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A Qualitative Exploration of First-Generation Asian Indian Women in Cross-Cultural Marriages

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A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF FIRST-GENERATION ASIAN INDIAN WOMEN IN CROSS-CULTURAL MARRIAGES

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of The Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology

by

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A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF FIRST-GENERATION ASIAN INDIAN WOMEN IN CROSS-CULTURAL MARRIAGES

Monica Thiagarajan, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2007

The literature on Asian Indian women has not adequately addressed the experiences that first generation Asian Indian women face while going through the process of making the decision to marry cross-culturally. The purpose of this exploratory study was to identify, describe, and understand the struggles, challenges, and conflict experienced by Asian Indian women who decide to marry cross-culturally and to understand the consequences of the decision on the lives of these women and their interpersonal relationships.

Initial and follow-up phone interviews were conducted with eight Asian Indian women who had experienced cultural and familial challenges regarding their decision to marry cross-culturally. Interview questions were designed to address the women’s personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences in making the decision to marry cross-culturally and the consequences of their decision on their lives and their relationships. A qualitative method of inquiry was used to understand the experiences of first generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages.

Several themes emerged related to influences the women experienced as contributing to their marrying cross-culturally. These themes included: an emphasis on education, the level of gender role expectations in their families, family member’s
marriage expectations, the women’s own marriage expectations, the women’s experiences dating both Indian and non-Indian men, the extent to which the women negotiated and resisted traditional career and marriage boundaries, the women’s and family members concerns regarding divorce, and reactions from friends and loved ones to their cross-cultural marriage. Themes also emerged that related to the continued challenges the women faced as a consequence of their cross-cultural marriage. These themes included: the geographical dislocation the women experience, concerns regarding language, reactions they face from the greater South Asian community, and concerns surrounding raising a child in a cross-cultural marriage.

The women also shared what they considered to be the most important aspect of their experience, helpful supports experienced, and advice they wanted to give to other Asian Indian women deciding to marry cross-culturally. Findings are discussed in terms of understanding first-generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages, implications for counseling practice, and implications for future research.
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Monica Thiagarajan
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

There was never a doubt as to what the heart of my dissertation project would be. I knew that it would revolve around the gendered representation of Asian Indian women away from their homeland. My quest for my cultural identity did not in truth begin until I had moved away from home. My sense of identity as an Asian Indian woman was challenged and subsequently strengthened after my marriage to a non-Asian Indian. As I struggled with the juggling of my cultural identity, I was also struggling with the challenges posed by my family against a cross-cultural marriage. Somewhere within the confusion, there was a determination to let my voice be heard and to seek out similar voices. Appropriately, this research is dedicated to allowing the voices of Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages to be heard. By the narration of their personal stories, I looked for them to provide an insight into their experiences. It was my hope to have uncovered from their narratives, the complexity, contradictions, and ambiguity of Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. It was also my intention that through this research, the women of this study were able to give voice to the stories of their lives in context of their rich, complex, and dynamic gender roles and identity. Gender roles and identity that are disputed, mediated, accepted, compromised, and changed in individual ways.

As members of a cultural ethnic group, Asian Indian immigrants share a common set of behavioral and linguistic traits, which differ significantly from other ethnic group members. Marrying within the Indian community reaffirms the Indian cultural heritage,
and group identification, and to a certain extent is a safeguard against alienation (Dasgupta, 1989).

The literature supports the higher incidence of cross-cultural marriages of ethnic minorities who are native born, and citizens, when compared to those who are foreign born or non-citizen Asian Indians (Dasgupta, 1996; Tzeng, 2000). Asian Indian women, who have grown up in India, typically have a strong female support network. Asian Indian women who come to the United States as adults may often find themselves renegotiating their identities, and building a bridge between a traditional world left behind physically, and the one on their doorsteps (Gupta, 1999). It is my assumption that first generation Asian Indian women who are in cross-cultural marriages have experiences that may vastly differ from their native counterparts. First generation, adult, Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages, in the United States, are challenging the unquestioned acceptance of traditional ideologies prescribed for them, while growing up in India.

This qualitative research study was designed to investigate the experiences of first generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages in the United States. The aspects of gender roles, education, religion, sources of support, as well as the negotiation of their cultural identity are explored to provide an insight into their experiences. This study sought to capture the lived experiences of these women to understand the intersection of gender, ethnic identity, and sources of support in the context of cross-cultural marriages in a more meaningful manner.

A phenomenological method of qualitative inquiry was used as a way of researching gaps in the literature. Phenomenology offers ways of understanding not
offered by other research methodologies, one that is both expressive and interpretive
(Patton, 2002). It provided a way to go beyond measurable outcomes to find ways of
understanding the affective domain: feelings, emotions, and the lived experiences of first
generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages.

_First Generation Asian Indian Women in Cross-Cultural Marriages: Whom are we
talking about?_

In defining these terms, first-generation Asian Indian women are those who are
originally born or raised in India, have immigrated as adults, and are residing
permanently in the United States. Asian Indian refers to those people who are originally
from the Indian subcontinent. These people may be permanent residents of the United
States, and who may or may not have a United States citizenship.

Lastly, the term cross-cultural was used in lieu of interracial in remaining
cognizant to the fact that the concept of race is a social construct that artificially divides
people into distinct groups, with no biological validity, and serves to foster institutional
discrimination. For the purpose of this study, cross-cultural marriages refer to a union of
Asian Indian women to a spouse of different ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation,
cultural history, and/or ethnic classification.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to better understand the individual experiences of Asian Indian Women, it is essential to explore the rich diversity of experiences within the Asian Indian immigrant population of the United States. In particular, awareness of the diversification in religion, family life, generational status, and the numerous cultural variations that exist within this immigrant population is crucial (Sheth, 1995). Women’s suppression is rooted in the very fabric of Indian society, evident in her traditions, religious principle and practices, and within families.

With the family being the most compelling and primary socializing agency, the values, attitudes, and beliefs learned amidst the family have pivotal implications. For instance, the preservation of cultural traditions, as well as decisions surrounding significant life choices such as education, friendships, and marriage are often influenced by family members (Jethwani, 2001). Religion also plays a central role in serving as a vehicle for the transmission of cultural traditions (Kurien, 1999). Transference of traditional culture and values is intricately interwoven with religious affiliation, which prescribes the form of worship and guides daily behavior (Segal, 1998). The geographical region in which one is born usually identifies the language one speaks, the food one eats, the clothing one wears, as well as the art, literature and music one enjoys (Segal, 1998). Subtle variations in the customs and rites depend on the class, place of residence (rural or urban, as well as the state in which one lives), caste, and religion.
Given India’s rich cultural heritage, it is important to understand its history, in order to fully appreciate the Asian Indian experience in the United States (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997). Since it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address the immense diversity within the people of India, this section will provide a brief overview of, particular cultural customs and traditions including religious beliefs, family life, arranged marriage, caste and dowry system, to provide a background of influential factors that may contribute to Asian Indian women’s cross-cultural marriages.

The Traditional Family in India

In India, the family is considered to be one of the most significant social groups in people’s lives, and no institution in India is more important (Almeida, 1996; Dasgupta, 1998; Desai, 1999; Ramisetty-Mikler, 1993; Wolpert, 1999). The household provides the primary place for socialization and for the establishment of an individual’s identity within a family context (Bhopal, 1997). It is within the context of the family that Asian Indian women first learn what their role and expectations are as women within the family and society.

The traditional Indian household system is that of the joint family. Within this system, hierarchy, patriarchy and patrilineality are strictly followed, and three or more generations generally live together under one roof. Privacy in an Indian household is rare, a value that is neither missed or much desired (Desai, 1999). The different roles of each member within the family are prescribed by gender, age, and generational status of individuals and the lines of authority are clearly defined (Segal, 1998; Johnson, Johnson, & Clark, 1999). Deference to age and authority are societal values that are inculcated in the family (Wolpert, 1999).
The familialistic orientation of South Asian communities centers around the primacy of the family over the individual. This orientation, which subscribes to a hierarchical and authoritarian structure, ensures the fulfillment of role obligations and role expectations from kin members. As children approach their adolescence and young adulthood, the primary mechanisms of control used are guilt, shame, and moral obligations (Ramisetty-Mikler, 1993). The family emphasizes conformity, interdependence is fostered with a concomitant inhibition of self-identity, and a conventional temperament that is resistant to change is reinforced (Gupta, 1999). These mechanisms assure that the integrity of the family is maintained through a deep-rooted belief in societal norms and an obligation to duty (Mullati, 1995). Other positive outcomes include strengthening of family stability, and guarding against the dissolution of family members, resulting in placing a high premium of group integrity.

The patriarchal system, so prevalent in the Indian family system is rooted in the Hindu religious belief of the inequality between the sexes. Although the patriarchal structure is changing slowly towards a more egalitarian orientation among the urban (as well as some rural) middle classes, the centuries-old, male-dominated family continues to persevere. Among the urban middle and upper class, social, and cultural adaptations to a pseudo-Western culture are prompting an increase in the number of people choosing to be in the nuclear vs. extended family system. Despite this push, the deep-rooted jointness of the various structural and functional aspects of the extended family system still continues to influence the nuclear family.
As India becomes more modernized with resulting social transformations, structural-hierarchical relationships within the joint family are changing in favor of greater individualization (Ahmad, 2003). As an increasing number of middle class couples, become dual-wage earners, they tend to have nuclear, rather than the traditional extended families. Couples tend to make day-to-day decisions themselves, yet, still defer to their elders for important decisions. The modified nuclear family system allows a closer more companionable husband-wife relationship when compared to living in a joint family (Ahmad, 2003). These couples usually tend to rely on one or both sets of parents to help with childcare, which may lead to a joint family system, and as such may create a cycle with children leaving home for jobs (Mullatti, 1995). Even in the modified nuclear families conformity, interdependence, as well as a conservative and compliant orientation are valued, encouraged, and reinforced (Segal, 1991)

In urban, more nuclear, (dual wage-earner) households conflict may arise when there are not enough members to shoulder the responsibilities of housekeeping as well as childcare. Greater autonomy and individuation, resulting in social and psychological changes, often inevitably involve conflicts. Women continue to be the primary caregivers and are in charge of the household duties. Even in a nuclear system, men gain from women fulfilling domestic labor roles. Men’s resistance to change and their refusal to collaborate is an illustration of their power over women (Bhopal, 1997). Husbands who have not been raised to help with household tasks may be apt to look to their wives to fulfill the traditional role of housekeeping, even after the latter’s full day of work. This may cause wives to feel resentful and unequal.
Regardless of whether it is a joint or nuclear family, the words of Indian historian Stanley Wolpert (1999), best describes the impact of family on Indian society.

The family is the nucleus, the matrix, the model from which all else that is Indian grows, often in direct emulation or imitation of what is learned, expected, found there; hence, the continuity that is India, the comforting stability, the security, and all the conformist limitations and modern Indian weaknesses as well (p. 136).

The modified extended family provides significant and continuing assistance and support to the nuclear family. The modified extended family continues to persist and is preferred despite forces of urbanization and industrialization, while changes and adaptation to a pseudo-Western culture pushes the middle and upper classes towards a nuclear family system (Nilufer, Larson, & Dave, 2000).

This push towards a pseudo-Western culture is pertinent with regards to how values and expectations differ for the younger generation of women, away from a hierarchical structure of the extended/joint family. Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages may have been raised with a greater degree of autonomy, and/or encouraged to participate in making decisions in their lives.

Collectivism

In less industrialized and more traditional societies, collectivism is related to family integrity, family unity, and family loyalty (Medora, 2003). Collectivism places importance on harmony, interdependence, and concern for others. In collectivistic societies there is a strong orientation towards kinship roles and obligations, whereas, in individualistic societies the emphasis is on personal goals (Seymour, 1999). Within
collectivistic cultures, the individual is embedded in his or her family, and there is a greater emphasis on the views, needs, and goals of the family than on the individual. The value of family centrism in Indian society contributes to Indian women subordinating their personal needs rather than jeopardizing the needs of the family (Gupta, 1999).

Given the collectivistic nature of Indian culture, with premium placed on conformity, Asian Indian women choosing to marry cross-culturally are faced with explicit or implicit censure in going against ingrained values. It is therefore important to make room for multiple understandings of the experiences of Asian Indian women growing up in a particular family context, with clear cultural and societal expectations yet who decide to take a different path in deciding to marry cross-culturally.

*Patriarchal Influences*

Indian culture for a large part traces descent and inheritance through males-*patrilineality*, with the exception of the southern state of Kerala, where families are matriarchal, although these are also changing towards a patriarchal system. The Indian family system encourages male relatives to reside together bringing their wives into the family residence-*patrilocal*. The hierarchical nature of the joint family system gives males authority over females; basing family honor in terms of the sexual purity of women, and utilizing arranged marriages at an earlier age to curb female sexuality. Similarly age-based hierarchies of authority are the norm in traditional patrifocal families. Older members have authority over younger members, and men have authority over women (Bhopal, 1997; Ramisetty-Mikler, 1993; Segal, 1991).

Ideally, girls are socialized to be obedient, docile, self-sacrificing, chaste, deferential, hardworking, and segregated from boys. This ensures that they adjust well
and contribute positively as wives and daughters-in-law in their new households (Seymour, 1999). Seymour (1999) talks of a slow, gradual transition of educated wives who are able to assert themselves and oppose the collective interests of the traditional patrifocal family. These assertions pose such a threat to the coherence and unity of the joint family system, that families are reluctant to educate their daughters, and/or to find wives who are highly educated for their sons.

As the age of marriage for highly educated women of the next generation slowly increases, disparities in education, and age between spouses are gradually being reduced, thus creating the potential for a more egalitarian and affectionate relationship between spouses (Kurien, 1999; Sheth, 1995). As Indian families gradually make this transition from age and gender based hierarchy to a more egalitarian family system, they do not do so without conflict and tension between extended family members (Hegde, 1998; Ramisetty-Mikler, 1993; Prakasa Rao & Rao, 1982). Increasingly young women want to marry men who respect their career aspirations, and with whom they can share decision-making (DasGupta & Dasgupta, 1997).

At marriage, the woman moves to her husband's home which he shares with his parents, grandparents, brothers, and unmarried sisters (Das, &Kemp, 1997). As a bride she is initially a shy, respectful wife and daughter-in-law, gradually transitioning to becoming a forceful mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother (Seymour, 1999). As the newest member of the household, the daughter-in-law becomes the most subordinate member of the household's female hierarchy. The women's status in her parent-in-law home begins to improve when she bears children, especially sons to continue the patrilineal line. The bearing of children also increases her responsibilities and moves her
up the hierarchical order among the women, to that of the “matriarch” and thus in charge of delegating and managing responsibility surrounding the household activities (Kakar, 1992). Thus gendered socialization in India continues to perpetuate traditional gender roles (Srinivasan, 2001).

With the persistence of strong patriarchal traditions, women’s lives continue to be shaped by customs that are centuries old. While many Asian Indian women lack the power to decide who they will marry, young women with increasingly higher educational qualifications, career aspirations, as well as increasing exposure to more egalitarian couple relationships (in their own families, media, etc.) are making the choice to be in cross-cultural marriages by consciously stepping out of prevailing patriarchal traditions.

**Gender Role Socialization**

Women in Indian society are socialized with one role in mind, that of a mother and homemaker (Dasgupta, 1989). This social structure is responsible for entrusting women with the burden of maintaining the family honor. As they grow into adulthood, young women in Indian communities face great pressure towards conformity, obedience, and support towards the family. The reputation of the family is considered to be of paramount concern, as evidenced by young women sharing the burden of cultural shame if they do not find a suitable partner. Moreover, if a woman’s character is in question; her siblings’ chances are also jeopardized, with “loss of face” of the entire family (Bhopal, 1997; Srinivasan, 2001). Thus when women reject arranged marriages, not only is there a threat of rejecting their cultural traditions, but their identity as well. With greater pressure upon women, rather than men, on conforming to the tradition of arranged marriages, rebellious
behavior is rarely tolerated due to the humiliation to the family. Bhopal (1997) concisely describes the impact of the family and traditional cultural values on Indian women:

They have grown up with the values of respect, obedience, filial duty and parental obligation; with knowledge of the supreme importance of the family, its position and honour within the community; with a strong sense of tradition and a self-definition in terms of role rather than personal individuality. (p. 66).

Traditional patrifocal family values demand that, as a wife, a woman should naturally put the needs of the husband and his family above her own as well as those of her children (Seymour, 1999). Women are socialized to please others, and by keeping with the tradition of an arranged marriage they ensure their parents and family will achieve respect and status within the community (Bhopal, 1997). However, Seymour (1999) points out an advantage of women receiving a complex training in the joint family for both interdependence and dominant behavior that may help them as they move into the modern hierarchical and bureaucratic workplace. The exposure to and interactions in the workplace and the outside world may contribute to the possibilities available for women, beyond the traditional arranged marriage.

Religion

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism, are the major religions practiced in India (Mulatti, 1995). Of these 83% of the population practice Hinduism, 11% Islam, 3% Christianity, and 2% are Sikhs (Sheth, 1995). Additionally, whatever their nominal faith, most Indians share a number of religiophilosophic values and beliefs, that Indian society and family is constructed from principles deep rooted in the ancient Indian civilizations that are the cells for modern
Hindu beliefs and rituals (Wolpert, 1999). However, the paradox of Goddess or mother worship in Hindu religion, which coexists with general female subordination, makes it appropriate to make the Hindu religion the focal point of this section.

According to Hinduism, three Gods rule the world. Brahma: the creator; Vishnu: the preserver and Shiva: the destroyer. These three Lords have female consorts, and without whose powers his own would be greatly diminished. The main three are Sarasvati; goddess of learning, Lakshmi; goddess of wealth and prosperity, and Kali or Durga; the ferocious form of the divine mother (Wolpert, 1999). Besides those mentioned here, there are a number of other Gods and Goddesses.

There are apparent paradoxes within the Hindu culture and society (Seymour, 1999; Wolpert 1999; DasGupta & Dasgupta, 1998). Hindu devotion to Mother Goddess worship dates back to the Indic Civilization (2300-1700 B.C.), which has modern implications, for no relationship is stronger in a Hindu family than that which binds sons to their mothers (Wolpert, 1999). It is motherhood with its self-effacement, sacrifices, anonymity, and silent toil, rather than womanhood with her own personality, and pleasures of life, that is glorified by the Hindu texts, and a Hindu woman does not come into her own until she becomes a mother, with preference to a son (Johnson, Johnson, & Clark, 1999). Additionally, in the Vedic period (1500 B.C.-500 B.C.) women were educated, had religious equality with men, and participated in public affairs. Female deities with their divine power, *shakti*, were both creators and destroyers, and all animating power in Hinduism is also attributed to females. In Hindu theology, womanliness is associated with energy, animation, and creative artistry, in contrast to the dominant male forces in Judeo-Christian beliefs (Seymour, 1999).
Somewhere between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D., Manu produced the first compilation of the classic book of Hindu moral law called *The Laws of Manu* (Wolpert, 1999). According to Manu women had excess power or *shakti*, and were endowed with stronger sexual appetites than those of men. Women were also bestowed with unlimited quantities of blood and milk, unlike men, whose semen supply is limited. Hence, it was important that male kin subject a woman to lifelong control, due to the pervasive male fear of women draining them of their vital fluids (Kakaiya, 2000; Seymour, 1999). This set a pattern of male biological, political, and economic dominance, leading to the emergence of a patriarchal orientation similar to much of the Western world. Although there are several explanations, many feminists credit Manu as one of the reasons for the gradual erosion of women’s position in Indian society (Bumiller, 1990). According to Poggendorf-Kakar (2003), the equation of ‘virtuous mother and powerful goddess’ promises women their share of false public power, gives women a sense of identity, emotional strength, and a feeling of empowerment while continuing to harden patriarchal structures in family and society instead of tearing them down.

Religious beliefs also play an integral role in the arrangement and commitment of marriages. Marriage is considered a scared duty by the major religious doctrines in India. According to Hindu sacred scriptures, the main purpose of marriage is the performance of *dharma*, or the fulfillment of social duties (Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003). Based on the Hindu belief that lives are predestined, and fate is preordained (Medora, 2003), astrologers are routinely consulted, in rural as well as urban India, before a marriage is finalized. The astrologer’s role is to match partners’ horoscopes to predict whether the celestial forces of the universe will enable the couple to enjoy marital happiness, financial
success, and be blessed with children. Beliefs in destiny, and *karma*, wherein one’s present life is predetermined by the sum of all good and bad actions from their previous lives, are so central to the Hindu religion that they influence the marriage arrangement as well. Women tend to believe that they were married to their husband in a previous life, and will continue to be married to him in the next life as well (Bumiller, 1990).

**Arranged Marriage**

In Asian Indian tradition, marriage is not only sacred but also an important social institution. Marriage not only involves the union of two individuals, but is comprised of an alliance between two families, thus bringing about a new network of relationships (Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003).

The major and preferred method of mate selection continues to be the “arranged marriage” (Medora, Larson & Dave, 2000; Prakasa Rao & Rao, 1982; Raison, 1997;). The marriage is arranged by parents and elders of the family or community and endures even among the highly educated urban communities and castes. Although the Hindu Code Bill of 1954-56 Act recognized inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, parents continue to emphasize religious and caste endogamy in mate selection. Under certain conditions a girl may be married into a family from a slightly higher sub-caste, however, a girl’s marriage into a lower cast or sub-caste is disapproved (Mullatti, 1995).

Traditional Indian marriages are geared towards procreation, as well as the maintenance of the family culture. Much of the middle-class of India defines love as a long-term commitment and devotion to the family, which develops only with much time and patience (Bumiller, 1990). Indian marriages value the subordination of individual interest to the general social aspects of the institution. Personal and sexual desires play a
minuscule role in the maintenance of the family culture. Even though individuals are increasingly beginning to have more input in negotiating their marital partner, the majority of marriages have to be approved by parents, and/or other relatives.

While social, cultural, and economic changes have occurred in the past few decades with regard to selecting prospective partners, marrying within the religion and caste still continues to prevail as an important determinant in marriage (Medora, 2003; Mullatti, 1995). Through an extended network of family, and friends, prospective spouses are identified and investigated for suitability (Johnson, Johnson, & Clark, 1999). Advertisements in matrimonial columns of newspapers are also acceptable ways for parents to find a match for children (Henderson, 2002). In recent years, after a suitable partner is identified, young men and women correspond via Internet to find out if they are compatible before they actually meet. Only recently have young adults have been allowed to meet, go on chaperoned dates, and talk over the phone before informing parents of their decision. It is important to note however, that these practices are more common among the upper class, more Westernized, and educated families living in metropolitan areas. These “semi-arranged” marriages are different from American dating as parents and family are still involved in the screening process, the courtship period is brief, little or no premarital sex is allowed, and there is a realistic expectation by both parties that the purpose of the meeting is marriage (Medora, 2003). A minority of youth from educated, independent minded, pro-Western urban middle and upper social class families select their own partners. These so called “love marriages” are not generally approved, and are a great source of anxiety and concern for parents, and family members (Henderson, 2002).
Marriage is not only the union of two individuals, but of greater importance it is regarded as the establishment of an enduring bond between two extended families. Marriage is considered a sacrament, a social and cultural duty, and a lifelong commitment among most of the religious sects in India (Medora, 2003; Mullatti, 1995; Vaidyanathan & Naidoo, 1991). Though there are increasing rates of divorce in the middle class, it is still considered extremely shameful, with the possibility of remarriage for the women markedly difficult (Bumiller, 1990). With arranged marriages being the norm, paired with increasing rates of divorce, couples who engage in a love marriage may experience opposition, adversity and difficulty with both sets of parents, and family members early on in the relationship (Nilufer, Larson, & Davis, 2000).

The cultural ideology with respect to husband-and-wife relationships has been changing. Within the broad continuum of the arranged marriage there is an increased leaning toward a more compatible marriage, where the husband takes the wife’s emotional needs into account, as well as a union where the wife is recognized as a person in her own right (Medora, 2003). This is in contrast to the joint family system where other women members, children, and younger brothers-in-law meet the emotional needs of a woman. Individuation can also introduce considerable conflict over traditional attitudes and values around women’s position in the structural hierarchy. However, Ahmad (2003) cautions against making the assumption that the majority of Indian marriages are moving towards a more egalitarian relationship. Oftentimes women’s increasing expectations for greater participation and recognition by their husband is not always met; were the husband may still be rooted in older and more traditional attitudes and beliefs (Ahmad, 2003). In spite of modernization and women’s increasing
empowerment the practice of dowry, which has strong roots in Indian tradition, is becoming more widespread in arranged marriages. The next section will address the implication of the dowry system on women.

*Dowry*

Arranged marriages include a financial contract in which money and/or material wealth is provided to the groom and his family. Within the highly stigmatized custom of *dowry* cash, gold, cars, furniture, appliances etc. are given to the boys by the parents of the girls. This places an especially high burden upon families with highly educated daughters who require more highly educated bridegrooms (Prakasa Rao & Rao, 1982; Seymour, 1999). The custom of dowry is practiced in rural areas as well, sometimes with appalling consequences. Dowry deaths, (e.g., the burning of women by the groom’s family who are dissatisfied with the amount of dowry, or for the sake another dowry at the time of remarriage after the wife’s death), continue to persevere in modern India (Mullatti, 1995). The increased investment on education of sons with higher professional employability, in fields such as medicine and engineering, are so widely pursued that it raises family’s expectations for dowry at the time of marriage (Mullatii, 1995, Seymour, 1999). The marriage of a daughter has sometimes resulted in the financial ruin of the bride’s family (Prakasa Rao & Rao, 1982). Through this economic burden, daughters are viewed as a liability and there is pressure to regulate their numbers through abortion, infanticide, or neglect (Wolpert, 1999).

With modernization and the increasing role of women in the labor economy, the expectation that the popularity of the dowry system would diminish does not seem to hold true in the Indian society. Although urban residence, and exposure to Western
values and education has increased negative attitudes towards the dowry system among the younger generation, it continues to be a competitive way to procure high-status mates for brides (Prakasa Rao, & Rao, 1982; Srinivasan, 2001).

**Caste System**

India’s caste system serves as a means of social hierarchy. The Indian word for caste is termed “jati,” or birth, for the membership in a particular caste is achieved by birth. *Jati* is also used to refer to any community based on religion, language, origin, and similar geographical background (Mullatti, 1995). India’s caste system is deep-rooted in Indic Civilization and is an important part of ancient Hindu tradition dating back to 1200 BC (Wolpert, 1999). There are four underlying *varnas* (colors or divisions or groups), the four groups being, intellectuals and priests (*Brahmin varna*), rulers and warriors (*Kshatriya varna*), agriculturists and business persons (*Vaishya varna*), and other workers or servant class (*Shudra varna*) (Narayanan, 2003). These four varnas are representative of all the occupations in society. The caste (tribe) system is different from the ideal *varna* (class) system. *Varna* class depends on a tribe’s social status that can be changed, whereas caste/tribe is by birth and cannot be changed by conversion. Castes may reflect distinctiveness of religious practice, occupation, locale, culture status, or tribal affiliation, either exclusively or in part. There are 3,000 castes and 25,000 subcastes in India, each related to a specific occupation. Caste not only dictates one’s occupation, but dietary habits and interaction with members of other castes as well. Since upward mobility is very rare in the caste system, most people remain in one caste their entire life and marry within their caste (Wolpert, 1999). In recent times, tribal identity of the offspring can be modified through inter-marriage. The chastity of women is strongly related to caste
status. Generally, the higher ranking the caste, the more sexual control its women are expected to exhibit. For the higher castes, such control of female sexuality helps ensure purity of lineage (Seymour, 1999).

Although the Indian Constitution, since India’s independence in 1947, has legally abolished the practice of untouchability as well as discrimination on the basis of caste, race, sex, or religion, the caste system continues to operate. Caste becomes a crucial issue during the time of marriage. It is not uncommon for parents to disown a child who has engaged in a marriage out of their own caste system (Medora, 2003; Seymour, 1999).

According to Wolpert (1999) conformity to the family, to authority, and to the jati or caste, becomes the first law of Indian life and a major limiting factor to creative growth, radical change, or independent initiative. Although the above is a sweeping and generalized statement, the conclusiveness of which can be questioned, it holds an element of truth for the lives of women in the Indian society (Wolpert, 1999). Recognition of gender inequality has increased, and the growth of the women’s movement in India has been impressive, however, the awareness that women have rights is still struggling in the deep-rooted patriarchal system (Srinivasan, 2001).

The brief overview above serves to provide the reader with a glimpse of the customs and traditions of India. When Indians immigrate, they transport not only themselves but also the cultural mores and conventions that are inherently entrenched in Indian heritage. The family system, as well as the role of caste, and religious and traditional values becomes critical issues for female development in a society. Traditional patriarchal attitudes and values restrict opportunities and are oftentimes reinforced multiple times because of the presence of extended family members (Kumar, 1999). Even

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if immigrants come from highly educated, more liberal, urbanized, and westernized families, they still carry with them, diluted “cultural baggage” that needs to be re-evaluated, and renegotiated. Indian immigrant women in transition are much more subject to forces of change than their counterparts in India (Naidoo, 2003). As the trend towards a breakdown of extended family structures into smaller nuclear units continues, they typically provide greater freedom because of changed parental roles and attitudes. While young women experience freedom in the form of increased opportunities for education and socializing, these opportunities are juxtaposed with traditional expectations (Kumar, 1999).

It is important to understand given the paradoxical nature of women’s status and roles in India, how the socialization of these values impact their decision making process in engaging in a cross-cultural marriage. The tension between the “prescriptive” what women ought to do, and the “descriptive” what women actually do, provides the framework of this study.

The literature review will now shift from a discussion on Indian culture, values, and tradition to the Asian Indian immigrant experience in the United States. The next sections will discuss the literature on the Asian Indian immigrant experience, Asian Indian communities in the United States with regard to Indian organizations, the student experience, Asian Indian women as immigrants to the United States, and Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages.

*Asian Indian Immigrants in the United States*

Researchers cite increased economic opportunities, advanced studies, professional growth, increased independence, and a desire to see the world as reasons for immigration
among Asian Indian individuals (Helweg, & Helweg, 1990; Kumar, 1999). Students have composed a large proportion of Asian Indians who have adjusted their status from students to permanent United States residents (Sheth, 1995). Between 1996 and 2003, the Indian student population in the United States has more than doubled (www.opendoors.iienetwork.org). The immigrant experience can be a painful one wherein the individual is uprooted from a familiar world of close friends, and other emotional attachments are left behind (Das Gupta, 1997). A majority of Indian immigrants post-1965 belong to a Westernized educated elite in their countries. Their ability to speak English fluently, allows them to acculturate by adopting the United States/western mode of dress, utilizing manners and etiquette learned at the workplace, or in formal social contacts with other Americans (Segal, 1991). With regards to food preferences, religious practices, family ideology and values, and religious practices they are selective in maintaining their traditional Indian culture (Kurien, 1999; Srinivasan, 2001). It is important to be aware that even among Asian Indians, there are many differences that exist among this population. Asian Indians identify themselves with their own particular linguistic-regional subgroup, rather than a national Indian identity (Kurien, 1999).

The concept of ethnic identity is both complex and dynamic; an individual may espouse several different identities, reflecting their region of origin, language, or religion (Sheth, 1995). The pain of uprootedness is constantly felt according to Espin (1997) through absence of familiar smells, familiar foods, and the feeling of disorientation and disruption due to the lack of an accustomed environment. Researchers of ethnic identity find that the answer to the question “who are you?” is contextual. The issue of being
Indian only arises when the individual has stepped out of the boundaries of India (Das Gupta, 1997). The desire for first generation Asian Indian immigrants to maintain their distinct ethnic and cultural identity is strong. An immigrant’s psychological health and well-being is also tied to the extent the individual is invested and maintains association with their own cultural group or tends towards assimilation with the host society (Furnham & Sheikh, 1993). Participating in Asian Indian organizations provides a sense of community and structure. Gathering together periodically to celebrate religious festivals or share meals, are some ways that Indian immigrants maintain their identity (Leonard, 1997; Sheth, 1995).

As Asian Indian immigrants began to root themselves in the United States, they proceeded to reconstruct communities that included all the familiar essentials of home. The “model minority” myth that Asian Indians fall under has further reinforced the Indian community to create the impression of an unblemished and idealized immigrant community (Sheth, 1995). However, faced with the external threats of racism, assimilation, and cultural dissolution, Asian Indians have redefined themselves in terms of an extremely rigid notion of being “Indian”, which homogenizes diversity, rejects change, and silences discordant voices (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996; Das Gupta, 1997). This representation of an idealized community holds the icon of the Indian woman as chaste, modest, nurturing, submissive, loyal, and upholding the traditional spirit of India. “Through this creation of an unblemished Asian Indian public face, the immigrant patriarchy has rested the validity of the entire community upon the submissiveness of the community’s women” (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996, p.384). Women, who do not fit into
this mold of traditional Indian womanhood, are considered betrayers of their tradition, culture, and community (Rayaprol, 1997; Shah, 1993).

Furnham and Shiekh (1993) discuss the stressful life events of migration, and the subsequent adjustment processes that impose significant stresses on the individual. Learning the new social mores, cultural patterns, and having to deal with prejudice and discrimination may produce psychopathological consequences. Sources of social support are often reduced in the process of migration. For immigrants dealing with the loss of a familiar world, cultural expressions and rituals may take on a whole new meaning as they struggle to retain their cultural identity (Kumar, 1999).

Under the threat of assimilation and cultural dissolution, Indian communities are actively engaged in inculcating their young on Indian values, culture, language, and traditions (Ramisetty-Mikler, 1993). Here too however, there are gender discrepancies. The emphasis of schooling their youth is placed on the careful preservation of gender roles. Young women are expected to be chaste, pure, and docile, and restrictions on autonomous dating practices are placed on them, to forestall exogamous unions (Dasgupta, & Dasgupta, 1996). Asian Indian men are treated in the home and the Indian community with concessions consistent with traditional patriarchal advantages and the strong Indian tradition of son-privilege.

Dasgupta (1998) conducted a study of forty-six Asian Indian families investigating their concerns with the continuity of ethnic identity via the maintenance of traditional culture. Not surprisingly, her study found that children born in the United States held more liberal views about women’s role in society than their native born counterparts. Dasgupta (1998) suggests that those children who had spent their early
years in India resulted in a more ingrained dichotomous gender role ideation than their United States born counterparts. Dasgupta’s study also found that across the second generation whether foreign or United States born, there was a trend towards conservatism with age (1998). This suggests that the Asian Indian community even in migration has been successful in instilling their children with Indian cultural values, especially when their children approach a marriageable age.

Helweg (1990) talks of the process of compartmentalization that Asian Indians utilize when threatened with contradictory values, and beliefs. However, the process of compromise can be difficult and unique for each individual (Helweg, 1990). Taking part in regional and cultural associations, as well as spending time with family and friends from the same culture provides one way to compartmentalize their ethnic identity. Among their ethnic family and friends immigrants may allow themselves to be at ease and relaxed in a manner they are unable or unwilling to display among their American counterparts. Compartmentalization allows Asian Indian immigrants to belong to a group where they feel at ease speaking their own language, eating familiar food, and associating with people to whom they do not owe an explanation for their actions.

Hans’s (2001) quantitative study of acculturative stress of Asian Indians found that an adoption of western values and cultures promotes assimilation in the host culture reducing acculturative stress. The data for this study was collected from one hundred and one participants from various Asian Indian community centers in the Bay area of California. Multiple regression analysis of the data provided findings that indicated acculturative stress was significantly related to symptoms of psychological distress. Hans’s sample consisted of individuals who participated in religious and social
organizations within the Indian community. Her study found that participants who reported lower levels of psychological distress had strong social connections within the Indian community, and Hans postulates that this vital connection helps immigrants deal with psychological distress (2001).

Saran (1985) conducted ten in-depth interviews of Asian Indian immigrants to better understand the Asian Indian experience in the United States. She found that in times of stress and strain, Asian Indian immigrants relied and depended exclusively on friends and family rather than on mental health professionals. The stigma attached to seeking mental health resources, as well as not seeing any merit in counseling was cited as reasons for not consulting professionals. Das and Kemp (1997) also found that most Indian families in America feel that seeking counseling would stigmatize the entire family and try to find other means of solving their problems.

Predominantly Asian Indian immigrants who come to the United States as graduate students arrive with the objective of returning home after completion of their studies (Shah, 1993). Gradually they found work and changed their visa status and remained in the country. Historically, in the 1970’s students who came from India were largely male (Kurien, 1999).

Indian gender norms that emphasize the importance of chastity for women generally discourage young, single women from pursuing their higher education away from their native country. The United States is portrayed as a sexually permissive country where a woman’s purity may be at risk. Consequently, Indian women who do immigrate to the United States for educational purposes are a highly selective group, with families who are generally more nonconforming, and resist traditional gender norms (Kurien,
While several factors that prompt migration has been established, the literature has paid little attention to the motivations for Asian Indian women to migrate (Kumar, 1999).

Since the 1980’s, larger numbers of Asian Indian women students have arrived in the United States, and although the number of male and female students from India has become more proportionate, they do not choose their counterparts as marriage partners. Male students prefer to return to India on concluding their education and have arranged marriages. Indian women students tended to consider their male counterparts as “sexist,” “boorish,” and “traditional” (Dasgupta, & Dasgupta, 1996). It is not surprising that more Indian women than Indian men prefer to choose Americans or non-Indians as marriage partners.

Kumar (1999) conducted an exploratory qualitative study to understand the meaning of migration, gender and identities in the lives of Asian Indian women. Her study found that many of her participants talked about the risks involved in being South Asian and an immigrant. These risks included interacting and creating new environments for themselves, away from their familiar ones. Risks also include the more subtle ones such as preserving, changing, or letting go of cultural traditions. The opportunities and freedom gained through migration also comes coupled with an undercurrent feeling of confusion stemming from internalized traditional expectations. As families move away from the traditional joint family systems, attitudes towards child rearing are also changing. As parents become more affluent, and educated, they seek to provide a more “liberal” upbringing for their children as well as opportunities that were unavailable for the generation before.
Role of Asian Indian Organizations

As previously mentioned, Asian Indian organizations serve various functions, such as the maintenance of Asian Indian religion and culture. Asian Indians, compared to other Asian immigrants, with a greater command over the English language, do not have a need to form ethnic residential enclaves, and are mainly dispersed in the suburbs. Thus Indian religious and cultural organizations play an important role to meet the need of "community" by Asian Indian immigrants (Kurien, 1999).

These organizations also serve to meet the social and cultural needs of immigrants. In the 1970's Asian Indian organizations were limited to and organized by university students on local campuses. As the immigrant population from India grew so did the membership and participation of these organizations to include the extended growing community. These organizations celebrate religious and national holidays, as well as providing lectures, and discussions on Indian issues (Rayaprol, 1997; Sheth, 1995). Immigration and relocation tend to challenge one's cultural identity that has heretofore been taken for granted (Kurien, 1999). Indian immigrants faced with the disruption of resettlement, ponder the meaning of religion, and are likely to turn to religion and religious practices with renewed consciousness that was tacit back home. Through membership, ethno-religious institutions serve the purpose of transmitting key religious beliefs to young people of the community, as well as fostering a climate for ethno-religious consciousness (Naidoo, 2003). Indian organizations also serve as meeting place, where the Indian community encourages youngsters to meet and socialize to encourage endogamy (Jethwani, 2001).
Researchers have commented on the patriarchal nature of Asian Indian organizations (Dasgupta, 1989; Kurien 1997). Indian associations can also be exclusive. They are usually started as informal networks; however, when members from a particular region such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, or Punjab, represent themselves in larger numbers, then small cliques form based on religious and ethnic identification (Rayaprol, 1997; Segal, 1998). Men who have conformist dispositions and have arranged marriages to partners who are likely to be from the same linguistic, caste, and religious backgrounds largely form these organizations. Typically, members of these associations are the men described above, and their families. Asian Indian women with non-Indian spouses or with Indian spouses from a different subcultural background are not very comfortable, or feel unwelcome in these subcultural associations (Kurien, 1997). Caste plays an important function in organizing society, and although it is not explicitly mentioned, in the United States, people from the same caste and ethnic origin tend to congregate with each other. Even among immigrants, the emphasis is placed on children to marry within their caste (Rayaprol, 1997).

Researchers have shown that language, cuisine, and participation in ethnic organizations are ways by which immigrants retain their ethnic identity (Leonard, 1997; Dasgupta, 1997; Segal, 1998). Language is considered an embodiment of ethnicity, and as such is a strong predictor of ethnic identity (Alba, 1990; Sukumaran, 2000). One way that Asian Indian immigrants have preserved their ethnic identity is by frequent contact with others who speak the same language. In the same way one’s partiality to their ethnic cuisine is strongly related to the salience of their ethnic identity (Alba, 1990). Another manner in which Asian Indian immigrants retain their traditions is by forming and
participating in social support (e.g., religious, regional and socio-cultural groups, political, and service organizations) (Talbani & Hasnali, 2000). By maintaining their Indian identity, immigrants feel a sense of psychological gratification, as well as a means of developing networks and friendship groups, that act as a substitute family (Segal, 1998).

Indian culture de-emphasizes individuality, and decisions are not based on individual enhancement; rather on the effect it will have on the kin group (Desai, 1999). According to Helweg (1990), the Asian Indian single women in the United States are subject to conflicting norms. The Indian student community tends to censor the behavior of Indian women, and term them as “loose” if they date white males. Asian Indian associations have their disadvantages; by being a member of these associations, individuals are subject to continuous scrutiny and pressures by the people of the Indian society (Kurien, 1999)

As Asian Indians continue to immigrate to the United States, there is a concern surrounding the continuity of ethnic identity via maintenance of traditional culture. Asian Indians manifest their ethnic identity by anchoring themselves to beliefs, values, and customs of the Indian culture. Participating in religious practices, speaking the regional language, and attending Indian organizations are cited as means of maintaining the ethnic identity of Asian Indians (Sheth, 1995).

As Asian Indian Women Immigrants in the United States

The degree to which Asian Indian immigrants drift from traditional beliefs and customs varies. Asian Indian women in the United States come from diverse linguistic, religious, economic, and occupational backgrounds. The decision to emigrate for the
most part is not made by the women, but by their husbands (Hegde, 1998). For Asian Indian women migration sometimes allows for more opportunities and options with regards to marriage and career that the traditional social structures back in Indian may not provide (Kumar, 1999). It is common for immigrant Indian men to travel back home to have a traditional arranged marriage, and their wives later join them in the United States. As spouses of migrants, the roles of Asian Indian women have been deemed less important (Kumar, 1999). The permissive sexual atmosphere of the United States is viewed as a threat to women’s purity. Thus, Indian women who do arrive as students are a self-selective group, mainly from relatively non-conformist families that are willing to go against prevailing norms (Kurien, 1997).

Several researchers (Bhutani, 1994, Dasgupta, 1986; Kumar, 1999) have addressed the isolation experienced by Asian Indian immigrants. The lives of Indian immigrant women are infused with several losses. Significant kin and long-established, enduring, intense interpersonal relationships are left behind (Dasgupta, 1989; Kakaiya, 2000). In India men and women generally have separate social networks with their emotional and social needs met by members of their own sex. The loss of these networks causes couples to become more interdependent for companionship and emotional intimacy than they would back in India. Thus the settlement process after immigration can lead to greater egalitarianism in gender relations among couples (Kurien, 1999). Another positive consequence of immigration for women is the freedom they experience in the United States away from the social constraints of in-laws and relatives, nor do they need to depend on others in order to travel, as they would in India (Kumar, 1999).
Opportunities for higher education and a professional identity often force women to create new identities (Bhutani, 1994). These new experiences can be transformative and liberating, while the often static and unchanging traditions may seem oppressive from an ethnocentric perspective (Kumar, 1999). As Indian women immigrate to the United States, they look for opportunities to shrug their “cloak of submissiveness.” In their marriages they demand more independence, more respect, and want to participate in an increasing mutual decision making process (Dasgupta, 1989). Asian Indian wives and mothers in the United States also play much more of a crucial role in defining and transmitting Indian culture and ethnicity (Das Gupta, 1997). Women are considered the preservers of culture and hold the responsibility of transmitting rituals and tradition onto their children (Sheth, 1995). Through the process of acculturation, these women play an important role in transforming the dominant ideology carried from India. Through the participation in religious and cultural associations, Indian women play an active role in the reconstruction and reinterpretation of religious and gender ideology to their benefit (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996; Naidoo, 2003).

Migration causes changes in the social environment as new relationships and networks are created. The change in environment also triggers different sets of expectations as new opportunities become available while limitations are also experienced either from the environment or created by the women themselves. Asian Indian women immigrants struggle to maintain continuity through attempting to hold on to an earlier identity, while negotiating aspects that they add or let go of (Kumar, 1999). Kurien (1999) discusses the contradictory nature by which Asian Indian women’s position is represented in the literature. Women in the United States are portrayed as
having greater gender equality, but also as having inegalitarian relationships wherein community members choose to espouse the patriarchal values of their natal culture. The pluralistic nature of Hindu culture allows Indian women who do not wish to conform to the preferred dominant model of the “obedient, wifely goddess” portrayed in Hindu mythology, the choice of another model. The role of the warrior goddess fighting against injustice has been forgotten in its transition to Indian American communities, as they seek to erase the strength of the Indian woman. However, according to Dasgupta, and Dasgupta (1996), Asian Indian women have the freedom to incorporate into their new identity the model of the independent, powerful, and aggressive warrior goddess, which is the long established tradition of women’s activism and power within Indian history and mythology.

Dasgupta (1989) interviewed twenty-five Indian immigrant couples to analyze the process of becoming an immigrant in the United States. The researcher found that professional Indian immigrant women recognized that sex-segregated division of labor is based on the process of socialization rather than a natural phenomenon, which their full-time homemaker counterparts tended to believe. Immigrant women actively negotiate their positions in the cultural and intricate contexts that they encounter in their everyday practices (Hegde, 1998). Dasgupta (1989) also discussed how professional women in her study de-emphasized their professional identities and showed deference to their homemaker counterparts in order to not be alienated from the Indian community.

Asian Indian women in the larger United States society have internalized egalitarian gender values. There is an expectation for these women to achieve, succeed financially, and be competitive with their female and male counterparts, or in short, to
espouse a Western rugged individualistic orientation. Nevertheless, within the realm of their families and homes, they are expected to conform to traditional Indian gender roles.

When immigrants cross borders, interpersonal boundaries are subsequently crossed as well through the process of incorporating new identities and roles into their lives. Immigrants do not realize the extent to which these boundaries have to be stretched, nor the emotional implications of such crossings (Espin, 1997). For immigrant women who undertake these crossings there is significant impact on gender roles, and opportunities. Often transition to a new country involves loneliness stemming from the absence of family and friends with shared experiences, confusion in terms of role expectations, and conflict in values of two different cultures. Family and friends are not the only things left behind in the process of immigration. An individual’s original identity is also left behind, and the struggles involved with reorganizing and reintegrating identity in a new psychosocial context are now emphasized (Espin, 1997). The feeling of being left out, or not belonging, as sense of social isolation and a lack of total acceptance, are commonly reported by Asian Indian immigrants (Dasgupta, 1989).

Asian Indian Women in Cross-Cultural Marriages

Through the course of their resettlement in the United States, Asian Indian women start taking on important commitments having long-term significance. One such commitment is getting married and setting up households. Researchers have also pointed out the sense of limbo that immigrants feel. The fear of the parents and the Asian Indian community is that marrying outside the community would lead to the loss of culture among their daughters. Dasgupta and Dasgupta (1996) emphasized the conflict of gender roles and cultural expectations between Asian Indian women and Asian Indian men in the
American society, leading to an increase in cross-cultural marriages among Asian Indian
women compared to their male counterparts. Asian Indian women reported a negative
attitude towards Asian Indian men, who they viewed as sexist. Asian Indian men also
seem to impose expectations on Asian Indian women to conform to typical gender role
expectations (Dasgupta, 1994; Gupta, 1999), while being uncomfortable with assertive
and independent women (Jayakar, 1994).

Dasgupta’s (1998) study investigated the concerns of the continuity of ethnic
identity via maintenance of traditional culture among forty-six educated, middle class
Indian immigrant families, the majority of whom were foreign born. Intergenerational
synchrony towards dating, and attitudes towards women were examined among forty-
three fathers, and forty-one mothers, who were foreign-born immigrants. Their twenty-
ine sons and thirty-four daughters also participated in filling out three questionnaires to
study attitudes towards women, dating, and anxiety experienced in conjunction with these
attitudes. Dasgupta’s study found that second-generation women’s belief in gender
equality was significantly stronger than their male counterparts’. Dasgupta speculates that
conflicting attitudes toward gender equality between young women and men may
indicate difficulties that translate into mismatched expectations between marriage
partners. Dasgupta’s (1998) study also found elevated levels of anxiety among the
women participants of all ages in the study. She attributes the anxiety to the
disproportionate psychological stress that Asian Indian women endure in experiencing
conflicts that generate from contradictions between patriarchal family ideologies and
personal bids for autonomy.
Jethwani's (2001) study on the experiences of second-generation Asian Indian women in the United States yielded findings that were contrary to parents' fears and the community's perception that there would be a loss of Indian values and culture upon marrying cross-culturally. Her qualitative study, which explored the perceptions and experiences of thirty second-generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages, found that Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages acknowledged differences in background between themselves and their husbands' backgrounds. However, these women indicated that they became more aware of their own cultural and religious background, as well believed that their knowledge of their Indian culture was enhanced through answering their husbands' questions about it (Jethwani, 2001).

Research has shown that Asian women with higher education do not regard arranged marriages as positively when compared to their counterparts with lower levels of education (Bhopal, 1997). Bhopal (1997) conducted sixty in-depth interviews along with participant observation of the intersection of gender and ethnicity of South Asian women living in East London. Bhopal's study found that South Asian women who participated in arranged marriages felt that it enabled them to maintain their cultural identity. Those women who did not participate in arranged marriages were more highly educated, wanted more freedom of choice in their partners, and viewed arranged marriages as disadvantageous for women. Women who had higher education than their counterparts also held the view that the dowry system humiliated women, and were less likely to participate in the system, as these women felt they had the choice to reject the traditions of their heritage. Women with higher position in the labor market also echoed similar opinions about the arranged marriage, and dowry system. Women in higher
positions of the labor market are able to be more independent and leave the private patriarchy of the household. Women with higher education levels, and higher positions in the labor market also emphasized a sharing of domestic tasks by their partners. However, in this study the majority of the independent thinking women who were British born had never traveled back to India.

In Jethwani’s study (2001) of second generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages, many of her subjects concealed their relationships with non-Indian boyfriends to their families for fear of parental and community disapproval. Cross-cultural marriages are not only considered taboo in the Indian community, but Jethwani’s study found that members of the Indian community are more likely to openly voice their disapproval. Many of the parents of the participants in Jethwani’s study had negative reactions on learning of their daughter’s cross-cultural relationships. The initial negative reactions were concerned with the consequences of racial, cultural, and religious differences between their daughters and non-Indian boyfriends, as well as the disapproval of the Indian community towards cross-cultural marriages.

The increase in cross-cultural marriage within the Asian Indian community in the United States has not received much attention from researchers in the counseling field (Jethwani, 2001; Sheela & Audinarayana, 2000). One of the reasons for the increase in intermarriages may have to do with Asian Indians being relatively newer immigrants, as well as the myth of the “model minority” that still persists around this population. Dasgupta & Dasgupta (1996) discussed the increasing number of women of Asian Indian descent who complain of their inability to find a spouse within the community who is
supportive of their wife's independence, assertiveness, activism, and who is not threatened by their ambition.

Rastogi (2001) studied the experiences of ten women of Asian Indian descent about their personal experiences of growing up in the United States. Rastogi found that seven out of her ten participants reported feelings of guilt when they do not follow the wishes of their parents, or engaged in behavior that they knew would disappoint, or be disapproved of by their parents. It is important to note that even though Rastogi's participants had been raised and had spent the majority of their lives in the United States, guilt was still used as a form of control to ensure children's foremost loyalty to family.

Liem's (1997) qualitative study compared feelings of guilt and shame among first and second generation Asian Americans and European Americans. Liem found that first generation study participants described feelings of shame and guilt depending on how their behavior shames important others such as family members. Thus in making the decision to marry cross-culturally first generation Asian Indian women would clearly experience an internal conflict between being concerned over how their behavior impacts others, as well their need to follow their own desire for self-fulfillment.

In Kumar's (1999) study of Asian Indian women's experiences of migration, she found that her participants who were in an inter-faith or inter-caste marriages experienced turmoil and anguish with regard to the impact of their choice on their parents. Kumar's participants vocalized the fear that goes along with crossing boundaries. Fear of losing family support and being isolated in such an endeavor speak of the conflict experienced by these women to conform. Internalized values and expectations are evident where one participant in Kumar's study expressed the "peace" she feels in making her parents happy.
and maintaining the family honor. Asian Indian women continue to experience pressure to conform to specific traditional gender roles. The ideal Asian Indian woman is subordinate to her husband and in-laws and is willing to compromise everything including her individual personality to fulfill traditional, submissive, and oppressive gender roles. Gupta’s (1999) seminal research on case studies of Asian Indian women who have divorced, describes the difficult and painstaking process that Asian Indian women go through while rejecting patriarchal gender roles, and engaging in the painful process of rebuilding their lives. Gupta’s study, based on in-depth interviews, conceptualizes divorced Asian Indian women as pioneering a new identity for themselves through the process.

The literature has clearly indicated that it has been vital for Asian Indian immigrants to keep their ties with their heritage. While frequent trips to India maintain the physical link, psychological closeness is sustained through developing a network of cultural and religious associations, and through social gatherings. Asian Indian immigrants have been fierce in maintaining their ethnic identity against the assimilatory forces of the United States culture. Consequently, Asian Indian immigrants have transplanted old-world gender ideologies and clearly dichotomized gender roles, while in the United States. While several Asian Indian immigrant women savor independence and liberation from repression faced by their counterparts in India, the fear of cultural obliteration through “Americanization” and exogamy forces the Indian community to uphold old-world gender roles for its women. Indian immigrants try to preserve cultural consistency, family unity, and friendship ties through arranged marriages, many complete with “ostentatious receptions and large dowries provided by the bride’s family”
The second generation of Asian Indian children born in the United States holds more liberal and egalitarian views about women's role in society as compared to their foreign-born counterparts. First-generation Indian women immigrants, having been brought up in India, tend to internalize a more dichotomous gender role ideology than their United States born counterparts.

First-generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages face constant challenges in going against long established Indian cultural traditions even while living in the United States. Within the Asian Indian community there is a high social cost associated when Indian women express dissenting voices. While researchers have hypothesized several factors, such as gender role conflict, stagnant, and unquestioning obedience of cultural expectations, the conflict that Asian Indian women face within themselves, and the unfolding of the process by which they work through this conflict in making the decision to marry cross-culturally has not been studied. Although researchers point to an increase of cross-cultural marriages in Asian Indian women, there is a relative paucity of empirical research on first-generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. The existing literature on Asian Indians does not adequately address the issues of first-generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. First-generation Asian Indian women in making the decision to marry cross-culturally, negotiate cultural disparities in challenging and contesting the core value of collective responsibility of pleasing others, with the cherished American value of individual autonomy and pleasing oneself. This study seeks to expand on existing literature by producing a much more detailed and contextualized understanding of how first-generation Asian Indian women make the decision to go against dominant Indian cultural patterns, attitudes, and beliefs to
marry cross-culturally, and the general implications the decision to marry cross-culturally has had on their lives and their interpersonal relationships. This investigational study also seeks to provide family, friends, and helping professionals an understanding of the complexities, struggles, challenges, and commonalities of the women's experience in deciding to marry cross-culturally, and what these women experienced as helpful or not as helpful from family and others. The choice of a qualitative methodology was driven by the opportunity afforded by phenomenological inquiry to gain an in-depth understanding of the essence of the experience of first-generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. The choice and description of the methodology in detail will be addressed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and understand the experiences that first generation Asian Indian women faced while going through the process of making the decision to marry cross-culturally. This study also sought to understand what the consequences of the decision to marry cross-culturally have on Asian Indian women's lives and on their interpersonal relationships. Phenomenological research methods were utilized in an attempt to understand the experiences of these women and the meanings made of these experiences. Phenomenological inquiry focuses on understanding the essence of experiences (Creswell, 1998), thus it is appropriate to explore the essence of how a sample of Asian Indian women understand their experiences in making their decision to marry cross-culturally. This chapter describes the rationale and methods for this qualitative study. The first section discusses the appropriateness of qualitative methods, and phenomenological approach for this particular study. The second section will provide the researcher's bracketed experiences of the phenomena that are being explored. The third section will address the questions that the study attempts to explore. The fourth section will describe the procedures employed including recruitment of participants; participant selection, participant demographics, data collection, and data analysis. Lastly, the rigor of data analysis will also be presented.

Research Design

The principal objective of this research was to examine the internal processes that Asian Indian women engaged in, in making the decision to marry cross-culturally. The
intention of this research was to allow the voices of Asian Indian women to be heard, and this can only come from their lived stories. As such, personal and subjective narratives of these women are particularly well suited for being captured within the framework of the phenomenological qualitative research design. Phenomenological research aims to clarify situations lived through by persons in everyday life, and aims to remain as faithful as possible to the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). In an effort to understand the experience, the meanings women made of their decision to marry cross-culturally are described within the participant’s own context.

This method of qualitative inquiry concentrates on capturing as closely as possible the way in which the phenomenon is experienced with rich contextual examples (Girogi, & Giorgi, 2003). The nature of this study is exploratory, meant to describe and understand the struggle and conflict experienced in Asian Indian women’s decision to marry cross-culturally, and the consequential influence on their lives and interpersonal relationships. Given the scarcity of literature available on first generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages, the experiences and meanings constructed through the process of making the decision to marry cross-culturally have not been adequately researched.

Phenomenology allows detailed examination of the participant’s world and attempts to explore personal experience, and is concerned with the individual’s personal perception or narrative of an event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the event itself (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Thus, the qualitative focus on representing reality through the eyes of first generation Asian Indian women, with an
emphasis on an inductive description of the experience rather than an explanation, is appropriate for this study.

For the present study, qualitative data with "their richness and holism" and a strong potential for revealing complexity provided "thick descriptions that are vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has strong impact on the reader" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). This study sought to illuminate the knowledge women gained from going through the process, the tension and ambiguity, as well as the coping methods and approaches employed by these women that were considered helpful, while making the decision to marry cross-culturally.

Researcher's Narrative

Qualitative researchers are aware that it is impossible for researchers to be totally free of biases, or to transcend the influences of their own understanding of the phenomenon. Phenomenological research methods provide a way to understand human phenomena as they are experienced and made meaning of. As the phenomenological approach calls for the researcher to have "a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994 p. 59). Bracketing consists of suspending one's natural attitude, or our "taken for granted" approach to everyday living, and requires a rigorous reflection of one's biases, opinions and cultural backgrounds (Patton, 1990).

Within the framework of the present qualitative study, the researcher herself serves as the instrument. As such, it is important that the reader be informed of the researcher's own relationship with the phenomenon, and the meanings constructed from those experiences. By "bracketing experiences", the researcher's expectations and
assumptions regarding the inquiry are also acknowledged. As an Asian Indian woman in a cross-cultural marriage herself, the researcher is passionate as well as personally invested in this study and will provide her bracketed experience in this section. The inspiration for this study flows in part from my own experiences as a first generation Asian Indian woman who has made the decision to be in a cross-cultural marriage. The intermingling of the freedom of independent thinking provided to me in the United States, urged me to break away from Indian cultural traditions, while feeling enslaved to an extent by these same values and traditions. These push and pull factors surrounded me with conflict and confusion.

I am a 33-year-old Asian Indian woman. I come from a traditional, extended family, with a strong Christian religious background. In 1996, I transferred from my college in India to a small mid-western university to pursue my interests in the field of psychology. For most of my twenty-one years before I came to the U.S., I had been an obedient daughter, had an idyllic life surrounded by my extended family, with big dreams dancing in my mother’s eyes on the match she would arrange for me. My sister who is my elder by five years had a traditional arranged marriage, and the expectations of my family were for me to follow in my sister’s footsteps and have an arranged marriage as well. Although, I was not averse to the system of arranged marriages, I was nevertheless anxious about my prospects, and apprehensive of personality conflicts with a future mate.

In retrospect, my friendship with my current husband was not purposeful, nor calculated. We were merely friends, who shared similar interests, and were happy and comfortable in each other’s presence. There was no whirlwind romance, no premeditated plans, and after two and a half years, it was a steady progression to the obvious next step

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of marriage. Somewhere along the way we had developed a mutual, respectful love for each other that grew stronger with time as we continued to be together. While the heart thumping, blood-rushing features of a young love were absent; they were all too present when the dreaded thought of approaching my family with my decision. I was racked with constant doubts as to whether I was making the right decision. The implications of my actions, and the reaction of my parents and extended family, weighed on my mind on a daily basis. There was a constant pull towards the traditional values and expectations I had internalized, and the push towards an independent decision to please myself. Additionally, the support of my grandmothers, and aunts to whom I had always turned to for any conflict while in India, were not present in the United States when I needed an understanding ear the most. As a first generation immigrant, I was also unable to share my true feelings with my friends back home, who were not empathic to me going against my family wishes. I was also unable to share my conflict with American friends who could not fully comprehend the extent of my emotional pain, which led to feelings of isolation and disconnection. I fully came to understand what it was to be an immigrant, the sense of entrapment, of not being able to give up what I had found here in the United States, yet the constant yearning for what I had left behind at home. There was also the recognition in me of the inherent complexity involved in crossing borders and straddling two different worlds.

When I did decide to inform my parents of my decision, it was typical of many of my confidences to my family. The patriarchal and hierarchical nature of our family rested the ultimate decision on my father. When I finally forced the words out to my father, I remember clearly a sense of relief, quickly replaced with deep shame and guilt. I saw in
my father's eyes how shattering my decision was, and felt his sense of the loss of his daughter in one manner. In all my imaginings of how the moment would be, I had considered anger; I was even prepared for something physical, but was unprepared for the grief and the breach of faith that I felt reflected in my parent's eyes. I cannot adequately articulate my emotions, even at present. I was torn between taking back my words, and the disappointment I knew would be present in my husband's eyes that I had somehow failed him, after postponing revealing my intentions over and over, to my family.

When I did seek counseling, after I had informed my parents, and to help manage my emotions, I found it a rewarding experience. Although, I received much support and was grateful for it, the lack of true understanding of my culture by my counselor did not help in making an interpersonal connection through our relationship. However, the counseling process did help me become aware of the resilience and inner strength that I realized I possessed as a result of this process. There was a determination; the refreshing sense of making an independent decision that propelled me to go against all my ingrained values, and traditions. The ability to take control of my life, and shape the direction of my future, has given me confidence as well as empowering me to stand up for my beliefs. The process has also showed me ways to achieve equilibrium by holding on to the cherished aspects of my own culture while embracing aspects of my husband's culture as well.

My educational background in counseling psychology provides a foundation from which to conduct this qualitative research study. The interpersonal skills gained through doctoral training forms a basis for having an empathic understanding of and respect for
others perspectives. Many of the skills utilized in sound qualitative interviewing underlie those used in the counseling process as well (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

My training experiences at a university counseling center, as well as my personal experiences, have made me aware of the importance of addressing the needs of international women. I have published on Asian international women students, as well presented on the acculturation process of Asian Indian women. My training as a therapist has led me to understand that international and immigrant women given the opportunity of empathic understanding, advocacy, and encouragement, are able to solve and construct creative and better solutions to their own problems. My ethnic background and experiences as a recent first-generation Asian Indian immigrant in a cross-cultural marriage provided certain advantages in conducting this study. My familiarity with the vocabulary and experiences may have helped the participants feel more comfortable while narrating their stories and perhaps facilitated in their sharing more information.

For a generation of women whose socialization is based on the traditional gender role concept of women as “conforming and submissive”, making the choice to marry cross-culturally does not come easily. I assumed that during this study, I would hear women’s stories surrounded by conflict, confusion, and the resolution of their emotional pain. I also realized that the process has an influence on their interpersonal relationships with family, friends and their husbands, as well as on their identity as an Asian Indian woman. As women who have chosen not to follow established cultural scripts, but have chosen instead to make unconventional choices, my assumption was that these individuals were likely to have values and understandings about themselves, and their identities that are complex and nontraditional. I expected the women to consider their
experiences to be unique, and to be willing to share their stories for women in similar circumstances and who can be appreciated for the intimate sharing of their experiences. It was my hope that the stories that these women would tell, would resonate with other Asian Indian women who are in cross-cultural marriages. Above all, I believed letting these women share their stories in their own way would allow an affirmation of their reality, as well as providing a venue for validating their perceptions. Each story was expected to allow a thread to be added to the seamless sari of the infinite experiences of immigrant Asian Indian women.

Research Questions

In the words of Moustakas (1994), “phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning.” As such the questions selected are intended to explore participants’ understanding and experience of their decision, and the consequential influence on their lives and relationships and the meanings they have made of the process.

The current study sought an in-depth understanding of the experiences of first-generation Asian Indian immigrant women on their process of working through and going against strong cultural traditions in making the decision to marry cross-culturally. How does gender role socialization, and the Indian culture influence Asian Indian women in their decision to marry cross-culturally? What are the barriers and challenges that these women faced in making and implementing their decision? What are the experiences that they considered supportive and/or helpful during their decision making process? What are the consequences that their decision to marry cross-culturally have on their lives, interpersonal relationships, religious beliefs and view of traditional Asian Indian culture?
Participant Recruitment

Several methods of participant recruitment were pursued. E-mail and listserv solicitation were used to recruit participants. The two listservs utilized were the South Asian Psychological Networking Association (SAPNA) and South Asian Women's Network (SAWNET). The invitation to participate in the study (Appendix A) requested potential participants contact the researcher via e-mail or phone, if they were interested in participating in the study.

Individuals of the Asian Indian community were also contacted for word-of-mouth referrals of possible names of interviewees who met the criteria of the study. Family, friends, and acquaintances of the Asian Indian community were e-mailed or given a hard copy of the invitation to participation (Appendix A). They were requested to share this information with Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages, whom they knew, who may have been interested in learning more about participating in the study. If potential participants were interested in the study or required more information, the student investigator's e-mail and telephone contact information were provided in the invitation to participation. Lastly, a snowball sampling method was employed wherein participants who were already recruited were requested to provide recommendations for women who fit the criteria of the study. Identified participants were contacted by phone (Appendix B) in which the description, inherent risks and benefits, method, and time commitment of the study were stated. This phone contact served to prescreen participants and to assure that they met the selection criteria. Selected participants were mailed the informed consent form (Appendix C) and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix D). The women were then asked to participate in an initial interview, over the phone, which
lasted approximately 1-11/2 hours. Following the initial interview, a second interview focused on completing the interview questions and provided them an opportunity for verification and clarification of their stories, and their input on commonalities across participants. The total time commitment required of each participant was in the range of 2-3 hours. The interviews were conducted in the spring of 2006, through the spring of 2007.

**Criterion Selection**

A purposive sampling method was used to select “information-rich cases”, to help illuminate the experiences of these women (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Purposive sampling when compared to representative sampling is useful when focusing on studying and understanding a selected subgroup in depth. Criterion sampling has been noted to be essential with phenomenological studies as it is necessary that all participants have experienced the phenomena under study (Creswell, 1998). Accordingly, I sought as participants Asian Indian women who were born in India and who had immigrated to the United States during the 1990’s. Participants must have been in a current, satisfactory cross-cultural marriage in the United States, which was their first marriage, had been married for at least one year, had the ability to articulate their experiences, and the willingness to describe and share their experiences of making the decision to be in a cross-cultural marriage.

Qualitative inquiry focuses in depth on relatively small samples, studying information-rich cases to yield insights and in-depth understanding, with careful attention to detail, context and nuance rather than empirical generalizations (Patton, 2002). Because of the anticipated richness in the stories of the process of Asian Indian women
who have made the decision to marry cross-culturally, the planned actual sample size was to be relatively small with 6-8 participants. As much of the literature focused on first-generation Asian Indian immigrants had been done in the 1980's or earlier, this study intended to study those women who arrived in the United States in the 1990's or later. There was no restriction in age range so as to allow for a fuller and more comprehensive view of the patterns and experiences of women in different stages of their lives.

Appropriate participants were expected to be able to describe their thoughts, feelings, emotional reactions, their support systems, and coping strategies used regarding their process in making a decision to marry cross-culturally. Demographic information including age, religion, language, region of birth in India, caste, years of education, and occupation were recorded. The marriage was their first and only marriage, and they had all been married for at least one year. Asian Indian women who met these criteria, and who had experienced significant cultural and familial differences with conflicted emotions regarding their decision to marry cross-culturally and who were willing to share these personal experiences with the researcher were invited to participate. This resulted in a self-selected sample comprised of first generation Asian Indian women who had extensive personal life experience with making the decision to enter a cross-cultural marriage and who were willing to share their personal experiences for research purposes.

Once potential participants were identified, each woman was contacted by phone. The initial phone interview served to explain to the potential participant the details of the research while making sure that the participant understood what was required of her from the research process as well as her involvement in the interview process. The phone call also served to identify participants who met the selection criteria. If potential participants
expressed an interest in participating in the research, a follow-up letter was mailed to the women, in which the goals of the study, method, time commitment, and informed consent as approved by Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) were included. Confidentiality of information shared by the participant, assurance of anonymity, as well as the voluntary nature of participation was emphasized. Consent was also obtained from the participant for the interviews to be audio taped.

**Participant Demographics**

My participants were eight Asian Indian women who had spent the majority of their childhood years in India. In terms of geographical location in India, three women were from North India, three from East India, and two from South India. With regards to their present residence, the geographic regions represented by participants in the United States included four residing in the East, one in the Midwest, one in the West, and one in the South. One participant explicitly requested that her location remain undisclosed to preserve confidentiality. The majority of the women were Hindu, with two Christians, one Buddhist, and one woman who identified herself as a “humanist.” The educational levels of the women were relatively high. Three women had their doctorate, four had their master’s, and one had her undergraduate and was currently working on her master’s.

All the women were cross-culturally married. Seven of the eight women were married to Caucasian men. One participant was married to a man of ethnic minority. They had been married to their spouses from one to fifteen years. This was the first marriage for all of the women. Participant demographics are listed in Table 1.
Table 1

Participant's Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Indian State</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Ethnicity of Spouse</th>
<th>Years Married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jyoti</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Artist/Professor</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>5yrs 4mos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asha</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>White American</td>
<td>1yr 9mos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roshni</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Professor/Counselor</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>4yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priya</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>3yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpa</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Program Officer/ Philanthropy</td>
<td>Irish-American</td>
<td>3yrs 9mos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bina</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Career Counselor</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neela</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>15yrs 5mos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meena</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>Humanism</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Research Scientist</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>3yrs 8mos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ethnicity of spouse as reported by participants.*
Data Generation

This section will address the procedures that were used to collect the research data. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, and able to be made known explicitly (Patton, 2002). Thus the researcher attempted to interview women to explore their subjective process of making a decision to marry cross-culturally and to gather their stories. Qualitative interviewing is intended to be in-depth and semi-structured. While there are several ways of interviewing, Franklin (1997) and Mason's (1996) best described the approach I intended to use. Mason (1996) advocated a relatively informal style of interviewing, for example with the appearance of a conversation or discussion, and with the help of an interview guide that is topic centered, rather than a formal predetermined set of questions. The researcher comes to the interview as open-minded as possible with her pre-suppositions examined. The interviewer aims for clarification, and paraphrases while the interview is in process to encourage the interviewee's responses and corrections, and when possible a follow-up session is arranged to corroborate further interpretations (Franklin, 1997). The assumption is that rich, nuanced, descriptive data are generated via the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Franklin, 1997; Mason, 1996).

An interview protocol developed for the current study was used to guide the interview (Appendix I). "The interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject" (Patton, 2002, p. 343). By using an interview guide, the researcher is able to carefully decide how best to use limited time, as well as make the interview process more comprehensive by defining in advance the issues to be explored.
(Patton, 2002). The guide contained a list of open-ended questions that were addressed during the interview. The open ended questions included concentrated on the participants experiences growing up in India, their expectations of marriage while in India, their experiences with immigrating to the United States and expectations for marriage while in the United States, their personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences in making the decision to marry cross-culturally, and the consequences of the their decision on their lives and their relationships (Appendix I).

Phenomenological interviewing is committed to an empathic and joint search by the researcher and the participant for shared understanding (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, in this relationship, the women in this study were perceived as the experiential expert on the subject. The researcher aimed to establish a climate of trust and openness to allow the women to feel comfortable in introducing issues not previously considered by the researcher. Thus a semi-structured in-depth interview facilitates rapport and empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage, allows the interview to go into novel areas, and tends to capture richer data (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

All interviews were audio taped for maximum fidelity, and then transcribed. A second tape recorder was used for back-up purposes. Bearing in mind the exploratory nature of the study, the interviews did not have a rigidly imposed agenda. Following the first interview, the tapes were transcribed, and the data analyzed. The researcher then wrote a summary story for each individual participant. The narrative summary for each individual was sent out to the participants. During the second interview, the participants were first asked how well the narrative summary story captured the participant’s experiences. Participants were then requested to clarify or elaborate on information...
shared during the first interview. Participants were also requested to reflect upon any significant additional thoughts and experiences that they felt they needed to share in the second interview to appropriately capture their experiences that had not been mentioned during the first interview. Finally, each participant was asked to respond to the researcher’s preliminary themes across multiple participants. The summary of each interview and the researcher’s observational notes were used during data analysis and in preparing the written report of the study. Towards the conclusion of the study, an overall summary of the research findings was mailed to the participants and a phone call provided them with the opportunity to add final thoughts or comments.

Data Management and Analyses

Data analysis allows the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The initial interviews were transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was reviewed by listening to the tape of each interview while reading the transcript to insure accuracy. Any identifying information was removed and a pseudonym was used, to ensure that participants’ confidentiality was preserved. Names of persons and locations were replaced by general descriptors. The signed informed consent documents were retained in a locked file cabinet, and the transcripts of the interviews were stored in a locked cabinet separate from the informed consent documents. Upon reading the transcripts multiple times, themes were identified, and differences between participants were noted. By immersing herself in the data, the researcher was able to get an overall feel for the data’s scope and meanings (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 2002).
Qualitative Solutions in Research, Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing
Searching and Theorizing (QSR NUD*IST) was used for constructing, refining and relating analytical categories, coding and retrieving data. The researcher’s observational notes also provided ideas for further questions for the second interview. The analytic procedures described by Marshall and Rossman (1995) were primarily employed for this investigation, suggestions by Barker, Pistrang, and Elliot (2002) and Moustakas (1994) were also included.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), the steps of data analysis include (1) organizing the data; (2) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (3) testing emergent hypotheses against the data; (4) generating alternative explanations of the data; and (5) writing up the findings.

1. Organizing the data: Data analysis began with careful reading and re-reading of transcripts. Taped interviews were carefully listened to, and observational notes were reread to familiarize with, and become more intimate with the data. To organize data more efficiently it was entered into QSR NUD*IST. The process of inductive analysis involved typologies that emerged from the participants themselves as well as those identified and created by the researcher to signify salient or diverse groups of data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

2. Generation of categories, themes, and patterns: The next step of data analysis involved generating categories, themes, and patterns. “Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis and one that
can integrate the entire endeavor" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 114). The process of category generation involved internal convergence and external divergence; which meant that the categories should be internally consistent while being distinct from each other. The meanings and essences of the experience were constructed for each participant, which incorporates the invariant categories and themes.

3. Testing emergent themes: Once the categories and patterns were delineated, the themes were tested. The data was then searched to confirm and challenge the emergent themes and incorporate them into larger constructs when necessary. The data was then approached with “skepticism and willingness to consider that the participants in the study have ensured a particular presentation of themselves to the researcher” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 116). The information gathered was also examined to determine whether it addressed the questions of interest.

4. Generation of alternative explanations: The next step involved seeking alternative explanations. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995) “the researcher must engage in the critical act of challenging the very pattern that seems so important” (p. 116). Plausible explanations for the data and the linkages among them were searched for with the aim of demonstrating why the chosen explanation was the most plausible one of all.

5. Finally, a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experiences, which would apply to the group of participants in its entirety, was developed (Moustakas, 1994).
For each transcript of each interview steps 1 through 4 were followed. Following the first interview and before the second interviews were conducted, an individual summary was generated for each participant. A copy of the preliminary summary of the analyzed data from the first interview was sent to each participant. These summaries were discussed with the women during the second interview. The second interview provided participants the opportunity to respond to how well the individual summary of their narrative captured their experience. This allowed the participants to add information that they felt needed to be included that was previously left out. Themes from the individual summaries were clarified and expanded, with room for further meaning to be made during the second interview. After the second interview, steps 1 through 5 of the data analysis were carried out again. A composite description of the essence of the experience of all the participants was then developed. The women were mailed the final composite of findings based on all participants' stories, and a phone call was made to provide opportunity for a final verification of the overall themes and interpretations.

*Member Checks*

"Researchers and evaluators can learn a great deal about the accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of their data analysis by having the people described in that analysis react to what is described and concluded" (Patton, 2002, p. 560). To verify that I accurately captured the experiences of the women, each participant was sent a follow-up letter (Appendix J), with an individual narrative summary of their story. During the second interview, the women were given the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the accuracy of their summary and to add more information to their initial interview information and the description of their experiences. In addition, the
women were encouraged to share further thoughts and reflections that emerged since the initial interview. After review and discussion of the emergent themes from their individual initial interview, participants were asked to reflect and comment on the broader themes that emerged from the entire sample. A final composite of the research findings was mailed to the participants and a brief phone call provided the women with an opportunity to verify and give their final feedback.

The Rigor of Data Analysis

In this section, procedures utilized to strengthen the study’s rigor are discussed. As the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry, the researcher’s personal connections and influence with the topic studied are provided under the researcher’s bracketed experiences (Patton, 2002). Bracketed experiences allow the reader to evaluate the researcher’s interpretation of the data (Barker et. al., 2002).

Through the selection of the sample, the researcher provided contextual descriptions of the research participants so readers can judge how widely the findings may apply (Barker et. al., 2002). The semi-structured interview guide served as a tool to keep the inquiry focused generally on the topic of concern. Prolonged in-depth interviewing allowed for “thick” descriptions showing the complexities of the stories, through ample examples of raw data to illustrate analytic procedures used, allowing readers to evaluate the findings as well as transferability to other settings and situations (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The researcher employed several techniques to establish rigor of data analysis. The researcher was conscious of being tolerant to ambiguity, and sought to generate alternative explanations (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Credibility checks including
member checks were used to verify the results with the original informants of the study (Patton, 2002; Barker, et. al., 2002). An individual narrative summary for each participant after the first interview was sent to the participants to ensure accuracy and elicit feedback. Feedback was also elicited on an overall summary of themes across all participants. Follow-up interviews afforded participants an opportunity to reflect on and discuss their experiences.

The emerging themes and categories were also validated by triangulation. More specifically, data-source triangulation involved the “combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon or programs” (Patton, 1990, p. 187). A multi-session interview format used in this study generated data from different sessions that were used to look for inconsistencies and contradictions, and to corroborate various themes. Member checks and the use of an auditor to review the codes and categories also contributed to data triangulation. Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) discuss the benefits that an auditor brings by providing a different perspective to the research process. In the present study an auditor was consulted during the research process. The role of the auditor was to verify the consistency of agreement among the original data, the data analysis process and the written report of findings. As the interviews were conducted, the auditor was given anonymous transcripts of the interviews. The auditor then came up with her initial codes and provided her feedback after the first round of interviews. The codes that had been generated by the researcher and those of the auditor were then compared and examined for consistency. The auditor was also given anonymous transcripts of the second set of interviews and provided her observations as to whether each of the codes reflected original data. Once the researcher completed follow-
up interviews, data analysis, and a draft of the results section, the auditor was consulted again. The auditor also evaluated the congruency between the data and the final composite of research findings. The auditor provided several suggestions based on her observations. For example, the auditor suggested the increased emphasis of the influence of strong women role models in the lives of the participants. The researcher incorporated this and other suggestions to more clearly and explicitly describe the data.

Lastly the researcher attempted to interpret the data in a manner that is coherent and integrated, yet without oversimplifying the data. The researcher also endeavored in writing the results of the study to capture and make sense of the phenomenon, enabling the reader to understand the phenomenon more fully (Barker, et. al., 2002).
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The nature of this study is exploratory; it is meant to describe and understand the struggle and conflict experienced by Asian Indian women in deciding to marry cross-culturally and the consequential influence on their lives and interpersonal relationships. The women’s upbringing provides a substantive background as to the influences contributing to their decision to marry cross-culturally. The challenges the women faced after their marriage also provide us with information as to the continuing struggles that Indian women face as a result of being cross-culturally married.

The first section identifies themes influencing the women’s decision to marry cross-culturally. The second section identifies themes relating to the consequences of the women’s decision on their lives and interpersonal relationships. The third section includes the women’s responses to three specific questions addressing: a) what they considered to be the most important aspect of their experience, b) helpful supports through out the process, and c) advice they would like to share with other Asian Indian women deciding to marry cross-culturally. Lastly, an overview of the women’s experience in marrying cross-culturally is presented. This section highlights and provides an overview of the common elements that emerged among the women and attempts to integrate the findings across the main themes. Themes that emerged are illustrated with key examples and selected quotes.
Influences Contributing to Women's Decision to Marry Cross-Culturally

This section presents several themes that provide us an understanding of the influences that seemed to help set the stage for the women marrying cross-culturally. The themes included: the emphasis on education, the level of gender role expectations in their families, family member's marriage expectations, the women's own marriage expectations, the women's experiences dating both Indian and non-Indian men, the extent to which the women negotiated and resisted traditional career and marriage boundaries, the women's and family members concerns regarding divorce, and reactions from friends and loved ones to their cross-cultural marriage.

Education

Six of the participants described the importance of education in their lives. There was a common theme of education having been emphasized by the family of five of the women. Participants in this study had relatively high education levels. Four of the women had earned master's degrees, three had doctorates, and one had an undergraduate degree and was currently working on a master's degree. While participants described their parents having placed an emphasis on education, they also described education not being as highly valued among extended family members. All of the women also had the common experience of having completed some part of their education outside of India, with or without the support of their family. Three of the women completed their undergraduate education in the United States. Six of the women completed their graduate education outside of India while two women completed post-doctorate fellowships outside of India.
Asha attributed her parent’s liberal value system to their strong interest in education. Asha’s father had a Ph.D. and she described him as, “really well read.” Comparatively, she did not consider her extended family members placing as much emphasis on a graduate education. Despite Asha’s own reservations, her father highly encouraged her to go to Malaysia to continue her higher education.

I was planning on moving to Bombay to pursue an acting career, so I really wasn’t sure whether I wanted to go to Malaysia, I didn’t even know where Singapore was. I was just very ignorant about outside of India, except for what I had seen on T.V. …. But when I changed my mind, I’m sure it made my dad very happy.

Asha’s extended family members on the other hand, did not think “it was a good idea to let a young single girl go to a foreign country where you didn’t have any relatives or friends.”

Roshni’s mother directly conveyed the importance of education in the lives of her daughters. Roshni considered her mother a “radical” who emphasized independence and who often stated, “I hope you girl’s don’t get married before you learn to stand on your own feet and first make a life for yourself.” Roshni’s paternal grandmother who had an early marriage at 14-years of age also encouraged her granddaughters to “be educated and get a job and stand on your feet and then you can think about marriage, and think about things like that.”

Bina’s parents also prioritized education over marriage for their daughters. Bina’s father’s explicit expectation was that Bina complete her graduate education before she was married.

Both my parents believed that. They only had girls so they really believed in making sure that the girls got what the boys did in terms of education. My parents, both my father and my mother, always said that you can be whatever you
want to be as a woman, I mean you don’t have to be restricted to certain career paths or certain educational opportunities.

Neela described several generations of her family having progressive beliefs. For example, Neela’s grandmother was instrumental in starting the first school for girls in her neighborhood. Her parents were also highly politically involved and had met through their political activism. Neela mentioned growing up in the 1970’s surrounded by political turmoil in the city she lived in. Her parent’s involvement in the political movement took precedence over following the traditional expectations for children. “People were not living a regular life I would say, you know, (such as) first put your kids through school and then look for their marriages. I think there was a bigger social political picture that dominated the culture of the city.”

While Alpa’s parents and extended family members held traditional values it did not affect her education. “The expectation that they had about girls, it never interfered with education or college or anything, we could probably go through and get two masters…” The value of education in Alpa’s family was not considered to be a threat or a major source of interference with more traditional values.

Meena described her mother as “spirited” but not having a strong educational background. “She never had a job and she always felt that if only she was married a little later, if only she could have finished college she could have a job, she would be independent, she would do things.” In this instance, Meena observed her mother repeatedly conveying regret over not having bettered her life through the opportunities an education would have provided. Her mother’s dissatisfaction with her life contributed to Meena’s determination for independence and her desire to pursue a higher education.
While Jyoti described her mother as much more liberal than extended family members, there were still differing expectations for Jyoti’s education compared to her brother. “I think my brother went into engineering and all that. But I don’t think there was as much emphasis on my (education), you know, what I was going to study because I was expected to get married. But that was almost an underlying expectation, more implicit.” However, when Jyoti decided that her life in India was no longer satisfactory, she decided to move to the United States to pursue a degree in photography. While her extended family members had their reservations, Jyoti’s stated her mother, “supported me even though we were fighting like crazy...she was just in a way glad that I had made a decision to do something.”

In essence, participants described parents having communicated the importance of education contributing to greater career opportunities and self-sufficiency. Parents of several of the participants also prioritized education over the traditional emphasis of marriage. Parents were also supportive of the women when faced with concerns from extended family members. The commonality of the women’s experiences of experiencing encouragement and support to advance the participants educational aspirations opened up the possibility of considering alternate options than those afforded by traditional Indian expectations.

*Family Gender-Role Expectations*

Several women in this study did not feel constricted by traditional gender role expectations, pervasive in the Indian society, within their nuclear family. Participants, however, made the distinction between more liberal gender role expectations within their immediate family and more traditional gender role expectations among extended family
members. While gender role expectations seemed to be more liberal within their immediate family, a few of the women talked about the conflicting “mixed messages” they constantly received, not only between their immediate and extended family members but also from their own parents.

Jyoti described the differing expectations within her family. “My father was extremely independent and believed in equal rights for men and women...my mother is also very liberal...again it was my extended family, not my parents who had rigid beliefs.” After Jyoti’s family moved back to India from England she noticed differences in expectations between her brother and her. “I think once I came to India some of those expectations were you know to help out in the house more, where as my brother didn’t have to, again you know, serving tea when people came when again my brother didn’t have to.”

Jyoti noticed changes especially as she grew into young adulthood.

I think I got a lot of mixed messages, and it actually created a lot of conflict between my mother and myself, because I think until then the way I had been brought up was that I was equal, treated equally as my brother was, that I should be happy, that I shouldn’t be forced into anything I don’t have to follow traditions and then when I became of marriageable age my mother kind of I feel changed her tune a bit....she would tell me things like I wish you would elope. It was like these mixed messages.

Bina shared a similar upbringing. “From my parents I got mostly more liberal values as when compared to families in India...I think in terms of women’s roles I think I got more liberal values.” However when it came to dating and clothing, my mother “would not allow me to go out with boys and (she was) very conservative in terms of dress, so she would be like you can’t wear shorts, can’t wear tank tops, so those were the more conservative values that I got.”
Asha also experienced mixed messages from her nuclear and extended family. She also experienced mixed messages from her parents. While her father provided her opportunities that were not restrictive of gender roles, her mother appeared to be more reserved.

I remember one time I had gone to a cousin’s wedding and I was on the roof, hanging out with some of the boys my age. My father brought me up like a tomboy. So I was just sitting on a chair and there was a table in the middle and I had my feet up on the table, and this uncle of mine came and scolded me for having my feet up and what am I doing with the boys and I should go and hang out with the girls. So extended family very, very, traditional, but I think my father probably wanted a boy and then it was me and so you know, if we had to change the tire on his scooter we would do it, or he would teach me how to do it and the next time I would do it, or if we had to go to the ration (dry goods) shop, he would send me by myself, even though my mom would say you know, don’t send the girl alone, all kinds of guys are there.

Priya who is from a Christian family considered her religious background to contribute to her parents being:

A little liberal probably, I think in some families like the Hindu families, they are much more strict especially with little girls, especially with girls. But in our family we did not have that difference between the boy and the girl, and we were treated alike, and if I could not do something, my brother could not do that too. It was not like oh! Benji (brother) you can do anything you want and you (Priya) you can’t do anything because you are a girl, no! We didn’t have that.

Alpa also described the differences in expectations for girls in their joint family living system.

In terms of gender roles, we lived in a joint family system, with my grandparents, and uncle and so obviously there was gender discrimination. But the way it was done in my family was strange, it wasn’t so much through my parents it was more from my grandparents...But you know my grandmother made it very clear that she preferred boys to girls...I kind of experienced my grandmother constantly telling my mother that why don’t you try for one more kid, it will be a boy, that type of stuff. Praying for a boy, and all these comments that went around like “Oh! We wish that I had a grandson” things like that.
The women in this study shared how their parents placed less emphasis on and for some of the women even encouraged them to be non-conforming of traditional Asian Indian gender roles. At the same time, extended family members continued to hold on to more conservative traditional expectations. The women also experienced conflicting expectations within their immediate family environment. The participants described their mothers holding on to more conservative expectations in certain areas when compared to the women’s fathers. The women’s stories illustrate the duality of the contradiction in expectations that they continually faced.

Influence of Western Values

Six of the women identified having family overseas, had parents who had traveled, or had themselves lived a part of their lives overseas before moving back to India. All six of the women identified these experiences as having contributed to a more liberal or non-traditional Indian upbringing while growing up.

Roshni grew up with a strong influence of a British presence in her family. There was also a precedence of intermarriage in her family with her grandfather marrying a British woman.

Well it meant that at home English was very much spoken I mean Bengali was spoken, and I know Bengali, but English was a central language. The books that were in every room were all English. Actually even though we spoke Hindi outside and we did all that, there were not books no Hindi books in the house and there were very few Bengali books...so my ideas growing up were informed by British literature. And nobody contradicted that necessarily around me.

Alpa had several extended family members who resided in the United States. Alpa felt that these family members were influential over the type of family Alpa married into.
They knew that they would not want me to marry into a family that was very old fashioned. They obviously wanted me to be with somebody who would respect me as a person and who was educated himself. So, they probably would never want me to marry somebody who had a high school diploma.

Bina’s father’s job contributed to his immediate family traveling overseas while Bina was growing up. She considered this to be a positive influence on her upbringing. “So we came in contact with a lot of western values, and so I think it had some sort of positive influence and that he (Bina’s father) was a little more open to different ideas and different cultures.”

Priya also attributed her childhood years spent overseas to her parents holding more liberal values.

We lived in Dubai and that makes a big difference. It makes a very big difference. If you look at my peer cousins who were brought up there, it is totally different from the way we were raised. For example, we had a chance to interact with boys. But in India the kids are raised completely differently, girls are kept separate from the boys from a pretty young age. Say when the kid comes to 9 or 10 years-old they don’t run around the boys and play around that much, I mean some of them do but not. My cousins had friends but as they grew older they didn’t have friends. I had a lot of boy friends just play friends. I mean even until I was twenty-two years old, my best friends were guys mostly. My mom and dad knew about it and they did not care. But you know in India you couldn’t do that no way!

Jyoti was born and lived in England until she was 10-years-old. She felt her parents were both influenced by their experiences in England, especially her mother. “I think that she (Jyoti’s mother) was definitely affected by her experience in England. Seeing that women had other choices. Seeing that you don’t have to follow, I mean its okay not to have to follow certain traditions.”

Asha also attributed her father’s liberal beliefs to “my father actually went to London for 6 months on training. And, I felt that might have something to do with how he has just kind of allowed me and my sister to be more independent.”

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The women shared their common stories of how exposure to non-Indian cultures impacted the values of family members. Some of the women also described the positive impact of having visited or having lived in a culture other than their own. The women experienced the exposure to different cultures as leading to their parents' openness and receptivity towards values that were different from traditional Indian values. The influence of other cultures also contributed to a family environment that provided choices and opportunities for the women not typically provided by traditional Indian culture.

*Family Member’s Marriage Expectations*

Parents and extended family members communicated either implicitly or explicitly their expectations regarding marriage to the participants. All of the women in this study shared a common understanding of marriage developed relatively early based on their family’s expectations. Although the degree of expectations and requirements for participants were varied, all eight women expressed some expectation held by family regarding marriage. Expectations for marriage for the women ranged from a traditional arranged marriage with a spouse of the same caste, culture, and religion, to the more progressive expectation of having the option of choosing a spouse from any culture. Several of the women also shared the common experience of parents not imposing the value of a traditional arranged marriage, however with the implicit expectation that their spouse would be Indian. A shared concern of some of the women’s parents dealt with the Indian community’s racial and religious prejudices regarding their daughter’s choice of marital partners.

Bina described progressive expectations from her mother who stated, “I (Bina’s mother) don’t really want you to be in an arranged marriage, because I don’t want you to
blame me if anything goes wrong.” Bina’s parents were also different from typical Indian parents. “I think when I was younger I never really got a lot of pressure in terms of marriage or even when growing up. In fact actually my parents never really talked to me about marriage.” While her parents did not expect her to have an arranged marriage, Bina stated, “I think that in some ways there was an expectation or maybe they took it for granted that we (Bina and her sister) would marry Indians.”

Neela’s parents did not have a traditional arranged marriage and they did not expect Neela to have an arranged marriage; there was an expectation however that she marry someone Indian. “I think they expected that we (their children) would find a life partner within our cultural framework. So, that expectation was certainly there, but no nothing much except that.”

Bina and Neela’s parent’s expectations for their daughter’s spouses were relatively liberal in not expecting them to have a traditional arranged marriage. However, there was an underlying assumption that their spouses would be Indian.

While Jyoti described her mother as “liberal,” her mother nevertheless felt a lot of pressure after Jyoti’s father passed away, to follow traditional expectations of an arranged marriage along with the dowry system for her daughter, from extended family members. Jyoti was also socialized to believe while growing up that the “ultimate goal” for a woman was to be married. Jyoti shared some of her family’s implicit expectations for partner choice,

It wasn’t said to me but it was said to my cousins that you can marry anyone but just make sure that it’s not an African American. And though it wasn’t said to me, I think there would have been a difference in attitude if my husband was black. I think that is definitely true. I feel that there is a certain racism in India and him being white made a huge difference in terms of him being accepted.
Meena described her mother being concerned with keeping up with traditional expectations. She was concerned about the consequences from the Indian society if her daughter did not follow traditional expectations. Meena shared her parents’ reaction when she was married, “actually my family was very happy when they heard that I was getting married because they had basically thought that I would never get married. Also I guess in all fairness I have to say that if I, my husband is white, instead if he had been black, or if he had been Muslim…I think that it would have been way, way, harder, that I know.”

Asha’s parents also did not expect her to marry someone who was Hindu and of the same caste. However, she stated, “If I had walked home with a Muslim guy they would have been shock. That would have been much harder for them.”

Alpa’s parent’s specifications for her husband emphasized education and professional qualifications. “They wanted me to marry somebody who is professional in terms of either a doctor, a lawyer, one of those things. Earning big, having his own business earning big bucks.” Alpa’s family also expected her to marry the son of a family friend through the process of “facilitated dating.”

Of all the participants, Priya’s parents had the most traditional expectations of marriage. Her parents emphasized race, ethnicity, and professional requirements for her future spouse.

As we grew older, dad and mom’s thing was that we get married to an Indian man from the same caste, from the same culture, but (and) it was get married to a doctor to an engineer, as we grew up, that was their expectations of us. I mean to get married to a traditional Indian man, from back home from our place. Happily, an arranged marriage that would be the only way to go, because that’s the way they got married and that’s the way traditions have been.
There was precedence in Roshni’s family of members being cross-culturally married. She was the only participant who described her family not having any expectations for her to be married to someone Indian.

I never got an expectation that you have to; your final relationship or even any relationship has to be with someone from our own group... In fact, it was almost a kind of contrary expectation. I mean if I had brought home somebody who was like a Bengali Brahmin my parents would have been kind of whoa! Are you rebelling against us?

Participants were clear in describing parent’s expectations of suitability of future spouses for the women. Several of the women’s examples illustrate progressive beliefs held by their parents for their daughters’ marriage expectations. The women described their parents not broaching the subject of marriage while the participants were younger, nor did their parents expect their daughters to have a traditional arranged marriage. Participants described their parents providing greater opportunities for independence, autonomy, and flexibility in their daughter’s choice of marital partners outside of the traditional norm of an arranged marriage. These freedoms however had their limits. While participants described their parents having progressive beliefs they also described conventional expectations concurrently held by their parents.

Women’s Own Marriage Expectations

While participants were made aware early of expectations surrounding marriage and marriage partners, by parents and family members, these expectations were not always echoed by the women themselves. Many of the women challenged their parents’ assumption of requirements of their future spouses.

Alpa explicitly made her intentions for her future clear to her parents. As a young woman, Alpa stated her focus was on academic achievements rather than on marriage. “I
still never wanted to get married. I made it very clear to my parents so I think the first
time that they approached the topic in all seriousness was maybe when I was nineteen.
They were progressive enough to allow me that space.” Given the preoccupation with
marriage, especially for women in the Indian culture, Alpa’s parent’s restraint in not
bringing it up earlier in her upbringing is noteworthy.

While in undergraduate years and until she met her husband, Neela shared being
more interested in her academics than in marriage. “I was very much immersed in
studying physics, and that (marriage) was very remote at that time in my mind. I did not
think about it at all.” Both Alpa and Neela directly convey the importance of education in
their lives. Education provided the women with the availability of knowledge, the
opening up of opportunities to have careers, and the promise of independence.

Three of the women shared having negative associations regarding marriages.
From the women’s stories, the negative associations appeared to be based on their
observations of their parents’ rocky relationships.

Asha’s view of marriage when she was younger was affected by exposure to her
parent’s relationship that was conflicted. Asha witnessed constant arguments between her
parents. She was also much affected by the arranged marriage of an aunt, with whom
Asha was emotionally close to, that resulted in her aunt being abused in the relationship.
Asha describes how these experiences affected her own view of marriage.

While I was growing up my parents used to have a lot of fights. And then the
whole incident with my aunt who got married to this guy and the marriage turned
out to be awful. So early on, when I was a teenager I decided that I wasn’t going
to get married...My faith or trust in marriage was very weak at that time when I
saw all that was happening.
Bina parents had separated when she was younger and similar to Asha, she described how her parent’s marriage influenced her own marriage expectations. “...my parents marriage had not really been that successful and I really feel that relationship was definitely not a model for what a healthy marriage should be.” Bina also shared how her expectations for marriage changed. “I started seeing marriages here…and there was mutual love and respect within people’s relationships and marriage. So I started seeing different kinds of relationships.”

Meena explains why her own expectations for marriage were non-traditional.

I wasn’t really looking to get married so the expectations if anything was pretty low. I mean I actually saw myself to be the single professional, woman. I really didn’t have a really good role model while growing up as what a marriage would be.

Asha, Bina, and Meena may have viewed their parents’ incompatibility contributing to conflicts in their parents’ marriage. When the women observed conflicts that are inherent in any marriage, in their parents’ marriage, it may have been contradictory to the cultural image of marriage and may have been perceived to be threatening. This is illustrated in Asha’s recognition of the realities of marriage relationships while in the United States.

When I came here and I made friends with Indians who were married who were dealing with the kind of issues that my mother had dealt with at home or my aunts had...It made me appreciate complaints, or thoughts, or feelings, that my mother had, which I never understood up until I met friends here who had the same kind of issues and then it made me realize that what turned me off about marriage seeing my parents it made me realize that...it’s normal, I guess it’s something that happens.

Roshni mentioned being exposed to traditional weddings and shared her emotional dilemma of the loss of familiar rituals while simultaneously recognizing that it was not a comfortable fit for her as well.
I went to those marriages, those weddings as a child and on the one hand it was like wow! Cool! On the other hand it was oh, my God! I don’t want this for myself... But I also knew that I could never live in that embedded network.

Priya shared how her own expectations for marriage differed significantly from those of her parent’s. While her parents wanted her to have a traditional arranged marriage, where partners are often strangers to each other, Priya wanted much more emotional familiarity and intimacy with her partner before being married.

My expectations for my marriage were totally different from my parents. I wanted to know the person I was getting married. I wanted to be in love with the person I was getting married. I just did not want to get married to some stranger from the road that I don’t even know that my parents picked out for me, I was not ready to do that at all.

Jyoti challenged the expectation of her family for her to have an arranged marriage. However, Jyoti was the only participant who articulated that she had always been attracted to Indian men and “I had never thought about not marrying an Indian man.”

Educational and professional aspirations were prioritized over marriage by some of the women in this study. The women also shared being influenced by the discordant marital relationships they observed of parents and other loved ones. The women shared how these observations painted a negative picture of marriage while they were younger. Women also shared examples of not considering traditional notions of marriage, such as the arranged marriage, being as important or comfortable to them. The women’s focus on their educational and professional achievement, lack of positive role-models of arranged marriages, and questioning parent’s assumptions of characteristics of a suitable spouse contributed to the women deemphasizing the value of marriage in their own lives.
Experiences Dating Indian Men

Six of the eight women talked about the negative experiences of dating Indian men. Three of the eight women described a significant dating relationship with an Indian man that had a negative impact on their lives.

Asha shared her experience of frustration of centuries old ingrained power differentials between the genders:

(Indian men) have huge egos and they are brought up to think that they are superior than women and it never goes away, it just never goes away. They expected me to be in a different degree, to a different extent to be less independent, or to not have that much freedom, and I just couldn’t fathom that...I just felt that I could be more myself when I was not with an Indian man.

Roshni also talked about an important intimate relationship with an Indian man that ended bitterly. Roshni reported being influenced to come to the United States by the person she was dating, who was going to continue his studies in the United States. However, she shared, “one of the things that happened when I was in college was that I was raped and he could not deal with that. So he did all kinds of things including ending up sleeping with my best friend and so we broke up.” During the interview she shared not wanting to be “involved with an Indian man in any permanent basis.”

In generalizing her dating experiences with Indian men, Roshni stated “the thought of dating an Indian man at some points literally gave me stomach aches, because I thought, scratch the surface and you’ll get your traditional chauvinistic.” Roshni also articulated the much more complex concern of her own role in a relationship with an Indian man.

Well I shied away from Indian men because... I think I also felt that if I was involved with an Indian man that would trigger for me all of my sort of cultural socialization. It wasn’t so much they would be dominating or the actual
chauvinistic ways that I couldn’t deal with but more that I would start playing into
gender role stereotypes.

Meena was another participant who had a painful relationship previously to being
cross-culturally married. She shared being in a relationship with a married professor and
how distressing and disempowering the situation was.

You (Meena) are in your early twenties, you don’t really know what’s going on
this is the first time you have felt like this and it was probably one of the hardest
experiences in my life. And it took me many years even after coming here to sort
of get out of that frame and see that you can be taken in a more egalitarian way.

Meena also voiced her frustration over Indian men’s traditional expectation of
their wives.

People (Indian men) can go out with you, they can have fun they can have an
intellectual conversation but when it comes to marrying they would want the wife
to have a meal cooked at home when get home. At least to a certain extent which
was too far for me.

Priya shared her experiences of dating Indian men while in the United States. She
found several Indian men wanting to date other Indian women who either had permanent
residency or United States citizenship; Priya appeared incredulous over this requirement.

That’s not the reason to be getting married to somebody because you want to get a
green card or citizenship. You are getting married to somebody if you like them,
or you don’t like them, or you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody.
This is, you are talking about the rest of your life.

Alpa described her negative experiences in dating South Asian or Indian men.
While she felt Indian men were embracing some progressive beliefs such as wanting their
wives to be educated and have a career, she felt they also continued to hold on to
traditional role expectations as well, which she found “off-putting.” In talking about
dating Indian men, Alpa shared,

however progressive they were at some point they were like I want my wife to
cook and clean, you could have a job but well it would be nice if you could stay
home because I’m making big bucks...at some point they do expect you to do certain things that they’ve seen their mothers do for their fathers.

Alpa portrayed her experience of being engaged to the son of a family friend and the reaction of her parents after her engagement which contributed to her ending the relationship.

Well actually, when I was 20 years or 21, when I finished college in India, my parents introduced me to a guy; it was more like facilitated dating. And, I did like him, and he was my mom’s best friend’s son and he was really progressive... I was engaged to him for a brief period but I just got cold feet because this was just insane. I wanted my parents to be proud of my educational accomplishments, which they were, but seeing them be so excited about a wedding was just like a different thing to me and it was disappointing...It was pretty upsetting to me; I felt they weren’t the same parents I had known all these years.

Alpa highly valued her parents guidance and wanted to engage in a relationship that bore her parent’s best intentions for her. However, the engagement led to a shift in thinking for Alpa contributing to her disagreeing with her parents on what was most important in her life at the time. She shared being disappointed and frustrated in her parents reaction to her upcoming marriage. Alpa’s parents prioritized her future role of a daughter-in-law and encouraged her to cultivate a relationship with her future mother-in-law, rather than being proud of and encouraging her academic accomplishments. Alpa also described having struggled in making her decision to break off the engagement. She had to consider several family ramifications in making her decision. She conveyed what a difficult decision it was for her, “I think that the time I broke off my engagement was more challenging than marrying cross-culturally.”

Finally, Jyoti shared feeling that “the men never seemed to have the strength to stand up to their mothers.” Neela’s husband was her first dating experience and while
Bina had dated Indian men she did not bring up any negative stereotypes or experiences in dating them.

While dating is often a controversial topic among Indians, all of the participants with the exception of Neela had dated Indian men. The women in this study shared a common theme of feeling restrained or disempowered in a variety of ways in their relationships with Indian men. The women often referred to not feeling free in being themselves or described being held to the public image of the ideal Indian woman, which did not fit the women’s identities. The women’s experiences often reflected a sense of disappointment over the more traditional expectations upheld by the men. The women’s relationships with Indian men also provided a context outside of their own family in which they were faced with traditional Indian cultural expectations concerning gender roles and marriage.

*Experiences Dating Cross-Culturally*

Six of the women reported having dated cross-culturally before being married. Four of the six women identified positive experiences in dating cross-culturally. The women shared a common theme in dating cross-culturally and described their dating experiences as liberating, equable, with shared similarities despite cultural differences. Two of the women also described their concerns when they dated cross-culturally.

Roshni emphasized the importance of dating men who belonged to ethnic groups. She clearly felt that her experience as an immigrant was paralleled by dating men who were ethnic minorities.

You know I ended up dating a lot of people who were immigrants or ethnically, I only dated one white man. So I dated a Chinese American, an African American man...what we had in common and it was this dislocation, that they understood that piece. I think that was important.
Roshni referred to forming relationships based on the awareness about the commonalities of their marginalized social experience.

Meena reported having positive experiences in dating cross-culturally and being considered “in a more egalitarian way” by her dates. She shared that she did not have any “emotional concerns” in dating cross-culturally.

Alpa shared influences that contributed to her considering dating non-Indians. Along with the contribution of the media, Alpa was also self-aware that she was not restricted to dating or attracted exclusively to Indian men.

I think that sort of thought developed when I was in India and I would actually largely contribute that to reading books and watching T.V. I would say with the advent of MTV and all the other western channels. And so originally it was a silly girl’s fantasy, oh, this guy is cute, and not really thinking about the fact that I was actually not finding non-Indian men cute or attractive. But obviously as I was older this sort of silly teenage attraction, I was able to process that and understand that I really was not averse to people from other cultures and being attracted was not limited to people from one culture. It could be with anybody.

Asha also described her cross-cultural dating experiences as “interesting and exciting.” She shared a sense of freedom in dating cross-culturally, “in some ways, I feel that I don’t have to adhere to the Indian woman ideal.”

While the women above shared positive experiences in dating cross-culturally, the women also mentioned differences in expectations in dating and relayed some of their concerns.

Bina had been dating an American man and was in a long-term relationship, before she met her husband. While this experience allowed her to think of the possibility of marrying someone who was non-Indian, she was also apprehensive over how her relationship was perceived by others. She described reactions of her boyfriend’s family
and friends who “were surprised he was dating someone who was not American or you know who’s from another country, so there were concerns about that.”

While Priya was open to dating cross-culturally, she was still surprised by differences in expectations of her dating partners. She described having difficulty regarding cultural differences in sexual expectations.

I was set up with all these different guys. And of course they were all non-Indians, they were American people. And that was like shocking to me sometimes, because there were some guys that I spoke to and all they wanted to do is to jump into bed, and I was like What! No! So that didn’t work out.

Jyoti’s dating experiences was different from the other participants, “I suppose the kind of people I am attracted to has always been Indian men. I had never thought about not marrying an Indian man.” Jyoti similar to Neela did not have any other cross-cultural dating experiences previous to dating their husbands.

The majority of the participants were open to dating cross-culturally before they were married. The women did not share much conflict or concerns in dating cross-culturally. While the women’s experiences were unique there was also a shared commonality among their experience. The women shared looking for relationships in which there was a sense of connection. While two of the women shared some of the concerns that they had while they dated cross-culturally, overall the women shared positive experiences. All of the women did not feel limited to dating Indian men exclusively. Their experiences often expressed excitement, freedom, and shared similarities in values with their cross-cultural dating partners.

Negotiating and Resisting Traditional Boundaries

The women in the present study shared a common experience of a tug of war over actively challenging and negotiating traditional cultural assumptions for Indian women.
After analyzing the eight interviews, there emerged a common theme of the women pursuing greater autonomy and individuation even under pressure from family members and the greater Indian society.

Jyoti shared her experience of questioning important Indian traditional, societal gender expectations. She described how her career provided an opportunity to expand her worldview of the role of an Indian woman different from the one presented by her sheltered family and school life.

I thought that marriage was every girl’s ultimate goal. And I thought that was the thing to do. But as I started working and coming out of my cocoon of just family and school, I started questioning certain traditions we have within our community and my job gave me a lot of satisfaction, so marriage wasn’t the only goal that I thought could fulfill me.

Jyoti and Asha also spoke of their respective families’ concerns over pursuing professions that are traditionally not seen as financially rewarding. The women also chose careers in the arts which are not traditionally encouraged in the Indian family as strongly as are professions in the hard sciences.

Jyoti went against extended family members’ apprehensions and made the choice to come to the United States to pursue her interest in photography. “They (extended family members) thought that I was taking the biggest risk and mistake of my life...my extended family thought I was nuts.” Although her extended family members were discouraging, Jyoti felt it was important to assert her voice in making her own choices in life. Jyoti shared that her mother supported her choice despite extended family members’ apprehensions.

Asha also decided to pursue a career that is not a typical choice for a young Indian woman. “My father, he really wanted me to pursue a career that I could be successful at.
He wasn’t really fond of the idea that I wanted to become an actor, but slowly he saw my point.”

Both Asha and Jyoti describe taking risks and engaging in experiences that were not sanctioned by loved ones. Both women also experienced their parent’s ultimately being supportive of their daughter’s decision even though participants were going against the norm.

Asha also shared challenging traditional cultural expectations. “I like to challenge things, especially when people tell me this is how, this the only way you can do it. It’s just, I can’t stand it, it’s impossible that’s the only way you can do something.”

While, Asha’s parents were concerned that their daughter was “rebellious” they were also able to appreciate how her personality was able to help her stand up for her beliefs and against concerns that extended family members brought up repeatedly. While Asha’s parents were continually faced with extended family members’ concerns, this was not the case for Asha. Asha’s geographical distance from extended family members’ pressures permitted her to be “rebellious” or make choices independent of what was expected of her from family.

I think my parents wished that I was not so rebellious but you know they are both glad that sometimes that I am because it has helped me. Because when I moved to the U.S., I remember my family gathering and all my aunts and uncles will be asking my mom, so what’s happening with Asha? When is she getting married? When is she coming back? Have you been looking for a guy? All that kind of stuff was going on but I didn’t have to face it.

Meena credited her “all-girls” school to fostering much of her independence. She shared engaging in several activities that she felt were an “exception” to the traditional expectations for a young Indian girl.
I really had some very good role models as teachers and people, there was one teacher in middle school who was a mountaineer...she was kind of a mentor for me, for an extended period...I was able to participate in the national cadet corps...I also was participating a lot in debates representing my school and later my college going to other places and speaking out. Actually, I wasn’t a very good student until maybe about 9th grade or something. That’s when things really started to take shape in me that I really needed to have a life on my own and stand on my own two feet.

Meena attributed having a positive role model who did not fit the traditional norm and participating in non-traditional activities to nurturing an independent self-concept.

Due to her parents’ separation, Bina was brought up by her paternal grandmother whom she described as a very “non-traditional woman.” She also attributed her streak of rebellion to the liberal values espoused by the paternal side of her family. She shared following her own rules while at boarding school and described herself as, “a kind of rebel, and I would get into trouble.”

Priya also shared standing up to the pressure she felt from her parents and from extended family to get married. She was determined to make sure her criteria for a spouse were met while resisting family pressures. Priya shared how as she got older, into her late twenties and early thirties, the pressure grew.

I put off marriage, because every time when I had people (men) coming to see me, either it was my personality and his personality, we did not have anything in common, so I could not click with them...They (extended family) gave me a hard time, because when I hit thirty-two and I was not married everybody gave up on me getting married. Oh! Yes, they just gave up on me, and they said oh, she’s never going to get married; she’s going to stay single.

Young women in Indian society are primarily socialized to be a mother and a homemaker. Participants in this study, however, were increasingly provided opportunities to advance their educational and professional aspirations. Nevertheless, the women also
shared how progressive opportunities were constantly juxtaposed with traditional expectations. Neela’s experiences described this contradiction.

As a young girl or a young woman living out of my home and traveling everywhere and I saw some kind of hostility towards women who were not married at twenty...women of career or doing something on their own there is some kind of hostile feeling in the society in India which was there.

The family plays a powerful role in the socialization of children. The family is also crucial in promoting values and beliefs. Roshni described her family as “radical reformers” and shared being raised to be a “cultural rebel” by her parents. Roshni’s unique upbringing contradicts traditional Indian expectations for women. Her family’s values included raising their daughter to be a nonconformist.

Alpa was remarkably courageous in asserting her individuality in deciding to end her engagement against her family’s wishes. Alpa also decided to move to the United States after graduating from school in England. “When I came to the U.S. it was a statement on my part that I was going to lead my own life and I wasn’t going to listen to anything of theirs (her parents).”

The women shared taking part in opportunities that fostered a sense of independence. They shared experiences where they questioned and challenged traditional cultural norms to make choices that were personally important. The women had strong women role-models either in their families or in schools who provided alternate options for a young woman other than the traditional norm. The women stood up to pressures from family and society and parents of several of the women encouraged and supported their daughter’s choices. Participants in this study share their stories of being constantly exposed to conflicting and confusing expectations. While the women were given increasingly greater opportunities, most often by their parents, simultaneously they were
also burdened with the responsibility of upholding an image of the Indian woman which encompasses conformity and obedience.

**Concerns Regarding Divorce**

Four of the eight women shared how family members often expressed their concern over the possibility of divorce in a cross-cultural marriage. Some of the women also shared how this fear was then echoed by the women themselves.

Priya shared her mother’s concern about the possibility of her daughter getting divorced if she married someone American. Despite Priya’s sense of independence, she shared how traditional expectations and fears of her mother were transmitted to her. She shared the importance of allaying these fears upfront before being married.

Fears? It did, absolutely it did. Yes, I absolutely, I thought about it. That was one of the things I was concerned about when I was dating American men. Will this person stay with me, or was I going to be landing up getting a divorce? So, it did bring concern when I met John and we talked about it extensively, we did have conversations about it, and he made it very clear about what his values were and what was important for him and I made it very clear to him what was important for me.

Alpa also shared having concerns regarding her husband understanding the importance of the value of commitment in marriage. While dating her husband, Alpa shared, “I had already in the first couple of dates, I had already gotten through all of these questions. His parents were married for thirty-five years.” Alpa was also socialized regarding the importance of commitment in a marriage by her family and Indian society. In dating cross-culturally, she shared traditional Indian beliefs upheld by her and her fears of marrying a non-Indian who did not share the same cultural values, particularly regarding marriage.

In India you are raised that marriage is like the absolute thing in your life, and once you are married, no matter what, you are married for life. And I cherish that
belief. I don’t know why but they (western cultures) seem to be a little more flexible with that commitment aspect of marriage. Well if you don’t get along. It could be a very simple thing... well its okay you don’t have to be married to that person. So, I guess my fear was being a victim of one of those thought processes.

Alpa shared being conflicted in wanting to make an independent decision to marry cross-culturally but continuing to feel the pressures of “certain cultural boundaries and expectations.” She articulated her dissonance in wanting to make her own choices but fearful of the consequences.

There is a still a sense of comfort in some ways when you think that oh! I’m marrying an Indian guy okay, so at least I don’t have to worry about the whole divorce part. Which can be false, you can just as easily divorce an Indian guy but you are programmed to think that way, and so when you are marrying cross-culturally there is twice as much pressure on you to make the right choice. When you are making the choice you are obviously more responsible for your actions.

While Roshni had fears of being married, she had also internalized Indian society’s stereotype of marriage being of a transient nature among Americans.

It would be a decision that there would be no going back from. As long as we lived together and then it did not work out then we moved on, but if you got married then there was no moving on... because then you would get divorced.

Similar to Priya’s experience, Alpa’s father and her uncle prioritized divorce as their primary concern, conveying their fears onto Alpa’s decision to marry cross-culturally.

When I announced my decision to marry, my father’s comment was what happens when you are getting divorced? I’m very close to my uncle but he asked as well, have you thought about what happens when you get divorced? And so, I was like, I don’t want to discuss these things right now. I mean it’s just life. So, I think that was pretty stressful cause it kind of casts a doubt sometimes even a decision that you made, well what happens if..., but then again it’s not in the present and you can’t dwell in the future, especially things that you definitely are not certain about.
Neela’s mother shared similar concerns, over divorce, as Priya’s mother. However, Neela’s mother’s fear was based on her observation of a family member who had married a non-Indian and whose marriage did not last.

One of my family members did marry (a non-Indian) member...but that ended in a very bad manner. So, any foreigner meant at that time to my mother that their marriage is just for a little while and they will end up in divorce.

In contrast to Priya and Alpa, Neela did not share her mother’s fears; rather she was firm in her convictions. “That (concern of divorce) didn’t occur into my head at all. I think when you are in love you do not worry too much about that I suppose. I was quite sure in my head. I knew that’s how I wanted to spend my life.”

While Asha felt her extended family members may have had concerns about divorce due to her cross-cultural marriage, she stated she did not seem to share their concerns, “I personally don’t think that I would be fazed by the stigma of divorce.” However, she also added “his (her husband’s) parents have been together, my husband believes in marriage.” Although Asha stated she was not concerned over divorce she nevertheless sought assurance through having observed relationships in her husband’s family as well knowing what his values were regarding commitment in a marriage.

While Jyoti was also raised with the belief regarding the importance of commitment in a marriage, this was not a concern for her in marrying her husband. Jyoti was the only participant who married a divorcee. “I suppose there was a bit of contradiction of what I believed him to be compared to maybe him having a divorce but I viewed him as dependable and loyal.”

The participants expressed family members concerns over the women’s marriages resulting in divorce if they married outside of the Indian culture. Parents were not the
only ones with concerns; some of the women themselves shared similar worries. The participants shared taking a risk in making an individually based decision to marry cross-culturally and having to bear the consequences of their choices. While some of the participants denied having fears of the dissolution of their marriage, they also shared examples of calming their fears through finding shared similarities in values regarding commitment with their husbands and through observing relationships in their husband’s families.

Reactions from Friends and Loved Ones

The women in this study in deciding to marry cross-culturally were often faced with disapproval from family and friends. Six of the women shared their distress and turmoil over how their decision to marry cross-culturally may have impacted their parents and other loved ones.

Indian culture emphasizes filial piety with the requirement for children to fulfill a complex system of obligations and responsibilities towards parents. This is evidenced in the emotional pressure Asha faced from her sister. For Asha, one of the difficult aspects in deciding to marry cross-culturally was the reaction of her sister.

I think personally, personally, more difficult for me was my sister’s response. Because when I left India she was left behind and she then had to be with my parents, bickering and fighting all the time and it was hard on her and then she wanted me to come back period! And she felt for the longest time that I had not been a good daughter because I haven’t come back. I need to be in India, so I can take care of my parents when they grow old, what kind of love is this that I don’t care for them. So all those kind of things she has expressed to me in different ways...it was just emotionally difficult because I didn’t know how to explain to her that what I was doing was okay.

Priya shared the negative reaction of her best friend who was also the sister of her husband and the hurt she experienced.
She was my best friend and when we decided to get married, it was stressful. She thought that I was taking her brother away from her and she was not very happy about it. And she made it pretty stressful for both of us and especially for me, I was very, very, stressed out. I expected her to stand by me and she did not and she turned around, so that was a big stressful situation.

Although Priya resisted the boundaries of traditional expectations, nevertheless her resistance was intertwined with a strong need to have approval from her loved ones.

“I was concerned about getting her (mother’s) approval, I wanted her to like him and accept him. Oh! Absolutely! And of course I wanted my brother and my sister to like him. That was so important to me, so, so, important to me.”

There was also an added complexity to Bina’s experience. Bina’s sister is also married cross-culturally to an African American man. She shared that her parents were initially “shocked” by Bina’s sister’s choice of a marriage partner. While she considered her sister to have “in some ways paved the way for me,” it did not dissipate her concerns regarding the consequences her decision to marry cross-culturally would have on her parents.

I was also concerned about is this going to disappoint my parents? What are they going to think? One of my biggest concerns even then was how is this going to impact my parents? And also, how are they going to have to answer to their families? So, I was concerned about that... I know they were getting a lot of flack from their family about the fact that now their second daughter was getting married to somebody who was not Indian. It was stressful because extended family gave my parents a lot of crap. And there was a lot of passive aggressive things (addressed to her parents) like, “oh! You poor thing, you’ll never have a real Indian grandchild!

Bina also struggled with the reactions of her husband’s biological father. She shared feeling hurt in being judged, based on her religion, prior to meeting him. She also shared her distress over being the source of conflict between her husband and his father.

Mark’s father...he has always from the very beginning never been very thrilled about our relationship. To this day he does not really have much of an interaction with me. From the very beginning he was not very happy about him marrying
someone who was not American, and a lot had to do with religion. Because he thought he was marrying someone who was not catholic, even though I was brought up catholic, in his eyes that’s not real catholic. It was very hard. I think at first I was sort of angry and hurt that someone would just reject me without even meeting me. I think it was more about feeling bad for my husband. There came a time closer to our wedding where his father basically said, well if you go ahead and get married, we are not really going to have much of a relationship. It was a lot of guilt for me that he was giving up his relationship with his father to be with me.

Bina’s mother-in-law who is remarried to a man of Pakistani descent also had several concerns over her son marrying someone from India. Bina described her mother-in-law’s reaction to be based on preconceived notions based on her own experience in marrying someone of South Asian descent.

I think his mother was a little worried and was concerned about us having the same struggles that they had in their relationship. For her, I think she was very much shunned from his family, because he didn’t marry someone who was Muslim, he married someone who was American. So, she really didn’t have any sort of relationship with his side of the family. So she was initially concerned for her son being rejected by his in-laws...she was concerned about Indian society in general. I think those concerns went away over time. But it was from their experiences that they were more concerned.

While Neela’s parents had not married within their own caste system, her mother was concerned that Neela’s cross-cultural marriage would cause a “big scandal, much bigger, with the family name” being involved. Neela shared her awareness of crossing cultural boundaries and the risks involved with those crossings, such as the loss of parent’s support. She described the painful experience of witnessing her parent’s reaction to her decision to marry cross-culturally.

It was a bit sorrowful for me. I went through a daze...I never thought I would do all this without my mom. So in that time I lost about 10 lbs of weight. So it was scary especially when I got married without my parents being there it was a bit scary.
Neela also shared concerns her brother had regarding the age difference between Neela and her husband.

My brother in the beginning was worried. I think the second point of their worry was the age difference in addition to him being a foreigner my brother said that marriage is a long term commitment and I hope you understand that and have you thought about the fact that he is older which is, of course I thought about that and I thought well I will take it as it comes.

Jyoti, a photography artist by profession, also shared the reaction of her brother towards her marriage to someone non-Indian. Jyoti described her brother’s reaction having to do with her not conforming to traditional norms for an Indian woman.

My brother has never really accepted my husband. But that’s also because he has issues with me. It’s actually affected me quite a bit, in terms of because it is a certain loss. So he and I were pretty close as kids but over the years he has followed a much more traditional path and arranged marriage...and so for him especially with some of the things I talk about in my artwork, I’m bit of an embarrassment I think to him.

Some of the factors that Jyoti had to take into consideration in marrying her husband are summed up by this statement, “so it was bad enough that he was a different race, different religion, different culture, but also he was separated with a child.”

Although Jyoti identified the differences between her and her husband, she was still surprised by her mother and her best friend’s concerns when she introduced them to her husband to be.

So, when I introduced both of them to Mike and they were really concerned because there was a fear that it was a backlash, was a rebound, because he had been separated from his family, they were concerned because of my stepdaughter. I suppose they felt that we didn’t really know each other that well too, because it was relatively, a relatively short time.

Alpa’s parents had similar concerns to Neela’s mother. Alpa shared, “I think that both my parents were more concerned about what the world is going to think, or how they are going to explain it to people why I am marrying a non-Indian, as opposed to
things like whether I am going to be happy.” Alpa’s parents were also concerned as to how her paternal grandfather would react to their daughter’s decision, “they (her parents) were kind of nervous about how he (her grandfather) was going to take it.”

Roshni felt her “American friends” appeared to have more concerns about cultural differences between Roshni and her husband, than Roshni herself did. “They thought that culture was a bigger deal than I thought it was. Culture is important, but I think they thought it was more powerful and separating than I thought it was.”

All of the women above shared facing challenges regarding the reactions of family and friends in their decision to marry cross-culturally. The women shared their concerns over seeking parent’s approval, not disappointing parents, and the objections parents would have to face from extended family members and Indian society at large. The participants also shared challenges they faced from their husband’s family members. While participants acknowledged differences between their husbands and themselves, they themselves did not see these differences to be insurmountable. The women also expressed disappointment in their loved one’s emphasizing concerns over and above the women’s happiness.

Consequences of the Women’s Decision on their Lives and Interpersonal Relationships

This section presents themes related to the continued challenges the women faced as a consequence of their cross-cultural marriage. The themes presented under this section include the geographical dislocation the women experience, concerns regarding language, reactions they face from the greater South Asian community, and concerns surrounding raising a child in a cross-cultural marriage.
Geographical Dislocation

As immigrants, the women in this study interacted with and created new environments for themselves. However, the women also shared experiencing a simultaneous loss of the environment that they grew up in and were familiar with. Five of the eight women interviewed shared their losses of being away from home, family, and in not being able to consciously make the decision to move back to India at present.

Jyoti shared wanting to first come to the United States so as to experience freedom from traditional Indian cultural expectations.

I chose America because even though I was born in England, I had family in England, I chose America because I did not know anyone and no one would try to force me into anything or put any limitations on me, so that I could come here and be who I wanted to be rather than what other people expected me to be. But at the same time, I really miss my family so. Yeah, I think that every choice comes with its losses.

After her marriage, Jyoti shared how her responsibilities made it difficult to move back permanently.

I mean, I think because I’m now married and have my step child I can’t decide to go back to India if I wanted to, until she’s in college or something like that. Part of me really misses India really misses my family.

Here, Jyoti shares how the opportunities that she gained through migration are tempered with the loss of significant interpersonal family relationships.

Neela also shared her apprehensions over moving back to India after she had a child. She also acknowledged that the gender of her child influenced her decision to remain in the United States. Neela expressed her reluctance to expose her daughter to traditions in India that she viewed to be disadvantageous for a woman.

I did hope to go back and even after marrying Greg, I thought we both would go back. But through discussing with him he can go back but thinking about our daughter and we did not really dare to go back in some extent... But if I had a boy I would have gone back faster or at least I would have argued with Greg a lot.
more definitely. So we have our misgivings about taking her, although India is full of women too and they are doing a wonderful job but I guess it is a personal bias that I have so I have always hesitated after I became a mother. Up till then I always thought I would always go back. Maybe when she is in college I will go back.

Roshni also shared her struggle in making a decision that would among other things affect her future place of residence. She shared having to explicitly deliberate these concerns with her husband.

Oh, yeah! I mean I was first sort of attracted to my current husband, I struggled with it a lot, because I liked him and was comfortable with him in so many ways and yet it did seem like this permanent step away... it would mean that if I ever wanted to sort of return back to India that would sort of be much more difficult. I thought about that we both sort of struggled with in the beginning for quite a bit and sort of doing this calculation of what we were getting in our relationship with each other was it worth it in terms of what were giving up.

Asha also shared her concern over how the physical distance between her family and her and the loss of important extended family networks. She appeared resentful over how much closer her husband’s family was geographically when compared to her own family.

And you know I haven’t been home in four years right now, at this point, or it will be four years when I go home, so you know, going back isn’t easy, it’s expensive. And for them to visit me isn’t always a possibility that they can say, hey! We’re coming over. So, I think that growing up, you know, cousins, and everybody would get together every month, at least once, and we would go have a party or just have an evening where we’re just dancing and all of that. So, I’m sure that it’s changed, in some ways, it’s more isolating for me here... I am trying to figure my way around his need to see his parents every year and whereas... it’s very expensive to go to see your parents every year... So, it’s kind of like financially you understand, I’m not stupid, I understand, but at the same time emotionally I want to be able to do the same thing that he is doing where he wants to see his parents every year because they are getting older. So, I think that just geographically also it is very challenging to navigate through all of that.
Bina shared her concerns over aging parents and being away from them. Bina also shared her concerns over the complexities involved in uprooting her parents from their home to bring them to the United States.

But from early on when we got serious and committed, my husband would always be very open to the idea of moving to India. And I really didn’t take him seriously for the longest time because I was like you may have these romantic notions of what it may be like and so I never really took him seriously but yes I did feel that initial feeling of oh, wow, I really won’t be able to go back and live there. And I think the biggest concern tied to that was if my parents got older and got sick I would want to go back and I would want to go back and be with them instead of bringing them to this country. Because that is their home and they are comfortable there and I may not be able to do that now or it would be harder to do that.

As companies from the United States continue to outsource to India and as opportunities increase in the field of technology, the possibility of returning to India increasingly becomes a viable option. Bina’s apprehensions in moving back have lessened over the years due to her husband’s openness.

In some ways the professional career he is going into is actually feasible that he could actually find a really good job there and so more and more I really feel like I could move back there and he would move with me and it wouldn’t feel like a sacrifice for him.

The women acknowledged losses that were inherent in making the decision to marry cross-culturally. All of the women above mentioned the geographical distance between their families and themselves. The women shared their struggles in making the difficult choice to leave behind important family members and social networks. The women also have to deal with pertinent fears and anxieties of aging parents and negotiating with their spouses the possibility of moving back to India or bringing their parents to the United States. They also shared having to prioritize responsibilities to their children and waiting until the children were in college before considering any sort of permanent move to India.
Language

Six of the eight women shared how not being able to share their mother tongue with their husbands was experienced as a loss in their marriage. Language and culture are closely intertwined and language is an important means by which immigrants retain their ethnic identity. While all the women in this study speak English fluently, they also share an ambiguous loss in being unable to share cultural subtleties that are often lost in translation. Several women indicated that the significance of the language barrier was most apparent when they were with their families and the Indian community.

I think language can sometimes be a struggle like for example my husband and I recently came back from India and just being there with my family or watching TV or something you would hear something really funny that was said in Hindi and we would all laugh and my husband was kind of out of place. But then having to translate and him going “I don’t understand why that was so funny” and not being able to explain that. Or not being able to translate the true sentiment of the songs to my husband because he would not really get it. Or even terms of endearment, in Hindi there are just some beautiful things that people who are in love say to each other and the fact that he cannot really say those things to me is sort of sad. He learnt the word for love and he uses that but it often times is not the same.

I do feel that the language, in terms of the language there are so many nuances that you can understand only if you speak the language. So, while I often translate everything to my husband when we are just chatting in the family but I sometimes wish I didn’t have to constantly translate for him because it would be so much easier if he would just understand certain sentences or certain ways of doing that would make it easier. But I think he is very good, he does pick up on a lot of things and he does get better everyday.

There are times when you cannot share certain things with your husband or wife. For instance, you know, all Bengalis just are crazy about Tagore and I am no exception. So I sort of grew up singing Tagore, reading Tagore, reciting Tagore and my whole life was all full of Tagore. Greg doesn’t know my language, he knows Tamil, he knows Kanada, but he doesn’t know Bengali. So he doesn’t, he likes Tagore too, but he only read Tagore in translation, so he cannot share with me at that level. If I sing something it will seem nice to him but all the nuances of the words will not get to him.
I grew up with my parents listening to ghazals (lyrical poetic recitation) and Urdu poetry, and there have been many occasions while we were dating and after we married and I would read something and I would feel, or I would listen to a ghazal and I would wish he could understand this and feel how wonderful it is and what it means. I think even if he knew the language I don’t think it would translate that way.

There are other pieces that aren’t so easy. I can’t just say something in Bengali and have him pick up the reference and have an innate understanding of it. I have to explain myself much more, as does he. I don’t know if I make fewer assumptions, over time I think I work through more of them.

Actually it’s not so much the language as so much what the language lets you express. Because to buy bread in the supermarket whether it in English or Bengali is the same. But sharing a poem or something like that sure it’s more difficult and sometimes I have tried to explain or elaborate and then finally he will say no it’s not able to be translated.

The examples above do not refer to pervasive conflicts arising out of language differences. Rather, the examples refer to specific contexts in which the women shared an inability to share a common cultural perspective, such as when the couple is with family, or a specific reference to a poem. The predominant emotions from these examples refer to sadness and frustration in not being able to share something culturally significant to them with their partner.

Priya was the only participant who specifically denied having any concerns related to language in her marriage. Having grown up in Dubai, Priya “did not learn to read or write in Tamil (her mother tongue). So that makes a big difference. I never came across the problem of language.”

Reactions from the South Asian Community

Five of the eight women spoke of their concerns over negative perceptions from the South Asian community based on their cross-cultural marriage.
Roshni tried to make sense of the assumptions that Indians make of her and the way she felt categorized based on her cross-cultural marriage.

When we have gone back to visit, people stare, he doesn’t understand the language, people make assumptions about him, and people make assumptions about me and it’s just sort of it’s not a big deal in family but in sort of society it’s a stressor. I have a theory that for some reason in India...there is this idea that women carry culture that they have to start to be the vessels of culture and so if you do something as a woman that is not culturally correct then you are just not out of sync with culture, you are betraying Indian culture. So what I get often is how that either I am westernized because again that means somehow I have betrayed...that I am either betraying, or I am not good enough, or I am confused and I just need an Indian man to show me.

Roshni also shared her experiences with the Indian community while in the United States.

I do not have much involvement with the Indian community, because if I go to events, I mean even in the university town, if I go to events, concerts, or dances, people particularly Indian men, but Indian women a lot look at me like what’s wrong with you? Why are you with that white man?

Roshni shared feeling accused of letting down the Indian community as a result of marrying cross-culturally. She also shared her frustration in not having the freedom to choose her partner and the constant judgment she faced as a consequence of her choices.

Similar to Roshni’s experiences Alpa also shared struggling with the judgment she faced from her cultural community. Alpa also shared a negative event that had impacted her regarding how her marriage is viewed by the South Asian community.

Actually I experienced a really upsetting incident, a year or two years ago, That was propagated by a woman of South Asian origin...my husband and I were on the train going to another part of town and she was just sitting across and just staring at me and giving really dirty looks until my husband was like do you know this woman? I think she is really angry with you... And I was like she’s a stranger I have no idea who she is until after a couple of stops after my house she comes up to me and throws something at me, and says “so you think you’re a white girl now?” and just walks away. And apparently she was really upset seeing my husband and me holding hands and being in this relationship and it was really, really bizarre. I was very angry and I was also shocked that someone from my
own community would do that to me. Anger came from who was she to judge me for my decisions and you know how on earth can she just think that I have lost all cultural connections just because I’ve married cross-culturally that is the most annoying thing that people often pass this judgment.

Immigration, relocation, and being cross-culturally married required the women in this study to reconstruct and reinterpret their identity. Being Indian however, continues to be a central aspect of their identity. Neela shares her hurt in having her identity as an Indian questioned because of her cross-cultural marriage.

And yes among Indian women I have heard...that okay; she is not really true Indian. Which hurt me, I still carry an Indian passport and I do think I am a true Indian and that is part of my identity even though most of my life now I am out of the country in different places. So, my love for my country and everything is not in clash with any part of my other identity. And that is in me wherever I go. So if someone says “she is not a true Indian,” that hurts me.

Priya shared her self-consciousness in the physical dissimilarities, between her husband and her, which she feels contributes to the reactions she receives from people.

I think that people are looking at us like oh! These two are, this is an interracial or intercultural marriage, and that is what I look at it as, and I know that is what they are looking at us like that.

Bina was the only participant who shared having positive experiences with the South Asian community.

My experiences with the South Asian community here is mostly through being at the university and interacting with people who are students here. And through those interactions I have felt mostly positive openness from them.

However, Bina also shared some of her fears in interacting with the larger South Asian community outside of the university community in which she worked, “there is a little fear for me to be around older south Asians because I am afraid of that judgment.” She also expressed her concerns as to how her marriage may be viewed by the larger community.
I would hear lots of stories where I would hear people flippantly talking about someone who had married a foreigner and they would say things like, well she only did that because she wanted a green card or she was a rebel. I did worry about that, I did worry people would minimize my relationship and think that I just did it for trivial reasons or that I was just being a rebel.

The women shared being placed in a painful position of justifying marrying a non-Indian to the Indian community. The participants expressed concerns over being judged by their own communities for their choice in marrying cross-culturally. Negative cultural sanctions against cross-cultural marriages are important concerns for these women. Neela articulated the importance of culture and citizenship as part of her identity and shared her disappointment in having her identity as an Indian woman dismissed in such a callous manner. Roshni and Alpa also shared their frustration over being judged and their attempts at interpreting those reactions. Bina expressed her anxiety over people making false assumptions as to why she married cross-culturally. Judgment and negative perceptions from their own communities are harsh realities that the women have to learn to incorporate into their experience of being cross-culturally married.

Concerns Regarding Raising Children

Three of the eight women shared their concerns regarding the upbringing of their children. The women reported considering the challenge of emphasizing Indian culture in their children’s upbringing while living away from their native country.

Neela discussed issues related to raising a child with differences in cultural values between her husband and her. As Neela’s husband is British, she shared a sense of relief in bringing up her child in a “third country.”

I think bringing up a child in a mixed marriage I think is the hardest. Because we are adults we can work out these things, but the children have so many questions and they absorb culture from the house right? I think for us it is sort of working out because we are in a third country. So it’s neither India nor England. One
culture is not dominating the other or anything. It's a third culture where we all have to learn and live. So that has it’s advantage I think otherwise you might think oh, she’s not learning anything Indian in the end or you might think oh, she’s not learning anything British.

As an immigrant in a cross-cultural marriage, opportunities of developing, maintaining, and transmitting Indian values, culture, language, and traditions to children becomes a challenge. Asha commented that she and her husband have also discussed a number of issues concerning raising their children in the future.

We do plan on having kids and then I want the kids to learn Hindi, be familiar with the Indian culture, celebrate holidays and festivals and all of those tiny little things become challenging in the day to day existence when you are living in a culture where Hinduism or Indians are a minority. Because it’s not something that everybody is doing so it requires extra attention, extra time, extra work to make all of that a part of your life...I mean it’s a small thing but right now we don’t have a child...but I think that things like these come up every now and then where one has to really think about how the other person thinks and what we are going to do and how we are going to figure it all out. So I know that we will have a discussion about it whatever it is going to be and that we will come to some kind of a mutual compromise or decision.

Roshni shared her anger and dilemma over the way she is treated by the Indian community. On one hand, she shared wanting to avoid the Indian community while on the other, having limited opportunities to have her child exposed to her cultural heritage.

My response (to the Indian community) was “screw you all” I’m not going to have to deal with you if you cannot accept my life choices. But now I have a baby and I want to take him to Bengali classes and events and things like that and I’m just going to have to bite the bullet; they are going to have to deal with me one way or another. So that’s going to make changes. I just can’t be reactive and go “well you know, I won’t deal with you!” because I can’t do that to my baby.

While Bina does not have children currently, nevertheless she shared having discussed with her husband the differences in the educational system and the concern of raising a biracial child in the United States’ mainstream culture.

Neither of us are very happy with the educational system here and I am thinking like okay so it’s going to have to be boarding school in India when he’s’ old
enough and actually my husband is fine with that because he doesn’t want him to be go through school here and that’s fine. It’s concerns like consumers and materialism and the lack of discipline and safety and he’s a multiracial child and how is he going to be treated in schools.

All of the women above shared the importance of recognizing the challenges of raising a child in a bicultural marriage. The women did not express concerns over enormous cultural differences in parenting roles and expectations. However, they described the challenges inherent in acquainting their children with and instilling them with cultural traditions while living in a country that is not your own. Above all, they clearly articulated the importance of negotiating cultural values and differences in raising their children with their husbands.

The Most Important Aspect of the Women’s Experience in Marrying Cross-Culturally

During the interviews, the women were asked to identify the most important aspect of their experience in marrying cross-culturally. The women identified several positive aspects of their experience in being cross-culturally married. The women recognized experiences of growth, learning, and shared feeling privy to a deeper understanding of their husband’s culture. The women also identified the importance of making independent choices and having their voices heard while marrying cross-culturally as positive aspects of their experience, even while they faced challenges from extended family members.

Meena, who is a political activist and who described herself as a “humanist” shared her process of self-examination. Meena shared her dissonance in being angry with the “white American male” and having to resolve the dissonance in being married to her spouse who is white. Meena’s relationship with her husband allowed her opportunities for growth by confronting her own prejudices through self-reflection and self-inquiry.
I think the most important thing that stands out in my mind is that I had a very stereotypical idea of the white American male as the causer of all the problems in the world because of my political kind of view and what I feel sociologically what this country has done. And I was responsible for the same kind of fault on the other side of the spectrum. So to be able to distinguish him (her husband) from this political structure and see him as a person was I think a big, big step for me. And I think it sort of overall helped me overall in terms of not jumping to conclusion about somebody depending on just knowing where they are from.

Asha acknowledged both the positive and challenging features of her marriage. She shared how her intercultural marriage was “going to be challenging, it’s going to be exciting and interesting at the same time.” She also echoed other women in the study in feeling that her life had been enriched by incorporating important rituals of her husband’s culture into her own life. Asha shared her happiness in feeling more integrated in her husband’s family through taking part in festivals that were important to her husband and his family.

One of the positive things that happened was that...we got a little Christmas tree for our apartment and I think I was a little surprised by how I have grown to enjoy this festival and I guess because of him its become and because of his family I have started participating with them in the whole ritual of Christmas is becoming slowly also something that I enjoy, something that I look forward to. And I think that it’s important for both, for him and for me.

Similar to Asha, Neela also felt fortunate in being able to acquire intimate knowledge about her husband’s culture. “I think the positive side is you gain a lot you see two cultures from inside from both the spouses.” Neela shared how the inherent differences between her husband and her posed several challenges. She went on to express with pride how her marriage, based on love, withstood these differences and contributed to marital satisfaction.

I think that people from entirely different background and different culture and everything could still love each other and could still form a successful unit I would say, I mean successful quote unquote of course, but you know we still love each other and we still are a family and I guess I mean I have never regretted that
decision ever in my life even after 14 years not even a single day. I might have fights with my husband but that is different. So, I think that the thing to take away from this is that probably even before an entirely different background, age difference, cultural difference, everything different you can still love each other. At our wedding one of Jim’s friend said “life is like a sand castle and you can build it if the sand is wet.” What he meant is that if there is love you can do it. I think that’s the message.

Roshni commented on the learning opportunities provided by her marriage that were similar to the experiences shared by Neela and Asha. She also shared her excitement in building their marriage based on two different cultural heritages.

I gained surprises. The learning, the newness, the exploration, the sort of building something that comes out of both our pasts and our histories that is new to both of us, our own foundation together.

While Roshni acknowledged the constant negotiations that occur in a cross-cultural marriage, she downplayed any major cultural differences in her marriage,

I guess that while it was not a huge divide of a traditional cultural upbringing with all of those structures and then this huge break through a cross-cultural marriage with someone from another culture and race and all of that….there are still chasms that one has to cross constantly. Which you know in some senses one chooses the life of crossings.

Priya shared being pleasantly surprised in her husband not expecting her to play into traditional gender role stereotypes. She found her relationship with her husband to be more egalitarian regarding domestic roles in comparison with her experiences with Indian men.

I think the ways in which it (cross-cultural marriage) has affected me probably is that he does things in the house that I would not expect an Indian man to be doing. Most of the Indian men that I’ve come across, they sit down and do nothing and expect their wife to do everything.

Priya acknowledged the common public perception that cross-cultural marriages have a high incidence of failure. However, she also shared her joy in having made the “right” choice in marrying her husband. She also identified characteristics that are
important in any marriage such as love, respect, and trust which contributed to marital satisfaction in her own marriage.

The only thing that I have to say is that I know that people think that cross-cultural marriages don’t work out, but man, I’m so happy; I don’t think that I could have been so happy with any other person. So, you know, I made the right choice and I am so happy with it, because John treats me like a woman, he treats me with respect and he loves me and he trusts me and that is the most important thing in a marriage and I’ve got it.

Most of the women in this study shared positive aspects specific to their relationship with their husbands. However, when Bina was asked to identify the most important aspect of her experience, she chose to reflect on her relationship with her parents and extended family rather than her relationship with her husband. In deciding to marry cross-culturally, Bina recognized her parent’s support to have been the most meaningful aspect of her experience. Although Bina’s parents’ were supportive of her; she still had to contend with extended family members in voicing her own needs and making an independent choice to be cross-culturally married.

I think for me, one of the things, that is different in my case is that my parents were a lot more liberal in their values about marriage and less traditional than a lot of Indian families. And so, I think that has been a blessing, and in some ways it has also been in some ways trickier to navigate through this because even though my parents had been liberal, extended family had not, and to sort of realize when to act a certain way and when not to, has always been tricky.

In sharing the most important aspect of her experience Asha also identified having “developed a thick skin against my extended family. I think I learned it from my dad where I necessarily didn’t care a lot about what they were saying or thinking.” Asha’s “thick skin,” influenced by her father’s attitude of indifference, allowed her to make decisions that focused on her personal fulfillment as opposed to preserving family traditions and cultural prescriptions.
Jyoti focused on her experience of navigating her loyalty to family and friends while simultaneously prioritizing her own needs. She also echoed Asha, by emphasizing the importance of making independent decisions.

I mean I think that it’s about some of the Indian traditions, up keeping the family and friends connections are really important, but balancing that with making my own choices and not following traditions just for the sake of family, I think that has been the most important.

Bina, Jyoti, and Asha, all shared the importance of having developed a stronger sense of inner-strength, independence, and self-confidence in making this major decision of marrying cross-culturally while faced with challenges from extended family members.

The women shared engaging in a journey of self-awareness, self-exploration, of learning and growing, through interacting intimately with the cultural opportunities provided by their husbands in their cross-cultural marriages. While the women recognized cultural differences between their husbands and themselves, they did not necessarily identify these differences as divisive. In fact, the women believed they gained knowledge through learning about their husband’s culture and saw it as positive and beneficial. The women acknowledged the negotiations inherent in their marriages but deemphasized differences in culture contributing to the challenges. Despite facing negative responses from extended family members, the women identified the benefit of standing up for their own beliefs as an important aspect of their experience. Overall, the women highlighted their happiness in their relationships with their husbands, as well as the opportunity of growth they noticed in themselves as important aspects of their experience in deciding to be cross-culturally married.


Helpful Supports

The women were asked to identify what they found to be most helpful and/or supportive while they faced challenges in making their decision to marry cross-culturally. The women overwhelmingly identified the support of family and friends to have been most supportive while deciding to marry cross-culturally.

Priya identified having the approval of her choice in partner by her brother, sister, and her mother, to be extremely affirming. She also shared having the support of friends to have been helpful during this period. Finally, she identified her husband’s constant reminder of her importance to him to have been invaluable.

When he (her brother) met Chris, he liked Chris and that was a really big support for me. And of course, my mom when she met him she absolutely fell in love with him and thought he was the nicest guy and so did my sister. So, just accepting him was big support for me...I had some really good friends who helped me through it. Above all it was my husband. His support was there with me he made it very clear to me that I was the most important person and nothing else mattered...I had his support so that was really amazing.

Similar to Priya, Roshni also found her family’s unconditional acceptance of her choice in partner to have been very supportive. “Well nobody questioned my choice. Nobody in my family did.” Apart from family, Roshni was also able to identify several supportive factors including, her course of study, and having friends in cross-cultural relationships. Roshni also spoke of recognizing the positive value of being in a cross-cultural relationship and credited her knowledge base of cross-cultural counseling contributing to some of her positive associations.

Partly because my area of study was cross-cultural counseling ... I could sort of in some ways I had a knowledge base to help me. And I had this attitude about it (her marriage) being a good thing. So I think that helped. It helped to have friends who were in cross-cultural relationships. Because I have a close friend of mine who is Japanese and she is involved, she is actually now married to the man who is European American. I have another friend who is African American and she is
involved with a white man too. So I had friends who were negotiating in similar ways and there were times when we would go out and have a cup of coffee and talk about some of those stressors and support each other. And that was helpful.

Bina found her parents to be supportive of her decision to be married cross-culturally. She also found the support of her sister and her in-laws who were also cross-culturally married to be helpful. More specifically, Bina’s mother-in-law was also married to a man of South Asian descent contributing to several similarities in their experiences. She acknowledged the comfort in feeling understood by her sister and in-laws. They were able to empathize with Bina’s experiences in being cross-culturally married themselves.

Especially from my sister and my husband’s mother and stepfather, there was a lot of support and a lot times when I was frustrated, I remember feeling like, they understood because they had been in those situations also. Even my parents I think it was helpful for me to feel supported by them. Even though I knew they were getting a lot of flack from their family about the fact that now their second daughter was getting married to somebody who was not Indian. And so, it was helpful for me to know that my parents were supportive.

Neela also identified a few friends, her brother, and a cousin whom she considered as a sister as helpful during that stressful period in her life. She also spoke of how meaningful it was for her to have them show their support by attending her wedding.

Asha also found positive reactions of friends to be helpful. She also found her parents and her in-laws to “have been open-minded and welcoming.”

Meena identified having a dialogue with friends to have been helpful. “I just found the fact that I had a lot of friends that I could talk with was very helpful. So just being able to interact with a large number of people and having open conversations was helpful.” Meena described herself as an outspoken, political activist, who had engaged in
debate teams while younger. Hence, her appreciation for the opportunity to discuss her decision in-depth with a safe and supportive network of friends is understandable.

Jyoti shared her regret in not having friends who could have been potentially supportive.

I just found that they (friends) brought it up but there was no further conversation it was just stating their concern and that was the end of it. I think being able to have more of a dialogue and thinking through the process to make the final decision. I think that would have been helpful.

Alpa found having explicit conversations about her concerns with her husband to be most helpful in making the decision to marry cross-culturally. She also considered observing her husband’s family to be helpful. Based on her observations, she was able to reassure herself and understand the importance placed by his family on the value of commitment in a marriage.

Obviously, if you want me to name one person I would say that my husband was the most supportive, and you know, I did discuss all these concerns and expectations with him when we got engaged. And even prior to the engagement we had several conversations about marrying cross-culturally and my concerns etc. He was very helpful in addressing these concerns. But I also had the opportunity to observe his family and the relationships in his family and the fact that his grandparents took marriage very seriously they were married for forty, fifty, years until his grandmother passed away recently. His parents have been married for forty years. So there were a lot of these signs, and his sister, his immediate family, his sister has been married for six years but has been with the same partner for twenty years. So there was a lot of examples in his family that showed me that they do value relationships, and my husband wasn’t just making an impulsive decision.

The women articulated the importance of having the approval and affirmation of family and friends while deciding to marry cross-culturally. While the women chose to depart from traditional cultural scripts to be cross-culturally married, they wanted to do so with the approval of those closest to them regarding their choice of partner. The women sought to make independent choices but wanted to do so in a way that would
minimize any major repercussions from family and friends. The participants shared their relief and happiness in having immediate family members approve their choice of partner and not challenge their decision. The women also shared the value of surrounding themselves with friends with whom they could share concerns regarding their decision to be cross-culturally married. The participants also identified the importance of having relationships with other individuals and/or couples in cross-cultural relationships. These relationships allowed the women's struggles to be empathized with, and was acknowledged as a meaningful source of support. One woman in particular expressed the loss of not having an intimate network of friends to deliberate her concerns in deciding to marry cross-culturally. Finally, the women also viewed having open conversations with their husbands about their concerns and observing long standing relationships in their husband's family as reassuring and beneficial.

Sharing With Other Women

The women were requested to share from their own experiences advice to other Indian women who are deciding to marry cross-culturally. In sharing advice based on their own experiences, a common theme emerged in the women clearly articulating the importance for other Asian Indian women to stand up to traditional pressures in making individual choices to be cross-culturally married. However, along with making independent choices, participants emphasized the importance of having the support of family and friends in deciding to marry cross-culturally. Participants also wanted to impress upon other women that while all marriages posed challenges, cross-cultural marriages present unique challenges based on cultural differences.
Negativity surrounding marrying outside of the Indian community requires Indian women to take precautions in considering all aspects of a marriage besides focusing exclusively on the romantic aspects of the relationship. Alpa illustrated the practical parts of the relationship that have to be considered especially in marrying someone non-Indian. She also shared the burden Indian women bear in making independent choices and straying from cultural norms.

I can just say that it is important, as in any marriage it's important especially in cross-cultural marriage to not romanticize the relationships. And when you are thinking about making the decision I think it is important that you are evaluating it practically. Because I feel that at the end of the day we are all raised, however progressive our parents are you are still raised within certain cultural boundaries and expectations and there is still a sense of comfort in some ways... But I think when you are making the choice you are obviously more responsible for your actions.

Given that the majority of Indian marriages are arranged, women who are making the decision to marry outside of the Indian culture face a lot of pressure. Indian families have an important influence and voice in whom their children marry. Even when facing cultural and family pressures Priya emphasized the importance of having the approval of important family members in making an independent decision. She also considered the challenges in cross-cultural marriages to be similar to any marriage, whether marrying someone from the same culture framework, or a cross-cultural marriage.

I would tell them that, you know, cross-cultural marriages are okay as long as, the families accept it. You need to have acceptance from your family, especially as I said, you know if they come from large families and they are so involved in each other's lives, then they try to pass their influence, or try to, you know, change things especially when you start having children... People need to take responsibility of their own lives; instead of getting influenced by everybody around them...All I can say is that whatever marriage, you have to work at it. It can be an Indian, you can be married to an Indian, and you can be married to an American or whomever, but you got to work at a marriage. Every marriage takes work. And if you don't work at it, it's not going to work, and it's hard work. Marriage is not easy and it's hard work.
Jyoti exhibited a similar sentiment regarding standing up to pressures. She mentioned the complexity involved in the process of individuation from family, while simultaneously seeking validation from family members, and preserving family relationships. As she stated,

My wisdom for other people, I think that I do think that things are loosening up a bit more. I think there is a lot of social pressure...So, I suppose being clear about what you want and also being honest with your parents. They can put their pressure on you but then you can also stand up to them and say what your opinion is without breaking the relationship. Because even though you are their child you are also a person who has an opinion and an individual, you know after a certain age, you should be treated as an adult and their views respected. I know that the pressure can be really, really tough. I think it does come with certain sacrifices...

Bina shared the dilemma that several Indian women face in deciding to marry cross-culturally. She articulated the importance of considering the reactions of family members so as not to risk losing their support and consequently causing a strain on the marital relationship.

I think, one of the things, I would say is, to be with people who provide positive words and surround you with them. And really think about what’s important for you. You know, is it important for you to have your family support your decision. Or do you feel like if you get married or get involved with someone interracially or inter-culturally and your family doesn’t end up supporting you, is that going to cause a strain in your relationship with this person. Are you going to blame this person? Are you going to feel bitter about it? And so to really think about how important it is for you to have your family supporting you, and your friends supporting you and what can you kind of give up and what is important for you to have. I think that’s what I would say.

Meena, similar to Priya, downplayed the cultural differences in marrying outside of the Indian community. For Meena, her activist identity appreciated the freedoms provided for a woman by marrying a spouse from the Western culture. The importance of egalitarian gender relationships in marrying outside of the Indian culture was also emphasized by her.
I think again, the most important thing is to really look inside oneself and to see if this is the person I want to spend the rest of my life with or to spend the next number of years with. That is to me far more important, and even when there are differences the thing is if you are Indian if somebody is an Indian woman and they are marrying an Indian man from the very same culture, and speaking the very same language that doesn’t mean they are going to have exactly the same set of values, actually more often not. So, I don’t see the cultural difference being such a big player compared to everything else that is in the picture. On the other hand, marrying especially a Western man I think you can start with the advantage that this is a place where the feminist movement sort of played out for much longer, and men are at least much more comfortable with the role of a woman as an equal than it would be from many, many Indians.

One of the primary concerns of the Indian community is the loss of Indian culture when children marry cross-culturally. However, Roshni’s experience in a cross-cultural marriage highlights the opportunity for both her spouse and her to learn and build upon their different cultural backgrounds. Along with the excitement, Roshni also emphasized the realities and stresses that cannot be overlooked in marrying cross-culturally.

I just think it would be so different and unique in each situation. But I think that I would share that any choice has loss, as well as gain. And that the things I gained the surprises the learning, the newness the exploration, the sort of building something that comes out of both our pasts and our histories that is new to both of us our own foundation that together with that there are other pieces that aren’t so easy.

Asha’s father’s atypical response reflects the importance of guiding his daughter in making a choice without emphasizing the cross-cultural aspect of the marriage. Asha also reiterates other participant’s sentiments in minimizing cultural differences in a cross-cultural marriage.

I would say what my father said to me last year, when I was like “we are going to get married.” He said I want you to ask yourself a couple of questions. One is, do I really want to marry this guy, can I really see myself with him when I am sixty, seventy. Ultimately it doesn’t matter what culture he or she is as long as you are prepared to deal with it and to accept it and what not.
While Neela also compared cross-cultural marriages to marriages within the same culture she also acknowledged stressors associated with cultural differences inherent in a cross-cultural marriage. Neela indicated the compromises and negotiations that have to be employed, such as open and honest communication, to help alleviate tensions associated with these differences.

I think it is more or less like in any marriage you have to do a lot of give and take that is true in any relationship I think. But more than that there are some culturally ingrained pointers that are not there. Certain things are not automatically understood, not automatically appreciated those things you have to tell each other about. If you expect something and you don’t tell but you feel bad about that then that keeps growing and it could grow into a bigger problem. So I think communication is very important. It is important in any relationship too but certain things that we assume that the partner will not understand but the cultural makeup is such that they don’t have those triggers to understand certain things so that I think one has to be open about and talk about.

The women articulated the importance of seriously deliberating the practical considerations in deciding to marry cross-culturally, over and above the romantic aspects of the relationship. The women shared the responsibility of choosing a partner that would contribute to marital longevity. The women also encouraged other Indian women not to blindly follow cultural scripts but to stand up to family and societal pressures in making choices that are personally important. While the women emphasized the importance of making independent choices, they also qualified how essential it was to do so with the support of family. While the women acknowledged similarities in the challenges of any marriage, they also identified challenges distinct to being married cross-culturally. These challenges were more specific to cultural differences in worldview, communication, and socialization which occur through a cultural lens that have to be compromised and negotiated to contribute towards marital success.
Summary of Asian Indian Women’s Stories in Cross-Cultural Marriages

In this section, the overall summary of the women’s stories is presented. The summary highlights important themes that emerged from the women’s interviews. The women shared experiences that contributed to their decision to marry cross-culturally, the struggles and concerns they were faced with and the continued impact of their cross-cultural marriages on their lives. They also shared the most important aspect of their experience, supports they found to be most helpful, and finally advice for other Indian women who are deciding to marry cross-culturally.

The women in this study described their parents as “radical,” “progressive,” “political activists,” “spirited,” and who fostered the women’s “independence.” A majority of the women considered their parents’ values to be more liberal in comparison to their extended family members and/or in comparison to the more traditional Indian parent. The women also shared the emphasis their parents placed on education; a departure from the traditional focus of marriage for Asian Indian women. The women’s parents’ strongly encouraged their daughters to take part in opportunities such as studying outside of India, or emphasizing self-sufficiency, and education.

The participants also shared examples of their parents being moderate and liberal in socializing their daughters rather than adhering to traditional gender role expectations. The women shared how parents espoused beliefs in equal rights for both sexes and several women shared having had the same opportunities as their brothers. The women also juxtaposed their parents’ flexible beliefs with extended family members who tended to hold more conventional or “rigid” beliefs when it came to gender-role expectations. However, the women also experienced contradictory expectations imposed on them not
only by extended family members but sometimes by their parents’ as well. As the women became older, they shared examples of mothers’ liberal expectations becoming more conservative, in terms of dating, clothing, or when parents had to justify their daughter’s actions to Indian society in general.

Several of the women’s families had been exposed to western values that were considered to be more progressive than traditional Indian values. The influence of traveling to, and/or living in other countries, or having family members living abroad, provided the women’s parents opportunities to experience different cultures, values, and ideas that were different from traditional Indian values. This exposure in turn seemed to affect their parenting beliefs in being receptive to allowing the women more autonomy and independence in choosing careers and with regards to the women’s partner choices for their marriages.

The respondents in this study portrayed their parents placing less of a focus on the traditional cultural expectations, which prominently features the role of marriage for women. Several of the participants’ parents’ marriage expectations for their daughters also did not promote the traditional notion of arranged marriages. Marrying someone from the same caste or religion was also not emphasized for many of the women. While, the women described their parents having “progressive” values regarding marriage expectations, the women also experienced conventional expectations held by parents. Participants experienced a common assumption held by their parents’ that the women would choose an Indian spouse. The women also reported parent’s racial and religious prejudices and the more negative reactions parents may have expressed had their daughters married someone African or of the Muslim faith.
In terms of their own marriage expectations, while younger, the women focused on their education and their careers rather than on marriage. Some of the women in this study also shared observing conflict in their parents', and other loved ones', relationships that contributed to negative associations with marriage. A couple of the participants shared challenging traditional expectations parents had for their marriage.

A majority of the participants did not consider dating Indian men to have been positive experiences. The women did not experience gender equality in their dating relationships with Indian men. They spoke of the power differentials they experienced in their relationship with Indian men and described Indian men as “off-putting,” “chauvinistic” and with “huge egos.” The women voiced feelings of disempowerment, disillusionment, and frustration in their relationships with Indian men. While the women adhered more to a role that focused on education, career, and fostering their own independence, Indian men appeared to continue to hold on to traditional gender role expectations for Indian women.

Several women in this study had dated cross-culturally before their marriage. The women were open to and did not appear to have many reservations in dating cross-culturally. In contrast, several participants shared positive experiences in dating cross-culturally. They found dating non-Indian men to be more liberating, in not having to live up to the ideal of a traditional Indian woman, and found the relationships to be more egalitarian. A couple of the women shared concerns regarding the differences in values between themselves and their dating partners and also became aware as to how a cross-cultural relationship might be perceived by society.
A common thread conveyed by the participants across several themes was the presence of mixed messages. The women repeatedly mentioned the conflicting expectations placed on them by parents and family members. In some instances, parents themselves conveyed mixed messages. For example, while some of the parents held progressive beliefs of emphasizing education and less traditional gender-role expectations, they also held more conservative beliefs regarding dating, career choices, and/or marriage expectations. In other instances, while parents had more liberal parenting values, extended family members appeared to convey expectations that were more traditional of Indian expectations for women.

The progressive and liberal upbringing by the women’s parents appeared to be a contributing influence in the women being actively engaged in negotiating or challenging traditional expectations. The women shared stories of how options and alternatives to traditional Indian expectations were supported and encouraged by their progressive family environment and through positive role-models. The women stood up to pressures from parents and family members to have their voices heard allowing them to make independent decisions particularly with regards to career and marriage choices.

The women also shared the struggles, challenges, and concerns they faced in deciding to marry cross-culturally. Although the women described parents espousing liberal beliefs, parents and family members nevertheless had concerns of divorce based on stereotypes of Western marriages. Concerns regarding lasting commitment in a cross-cultural marriage were also expressed by the women themselves. The women reassured themselves by addressing any doubts explicitly with their husbands while still dating or by observing the stability of relationships in their husbands’ families.
The women reported the powerful socialization influences that contributed to them feeling pressured to make the “right” decision. In traditional arranged marriages the marriage partner is carefully chosen by family members. The women in making the decision to choose their own partners outside of the Indian cultural framework felt considerable responsibility to be successful in their marriages. The women expressed the burden of being held responsible for making the choice to marry cross-culturally and having the courage to bear the consequence of that choice.

The participants in this study also shared being confronted with reactions from family and friends. The women were concerned about their parents facing judgment for their daughters being cross-culturally married, from extended family members and the greater Indian community. Given the Indian culture’s taboo of marrying cross-culturally, it is noteworthy that only one participant lost the support of her parents for a period of time. Although several parents expressed concerns, these concerns did not ultimately negatively impact their relationship with their daughters. The women did not consider cultural influences such as language or religion to be an impact when deciding to marry cross-culturally. However, some of these cultural factors played a role in the challenges they faced after their marriage.

The participants shared challenges they experienced while being cross-culturally married. The women shared the loss of being away from family and home. Aging parents and the loss of family networks played a role in some of the women’s concerns. A few of the women identified their children as a reason for being unable to permanently move back to India at present. The women’s longing for their homeland and their family networks is reflected by considerations they had to take into account before returning.
home in the future. Some of the women shared having contemplated the possibility of moving to India given increasingly viable career options for their spouses or moving back after their children were in college.

A majority of the women also shared the loss of being unable to share their language with their spouses. The women did not report major obstacles based on not sharing their native language with their spouses. Nevertheless, the women expressed a longing to be able to share certain cultural aspects that can only be communicated through a shared knowledge of their native language. The women specifically reported being unable to share the nuances of poems and songs that were a cultural part of their lives. The women also mentioned noticing language differences while spending time with their Indian family members and the burden of having to translate on behalf of their spouses.

One of the difficult challenges that the women were faced with in being cross-culturally married were the reactions from the South Asian community. The women reported feeling accused of letting the Indian community down, expressed their fears of being judged, having their motives challenged for marrying a non-Indian, and having their identity as an Indian questioned as a result of their decision to marry someone cross-culturally.

While only a few of the women have children, these and other participants expressed concerns about raising biracial children. The women expressed the limited opportunities of exposing their children to Indian culture in comparison to the exposure their children would receive of their husbands’ culture. The women also shared the
importance of understanding the differences in upbringing, between their husband and
themselves, in raising their children.

In sharing the most important aspect of their experience, the women
overwhelmingly described positive characteristics of their cross-cultural marriage. The
women identified opportunities of learning, growth, and excitement afforded by their
marriage. The women also voiced their appreciation of getting to know their husbands’
culture intimately. Although the women acknowledged cultural differences between their
husbands and themselves, they did not attribute these differences in contributing to major
conflicts in their marriage. Rather, they credited the cultural differences to providing a
foundation on which the couples’ future could be built. The women also did not disregard
the challenges inherent in cross-cultural marriages; instead, they emphasized open and
honest communication, along with compromises and negotiations in their marriages.

The women identified how affirming and validating it was to have family
members and friends approve of their choice in partner and to be cross-culturally married.
They found the support of family and friends to be essential throughout their journey.
The women also shared the benefits of having friends or family in cross-cultural
relationships who were able to empathize with the women’s experiences. The women
observed long-standing relationships in their husbands’ families to help assure that their
own marriages would be successful and enduring. Finally, the women shared relying on
their husbands for reassurance through honest exchanges over important values such as
commitment.

Lastly, the women shared their advice to other Indian women who may be
deciding to marry cross-culturally. The women emphasized considering the practical
aspects of deciding to marry cross-culturally apart from the romantic notions of the relationship. The women also deemphasized the cultural differences in choosing to marry cross-culturally. Rather, they stressed the importance of choosing a partner who would be committed to the relationship and with whom they could envision a future.

The women also shared inherent challenges of being cross-culturally married. They experienced challenges stemming from differences in cultural socialization between their husbands and themselves. The women had to avoid making the assumption that their husbands held the same cultural beliefs as they do, making open and honest communication all the more important. The women also acknowledged that some of the challenges they experienced were not exclusive to cross-cultural marriages, and along with communication, compromises and negotiations, were fundamental for the success of any marriage.

In choosing to marry cross-culturally, the women in this study strongly encouraged other Indian women to have the courage to make independent decisions even if it goes against traditional cultural expectations. However, one of the key messages they also shared was not to minimize the significance of family members' approval and support throughout their experience in deciding to marry cross-culturally.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of how first-generation Asian Indian women made the decision to go against dominant Indian cultural patterns, attitudes, and beliefs to marry cross-culturally and the general implications the decision to marry cross-culturally has had on their lives and their interpersonal relationships.

This chapter is structured by the core findings that emerged among Asian Indian women participants who were cross-culturally married. This chapter is organized into four main parts. The first part discusses and compares current findings with some of the earlier findings in the research literature to consider possible similarities and differences, and to bring attention to possible new findings in the present study. The second part will discuss implications for psychologists and counseling professionals who may work with Asian Indian women who are considering being married cross-culturally. The third part will discuss limitations of this study and the final part will focus on implications for future research with this population.

Current Findings and Research on Asian Indian Women

This section focuses on discussing current findings from this study in the context of some of the earlier findings in the research literature to consider possible similarities and differences. Possible new findings of the present study will also be discussed in this section.

The women shared how parents overwhelmingly encouraged and supported the women's educational achievements and aspirations. While traditionally emphasis was
placed on education for women to procure a suitable husband (Bhopal, 1997; Desai, 1999; Gupta, 1999; Segal, 1998), the women in this study experienced family members emphasizing education for the sake of promoting self-sufficiency and independence for the women’s future. For most Indians, a high educational level is associated with a successful career and a sense of security. While the image of the well-educated professional Indian woman is encouraged and respected in India, it is simultaneously juxtaposed with the conventional image of the obedient woman (Kurien, 1999).

Participants in this study experienced encouragement and support, from their parents, towards greater academic achievement but they also emphasized that they were encouraged as strongly as their brothers and/or other male counterparts to focus on their education and to have a successful career. Increased educational opportunities provided the women in this study greater empowerment, provided greater economic opportunities, lessening dependence on men, and narrowing the gender gap; this finding has also been supported by Medora et al, (2000) and Segal, (1998). The women’s experience described in this study also seems consistent with the literature reporting that South Asian women with higher education are less likely to view arranged marriages positively (Bhopal, 1997).

First-generation Indian women are often presented in the literature as being held to more extreme gender role expectations (Bhopal, 1997; Srinivasan, 2001). The women in this study, conversely, shared experiences of having been socialized with more emphasis on equalized gender roles by their parents. The women in this study did not share being socialized by their parents towards traditional gender role expectations for women with emphasis on values such as conformity, docility, and self-sacrifice (Bhutani,
1994; Seymour, 1999). However, the women often contrasted relatively liberal gender role socialization and expectations of parents, with the more conservative outlook of extended family members as well as the Indian community. They also experienced mixed messages from parents as well. As participants became older their mothers began to experience the pressures, from extended family members and society, to socialize their daughters in traditional gender roles. The women shared examples of mothers’ concerns related to clothing, dating, and more traditional gender roles at home, as the women got older. The presence of mixed messages and dichotomies experienced by Asian Indian women, as those experienced by the women in this study, has been well documented in the literature (Agarwal, 1991; Bumiller, 1990; Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996; Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1997; Dasgupta, 1998; Kurien, 1999; Segal, 1998). The women in this study through a process of active negotiation were able to accept, reject, or modify the meanings that are socially derived through the process of socialization.

Several factors and influences seemed to be experienced by participants associated with them experiencing fewer double standards and more freedoms in their gender socialization. One of those influences was the lack of oppressive patriarchal influences in their socialization by parents. To the contrary, the women often described being socialized by both parents and sometimes more often by their fathers towards greater independence. Socialization by Indian fathers towards greater independence has also been reported in the literature to have played a role towards greater marriage options (Ralson, 1997). The women in the present study also did not report a discrepancy between traditional gender roles and beliefs that they endorsed for themselves and the roles and beliefs that their parents endorsed for them. Through their liberal gender role
socialization, the women experienced options other than the traditional boundaries of femininity typically idealized by the Asian Indian community. Critical theorists such as Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) suggest that individuals who do not blindly follow cultural scripts are likely to have constructed stories that have the potential for personal empowerment and social change. Independence, self-reliance, and self-identity are not qualities that are traditionally emphasized in the Indian culture as they jeopardize the unity and welfare of the family unit (Medora, et al. 2000). However, the women’s narratives suggest an upbringing that was unconventional leading to the women embracing values, understandings of themselves, and social roles that are considered nontraditional. Participants’ relatively liberal socialization appeared to play a significant role in impacting their daughters’ marital choices.

Some of the major factors that are reported in the literature as responsible for change in the Indian family include industrialization, urbanization, education, geographic mobility, and increasing contacts and influences from Western societies (Kumar, 1999; Ross-Sheriff & Chaudhuri, 2004; Talbani & Hasnali, 2000). The process of incorporating values from other cultures by the women’s families in India appeared to allow the participants in this study more options. The women shared parental and familial attitudes and values that were subject to forces of change contributed by the influence of cultures beyond the Indian culture. They experienced more options specifically with gender role socialization, educational opportunities, and with regards to marital choices. Influences of other cultures allowed participants’ parents to incorporate values from other cultures rather than primarily raising their daughters with traditional Indian cultural expectations that may be viewed as repressive for women. Findings from this study also seem
consistent with reports in the literature that patriarchal norms in India are gradually, albeit reluctantly, eroding away and are slowly paving the way for more egalitarian gender norms and preferences (Seymour, 1999).

The women in this study shared being exposed to different cultures through having family living abroad, having parents who had traveled, had traveled themselves, or had lived a part of their lives outside of India. All the women, with the exception of one, had met their spouses after migrating to the United States. The women’s experiences lend support to Cottrell's (1973) study that suggested that international marriages in India may suggest an extension and continuation of an already established international lifestyle.

While all the women in this study were married after migrating from India, Dasgupta and Dasgupta (1996) disagree with the commonly held assumption that credits women’s emancipation exclusively to their immigration experiences. They offer India’s rich history of women’s contributions, activism, and social awareness as a way to conceptualize progressive opportunities for India’s contemporary women. Participants in this study provided examples of grandmothers and mothers being politically involved and described them as activists, and as “radical” and “progressive” reformers. So, while values from other cultures may have been internalized by the women and their families; the encouragement and support of strong women relatives who modeled and fostered the women’s independence and assertiveness cannot be ignored. Participants’ general view towards marriage was clearly influenced by their family history that encouraged women to speak their voices by making independent choices.
The women in this study were able to clearly articulate parental expectations in their marital choices. Traditionally, Indian parents choose their children’s partner; ideally someone who is from the same religion, caste, and region as their own. Additionally, parents and family members also specify other characteristics, in seeking a spouse for their child, that are important to them such as social background, along with educational and professional qualifications. In recent years, the traditional mode of arranging marriages has undergone some changes (Henderson, 2002; Medora, 2003; Mullati, 1995). Increasingly, Indian parents are open to their children being more active in voicing their opinions in choosing their marriage partner. Regardless of this transition, parental approval and consent is still considered to be essential. The choice of marriage partners in India are significantly affected by the process of mate selection permitted by parents (Segal, 1998). Participants shared how parents had socialized their daughters in a relatively more liberal manner. It is probable that parents wanted their daughters to be married into families where they would not feel disempowered or subject to patriarchal dominance in their married life. For most of the women in this study, the boundaries for preferred marriage partners were not exclusively limited to their specific caste, community, or religion.

First-generation immigrant parents in the United States are often portrayed in the literature as being afraid of cultural erasure which leads them to adhere more strongly to traditional expectations (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1998). However, the majority of the women in this study shared how their parents in India did not feel bound to traditional marriage expectations for their daughters. Overwhelmingly, participants shared how their
parents allowed their daughters to exercise greater freedom of choice in their marriage partners.

While parents held mostly liberal beliefs for their daughters’ marriages, they also exercised caution by setting boundaries in the women’s choice of partners. Most of the women were socialized with the message that they could choose their own partners as long as it was within prescribed cultural parameters. Historically, there has been antagonism between the Hindu and Muslim religion, this animosity continues to be played out in present day India (Akhtar, 2005). Several of the women’s parents, either explicitly or implicitly, conveyed their negative reactions towards marrying someone of the Muslim faith. The women also described prejudices that their parents held towards marrying someone African. This finding supports the research by Jethwani (2001), wherein parents of second-generation, cross-culturally married, Asian Indian women, had similar apprehensions. Lack of knowledge and integration of stereotypes of African Americans from mainstream United States culture may contribute to the Indian community’s prejudice against their daughters marrying an African American compared to a white American partner (Jethwani, 2001). Indian parents may also have fears that their daughters in marrying Muslim partners may be subjected to religious conversion and/or subjugation. While parents of several of the participants had liberal beliefs regarding marriage the majority of the women’s parents expected them to marry someone Indian. Indians often fear cultural obliteration through their daughters marrying someone non-Indian (Dasgupta, 1998).

Traditionally marriages in India are based on practical and realistic expectations with emphasis on filial commitment and an adherence to cultural tradition rather than on
spousal intimacy (Bumiller, 1990; Jayakar, 1994; Vaidyanathan & Naidoo, 1991). The women in this study cited the observation of negative models of traditional marriage relationships as negatively coloring their own expectations for marriage. This negative outlook also seemed to contribute to the women focusing their energies on their educational and career aspirations, while they were younger, rather than being preoccupied in making a suitable match in marriage.

In more industrialized countries such as the United States or in Europe, romantic love is valued and experienced more than in countries that are more collectivist, traditional, and less industrialized (Medora et al., 2000). While the women in this study were raised with the awareness of family obligations, along with social and cultural expectations, the women’s personal attitudes and expectations reflect experiences that were not bound by Indian cultural traditions. Several participants in the sample had dated prior to their marriage. The majority of the women in this study did not consider dating Indian men to be a positive experience. The literature on Asian Indians supports the women’s experiences in this study where they were unable to find a partner within the Indian community who were supportive of independent and assertive Indian women (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1997). While Indian men may be receptive to casually dating Indian women who are assertive, intellectual, and career driven, the characteristics they look for in a suitable spouse may be vastly different. Indian men often prefer to marry women who are quiet, humble, and who will cater to them as their mothers do (Lessigner, 1995). Women in this study shared examples where they experienced feeling restrained in their relationships with Indian men. In spite of modernization and women’s increasing empowerment, Indian women’s beliefs in gender equality are significantly more
progressive than their male counterparts (Jayakar, 1994). Participants in this study continued to experience Indian men as rooted in older and more traditional attitudes and beliefs. Asian Indian men were also experienced by women in this study as expecting them to conform to typical gender role expectations. Also, having been raised with a relatively liberal upbringing, participants were dissatisfied by the traditional values and expectations held by their male counterparts. These less than positive dating experiences with Indian men contributed to the women dating cross-culturally.

Several participants identified positive aspects in their experiences in dating non-Indians. In dating someone from outside their cultural framework, the women prioritized dating men who shared several similar values as the women. The women shared several gains in dating cross-culturally; the importance of equality in the relationship, not being held to the image of the traditional Indian woman, and sharing similarities in experiences in dating ethnic minority men, as well as the excitement in dating someone from a different culture. These positive experiences in dating cross-culturally seemed to be rather consequential in the women deciding to marry cross-culturally.

One of the key findings in this study is that several participants shared how parents did not feel encumbered with placing rigorous restrictions on their daughters' freedoms or pressurize them to conform to societal expectations. First-generation Indian immigrants are often viewed to hold beliefs that are "fossilized," "frozen in time," and steeped in gendered values (Gupta, 1997; Srinivasan, 2001). While first-generation Indian immigrants in the United States may focus on maintaining cultural values against the threat of erasure or assimilation into the mainstream American culture, this manner of thinking may not hold true for all Indian families in India. Families in India are...
increasingly incorporating values from the west into traditional cultural values (Ahmad, 2003).

While it is important to examine the Indian family with regards to the cultural traditions that govern it as per society’s norms, it is also important to take into consideration the internal dynamics within each family structure. Therefore, the extent to which cultural traditions are embraced and alternative options are negotiated depending on the individual’s psychosocial characteristics and experiences cannot be ignored. The women in this study shared a common experience in actively challenging traditional cultural assumptions concerning careers and marriage expectations, for women, held by their family and Indian society. In standing up for their values and beliefs, participants had already established an identity that embraced gender empowerment, autonomy, and initiative that may have contributed to the women in this study deciding to marry cross-culturally.

While most Indian women who immigrated to the United States came primarily as wives or daughters (Hegde, 1998; Saran, 1985), participants in this study seem to represent an increasing number of Indian women who are immigrating independently (Kurien, 1999); most often seeking educational and/or career opportunities. Participants in this study also lend support to the literature that portrays Indian women who immigrate to the United States for educational purposes as a highly selective group, with families who are generally more nonconforming, and resist traditional gender norms (Kurien, 1999).

Participants’ identities also presented paradoxes and contradictions, not unlike those they were exposed to while growing up from family and Indian society (Dasgupta
While one facet of the identity of the women in this study is portrayed as independent and empowered, the women also shared their struggles in marrying cross-culturally that stems from a stance that is culturally-rooted. All the participants in this study shared several common concerns and struggles in deciding to marry cross-culturally. The emphasis of relationship stability, acquiring the support of parents and family members, reactions from the South Asian community, not being able to share their native language with their spouses, the geographical distance from their homeland, and the cultural upbringing of their children were some of the struggles that the women were faced with.

One of the challenges that participants in this study shared was the concern regarding divorce that was expressed by several of the women’s family members. Marriages in India are predominantly focused on long-term commitment and the establishment of an enduring bond between two families. Divorce in the Indian culture is considered to be extremely shameful and the divorced individual, particularly the woman, is often highly stigmatized and is often isolated and rarely remarries (Jayakar, 1994; Segal, 1998). With the increased influence of the west on Indian culture, Indian parents have been forced to confront the difficult task of integrating their culture with markedly different American standards for marriage and divorce. The Indian community is often proud and quite defensive of the perceived advantages of marriages in their culture and the value of family commitment (Singh & Kajirathinkal, 1999). The Indian community often holds a highly critical view of the American culture as it is perceived to have a destabilizing effect upon marriage and family commitment. Those in the Indian community also commonly hold the stereotype that marriages to Americans often end in
divorce (Segal, 1998). Given the perceptions of divorce in India, parents and family members of several participants support the literature illustrating fears surrounding divorce in having children marry non-Indians.

However, fears regarding divorce were not exclusive to family members of the women. Some of the women in this study also had similar fears regarding longevity of the marital relationship in marrying cross-culturally. In traditional Indian marriages, elders in the family investigate prospective spouses for suitability. Women in this study however did not rely on their families to screen their spouses before deciding to marry them. However, the women appeared to do their own screening through having open and honest conversations to see if their partners had similar values regarding commitment and stability in a marriage. The women also observed the longevity of marital relationships in their partners’ families. It appears that the women were very rational and cautious in their decision to marry cross-culturally. While there appears to be progressive changes in India as to how suitable partners are identified, it appears that the women in this study continued to value the importance of maintaining certain cultural norms in identifying a marital partner. For instance, participants carefully considered their husbands’ relational and familial networks before deciding to marry cross-culturally. The women had internalized and were taking on the responsibility of scrutinizing the suitability of their partners in lieu of parents’ and extended family members who normally take on this role.

Participants also shared their struggles with reactions from their husbands’ family as well as the women’s own family members. The women in this study were faced with disapproval and pressure from siblings. The women were also faced with the displeasure of their husbands’ family and were concerned over their husbands having to choose
between their relationship with their wives or with their families. Participants shared how in some instances their husbands' families often had reservations based on cultural differences. Cross-cultural marriages sometimes contribute to deep conflict in families which reflects fears about loss of valued traditions, and wanting to avoid undesirable status or stigma through family association (Root, 2002).

Lastly, some of the women expressed their protectiveness of their parents in anticipating consequences such as criticism parents may face from the Indian community. Cultural sanctions against cross-cultural marriages continue to be supported by familial and community pressures against marrying outside the Indian community. All of the participants shared some concerns and struggles in deciding to marry cross-culturally. In making the decision to marry cross-culturally all the women shared experiencing concerns over how their behavior would impact their family as well as their own lives. Internalized cultural values and expectations played a powerful role in the women deciding to marry cross-culturally. Love marriage is often viewed negatively by the Indian community as it suggests a sexual relationship prior to marriage and is often perceived as a threat to family honor (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). Some of the women's parents also had concerns over the family image and reputation in having their daughters marry someone non-Indian. It is evident that while parents were willing to hold relatively liberal values regarding their daughters’ educational and career choices, they continued to hold reservations in allowing the women complete freedom in partner choice.

Throughout the interviews, participants often made a distinction between parents’ liberal values juxtaposed with extended family members’ conservative expectations. Indian families value a deep sense of obligation to take care of one another; and the
individual is seen as part of the larger family and community. However, conflict often arises when this same closeness and caring for each other leads to attempts to stifle an individual’s desire to hold values that are contrary to the family or cultural values (Dugsin, 2001). The women in this study often shared experiences wherein they felt that extended family members expressed their displeasure in the women’s gender roles, choice of career, and their choice of marriage partner. It is probable that the women in being physically away from their extended family were able to make choices, such as marrying cross-culturally, without the persistent emotional scrutiny they would have likely been exposed to were they to have resided in India.

The principles of familialism and interdependent social relationships are nurtured among Indian women (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). Indian children are often socialized to respect the authority of parents and elders, bring honor to their families, and are often emotionally dependent on their parents, even through their adult lives (Segal, 1998). Although the women in this study espoused a worldview and concept of self that suggests an emphasis on individuation rather than group orientation, the deeply ingrained cultural socialization explains participant’s struggle in emphasizing what the consequences of their decision to marry cross-culturally would be on their parents.

While participants experienced some struggles prior to being cross-culturally married, several of the challenges faced by the women were experienced after their marriage. One possible reason for the women identifying struggles after their marriage could be attributed to the retrospective nature of this study. The women appeared to identify those struggles that were most salient to them at the present. Also, according to Espin (1997), immigrants often do not recognize the emotional implications of border
crossings. Similarly, women in this study were not aware of how marrying spouses not of Indian origin would affect their ability to move back to India. Participants shared the challenge of reconsidering the possibility of being able to permanently return back to India, as a consequence of their marriage. The women spoke about the losses experienced by being separated from relatives, loved ones, and their homeland.

Given the interdependent nature of Indian culture, the younger generation of Indians often see it as their responsibility to care for their elderly, and are often under family, social, and cultural pressure to do so (Segal, 1998). The women shared concerns over providing care to aging parents, given the geographical distance coupled with the responsibilities of child rearing. One of the ways that the women appeared to manage this confusion was to have seriously considered with their spouses the feasibility of returning to India. The women had given careful consideration to career opportunities that would be available for their spouses or were thinking of returning once children were grown. However, one participant expressed her sadness in not being able to move back to India at present as she was concerned with raising her daughter in India. Literature supports her perception that Indian women who have traveled and return back to India consider Indian society to impose very strict and harsh rules of behavior on women (Srinivasan, 2001).

Another of the losses that was identified by the women had to do with language. The women shared the ambiguous loss of not being able to share the language of their childhood with their spouse. The women shared their frustration in being unable to share with their spouses information that is symbolic in its cultural meaning, which is often lost in translation.
The women did not share instances of prejudice from the mainstream American culture; rather, the women shared referencing themselves against the South Asian community and recognized challenges regarding the negative reactions they faced. The South Asian diaspora often carry certain representations of their “home” culture in order to recreate their cultural identity in the host culture. It is often important for this community that Indian values and culture are cultivated among the younger generation (Segal, 1992). The individual in social interactions represents the family or their subcultural group and is not free to conduct relationships in a totally individuated way. Members of the community who depart from the cultural norms are often harshly judged and/or stigmatized (Ross-Sheriff & Chaudhuri, 2004). The women in the present study shared instances where they felt unjustly judged, as betrayers of their culture, and sometimes felt their patriotism questioned on the basis of being in a cross-cultural relationship.

The women in this study shared similar concerns as the Indian immigrant community with regards to the cultural upbringing of their children. First-generation Indian immigrants are often faced with challenges in maintaining their cultural values and passing them on to their children amidst the threat of assimilation into mainstream culture (Dugsin, 2001). Ethnic identity is a part of a positive self-concept that consciously anchors an individual to their particular group, fosters a sense of belonging, as well as a commitment to the group’s values, beliefs, behaviors, conventions, and customs (Dasgupta, 1998). Participants in this study as a consequence of their cross-cultural marriages have the added challenge of not having the Indian culture represented by both spouses in the homes. Participation in cultural celebrations and communal festivals
provide an avenue of familiarizing the next generation with their Indian heritage and
traditions (Dasgupta, 1998; Ross-Sheriff & Chaudhuri, 2004). However, Asian Indian
women in cross-cultural marriages do not feel comfortable and often do not feel
welcomed in subcultural Indian associations (Kurien, 1999). This observation was also
supported by participants in this study who expressed the negative reactions they were
faced with from the Indian community. One of the participants explicitly mentioned
having avoided active participation with Indian associations as a result of these reactions.
However, without the cultural influence of family members, she had to reconsider her
attitude, as participation in community events provides one important vehicle of
transmission of culture. Most participants emphasized the importance for their children to
grow up understanding the cultural backgrounds of both spouses.

There were also common themes that emerged among the women in what they
considered to be the most important aspect of their experience in marrying cross-
culturally. The women identified several positive aspects of being cross-culturally
married. One of the more salient themes identified was the opportunity of growth and
learning in themselves. Cross-cultural marriages often provide an avenue for challenging
stereotypes, particularly among extended family networks (Root, 2002). Cross-cultural
marriages also provided an opportunity for the women, their families and their husbands’
families to learn about each other’s cultures.

While the women acknowledged inherent challenges in their marriages due to
cultural differences between them and their spouses, they tended to minimize these
differences. Segal (1998) hypothesizes that Indians who marry cross-culturally are more
cognizant of potential challenges arising out of conflicting cultural expectations and
consequently invest much more in compromise and adjustment. The women in this study emphasized the importance of open and honest communication to counteract the challenges posed by cultural differences.

The women were also requested to identify helpful supports when faced with challenges in deciding to marry cross-culturally. The women overwhelmingly reported experiencing their family, friends, and husbands to have been supportive. None of the women in this study mentioned utilizing counseling or mental health services to address their needs while deciding to marry cross-culturally. The women in this study also support the literature that has well documented the underuse of psychological services and considering counseling as an option for coping with life problems, by the Asian Indian population (Das & Kemp, 1997; Panganamala & Plummer, 1998; Ramisety-Mikler, 1993; Sodowsky & Carey, 1987, 1988).

Finally, participants were requested to share their wisdom, based on their own experiences, to other Indian women who are considering marrying cross-culturally. The women shared three key messages; they conveyed the importance of making individual decisions, they encouraged other women to make decisions over and above romantic considerations, and lastly and most importantly to make their decision with the support and affirmation of important family members. The latter message is a key finding in this study. Although the women shared some intergenerational differences when it came to marrying cross-culturally, overall they suggest a general picture of harmony with their parents either before or soon after being married. The literature as well as participants in this study suggests that the profile of the Asian Indian community is hardly one of fixed and blind acceptance of traditions (Dasgupta, 1998; Jethwani, 2000). Despite the
emphasis on the values of autonomy and independence embraced by the women in this study, they have also been socialized in traditional ethnic values (Das & Kemp, 1997; Vaidyanathan & Naidoo, 1990). The literature also suggests that Indian women are more likely to emphasize social conventions such as respecting their parents’ wishes in selecting their partners (Singh & Kanjirathinkal, 1999). In adhering to traditional filial values, which dictate loyalty to family responsibilities, participants shared their reluctance to alienate family members by advancing self-centered interests and marrying cross-culturally. The women in this study considered their parents to be a source of support and nurturance, thus making parental approval and consent of utmost importance in the women marrying cross-culturally.

First-generation Indian immigrants are often portrayed in the literature as not having to struggle with values of biculturalism (endorsing both Indian and American values). First-generation, of early post-1965 immigrants, are often seen to have dichotomized, or compartmentalized their lives, by being Indian to the core within their families, and with the outside larger mainstream community they are more American (Agarwal, 1991; Dasgupta, 1989; Helweg & Helweg, 1990, Srinivasan, 2001). However, the cultural experiences of the women in this study are complex to say the least. All of the women were exposed to influences outside of India, had experienced relatively liberal socialization, and espoused values that distinctly departed from Indian cultural norms. With increasing globalization, the experiences of the women in this study may not vastly differ from the experiences of future first-generation Indian women immigrants. Hence, the concept of the Indian woman may need to be reconfigured. While the concept of self for these women changes over time, through the influences of migration and the exposure
to different expectations from their native and host cultures, several distinct cultural characteristics endure. These culturally distinct characteristics which are the essence of the continuity of psychological, cultural, and self-understanding sustain over generations, and serve as sources of strength and challenges (Ross-Sheriff & Chaudhuri, 2004), for Asian Indian women who decide to marry cross-culturally.

**Implications for Counseling Practice**

The implications of the findings of the current study for professional counseling practice are primarily the contribution they make to increasing counseling professionals understanding of Asian Indian women who are considering marrying cross-culturally or who have already married cross-culturally. One of the primary conceptual frameworks that the counseling profession has used in understanding cross-cultural counseling and multicultural counseling competencies has been the model of multicultural counseling competencies which posits three dimensions or aspects of cross-cultural counseling competence: (1) awareness of counselor’s own assumptions, values, and biases, (2) understanding the cultural worldview of the client, and (3) developing and utilizing culturally appropriate interventions (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Arrendondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Locke, Sanchez, and Stadler,1996; Sue & Sue, 2003). Findings focus on the lived experiences of a small group of first generation Asian Indian women who experienced cross cultural marriage. The implications for counseling practice seem to be primarily in terms of enhancing counseling professionals’ knowledge and awareness of what the lived experiences of making this decision to marry cross-culturally and the consequences of the decision were like for a group of first generation Asian Indian women. Also, findings may imply and suggest some possible directions in
counseling assessment and interventions that counselors may wish to consider when providing counseling services to Asian Indian women who are cross-culturally married or who are considering marrying cross-culturally.

The multicultural counseling competencies emphasize that first and foremost a multiculturally competent counselor must become aware of their own attitudes, values and biases with regards to the population they are working with. The findings of this study provide a reference point for counselors to become more aware of their own biases and stereotypes that they may hold with respect to Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages and the impact this may have on providing services for this group of women. While the current study did not investigate counselors’ attitudes towards Asian Indian women, the women’s stories may serve to help counselors reflect upon any preconceived notions they have of Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages and contrast them with the actual experiences of the women in this study. The culturally skilled counselor needs to be aware of stereotypes and preconceived notions that they may hold towards other racial and ethnic minority groups (Sue et al., 1992). Professional counselors are expected to explore and understand their own gendered socialization and ask themselves whether their own racial/gender status is privileged or oppressed with regards to the mainstream culture and how that contributes to meanings associated with womanhood in the counselor’s own cultural groups (Patel, 2007).

To understand the experiences of Asian Indian women who are cross-culturally married, it is advisable to understand the gender role expectations within the family, extended family relationships, and processes for the maintenance and transmission of cultural traditions. Understanding the significance of cultural expectations, family
relationships, and cultural losses will provide clinicians with insights into specific challenges experienced by Asian Indian women who are considering marrying cross-culturally. Counseling professionals will find it beneficial to have a basic understanding of Indian cultural values, beliefs, and social parameters for women in India and as immigrants in the United States.

All of the women in the present study experienced traditional cultural expectations for Asian Indian women as part of their growth and development as young girls and young women in India. However, the women in this study were afforded opportunities for independence, autonomy, and flexibility in their career and marital choices. The women’s relatively liberal gender socialization and upbringing also provided the possibility for them to challenge and negotiate traditional expectations with respect to gender and marriage. The women’s parents often provided opportunities for the women and the latter did not often experience differential treatment. However, as the women grew older, the more conservative mothers became regarding gender roles. Women expressed how mothers began placing restrictions on their daughter’s behaviors with regards to clothing and dating. The women also contrasted the imbalanced gender role expectation imposed by extended family members in contrast to their parents’ relatively liberal expectations. The women in this study shared negative reactions they experienced from extended family members as a result of not following traditional gender role expectations, and were also concerned over how these reactions would impact their parents. Counseling professionals who are providing services to Asian Indian women may find it helpful to carefully explore and assess the gender role expectations that immediate and extended family members have of them. Counselors should also explore
how these expectations changed over time, as well as the impact, consequences, and conflicts that their clients may have experienced as a result of these expectations.

Although South Asian women are often characterized as weak victims of their gender oppressive cultures (Dasgupta, 1998), the women in this study provided several instances of women’s empowerment in their own families. Women in this study were encouraged by women role models, within their families and outside, who provided encouragement and reflected an alternate image than that of the traditional, submissive, Indian, woman ideal. Counselors can explore strong images in their client’s families, background, and/or history to expose them to information and experiences in which women were active agents of change. These strong images can be used as a counseling intervention to foster growth and development.

Counseling professionals should also be aware of the continual presence of mixed messages and cultural paradoxes that were experienced by the women in this study, even in the context of very supportive parents. The women shared struggles with experiencing differing expectations from extended family members and the Indian community. These conflicting messages can often pose dilemmas that are often a source of stress for Asian Indian women. Counselors must take the time to find out how each individual Asian Indian woman copes with cultural conflicts. The Asian Indian culture emphasizes significant values such as kinship responsibilities, obligations, filial piety, respect and loyalty (Ross-Sheriff & Chaudhuri, 2004). Asian Indian worldview, cultural values, and the family are significant influences on self-concept. The women in this study indicated that parental support and affirmation was important to them. Professional counselors in fostering healing to take place within the family, due to the centrality of parent-child
relationships in the Asian Indian culture, should make an effort to include parents and other family members as appropriate. Counselors can explore opportunities for parents and daughters to discuss the cultural pressures that each face. Counseling professionals can also explore core Indian values important to the individual and the family. This will allow the client to identify core values that need to be maintained and identify supporting values that might be modified without the intent of rejecting her cultural identity in its entirety (Dugsin, 2001). It is also important to note that worldviews and self-concept change with immigration and exposure to differences in cultural expectations, Indian versus American.

Professional counselors should also be aware of the importance of parental and family support to Asian Indian women in the context of marrying cross-culturally. Even though participants in this study made independent decisions to move to another country and to marry cross-culturally, contrary to traditional Indian values, the continuity and links to those cultural values and to their families were still very strong and important to them. Concurrently, the women also expressed struggles related to concerns that parents had over their marriage and apprehension about how parents would cope with reactions from family and society over their daughter's cross-cultural marriage. The women in this study indicated that parental support and affirmation was very important to them. It is important that counselors should be aware of and assess Asian Indian women clients’ perceptions of the possible impact their decision to marry cross-culturally on their parents and extended family members. The women also emphasized the value of connectedness with parents, siblings, husbands, and close friends. Hence, counseling professionals,
working with Asian Indian women clients, should consider counseling approaches that emphasize relational tendencies as healthy coping strategies when indicated.

The women also mentioned several losses that they experienced as a result of being cross-culturally married. The women shared their sadness in being away from their homeland, as well as their inability to share cultural intimacies, with their spouses, by way of their mother tongue. Asian Indian immigrants have traditionally depended on their family networks to provide emotional support (Segal, 1998). Asian Indian immigrants also tend to cope with stressors through joining local Indian organizations, where immigrants meet regularly and form friendships (Sodowsky & Carey, 1987). However, participants in this study had to deal with the double complexity of being separated geographically from family networks. The women also expressed their loss in being questioned, rejected, and judged, by the South Asian community as a result of being cross-culturally married. They also shared not participating in Indian organizations given the negative attitudes they faced as a result of their cross-cultural marriages; their experiences suggest social isolation and loneliness from their own communities. The women in this study also shared challenges they experienced with regards to reactions from their husband’s family members. Some of the women shared experiences of racism, and felt guilty in their husbands’ having to choose between their marriage and his family.

Clients who present with the above concerns may essentially be dealing with grieving these losses. The women not only expressed sadness in these losses but also frustration, anger, guilt, and confusion. Counselors can help clients articulate and define their losses, explore current and potential resources, and therapeutically define and redefine the meaning assigned to these losses. Counselors can help normalize these
feelings, and help the client embrace and accept the full spectrum of emotions related to these experiences. Counselors also need to be aware of the role of the husband’s family in the women’s decision to marry cross-culturally as well as in the women’s adjustment after their marriage. Counselors also should assess what resources are available for coping. For example, with the absence of family networks the women in this study described having friends in cross-cultural relationships to be of benefit in deciding to marry cross-culturally. In these instances, the women may also benefit from resources such as general support groups, or a support group or an association dealing with cross-cultural relationships.

The women in this study in identifying what they would like to share with other Asian Indian women considering a cross-cultural marriage encouraged other women to make independent choices. However, they recommended that other women make these choices only in conjunction with the support of parents. Counseling professionals counseling Indian women who have struggles related to intergenerational concerns need to use caution in emphasizing autonomy and individuation. Practitioners must explore how the client defines the closeness, connectedness, and interdependence of their relationship with their parents. While the women’s experiences in this study suggest that they endorse an individual concept of self, practitioners must examine the woman’s individual relationship with her parents to facilitate case conceptualization and treatment planning. It is important that counseling professionals explore how clients define ideal relationships, the level of connectedness to various family members, and most importantly evaluate whether clients’ ideas of relationship satisfaction, within the Asian Indian culture, are the same as those of the counselor. Counselors must also realize that
there are inherent variations in the lives of Asian Indian women and their struggles must be understood in the context of the individual uniqueness of each client.

The women in this study also expressed concerns over raising children in a cross-cultural marriage. Counselors in addressing these concerns need to explore differences in cultural background of each spouse that may become most obvious during decisions surrounding child rearing. Counselors may want to help their clients and their spouses explore the attitudes of their respective culture towards raising children, expectations for the roles of the mother and father, as well as how the cultural norms of the Asian Indian culture and the father’s culture will be incorporated in raising their children.

Counseling professionals working with this population need to go beyond looking to clients to teach them about Asian Indian women in an historical and sociocultural context. While clients are instrumental in providing culturally relevant information, counselors must make it their responsibility to gain culturally-specific knowledge and information regarding the population they are working with (Sue et.al., 1992). Counselors less experienced with Asian Indian women clients can familiarize themselves with literature that integrates Asian Indian cultural heritage, personal liberation, and gender empowerment. Some literature resources that counselors can make use of are, Gupta, (1999). *Emerging voices: South Asian American women redefine self, family, and community,* Dasgupta, and Dasgupta, (1996). *Astride the lion’s back: Gender relations in the Asian Indian community,* and Das Gupta, and Dasgupta, (1996). *Women in exile: Gender relations in the Asian Indian community in the U.S.* For non-Indian counselors, consultation with an Indian counseling professional is recommended to enhance the Indian client’s ability to feel understood by their counselor.
The literature on Asian Indians suggests that first-generation immigrants based on the years of residence in the United States are less acculturated to Western society than second-generation Asian Indians born in the United States (Ramisetty-Mikler, 1992; Segal, 1991). Panganamala and Plummer’s (1998) study also suggests that first-generation Asian Indian immigrants may have less positive attitudes towards psychotherapy. While the women in this study did not mention counseling to have been a helpful support while struggling with the decision to marry cross-culturally, the heterogeneity of the Asian Indian population should also be taken into account. The women in this study immigrated later on in life, they are all highly educated, have well-developed English-language skills, have been exposed to different cultures other than the Indian culture, from a young age, and their openness to being married cross-culturally are all factors that can affect their attitudes towards counseling. Hence, counseling professionals should be aware of within group differences in treating this population.

Underutilization of mental health resources by Asian Indians is attributed to cultural values of privacy and the proscription against talking about personal, intimate problems outside of the family (Jayakar, 1994). Asian Indian immigrants who are overly represented as college-educated, middle-class professionals may be reticent to seek counseling due to pride and perceived prestige (Panganamala & Plummer, 1998). Asian Indians immigrants often termed the “model minority” may feel a sense of shame and embarrassment, as well as a certain amount of denial of mental health and emotional problems (Das & Kemp, 1997). Gill-Badesha’s (2004) study on the attitudes of South Asian immigrants toward utilizing counseling services found that participants expressed a general lack of knowledge about counseling and ways to access formal support. Given
the feelings of isolation reported by the women in this study stemming from the absence of close family support networks, as well as the negative associations with the Asian Indian community, indicate the need for future outreach efforts to aid this population in understanding and utilizing counseling services. University counseling centers might consider developing support groups for international students in cross-cultural relationships. Educating Asian Indians about the purposes, methods, and goals of counseling and psychotherapy is also important to help dispel previously held stigmas about counseling (Panganamal & Plummer, 1998).

Potential Limitations

The qualitative descriptive nature of this study captured important information through the narratives of the eight women, in their own words, and the design of the study was carefully considered to minimize inconsistencies and/or limitations. The aim of this study was not to generalize to the larger population of Asian Indian women, but to capture emerging themes from a small sample of Asian Indian women who are cross-culturally married. However, the results of this study need to be considered in light of some potential limitations. I chose to explore the lived experience of Asian Indian women deciding to marry cross-culturally, the struggles, and conflicts experienced by the women in making their decision, and the consequential influence of their decision on their lives and interpersonal relationships. The limitations of sample size and the method of sampling used have to be considered with regards to the findings of this study. Given the small sample size, the results are exploratory in nature and must be considered with caution. The lived experiences of these eight women, acquired through snowball sampling need to be viewed as descriptive of this sample, rather than representative of
this entire group. The sample population was composed of English-speaking, highly educated women from diverse regions of India who were all living in the United States and who may have had a particular interest in the research topic. The results from this study may not pertain to all first-generation Asian Indian women who are cross-culturally married, but who chose not to participate. It is important to view this study as a means to begin future discussions, rather than an exhaustive analysis, of first-generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages.

Research processes lend themselves to be enhanced only when limitations of methods are made explicit so that proper limits on ensuing interpretations of findings can be established. The researcher is aware that when retrospective descriptions are obtained, the possibility of error or deceit on part of the participant cannot be ruled out. Longer in-depth interviews provided the researcher more opportunity to discern when participants are trying to control descriptions (Giorgi, & Giorgi, 2003). The authors Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) also point out that this vulnerability is not unique to phenomenological research, and though there are checks and balances, there is no foolproof strategy for detecting deception.

Another limitation of this study, as with most qualitative studies, is the potential for researcher bias. Efforts to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings were made through several avenues. An auditor was used to confirm the categorization of themes of the data. Rigor of this study was also supported through having participants confirm findings. An individual narrative summary for each participant after the first interview was sent to the participants to ensure accuracy and elicit feedback. Feedback was also elicited on an overall summary of themes across all participants. Follow-up interviews
afforded participants an opportunity to reflect and discuss their experiences. This also afforded participants an opportunity to change any information that they found inaccurate and or add new information. Providing participants multiple opportunities to provide feedback contributed to establishing accuracy and credibility and helped toward minimizing researcher bias.

Another limitation of this study was the nature by which the participants were interviewed. While, interviewing participants by telephone provided a sample that was not limited by geographical location, there are some limitations that need to be considered. Participants may have felt uncomfortable sharing intimate information with a research investigator over the phone. Although my cultural and gender identity are characteristics that may have strengthened the relationship with the participant and facilitated communication, interviewing via telephone may have also affected their sense of comfort and hindered communication.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The current study, together with existing research, provides direction for future research on first-generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. The women’s experiences and perspectives in this study help us in better understanding the importance of continued progress in the study of cross-cultural marriages in the United States. With increasingly greater numbers of Asian Indian women immigrating for economic opportunities, future research must take into account the rapidly changing population demographics and the implications for the possibility of increased cross-cultural marriages. Future research would also benefit from having a sample of Asian Indian women who are of different education levels. Participants in this study all have a
graduate education and relatively high socioeconomic levels. Existing literature supports a correlation between higher education and increased cross-cultural marriages. A follow-up study to this research should broaden the sample to include Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages with varying socio-economic and educational levels. A study of cross-cultural marriages of women in India who marry a spouse from another culture but who work and live in India might also be the focus of a future study. The struggles and challenges of Asian Indian women with high socio-economic and educational levels may be different from those of low socio-economic and educational levels.

Since this study was retrospective in nature, a future study that focuses on the struggles of Asian Indian women who are actively deciding to marry cross-culturally may be beneficial. The paucity of qualitative research on the experiences of first-generation Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages was the primary reason for focusing this study specifically on this population. However, given the women in this study identified their husbands and family members to primary sources of support; this study could be further enriched by including the perspectives of the families and spouses of the women. Future studies could also benefit from focusing on the experiences of first-generation Asian Indian men in cross-cultural marriages and comparing them with their female counterparts. Lastly, as several of the women mentioned anticipating negative consequences if their spouses had been of the Muslim faith or were of African descent, focusing on the experiences of Asian Indian women with these spouses would also provide an invaluable addition to the literature.
Appendix A

E-mail Message: Invitation for Participation

Hello. My name is Monica Thiagarajan and I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Western Michigan University. This is an invitation for you to participate in a research study designed to explore the experiences of first-generation Asian Indian women who have decided to enter into a cross-cultural marriage. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Patrick H. Munley in the Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Department at Western Michigan University. This study may be an opportunity for you to help add to our knowledge and understanding about Asian Indian women immigrants and provide information that may be helpful to other Asian Indian women.

I invite you to add your voice to this study, if you are an Asian Indian woman who:

- is at least 21 years of age
- grew up in India, and have migrated to the U.S. in the 1990’s, or later
- is currently in a satisfactory cross-cultural marriage, and this is your first and only marriage
- experienced conflict in making the decision to marry cross-culturally,
- has been married for at least one year,
- is willing to articulate your thoughts, feelings, and emotional reactions about your decision and the resulting consequences and impact of your decision.

Below is a brief description of the research study for your review and consideration. If you are interested in learning more about participating, please contact the investigator by e-mail (mthiagar@hotmail.com) or phone (859-264-7210) to receive additional information.

The first phase of this project involves identifying potential interviewees through an initial phone contact, and through the completion of a demographic background questionnaire that takes about 10 minutes to complete.

If you are selected from among those who agree to participate, you will be invited to participate in the second phase of this project. Individuals who are not selected will be notified by phone. The second phase involves two phone interviews scheduled individually at a time convenient for you. All interviews will be tape-
recorded. Interviews will last approximately 1½ to 2 hours. Phone interviews will
be scheduled about 3 months apart. Towards the conclusion of the study I will make
a brief phone call to give you an opportunity for feedback on the overall summary of
the research findings.

All information collected is confidential. Demographic information you provide
will be used for selection purposes, and to describe the interview participants
comprehensively. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and I will ensure that
any information that could identify you will be excluded.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration!

Warm Regards,

Monica Thiagarajan, M.A.
Western Michigan University
(859) 264-7210
Appendix B

Preliminary Telephone Contact to Provide Information about the Study

“Hello. My name is Monica Thiagarajan and I am from Western Michigan University. May I speak with (participant’s name)?”

“Hello (participant’s name). I am returning the message you left me regarding the study on Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. Or, I am contacting you with regard to your e-mail expressing interest in the study on Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. Are you interested in hearing more? Is this a good time to talk?

First, I would like to give you a general idea about the nature of the study. Then I will go over the experiences and characteristics we are looking for among volunteers for the study. This will help you decide if it would be appropriate for me to send you additional information about possibly participating this study.

The purpose of this study is to describe and understand the experiences that first generation Asian Indian women face while going through the process of making the decision to marry cross-culturally. The results from this study will enhance the knowledge of understanding the experience of Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. It is hoped that this better understanding will be useful and of value to mental health professionals in providing care and supports to Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. This study involves completing a demographic questionnaire, and participating in two telephone interviews, and a final brief phone call to give you an opportunity for feedback of the overall research findings. Both interviews will be tape-recorded. Your total time commitment will be between 3-31/2 hours.

You will be asked to respond to open-ended questions during the interview and you will be sent a pre-interview guide to help prepare for the interviews. This study will provide you with an opportunity to reflect your own thoughts, feelings, and experience as an Asian Indian woman who is in a cross-cultural marriage. The difficult part for you may be possibly discussing some private, sensitive, or painful experiences you may have had. All data collected through demographic questionnaires and interviews will be kept confidential.

In terms of volunteers for this study, I am are looking for women who are:

Asian Indian and at least 21 years of age;

who grew up in India and migrated to the United States in the 1990s or later,
who currently are in a satisfactory cross-cultural marriage that has lasted for at least one year, and this marriage is their first and only marriage,

who have experienced conflict in making their decision to marry cross-culturally;

and who are willing to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and emotional reactions about their decision and the resulting consequences and impact of that decision.

If you believe you meet these criteria for participating in the study, and if you are interested in participating, would you like me to send you additional information concerning the study and to consider you as a possible participant?

If no, I very much appreciate your time.

If yes, thank you for considering participating in this study. I would now like to send you additional information on the study. The additional information will include an informed consent form for this research study and a demographic questionnaire. Once you review the informed consent form, you will be asked to sign the consent form, complete the demographic questionnaire, and return both forms to me in the stamped envelope I will send you. Once you return the materials I will then be able to let you know if you are accepted into the study as a participant.

Obtain preferred mailing information and send packet with informed consent form and demographic questionnaire. Potential participants will also be provided the investigator’s contact information in case any questions arise.
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Western Michigan University
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Principal Investigator: Patrick H. Munley, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Monica Thiggarajan, M.A.

Title of Study:
A Qualitative Exploration of Asian Indian Women in Cross-Cultural Marriages

I am contacting you because you expressed interest in participating in a research study about the experiences of first-generation Asian Indian who have chosen to marry cross-culturally (i.e. not married to someone who is non Asian Indian).

First-generation Asian Indian women have a lot to consider when making the decision to marry cross-culturally. Often women in this situation feel pressured to decide between pleasing their families or themselves. I am interested in hearing your stories and exploring your experiences involved in the process of making your decision and also hearing about the experience and implications this decision may have had on your life. There is relatively little known about the experiences of Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages, and this study is an opportunity for you to add to our knowledge and understanding of Asian Indian women immigrants. Your participation in this study may be beneficial to other Asian Indian women going through similar experiences, and I invite you to add your voice to this study.

The first phase of this project involves your participation in the completion of the enclosed demographic/background questionnaire. This questionnaire will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete. The second phase involves two phone interviews that are expected to last approximately 1-2 hours, scheduled individually at a time convenient for you. Phone interviews will be scheduled about 3 months apart. Towards the conclusion of the study I will make a brief phone call to give you an opportunity for feedback on the overall summary of the research findings. Your total time commitment will be between 3-4 hours. All of the information collected from you will be confidential. No specific information that would reveal your identity will be reported. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and I will insure that any information that could identify you will be excluded.
The research materials will all be coded, and Monica Thiagarajan will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding pseudonym. Demographic/background information you provide will be used for selection purposes, and to describe the interview participants as a group. Once the data is collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. A tape recorder will be used during our interviews. The use of a tape recorder is to ensure the correct transcription and analysis of the interview data, and in no way will your confidentiality be jeopardized. After the interviews are transcribed the tapes will then be destroyed. All of the information on tapes, notes, and forms will be stored in a secure location.

The purpose of this research is to collect data, and results obtained from the analysis will be presented in a doctoral dissertation in Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. The dissertation will be published as such and, in addition, may be published in academic journals or popular press. Select direct quotes from multiple participants will be used in presenting the findings of this study. All quoted material will be completely anonymous and no personal identifying information will be linked to any data presented in the results. You will be given an opportunity to review the summary of your personal narrative and provide feedback in the interest of capturing an accurate portrayal of your experience.

I anticipate minimal risk to you while participating in this research. Expected risks include feelings of sadness, anger, stress, or discomfort in recalling or revealing information during our interviews. You have the option to end the interview process at any time if you are uncomfortable and choose not to continue. In the event that you experience strong emotional responses during the interview, I will make a referral to appropriate professionals in your area, at your request. You will be responsible for the cost of counseling if you choose to seek it.

One of the ways that you may benefit from the study is by having the opportunity to reflect on and share your personal experiences of making the decision to marry cross-culturally. The information provided by you will be used to contribute to the research literature on Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages, as well as increase the understanding of helping professionals concerning the experiences of Asian Indian women who decide to intermarry. Your participation will also hopefully benefit other Asian Indian women in similar situations.

You may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time during the study without any consequences. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact the student researcher, Monica Thiagarajan at 651-325-8916 or
monicastudy@yahoo.com, the principal investigator, Dr. Patrick H. Munley, at 269-387-5120, or the vice president for research at 269-387-8298.

This letter contains consent information that has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature in the upper right corner of each page. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is more than one year old.

By providing your signature below, you are indicating that you agree to respond to the demographic questionnaire and participate in two phone interviews, and a final brief phone call. Please return this signed form to the researcher in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped, envelope. Please retain one copy of this consent document for your records.

__________________________________________

Name (Please Print)

__________________________________________

Signature

__________________________________________

Date
Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire

If you would like to be considered for participation in this research project including two phone interviews, and a brief, final phone call, concerning your experience as a first-generation Asian Indian woman in making the decision to marry cross-culturally, please complete this demographic questionnaire, sign the enclosed informed consent form, and return both documents in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. Please keep a copy of the informed consent for your records. Review the informed consent form for additional steps that will be taken to ensure your confidentiality. Thank you again for your consideration.

PLEASE PRINT

Name: ___________________________________________

Mailing Address: ___________________________________________

Phone: ____________________________

e-mail: ____________________________

Demographic Information

Age: __________

Birth date: __________ (month/day/year)

Ethnicity of Spouse ___________________

In what year did you come to the United States? ____________

Do you have members of your family who have stayed, or settled in the U.S.? ___________________
If you answered yes to the above question, please answer how they are related, and how long they have been in the U.S.

Highest educational degree obtained _____________

Field of Study _____________

What is your current occupation/profession? _____________

How many years have you been married? _____________

What is your religious orientation? _____________

What is the religious orientation of your family in India? _____________

Which state in India are you from? _____________

What is your mother tongue? _____________

What is your caste? _____________

Are you a member of any Indian associations? _____________

If you answered yes to the above, what is the name of the association? _____________

What is your socioeconomic status? _____________

When did you get married? _____________ (month/day/year)

Is this your first marriage? _____________

Did you experience conflict in marrying cross-culturally? _____________

Are there other members of your family who are married cross-culturally? _____________

If you answered yes to the above, how are they related to you? _____________
Would you consider yourself satisfactorily married?  _______

Do you feel that you are able and willing to discuss your thoughts, feelings and emotional reactions about your decision to marry cross-culturally and the impact of this decision with the researcher during the interviews that will be conducted during the study?  ____________________________

Thank you very much for your time.
Appendix E

Telephone Script for Participants Selected for the Study

Hello [Name], this is Monica Thiagarajan. I am calling you with regard to the study on Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. Thank you for responding to the demographic questionnaire. Based on your responses, I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Are you still interested in participating?

If yes,
Then I would like to go ahead and set up a time that would be convenient for you for our first interview. The interview will last approximately 1½ to 2 hours. To help you prepare, I will be mailing you a list of topics that we will discuss during our interview. Do you have any questions? Thank you for participating.

If no,
Thank you for your time and participation so far.
Dear ______________________,

Thank you for your participation and response to the demographic questionnaire! I am writing you to confirm our appointment on (date) ____________________ at (time) __________________, at (phone number) ______________. I am looking forward to talking to you so we can get started on our first interview.

I have enclosed a list of topics that we will discuss during our interview. Please take the time to read through and reflect on these topics, which will help you prepare for the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating, please do not hesitate to call me at (859) 264-7210 or e-mail me at mthiagar@hotmail.com.

Thank you again,

Sincerely,

Monica Thiagarajan, M.A.
Appendix G

Pre-Interview Guide

I am interested in exploring your experiences in making your decision to intermarry. I would also like to know what you think about your experience and the implications this decision has had on your life.

Please use this guide as a way to prepare and think about the topics that we will discuss in the upcoming interview.

General Topics:

**Upbringing in India**
- Traditional, or liberal upbringing
- Family values
- Religious values
- Western Influence on your family
- Expectations for girls in your family

**Marriage**
- Your expectations
- Family’s expectations
- Changes in expectations

**Immigration**
- Expectations of your family
- Impact on your life
- Ways you kept in touch with Indian culture
- Ways in which American culture influenced your life

**Cross-cultural marriage**
- Concerns
- Benefits
- Family influence
- Asian Indian community’s influence
- Support system
- Relationship with your husband’s family
- Ways in which your decision has affected your life and relationships with family and friends

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Appendix H

Telephone Script for Respondents to the Questionnaire Not Selected for Interviews

Hello (Name), this is Monica Thiagarajan, and you previously responded with interest in participating in a project about Asian Indian women in cross-cultural marriages. I am calling to let you know that I appreciate your response although I will not be able to include you in the interviews. I selected a very small number of participants, and I am unfortunately unable to interview everyone who expressed interest in participation.

If a participant does not meet one of the selection criteria based on their questionnaire responses, and this is the reason they are not selected for interviews, they will be informed of the specific reason they were not selected. For example, if a potential participant indicates on their questionnaire that they have not been married for at least one year, the participant will be informed that: One of the criteria for participating in the study is that the person has been married for at least one year. You indicated that you have been married for 10 months so I could not invite you to continue in the study. Thank you for your response and your interest in this project.
Appendix I

Phone Script and Interview Protocol

Hello, _____________, this is Monica Thiagarajan, and as arranged, I am calling to speak with you about your experience as an Asian Indian woman in a cross-cultural marriage. The purpose of this study is to help describe and understand the experiences of first-generation Asian Indian women who have made the decision to marry cross-culturally.

Let me begin by telling you a little about myself. I am an Indian woman, and I moved to the U.S., from Chennai, in 1996. I met my husband, who is American, during my undergraduate studies, and after four years of dating we decided to get married. At the time, my family was very upset with my decision. I also found that my decision affected several aspects of my life, such as my relationships with my family, friends, and the Asian Indian community. I would like to understand your and other Indian women’s experiences in marrying cross-culturally. So, this is personally an important and meaningful project and I value your contribution to this study. During this interview I will be asking a series of open-ended questions about your experiences in deciding to marry cross culturally and how your decision has impacted your life.

Before we begin do you have any questions that need to be clarified? [If yes, then clarify questions, if no, “Then shall we begin?”]

1. Could you please begin by describing the messages you received, as a young girl growing up in an extended, or nuclear family, in India?
   Possible Probes
   Tell me more about your family values, how traditional or liberal were they?
   Describe your experience with religion while growing up

2. Could you describe your experiences as a young woman growing up in India, please tell me what your thoughts and feelings were about marriage?
   Possible Probes
Tell me more about your family’s expectations for your marriage?
Did the expectations of your family change for you, as you grew older? How so?
Tell me more about your thoughts and feelings of your own expectations for your marriage?
How did other family members your own age come to be married?
How did values from the West impact your family’s expectations for your marriage? Can you share some examples?

3. Could you tell me what brought you to the U.S. and share some of the challenges and positive features experienced by you as an Asian Indian woman in the U.S.?
Possible Probes
What were the expectations of your family for you as a woman in the U.S.?
Did you plan to stay on in the U.S. when you first moved?
Could you describe how your life has changed as a consequence of living in the U.S.?
What were the ways that you initially kept in touch with your Indian culture upon moving?

4. When you were a new immigrant, please tell me what your thoughts and feelings were about traditional Asian Indian expectations concerning marriage.
Possible Probes
Please tell me more about how your thoughts and feelings changed over time once you were in the U.S.

5. When were you first aware that you might marry cross-culturally? What experiences led up to that awareness?
Possible Probes
Please share the issues, and concerns that you considered that influenced your decision
What were some of the positive aspects that influenced your decision?
6. Please share your thoughts, feelings, in experiencing the conflict between the expectations of your family, traditional Asian Indian cultural expectations, and your decision to intermarry
   Possible Probes
   Could you share what got in your way or made it difficult for you in deciding to marry cross-culturally?
   Can you share times in which that you still experience a conflict in your decision?

7. Please describe your relationship with your husband’s family
   Possible Probes
   How did they influence your decision?
   What was their reaction to your husband’s and your decision to marry?

8. Please describe how your decision to enter into a cross-cultural marriage has affected you, your life, and your relationships?
   Possible Probes
   Please share how your decision impacted your relationship with your husband, your family, your close friends, the community.

9. What did you experience as helpful and supportive from family, friends, and/or others while making the decision to marry cross-culturally? What did you experience as stressful or not as helpful from family, friends, and/or others during this time?

10. What would you like to share with other first-generation Asian Indian women who are going through the process of entering into an cross-cultural marriage?

11. Is there anything else of importance that you would like to share that we have not touched upon during this discussion? To really understand your experience, what is the most important thing that you feel I should focus on?
General Probes

At certain times during the interviews, the following probes will be used as appropriate to elicit a more detailed and rich description of the women's experiences.

Tell me more about that experience.

What happened exactly?

Can you give me an example of that?

What was that like for you?

How did you feel at that time?

How did that experience impact you?

What were the reactions of others?
Appendix J

Cover Letter to Participants Prior to Follow-Up Interviews

Dear ________,

Attached is a summary of your personal narrative based on the information you shared with me during our first phone interview. It is important to me to make sure that I clearly understand what you told me during the first interview. Please take the time to review this summary. During our second interview, I would like to ask you some questions about how well this written information captures your experience, and see if there are any aspects of your experience that are missing. When we talk, I will also share with you some of the collective themes across multiple participants and discuss with you how well the collective themes fit your experience.

I will be e-mailing or calling you within the next couple of weeks to schedule a time that is convenient for you. I look forward to speaking with you again soon.

Sincerely,

Monica Thiagarajan
Appendix K

Script for Second Interview

“Hello, ________________, this is Monica Thiagarajan calling to ask you some follow-up questions regarding your experiences as an Asian Indian woman making the decision to intermarry. By now you should have received the personal narrative that I sent to you? I hope you have had a chance to review it? [If “yes”, continue; if “no”, ask participant to read the narrative first before proceeding with interview]“First I would like to ask you about the summary of the narrative that you reviewed, later I would like to share with you some themes that came up for other participants and see if those themes fit with your experience.”

How well does the summary of your personal narrative that you reviewed capture your experiences as an Asian Indian woman who made the decision to marry cross-culturally? Are there any important aspects of your experience in making your decision that are left out? If so, please tell me about these experiences. Follow up with interview probes as appropriate.

Now I would like to share with you some things that other participants shared. One theme was [state theme]. Do you relate to this theme? [repeat for all themes].
Appendix L

Cover Letter to Participants Prior to Final Phone Call

Date

Dear (Name),

Hello! Thank you for participating in two phone interviews about your experience as an Asian Indian woman in a cross-cultural marriage. I am in the last stage of this study. Attached is a draft of an overall summary of the research findings. I am writing you to allow you an opportunity to review the material and give your feedback on the overall summary of the research findings. I will make a brief final phone call that will last approximately 10-15 minutes.

I will be e-mailing or calling you within the next couple of weeks to schedule a time that is convenient for you. Again, please know that your contribution to this study has been valuable thus far. Thank you for your time. Please e-mail me at mthiagar@hotmail.com, or call me at 859-264-7210 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Monica Thiagarajan
Appendix M

Script for Final Phone Call

Hello ____________, this is Monica Thiagarajan. Thank you again for participating in the two phone interviews. I am making a final call to you to receive your feedback on the draft of the research findings. Have you had a chance to review the final summary? Are there any final comments or suggestions you would like to make?
[If yes, then follow-up on feedback]
[If no, then thank them for their participation]

I would like to express my appreciation again for your willing participation in this study.
Appendix N

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval

Date: June 14, 2006

To: Patrick Munley, Principal Investigator
    Monica Thiagarajan, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Extension and Changes to HSIRB Project Number 05-06-02

This letter will serve as confirmation that the extension and changes to your research project “Asian Indian Women in Cross-Cultural Marriages” requested in your memo dated 6/13/06 (follow-up telephone contact to clarify inclusion/exclusion; change “conflict” to “obstacles, struggles, and/or challenges” in invitation to participate email and demographic questionnaire) have been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: June 14, 2007

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REFERENCES


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Mason, J. *Qualitative researching*. California: Sage Publications.


