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Identity negotiation: The perspective of Asian Indian women

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Identity Negotiation: The Perspective of Asian Indian Women

by

Pangri Mehta

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my grandmother, the late Madhuben Babubhai Patel, my mother, Dr. Pankaj Mehta, my father, Mr. Girish Mehta, my sister, Bansri Mehta, and all of the beautiful women in my family. I would also like to dedicate this to each of the incredible women who allowed me to share their story.

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I would like to thank each of my friends throughout my college and graduate school career. Through our shared experience, you have been incredible motivators and the most entertaining distractions. Thank you for all of the laughter and good memories.

To my mother, father and sister, you have supported me in taking the road less traveled, cheering me along every step of the way. Thank you for being my role models and my cornerstones. You each mean the world to me.

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Identity Negotiation: The Perspective of Asian Indian Women

Pangri Mehta

ABSTRACT

Traditional Indian cultural narratives are pervasive and serve to typify personal identity and experience. These cultural narratives portray Indian women as a wife and mother, nurturing, obedient, forbearing, soft-spoken, and the primary transmitters of the ethnic culture. American culture, on the other hand, encourages independence, individualism and a more elastic view towards gender. As assimilation theory suggests, Asian Indians in the United States are likely to assimilate at least some degree into American society. Accordingly, these narratives make up the cultural identity of Indian women in the United States. The contrasting cultural narratives shape the identities of Indian women residing in the United States and have the capacity to influence Asian Indian women's attitudes toward traditional Indian views about marriage, culture and gender expectations. Using data from interviews with eleven college-aged Indian women, I examine how college-aged Asian Indian women in a large southern university negotiate their Indian identity in American society. The personal identities they construct are much more diverse and complex than the typifications in the cultural narrative of 'Indian women.' Specifically, I explore how these women understand expectations of dating and marriage, education and independence, and clothing and demeanor, as well as how each of these are negotiated and shaped to fit the personal identities these women are constructing for themselves.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Identity, Gender and Marriage: The Traditional Perspective

Shakti, a Hindu concept that represents divine feminine power, is a widespread and commonly accepted image in Indian society. More prevalent, however, is the cultural identity of Indian women as being a wife and mother, subordinate to her husband and his family, forbearing to her family, moral, obedient, chaste, and one who upholds cultural traditions and family unity (Abraham 1999, Goel 2005, Dasgupta 1998, Dasgupta & Warriar 1996, Bhanot & Senn 2007). On the other hand, American culture encourages independence, individualism and has a more elastic view towards gender. Asian Indians in the U.S. are likely to assimilate at least some degree into American society (Inman 2006, Bacon 1996). Multiple narratives make up the cultural identity of a group. These contrasting cultural narratives are resources that can be used to shape identities (Loseke 2007). For Indian women in the U.S. this has the capacity to influence Asian Indian women's attitudes toward traditional Indian views about marriage, culture and gender expectations. In the following pages, I examine how Asian Indian women negotiate their Indian identity in American society and their understanding of what parts of Indian culture and traditional Indian female identity their parents and surrounding Indian communities believe are important for them to follow and preserve. I also look into what

aspects of traditional Indian femininity these women are choosing to retain and follow for themselves. In order to explore which aspects of the traditional Indian cultural identity women identify with and incorporate into their lives, I conducted eleven qualitative interviews with college-aged Indian women at a large Southern university.

Personal and Cultural Narrative Identity

Loseke (2007) argues that multiple narratives make up the cultural identity of a group. Cultural narratives serve as a collective representation for categorical identities with ‘dis-embodied’ social actors. The categorical identities generally associated with family, gender, religion, nationality and ethnicity are constantly being re-created, challenged and negotiated. Loseke (2007) calls these cultural identities ‘formula stories.’ Such stories pertaining to ethnic identities serve to re-enforce cultural expectations and perceptions of morality, as well as simplify complexity. She states, however, that the way individuals make sense of their lives (personal narratives) are varied and complex. Accordingly, they do not always fit into a neat and compact formula story. While new stories are being constructed, those already created become modified or even discarded according to individual and broader experiences (Loseke 2007). For Indian women in America, understandings of contrasting cultural narratives of identities play a major role in creating and re-shaping their personal identity narratives, as they each influence one another.

Traditional Femininity in India

Abraham (1998) asserts that while the Asian Indian concept of ‘woman’ varies according to region, religion, class and ethnic group, the foremost identity of woman as wife and mother is fairly unified. It is one in which woman is defined in relation to man

and her capacity to reproduce. Religions and cultural practices within India have condoned patriarchy and the belief that men are dominant/superior to women (Abraham 1998). According to the traditional Indian cultural narrative, women are expected to maintain the home and family, and exercise unconditional self-sacrifice and nurturance. One line of research suggests that cultural pressures to maintain these aspects of the traditional Indian female identity continue to exist. Not adhering to these expectations often translates into perceived failure and dishonor of the Indian community and/or family (Rastogi & Therly 2006, Abraham 1998).

The traditional Indian female identity places women in a very restrictive role. Education, for example, is seen as a means to increase the social status of women for the purpose of finding a more desirable husband (Bacon 1996, Abraham 1998, Dasgupta & Warriar 1996, Goel 2005). As illustrated by Dasgupta and Warriar (1996), the immigrant women interviewed reported they were taught to view education not as a tool to increase their independence or move forward in their careers, but rather as a means to increase their chances of finding a husband with a higher social status.

Immigrant women in Dasgupta and Warriar's (1996) study also stated that at a young age they were taught to associate femininity with subordination. Experiencing gendered restrictions and expectations were not only accepted, but also expected parts of being a woman. Their families had placed a great deal of importance on marriage, motherhood and religion. This led many of the women to believe that acceptable female roles included only those centered on being a "devoted daughter, nurturing wife, and sacrificing mother" (Dasgupta & Warriar 1996: 246). Families placed much emphasis on what the wife was expected to do in order to satisfy her husband and family. If the wife

adhered to the traditional female gender expectations, then the husband would be happy and the marriage would be a 'romantic fantasy.' No such behavior was expected of men. Emphasis was placed on what 'she' should be, not on what 'he' should be. All of the participants strongly believed that it was the wife's duty to sacrifice unquestioningly and yield to all of the husband's wants and wishes (Dasgupta and Warriar 1996).

Goel (2005) states that Indian cultural stereotypes of femininity are expressed and reinforced through religion, and particularly through the historical Hindu epic, *Ramayana*. The main characters, Ram and Sita, represent the ideal man and the perfect woman/wife. The story illustrates what is considered to be the ideal marital relationship: Sita is portrayed as completely devoted to her husband, irrespective of ensuing danger or personal safety. Through Sita's role in this story, women are taught not only what it means to be an ideal wife, but also how they must silently tolerate adversity. It is interesting to note that while a number of other Indian mythical heroines embody strength and power, Sita, remains the preferred role model for girls and women who are socialized to become wives and mothers. Sita's role exemplifies forbearance, tolerance, and preservation of family hierarchy. According to Goel (2005), these same values are seen as ideals in Indian women today. Indian wives are expected to abide by the traditions and expectations of the marital house and avoid any behavior that might bring shame to the natal and marital houses. In addition to this, promises made by the woman and man to each other during the wedding ceremony are vastly different. Goel (2005) states, "these words illustrate the traditional view of the Hindu marriage: the wife is expected to be the embodiment of dharma and virtue, the husband is expected to try" (650). According to Indian feminism, a women's strength lies in her ability and readiness to sacrifice for her

family. Cast in a negative light, self assertion and individualism are seen as reflective of western imperialist influence. In correspondence to Goel's (2005) analysis, it often means asking them to reject what they traditionally know about being a good wife and participating in/accepting what they were taught was shameful.

Another example of differences between Indian feminine and masculine gender expectations can be seen through annual tradition. As previously mentioned, the ideal Asian Indian wife shows extreme devotion to her husband. Kaurva Chauth, a devotional ritual is a fast kept by women for their husbands' longevity. During this fast, no food or water is consumed from sunrise to moonrise. Studies show that this is the most commonly adhered to fast practiced by Indian born women both in India and abroad. No such fast is done by men for women. Once again, traditions reinforce the importance of a devout wife. It also emphasizes the notion that support and security can only be provided by the husband, and that motherhood and providing a home life is a necessary mark of a good wife (Goel 2005). Much of the literature examining the understandings and attitudes toward adhering to traditional Indian gender expectations focuses on married first generation women. Exploring how these attitudes may differ among unmarried college-aged women in the U.S. would be beneficial in understanding how the contrasting, yet prevalent cultural narratives influence beliefs about traditional Indian femininity.

Cultural Pressures

Assimilation

As discussed above, expectations of Indian ideals are gendered. These gendered expectations are influenced by traditional Indian culture, as well as by the lifestyle and expectations of the host country for those residing outside of India. Studies suggest that

traditionally Indian cultural expectations have less of a following among those living in the U.S., and especially for children of Indian immigrants (Bacon 1996). Thus, adhering to traditional Indian gender expectations indicate to what extent a woman maintains her ethnic culture in the U.S. While South Asian women are culturally expected to be obedient, forbearing, and work for the collective, Western culture promotes independence and individualism (Inman 2006). In addition, gendered expectations and outcomes are often negotiated between sending and host cultures and communities. While generation is commonly used as a barometer measuring how much one is likely to adhere to expectations of the host or sending country, Portes and Rumbaut (Portes & Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut & Portes 2001; Portes & Rumbaut 1996) assert that the actual level of assimilation is an important factor to consider.

According to Portes and Rumbaut (1996), learning the language and culture of the host society is the beginning of the adaptation process, known as acculturation. Assimilation is the final stage in the process of integrating a foreign-born resident into “mainstream” society. This transition is measured over time and by occupation, residential neighborhood, language proficiency, cultural adaptation (Inman 2006), interracial marriage and education (Rumbaut & Portes 2001; Portes & Rumbaut 1996). Assimilation is important to study because it tells us about the individual’s negotiation of identity between traditional ethnic values and traditional American values. This is important for this present research specifically because it allows us to examine to what extent Indian women in the U.S. are retaining their ethnic culture and adhering to traditional Indian views about identity, as well as if and how much they are taking on the belief and values system of the dominant American culture. South Asian women in the

United States find themselves “negotiating a bicultural socialization” in two very different social systems. In order to adapt to American society, ethnic minorities often have different modes of utilizing the two cultures to construct an identity that may accept, fuse or reject cultural and traditional aspects of the ethnic and dominant societies (Manohar 2008, Inman 2006, Inman, Howard, Beaumont & Walker 2007). In doing this, they are exposed to cultural conflicts influencing how they negotiate their identities. This may result in “cultural value conflict” in which beliefs and values from an ethnic origin are internalized along with those held and/or enforced by the dominant culture (Inman 2006).

Previous literature has identified assimilation as a “straight-line movement” into the economic and social mainstream of the host society, while at the same time losing the ethnic culture and language (Gordon 1964). Many scholars today, however, do not agree this paradigm. Rumbaut and Portes (2001) conceptualize assimilation as a varied and un-uniform adaptation process. Here, assimilation is the product of the social context of ethnic family and community expectation, as well as outside influences from the host society. They assert an assimilation model which takes into account the multiple ways immigrants integrate into mainstream society to further explain this: segmented assimilation. They explain that assimilation has become more of a *segmented* process in which immigrant experiences of integration and acceptance into mainstream society vary. Experiences of first generation immigrants, language skills and acculturation of the parents and children, cultural and economic capital, as well as availability of family and community resources to assist with social and financial challenges largely affect a minority’s experience of segmented assimilation. Using segmented assimilation as an

umbrella term, Portes and Rumbaut (1996) explain four ways in which ethnics assimilate: consonant acculturation, dissonant acculturation, selective acculturation and consonant resistance to acculturation.

Consonant acculturation refers to when children and parents learn the host language and culture at a similar rate, and modify their behavior to fit the norms of the dominant society. Parents with higher levels of education and a more firm grasp of the English language are more likely to experience consonant acculturation as they can better understand and relate to how their children adjust to living in a different country (Rumbaut & Portes 2001). However, the clashing of expectations among the host and ethnic cultures can lead to a rise in the awareness of racial discrimination from the mainstream and an increase of ethnic solidarity and defensive identities in order to counter it (Portes & Rumbaut 2001).

Rumbaut and Portes (2001) assert that dissonant acculturation is far more problematic. This occurs when the children learn the host language at a faster rate than their parents do. This often leads to increased family conflict and decreased parental authority because of differing expectations, and a greater disregard for their ethnic culture. Rumbaut and Portes (2001) argue that working-class immigrants with lower levels of co-ethnic community solidarity are likely to experience dissonant acculturation because of increased economic tension and decreased community validation.

Rumbaut and Portes (2001) suggest that “selective acculturation,” a process in which immigrants learn and combine parts of the American and ethnic culture while maintaining strong bonds with the ethnic culture may have more positive results. They believe selective acculturation is specifically beneficial to non-white immigrants who are

more likely to experience higher levels of prejudice and discrimination. Fundamental to selective acculturation is the absorption and respect for key values of the ethnic culture. Conventional assimilationists may view this as having an adverse affect on the successful adaptation to the host culture. However, Portes and Rumbaut (Portes & Rumbaut 1996; Rumbaut & Portes 2001) assert that selective acculturation can lead to more positive psychosocial and achievement outcomes because it better preserves immigrant and cultural bonds across generations which give children a clear point of reference for their future lives.

Consonant resistance to acculturation is the final type of assimilation that Rumbaut and Portes (2001) explain. This occurs among immigrants who intend to return back to their sending country, regarding the host country as a temporary residence. In summary, each type of assimilation contributes to a varied and diverse immigrant and minority experience. It is important to consider the different forms of assimilation, and the role they each play in the negotiation of the female identity between Indian and American cultures.

Issues of Assimilation for Asian Indians and American Culture

There are contrasting views among children of immigrants regarding the establishment of an Indian American identity. The processes, experiences, and views of assimilation vary according to the individual. Bacon (1996) states that sometimes children of immigrants feel confused and experience difficulties when trying to negotiate between American and Indian cultural identities. Another position held by second generation Indians does not view establishing an Indian-American identity as problematic, but instead sees sharing cultural traditions and artifacts as a positive,

interesting experience. Yet another distinct position sees assimilation as unattainable. According to this perspective, despite citizenship, skin color keeps non-white immigrants from being 'true' Americans (Bacon 1996).

Bacon (1996) and Abraham (2005) assert that among Asian Indians the most visible and dominant adjustment issues include education, dating, communication and marriage. Much of the literature regarding education and Asian Indians pertains to pressure by parents for their children to achieve good grades. For some, getting an A+ seems like the only acceptable option. A good study ethic appears to be heavily embedded within the Indian culture in America. Bacon (1996) also states that many second generation Indians feel that their parents have a narrow view of what a 'good education' means. Medicine, engineering, and law are considered by many of the people Bacon interviewed to be the only respectable and successful occupations. Children's educational attainment and occupations are often seen as a reflection of the family. Education, however, is not considered a significant predictor of cultural retention (Inman 2006, Kurien 2005). Kurien (2005) states that in general, Asian Indian immigrant parents tend to view education as a means to reduce racial and ethnic barriers in the U.S. Within traditional Indian culture, however, educational attainment holds different meanings for men and women. For men, it is a means to succeed and find a well-paying job. For women, education is considered a way to increase status and chances of finding a suitable husband (Dasgupta & Warrier 1996). Since an increasing number of women are joining the workforce, and higher education generally leads to better-paying jobs, what deserves further attention is how educational attainment affects attitudes about having financial independence and self-sufficiency. In addition, the question remains about the extent to

which these ideas are found in the Indian culture in the U.S. This may help understand a change in the women's attitudes toward higher education, and if this influences how they feel about traditional Indian gender expectations and independence within a marriage.

A second common issue in the adjustment to American culture is dating. Between Indian and American culture, dating can encompass an array of different meanings. According to Bacon's (1996) research, Many Indian immigrants reject dating because it is viewed in a negative light. Indian parents believe that it goes against traditional Indian culture, negatively influences their children's well-being, gets in the way of the ideal study ethic, and leads to a degeneration of family values (Dasgupta 1998, Bacon 1996). Bacon (1996) found that the Indian participants she interviewed often equated dating with pre-marital sex. Along the same lines, Dasgupta's (1998) research indicated that the general consensus according to Indian parents was that boys only wanted girls for sex. Problems of teen rape and pregnancy were considered enough of a concern to prevent their children, especially their daughters, from dating (Dasgupta 1998, Inman, Howard, Beaumont & Walker 2007). Although this is a commonly stated viewpoint, Bacon (1996) asserts that it is not the only one. Many parents acknowledge that their children are missing an important part of American adolescence when they are not allowed to date, but feel unsure about how to respond to this. For parents who share this concern, group dating appears to be a viable compromise between American culture which accepts and encourages dating, and Indian culture which views it as a distraction to academics and a precursor to premarital sex (Bacon 1996).

Second generation Indians also have varying stances on dating. Bacon (1996) reports some participants as viewing dating as a means to get to know another individual,

and not necessarily leading to a relationship. Others make a distinct connection between dating and marriage, meaning that dating is done with the intent to marry. Still others believe dating to be a positive and useful experience as they would not want to marry someone they did not know. On the other hand, some second generation Indians share the same views as many of the traditional Indian immigrants. Some assert that they do not need to date in order to make friends and that waiting until an 'appropriate age' to date decreases the likelihood of divorce (Bacon 1996).

In addition, there are diverse attitudes about interracial dating. While interracial dating is on the rise, literature suggests that it is still largely unaccepted within the Asian community (Bacon 1996, Fujino 1997, Manohar 2008, Mok 1999). Mok (1999) states that Asians in interracial relationships with white Americans are not uncommonly accused of having little pride in their ethnic culture, and in some cases disowned for dating a non-Asian (Fujino 1997, Manohar 2008, Mok 1999). One line of research suggests that minorities with decreased bonds and attachment to the ethnic community and identity are more likely to date interracially. However, Mok (1999) found that among Asians, levels of attachment to the ethnic identity did not prove to be a significant variable determining the likelihood of interracial dating.

As illustrated, there are multiple views toward dating. The more traditional Asian Indians tend to reject dating as it goes against traditional Indian culture and values. Others, however, view dating as a good way to get to know potential partners. Because traditional Indian culture opposes dating, it can be assumed that Asian Indians who do date are taking on this aspect of American culture. This is likely to lead to higher rates of assimilation, as well as more Americanized views about gender expectations and possibly

less traditionally Indian views toward marital preservation. Exploring college-aged women's views on dating would provide insight into the extent that these women experience assimilation, what aspects of the culture they are encouraged to retain, and how they negotiate traditional Indian expectations about dating in American society.

The third common issue experienced by Indian immigrants and their children is a disconnect in communication. According to Bacon's (2006) research, there appears to be a general consensus among those interviewed that there is a "lack of openness" which prevents both the parent and child from listening and understanding each others' points of view. With a significant gap in communication, perhaps children of immigrants will be less likely to follow cultural norms, including traditional gendered expectations (Rumbaut & Portes 2001). Looking into whether there is a communication disconnect among Indian parents and children may also provide insight into transmission of culture and traditional gender expectations and thoughts on marriage preservation, and how they are negotiated between traditional Indian and American cultures.

Asian Indian groups and cultural organizations have been formed in the U.S. based on language, caste and religion in order to transfer Indian culture and values from one generation to the next. Indian festivals and celebrations have been performed in order to maintain nostalgic cultural traditions for immigrants, as well as familiarize subsequent generations with the ethnic heritage (Dasgupta 1998). Kurien (2005) asserts that religious institutions also play an important role in cultural transmission, ethnic cultural retention and assimilation for Indian Americans. Additionally, Inman (2006) argues that speaking the ethnic language and participating in public activities specific to the Indian ethnicity also serves to retain the culture.

Although multiple cultural centers and community and religious organizations have been formed specifically with the intent to uphold Indian culture in American society and transmit Indian culture to subsequent generations, family still serves as one of the primary socializing agents. Inman (2006) states that many South Asian families pressure women to assume gender expectations that closely adhere to the traditional Indian family structure. This identity asserts traditional female gender expectations, placing family as the foremost responsibility and values associated with conservative intimate partner relations. At the same time, dominant American culture imposes a different set of values. As a result, Asian Indian women in the United States might find themselves trying to balance conflicting cultural expectations.

Finally, in order to understand the cultural and societal factors which influence Indian women's experiences with marriage, independence and identity, it is also important to look at the common forms of marriage in the ethnic culture. Bacon (1996) states that many Asian Indians face pressure from family and the Indian community to marry within their own caste, religion, status, ethnicity, and so on. Some parents place a great amount of emphasis on required characteristics of the potential spouse and have much influence over whom their child will marry. Others however, leave this responsibility up to their children (Abraham 2005; Bacon 1996).

Among Asian Indian immigrants, the most frequent types of marriages include arranged and 'love' marriages. For arranged marriages, there has traditionally been the expectation to adhere to customary gender relations. As a result, there is a widely held sentiment that these women should and will promote a strong sense of stability and unity in the family (Abraham 2005).

However, Bacon (1996) notes a common response to arranged marriages from second generation Indians: Many of them feel that they should not be pressured into a marriage. Instead they should be free to make their own choices. In advocating against arranged marriages, Bacon states that some second generation Indians believe that their parents seek potential spouses that look good on a resume rather than for personality compatibility. In other words, parents value occupation, status, and caste more in potential marriage partners than the compatibility of personalities (Bacon 1996). This method of match-making is very traditional among Asian Indians. Although it is becoming a less common in the U.S. and India, this practice still persists.

‘Love’ marriages refer to those in which a man and woman decide to get married on their own accord with little influence from family members. Arranged marriages are still prevalent. However, Abraham (2005) asserts that ‘love’ marriages are on the increase among second generation Indians in the U.S., though she provides no statistical proportions for this. Also, there has been a small increase in the number of interethnic marriages among Asian Indians, though these are largely unaccepted by the Indian community (Abraham 2005).

Bacon (1996) states that in general, Indian immigrant parents desire to “preserve the Indian” and “guard against the mainstream” (25). When talking about hardships faced by living within both Indian and American culture, Bacon states that a common piece of advice given by elders includes retaining one’s heritage, while choosing only the positive from American society. Bacon (1996) also notes that “choosing the positive” refers to educational attainment. Negatives, she states, include, but are not limited to, wearing ripped clothing, using profane language, drugs, dating, sex, and drinking alcohol (Bacon

1996). According to Mehta and Belk (1991) and the eleven immigrant families they interviewed in an urban area in the Western part of the U.S., immigrant parents feared that each of these could potentially contribute to their children losing their Indian identity. They worried that their children would not retain their ethnic culture, including language and tradition, and would marry outside of their ethnic group.

Critical concerns of assimilation among the Asian Indian community in the U.S. include those regarding cultural value conflict between Indian and American culture. Some of the major issues include gendered expectations, familial obedience and obligation, individualism vs. collectivism, marriage and dating. Contrasting views, beliefs and morals of Indian and American culture add an element contributing to the complexity of negotiating the Indian American identity (Dasgupta 1998). Therefore, I intend to examine the bicultural negotiation of gender expectations through educational attainment and independence, views on dating and marriage, and clothing and demeanor to gain a better understanding of how these women are shaping their identities as Indian women.

Authenticity

Adhering to ethnic cultural expectations versus those of the host society has a hand in determining whether one truly retains his or her ethnic identity (Inman 2006) and thus remains authentically Indian. Attitudes and behaviors regarding dating and marriage, education and independence, and dress and demeanor are all important aspects contributing to the authenticity of the identity of the Indian woman. Grazian (2003) further expands on this notion of authenticity. He explains it as the ability to “conform to an idealized representation of reality” (Grazian 2003: 10), and in the case of the eleven interviewed Indian women, expectations regarding their appearance and behavior.

Authenticity refers to upholding appearances and behaviors that represent idealized expectations. It includes conforming to a particular set of expectations based on how one should dress, behave and believe. In addition, it refers to how genuine and natural the performance of expectations is, as well as the ability to be seen not as the imitation, but rather as the original or traditional. It is measured by how well the idealized vision of the cultural identity is represented (Grazian 2003). Among Indian women, it refers to beliefs, behaviors and dress. As one assimilates into the dominant society, there is less of a chance of maintaining ethnic culture, including traditional Indian gendered expectations (Dasgupta 1998, Portes & Rumbaut 1996). Dasgupta states that second generation children tend to hold more liberal attitudes about women's roles in society (1998), which could perhaps lead to alternate, and potentially less authentic views and behaviors concerning dress, independence, relationships and gendered expectations. As a result, I intend to examine what the "authentic Indian identity" is to these college women, and to what extent they experience pressures to adhere to authentic Indian gendered expectations and the degree to which they take on a more Americanized expectation of female gender. Exploring this will provide insight into attitudes and the possible cultural pressures they face from the Indian community concerning dating and relationships, independence, gender and marital preservation. Researching the gender expectations and understandings of Indian women in the U.S. will allow me to explore authenticity and the prevalence of traditional Indian feminine ideals of being a wife and mother, obedience to the husband and nurturance, as well as examine the extent to which these women believe that Indian wives should assume the responsibility of preserving family unity.

In summary, predominant cultural narratives of Indian women construct them as

wives, mothers and homemakers. However, because of assimilation and changing images, categorical identities are constantly being challenged and re-shaped. According to Loseke (2007), widespread circulating narratives reveal the real experiences of a very few people while ignoring the complexity of social life. Prevailing cultural narratives also tend to be extremely narrow and unidimensional and so, again, are not adequate to describe the characteristics or experiences of real people. General cultural images are not sensitive to the diversity among women. Typifications serve to collapse the women's diverse attitudes and experiences (Loseke 2007). As such, I explore how cultural and personal narratives are being re-created among eleven college-aged Indian women. I examine the perceived expectations placed on them by their families and surrounding Indian communities, as well as those they have of themselves. Because prior literature has indicated gendered restrictions and expectations, I will examine how their experience and attitudes regarding relationships and marriage, education and independence, and clothing and demeanor contribute to authenticity and their identities as Indian women.

Chapter 2: Methods

Individuals often draw on their understandings of cultural narratives to create and re-shape their understandings of their selves- their personal identities (Loseke 2007). Within Indian and American culture, gender expectations differ and at times conflict with one another. Both cultures have very different views on dating and marriage, reasons for obtaining higher education and maintaining an authentic Indian identity through dress and demeanor. Examining assimilation and ethnic cultural retention versus how influential the dominant society is on women of Indian descent will provide us with valuable information about attitude trends among Asian Indians in America.

Sample

Because education is highly valued in the Indian community, Asian Indians are encouraged to attend college. College is a place where students may experience a form of culture shock as they are exposed to many people with diverse attitudes and experiences. This could play a major role in the understanding of American culture, and the re-shaping of a personal identity. Additionally, dating at this time is considered to be more acceptable for Indian women. Because many women on a college campus are not under the close watch of their parents, they have more independence in making their own choices regarding if and whom they date. Also, this is the age when women typically start being asked by others in the Indian community if they are seeing anybody “special,” or “marriage-worthy.” Indian community members are also more likely to either arrange or

ask to arrange a meeting between a woman of this age and a potential suitor. Because of this, I conducted interviews with eleven self-selected female college students at a large University in a mid-sized city in the southeastern part of the United States. I obtained the sample over the course of three months by asking women whose physical appearance suggested that they had Indian ancestry in and around the library their ethnicity, and if they would be interested in participating in a study about gendered expectations and identity. Only two women declined being part of this study. This is a small self-selected sample that includes only those obtaining higher education. I in no way claim generalizability, however, I do feel that interviewing college women will provide me with a glimpse of the attitudes toward cultural and personal identity narratives and gendered expectations of single young Indian women above the age of 18.

The participants range in age from 18 to 24, and range from women in their first year of college up to women pursuing a PhD or a second Master's degree. At the time of the interviews, six of the women were pursuing undergraduate degrees; four were in Master's programs, including one obtaining a second Master's degree; and one who was in a PhD program. This sample includes five first generation, one one and a half generation, four second generation and woman who believed herself to be seventh generation Indian. These women range from those who seem deeply embedded in the ethnic culture to those who identify more with American society.

Research Technique

My interest was in the attitudes and experiences of identity including gendered expectations regarding education and independence, relationships and marriage, and clothing and demeanor. The most appropriate research method for such questions is in-

depth interviews. Although a rubric of open-ended questions was constructed, interviews took a conversational approach (Kvale 1996). Accordingly, themes emerged based on what each of the women felt was important to her identity as Indian woman (Interview topics and questions are listed in Appendix A). Interviews took place in either private study rooms in the school library or their homes, and ranged from forty minutes to two hours long. Through interviews, participants had the opportunity to talk about various complexities within Indian-American culture and their personal understanding of what is expected from them as Indian women. I examined participants' attitudes toward traditional Indian gender expectations and the extent to which they feel pressure to adhere to them, as well as the pressures they perceive from the Indian community regarding maintaining specific aspects of traditional Indian culture.

Being a female of Indian descent and aware of the dominant cultural narrative as well as the gendered expectations of behavior, my positionality as an Indian woman placed me as an "insider" with these women who appeared to feel comfortable talking about their experiences (Kvale 1996) without having to give in-depth definitions of Hindi terms (such as common forms of clothing and other material markers of identity). While I am proficient in Gujarati and know a bit of Hindi, many of the first generation women also seemed to feel comfortable speaking in Hindi to convey their attitudes or the commonly held expectations of them. Because language reflects cultural values, at times conveying a message in the mother-tongue held more meaning than the English translation. Being an "insider" allowed me to ask questions about dominant cultural and personal expectations that may have been overlooked or perhaps not recognized by an "outsider." Gender, ethnicity, proficiency in Gujarati and awareness of cultural practices

and behavior all served to facilitate a comfortable atmosphere and communication with these women.

Data Analysis

A majority of the eleven interviews were conducted in English. At times, four of the first generation women spoke in either Hindi or Gujarati, and usually to emphasize a particular expectation or emotion. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Data were then categorized according to the interpreted expectations of the women's parents and surrounding Indian communities for what it meant to maintain the cultural identity of an Indian woman. These surrounded: marriage and relationships, education and independence, and clothing and demeanor. For these women, however, the perception of who an Indian woman is and how she should act does not necessarily coincide with what they are deciding to take on as part of their own identities. Instead, the women believe they are more or less choosing for themselves what aspects of the traditional Indian female identity they are holding on to, discarding, and shaping and molding according to their individual experiences and changing times. While religion and religiosity were mentioned in the interviews, it did not appear to be a central part of the identity of "Indian woman," so therefore I will not examine women's understandings of religion. Not surprisingly, gender was the major theme that reoccurred throughout each of the interviews, including the expectations regarding relationships and marriage, education and independence, and clothing and demeanor.

While each of the women stated experiencing different types of cultural pressures from themselves and their surrounding Indian communities to adhere to varying aspects of the traditional Indian female identity, they all appeared to be interrelated. The main

theme tying each of them together was attitudes toward dating and ultimately marriage. Regardless of their personal beliefs toward marriage, a majority of the women based expectations of themselves on their feelings about marriage. Though attitudes varied greatly, marriage remains a prevalent expectation for these women. Accordingly, I will begin with the expectations and attitudes toward relationships and marriage, and elaborate on how this relates to education and independence, and clothing and demeanor in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3: Relationships and Marriage

Dating

Nine of the eleven women stated having a less than open system of communication with their parents regarding dating and relationships to some extent because dating is not considered to be part of traditional Indian culture. This remained consistent, despite immigration generation. The women were very hesitant about telling their parents about current and/or previous relationships. For the Indian communities surrounding these women, dating is considered to be culturally Western. Others believed that being of an “appropriate age” to date remained an important issue for their parents. According to their families, they are still considered to be too young to be in a relationship. In addition, dating is something that ‘good’ Indian girls do not participate in. Avani (all names are pseudonyms), a first generation Information and Technology student, concisely states a commonly held attitude toward dating:

If I want to date with a guy today, [my parents] won’t allow me. They’ll say, “What is this?”...That is not Indian culture...I go out with a guy friend, that’s not a problem. But dating is different.

While this was a commonly experienced attitude among these women, others had different opinions. For them, dating was acceptable to their parents because they were considered to be old enough to make responsible decisions about being in a relationship. Similar to a majority of the interviewed women, Lee who introduced herself with a shortened, Americanized and androgynous version of her real name, answered my

question about relationships:

P: How do your parents feel about you being in a relationship?

Lee: Absolutely no issues with it. (Laughs) I haven't had any so far...But yeah, totally fine with it because I'm 24 years old right now, so they know if I am in a relationship, it's totally called for. It should be.

Two of the participants had a slightly different experience. Dating was allowed by the parents of Amy and Reena, both of whom were raised in the United States. For Amy, a fourth year International Business major, dating was never prohibited and she claimed to have had relationships that her parents knew about as early as grade school. Reena, a psychology student getting ready to apply to graduate programs, believed her parents had no problem with her having a relationship, but she only started dating when she was in college. Both women had an open system of communication with their parents in terms of dating and relationships. In a statement that expresses the similar attitudes held by their parents, Reena explains:

They're very open-minded with some things. We have a very open relationship in the sense that communication is there on all four sides with the four of us...so we don't feel like we have to sneak around or anything. I know that not many people have that, especially with traditional parents. I don't feel they stifle us in any way.

While there was obvious variation in terms of what these women felt was accepted in the Indian community, the majority of the women felt that dating was inappropriate unless it was done with the intent to marry. This sentiment was expressed most vocally by four of the first generation women. Avani conveys the attitude held by the parents and Indian community:

If I say I want to date with a guy...[my parents] won't allow me...If you are going to date a person, you have to marry him...you can date if you are going to get married for sure...In that case, they will allow a date.

Consistent with Rumbaut and Portes' theories of assimilation (Rumbaut & Portes 2001; Portes & Rumbaut 1996), the women in general tended to take a more liberal stance toward dating than their parents, although at times their attitudes did overlap. Among the women born in the United States, Dhara, Reena and Amy participated in casual dating. While Mya sees nothing wrong with it, however, she does not date because she believes her parents would object. However she believes nothing is wrong with casual dating. Attitudes toward casual dating were mixed between the first generation women as well. In general, however, dating was taken much more seriously among first generation women. Five of them stated that they would only date a person if they felt there was a strong possibility of marriage in the future. Their responses indicate a modification of casual dating and the traditional arranged marriage. Avani expresses this sentiment:

So, I won't be like my parents say. I won't say, "No, ok. I won't date anyone. I won't go out at all." I won't do that at all... And in this case I won't date 10 or 15 people before I get married and, uhh be like totally an American, I won't be like that also.... What I would do is, if I find someone whom I like, probably I will go out... and if things move well for a period of time, well and good, I will probably tell about that person to my parents. And my parents, obviously they love me, they will maybe admit me to get married. If they don't like, I will just move on. I don't want. This is better than getting married to an unknown person. The known is definitely better than an unknown stranger (laughs).

Avani, along with a few other first generation women, believes dating is an American concept although it is becoming more accepted within the community. Drawing on theories of assimilation, and specifically selective acculturation, dating with the intent to marry combines the traditional Indian values of maintaining purity and innocence with American values of freedom of choice.

There was variation in terms of what each of the women perceived as being acceptable to their parents. Some believed their parents were open to them dating, while others felt being in a relationship would not be permitted by their parents. Age did appear to be one of the primary determining factors for whether dating was acceptable for these women. Women in their last year of undergraduate work, and those pursuing their graduate degrees were more likely to believe their parents thought dating was an acceptable practice. In addition, there was variation in terms of how each of the women felt about dating and relationships. While attitudes varied, the women tended to be more open to the idea of dating than their parents.

Interethnic Relationships

While the women generally referred to relationships between Indians and non-Indians as ‘interracial,’ I will use the terms ‘interethnic’ and ‘ethnicity’ to discuss the women’s attitudes toward cross-cultural relationships.

The women’s interpretations of their parents’ and the Indian communities’ attitudes toward interethnic relationships were extremely important to them. While the women told of having different expectations, the majority felt that interethnic relationships were generally not accepted among their parents or the Indian community. Six of the women felt interethnic relationships were something that their parents would simply not prefer.

P: What [ethnicity is your] boyfriend?

Nina: He’s Filipino....I haven’t told my parents yet....I’m not scared they’ll say no or anything. I know they won’t say, “No.” It’s just that they’ll prefer me to like, get an Indian boyfriend, or like Indian relationship.

But for others, having an interethnic relationship was interpreted as having much more serious consequences. According to Mya, it was a matter of ‘disgracing’ her family. Dhara stated that if her parents found out about her Filipino boyfriend, she might be made to transfer to a different school. Interestingly, the women who were born and raised in the United States felt their parents would object most strongly. Mya elaborates her understanding of this general sentiment:

Parents are afraid for their children because this is such a foreign culture that they don’t want for children. Because when you, you’re in another culture, your background is another thing. What are you? Are you Indian because you’re born that way, or are you American because you are born here and you have to get along with them, you know. So that confusion kind of messes up a lot of people. And you know that when some kids do really stupid things and the parents are automatically, you know, they grow up, like they raise their kids with certain rules and say “You gotta do this, you gotta do this, you gotta do this in a certain way” so. It just seems like it’s a lot more structured here, like it’s almost expected.

Not all of the women experienced these restrictions. Interestingly, the two women who had families who were more open to interethnic relationships were also born and brought up in India. Not only was this type of relationship accepted in their families, but for Mina who is first generation born and brought up in Calcutta, it was even encouraged by her father.

P: How do your parents feel about [you having a non-Indian boyfriend]?

Mina: Uh, my dad’s really happy about that. Because he’s like, “I don’t want you to stick just with Indians because *you’re* an Indian. You go ahead and look.” My mother is still not that comfortable, but maybe because she’s never lived for very long outside of India.

In contrast to what was expressed by a majority of the interviewees, Mina’s parents, specifically her father, hold a very different perspective toward interethnic dating. In this case, Mina’s father did not feel that having an interethnic relationship took away from his

daughter's identity as an Indian woman. Perhaps here, it was not a matter of 'losing her identity,' but rather developing more of a bi-cultural identity.

The interviewees generally were more accepting of interethnic relationships than their parents. Many of them stated that in the end, it was 'about the person.' However, interethnic relationships were not wholly accepted by all of the women. Three women, all of whom were first generation, felt particularly strong about it. For Sveta, it was a matter of adhering to 'traditional Indian values.' For all three of them, marrying within is considered important in maintaining their identities as Indian women. Similar to the sentiment expressed by Kaya and Seema, Avani states:

P: What about if the person is not Indian?

Avani: (laughs) I won't fall in love with an American (still laughing)....I just don't think I will fall in love with an American...I won't date an American...my friend who wants to get married to an American...I don't know why. She says she'll come to the U.S. next year. She's planning to for her studies. And what I used to say is, "With an American...no, no way. The culture is different."...I prefer someone who knows my language. (laughs) When you, when you converse with a person who knows the language, my language is Tamil, the bond is more than conversing in English.

The first generation women had different levels of acceptance towards interethnic relationships in the U.S. and India. As illustrated by Avani's comments, the women generally felt that being in an interethnic relationship meant either stepping out of the societal norm, or not adhering to cultural values. Four women were more accepting of interethnic relationships in the U.S. because they feel Indians in America are significantly more Americanized, and in a sense *less Indian* or not authentic. In not adhering to the expectation that Indian women should participate in only intraethnic marriages, authenticity and the closeness of ties to the Indian culture were challenged. According to

Grazian (2003) it did not conform to the idealized representation of reality. Along the same lines, these same women tend to view Indians in India who are involved in interethnic relationships as stepping out of the norms of society. Kaya explains this sentiment:

P: Um, if let's say an Indian girl was walking down the street holding hands with a non-Indian boy, what would you and your friends think?

Kaya: (laughs) What is she doing? Yeah (laughs). Definitely, that's what I said. They'll pass comments. That's what I said to you just now (laughs). If you do something wrong, something weird, something noticeable, that's what I want to say. They'll pass comments.

The first generation women who were uncomfortable with interethnic relationships believed this is because of perceived cultural differences and language barriers. Similar to their interpretation of their parents' attitudes, there was also the notion that a non-Indian partner could not be interested in having a long-term relationship with an Indian woman. These women assumed relationships with non-Indians were temporary.

However, not all first generation women had reservations about interethnic relationships. Aligning themselves closer with how they interpreted their parents' perceptions, Lee and Mina had no problem with interethnic relationships. Both did not see ethnicity as a significant factor affecting their decision to date or marry a person. For these two women, marrying within is not considered an important component in maintaining their identity as Indian women. According to Mina:

P: ...How do you feel about interethnic relationships?

Mina: I think it's a good thing. I don't think race or ethnicity should come into play when you are having a relationship with somebody. Just, you like the person for whatever his or her qualities are, you like that person as an individual. So I think if it happens, well and good.

For Reena, who was born in Orlando, and Avani, who was born in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, having a relationship with an Indian partner was a means to maintain Indian culture and uphold their traditions. Avani, who felt extremely rooted to Indian culture, plans to uphold the tradition of moving to her husband's house once married. For her, marrying someone from her hometown and who speaks the same mother-tongue ensures that she will be able to maintain her identity as an Indian woman, and uphold the Indian culture and values she grew up with in India. In Reena's case, as with a few others who have a strong bond with the Indian community in the U.S., marrying within is more a way to maintain the ethnic culture and identity. Reena states:

I personally prefer Indian guys...it would be a lot more cohesive, your relationship, because of living and blah blah blah. Because the cultures, they're pretty much a given. You don't have to like figure it out, like how to compromise and how to blend the two with religion or culture or whatever.

In addition to the attitudes held by the Indian community about interethnic relationships, women also perceived an apparent double standard. They believed it was much more acceptable for men to be in an interethnic relationship than women. For some it was more acceptable because men's relationships were seen as more of a "fling," whereas women's relationships were assumed to be more permanent. For others, it was a matter of retaining Indian culture. In traditional Indian marriages, wives generally move in with or at least closely to the husband's family and begin to follow the customs and traditions of his side. In order to uphold the traditions of the culture, some of the women stated that it was important to marry within. Avani explains:

People in India, I mean, my parents, if a guy's getting married to a non-Indian girl, they would say okay. But a girl getting married to a non-Indian guy, they won't accept it...Girls get adapted to whatever the uhh,

husband's whatever. In India, it's like that...If you are North Indian and there's a South Indian girl getting married to a North Indian guy, it's like she goes to his culture.

This tradition was more commonly encouraged and likely to be upheld by the first generation women who appeared to have a stronger attachment to following certain aspects of Indian culture. None of the second generation women talked about this expectation of them. Assimilation literature explains that interethnic marriage is rare, especially among non-white first generation immigrants (Rumbaut & Portes 2001; Portes & Rumbaut 1996). For ethnic immigrants, marriage within the ethnic group is considered important in maintaining their own ethnic culture and tradition (Portes & Rumbaut 2001, Rumbaut & Portes 2001). Perhaps marrying intraethnically is highly encouraged among some of the first generation interviewees because of the strong traditional expectation of Indian women in India to move closer to the husbands' families and become acculturated to their traditions. It may be important that women marry within the Indian culture, and specifically their ethnic group, so as to maintain their own ethnic cultural traditions.

Most women did experience parental and cultural pressures to remain in a relationship with another Indian. Regardless of whether the women were born in the U.S. or in India, the majority of them believed that in their surrounding Indian communities being in an interethnic relationship called women's morals into question, as well as whether she respected herself, Indian culture and her family. This was not necessarily the case for Indian men in interethnic relationships. According to the women's experience of the surrounding Indian community, there was the common perception that if the woman respected her culture, she would not have started a relationship or married outside of the Indian community. Eight of the eleven women shared this interpretation regarding

interethnic relationships and the Indian community. Mina expresses the common interpretation:

P: What about if an Indian girl were [in a relationship] with a non-Indian boyfriend, what do you think other Indian parents would say?

Mina: Uh, if it's a girl with another non-Indian guy, the relationship is such as, I mean the individuals in the relationship, it doesn't matter as much as the girl's upbringing or- it sounds really corny- but her morals, see. How does she think, and all of that. And how is the family thing really, how does the family react to it. But if it's a boy, the focus is more on the *fact* of the relationship, "Ok, so how, why does he like"—it's not like an Indian cannot like a non-Indian, but more like "why does he like *her*? What's there in *her*?" So.

P: So do you feel any pressure from the Indian community to stay with another Indian?

Mina: I think so. I think there is. Whenever there is a scene over here, the match-makings that go on is still very restricted to the Indian community.

The strong theme here is that an Indian woman should be with an Indian man otherwise she is criticized for not following traditional family values and morals. The moral values of her family are also called into question. According to the interviewees, women in interethnic relationships are viewed differently than their male counterparts. Along the same lines, Mya also states:

Mya:...like, it's okay for an Indian guy to run around with a non-Indian girl, but if an Indian girl is with a non-Indian guy, it's like 'Oh my God, she's mmm' (shakes her head disapprovingly).

P: What do you think they are thinking at that point about the Indian girl?

Mya: That she's uhh, inappropriate...Like, "Oh, she's a bad girl because she doesn't respect herself and blah blah blah and she doesn't want to be Indian" which is not necessarily true...Yeah, definitely, because yeah, I see it a lot. They expect you to act [differently]...there's a big difference I think.

As Mya expresses, the Indian community surrounding five of the interviewees disapprove

of women in interethnic relationships because the woman is seen as stepping away from her culture in favor of another.

There are diverse attitudes regarding the practice of dating, as well as interethnic dating. A few of the women believed there was nothing wrong with dating and have interethnic relationships. Others, however, believed that practicing either one or both significantly challenged their authenticity as Indian women. Dating and interethnic relationships were for some not only considered to be Americanized behavior, but also *un-Indian* behavior. In this regard, that which was considered to be part American culture, was also seen as not adhering to, and at times disrespecting Indian culture.

Arranged and 'Love' Marriages

The women had very different attitudes toward arranged marriage. Among the second generation women, arranged marriage was seen as either being too far removed from their lives, or did not appear to have strong feelings about it one way or another. None of them stated holding particularly strong attitudes about arranged marriage. They did not believe having an arranged marriage was a cultural expectation of them. Dhara, for example, who did not see arranged marriage as a common practice anymore, stated that she knew very little about it and accordingly did not believe that she would have one. And Mya stated that her feelings about arranged marriage were not coercive, but rather depended on her personal situation at the time.

P: How do you feel about getting an arranged marriage?

Mya: Umm, ok. I think that changes on the point, or the moment. Um, because right now, I don't really care. I don't like anyone anyways...So arranged marriage, umm, ok. If I don't have anyone in mind and if I don't care...--obviously it's not going to be some random [person] out of like a catalog or something. It's going to be someone closer. So therefore I think

I'm luckier than a lot of Indian girls that way because in India you don't even know who you are marrying half the time...So, as of right now I don't care because I know my parents aren't going to force me to get married or do this or that...But, say in a couple years or something and if I met somebody and I really, really like him, but I don't have the guts to tell my mom or dad, then I'm pretty sure my point of view would be, "Oh, I don't like arranged marriages!" So I'm pretty sure it changes on the situation.

According to Reena, also second generation, the concept of arranged marriage has been transformed from the traditional sense of the parents finding a suitable partner to parents introducing prospective partners to each other. For her, arranged marriage no longer meant being introduced to someone through family or close friends, and then being expected to marry within a short period of time. Instead the concept has changed to include simply being introduced to a potentially compatible individual, with no expectation of marriage. Reena explains:

I don't think, because like I told you, my parents aren't like ultraconservative, I don't think it would be like in the 'shock' sense that everybody thinks that "Arranged marriage! You won't see him until your wedding day!" You know, it's not something that would be remotely possible in my family. Um, I think that for my family, 'arranged' would more mean them being introduced to a guy, somebody who maybe had been brought to their attention. And if like they're interested, they might pass on information to me or whatever, and then it would be up to me and the guy to, you know, get to know each other through the phone, whatever, like meeting and stuff like that. So I don't think—my outlook on that, I'm not too worried. I don't have a fear that will wake up one day and my parents will be like, "Surprise! You're getting engaged today! Figure out something to wear!" So that's not something I have to think about. But that's why I'm not too worried about arranged marriages.

Reena does not feel that having a traditional arranged marriage is likely. The altered definition sees it more as a way of introducing potential romantic interests to one another. Using this conceptualization of an *arranged marriage*, not only does she believe that it is more acceptable to her, but also that it is more likely to happen. For her, the traditional

idea of an arranged marriage has been modified according to more contemporary and Westernized views of marriage where she would be introduced to someone, but it would be her decision to take the next step and establish a relationship.

The first generation interviewees had more concrete and extreme attitudes toward arranged marriage as it was more closely linked to their experiences and cultural expectations. Similar to Mya, Avani had contrasting opinions about the practice. In accordance to Reena's statement, however, Avani's attitude also illustrates a changing sentiment toward arranged marriage. According to assimilation theory and specifically selective acculturation, Avani appears to be combining the dominant attitudes of Indian and American culture, taking an approach that incorporates the cultural expectations and practices of both. She explains her opinion of arranged marriage:

Uhh, I have two views in this. Number 1, I like the concept of it, it's good to be like how my parents say. I won't say that it is bad because that is how the culture is, how the culture is in India, in the place I was brought up. Maybe if I was born and brought up here, it's a different case. I would say, "Oh my God! They are so primitive! And they're like being like this!" I would have told like that. But, since I was brought up in India, I prefer—ok, being like that is good because when you date, you expose so many things, you tell so many things which is supposed to be with one person to whom you're going to get married with. That's one thing I like with, I like about my parents views. I'd like to stick onto it. O.K., there's another thing here, which I don't like. I don't want to get married to a person who is, um, who I don't know. Like in arranged marriage. They find someone through someone, through so many relations we find some person, and you don't even know if he is up to your wave length and if he is a right match for you, they allow up to talk and to date with him, what if you get married to that person and in a year I find that he is totally not for me. Then that's like a whole life is like, "Ugh, I can just divorce him for that." O.K. So in this particular, your point, I prefer you should know a person. And you should go and know well of the person before marrying him.

The other first generation women, however, take one of two sides: they either view arranged marriage positively or negatively. Nina, who was born in India, but moved here

when she was thirteen, had a more positive perception of arranged marriage; however she states that she would only consider having one in what she sees to be an extreme circumstance. Also similar to traditional attitudes about arranged marriage, as well as previous statements, Nina believes that when it comes to arranged marriage, parents have their children's best interest in mind. As she explains:

Nina: Hmmm, I don't think it's bad at all. Because what if there's a girl, she's like 27 and she can't—not like find a guy, but she lives with a guy for five years and he left her. And if her parents can find a better guy for her, then go for it, you know. I don't think it's bad at all. And if her parents like know what kind of person she would like, then they would only pick the best for her. So I don't think it's bad at all.

P: Yeah. Would you ever get one?

N: Ehh, it depends on the situation, like if I am 26 or 27 and I'm like, you know. At that age, you can't really go out to the club and say, "I'm ready, I'm single," you know. You can't be like that, you know (giggles). So at that point, yeah, I'd consider it, I think.

Some of the first generation women also had more romanticized feelings toward arranged marriage. Seema, for example, sees arranged marriage as a fantasy in which two people gradually get to know each other. Despite being in college and living in the United States for two years, she still holds very traditional attitudes toward arranged marriage.

P: How do you feel about arranged marriage?

Seema: Personal level, I find it very exciting. I wish I would be doing an arranged marriage. I find it very, I don't know whether this is some fantasy about it, but I feel very excited. Parents finding, searching. You have a few options. You, for whatever reason choose somebody. You enter a new life. You start exploring that person, you know. It's knowing somebody new--their life, their friends.

However, Lee and Mina, both of whom have parents opposed to arranged marriage, stand on the other side of the spectrum. Both are first generation and prefer 'love' marriages.

While Lee, for example, does not believe arranged marriages are necessarily negative, they are not appropriate for her. She and her family believe that she can and should choose her own partner without too much help or influence from her parents. She will take her parents' opinions into consideration, but she does not expect to rely on them to find a partner for her. For Lee, 'love' marriages are not only preferable, but also more realistic. Mina too prefers 'love' marriages and holds a stronger attitude toward arranged marriage. She sees this tradition in a very negative light. As she argues:

Mina: It sucks. It really does. I mean, how can somebody else pick someone out for you and tell you, "Ok, this is who you are going to spend the rest of your life with." And I have seen so many of them fail, fail so badly.

P: What do you mean "fail"?

Mina: In the sense that they can't get along. And initially it is supposed to be a good match because the guy does something good. The girl is good. It's all set up. But, and especially I have seen them fail after they have kids and they can't reconcile either even for the sake of the kids. So there is something...I don't know. It just doesn't feel quite right.

P: So what happens to these marriages?

Mina: Some break up. I mean, they take legal action to divorce. But I think the saddest ones are those where they don't take action. They sort of just live out...I wouldn't call them marriages. I mean, they can't communicate, they can't talk to each other about anything without fighting. And I think that that is really, really sad.

The women have varied and complex attitudes toward relationships and marital practices. In accordance to selective acculturation, each of them has made a conscious decision about which aspects of American and traditional Indian culture they are choosing to follow and incorporate into their lives, as well as which parts they have chosen to alter or discard. Modes of incorporation include attitudes and practices

regarding dating and relationships, and often play a role in characterizing authenticity. These hold different meanings for each of the women, thus resulting in a diverse negotiation of authenticity and the Indian female identity.

Five of the Indian women believed that among people in their surrounding community, there was a perceived preference between arranged and 'love' marriages. Arranged marriages were viewed more positively, as they were seen as a responsible decision made by both the husband's and the wife's family. It was also considered to hold more prestige because each of the families was able to discuss with one another what they wanted in a spouse for their son or daughter, and thus had their requirements and expectations generally met. According to Chetana:

Chetana: I mean there's still like "Oh a guy has a love marriage, fine. A girl, Oh my God!" and I don't have a reason behind it. Yes there is. Like what I was saying is if you are a guy whose son is having a love marriage, it's okay. But when you talk about a daughter or she's doing a love marriage, it's like "Oh my God." You still have, not everyone does it, but you still have people saying that you know, "That's...different."

P: Tell me more about that sentiment.

Chetana: See, in a way girls are still allowed to do everything. But it's still in a way still expected to hold on to you know, um, what the family wants. To marry a guy that the parents think is right for her, I guess.

According to Chetana, the woman is still expected to follow what her family wants. Other women expressed placing varied amounts of importance on making decisions with their parents' wishes in mind. This suggests the presence of segmented assimilation. Although for some this serves as another indication of a gendered expectation of obedience to their families and upholding cultural tradition, it also illustrates that women are incorporating American cultural norms and expectations into their personal identities.

Gender Expectations Within Marriage

While there are gendered expectations throughout the Indian community, the interviewed college women are re-defining gender within marriage. Keeping in mind that this is a self-selected sample of college and graduate school students, not all women believed that becoming a wife and mother are integral components of who the modern day Indian woman is and should be. Instead, some women believe that in addition to having a family, a career is vital. Indeed, for three of the first and second generation women, marriage did not appear to be an integral aspect of their identities as Indian women. To them, having a satisfying career is much more fulfilling. They believe that being a wife and mother is not essential to womanhood and that in fact it sometimes serves to restrict goals. According to Mina:

You should concentrate on your work and career or whatever. And if you find someone along the way, and you are willing to take that responsibility, then definitely settle down. But no, it's not that somebody should get married and somebody should focus on their career.

In the same vein, an exchange with Lee illustrates a similar sentiment:

P: So when you get married, what are you going to do?

Lee: If I get married—

Different from traditional expectations, Mina and Lee convey a very different message about what it means to be an Indian woman. For them, being a wife and mother is not vital to their identities as Indian women. Instead, having an established career and independence carries much more importance for them.

On the other hand, Avani asserts that women should not live alone. In response to a question about unmarried women, she stresses how important it is for women to have

families of their own:

You can't survive alone in this world. [A woman] needs protection...There are cases where there are girls who are not married. They live as spinsters, but they are professionally attached. They are professionally attached to their jobs. They will be very much keying in on their job. They prefer to be alone and without a family. And they are actually good....So you know, spinsters...there is a point with them that they will feel, "I should have got married. I should have had a family of my own."

According to Avani, a woman should not live on her own, a sentiment reminiscent of traditional Indian views that women *need* to be taken care of. In addition, she strongly feels that being a wife and mother is integral to womanhood. For her, unmarried women are seen as being lonely and regretting their choice to be single.

Along the same lines, for most of the other women, getting married, having children and being the primary provider of home life are extremely important. They undoubtedly plan to work and do not intend on giving up their careers in order to raise a family. In accordance with their understandings of the expectations of their surrounding Indian communities, many still consider being a homemaker a primary responsibility of theirs and women in general. Chetana asserts that this role is innate to women— it is "in their genes." She feels that women are *naturally* more inclined to take care of children and as a result are the primary child care-givers. She does not consider this as an issue of gender inequality, but rather a responsibility for women because of their "natural ability."

Reena also states:

I still feel like the women should provide some sort of basic home life in the family in the sense that there should be cleanliness in the house, organization in the house, whatever, and if you have kids, you know, general upbringing of the kids. But I think you can do that, um, while having a career. Like, I don't think I will ever give up my career just to raise my family. Like, I'd like for me to be financially secure so I can take

maybe a year or two off to raise a baby, but if I had to stay at home and be a housewife, I would not have that at all.

While the women have different attitudes toward relationships, marriage and family, it is clear that the traditional Indian female gender expectation is slowly transforming. Regardless of generation, patterns of acculturation suggest that women taking on the culture and belief system of the United States are more likely to be accepting of dating, 'love' marriages, interethnic relationships and non-traditional roles of gender and marriage. Instead of accepting and following the traditional customs and expectations of Indian culture, the women are molding aspects of the traditional gender expectations according to assimilation into American society, resulting in the molding of their own identities.

Chapter 4: Education and Independence

Undoubtedly, education is a very important aspect these women's identities as they are all in either undergraduate or graduate school. Each of these women has high career aspirations, including pursuing post-graduate degrees and education for some has a tremendous influence in how they view themselves. Lee, who is pursuing her second Master's degree in Communications, makes this point most explicitly:

(regarding a few of her friends from India who "went completely wild" after coming to the U.S.) ... it's just this whole thing of creating an impression that we fit in. It's pretty shocking to me. I didn't understand at first because they were all graduate students. Most of them were PhD students. There is no necessity to create an impression anymore, your degree says it all, you know what I mean?

Attitudes about education held different meanings for men and women. For many first generation women, access to education was considered an important step toward gender equality. For some of them, access to education *signified* gender equality. Historically, the right to an education has not been equally afforded to both men and women. Chetana states that if men and women were not treated equally today, they would not be granted the same education opportunities. Accordingly, she believes that male-female gender expectations are different, but still egalitarian. In addition to education and holding a career, she has accepted the expectation that women should be wives and mothers. As expressed by Chetana:

P: In terms of Indian men and Indian women, do you feel they are treated equally?

Chetana: Yeah. I mean you have an equal number of boys and an equal number of girls coming to the U.S. for studies. If they weren't treated equally, they wouldn't send the girls or they wouldn't send the boys. They are. Everyone is given equal opportunity to develop themselves...Um, today there is like no field where the Indian woman is not there, and um, I guess it's more like being an Indian woman or being an Indian man is more or less the same thing. The only thing is that being a woman, you kind of have more responsibilities being toward the family and toward the house compared to the man.

Other first generation women conversely believe that restrictions are placed on the value of a woman's education. Because these women perceived expectations of a housewife and mother once married, little value is placed on their degree. Lee states:

Lee: I know people who got a bachelor's...then got a PhD, taught for a couple of years, then got married. And their husband's only have a bachelor's degree.

P: How do you feel about that?

Lee: I don't feel good about it at all. It absolutely sucks. Because my professors are all brilliant. They've done their PhD not because they had to, but because they wanted to. Not to make any money off of it. They wanted to because they are such academically, highly intellectual people. And um, I think it really sucks that in a place where education is given such importance, educational qualifications, it's the first thing you put on your resume, this is the kind of thing that happens. With the man and his Bachelor's degree, that's enough. But she has her *PhD*. You know what I mean?

Because Lee views education as being integral to the identity of an individual, she equates marrying someone with a lower level of education to "marrying down." In her experience, women all too often have had to accept who their families expected them to marry, even though educational attainment was considered a status mobilizer and a means to increase the validity of self-decision-making. In addition, even though all

women interviewed were in undergraduate or post-graduate programs, many of them acknowledge feeling pressures to continue with the traditional male-female gender expectations. This was especially apparent among the first generation women who came to the United States specifically for college. While three of the women mentioned that despite their schooling, they were ultimately expected to be housewives, Mina was particularly vocal about this:

They (referring to the surrounding Indian community from her hometown in India) are like, (imitating a more complacent and docile tone) “Yeah ok, so you do a Master’s, maybe you get into a PhD. Chances are you are going to be teaching, or maybe you’ll get into a publishing house.” (back to normal tone) That’s as much as they think of women in India. But you’ll get married, you’ll have kids and you’ll settle down with a husband like that. But as far as men go, they think they are more ambitious, and that it’s okay for them to be more ambitious. So, I think, I, I personally felt that...It’s a little offensive when you are told that way.

For women having arranged marriages, Lee states that there is an expectation for women to become housewives. This is a strong theme regardless of generation and education and is a sentiment acknowledged by most of the women interviewed. As Lee puts it:

Lee: If you have a Master’s from America and you are having an arranged marriage, right, probably the girl will say, “I have to work because I have spent so much time studying in the U.S. I need to work and pay off those dues or at least get some experience; otherwise my education will go to waste.” It’s understandable, but work for “some time.” That’s the clause. Um, eventually she is expected to end up as a housewife. She is expected to take care of the house.

P: Is there that same expectation if the woman gets a PhD in India?

Lee: Yeah. Yeah, pretty much.

Kaya feels similarly, and sees this as a common expectation of women, despite the marriage type and the level of education for either spouse. All three women are born and raised in India, yet have very different a perception of what they believe is expected of

them. Their individual experiences and understandings of what it means to ‘follow Indian culture’ differ, indicating that their identities are much more diverse and complex than the cultural images of “Indian women.”

Education could be linked to how women viewed relationships and marriage, and was specifically seen as a means to increase their status for the purpose of finding a husband. Consistent with literature on Asian Indians, education and marriage, attaining higher education was valued for increasing their marketability, and ultimately award them more power to have greater input in finding a partner (Abraham 2005, Bacon 1996). Although not addressed explicitly, women believed that because of their education level, they ‘did not deserve’ certain types of behavior. According to Avani:

Physical abuse...you know, I have studied so much. Why should I be under him and why should I suffer under him like that.

The excerpt above illustrates that having a high education level gives women more credibility in making choices, such as divorce, they believe would otherwise be criticized by the Indian community. The individual is seen as being *capable* of making the *right* decisions pertaining to personal relationships as their education level increases.

Several women talked of having a tremendous amount of encouragement from their parents to maintain financial independence before and after a marriage for similar reasons. While divorce is not as accepted within Indian culture as it is in American culture, being financially self-sufficient is considered by the Indian community to be the most important form of independence for women and men. Both first and second generation women stated that financial independence was encouraged so that relying on a spouse for financial reasons did not become a primary factor in staying in a troubled

marriage. Similar to the attitude that was conveyed to four of the women by their parents, Dhara said:

My mom really wants me to be independent and have my own finances and stuff, just so if he happens to be a d--che, I can just leave him and it won't be a matter of money.

Education was also linked to attitudes about independence. In contrast to their parents, the women viewed independence as being more than just financial self-sufficiency. For most of the first and second generation women, independence included being educated, having a career and knowing how to take care of themselves. In addition, when asked about their plans for the future, plans for higher education or their careers often preceded talk of marriage and family. This may indicate that for these women, perhaps educational attainment, having a steady career and establishing independence is gaining importance to their identities as Indian women, in addition to having a family. This perspective stands in opposition to the more traditional role in which the Indian woman is viewed as being forbearing, subservient and obedient to her husband. It also opposes the widely held notion that women are expected to remain in a marriage regardless of marital troubles. It gives the Indian woman more self-autonomy and freedom to make life choices that would have traditionally been made for her.

Chapter 5: Clothing and Demeanor

Clothing and demeanor were also mentioned as contributing to the identity of Indian women. When interviewed, each of the women wore Western clothing: jeans, sweatpants, button downs and/or t-shirts, sneakers or sandals. The only material marker of Indian identity worn was traditional Indian bright gold jewelry including earrings, necklaces, bangles, anklets and nose rings. The most commonly worn pieces of jewelry that appeared to be authentically Indian were earrings and necklaces. None of these women wore the traditional kumkum (red powder used as a marking for religious ceremonies) or bindi (marked decoration between the eyes symbolizing a religious or social ceremony) on their foreheads, as some of the first generation women's parents and other family members had asked them to do. These same expectations did not exist for second generation women. Among second generation women, however, expectations revolving around dress and demeanor did vary according to feelings of attachment to Indian and Western culture.

Five of the women stated feeling as if they were 'not like other Indian women,' namely because they felt their actions and dress did not align with what they knew to be 'traditionally Indian.' For Dhara and Mya, both of whom were born in the States, dress was an important component of the Indian female identity. According to them, Indian women not only dressed more conservatively, but also always were well-put-together.

Mya: I see girls like with shiny shiny clothes and the best jewelry and eye

make-up and oh my gosh, they look so beautiful, and I'm too lazy to do all of that.

For Avani and Chetana, both first generation women, there is a big difference between dressing like an American and simply wearing Western clothing. They consider certain types of clothing to be more American, and as a result tend to shy away from it. Avani most explicitly expressed this sentiment when she said:

I don't wear dresses like spaghetti and I don't wear shorts, even here I don't wear because I prefer to bind to my culture. I don't want to be away from my culture or tradition because I am brought up like that.

Short and revealing clothing is seen as being very American, and especially among the first generation women, *un-Indian*. Clothing had the capacity to challenge authenticity. For many of the first and second generation women, clothing was an important measure determining to what extent the women maintained their ethnic identity. While none of the women wore traditionally Indian clothing on campus, they clearly explained the expectations regarding Western and American clothing and its influence on authenticity. Avani and Chetana make a clear distinction between wearing Western clothing and still maintaining Indian culture, and wearing Western clothing and following a more American tradition.

The women also stated that expectations regarding clothing and demeanor were extremely gendered, especially when it came to dressing up for and attending celebrations and religious functions. Kaya, who is originally from Mumbai and came to the States to study biomedical engineering, elaborates:

Kaya: In traditional values, you have to wear [Indian] clothes and all those things, you have to follow traditions, do poojas (Hindu religious ritual honoring deities), all those things and if you don't follow, they will say, "What is this girl, Yaar? She is not following her culture, she is not

following her traditions, she is too liberal! (In Hindi) What is this, her parents gave her too much freedom.”

P: What if the boy acted the same way?

Kaya: They will say, (singing) “Oh, he is very naughty.” If they don’t like it they will say, “Oh, it’s fine. If you want to go out, go out. That’s fine.” They will take it very lightly. But for a girl, she has to do it.

Along the same lines, the respondents stated that they also were expected to wear traditional Indian clothing during Indian celebrations and religious events. The women mostly mentioned being expected to wear saris or salwars (both traditional Indian clothing) and jewelry. For example Mya, who is a second year classics major on the pre-med track, mentioned the importance of physical beauty and wearing Indian clothing throughout her interview. For her, this was integral to her understanding of what was expected of her from the Indian community.

P: Do you feel like the Indian community—

Mya: --has expectations for me because I am a girl? Yeah, I think they do....I think they expect me to act more feminine and lady-like...Like talk properly, wear jewelry, wear pretty clothes...but definitely they (referring to the Indian community at her Temple) expect Indian girls to behave a certain way.

P: Ok. Tell me more about what they expect.

Mya: Ummm, they want you to look really pretty all the time...I feel like my dad always says, ‘You look like a boy all the time! Just act like a girl every now and then!’ I’m like whatever. They just want you to be more feminine...you know.

For Avani, one of the first generation Indian women born and brought up in Chennai, a metropolitan city in the state of Tamil Nadu, this aspect of material markers signifying the Indian female identity included wearing a bindi and jewelry, as well as the more

traditional kumkum. Avani explains her understanding of this expectation:

I think my parents are fine, but my grandparents, if I go over to their place and I don't have bindi, first thing they'll ask me to wear is kumkum... they'll ask me to take it and I'll have to wear it. They'll put it for me and say, 'You should be with kumkum' (laughs). And my grandma, even now she's asking, 'Why not bangles in your hand?' (laughs)...I said, 'How can I wear jeans and tops and wear bangle here?!' Maybe a bracelet is fine. I am really uncomfortable with bangle. I can't wear it. I used to fight with her and she would say, 'Come on, you should wear bangle!'

Again, this expectation was distinctly gendered because the women believed men were given more leeway and were often allowed to wear Western clothing to the same events.

Avani: But when it comes to...mmm, dressing. See he (referring to her brother) can wear whatever. There is no dress code. But when he comes to Temple, there's one Temple where the girls have to wear sari or half-sari, and the guys have to wear dhoti (formal and traditional men's garment)...My brother, he will say, 'No way, I'm not going to wear it!' They, they'll ask him to wear some, maybe two times. If he's not yielding to it, they'll say, 'Fine, okay.' ...he has to come with dhoti, but some days he'll wear shorts and he'll come. Umm, if I, I won't, I won't say no at all. I like wearing saris and all, so I wear. But a cousin of mine, a younger cousin of mine, girl cousin, she doesn't like wearing half-sari, but uncle used to say, 'You have to wear, you have to wear.' They force her to wear (laughs), they tie it up and she'll be, 'Uuuggghhh' during the time she is going to the Temple. (Laughing)The whole point is, you know, Temple is a place of wisdom and when you are upset, it's too bad. And she'll be irritated while she's wearing half-sari...That's the difference. They don't for my brother, but they force her.

The excerpt above illustrates what the women believed to be a commonly experienced expectation from their parents and Indian community. Regardless of whether they were first or second generation, most of the women felt some sort of pressure to wear traditional dress for religious and cultural events in order to uphold ethnic tradition. Critically, most of the women believed that the same expectation does not hold for men. Half of the women mentioned that this was one of the more apparent double standards that they still experience today.

For Lee, gendered expectations of clothing and dress also translated into demeanor. She interprets Indian women as generally being shy, soft-spoken and less likely to go out to parties or dance at clubs. She does not follow or fit in with this idea of who she believes the typical Indian woman is and how she acts. She states:

I am not [a typical] Indian [girl] as you probably noticed...I mean, I used to club a lot, and I used to hang out at all the, well, supposedly hip places back home, and it was this very similar dressing sense, similar behavior. (speaks very directly and matter of factly, not shy answering questions, masculine dress with a red plaid button down, baggy blue jeans, tevas and very short hair- boy cut.)...I am very, very different from other girls. I am very, very...not normal... I have a very masculine side to myself, right? And I am very straight up and very outright. I'm not like other girls. I'm not, I don't have long hair. I don't look like a girl. I certainly don't act like a girl, I don't talk like one. And I don't have this whole shy, sweet thing about myself at all.

Lee not only explicitly states what traits she believes the traditional Indian woman today embodies, but also what aspects she is rejecting and molding to forge her own individual identity. In light of assimilation theory, it appears as though Lee began acculturating to American society before immigrating to the U.S. In this case, assimilation, not generation, is a more appropriate barometer measuring adaptation to American society. According to mainstream Western and Indian culture, she has chosen to reject traditionally feminine clothing and hair styles in favor of a more androgynous and somewhat masculine look. In terms of gender, she speaks in an assertive tone, one that she believes is not generally considered acceptable for a traditional young Indian woman to use. Although she states that she has molded her personal identity to resemble what she regards as more Western and masculine, she still claims to strongly identify with the Indian community.

Each of the women mentioned clothing and demeanor as contributing to the identity of an Indian woman. Their understandings of expectations regarding clothing and demeanor, however, were not all uniform. Among first generation women, distinctions were made between Western and American clothing. Between first and second generation women, there were perceived expectations for how to dress and act based on gender. For second generation women, it was also a matter of dressing more conservatively and looking “well-put-together.” Each of these women, however, implemented these expectations in very different ways. Dress ranged from wearing more revealing clothing, to dressing professionally to wearing androgynous clothing. Demeanor was also diverse, not quite adhering to the pervasive cultural narratives of either Indian or American society. The varied experiences, perceived expectations and implementation of these expectations illustrate that these Indian women are negotiating gender in different ways in American society, while still maintaining ties to the Indian culture.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Literature suggests that dominant cultural narratives construct Indian women as wives and mothers, obedient, subservient chaste, and so on (Rastogi & Therly 2006; Abraham 1998; DasGupta & Warriar 1996; Goel 2005). These narratives, however, are unidimensional and do not reveal the experiences of people. They often ignore personal narrative identities, as well as diverse perspectives and experiences. Nevertheless, narrative identities are constantly being re-shaped and re-created (Loseke 2007). Assimilation plays an important role in negotiating the complex expectations of the ethnic and dominant cultures (Portes & Rumbaut 1996, Rumbaut & Portes 2001), contributing to a diverse construction of personal identities. Throughout this research, I have explored how college-aged Indian women have forged new identities fusing the expectations of traditional Indian and American culture. I examined which aspects of traditional Indian and American culture they chose to incorporate into their lives, along with which aspects they chose to modify or discard. The women stated having expectations regarding relationships and marriage, education and independence, and clothing and demeanor. Each of these contributed to their perception of authenticity, what it meant to maintain the cultural identity of an Indian woman.

This research explores the narrative identities of a small sample of women. It examines their understandings of cultural narratives, and is limited to only those in college and graduate school. The understandings of gendered expectations for women

who have not attended college may differ in terms of dating, marriage and independence, as these appear to be closely linked according to those in undergraduate and graduate programs. In addition, women from only one large southern University in a mid-sized city were interviewed. Their understanding of expectations based on traditional Indian and American culture may also potentially vary based on city-size, region and the population and sense of group identity and influence of the surrounding Indian community. Due to these limitations, I do not in any way claim generalizability. This research simply provides a glimpse into the diverse understandings of authenticity, and cultural and personal narrative identities.

The cultural expectations regarding relationships and marriage, and how their attitudes contributed to an authentic Indian identity differed among the women. Similar to Abraham's (1998) research, attitudes about marriage and family were integral aspects of the women's narrative identity. Correspondingly, interview conversation topics invariably included talk of marriage, despite apparent differences in opinions. The women's perspectives were often reflective of their parents', though they believed they were generally more accepting of beliefs and behaviors that did not correspond with expectations of traditional Indian culture. Attitudes ranged from seeing dating as very American and rejecting the traditional Americanized concept, to accepting it and openly dating. Along the same lines as Manohar's (2008) findings, some of the women were more likely to view dating more seriously, and in effect date with the intent to marry.

The women's attitudes toward interethnic dating were also mixed and not wholly categorical by generation or acculturation. Similar to Mok's (1999) findings, some of the women were open to interethnic relationships, and did not see it as challenging their

authenticity as Indian women. Others, however, took a completely different stance and saw interethnic dating as something they would never consider because they perceived the different culture and traditions to take away from their ethnic identity. Aligning with the findings of Manohar (2008), however, each of them agreed that having a relationship with another Indian would be “easier” as their parents would be more readily accepting of it. In addition, their attitudes toward interethnic dating corresponded less with those of their parents.

As alluded to by Manohar’s (2008) research, many of the women also expressed having a modified definition of what it meant to have an arranged marriage. For a few, the concept of arranged marriage remained similar to the traditional meaning, and attitudes ranged from having romanticized feelings toward the practice to seeing it in an extremely negative light where the likelihood of marital unhappiness would significantly increase. Others, however, expressed an alternate conceptualization of arranged marriage in which parents would introduce potential partners to one another, without the added pressure of having to pursue the relationship or get married.

Finally, in sharp contrast to previous literature on gender expectations among first generation Indian women, (Dasgupta & Warriar 1996; Goel 2005; Dasgupta 1998; Inman 2006) attitudes toward gender and being a wife and mother also varied among these women. While a few of the first and second generation women do not see these as being integral to womanhood, a majority see these as expectations that they believe will unquestioningly be fulfilled. Many of the women assert that being a wife and mother is essential to their identities as women, while others believed the opposite. In addition, attitudes about gender within the marriage are diverse, meaning that they do not see

women as solely the wife and mother, and men as the only breadwinners. Instead, they assert the importance of continuing their careers. The women's attitudes and experiences are diverse and are not able to be categorized by generation. However, segmented assimilation, and specifically selective acculturation allows these women to create an identity by selecting which aspects of traditional Indian and American culture to incorporate into their personal identities (Rumbaut & Portes 2001; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). It is important to note, however, that there is extreme variation among these women which broad generalizations would likely overlook.

Educational attainment and establishing independence is an important aspect of the women's personal identities. As illustrated by Bacon's (1996) research, access to education is seen as significant to achieving gender equality. Using the framework of segmented assimilation, higher levels of education facilitate assimilation into the dominant host society. The interviewed women perceive increased education to allot them more power. Accordingly, it gives them the ability to choose for themselves what aspects of Indian culture to incorporate, re-shape, and leave behind. This was specifically linked to the women's talk about marriage and suitability, as well as making choices such as marrying interethnically and getting a divorce. Interestingly, while education is integral to the women's personal identities, findings align with those of Dasgupta and Warrier (1996) in that some feel that they are ultimately expected to become housewives, regardless of their educational achievement. Despite this, many of the women feel it is important to their identity to become a primary financial provider as well as child care giver.

Lastly, gendered clothing and demeanor contributed significantly to feelings of authenticity and the participants' identities as Indian women, mirroring findings similar to Bacon (1996). Interestingly, although most of the women believed they maintained close bonds with the Indian community, almost half of them felt that their dress did not align with what they perceived to be 'traditionally Indian,' either because they consider their dress to be too revealing according to the Indian tradition, or they felt as if they did not dress *feminine* enough. In addition, a majority of the women stated that a conservative, soft-spoken and obedient demeanor was an extremely important expectation. Despite this prevalent expectation, a number of the women made a conscious decision to not incorporate this into their personal identities as Indian women. Instead, through modes of acculturation, they actively created an identity incorporating the cultural norms and expectations of American society.

The experiences of these college women suggest that their personal narrative identities do not neatly fit into the prevailing cultural narratives. Instead, cultural and community expectations, expectations of themselves and implementation of these expectations result in a complex negotiation of the Indian woman identity. With dating and marriage, each have made deliberate choices regarding which specific aspects of American and traditional Indian culture they are selecting to follow and incorporate into their lives, as well as which parts they have chosen to modify or reject. Beliefs and behaviors concerning relationships and marriage hold different meanings for each of these women, regardless of generation and ties to the ethnic community. In terms of attaining higher education and establishing independence, the steps that each of these women are taking stand in opposition to cultural expectations of the traditional Indian woman. Their

attitudes also go against the widely held notion of subservience and obedience, regardless of marital troubles. Incorporating education and independence into their personal identities serves to give these women more freedom to make life decisions that would have traditionally been made for them. It provides them with greater power to choose which parts of Indian and American culture to take on as part of their personal identities.

This research contributes to the existing assimilation literature through illustrating that the assimilation process can begin before moving to the host society. Through attitudes about dating and marriage, education and independence, and dress and demeanor first generation women began taking on the dominant beliefs and practicing behaviors that aligned themselves with more with American society before actually moving to the U.S. This facilitated a smoother transition from Indian to American culture. In addition, these women are actively creating identity and culture. They are each negotiating their identities in everyday culture through various modes of incorporation regarding dating and marriage, education and independence, and dress and demeanor. This is not categorizable by generation. Instead, it can be better understood using the theoretical framework of assimilation, and specifically selective acculturation. These negotiations are understood, practiced and implemented differently as adhering to certain expectations in order to maintain and authentic Indian identity vary among the women. This suggests that identity negotiation and authenticity for Indian women in the U.S. are heavily influenced by segmented assimilation.

As previously mentioned, there are limitations regarding the size, educational and regional diversity of this sample. In addition, this study only explored women's understandings of their parents' and surrounding communities' expectations. It would be

beneficial to explore the emerging bicultural narrative identity through personal narratives of Indian women from small and large communities across the country. In addition, this sample only consisted of heterosexual women. Because heterosexual gendered expectations are so pervasive throughout Indian and American culture, exploring the experiences of women with diverse sexual preferences will provide insight into varied understandings of expectations revolving around dating and marriage, as well as how this affects education, independence, dress and demeanor. Through further research on identity, we will be able to better understand a greater degree of complexity regarding the negotiation of identity and authenticity, as well as acknowledge diverse experiences which stereotypes and cultural narratives often collapse.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

In order to examine how Asian Indian women in American society negotiated their personal identities around the perceived expectations of two different cultures, I used open-ended questions to explore their attitudes toward gendered expectations, relationships and marriage, education and independence, and clothing and demeanor. I asked questions regarding their demographics, connections to Indian culture, beliefs about Indian culture and attitudes toward marriage and problems. Demographics were important as they indicated the age, generation, and place of birth, as well as provided a foundation for subsequent questions. Questions regarding connections to Indian culture were asked as they allowed the women to openly speak of how imbedded they are within the ethnic culture. Beliefs about Indian culture explored to what extent these women retained traditional cultural beliefs toward authenticity, gender expectations and marriage preservation, as well as to what extent they had assimilated into American culture. Finally, the last set of questions were used to examine how these women felt about marital problems and cultural pressures to either stay in or leave the marriage.

List of Questions

Demographics

1. Where are you from?
2. What are you going to school for?
3. Are you in a relationship?

Appendix A (Continued)

4. Where were your parents born? How long have they been in the country?

Connections to Indian Culture

5. Do you feel that you are connected to the Indian community? How so?
6. Do you speak any language other than English?
7. What language do you generally speak at home?
8. With whom do you currently live? With whom did you grow up?
9. Does any family other than your parents and siblings live at your house/your parents' house?
10. Tell me about your family. What do your parents do? (cultural retention: traditional female/mother, male/father gender expectation?)
11. Do you have siblings? Tell me about them. (do siblings participate in ethnic activities/traditions)
12. Do you feel that Indian parents tend to be more traditional in their values, or do you feel that they are becoming more Americanized?
13. Do you feel that you and your parents have an open system of communication? Do you feel that this is the case with most Indian kids and their parents?
14. What are your plans for the future?
15. How do your parents feel about that?
16. How do your parents feel about what you are studying?
17. Do you ever feel pressured into choosing a particular career path? Do any of your friends?

Appendix A (Continued)

18. Do you celebrate Indian holidays?
19. Tell me about the last Indian holiday you celebrated with either family or friends.
20. Are you religious? If so, what religion do you practice?
21. Have you ever been to an Indian wedding? Tell me about the last Indian wedding that you went to.
22. What do you think the Indian community would say about relationship in which the girl is Indian and the boy isn't? What about if the boy is Indian, but the girl isn't?
23. At what age is it appropriate for you/your friends to start dating? What about getting married?
24. Have you or your friends been asked when you will be getting married? If so, by who?
25. Have any of your family or Indian community members ever tried to set you up? If so, why did they believe this person would be a good match for you? If not, have any of your other family members or friends ever been set up?
26. Do you feel your parents will have any say in who you marry? To what extent?
How do you feel about this?

Beliefs about Indian Culture

27. Tell me about a typical Indian family. What do mom, dad, brother and sister do?
What are their activities? What do they spend most of their time doing?
28. In an Indian family with a mother, a father, a brother and a sister, who does which chores?
29. Do you feel that Indian boys and girls are treated equally?

Appendix A (Continued)

30. Tell me a story about some Indian boys that are your age. Indian girls your age?
31. Among the other Indian families you know, do you feel that there is a difference between how boys and girls are raised?
32. Do you ever feel that there is a double-standard in what Indian boys can do and what Indian girls can do?
- a. What about staying out late?
- b. Are boys and girls directed towards different career paths?
33. What if an Indian girl your age were walking in the mall holding hands with her boyfriend. What would other Indian adults say? What about Indians your age?
34. Do you know of any interethnic couples?
35. Are any of your Indian friends in a relationship? If so, are they with other Indians or with people of other ethnicities?
36. What do you think about interracial dating?
37. Would you ever consider being in an interracial relationship? Why or why not?
38. How do your parents feel about interracial dating?
39. How do you feel most Indian parents feel about interracial dating?
40. Who is the ideal mate for you?
41. According to your parents, who is the ideal mate for you?

Attitudes toward Marriage and Marital Problems

42. What do you think are some common marital problems?
43. Tell me a story about a couple with marital problems. What type of problems do they have? Would they work it out, or get a divorce?

Appendix A (Continued)

44. What about preserving the marriage and divorce? Do you feel that it is more acceptable among your generation? Is it less stigmatized than it was for the older generation?
45. Have you ever heard of Indian couples getting a divorce?
46. In which possible scenarios would a divorce happen?
47. How do you feel about divorce? How do you think your friends feel about divorce?
48. How do you think the rest of the Indian community feels about divorce?
49. Tell me a story about a couple that got divorced. (At least one of the people must be Indian.)
50. What are “acceptable” reasons for getting a divorce? What about marital problems? What marital problems would warrant getting a divorce?
51. What about marital abuse? What do you consider wife abuse to be?
52. Do you know anyone who has ever been in this situation? Did she experience any from the husband’s side of the family?
53. Did she feel any pressure to stay in the marriage? From who?
54. What didn’t I ask you that I probably should have?

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