, her parents told her that caste was not as important as the commonality of race and culture with her partner.

Caste? It isn't as important, but it still holds some value. Ok, we (her parents) can put that aside as long as he's Indian. [As] long as he has good job. [As] long as he comes from a good family. We can, you know, [say,] 'caste no bar.' We could overlook that, but definitely the idea is another South Asian partner... But, it's not like they've (parents) ever come out to us and said, 'You know, you can’t marry somebody who's of a lower caste', or whatever. I think if I ever met somebody, and the person was here, and he had a good family and I got along with him and I wanted to marry him, I don’t think it would be a problem now. But, as long as they're Indian.
In contrast, another woman reported that caste seems to be such an important issue for many families that marrying outside of one’s caste is considered to tarnish the family’s reputation more than marrying outside of one’s race:

Outside of the caste is worse than marrying a White person. It is! It’s that humiliating to them! That makes me so mad. I wish, you know I wish [I could] find someone in a different caste than me. I just haven’t. I would go through with it if I fell in love with the person. I would fight for it.

Mate Qualities Desired by South Asian Men. All of the women had their own perceptions of the characteristics of an ideal mate desired by most South Asian men and their parents. The women reported that a desirable woman is expected to have the following qualities: conservative mannerism, sexually inexperienced, passive, beautiful, tall, fair, slim, ability to cook and clean, educated, athletic, outgoing, someone who took care of the kids and her in-laws. Much of the emphasis on a woman’s physical attractiveness and her ability to have both Western and Eastern traits.

They are probably looking for a girl within those groups (groups of South Asian women who ‘hang out together’ mostly with other women) and those people tend to be fairly conservative, fairly sort of shy when it comes to the dating scene. I guess what I consider them to be and I hope it not too much of an insult, but really passive, not very assertive in terms of getting what they want or going after what they want... South Asian men want someone who is a lot more conventional or more closely resembles that woman who is more of an insider to the culture... Preferably tall, slim and beautiful, all those things, and preferably educated.

Like when it comes to someone who excels in every area [of the], kitchen, you know, well educated, outgoing, athletic. Someone who takes care of her body, tall, [and is] slim. Their expectations are... [based] a lot on physical appearance! A lot of emphasis!
I think a lot of Indian guys look for somebody much like their [own] mothers. A lot of Indian guys now-a-days are, they are more likely to follow what their parents say, or more likely to satisfy their parents than they are to see what they want for themselves, or the way it is today.

C) Influence of the Family

Parental Education and Career. Parental education and career did not completely determine whether a woman felt more or less pressured to marry, but parents with university education or professional careers tended to have more liberal values than other parents. For instance, one woman explained that because her father held a “non-Indian” way of thinking, she did not get as much pressure to marry.

And, my dad’s a professional. He’s in the Indian community, but he doesn’t really have a really Indian way of thinking. He’s sort of realizes the pressures that we’re under and [it] hasn’t been a major problem for him.

It’s not necessarily the case, but parents who are more educated seem to be a little bit more liberal or lenient with the bringing up of their children. Whereas if the parents have the equivalent of a high school or grade school education in India, [they] are more likely to be traditional and sticking to more traditional Indian values.

Mother’s Role as a Facilitator and Advocate. Many of the women expressed that it was mainly their mothers who were given the role to guide their daughters to meet “appropriate” potential partners. Many mothers were actively consulting with other mothers or encouraging their daughters to pursue particular actions to increase their chances of meeting men. The mothers communicated on behalf of the fathers and daughters. Direct discussion about relationships or potential partners between the fathers and daughters were uncommon.
I always hear it through my mom because my dad will never come to us and say, 'Hey this is what they're saying.'... He's never come to us after and say, 'Well, you know these relatives are really getting on my back so I really think you need to do something.' My mom and him will have a conversation or whatever. We'll be talking with our mom and she'll kind of just bring it up. ... You know, mom pulls up The Link (South Asian newspaper) once in while, those [are] probably the worse days and you go, 'Oh no! Mom's going through one of her, you know, my daughter should be married days.'

But, she (her mother) tries a lot. She gets you registered here and there, introduces me. It's just like, oh! I can't say no to her. That's my problem. If I refused ever to, refused to not see someone, I think she'd be devastated. She's trying so hard. I can't say no to her. Even though I'm not in the mood to do your hair, make-up, look your best, sell yourself. I'm not in the mood, but I can't say no to her.

Multigenerational Family Issues. Each family certainly has its own strengths and struggles. These family issues often get transferred from generation to generation, affecting how the family system functions overall. Such influences certainly affected how the women viewed their predicaments. For instance, one of the women reported that her opinions about South Asian culture and her life had a great deal to do with her mother's past struggles with her family:

I know that she wasn't happy trying to be that ideal mother and the ideal wife, someone who could always provide, someone doing the right thing, doing what her parents wanted for one thing, doing what her husband wanted on the other. And in her case, that was tearing her apart because they didn't like each other. Her parents and her husband wanted different things and she was there in the middle and trying to be a good wife, mother, daughter, [and] worker... Seeing her spirit die by being controlled by other people's opinions, by these outside forces. ...Circumstances in her life were very different than me growing up. It's very different times. She had different parents and a different environment.

Parental Concerns. According to the women interviewed, some of their parents also began to question themselves as a result of their concerns for their single daughters.
Some parents questioned whether they had raised their daughters appropriately. They questioned whether they had been too lenient by giving their daughters the ability to choose a marriage partner. Sometimes they became extremely frustrated during the process.

[Parents] can’t dictate to their children, so parents are frustrated. They can’t dictate what’s gonna happen and they’re having pressures [and] they get frustrated with that. So, when they see their daughters aren’t getting married until they are in their late twenties ... They’re like, ‘Why?’ And, they think something is wrong [with] them (daughters).

My mom, the way she shows her frustration [is], she jokes about it. She can be very kind of, she jokes about my single life. Like, ‘auddh boodhi...’ (you are half an old woman). She goes, “When I was 28 I had 2 kids and they were 8 years old’, and so she jokes about it. But, I know she’s kind of like worried too.

**Parents Cannot Relate to Women’s Desires.** Several women mentioned that their parents could not understand why they were seeking a list of particular qualities in their mates. Consequently, the women’s desires were undermined by their parents.

To them (her parents) it’s the guys got a good job. ‘What do you mean soul mate?,’ you know? Their image is marriage is based on security as opposed to ours, [which is] based on more of, you know, friendship. We keep trying to tell our mom that you know this is the way it is now-a-days. Kids don’t care about caste, they don’t care about colour, they don’t care if the guy is East Indian or nothing, you know ... They (parents) just see sort of the good family, the job, he’s decent looking, [so] what’s wrong with him?

I just remember feeling a lot pressure at that time even though I knew I would never say yes to somebody I didn’t wanna marry. But, I didn’t like having to deal with, you know, haven’t to go through all that. Well, why don’t you like him? Sometimes it’s just the feeling. Sometimes it’s just the feeling that you didn’t like somebody... You’d always be looking for an excuse. I remember, you know, I’d hate it when the guy had a great job, and everything fit and you couldn’t think of an excuse why you didn’t like him because they’d never just take the fact that you said, ‘Well, he just doesn’t [have] what I’m looking for’ ... [They] can’t really relate to that.
Influence of and on Siblings. Since each family's dynamics are different, the effects on the siblings as a result of a woman's experience vary accordingly. In addition, the women reported that their brothers did not get the same amount of pressure to marry as the daughters in the family.

Then I was seeing this guy [and my mother and grandparents] said, 'Well you should set a good example for your brother and sisters and stuff... Whereas [with] my brothers [they] joke and say, 'Oh yes, when you bring your bride home', or like [in] a joking way, sarcastic way. Even my younger brother kind of just laughs. When they, mom talks about kids, she'll laugh at it with my brother... With us (her and her sister), it's like, 'Aren't you guys getting old to have kids now,' and that kind of stuff. They treat us kind of more serious as opposed to being sarcastic or laughing about it. It doesn't really affect my brothers.

A few of the women who were either the eldest daughters or who reported they had an older sister, agreed that the eldest daughter tended to receive more pressure to marry than her younger siblings. The marital status of other siblings further enhanced or hindered the pressures the women received.

My sister got married when she was 24. The pressure was definitely on her and she only saw her husband for a week, and had to say 'yes' or 'no'. So, she totally had different pressures than we do. Yah, I think once she was married the pressure was off of my parents for a while because one daughter was married. Yah, I think the younger you are the less pressure there is on you.

II) Conflicting Expectations

There was a clear tension between Western and Eastern values while living in Canada, but growing up in a South Asian cultural context. Women were often torn between cultural expectations and personal expectations. In particular, they were
striving to integrate their duty to their family and their growing individualism. By living in both the South Asian and Canadian cultures, women were able to compare and contrast the cultural differences in values and expectations. For instance, one of the women described that in the Western culture liberty and fending for one's self was encouraged, but whereas the "East Indian way of being, the sense that I get, is you are seen, but not heard."

A) Cultural Tensions and Expectations

Time. The length of time the family has been in Canada usually contributed to how "Canadianized" or Westernized the family had become. The families of the women in this study appeared to have "semi-liberal" views. The assimilated and integrated families seemed to have adopted more of the Western values and world views than families who were not. However, most of the women expressed that even though they grew up with the rules of their "Indian" culture, they were expected to abide by cultural rules by both the "Indian" and "Canadian" This constant balancing of two cultures often lead them to feel torn.

I'm an East Indian in a Western culture. You know, at home I walk in through the doors and I'm back in India, and then I'm back out and I'm in Canada. That's a huge barrier... I feel like a freak sometimes. I'm an Indian living in Canada. Those are two different major concepts. It's like East meeting West. It's like this clash!... I always have wished that I wasn't East Indian. Or, if I was East Indian [that] I grew up in that country, like India. Things would've been a lot easier for me. I would've only known certain things, grown up with certain things, expected certain things, you know. It's so hard being in one kind of culture, and living in another. It's so hard. It's so confusing. It messes you up.

Family in Western and Eastern Cultures. The extended family system is of great importance in the Eastern culture, whereas the Western culture emphasizes the needs of
the individual and the nuclear family system. One woman expressed her rejection of the
“Indian” extended family system and of her acceptance of the Western nuclear family.

[In South Asian cultures] it is the marriage of the two families. There is no
marriage of the individuals, but marriage of the two families...Things like,
the expectations living with the in-laws. There’s no separation. There’s no
recognition or separation of individuality, that’s the biggest thing I find.
It’s always, you’re always with the family, or you’re always part of the
family. You’re always living with the family, you know, you’re eating,
breathing, whatever with the damn family, you know. And, then marriage
within the White culture is very individual. It’s ‘you develop your own
family, you nourish your own family.’

Cultural Differences Regarding Relationships in Love and Marriage. Different Western
and Eastern cultural meanings regarding love and marriage were also said to create
differences in how the women, or their Caucasian friends experienced relationships, love
and marriage:

Love, in the East Indian culture community means you hang out, you’re
together, you’re in love and it’s going to last the rest of your life, and it’s
a very Barbie and Ken kind of deal. But, love in the Western culture
means supporting each other, being best friends with each other. The
Western culture has taught me that there’s more to life than the marriage
of the family, or things at face value. There’s things underneath the
surface... it’s important for you to connect... When the average White
person would say, ‘I’m getting married,’... as opposed to when I say ‘I’m
getting married,’ it’s so different.

Difficulties with Interracial Relationships. Each woman had a different comfort level
about dating someone outside of her own culture. One woman, who preferred to marry
inside her own ethnoculture provided reasons for her decision.

I do want to marry [an] East Indian because there’s that understanding
and connection that will be between us that we don’t have to speak of.
Like, with a White person it’ll be [a] bit harder. I’ll have to work that
much harder to have him understand my way of being and then he's going
to be working a little bit harder to have me understand his way of being.

Another woman stated that if she did not meet anyone from her own background
by the age of thirty she would then consider someone outside of her culture.

It wouldn't matter at that point. It's not because I've given up. I think if I
meet someone when I'm 30 who is not of the same background, but let's
say I connect [and] he has every other personality [traits that] I'm looking
for? Yah, he'd be worth it, right?

One woman stated that although she wanted to have a relationship with
Caucasian men, she was afraid that her choice would cause distress to her family.

I have particular kinds of expectations of a life partner. And, fortunately
all those expectations or characteristics or whatever, I was finding in the
White folks, not East Indians. Right? So, now I'm stuck up another creek.
It's like great, you know! I think I know what I want, but I'm not finding
it in, in people I'm supposed to find it in, being East Indian. [I was]
finding [it] in, you know, [in] the Caucasians. So, then I was going
through a lot of stress. Ok, great you know! I can definitely see myself
meeting some wonderful White guy and getting married, but then being
thrown, outcast by my family. Not my immediate family, but just the
general East Indian community here. And, that's another [stress] that's
big for me. I really do care about what people think about me. You know
my self-concept is made by how people see me. Not my entire self-concept,
but a large chunk of it... It was like, I had a major hate on for these guys
(South Asian men) because they were not what I wanted.... Meanwhile, the
White guys were like these... knights in shining armour.

Two of the women had been involved in interracial relationships. One of them
stated that even though her partner was right for her, her family had difficulty accepting
him because he was non-South Asian. She now found herself in another dilemma.

Like, the family knows about it. They've known about him almost a year
now. They all accept it, but my mom is in denial and doesn't talk about it.
I think she thinks... [if] I don't talk about [it] for a long time, I might just forget about him or something like that. My grandparents are more worried about what people are going to say. ... You just kind of wake up one day and realize he's not East Indian. And, then you kind of tie yourself whether should I dump this person because he's black? Really, that's the only thing, the pigmentation of the skin... He's pretty much the perfect guy that my parents would want except for the fact that he's black and I have a hard time dealing with throwing something so good away because he's black.

Kismat. The Eastern philosophy of *kismat* states that one's destiny is controlled by God and one's *karm/karma*. Although only one woman referred to the concept of *kismat*, many South Asian families believe in this world view. For example, a mother believed her daughters were not getting married because of her unfortunate *kismat*.

'What've I done!' Or, mom's always saying, 'Well maybe it's kismat! Oh well, what have I done in the past? Maybe God's punishing me this way.'

Importance of Izzat. Family honour and keeping face (*izzat/Azzat*) hold great importance in the South Asian community. All of the women recognized that their family's reputations were very important in the “Indian” community. As one woman put it, “It's all about recognition, how people are going to see you.” Or, as another described, “The East Indian community really, really, really emphasizes image, like the look.”

Even though none of the women mentioned the term *izzat*, they talked about the importance of maintaining a “good” image and a “good” reputation in the South Asian culture and that they were responsible for keeping the family’s honour from being tarnished. For example, one woman mentioned how her family struggled to “keep face” in the community because of her “unconventional” choices of relationships.
She (her mother) had concerns about what people were saying about her and I think she had actually heard some things come back to her, in terms of what, how she must be leading me astray, or must be a bad role model for me because she is a divorced woman, in allowing me my choices in life. Because if she hadn't allowed me to do those things, I wouldn't have those things, or that's the thought behind it anyway. So, if I'm doing something unconventional or wrong in people's minds then that does reflect back on my parents, especially a mother because like in most societies, it's the mother's role to educate the child in terms of the upbringing of the child. So, it's her responsibility... it's always the mother's responsibility.

My grandfather confronted me at that time and said, 'The whole town knows what you're doing, and if your gonna live in this house, your gonna follow my rules, essentially.'

The importance of family prestige in the South Asian community was also expressed by most women.

The idea of the family in the South Asian culture [is] as being the be all, end all, most important thing. But it's a very specific view of family. It's a view of family that keeps face and finds it important to have a high level prestige in the community, and that involves doing things according to this appropriate or ideal way. I mean good education, well paying job, status symbols like cars, homes.

Difference in Gender Roles. The women in this study were also socialized to carry out particular roles defined for women. A number of them mentioned that it is expected that a woman must know how to cook, clean, and do household chores, and be an ideal daughter-in-law and wife to her future family. At the same time, she is expected to be submissive, passive, and self-sacrificial. The women did not agree with these prescribed roles.

It's always a woman who's raised as a young child to grow up cook and clean, and to feed her husband and take care of the children. And, at the same time look very beautiful and have her clothes neatly together, her make-up done. And you know, never say anything bad, always to go along with the flow, to bite her tongue even though she might not agree with something. So, she's always been inferior.... Checking in with people,
making sure that you are doing the appropriate thing. An Indian woman always knows her place, knows her boundaries, what she should be doing. She smoothes things out with people. She sort of keeps the peace in the family or keeps relations smooth between her and her husband or her and her kids and husband or what have you.

In contrast, most South Asian men are socialized differently. They are given a lot of freedom, encouraged to take risks, and are not expected to do housework. One woman stated that South Asian men often get spoiled by their parents and then expect the women to complete their duties for them.

South Asian men I think have been quite spoiled by their families. Whereas South Asian daughters have been expected to cope, learn all those sort of household big things that women are supposed to know to impress their mother-in-law. South Asian men have relied on their mothers to do that for them, or their sisters to do [that] for them, even down to like washing their underwear for goodness sakes!

Limited Opportunity to Date for Girls and Women. An example of the difference in treatment of men and women, is that girls were not expected to date or socialize with males outside of their families. There were only three women who were given parental consent to date in their late adolescence or early twenties, providing their parents knew their partners. Most of the women were not allowed to date in their teen years, and were expected to remain sexually inexperienced until they married. Women reported that South Asian men were generally allowed to date and have sexual relationships whether it was with or without parental consent.

Males can go out. They can date. They can sleep around. They can explore their feelings. They can do all kinds of different things. ... The girl on the other hand isn’t even allowed to look at a guy until she is of marrying age. She's [to] remain a virgin, you know. She has to remain the same as the day she came out of her mother’s womb, basically.
B) Personal Expectations

Desire for Life. Although not all women mentioned their desires for their lives, some had aspirations of what they wanted and what mattered the most. The women who did mention some personal dreams wished to pursue a sense of self, self-development, careers, psychological, emotional, and financial independence, and to have the opportunity to explore their personal interests. One respondent summarized the underlying desire for all of the women, “I don’t just want a life, but a good, interesting, fun quality of life.”

Desire for Sense of Self

I consider myself as a progressive thinker... modern, ambitious, outspoken, loud... I'm very ambitious. I'm very motivated and very enthusiastic. And, I want to be heard not just seen.

I've worked too hard in my life. I've put myself through school. I've got a wicked job. I'm an independent thinker. I've done all of these things for myself.

I feel I have really come [a long way] from who I am as a person, and my level of development... I couldn’t be what somebody else wanted me to be.

Desire for Self-development

Professionally, I see myself as a very strong [person]... I know what I want and I'm going to get it. I can focus and I can put my mind [on] it. I'm in control. I'm in the driver's seat... I see myself as an independent person, motivated to do things, open to new ideas... I have an expectation of going to get my masters [degree].

We got our lives. We got our health. We got careers. We are smart, intelligent women. We can go and do other things.
Desire for Independence

I think girls are more likely to break off (from their parents) and kind of find themselves, or maybe cause it's something new that we never had, you know. We can actually be on our own.

I prefer to live with them (in-laws) when they are elderly, and have my youthfulness on my own.

It sort of would be nice to actually be going home, and just sort of having your own space for a while. That, I think I sort of miss more and more as I'm getting older.

Desire for Career

Obviously, my career, is important to me. If I've worked this hard, I'm not gonna throw it away.

Getting settled in a career, definitely. ...I definitely want to work until retirement. ...Just the simple things in life. I don't want anything more and anything less.

I was going to first establish myself as a person [and] then meet that Mr. Wonderful after I established myself... I worked way too hard to get [to] where I am. I am not gonna get sucked into that overwhelming vacuum of marriage.

Desire for Exploration

I have a good job. I can afford my own place. ...There's so much I wanna do and see in this world. There's endless, a number of things you wanna do.

I think it's so important to enjoy yourself, to go travel, to enjoy different adventures, to meet different people.

Desire for Love. All of the women who were interviewed expressed they wanted to be “in love”, or at least have some sort of “chemistry”, “spark”, or “click” with their partners before considering marriage. Almost all of the women stated that their parents
did not understand their desire for love before marriage since most of the parents had an arranged marriage themselves.

There is more to marriage than tangible things or things that are down on paper.... There's a lot more. There's things about you know, sensitivity, personality, interests, dislikes, likes ... It's not a thing. It's not a physical thing. It's just something that happens where you just get along with somebody and you enjoy being with that somebody. It's gotta be more of a best friend that you're proud to be with. You feel good when you are around them. ... And I know in a marriage I want to be respected from my husband, but love has to be a major thing too.

I'm not going to get married for practical reasons, I do believe in romance. I do and I'm going to keep on believing and I'd keep it alive, you know.

Women's Expectations of a Marriage Partner. The women generally wanted someone from the same ethnocultural background as their own, but a few women stated that they would consider someone from outside of their culture at some point if they had met the “right” person. One of women had relationships with only non-South Asians, and was expecting to marry a non-South Asian. To be compatible with the family's expectations, the women generally looked for similar caste and religious backgrounds.

I think if I met somebody through work or whatever and it just happened. I guess it's possible then I would. I can't say I'm out looking for somebody outside the culture. I tend to look more towards people of the same sort of background. So, that would be my ideal.

Each woman mentioned a variety of qualities that she desired in her ideal partner: someone who was independent, with a “good” or outgoing personality, with admirable social skills, was friendly, educated, and had some sort of a professional career. Many desired a partner with a sense of humour, who was more of a soul mate and friend. They wanted trust, honesty, and sensitivity in a man. Compatibility was of utmost
importance. All of the women were seeking a companion who was able to be physically, psychologically, intellectually, and emotionally intimate with them.

Other qualities included someone with a strong sense of self, someone who was goal oriented, communicative, a good listener, respectful, fun, and had similar interests and hobbies as the woman herself. Some women preferred a partner who believed in and practiced self-development, and who was aware of his likes, and dislikes. Others mentioned someone who had good family values, intelligent, proud to be South Asian, and was "well-rounded". Men who were confident, proud of his wife's independence and supported her career were also desired. All wanted partners who believed in and shared an equal division of domestic labour. Three women specified they did not want a man with an alcohol problem. One woman was very adamant that she did not wish to live with in-laws and this heavily influenced her decision when considering a partner.

The following are a list of most of their desires:

*I think you're looking for the basics like education, a job, good family I think that's really important to them (parents). Similar things to what I'm looking for, but you should be attracted to the person somewhat. But, you know that kind of clicking with somebody, the sense of humour, and sort of getting along with them.*

*Independence, strong sense of self, individuality, like they need to know who they are, motivations, goals, really interesting desires and interests... I want a partner where we both evolve together; we both connect on different levels... Sharing of interests and hobbies, compatibility of personalities. We need to connect in all different ways for a good life together.*

*Things like good sense of humour, and you know that kind of stuff is important. But, not really having a blanket, this is who I'm looking for. I have a hard time now to try to pin point a type of person. A descent, wanting a family, those kind of basic values. Doesn't have to be a doctor, or lawyer or whatever.*
My criteria? Personality. It's number one on my list. I think our personalities have to be compatible. They have to be outgoing, sociable, friendly, but someone with good moral values too, you know.

I need to connect with him at an intellectual level. [He should] have enough guts to be proud of the fact that he's married to a woman who has her own opinion and her own mind, right?... I don't believe in that orthodox [belief that] it has to be a lawyer or doctor or whatever. Apart from the respect issues, the intelligence, [and] 'all roundedness', right?

I'll look for someone more, you know, he's going to be my friend who I'll be able to trust his views. Will I be able to have a good conversation [with him]? Will I argue with this person or speak my mind and you know do outdoor stuff? I'll look for a guy who'll allow me to be myself. You know, who I can like laugh [with], and not just be serious all the time... To me, it's important whether the guy could do housework, you know. Could he clean the bathroom, or can he run errands, you know all that kind of stuff. It's important to me, because if I have to do it, I think he should be able to do it as well.

I want someone to be as independent and as self-sufficient and I know I am and to not expect that from me. I'm not there to be your mother. I'm there to be your partner and essentially you are there to look after yourself and I'm there to look after myself, but we can share a lot of things... I want someone who respects me on many different levels. Respects me as a powerful person, as an individual, as a person who is bright and can make up her own mind, but also someone who enjoys intimacy, being close to someone, being I guess not co-dependent, but I mean that kind of closeness in the relationship that I can depend on the person, that I can totally trust the person and know that they'll help me whenever I need help.

You want a soul mate, and you know working through things together and more of a friend. Finding somebody who's supportive in your career, you know.

Despite the above personal expectations, a couple of the women stated they did not have specific criteria for their marriage partners. One woman emphasized that it was more important to be attracted to and connected to her partner, than to assess his physical characteristics or educational and career qualifications.
It's a hard one because people always ask and I think when you grow up you think, oh he has to be tall, and whatever. He has to be educated and has to have all this and that. And, I think as I've sort of met people along the way, I don't think any of that really matters. I think when you meet somebody, you can sort of just put those expectations aside and the person may not have graduated from high school, but they've made something of themselves in life. So, I think, I don't try not to have those expectations anymore because I think, it all sort of goes out the window when you meet somebody and you just happen to click and get along.

Not Wanting to Settle for Less. A couple of the women stated that although they were having some difficulty finding a suitable partner and were afraid of being alone, they were still not willing to settle for someone who did not meet their expectations.

I'm not willing to settle until I find someone that I am happy with because it's a life decision. But at the same time I'm getting pressures to settle, settle, settle. 'You're gonna get left in the wind. You're gonna get left in the dusk,' and that's scary! I mean I don't want to be the only one alone. I wanna share my life with someone. But, then the flip side comes in. I don't want to share my life with someone that I'm not connecting with. That's more unhappy for me. I'd rather be single then. That's the bottom line. My happiness comes first. My comfort comes first.

I'm not about to make a rash decision to avoid being alone [by] marrying some person that's going to devaluate, or not recognize these strong characteristics that I have and that I'm proud of.

III) Effects on Women

As a result of the tensions between the cultural and personal expectations to marry, the women's health was affected physically, emotionally, psychologically, and socially. They experienced the frustrations both within themselves and with others around them.
A) Effects on Self

Effects on Personal Well-being. As a result of the on-going pressures to marry, some of the women experienced a mixture of emotions such as depression, anxiety, panic, discouragement and hopelessness. Other effects were anger, low self-image, uncertainty, isolation, fear, and suicidal ideation. First, statements which included mixed expressions will be illustrated, and then a list of the previous categories.

Some General Descriptions

It's (pressure to marry) affected me in all different rounds of life. Like, socially, psychologically [and] physically... It's affected all realms of my life.

Pressures of marriage has a profound, profound, profound negative effects on women of Indo-Canadian descent. So much that you can make an absolutely powerful business woman into a meek mouse! And, that's scary!

You just get lost, frustrated, scared and anxious, and then you get ulcers! Physically, you become sick... It's emotionally abusive, very emotionally abusive.

Anxiety and Panic

I can remember thinking around 24, 25, oh my God! I'm 24 and I'm not married! I can just remember like you were saying, you sort of wake up and think, you know, just feeling really anxious. Like, you're not married and you never will be because you're sort of at that age.

I started getting more panicky, realizing that oh my God, you know, that I don't think there are [any] East Indians out there that are for me.

Frustration

And, it's frustrating because you can't really think clearly. It's really frustrating.

I'm thinking that I'm trying too hard to search for love. I'm trying too hard! That's frustrating...I'm trying too hard and I wish it would happen.
Anger

So, then I was going through a lot of stress... Because I was going through it, there was a lot of bitterness, anger, negativity, anger, anger, anger, lots of anger.

Discouragement and Hopelessness

I feel discouraged. That's why I think single life is an option. I haven't really seen what I like out there. And, when I am interested I don't get a second chance. That's Murphy's law... Like I've been rejected a few times and it hurt.

Hopelessness is a huge thing too. That's very huge. I've definitely have felt it.

It's caused me to become really negative, bitter, and it's just caused me to be really discouraged, hopeless and in despair.

Fear and Depression

Maybe it's better that I just take somebody now because as I get older, people are gonna wonder what's wrong with me? How come I'm not married? Or, I'll be by myself.

Aside from feeling scared, and depressed and being alone, I was also scared and depressed about not connecting with my friends or meeting these people (men).

It's enough to drive you to the asylum! It's hard. It's really hard.
It's depressing. It's very depressing.

Low self-image

You feel so small. You know you're not worth anything anyway. So, what's the big deal? If you don't get married, you won't have a good life. Your life will suck, basically.

I think if anything, it has made me extremely insecure... That puts a profound impact on your image, your self-esteem. Like, you feel like a freak walking around.
Uncertainty

I don't really truly know what I want because I've always been told what's good for me.

I'm not sure of myself... I don't know what I'm looking for.

Isolation

I haven't seen it in my friends. That's why I feel alone. I feel like I'm the one who went through this... I do feel alone.

Right now, I feel like I've been outcast... You really feel like an alien.

Confusion. Many times the women felt confused when they did not receive the support they needed or when they were torn between the expectations of others and their own. Each woman's sense of self was determined by her unique experiences with her family. For example, one woman described that even though she had many personal desires, she did not take risks to meet them because she did not wish to disappoint her parents.

Sometimes it's easier to just let it (personal desires) go, because it causes discomfort in the household... So, it's easier to blend [in] than it is to go on a limb.... Because if you think your destiny is to be married and to take care of family, you might not focus on other energies which you might be interested in. You don't even give those options the chance or you don't consider them because you don't think they are an option to you.

Another also mentioned that although she used to lie or act as someone else in order to appear more desirable to certain men, she was slowly becoming more comfortable being herself:

When I was 25-26 I wasn't myself. I'm portraying this image that's not even me! 'Yah, I don't mind living with in-laws'. I think I was doing that because I was new in the game. ... You don't act like yourself anyway. You're just out to impress. You just say hunhji (formal yes), nehnji (formal no) and portray this goody, goody image.
Another woman stated that she seemed to have two sides to herself: one which was competent and confident and one which became weak and ambivalent when it came to the issue of marriage.

*I see myself as an independent person, motivated to do things, open to new ideas and but when it comes to marriage, you totally feel you don’t have a voice. The voice is completely sucked out of you... I feel like my sense of self is coming apart.*

Despite confusion and struggles with herself and her family, another woman explained how she tried to establish some trust within herself.

*As I get older they’re (parents) respecting that more and more, that it’s not a phase, that these are really the choices I wanted. ... There’s been times like that when I’ve really doubted myself, my own ability to choose. But in the end, I know that’s all I have, is my own judgment and my own instinct and gut feeling. Because, once I start factoring all these other variables like so and so is saying this and this person saying that, what have you. It just tears me apart. I just go crazy. So, things do work out in the end when I trust myself. It doesn’t mean that I don’t go through extreme hell sometimes in relationships and other things.*

**Inhibitions with Intimacy and Sexuality.** Sex is a very sensitive area in the South Asian culture. A woman is expected to not only stay a virgin, but also continue to be sexually naïve. In the name of the family’s *izzat*, a woman’s sexuality is used to control her and is not accepted as a natural human need. It is a lose-lose situation for the women. Either they acknowledge their sexuality and are condemned for it, or they remain chaste and feel inadequate and unprepared for marriage, or they compromise, and experience confusion.

*Women’s sexuality in South Asian culture is very much guarded over. It is the receptacle of family honour. ... My family or extended family or family associates were concerned about my dating behaviour specifically because of the sexuality that’s involved and the fact that I wasn’t ashamed about that. But, it’s kind of like a dangerous thing, sexuality. It’s*
a powerful thing and you don't want that to run rapid or loose because who knows what's going to happen to the women. She's going to go out and get pregnant. Things are going to get shot to hell right away. Families will be torn apart. ... I think it's a way of control. It's a way to control someone and I think that in the South Asian culture sexuality has such a negative connotation. It's so shameful for a woman. And, it's shameful to want to express that, to show that you're a sexual being.

Another respondent shared that because she had not been allowed to date or become intimate with a man, she was very curious about becoming involved in a relationship, but at the same time very cautious.

I wasn't allowed the opportunity to interact with the opposite sex on an intimate or personal level... I don't know what my own feelings of sexuality are, because I've never had a chance to explore them. I don't know what it feels like to be in love. I don't know what it feels like to have sex! I don't have anyone to share these feelings with. But, definitely I was curious. I wonder how it feels. ... I want to know what everyone's talking about. Anything to feel more fit.

In one woman's quest to figure out whether the man she had met would be her future partner, the described her guilt and frustration about becoming intimately involved with him.

And, you know, we did share a physical moment... but, still I'm thinking, wait! I can't marry him, so therefore I should not be kissing him because we are not going to get married... That's a [the] situation I'm in now so I almost feel like calling it off because the more we see each other the more we like it and the more physical we are going to get. ... But, then again I feel guilty when I come home. Because I know my mom knows that we were intimate. So, I kind of feel like I'm in a dilemma.

Because some women may feel frustrated with the on-going pressures to marry, they may become extremely anxious and even desperate. They may end up choosing partners who may not truly care for their best interest.
Sometimes when single women need, [or] are desperate to get married, they may do things they don't agree with, or they can never see themselves doing. Maybe they'll have sex with somebody because they feel that's the only way they can hold onto them (men). Maybe they'll let a man degrade them because they need him, and what if he was to leave? And, [then] that's another potential partner [gone].

Dissatisfaction with South Asian Marriages. One of the women brought up a very significant point that because there is great emphasis on South Asian women to accommodate the needs of family and culture before their own, the concept of the traditional Indian marriage may become unappealing to South Asian women who have also been brought up in a Western cultural framework.

I sit in a group of aapnia (our South Asian women) and you know we'll discuss how there's such losers out there and it's going to be the be all and the death of us when we get married. Because, when we get married we are going to have so many responsibilities, and we have to cook and clean [and, look] after our in-laws, and our husbands. We're like slaves, basically.

B) Effects on Self with Family and Community

Family Tension. Family tensions with parents, siblings and extended family may also arise as a result of a woman's continual single status. For instance, one woman explained the discord between her and her mother because of her inability to say 'yes' to any man she had been dating for the goal of marriage.

I can feel the tension between us. She thinks I'm closing up. I don't want to share details about my dates and [there's] anger between us.

Another expressed that even though her parents were usually quite supportive, there were periods where they became very impatient, discontent and frustrated with her.
They'll (parents) come back with, 'Who the hell do you think you are? You are only an East Indian. You are only a woman.' ... It's caused them to sometimes make rash and harsh decisions that are not [in] my best interest or theirs... You know there's a lot of negativity. I know it's [caused] friction between us. It's awful.

Sometimes when parents cannot fully relate to why the woman is being particular about her choice of a partner, on-going family tension could lead to a woman feeling she is a burden and she must compromise.

They get you to point where you are frustrated and angry and say, 'Fine! Just fine! I'll marry this guy and you guys take care of him! [He can] stay with you and you can talk to him, because I'm not talking to him!'

The presence of family tension does not always have a negative affect. One respondent shared that even though she and her family had experienced on-going struggles, they were slowly evolving as a stronger family unit despite their pain.

I guess this traditional notion of what the South Asian women is, we drag our families into that reality with us. We go through the pain. We make them go through the pain. We're all going through pain together.

**Competition and Tension Among South Asian Women.** Although this is an issue which often gets overlooked or unacknowledged, there are many occasions where underlying competition and tension exist among South Asian women, particularly in the areas of education, career, physical beauty, degree of Westernization, and competition for South Asian men.

It's kind of like, everybody is trying to snatch up a husband. Whoever gets one is one up on the other one, even though they might just be marrying that person because it's convenient... What kind of job does my husband have that I can tell the person that my husband does this?... I think women can be each others' worst enemy too because... instead of like helping a fellow woman, they kind of look at them or question them, 'Oh when are you getting married? Haven't you found somebody?'
It's such a competition! I'm not saying it doesn't happen in the Western culture, but I don't think it's as strong.

Conflicts With South Asian Men. Some of the women openly expressed their anger against South Asian men as well. Not only were they displeased with the men they were meeting through their “introductory dates”, but they were frustrated that most South Asian men seemed to be very disrespectful and discriminatory against South Asian women in general. Such treatment of females often discouraged women to date South Asian men, even though they were expected to marry an “Indian” man.

It's like cavemen! I feel that these guys are like out there!... [They have] such little respect for South Asian women and yet expect a South Asian wife to be essentially your mother...I guess I have a lot of negative views of South Asian men in that way.

It's sometimes the case that these guys [South Asian men] only date White women and say, 'I only wanna be with White women. White women are attractive.' I actually heard this line, 'I never date Indian women. I always date White women. White women are so much more beautiful than East Indian women. They work out. East Indian women don't care about their bodies. They don't do this. They don't do that.' 'What were you gonna marry then,' is what I asked. [He answered,] 'Oh, an East Indian woman!'

I find that [South Asian] guys even on a first date, they will not listen. They will talk about me, me, me. They ask you one question. They're not interested in what I do for a living. They look at you physically like, 'Oh, she's not bad,' and they're off somewhere else.

IV) Women’s Ways of Coping

As indicated in the methodology section, the women were also asked about how they coped with their experiences. Many of them answered by providing their personal strategies such as having greater self-confidence, focussing on life goals, and gaining
their independence. Others ignored the situation, applied some humour, and sometimes sought personal counselling. Some level of support from their parents and friends was considered extremely important and helpful even if they did not receive as much compassion as they desired.

A) Personal Strategies

Some of the women's personal ways to deal with their situations were as follows.

**Focussing on Self**

You have to have a strong sense of self.

It comes down to what's important, right to you. How to be true to yourself... I just try to focus on myself. I try very hard not to pay attention to what others are doing [or] what others want me to do.

I haven't backed down and I consistently am determined and bullheaded to just stick to my own idea of what my life is about. Because I insist it's my life and this is what I'm going to do!

**Gaining Self-Confidence**

If I didn't have a strong enough self-esteem that would've crippled me big time.

As you get older you have more confidence. You, being in the work force and reaching a certain stage in your life. You're better able to fend off the pressures. ... As you get older, you're travelling, you have more friends, you're working. I think you just have a lot more going for you in your life.

I just sort of [have] gone on and done what I've wanted to do. [I've] done my travelling and sort of try to keep that and [I] have my other interests, and work. And, my career has always been a big thing. ... Sort of really just believing in myself, and I like who I am and I sort have for a while.
Focussing on Life Goals

I guess for me it means that I stick to my instinct and what I mean by that is just this gut sort of deep level feeling that I have in myself about what is the right thing to do, what I want to do, what I need to do. ... But it’s some sort of little, sometimes it even comes to me in dreams, or what I think of as little voices or little stories that show me the direction to go in... So, it’s the determination to stick by that, no matter how many people think that’s a crazy idea or stupid idea.

Gaining Independence

I guess [one has to] have the courage to sort of leave it and go on your own. That’s maybe the way to go... there comes a point where you have to do something I guess for yourself... I guess you have to cope with whatever is there.

I guess when you come near 30 and stuff, you just let them (parents) have their own little break downs and stuff like that. You just kind of have to go on with life.

Ignoring Situation

How do I cope with it? Well, I ignore it. That’s what I do, but it’s kind of hard to ignore when people talk about it I guess.

You just kind of ignore [it]. You’ve heard it all before. You just kind of do what you want to do and stuff like that. Because you’ve tried dealing with it. I sure tried talking to them (parents). You try getting mad at them. You try not talking about it and stuff like that. Now, you just kind of come to this point where you just kind of say, ‘Anyways.’ I don’t even try to let it bother you.

Using Humour

You just kind of have to laugh it off. I think humour is the best medicine right? I laugh it off and I ignore it because in all honesty my parents are not disturbed by it. I really don’t care what the rest of the people think. And, that’s just how I feel.
Actually, inside I'm angry, but I come across as being humourous. I don't reflect my true feelings. I wish I could. I'm angry inside, kind of bitter, but I just smile and say, 'Oh, I don't know.' Or, I just smile and don't say anything.

Seeking Counselling

And I've been to a few counselling sessions to talk about these things. To talk about feelings of guilt or remorse or bad feelings between me and my family and they've really been helpful. ...I guess I got the reassurance that it's ok to feel what you feel. If you feel angry, it's ok to be angry.

B) Support from Parents

From the seven women who were interviewed, the degree of parental support one received, especially from the mothers, highly determined how well the women coped with the pressures to marry. A few of the women stated that they had support from their fathers, but it was primarily maternal support that allowed the women to have an opportunity to express their distress, enabling them to cope.

I think my mom has got to be like my anchor. But, my mom realizes the frustration. She knows. She goes, 'Honey, I know.' Every time I get ready I go, 'Mom, I'm tired.' She really understands. But, she goes, 'if you sit at home, how are you going to meet people?' She goes, 'I'm helping you.'

I think of my mother as an unconventional woman too, even though she did follow the pattern of education and marriage and marrying the appropriate person, etc. But, obviously being divorced in South Asian families is really unusual. I guess that's what makes me a little bit unusual too, is the fact that I have an unusual mother, and I have her support in various things I do in my life. Probably, her unconditional support and not the unconditional support of anyone else in my family.

As I've gotten older and I've gone through different relationships and I still come back to my family for support. I've realized that I guess I understand more where they're coming from too and why they want the things they want from me. But, again we are growing together.
Oh God! It's just like I talk about it a lot with my mom. My mom is great, great, the best listener. We'll stay up talking and we'll just go over, and over and over, you know about the date and just speculating for fun.

I've realized more and more how important my family is to me and how important their support is to me. But, funny enough I haven't had to change to get it and that I've just been me and I've still gotten their support.

C) Support from Friends

Support from friends was second to the parental support. The women who had the support of their close friends, especially who were going through similar experiences, coped better with their frustrations, than those who did not. Their friendships allowed them an opportunity to vent their frustrations, express their needs, gain moral support, and helped them from feeling totally isolated.

I'm fortunate to have good friends who are in certain situations. It helps talking to them.

My support has been my friends that are going through similar situations.

In terms of personal support, I had my friends, who were with me along the way and even took me into their homes.

V) Women's Suggestions for Change

One of the subquestions in this study asked the women about their suggestions for change to help them and other South Asian women living with the pressures to marry. Their recommendations could be summarized into four main findings. First, all cultures need to de-emphasize the importance of marriage and become educated on the issue. Secondly, women's needs and desires must be given priority. Thirdly, women have
different experiences with regards to the expectations to marry because of on-going evolvement of the South Asian community. Fourthly, there appears to be a slow but progressing movement within South Asian families to recognize the needs of the women, but the degree of support given to the women lags far behind the degree of support desired by the women. Below, women’s recommendations are categorized into four sections: cultural change; focus on women's desires; family, friends and other support; and the need for change in the South Asian community.

A) Overall Cultural Change

Decreasing Over-emphasis on Marriage. Since there is profound emphasis on getting married and getting one’s children married in most cultures, one woman pointed out that the accentuation on marriage needs to be decreased in all cultures.

> If we just let it go and just let people get married or come to their own conclusions when they want [to marry] and [let's] talk about something more important. I personally get tired of talking about the whole issue and it's just unfortunate that our community pushes, focuses so much on that (marriage) [that] we put 90% or 80%, [or] what not into these subjects. It would be a lot easier if we focussed on a decent amount on marriage and decent [amount] on something else and our lives would be a lot more balanced. It seems like it's out of balance right now and all we live for and all we hope for on is one thing: who are we going to marry? What about after marriage? Nobody talks about what happens after, actually. It's all about preparing, initial infatuation, and the talk, the plans, the preparation. Nobody talks about the after. If more consideration is given to after, things would be a lot different. It's too bad that we focus too much on it. It's big, but it's not that big. It's not the most important thing.

Raising Awareness. Since this issue is often undermined or unacknowledged, by both South Asian and non-South Asian communities, almost all of the women suggested that public education and awareness of this social issue was crucial. Better programming
(e.g., cultural shows which discuss this issue), movies, books, which can express the struggles discussed in this thesis could be helpful.

I've always sort of keep my eye out for, you know, there's all these books [on] so many different things, about girls' experiences, about what she's sort of going through that we could relate to. There's nothing out there like that in terms of our age group and our market.

I think raising awareness among our community, that this is what you are doing to your children... We need to raise this awareness that we are East Indians being raised in a Canadian culture.

I think better programming on t.v., where they incorporated these issues... Media could help relay the message to a large population and that could help once it starts coming out slowly.

B) Focus on Women's Desires

Finding Personal Power and Voice. One woman suggested that many South Asian women have not recognized their own power and voice, and that women need to be more comfortable about making choices for and in their lives.

I think a lot of South Asian women because they've been raised with this idea of the demure woman, or the woman who serves her brothers, serves her parents, [and] serves her husband, they don't have the sense that they are powerful and they can do whatever they want to do. ...But, wow! We are all so powerful. I don't know if my case or my feelings are applicable to anyone else because obviously, I've been raised within particular family circumstances. But, I think we all have this power within us to choose the best for ourselves. I think those little voices I get are within us all. And, maybe not enough of us are listening.

Fostering Self-sufficiency and Independence. Because each woman lives in different circumstances, some may be more financially, socially and psychologically independent than others. Some may be expected to live with her parents until they marry, while
others may have the freedom to live away from the families and gain some independence.

One interviewee suggested that regardless of their situation, South Asian women need to become more self-sufficient, and independent so that they could take care of themselves and not be dependent on others since they only have themselves in the end. They should not look to others for all their security and protection needs.

*I think that some South Asian women will eventually go through the process where they realize that they have to really rely on themselves because everything can get pulled out from underneath you. But, a lot of young women are still relying on other people or other things or other opinions to sort of show them the way. And, it can be really dangerous. It doesn't leave you with much in the end.*

Reframing Situation. Instead of feeling discouraged that she was not married, another woman learned to reframe her situation. She had started to enjoy herself by focusing on activities that she was able to pursue. She suggested that it may be helpful for women to focus on their own desires and pursue what was important to them.

*I think just the issue [of] rather than looking at it as I'm getting older, 'Oh my God, I'm not married!' I try to look at as I'm getting older, the things that I can do. Just being able to, each year now I sort of plan, I love travelling, so planning some major trip... I guess having things go really well with my career, in my work life makes a big difference. If I wasn't anywhere with that then I think it would be even worse. So, just having my career going for me, I think it's made a big impact.*

Having an Open-minded Attitude. Another woman suggested that it would have been helpful for her to have had an open mind when she met men from various backgrounds instead of just trying to meet a set criteria for a partner. She suggested that other women may also need to have more of an open attitude so they are not missing out on opportunities.
The importance of being more open-minded, importance of accepting, the importance of seeking out different people, because the more interactions you have with people, of all different levels, the more you learn, the more you learn about yourself and how you are. I’ve always guarded myself and opened up only to people I think are an acceptable person, that’s wrong. ...I can count on my hands how many times I’ve been attracted to a guy, that’s because I only allowed myself to reach out to a particular kind of guy. I think that’s a wrong approach.

The women in this study definitely wanted to marry. Some suggested that they also needed to make extra efforts to meet men. For instance, even though one woman was ambivalent about making some personal changes, she stated that by strategizing some balance between her professional and personal lives she could have had greater opportunities to meet men.

You do your career stuff, but then what are doing for yourself? Yah, I’m thinking too, if my career sort of settled down then maybe in a year coming up, just sort of, you know you put all this effort like you say into your career and finding a job, and maybe putting the same sort of effort into finding [a partner]...It’s always been friends, family saying here meet this person, here meet that person, I really haven’t done anything.

C) Family, Friends and Other Support

Need for Trust and Communication Between Women and their Parents. One of the most influential changes that would assist most women would be to receive greater support and trust from their parents. Increased communication and understanding could help to create a less stressful situation for both the women and their families as described by one of the women.

The parents and the kids have to gain a sense of communication and a relationship of trust between them. And, what would help is just a lot of thought sharing. Parents will eventually evolve, I’ve seen it in my experience. My parents’ way of thought when I was younger, was
completely different to now. I’ve started to see the change as we grew up and as we became more vocal and verbal with our parents, as we told them how what we were feeling, and we kept telling them the same thing over and over and over until it made some kind of impact on them.

**Support for Dating from Parents.** One of the women suggested that it would have helped her if her parents encouraged her to date openly, instead of forcing her to sneak around without them knowing. She stated that her parents could have given her advice on relationships, guided her on her choices and encouraged her to take risks rather than protecting her in a sheltered environment.

> If my parents supported me, supported me going out, letting me date other people, backing me up and helping me and instructing me as opposed to, ‘You can’t, you can’t even look at a guy,’ you know, [until] you are of marrying age.’ That is not going to help. It’s just going to screw girls up way more. It’s going to screw us up way more. And, allowing you know, individuals to be open and honest about relationships, letting them do what they want, like for instance, dating. Allowing that to happen, allowing experimental stuff to go on, you know. Again, we are raised that a girl has to be a virgin up until marriage. She’s closed, and she’s sheltered. That is not helping me! That’s not helping me at all. If anything, that has screwed me up royally.

Another woman also concurred that she would have had less stress if her parents had allowed her to date while she was growing up.

> I think dating is so, so important because you don’t know what your interested in, what it is that you’re looking for until you meet different people. ...If you were to date, you are able to seek where do I see myself fit in? Or, who do I see myself most likely to be with? I’m really unfortunate that I haven’t been able to date.

**Support from Friends.** A number of women mentioned that having a support system from their friends, especially those who were in similar situations, had helped them to
cope with their struggles and could definitely help other second generation South Asian women.

Having a good support circle of friends is a big thing. Not having that I think, probably will be a lot more depressing. ... People in your life make a big difference.

Having a good support system. ... My support group has been my friends, that are going through similar situations.

Support from Women in Similar Circumstances. Furthermore, a support group, an educational group, or social gathering with other women in similar situations were suggested as additional useful strategies.

Good support network of some kind, if they could meet with other women that are single and [are] going through the same thing, once a month or whatever, and just sort of talk about it. I think that would make a huge difference, having a resource of some kind.

We are not alone, like I'm not an example of an only girl going through this. There are many Indo-Canadian second generation women that are going through this... I think what's helped me the most is talking with other women that are going through similar experiences.

An example of how beneficial it is for women in similar circumstances to share their stories became evident when one of the women shared her relief that she finally connected with someone who understood her frustrations. She was thankful that I was able to relate to her story.

I'm ventilating my feelings with you, with someone who's in, been through somewhat what I have. It's great! Like talking to your peers who have been in the same situation. That really helps. Because I can't talk to my friends. No one is in the dating scene like I am, not even my sister. I have no one, who really, really understands me.
D) Change in the South Asian Community

Organizing Events, Networks and Agencies to Meet Men. Another suggestion entailed extra efforts on behalf of the greater South Asian community. One woman suggested that greater facilitation of networking amongst single South Asians was required so that people are exposed to a larger selection of eligible singles, even though she herself would probably not go to them because she did not wish to be seen as “desperate”.

If you go anywhere else in North America they have these societies called the networking for Indian professionals, right? They have these boat cruises, and stuff. Now, to this day I don’t like going to things like [it] because it ends up sounding a little you’re too desperate right? It’s a business card exchange.

Need for Greater Adaptation to Culture. Although adaptation to a new culture takes time, two of the women believed that newly immigrated or very traditional South Asian families need to make extra efforts to become familiar with Canadian values and assimilate into the mainstream Western culture.

It’s very important that East Indians learn the language and the culture when they come down here because I think once they learn the language and the culture, communication with all different races comes that much easier because this is a Western society and the main language is English. So, I think that should be [a] major priority within the culture.

Overview

In summary, five major themes emerged from the interviews: pervasive pressures to marry; conflicting expectations; effects on the women; women’s ways of coping, and women’s suggestions for change. But, what is the data really saying about the women and their experiences? The next chapter will discuss the significance of the findings and offer theoretical implications.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Theoretical Implications
Pro-activity

Pro-activity is the ability to take a research, curious stand. It is the wondering and questioning about what is happening in front of a person, rather than reacting and defending against the stimulus.

A person staying calm, involved and curious about what is happening will generally reduce others’ reactivity, allowing him/her to become more curious and hopeful about what is taking place.

(Freeman, 1998b, p.1)
Discussion and Theoretical Implications

The findings voiced seven unique stories which were both similar and different from one another. First, I will comment on the most important findings: on-going tensions between social and personal expectations; women's identities as related to the lack of marriage in their lives; unquestioned acceptance of desirability of marriage, and the ever-evolving changes within South Asian culture. Then, I briefly discuss our cultural obsessions with marriage. Following that, the findings are compared to personal assumptions held prior to the study and to previous literature. Finally, I conclude with implications for feminist, acculturation, multigenerational theories.

Theorization of Important Findings

As mentioned before, a grounded theory study offers data for generating a theoretical perspective about a social phenomenon. In this study, even though a theoretical diagram is not being presented, a number of theoretical perspectives which illustrate the significance of the findings are suggested as follows.

Social Expectations Versus Personal Expectations

One of the main finding of the study indicated that second generation, single South Asian women were caught between two forces: the social and the personal. Their greatest challenge was figuring out how to balance these two conflicting forces while still maintaining some degree of personal comfort and hope.
For instance, the women expressed desires for a sense of self, self-development, career, exploration, love, and particular expectations of their partners, but they were also aware that their desires were not understood or encouraged by their parents. Their own desires and needs were in direct competition with those of their parents, relatives, and culture. Even within the social expectations were conflicting tensions between the Western and Eastern cultures in areas of values, family, love, and relationships.

The parents wanted their daughters to marry in a “timely fashion” and by a marriageable age because they feared having their izzat tarnished or that their daughters would remain single. In the midst of these pressures, the women became uncertain about their own desires and questioned whether it was easier to give into the needs of others or to remain determined. Many times they became ambivalent on how to cope with these conflicting tensions. Their challenge consisted of balancing their own needs and wants with those of others, especially when many of them lived with their parents. Most were expected to live with their families until they married.

If the women did receive the support from their families, they were then pressured by relatives and friends to marry. Parental support allowed the women to feel comfortable with their desires, while the lack of support and on-going pressures to marry resulted in many negative effects on their well-being. If they did not receive the support from their parents or friends, they then had to tap into their own coping abilities.
The pervasive pressures of when, who and how they were to date (if at all) and marry were in conflict with their own desires of when, who and how they wanted to date and marry. The women in this study had different needs and struggles, but they were all seeking to achieve a balance of their own sense of self and the requirements of family, relatives and culture. The tension between the conflicting expectations of others and their own seemed to be as pervasive as the pressures to marry themselves.

Women’s Confusion and Ambivalence

The women were still confused and ambivalent between identifying themselves as unique and independent at times and identifying themselves at other times by their duty to marry. Thus, their identities were also composed by the lack of marriage in their lives. Being unmarried beyond a “marriageable age” was not considered desirable. It is interesting to note that most women considered interracial marriages or singlehood only as last resorts if they did not find anyone from their own culture. Marriage was not seen as a choice, but rather an obligation to others, including themselves.

The women were not only concerned about marrying someone for their parents, but they themselves also wanted to marry in a “timely fashion”. All of the women emphasized more on when and who the wanted to marry, rather than why they wanted to marry. Most wanted to marry but were also ambivalent about making extra efforts to meet potential partners. For example, one woman questioned whether she should have put extra effort into finding someone rather than focussing on her career, but at the same time seemed unsure if she really wanted to do that. And, another was uncertain if she
would go to a social gathering just to increase her chances of meeting a man even though she was frustrated with her single status. Overall, the women did not necessarily consider themselves as being single, but rather “unmarried”; the emphasis was more on the lack of marriage in their lives, rather than an acceptance or contentment of their single status.

**Unquestioned Acceptance of Desirability of Marriage**

Marriage in the South Asian culture is expected to be natural and necessary rather than a choice. The women in this study, as well as myself, were brought up in a culture which discourages critical analysis of our social surroundings and encourages social obedience. Thus, many of us have not questioned the need for relationships or marriage because we have been socialized to believe that marriage is the only way for us to have fulfilling lives. If choices to marry or not to marry are not presented, then it is expected that a woman will conform to others’ expectations. If no one questions the cultural emphasis on marriage then the existing social construction is not only accepted, but expected. In theory, harmony will exist if no one questions the status quo. The findings indicate that the women, their families and relatives appeared to accept the status quo rather than questioning their struggles with the cultural obligations to marry in a timely fashion.

Furthermore, the pressure to marry is not seen to be problematic, but rather a normal part of one’s development into adulthood. Many women do not consider being “unmarried” as opposed to being single—because we are not given the choice to not
marry. Being single to a South Asian women may have very different connotations and meanings than what it may mean to Western women although the expectations to marry (or partner) is also an unquestioned characteristic of the Western culture. South Asian women may not be allowed to have relationships, live independent of their families, or have total freedom of whom to marry. If we are not given a choice by our families and cultures to not marry, then we do not see it as a choice either. Thus, we relate ourselves only to marriage or to the lack of marriage in our lives and accept the current social constructions.

**On-going Changes Within Culture**

Arranged marriages continue to be a means of economic security for families. For instance, many of the parents of the Punjabi women came from an agrarian background, which is known to prosper if its members abide by familial, communal and societal expectations. In agrarian societies, women and men married earlier because it ensured the survival of communities. If a woman married earlier and into a family who had land, long term planning for future prosperity became possible. The women would also produce offspring at an earlier age. These children would grow and learn the trade of agriculture and support the family. Collective obedience is encouraged in agrarian cultures and individual choice is not promoted since it causes chaos in a collective system. Arranged marriages certainly, seemed to function very well in agrarian cultures.

Both industrialization and capitalism have also lead to the creation of urbanization and personal choice. The second generation women in this study were brought up with
the more individualistic values of Western culture than the collective values of Eastern cultures. Thus, the clash between their values and those of their parents, who expect the women to abide by collective expectations, caused friction and tension between the first and second generations.

Not only were there challenges between generations, there seemed to be many differences within the same generation as well. For instance, my experience and background seemed to be more traditional and conservative than those of the women I interviewed. Some of the women did not feel they were highly affected by the issue. Some of the women who were younger felt more hopeful about meeting a partner than those who were just a few years older. Those who were in their late twenties were more ambivalent in their hopes of finding someone. Thus, even within the same culture and age group there are noticeable differences.

Although most of the women did not have an issue with being South Asian, a couple of the women felt anger against South Asian men and their own ethnoculture. They advised that some South Asian families needed to learn English and adapt to the Western culture. Having experienced great anger and hatred against my own culture, once I would have agreed with these recommendations. But now, I question how racism affects how a subordinate group’s (e.g. South Asians) perspective on itself in response to the dominant group (e.g. Western culture). How do we assess which culture we belong to and why? Depending on the acculturation experience of the women, they will either accept their identity, deny it or become ambivalent. Thus, the on-going
changes within the South Asian culture will lead to different realities within the same generation.

**Cultural Obsession with Marriage**

Most of our societies and cultures seem to over-emphasize the importance of marriage. The myths about the “happily-ever-after” marriage often go unacknowledged and are in fact encouraged in most cultures. Even in this study, if the women had met a “suitable man”, I question whether they would be critical of the issue of the cultural expectations to marry? And, even if a woman herself was thought to be the perfect, ideal mate, would she have better luck in finding a mate, have a happier marriage and have more fulfilling life than a woman who did not meet the requirements of a perfect mate? Probably not. It seems that our beliefs of what a real marriage may entail are clouded with many romantic fantasies and a false portrayal of life after marriage. There is so much emphasis on getting married, that the real issues of life go unacknowledged. The obsession is often about getting married, not about the real life after marriage.

Certainly, marriage may not be appealing to all South Asian women either. Being unmarried may not be an issue for women who are content with being single. In addition, some homosexual and bisexual South Asian women may believe that marriage to a man is not needed in order to have a fulfilling life. Being single could also offer unique opportunities such as personal freedom, more time to pursue personal interests, and to learn more about oneself. Being single is not always a lost cause as it is often presented. Many unmarried people are quite content with their single status. In fact, women may
be missing out on many exciting opportunities by only considering the ritual of a partnership and marriage. There is more to life than marriage!

Myths of romantic love and marriage (also prevalent in Canadian society) often overlook the realities of daily life. Our society does not focus on the many potential hardships that a marriage could entail such as domestic violence, negative effects on mental health, unfair division of labour, women’s lack of power in decision making, stress of raising children, and the loss of a woman’s sense of self.

Our societies seem to be obsessed by both heterosexism and marriage. Even helping professionals have made assumptions that singlehood is not a desirable lifestyle. Such biases are presented by Lewis (1994, p.185) who reported the following advice given by single women over thirty to other therapists:

1. Do not blame women for being single. It is not always a question of fault. There is not always a deep-seated psychoanalytic reason for being single.

2. Being single is very painful for most people. It is usually not a lifestyle of choice, but circumstances and bad luck. I do not want to hear, “Well, you could be in a really bad marriage, instead.”

3. Do not project the ‘singlehood’ of your past to today’s situation. Remember, when you were single, you probably were younger than I am now; you may have had less experience in being single than I do now.

4. Help your single clients have a positive attitude about themselves. Society puts a high value on ‘mating,’ so those who do not feel like they have failed, somehow.

5. Be aware that a woman’s unhappiness may be related to parental pressure.”

(underlines mine for stress on biases)
After reading this advice to women, one wonders if indeed a woman should be blamed, is at fault or has some deep-seated psychoanalytical reasons for being single. Is being single always painful for most people? Why can not single life be a lifestyle choice, rather than being a product of bad luck and unfortunate circumstances? Are all older, single women unhappy with being single? Does that mean that only younger women should be content with being single? Do all single clients usually have a negative attitude and should feel they have failed? Such judgements about singlehood may be applicable to some single women, but not all. Some women may enjoy their single lives and critique our society for wasting its energies on couplehood, relationships, and the unneeded burdens of families. We cannot make generalizations that all single women are desperate, unhappy, unfulfilled, lonely, incomplete, and problematic. There are single men and women who live productive, fulfilling and content lives. Singlehood also has benefits which are often overlooked.

**Relating Findings to Personal Assumptions**

As indicated in the methodology section, a number of assumptions and biases preceded the study. Not all the assumptions were supported by the data. Because of my personal experience, I wanted to inquire about the stories of other single, second generation South Asian women in circumstances similar to my own. However, I was surprised to not have heard the sad and tragic stories I expected to find. Rather, most of the women stated that they did not experience high levels of pressures. One reason may be that the women who agreed to be interviewed did not experience as extreme pressures to marry as the women who perceived extreme pressures decided not to be interviewed. I found myself questioning the beliefs of some of the women, especially when they
contradicted themselves by providing examples and issues which indeed indicated they were being pressured. However, the women related to the stories of other women they knew. While these stories were not their own, the women were greatly influenced by their friends’ situations. These stories possess the form and the function of cautionary tales.

**Case A**

I just remembered a story of a friend. She got married last year. She started meeting people at age 24, got married at 27.... Her situation was really bad because [she] would wake up in the morning and start crying. She (her mother) goes, ‘What are you doing?! You’re supposed to [be] out of this house and married!’ My mom would never say anything like that. So, she had it bad. Her mom used to cry and we used to sit there. ‘Oh my God! You’re a burden!’... She was just ready to say ‘yes’ to one guy because he was interested. She was so frustrated with her mom’s behaviour. She was ready and I had to talk her out of it... She goes, ‘My parents are so mad that I don’t like this doctor.’ [The] doctor was interested in her. But, now thank God! She fell in love and met [another man]. Like, she’s happily married. It was arranged, but they dated for a year.

**Case B**

I have friends who have deadlines, you know, ‘O.k., you’ll be done school in June and we’ll give you until June to find somebody.’ I even have a girlfriend who took one course in the summer time. She had actually had finished her degree, but she told her parents she had more courses to go. [She] just took one or two courses, just to kind of buy time ...She kind of spent time doing whatever, her own thing, but she was so afraid that she enrolled herself in school again... because her parents were dead serious of getting her married off or forcing her [into] an arranged marriage.

**Case C**

I have another friend who’s 30. Her father went on a hunger strike, you know, ‘I’m not going to eat. I’m just embarrassed to go out in public because you’re not married!’ And, her mother doesn’t go to any family functions anymore. She’s (the woman) got an excellent job. She works for
this big, high computer company. She spent about six months trying to get this other job with this other big company and when she finally did get it, she told her parents about it and it was kind of one of the biggest things she ever did, her biggest achievement, getting into this dream firm that she wanted. Like, her parents said, 'You're still not married!' And, she was actually in a car accident about a week prior to that. It could've been really serious, but she called me up and she goes, 'I told my parents about this and they just said, 'Well, you're still not married!' She goes, 'I wish I had died'.

Case D

I have a girlfriend. She walked in the door and she said, 'I was having this really good day and I walked in the door, and I felt this paper being thrown against my bag.' And, she goes, 'I dropped my bags' and she had this purse thing in her hand or whatever, [and it] kind of fell. She goes, 'What's this all about?' They (her parents) sat her down right there and then made her call a guy out of the matrimonials, like there! And, they said, 'You call this guy and what's wrong with you?' And, all this kind of stuff. To tell you the truth she's seen probably about 200 - 300 guys only because her parents are just like find this one, and this one... Now she's at this point where she's making everything for herself you know. [She says,] 'I gotta do things for myself. I gotta save for myself and it's just not gonna happen.' What parents see is that she's seen how many guys? 'What's your problem?' But, they introduce her to everything! You know, like whatever guy moved, anything that moved, they'd introduced her to. She said she used to have breakfast, lunch and dinner planned for Friday, Saturday, Sunday. We didn't see her for the longest time because that's what she was doing. The parents would force her to do that. Yes, she's getting to this point where she's now wanting to move out because she realizes that she can't live with her parents forever.

One woman mentioned that her sister and other women are sometimes so affected by their single status that they have considered suicide.

She's (her sister) actually having a midlife crises right now. She'll be 30 in next month. She's saying that she's feeling suicidal.

But, I know there's a lot of girls out there who feel suicidal for not meeting the right guy for their parents.
In addition to their own anxieties, women were concerned about their parents and family members. They felt guilty that they were being burdens and their single status was affecting their parents' well-being as well as their own.

*I know they (other South Asian women) want their parents to not worry about them ... I think they as children worry about what their parents go through even more than finding the right person... They are worried about easing the worry of their parents.*

I was very surprised that the women did not provide many examples of family tension caused by their single status. Some of the interviewees may have been protecting their privacy by only sharing what was safe. My assumption that the needs of the families and the culture often outweigh the desires of women was not totally supported. The women were certainly aware of the expectations of others, but some were supported by their parents and their support systems. Some of the women mentioned that, even though their own parents or extended family did not have an issue with their single status, relatives and family friends put extra pressure for them to marry with constant questioning and judgments.

Although issues involving acculturation highly affected the women, they did not discuss them in detail. Perhaps it was presumed that I understood such issues, since I was from a similar ethnocultural background. As assumed, the degree of acculturation played a significant role in how the women, and their families perceived and coped with their situations. The assumption that the women had different meanings and expectations of marriage than their families was supported. The women were certainly affected in all areas of their lives such as personal, familial, cultural and social as I had assumed.
I was surprised that only one woman stated she had “high” expectations of her marriage partner. The rest stated that they did not have high hopes or demands, but were wanting someone who was their “soul mate”, “friend” or someone who with a “nice personality” or was “well-rounded”. Once I started to categorize the data, I was surprised to see that almost all of the women mentioned some form of anger or frustration against South Asian men. I had thought that my anger at men was unique to me, but it seemed that other women also felt angry because some South Asian men do not consider women as their equal or worthy of respect. It is likely that many men and women experience acculturation at different speed depending on who perceives the host culture to be to her/his advantage. South Asian women may perceive that they are making gains socially in Canadian culture while South Asian men may not. Therefore, women may be more eager to adapt while men may be ambivalent. This difference could cause tensions, lack of trust, estrangement and anger, at least temporarily.

Since I had experienced a lot of anxiety and sadness about being single, I expected the women to identify with these feelings. I wondered whether they would feel sad or depressed about not having a family of their own, or disappointment about “how things should have been” and with the lack of intimacy. None of the women mentioned feeling lonely, extremely fearful of remaining single or needing to mourn the absence of a companion. I interviewed only one woman over thirty years of age and expected a lengthy list of frustrations. To my surprise she was not overly concerned about being single. Her attitude may have been positive because of strong parental support behind
her. I was also surprised to know that a few women were allowed to “openly” date and that even some form of intimacy was expected by some parents.

Relating Findings to Previous Literature

How does this study compare to what is previously known about single women, and more specifically about single, South Asian women? Similar to previous studies (Wakil, Siddique & Wakil, 1981; Drury, 1991) daughters were not allowed the same freedom to socialize or date as the sons. Many of the women’s stories confirmed Basran’s (1993) indication that professional Indo-Canadian families seemed to be more tolerant of their children’s dating and marriage behaviours than working-class families. Wakil, Siddique & Wakil’s (1981) finding that Canadian-born South Asians expect love to be present before a marriage also matched the women’s desires in this study. Personal happiness, physical attraction to their mates, and particular desirable personality characteristics in their mates were priorities for the women just as previously reported by Joyti (1983) and Sinha (1984).

Although some of the women admitted that their education was considered to be an asset by South Asian men and their families as found by previous studies (Bhachu, 1991; Hines, Garcia-Preto, McGoldrick, Almeida & Weltman, 1992; Vlassoff, 1996), they did not highly emphasize this point; in fact, one woman stated that to be extremely attractive was considered more important to men and their families than being educated. The women definitely wanted the freedom to choose their own partners as noted by Tee (1996) and Bhopal, (1997), even though they were expected to marry within their
ethnic group, religion, and caste as found by Basran (1993). The women in these interviews did not wish to resort to arranged marriages as mentioned by Gupta (1994), but rather they preferred “introduced marriages” (Vaidyanathan & Naidoo, 1990) or “love marriages”

In terms of singlehood, Asutrom & Hanel (1985) found that satisfaction with single life was influenced by the amount of social support one receives from friends, community, and to a lesser degree family, romantic and sexual relationships. The women in this study seemed to depend more on the social support from their family and friends than community, romantic or sexual relationships. Women generally accepted their single status in the studies by Gordon (1994a; 1994b), but the South Asian women in this study were ambivalent about their single status. All of the women wanted to find partners in the near future. A couple of women were considering single life if they did not find anyone, but this seemed to be a very painful and undesired outcome. Some women were quite anxious, frustrated and angry with being unmarried as previously found by Lewis & Moon (1997); however, the women did not emphasize issues of grief and loss such as the absence of feeling special to a man, or having male companionship. The women in this study reported some of the symptoms characterized in Lieberman’s “single syndrome” such as high anxiety, low self-esteem, poor body image, depression, and alienation.

Single women in India seemed to have somewhat different experiences of these issues than single, second generation South Asian women in this study. Many of the
Indian studies (Kirshnakumari, 1987, Rathaur, 1990; Jethani, 1994) focussed on a representation of spinsters, widows, divorcees, or separated women. Although these studies reported personal reactions such as loneliness, depression and alienation, they mostly focussed on systemic issues such as discrimination in employment, stresses of looking after family, exploitation by others because of their single status, or other “social, psychological, economic and biological” problems (Jethani, 1994). Some similarities in findings were found with Kurian’s (1974) study, which considered the many qualities desired for a “girl” for marriage, such as good character, ability to manage the home, and obedience. The women also expressed their need for friendship and companionship in a male partner, even though they did not specify they were wanting someone with a higher income than their own, as found by Ramanamma & Bambawale (1978). In summary, some of the findings were similar, while others were contradictory to previous studies.

**Theoretical Implications**

How a situation is perceived will determine which actions are or are not taken; thus, the practitioner’s theoretical framework significantly colours her/his social work practice. Theoretical implications for feminist theory are presented below.

**Feminist Theory**

Generally, feminist theory presents marriage as disadvantageous for women (Cronan, 1986; Goldman, 1986; Greer, 1986); however, the degree to which marriage influences a woman’s well-being differs from culture to culture. Most of the feminist concerns regarding marriage have been analyzed from a Western ethnocultural
framework. For instance, Western feminists have criticized the institution of marriage, but have not analyzed cultural expectations to marry. Some of the reasons for overlooking such an analysis may be that most Western women are allowed to date, have sexual relationships, and have more of a say about who and when to marry.

On the other hand, marriage may not necessarily be the oppressive and discriminatory institution for all women as described by feminist theory. Not all relationships, marriages, and partners oppress all women. Although there may be disadvantages, many women also benefit from marriage. They may have increased economic security, intimacy, social opportunities, and society's approval to bear children in a legitimate marriage. Second generation South Asian women are aware of the possible disadvantages of marriage, but they must balance them against the disadvantages of being single.

Up until recently, feminist theory has mainly been constructed by and for Western feminists, and the experiences of so-called "women of colour", such as South Asian women are often ignored, unacknowledged, or undermined (Enns, 1997). Enns (1997, p. 88-89) pointed out the main points of the feminism of women of colour:

1) Traditional feminism has often been guilty of promoting simplistic views of feminism that overemphasize the importance of gender while ignoring significant status variables such as race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation.

2) Feminists have often reinforced inequality between women by defining issues according to the views of middle-class white women and assuming that these perspectives can be applied to the lives of women of color with only minor adjustments.
3) In order for a theory of feminism to be complete, it must be pluralistic and recognize the vast difference between women.

4) The lives of diverse groups of women must be understood from their own standpoints; women of colour must be involved in theory development at all levels.

5) As individuals with “outsider” status, women of color often have greater awareness of the complex manifestations of oppression than middle-class white women.

The last point (5) relates to feminist standpoint theory which recognizes that the less powerful members of society, mainly women, experience a different reality as a consequence of their oppression by men (Swingonski, 1993 & 1994). Swingonski further notes that members of oppressed groups must develop this more complete view as a survival skill to cope with oppression. Thus, the potential for “double vision” or double consciousness expands their sense of social reality. I would argue that feminist standpoint theory must also be inclusive of the experiences of women from all ethnocultural backgrounds, and that the “oppressors” are not always men, but also women in positions of power. South Asian women not only have to understand the connotations and realities of marriage from a Western context, but also from their own ethnocultural context. I would add that South Asian women not only need to learn how to deal with both Western and Eastern perspectives separate from one another, but they must have a “triple vision”, which results from the combination of both Western and Eastern cultures. There are not just a few standpoints, but multiple standpoints (Enns, 1997).
Although Western feminists have discussed gender oppression experienced by all
women, South Asian feminists (Bannerji, 1993 & 1995; Dua, 1992; George &
Ramkissoon, 1998; Gupta, 1994; Mohanty, Russo, Toress, 1991) have stressed the
importance of the interlocking oppressions of gender, race and class for South Asian
women living in Western countries. bell hooks (1984 & 1989) also emphasized such
issues of discrimination for Black women and other non-White, non-middle class and
“non-Western” women. The combination of gender, race, class, ethnicity is sometimes
overlooked by scholars, including those from a feminist theoretical framework.

“Non-Western” women are sometimes referred to as “women of colour”, “visible
minority women”, “immigrant women”, or “third world women”. Feminists from these
groups point out that not only do many Western White women misunderstand or do not/
fail to acknowledge the interlocking oppressions of “women of colour”, but rather
perpetrate gender, race and class discrimination. Racial and ethnic oppressions are
intertwined with the oppressions of gender and class discriminations. South Asian
women, like other women of colour, encounter gender discrimination from men from
their own cultures as well as those from the Western world. In addition, racial
stereotypes, biases and actions further categorize them as secondary citizens by many
Whites. Thirdly, the Western class system and the “Indian” caste system both make it
difficult for South Asian women to become independent and equal members of society.
South Asian women live in multifaceted layers of oppressions both in their own cultures
as well as in the Western cultures. In summary, South Asian women not only need to
have their own voices heard in Western feminist theories, but the importance of integrating race, ethnicity, gender and class must be practiced in any feminist theory.

Furthermore, I would state that single, second generation South Asian women not only deal with the interlocking forces of gender, race, and class, but they also combat the forces of acculturation, marriagehood/couplehood, and age discrimination. Each single, second generation South Asian woman may live in different familial circumstances, but the degree of familial and personal acculturation will impact their experiences in relation to the expectations to marry. Generational differences also cause additional pressures on these women. In addition, there is high emphasis on marriage and relationships in most cultures and thus being single is often seen as being “abnormal”. Second generation South Asian women have the added pressure of age put upon them; they must marry within a limited time period for them to be socially and culturally accepted. These women are caught between individual, familial, generational, cultural, and societal “pushes and pulls” and often they are caught in the middle.

Having had an in-depth discussion about some theoretical implications, the next chapter will focus on social work policy, practice and research implications.
CHAPTER 6

Implications for Social Work Practice
Wisdom is a wise attitude or course of action; an intelligent application of knowledge; an ability to live one's beliefs; and an understanding gained by actual experience. Wisdom is something from within, guided by an inner sense of what is right. A wise act is one that honors the integrity and specialness of the situation. It is devoid of judgement and has the potential of bringing out the best in the situation. Wisdom is different from knowledge in that knowledge attempts to figure things out. Knowledge is the search for truth and represents the sum of what is known. Wisdom includes knowledge, but also goes beyond knowledge. Wisdom is the search for deeper understanding and considers what is not known or understood; it allows for the using of the spiritual, moral and emotional aspects of a situation as a guide to understanding and action.

(Freeman, 1999, p.1)
Implications for Social Work Practice

In addition to the theoretical implications mentioned in the previous chapter, social work policy, practice and research must also reflect culturally sensitive service. There are a variety of clinical, familial and community development strategies that a social worker can incorporate into practice in order to help women and their families. Although a step-by-step plan cannot be prescribed, the following recommendations can assist in delivering culturally sensitive service.

Policy Implications

Social, institutional and agency policies often govern which issues get addressed and how they get resolved. The Canadian population has been and will continue to become culturally diverse. Our current resources for refugees and immigrants and other new Canadians do not seem to deal with the conflicting tensions between non-Western cultures and the Western culture. Our current resources emphasize more the process of assimilation than the process of integration. A culture and an individual are expected to eventually conform and dissolve into the Western culture, rather than to keep one’s heritage while integrating. An integration of both the Western and Eastern cultures and values is required if we plan to deliver cross-cultural service in an effective and efficient manner. However, if we do not change the present style of service, only a selected population, mainly the Western middle-class, will continue to have access to social services. We must strategize our budgets and policies to serve the existing culturally diverse clientele.
In addition, most agency policies focus primarily on the individual and do not include the individual's family system and ethnocultural factors. For instance, some women may not wish to speak with a South Asian counsellor for fear of being judged, misunderstood, or talked about in the community. Our present services do not even give the women a choice of having either a South Asian or a non-South Asian practitioner. Agencies may not believe it is important to have a culturally diverse staff or they may not have sufficient financial resources to hire the appropriate staff. Agency and institutional policies must consider the cultural contexts of the women and their families and become more inclusive of non-Western clientele and their cultural issues.

**Practice Implications**

More specifically, culturally sensitive skills, strategies and services are required for personal, familial and communal interventions. First, it is important for the practitioner not to stereotype South Asian women, since their situations may be very different from one another despite belonging to similar cultures. There are many women who do not experience the extreme pressures to marry. For those who do, they often turn to their close friends or sympathetic family members for support; however, they are not always supported. Some women may be hesitant to reach out to professional services, or they may be unsure about where and how to find help. Women who decide to seek professional counselling services may wonder whether the practitioner would understand their unique experiences. Even though second generation South Asian women are familiar with the counselling practice, shame and family pride may prevent some of them and their families from seeking outside help.
For many South Asian families, counselling is a foreign method of conflict resolution. The women may believe, as did I, that counselling professionals from their own cultural backgrounds may make discriminatory judgements about them. If the women and/or her family choose the route of counselling, they should have the choice of working with a South Asian or a non-South Asian practitioner. South Asian women may desire a professional who is not from their ethno-cultural background, but someone who is able to understand their situation and cultural implications. The importance of "saving face" will need to be respected by the social worker.

McGoldrick, Pearce & Giordano (1982, pg.xv) outlined some questions which may be useful for a family therapist who works with a multicultural clientele:

1) What do they define as a problem?
2) What do they see as a solution to their problems?
3) To whom do they usually turn for help?
4) How have they responded to immigration?
5) What are the typical family patterns of the group?
6) How do they handle life cycle transitions?
7) What may be the difficulties for a therapist of the same background or for a therapist of a different background?

The social worker must be sensitive to women's experiences and cultural mores regardless of the worker's own biases (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 1997). Depending on whether the clients feel that they, society or kismat is responsible for their lives, their beliefs and actions will vary accordingly. By understanding and honoring South Asian cultural terms and ideologies such as amanat, izzat, dharm, caste, sanjog, karm and
Kismat, the social worker can further comprehend the world views and cultural contexts of their South Asian clientele (Sue, 1978; Axelson, 1999; Sue & Sue, 1990).

In addition, by asking women to discuss their struggles among cultural expectations, familial expectations and personal expectations, the social worker can help identify the relevant conflicting tensions between them. Moreover, the individualistic nature of Western culture and the collective emphasis of South Asian culture may be other areas which cause personal, familial and communal friction.

An assessment of the type and degree of pressures a woman feels, together with her coping styles (Johnston & Eklund, 1984), may indicate how well she is functioning. Women may need guidance on how to deal with the pressure from family and friends. Some women may need a safe place to express their ambivalence, frustration, anger, pain, guilt, depression and mourning. Strengthening a woman's support system with her friends, family and women in similar circumstances, may assist her in coping. Some may want to develop specific strategies to help them meet potential partners in or out of their culture. Some may seek information and resources on issues of singlehood and relationships. Others may want to explore ways to become psychologically, emotionally and financially independent, while still have a connection with their families. Regardless of their situation, all of the women will greatly benefit from becoming aware of their own voices, power and sense of self.
South Asian women in this study suggested various strategies which would have helped them and could be extended to other women. These approaches should also be considered from the women’s own cultural and personal contexts as well as their comfort levels.

1. decreasing over-emphasis on marriage  
2. raising awareness  
3. finding personal power and voice  
4. fostering self-sufficiency and independence  
5. reframing situation  
6. open-minded attitude  
7. need for trust and communication between women and parents  
8. support for dating from parents  
9. support from friends  
10. support from women in similar circumstances  
11. organizing events, networks and agencies to meet men

In situations of severe personal or familial tension, a social worker can also assist women and their families to become aware of their family-of-origin anxieties and strengths. Siblings and extended family members may need to be welcomed into counselling sessions. The worker can help them by planning ways to cope with the pressures from others, understand each other’s expectations and to build a stronger support system. Most likely the process of acculturation has contributed to some of the conflicts between the women and their families. Thus, an assessment of the similarities and differences between the acculturation processes (e.g., integration, assimilation, separation or marginalization) experienced by the women and their families can further aid in understanding familial, cultural and personal tensions.

In circumstances in which a woman’s health is in great jeopardy, medical interventions may be required. For instance, if a woman is experiencing high anxiety,
panic, major depression, eating disorders, family violence or suicidal ideation, psychiatric and mental health services must be able to relate to her issues. In extreme situations, medication and hospitalization may be required to help a woman cope with her stresses.

Although the expectations to marry is discussed amongst friends, it is rarely discussed in therapeutic settings. An educational or support group can encourage women to share their experiences and to give each other moral support. The success of this group will be determined by how safe the women feel to expose their personal and familial issues. As mentioned by some of the interviewees, books, movies, magazine articles, or television programs could be utilized for public awareness. Web sites and chat rooms could also be initiated to provide information and connection with other women in similar circumstances. On a community development level, public education and training will enable South Asians and non-South Asian counsellors, therapists, social workers, psychologists and lay persons to learn about the challenges experienced by South Asian women and their families.

Research Implications

Currently, there are very few studies which focus on the experiences of single, second generation South Asian women and hardly any which solely focus on the cultural expectations to marry. The impact of socialization, acculturation, cultural expectations, personal expectations, pressures to marry and singlehood on South Asian women requires much needed research. Since this social issue seems to be rapidly evolving and changing over generations, races, sexes, classes and age groups, there is great need to replicate such studies over time. Studies concerning different South Asian cultures,
such as Hindu women, Muslim women, different castes and religions, etc., need more academic attention. Strengths as well as concerning issues of South Asian communities also need to be researched so that a less stereotypical perspective of South Asians is presented in academia and in Canadian communities.
CONCLUSION
Intimacy

Represents the special nature of the self that we bring to the world of relationships. Intimacy is not necessarily about romantic relationships or about what we need from relationships, but rather what we bring of our self to relationships. It is the ability to share important aspects of oneself in a relationship without needing other to validate and or respond in a certain way to make it safe for self to be open and vulnerable. An intimate relationship is one in which neither party silences, sacrifices, or betrays the self and each party expresses strength and vulnerability, weakness and competence in a balanced way.

Essentially a solid self has the potential to make each encounter with another person a special intimate connection.

(Freeman, 1999, p.1)
Conclusion

Expectations to marry are not solely experienced by South Asian women, but by most women from various ethnocultures; however, South Asian women's experiences may be particularly acute because of our unique cultural influences. Our societies will likely continue to see unmarried women as abnormal, defective or as secondary citizens for much time to come. Despite such acts of discrimination, more and more single women are fighting off such stereotypes and breaking away from the limitations put upon them by others. Single, second generation South Asian women are also growing in number and inner strength as we become more independent and confident of ourselves.

Second generation South Asian women are becoming more cognizant of our power as women and as individuals. We are recognizing our desire to be independent, but yet still to be connected to our families and our own inner selves. As we become more financially and psychologically secure, we will encounter on-going challenges as we try to balance the social expectations of others with our own. Slowly, we will need to adapt to the hardships and benefits of living in both Eastern and Western cultures. We will also need to become more in tune with our familial dynamics and our personal "unfinished business". I believe all women, not just South Asian women, need to take direction and ownership of our own lives, while still honouring our unique circumstances and cultural influences.

Further, we must question the multi-layers of oppression lived by most single, second generation South Asian women on a day-to-day basis. Many of the experiences
of South Asian women have been unknown to or ignored by Western feminists, theorists, policy makers and practitioners. We must acknowledge the interlocking oppressions of race, gender and class in the lives of South Asian women. As South Asian women become more confident with and within our selves, we can begin to articulate our strengths, struggles and suggestions for personal, familial, community, political and social change. We must become active participants of and in our own kismats. We do not need to feel ashamed of our realities. Rather, let us be proud of our unique, but similar journeys.

My Continuing Journey

This study not only provided me with an opportunity to express my personal struggles, but it also has allowed me to find strength and support for others and myself. Page (1988) stated that, “Some people who believe they are still alone because their standards are too high are actually not looking for an intimate partner. They are looking for themselves. But they are looking at the wrong place: another person. No potential partner will ever be good enough to satisfy that search.” (p.72) I, too have thought that maybe my standards for a partner were extremely high. Perhaps, Page is right that I have really been searching for a more confident, intelligent, modest, caring and successful me in a man. Perhaps, I have really been searching for acceptance and love all along. Perhaps, we also need to question our societal values, socialization and treatment of women, which do not allow us to be in touch with, be proud of, and own our inner selves. Often, our identities are not our own, but composed by and for others. We look to others for meaning in our lives. But, who are we? What do we want?
Having grown up in both Western and Eastern cultures which consider the "other" to be more important than the self, I did not even know I had a unique self within me. I am just becoming aware of my inner power. As I hear such comments as, "So, are you married yet? Don't worry, you'll find somebody. It will happen when you least expect it. It will happen when it's meant to be. Don't you want to get married?", I continue to waver between "good and bad days". Everyone in my age group, younger and older are all seem to be married, are getting married, or were married except for me. At times I feel very alone and sad. I do not necessarily even want to be married at this point, but it sure would be "nice" to have a caring companion. But, I am also thankful for the lessons I have learned as an "unmarried" Indian woman. Maybe I will find someone from my own culture and caste or maybe I will not. Maybe I will marry or maybe I will not. I do not know what the future holds, but I know I cannot continue to sacrifice my inner self anymore. I hope that my family will be able to support me regardless of the outcome; but, somehow the need for others' approval does not seem to matter as much anymore either. Whatever the situation, I know that I will always have my inner self for support, confidence and guidance.

For the last three years, I have taken out time to reflect, learn and develop a clearer focus on myself and my future despite on-going pressures to marry a "suitable boy". My past pain, anger and hurt are slowly evolving to a more compassionate and empathic understanding of others and myself. At the same time, I am questioning our social structures which continue to define single women as being incomplete, outcasts and appendages of others. I have decided to focus more on my self-development and
self-competence as a human being. Slowly, I am beginning to discover and redefine my values. What matters to me and who would I like to become? I am trying to let go of “how things should have been”. I am trying to find meaning within me rather than outside of me. I am trying to discover my own personal struggles and family issues. I am trying to balance the voices of others with my own.

Although our stories may remain silent, we are never alone in our experiences. By sharing such personal information, I have made myself very vulnerable to public scrutiny. But, I hope this study will assist others who are experiencing such cultural expectations to marry. My fondest hope is to encourage women of all ethnocultures to become critical of the social structures which surround us and to truthfully voice the issues which affect them the most. By being truthful, we can begin to demystify the false images we portray to one another. By being truthful, we can begin to mourn and heal from our most deepest inner pain. By being truthful, we can begin to acknowledge our separation from and connections to one another. Only then can we discover, connect with and embrace the true authentic spiritual self of others and that of our own.
References


APPENDICES
Appendix 4

Interview Guide

Name:
Code:

Date of Interview:
Location of Interview:

1. How do the expectations (pressures) to marry impact you and your life?

2. What are the challenges for you?

3. How do you cope?

4. What would help you?

South Asian cultural background:
Age:
Caste:
Religion:
Profession:
Language(s) spoken at home:
Country of birth:
Age of immigration to Canada:
(if applicable)
Appendix 5

Observation Guide

1) Body Language

2) Tone of Voice

3) Atmosphere of Setting

4) Reactions of Participant and Interviewer

5) Personal Intuitions

6) Questions or Concerns

7) Interview Over All
Appendix 6

List of Counselling Services

For all Areas of Greater Vancouver (Surrey, Delta, Richmond, Burnaby, New Westminster, Vancouver, etc.)

• Family Services of Greater Vancouver
  Intake Office  Phone Number: 1-604-731-4951

• Young Women’s Christian Association (Y.W.C.A. – has no religious affiliation)
  Phone Number: 1-604-895-5782

• Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society
  Phone Number: 1-604-436-1025  (counsellors speak Punjabi, Hindi and English)

Surrey Area

• Surrey Community Services
  Phone Number: 1-604-584-5811

• Options: Services to Communities Society
  Phone Number: 1-604-596-4321

Delta Area

• Deltassist Family and Community Services
  North Delta Office – Phone Number: 1-604-591-1185
  South Delta Office – Phone Number: 1-604-943-8610
Appendix 7

Acculturation Theory Diagram

ISSUE 1
Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?

"YES"  "NO"

ISSUE 2
Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with other groups?

"YES"  "NO"

INTEGRATION  ASSIMILATION

SEPARATION  MARGINALIZATION

(Berry, 1989)
Appendix 8
Terminology and Definitions

amanat: temporarily held in trust, liability

dharm/dharna: religious obligations towards family, community and society

dollli: traditionally a palanquin in which a bride left the parental home to go to the groom’s residence; in modern times it could be any vessel or vehicle in which a bride leaves her maiden home

daaj (dowry): money, good, or real estate that a bride brings into her marriage; the custom is often seen as a transfer of resources from the family of the bride to the family of the groom (Conway-Turner & Cherrin, 1998)

got/gotra: clan, family’s last name (often used to assess ancestral history)

izat/izet: family honour, family reputation

jaat/jaati: caste

karm/karma: destiny, deeds, tabulation good and evil deeds in previous and present births

kismet/kismat: fate, fortune, luck, destiny

mehndi: henna used to make temporary tattoos on a bride’s hands and feet

moksha: freedom from the cycle of births and deaths

sanjog/sunjog: kismat, destiny, meeting of two or more kismats

second generation: for this study second generation is defined as either being born in Canada, or having immigrated to Canada at 10 years of age or younger.

South Asian: (Indo-Canadian, East Indian, Indian)

For this thesis the above terms are being used to describe persons who have ancestral origins from Southern Asia, mainly from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, etc.

Many South Asians immigrated to other countries such as Africa, Canada, Canada, Britain, U.S.A., Indonesia, Thailand, Australia, Fiji, Kenya, Australia, Germany, Trinidad, etc.
Appendix 9

Summary of Participants

Participants in Total: 7

Ages: 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 28, 34

Professions: (in random order)

Research Assistant
Engineer
Nurse
Research Analyst
Student
Sales Representative
Administrator

Castes:

Punjabi Jat : 5
Hindu Kayasta : 1
Punjabi Chamaar (Untouchable): 1

Religion:

Sikh: 6
Hindu: 1

Languages Spoken at Home:

English: 7
Punjabi: 6
Hindi: 1

Country of Birth:

Canada: 6
India: 1 (age at immigration – 2 yrs old)
Appendix 10
Outline of Findings

I) Pervasive Pressures to Marry

A) Context of Pressures

Judged by single status
Marriageable age
Pressure to marry during or after post-secondary education
Parental consent to date may equate expectation to marry
Insufficient time to assess a partner

B) Realities of Looking for a Mate

Trends in meeting partners
Arranged marriage not expected
Parents’ expectations of a partner for their daughters
Mate qualities desired by South Asian men

C) Influence of the Family

Parental education and career
Mother’s role as a facilitator and advocate
Multigenerational family issues
Parental concerns
Parents cannot relate to women’s desires
Influence of and on siblings

II) Conflicting Expectations

A) Cultural Tensions and Expectations

Time
Family in Western and Eastern cultures
Cultural differences regarding relationships in love and marriage
Difficulties with interracial relationships
Kismat
Importance of izaat
Difference in gender roles
Limited opportunity to date for girls and women
B) Personal Expectations

Desire for life
  Desire for sense of self
  Desire for self-development
  Desire for independence
  Desire for career
  Desire for exploration

Desire for love
Women's expectations of a marriage partner
Not wanting to settle for less

III) Effects on Women

A) Effects on Self

Effects on personal well-being
  Some general descriptions
  Anxiety and panic
  Frustration
  Anger
  Discouragement and hopelessness
  Fear and depression
  Low self-image
  Uncertainty
  Isolation

Confusion
Inhibitions with intimacy and sexuality
Dissatisfaction with South Asian marriages

B) Effects on Relationships with Family and Community

Family tension
  Competition and tension among South Asian women
  Conflicts with South Asian men
IV) Women’s Ways of Coping

A) Personal Strategies
   - Focussing on self
   - Gaining self-confidence
   - Focussing on life goals
   - Gaining independence
   - Ignoring situation
   - Using humour
   - Seeking counselling

B) Support from Parents
C) Support from Friends

V) Women’s Suggestions for Change

A) Over all Cultural Change
   - Decreasing over-emphasis on marriage
   - Raising awareness

B) Focus on Women’s Desires
   - Finding personal power and voice
   - Fostering self-sufficiency and independence
   - Reframing situation
   - Having an open-minded attitude

C) Family, Friends and Other Support
   - Need for trust and communication between women and their parents
   - Support for dating from parents
   - Support from friends
   - Support from women in similar circumstances

D) Change in the South Asian Community
   - Organizing events, networks, and agencies to meet men
   - Need for greater adaptation to culture