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‘We weren’t allowed to date’: Unpacking U.S. South Asian Courtship Narratives

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ABSTRACT

South Asians first began to arrive in the U.S. in large numbers fewer than 50 years ago. U.S. South Asian children experience acculturation differently from their parents. First-generation South Asian parents’ attempts to retain ethnic traditions through child rearing may result in intergenerational conflict. This collective case study considers South Asian immigrants’ experiences with and perspectives about child rearing, with particular emphasis on traditions surrounding dating and marriage.

Emergent themes center around differences in gender role socialization, taboos associated with mixed-gender socialization, and children's deference to elders' authority. Dichotomies between collectivistic and individualist worldviews affecting socialization and familial dynamics are explored through immigrants’ own words.

Key Words: South Asian, U.S. Immigration, Marriage, Adolescence

Introduction

South Asians are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2010). South Asians living in the U.S. tend to work in professional or managerial fields, sales, or teaching positions. In spite of their strong social and economic presence, there is a dearth of literature about the family lives and everyday experiences of South Asian parents and their children (Graf, Mullis, and Mullis, 2008).

Migration “is a long-term if not life-long process of negotiating identity, difference, and the right to fully exist and flourish in the new context” (Benmayor, 1994, p. 8). Historically, immigration researchers have emphasized the acculturative experiences of adults (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Consequently, the social and psychological dynamics of immigration affecting adolescents’ development are not well understood. Research that explores processes of migrant acculturation through attention to natal and host social structures is needed (Bierbrauer & Pedersen, 1996). In particular, more research is needed on issues affecting the lives and development of the adolescents of more recent immigrant groups (Ahmad & Szpara, 2003; Morning, 2001). This study explores U.S. South Asian immigrants’ experiences and perceptions of marriage and dating, with particular emphasis on U.S. South Asian family life and related issues affecting South Asian adolescents.

Theoretical Perspectives

I employ a collective case study approach in this article. The case study model is a procedure of inquiry (Merriam, 1998) defined by “an analytic focus on an individual event, activity, episode, or other specific phenomenon” (Schram 2006 : 104). A case study is an indepth exploration of a bounded system (time, circumstance, process) selected because it “has merit in and of itself” (Creswell, 2005:440). When several “cases” are described and compared to provide insight into an event or issue, the methodology is referred to as a “collective case study” (Stake, 1995). The researcher locates collective cases in a larger geographic, economic, or political context (Creswell, 2005) in an effort to acquire a more complete understanding about a particular phenomenon or issue (Schram, 2006).

Birman’s acculturation framework — a framework that permits researchers to “capture [the] diversity of experiences of acculturation” present in a multicultural host society such as the United States, and allows researchers to “consider these experiences over a period of time” (Birman, 1994: 275) — informs my analysis. Triandis notes that social behavior and related constructs of values, belief systems, gender and familial roles, differ significantly between Eastern collectivist cultures (South Asia) and Western individualistic cultures (U.S., North America, U.K.) (Triandis, 1990). Sam’s (2000) model for studying immigrant resettlement also informs my analysis, since it emphasizes the degree of discrepancy between culture of origin and predominant culture in the resettlement country.

This study supports a commitment to accurate reflection of the voices, views, and perspectives of interviewees involved. A conscious effort was made to respect and preserve individual interviewee’s conversational style: sentence structure, grammar conventions, idiosyncrasies of speech were retained while false starts and crutch words (“um”, “uh”) were removed to create a paragraph form that represents as much as is possible the speaker’s true voice (Jones, 2004). As a researcher in narrative inquiry, I am committed to research methodologies which produce “a story or narrative that constitutes a theoretically informed interpretation of the culture of the community, group, or setting” being studied (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999: 8).

Methodology

Major data sources are 90 audiotaped and transcribed oral history interviews; additional data were drawn from informational forms. South Asian immigrants¹ living in a Midwestern state, and identified chiefly through snowball effect, were voluntary participants. Forty-three percent are female, 57% male. Ages range from 18 to 64 years (mean=38). Mean residence in the U.S. is 18 years. Seventy-three percent are first generation immigrants; 27% are second-generation immigrants. Most interviewees (69%) identify with the Hindu religion, though other religions are represented. Most (74%) have obtained at least a bachelors degree.² Eighty-seven percent are U.S. citizens.

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An open-ended questionnaire facilitated the collection of richly textured narratives averaging three hours in length. Interviews were transcribed. Data from transcribed oral history narratives were analyzed using both open and axial coding. As Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest, written narratives may be coded for main themes and sub-categories that intersect with main themes, as well as analyzed for code, concept, and category. Participants who mentioned marriage and/or dating were included in this analysis. Resulting narratives yielded four themes: gender role socialization, mixed-gender taboos, children’s deference to elders’ authority, and types of marriage. These themes, interspersed with immigrants’ narrative excerpts, are discussed below.

Limitations

Participants in this study reside in the Midwestern United States and primarily are first-generation South Asian migrants. The involvement of participants from a broader geographic area, or from a cross-section of U.S. geographic regions such as the Midwest, South, Northeast, and Southwest may have yielded different perspectives.

Analysis and Discussion

It has been said there is no such thing as adolescence in South Asia. That is, the Western concept of adolescence — with its emphasis on individual identity development, opportunities to try out different personas, consideration of possible career choices, and informal socialization with multiple potential marriage partners — is alien to the mainstream South Asian worldview. One interviewee muses:

We don’t have what you call a teenage year.... As far as life goes [there] for a teenager and young man or woman, it’s totally different than what they have here. [There], even at eighteen years you are still a kid in the house ... you always do what your parents want you to do, you listen to them, you respect them.... [There] parents take responsibility. Here, they have to take care of themselves by themselves.

Adolescence marks the beginning of cultural identity confusion for second-generation South Asian immigrants (Sodhi, 2008). South Asian adolescent females, in particular, experience difficulties at school due to the differing value systems at home and in the school (Singh Ghuman, 2001):

I didn’t allow her to go one-on-one with anybody in high school. When she went [away] to college, she was 18 and maybe able to handle it better. That was the compromise ... although there was a lot of tug-of-war. (1st gen. male)

The other day my [U.S.-born teenaged daughter] was talking to one of her friends and I said, jokingly, “Is there any problem with her boyfriend?” [She replied], “The problem is that we don’t *have* any boyfriends. We *can’t* have any.

That's the problem." (1st gen. female)

Marriage is the cornerstone of U.S. South Asian family and community life (Ternikar, 2008; Kniss and Numrich, 2007). In South Asia's strict social hierarchy, married persons have higher social status than unmarried individuals (Jayakar, 1994; Ramisetty-Mikler, 1993; Sodowsky & Carey, 1988). Finally, marriage is the ultimate mark of adulthood in a culture where, regardless of one's age or accomplishments, one is not considered an adult until s/he marries (Ternikar, 2008, p. 156). As one interviewee explains:

Everybody has to get married in India. If you're not married, it's a sad situation for anybody, yes. Girls are a little more worried because, you know, [because people say], "Now what's going to happen? She'll be a lonely woman, and she'll always have to live [with family]," things like that.... [It's] not just the parents [who pressure you], the society [pressures you] ... because it's expected [that everyone will marry]. (1st gen. female)

Each of the four major themes is discussed in this article. Interview excerpts are interwoven with relevant information from the literature on South Asian family life and socialization practices to establish a contextual base.

Gender Role Socialization

Many interviewees emphasize differences in women's roles between South Asian and mainstream U.S. cultures. Sociologists studying immigrant adjustment factors conclude gender differences between U.S. and birth culture may be as great or greater than interethnic differences (Mehrotra, 2016; Barringer, Takeuchi, and Xenos, 1990). Saraswalhi (1999), in the Introduction to her edited volume on South Asian culture, socialization and human development, concludes that, in South Asia, "gender colors all aspects of everyday life" (p. vii).

In Eastern patriarchal societies such as India and Pakistan, different expectations exist for males and females. Generally, males have greater autonomy, more personal freedom, and greater opportunities for educational advancement, while females' behavior and opportunities are restricted (Farver, Bhadha, and Narang, 2002). As Devi writes, boys "have considerable freedom to play in the streets and fields, but girls, especially those from better homes, are usually strictly circumscribed, living more or less within the house and courtyard, playing with members of the family or with approved neighbors' children" (Devi, 1998: 6). In U.S. South Asian families, these restrictions may be intensified as a result of parents' concern over perceived permissiveness toward women in Western societies (Dasgupta, 1998). Young South Asian women are socialized to believe Western feminist values are "anti-Indian" (Dasgupta and Das Dasgupta, 2000, p. 328).

Construction of ethnic identity is integrally linked to socioculturally determined gender roles (Das Gupta, 1997). A South Asian daughter's behavior

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reflects her family's *izzat*, or honor, at each stage in her life (Gupta, 1999; Mandelbaum, 1988). U. S. South Asian daughters are "disproportionately burdened with the preservation of culture" (Dasgupta and Das Dastupta, 2000, :. 327). If the ethnic community perceives an unmarried daughter's behavior as inappropriate, her own chances of marriage as well as her siblings' may be forever compromised (Lamb, 2000; Rudrappa, 2002). Ethnic community and religious expectations, then, reinforce adherence to accepted standards of behavior for women and girls. Coupled with intensified parental concern that children will become "Americanized", these sociocultural expectations lead to separation rather than assimilation in U.S. South Asian families:

Women in India do not have as much freedom [as women in the U.S.]. Even though they are highly educated, [they] still have to abide by the norms of the society. It is a male chauvinistic society. (1st gen. male)

My father was very conservative and very strict. My sisters were very highly protected. (2nd gen. male)
My parents are more strict [than U.S. parents]. I really can't go out with my friends. My American friends ... have more social life than I do. [Daughters] have to stay home with the family. (2nd gen. female)

I was walking with my cousin to get some candy while visiting my grandparents in India. The street vendor said [to me], "You know, wearing shorts is not really appropriate." So [being a girl] is really different [in South Asia]. It's a different life, basically. (2nd gen. female)

Mixed-Gender Taboos

South Asian cultures stigmatize unsupervised mixing of males and females as "improper and promiscuous" (Dasgupta, 1997, p. 590). Second- and third-generation South Asians living in North America reveal they were socialized to believe dating and mixed-gender interactions are taboo subjects, even "hush-hush" (Zaidi, A. U., Couture-Carron, A., & Maticka-Tyndale, 2013, :. 2). Feelings of greater freedom and different socialization motivate South Asian boys and young men to behave aggressively toward unchaperoned females. Away from their parents, Osella and Osella (1998) state, South Asian males seek to "rupture physical and social distance, reducing formality and restraint and bringing the girl and the boy into the same space" (p. 195). Young women are taught to avoid unchaperoned mixed-gender settings:

Here, it's OK if a guy walks close to [a girl]. Over there, [boys] walk on the other side of the street

[from girls]. If someone runs into you, [everyone] thinks you are flirting with [him]. No, I'm serious! (2nd gen. female)

Back home, I was young enough to play in mixed groups but, after we came here, that was one thing that changed. I no longer played with boys. (2nd gen. female)

I'm so worried about [my daughter]. She's growing and I'm losing my sleep.... Over here [mixed-gender socialization] is part of the culture, and over here, [our] kids see this part of the culture. (1st gen. female)

I don't like [teenaged] kids moving around [in mixed-gender groups]. We can categorically say "No" as far as drugs and alcohol are concerned. As far as dating is concerned, it becomes more difficult. (1st gen. male)

The South Asian child "lives within a world of the family, having a few more — but not many — primary contacts" while growing up (Devi, 1998, p. 7). Researchers note opportunities for U.S. South Asian adolescents mixed-gender contact occur during highly structured, family-oriented sociocultural events (see, for example, Hickey, 2008; Ternidar, 2008; and Foner, 2005).

Western adolescent rites of passage, such as mixed gender socialization and unchaperoned dating, are forbidden or frowned upon by many U.S. South Asian parents. Dating behaviors (as defined from the Western perspective) are acceptable in traditional South Asian cultures only within the context of marriage (Dhruvarajan, 1993). Dating itself, Rudrappa (2002) avers, is "explicitly forbidden" by U.S. South Asian parents (p. 98). Moreover, because individuals — especially females — are expected to remain chaste prior to marriage, premarital sexual relations threaten the family's honor as well as that of the ethnic community (Gupta, 1999). An individual who engages in dating or premarital relations betrays their ethnic heritage, and is said to be "Americanized" (Das Dasgupta, 1998). Thus, U.S. South Asian adolescents may experience guilt and family conflict when thrust into ordinary social situations outside the home environment (Ahmed, 1999; Inman, Ladany, Constatine, and Morano, 2001). Interviewees explain:

In my family, dating is still taboo. (2nd gen. male)

Over there, everything revolves around the family. Over here, there is a lot more freedom. Dating is one big difference [between U.S. and South Asian culture]. We were not allowed to do it. Sometimes I

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had a problem with that [as a young adult in the U.S.], because a whole group of friends were going out to dinner. That was not really a big thing [to them], but that is forbidden in our religion. So, it was very difficult... At home, it was always emphasized 'this is who you are, and this is how you behave.' (2nd gen. female)

We are not really exposed to the word "dating". Even Christians do not date in India. (1st gen. male)

The [American] way of dating and getting married simply doesn't fit into our value system. (1st gen. male)

We understood very clearly that we couldn't do it. It was just not part of the Indian culture. (2nd gen. male)

[Growing up in the U.S.] we weren't allowed to date. (2nd gen. female)

Here, the kids date — and it's different, way different [from South Asia]. (1st gen. male)

Dating is a major concern for U.S. South Asian parents (Jensen, L. A., and Dost-Gozkan, A. 2014; Ternikar, 2008; Das Gupta, 1998). First-generation South Asian parents regard dating as an American practice that is "cultural contamination of the worst sort", and a sexual world from which their daughters must be shielded (Hedge, 1998, p. 44). When U.S. South Asian adolescents and young adults seek permission to date, their parents "fear dating will lead to sexual involvement" (Segal, 1998, p. 349). Sexuality is not recognized as an appropriate topic of conversation in South Asian culture, nor is sex education available in the home or permitted at school (Segal, 1998). Thus, according to interviewees:

Dating is a big problem amongst [South Asian] kids and the parents. (1st gen. male)

[Dating] is a concern in the sense dating is quite common [here]. (1st gen. male)

[Dating] is a concern in the sense, particularly [because], the way we see things here, dating is quite common ... people usually date more than one girl, not necessarily at the same time. These days [American] kids sleep together ... it's just not the way that we are used to. The [American] way of dating and getting married simply doesn't fit into our value system in terms of moral values.

We don't necessarily discourage [our children from dating, but] do have certain guidelines that we have taught them over the years. To us, that has created enough of a foundation. If [our daughter] want to date, she will not simple date any boy. I want to make sure that she doesn't even have time to think about [dating].... You know, she tells [me], "I'm not going to even think about anything dating either until I get my studies [completed]," because it is demanding and is taking so much of her time. (1st gen. male)

And the dating is a big problem among amongst [South Asian] kids and the parents. Typical [South Asian] parents (including myself) thinking, as far as dating is concerned, you should do that once you're reasonably mature ... maybe after college. (1st gen. male)

I want to make sure [my daughter] doesn't even have time to think about [dating]. (1st gen. male)

My [U.S.-born daughters] never really dated ... they used to move mostly with girlfriends in groups. (1st gen. male)

The greatest source of parent-child conflict in U.S. South Asian families is dating and dating-related topics (Hynie, 2006; Farver, Bhadha, and Narang, 2002). Excerpts such as the following hint at underlying conflict:

[Our children] always complain, "Oh Mom, you are too protective. You guys are too strict." As far as the American standard goes, maybe compared to them we are strict. We don't let them do many things which their American friends are doing. Yes ... with our daughter ... sometimes she wants to go and spend the night [at] the friend's house, [and] we kind of little bit restrict her. Not every time she has the permission to and stay at somebody's house, unless we know the family very well, [unless] we know the parents very well. You can say we are a little bit over-protective. By American standards, yes, we are [strict with our children]. (1st gen. female)

[In South Asia, girls] are not supposed to go out with guys. You have friends [but] it's different [than in the U.S.]. (1st gen. female)

It all depends on what's good and bad, moral and not moral. Dating, I am not too happy about — therefore, I want to keep her away from it. (1st gen. male)

Children's Deference to Elders' Authority

Deference to one's elders is a major pattern found in South Asian families. Docile and obedient children add to family honor, and the model South Asian child is one whose behavior never brings shame to oneself or one's family (Segal, 1998). Even married children remain deferential to parents (Patel, Power, and Bhavnagri 1996).

The hierarchy and role expectations within South Asian families are closely tied to patriarchal belief structures, in which the eldest male has control over the rest of the family (Roland, 1988). Children do not participate in decision making processes, deferring instead to those of higher status on such important matters as career choice and mate selection (Farver, Narang, and Bhadha, 2002). In fact, Ternikar's (2008) research finds that a major reason for the prevalence of arranged marriages among U.S. South Asians is "South Asian immigrants place great importance on their parents' wishes" (p. 160). Interviewees elaborate, both from the parental and the child's perspective:

The way we view family [is] very different [than] the way American students do. We give a lot of respect to [our elders]. That's another reason why arranged marriages happen — daughters respect their parents, and respect their choice [for your spouse]. (2nd gen. female)

Children [there] are willing to do anything for their parents. If their parents want them to get married to this particular person, then they will. (2nd gen. female)

A lot of my decisions are based on what my family would agree to. Even like a decision about marriage ... we have arranged marriages. (2nd gen. female)

My marriage was an arranged one. I went [back home], and my mom decided I should get married. She picked out a wife, and I married her. (1st gen. male)

Even though our son is 25, he doesn't date. He feels, "Dad can help me find a partner [when the time is right]." He would rather get some guidance and help from the parents, which is the tradition back home. (1st gen. male)

[Decisions are made] by the parents as and when needed. They know they'll go to college [and] graduate school, period. It's not their decision. My oldest is 26. She went to Barnard, has a good job, makes an excellent salary, and still lives at home. (1st

gen. male)

Children are given too much independence in this country. Young children making personal decisions at a very early age, I think, has been deleterious to this country. Children of 15, 16, 17 [making] decisions about family and marriage is too, too early. (1st gen. male)

We are so protective of the kids. Every move, we know. (1st gen. male)

How did I meet my wife? Actually, the parents. They arrange it. (1st gen. male)

It was my parents' decision [who I married]. To raise issues with my parents, my father, [goes against South Asian culture]. I took it for granted that he knew what was best, so I didn't question him. (2nd gen. female)

I went back [home after finishing my degree] and got married. This was an arranged marriage, arranged by our family and by her family. (1st gen. male)

The majority of U.S. South Asians in Shruti Graf and colleagues' study prefer an arranged marriage (Graf et al, 2008). Gupta (1999) found 94 percent of U.S. South Asian females whose parents had an arranged marriage were willing to submit to an arranged marriage. "The arranged marriage," Ternikar (2008) confirms, "is still a common practice [among] South Asian immigrant[s]" (p. 166).

As has been mentioned, South Asian adolescents defer to their parents regarding major decisions such as choosing a life partner. Moreover, according to the South Asian worldview, marriage is a decision taken on by two extended families rather than two individuals. Arranged marriages, Morrison, Guruge, and Snarr (1999) affirm, "constitute, in essence, an agreement not just between two individuals but between the two respective families" (p. 145). Two interviewees expand upon this worldview:

Because of the joint family [things are decided differently in South Asia]. When my parents and her parents all agreed [we would marry], it was not just the decision of us — it was not just a marriage between her and me — it was a *marriage of two families*. (1st gen. male)

Mother was married to Father at the urging of her grandfather and my father's grandfather — that these two families should be united, that this

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should all be arranged so that the union should take place between these two families. (1st gen. male)

Types of Marriage

My findings concerning the types of marriage U.S. South Asians describe concur with Ternikar's (2008) findings: "arranged marriages, semi-arranged marriages, and "love" marriages" (p. 159). This study is unique, however, in that it provides primary source data on each type of marriage from the perspectives of multiple generations of South Asian immigrants.

Child Marriages

One interviewee described his parents' "child marriage". A "child marriage" is one of several types of arranged marriages recognized in the literature on South Asian culture. Marriage contracts between young children's families, and/or between a very young girl and an older male, were considered socially acceptable only one generation ago (Banerjee, 1999). Says the interviewee:

Mom's father was a friend to Dad's father ... [and the two men decided] this [marriage] should be pre-arranged. The actual marriage ceremony of my father and mother took place when my dad was eight years old, and Mom was seven years old.... They lived as man and wife when he was about eighteen and she might have been close to seventeen. (1st gen. male)

Arranged Marriages

"There are profound differences," Bhopal (1997) states, between arranged marriages and the western notions of 'free' marriage" (p. 97). According to most interviewees in this study, a person of South Asian origin is not "free" to marry whomever s/he wishes. The Eastern collectivist worldview teaches that one's actions affect one's family members (Singh and Bhayana, 2015), as the following interviewee reveals:

One of my husband's cousins in Chicago has a very beautiful daughter. Hundreds of [suitable boys] wanted to marry her. But she married an American. Because of that, her dad has an ulcer. They don't even talk to her anymore. (1st gen. female)

The preferred marital arrangement in U.S. South Asian communities continues to be the "arranged marriage" (Ternikar, 2008, p. 156). While marriages arranged by elder South Asian family members began in Vedic times, according to Bhopal (1997) the tradition persists because it

helps to maintain the social stratification system in the society (caste), it gives parents control over the family members, it enhances the chances to preserve

and continue the ancestral line, it provides opportunity to strengthen the kinship group, it allows the consolidation and extension of family property and enables the elders to preserve the principle of endogamy (p. 71).

Several interviewees discuss the arranged marriage tradition in current terms:

You have arranged marriages definitely going on. My brother just had an arranged marriage last month. (2nd gen. female)

In my family, everyone has arranged marriages. I want [my children] to have arranged marriages ... well, we will see about my son. My husband and I want to find [a] good girl for my son. We want him to marry [my husband's sister's daughter], but he didn't want to. (1st gen. female)

Other interviewees describe the process behind their own arranged marriage:

Ours was an arranged marriage. My dad [placed] an ad in the newspaper looking for a bride for "a son who lives in the United States, is going to school there", and this and that. Their family responded to the ad, and my parents selected, and then we got married. (1st gen. male)

My father went to India [to find a husband for me]. He made contacts with people who had inquired [among suitable families]. He [received] proposals. He met a lot of people and did a pre-selection. By the time I went [to India], he had narrowed down the field to his acceptable 10 or 12. That was a very nice way of doing things. My father is a very selfless person. I really trusted him to the fullest extent so, it was not a problem at all accepting his choices.

I met about 12 boys and [Dad], you know, gave me his input ... how he felt about the boys (laughs). It wasn't just a matter of me saying "yes"; they had to say "yes", too. Actually, more than one boy we saw, my father just didn't like the way he looked ... he was not good-looking enough, so he crossed him off immediately. There were 3 or 4 he wouldn't have minded — any one of them. He had really done a lot of the footwork, weeding out. He had done a lot of investigation into the families and into the boys, and picked who he thought were from good families ... good boys that he could trust his daughter to. (2nd gen. female)

Semi-arranged Marriages

South Asians who participate in arranged marriages in U.S. today are likely to feel they have some choice in the matter. “[They] are still coerced,” Gupta (1998) states, but in semi-arranged marriages “the impression is given that they are doing it of their own free will in that they are allowed to choose a partner [from among those identified by elders]” (p. 140). Interviewees expand on this notion:

[Our marriage] was sort of semi-arranged. The arranged marriage [was the prevailing custom]. Gradually this was modernized. Some choice was left to the individual and see if they would like [each other]. But that doesn't mean that they can really come to know the attitudes and values of the individuals. They may meet and talk for five minutes, but they cannot figure out if they [are] compatible. (1st gen. male)

There are various ways you could define arranged [marriage]. The older way is the parents will arrange the marriage, and you will only meet after the whole ceremony and the business is conducted. So you really haven't met the bride, bridegroom yet. [Now], you meet people based on introductions from families, and so you can call it “partially arranged” (laughs). (1st gen. male)

According to Ternikar (2008), while first-generation U.S. South Asian parents discourage their children from participating in the semi-arranged marriage process, nevertheless the practice is increasing as the second-generation matures.

We want it to be [our daughter's] choice, of course. But parents see so much more [than their children]. When you are young, you only see a few things. (1st gen. female)

Some interviewees refrain from referring to their marriage as ‘semi-arranged’, preferring instead to describe it simply as “different”:

[Our marriage] is not arranged, and it's not a love marriage either. So me and my husband don't know what to say. He says that it's a “research marriage.” A common friend [of the families] introduced us, and we met twice. My parents asked me [if I would be willing to marry him] and I said “yes.” He did the same thing [with his parents], and he said “yes.” (2nd gen. female)

My grandparents made the decision, and my parents got married. They didn't see or talk to each other before they got married. Mine is different. I talk to

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my fiancé [in Pakistan] a lot on the phone, but I don't date him. I have never gone out alone with him. Our families were friends before I was born.... (2nd gen. female)

Love Marriages

“Love marriages”, among South Asians, are those marriages resulting after the couple has spent time together in unchaperoned settings (Ternikar, 2008). Since, in the South Asian worldview, “love marriages” are linked to Western values and traditions, young adults involved in dating behavior seldom inform their parents that a relationship exists due to concern for family *izzat*. South Asian newspapers regularly carry stories of star-crossed “lovebirds” who have been stripped naked, shorn of their hair and sometimes tortured to death on the orders of local caste leaders (Lancaster, 2005, p. 2A), leading U.S. South Asians to keep the news of their romance to themselves. Below, a second-generation daughter describes her parents’ “love marriage”, and a first-generation female explains how she and her sweetheart tried to keep their relationship secret:

My father is Bengali and my mother is Punjabi. They fell in love at the University of Delhi (although they would hesitate to use the word) and had the proverbial love-marriage, which was kind of controversial for their generation insofar as they were from different regions of India. (2nd gen. female)

We were neighborhood sweethearts. I was sixteen and he was twenty. He was in med school with my brother when we met at a neighborhood funeral. But there, you can't date. Not at all. So for about a year he would meet me at my piano teacher's. My parents found out [because people talked], so they decided he had to come visit me at the house [chaperoned]. When I finished school, we were married. (Female college student)

Cosmopolitan Families

Not every interviewee's story fit neatly into the three identified South Asian marriage types. One interviewee emphasizes how his family differs from other South Asian families living in the suburban Midwestern United States as a result of the cosmopolitan influences in larger cities such as Los Angeles or New York. Says a professor at a major university:

We're a twenty-first century family. My daughter married [a man whose] mother is Polish, his father is Irish. And my son has married a lady [whose] father is German and mother is Norwegian.

Conclusion

Migration is a lengthy unpacking process. During the process of “unpacking”, migrants encounter opportunities to negotiate identities, gender socialization, childrearing patterns, spousal interactions, decision-making processes and other aspects of daily living. This collective case study of U.S. South Asian migrants examined, or unpacked, childrearing practices with an emphasis on courtship and marriage traditions.

The findings of the study illustrate the diversity inherent in the U.S. South Asian population. Some general patterns, however, were observed. Study findings may be summarized as follows:

- U.S. South Asian parents actively discourage mixed-gender socialization among pre-adolescents and unmarried young adults.
- U.S. South Asian adolescents and young adults accept ethnic and/or parental limitations on their socialization, and trust elders to make sound decisions regarding mate selection.
- Arranged marriage practices persist among some U.S. South Asian families, particularly those living in suburban and small town locales.
- Semi-arranged marriages are growing in popularity among U.S. South Asians, especially among the second-generation.
- Love marriages continue to be discouraged among U.S. South Asian communities.

This study is unique in its inclusion of primary source data on various types of arranged marriages from the perspectives of multiple generations of South Asian immigrants. Additional research needs to be done in order for scholars to understand the complexities inherent in the migration and acculturation processes for South Asians living in the United States. Collection and analysis of additional interviews with second-generation U.S. South Asians is needed, as is an analysis of U.S. South Asian migrants' perspectives according to religion, class, and gender.

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