The Cadillac, the Camry and Everything in Between: A Qualitative Investigation of Marital Attitudes Among First-Generation South Asian Immigrants

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Kristina C. Gordon, Major Professor

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The Cadillac, the Camry and Everything in Between: A Qualitative Investigation of Marital Attitudes Among First-Generation South Asian Immigrants

A Thesis Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

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Zahra Amer

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ABSTRACT

Previous research suggests that there is a significant generational divide between first- and second-generation South Asian immigrants (henceforth “SAIs”) around the issue of marriage and indicates this divide is causing psychological distress among the SAI population in the domain of marriage (Samuel, 2010; Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). The present study explores the current nature of this potential divide and both expands upon and updates the extant literature surrounding first-generation SAIs’ attitudes towards marriage. Analyses were conducted with a sample of ten first-generation SAIs residing in the US. Participants were recruited using the snowball sampling technique and were interviewed individually by the lead researcher using a semi-structured interview format. Given the exploratory nature of this study, grounded theory was used as the theoretical framework for data interpretation and analysis. Results from the present study indicate that the generational divide between first- and second-generation SAIs on the issue of marriage may not be as glaring as suggested by previous studies. Furthermore, our analyses suggest that first-generation SAIs may conceptualize love and arranged marriages as existing on a continuum as opposed to diametrically opposed systems. Our results also indicate that first-generation SAIs may come to the defense of the arranged marriage system out of a sense of allegiance to their native culture which has been historically misrepresented by Eurocentric perspectives. Additionally, our findings suggest that members of this community often believe that couples who have love marriages generally hold higher expectations for their marriages than couples who have arranged marriages. Finally, our analyses suggest that many first-generation SAIs maintain a relatively cautious approach to marriage. Clinical and research implications of these findings are discussed.
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INTRODUCTION

Prior research conducted on the South Asian immigrant (SAI) community suggests that marriage serves as a source of significant intergenerational tension among the SAI community in the United States. While first-generation immigrants of all origins struggle to adapt to Western culture over time (Negy, Schwartz, & Reig-Ferrer, 2009), their second-generation children are more adept at assimilating into the mainstream (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Researchers have highlighted areas in which immigrant parents struggle with their children’s developing bicultural identities, including dress codes, choice of schooling (i.e., religious versus secular), and dating practices (Daneshpour, 2009). As second-generation SAI are now reaching early adulthood, first-generation SAI’s concerns surrounding dating practices appear to have evolved into concerns surrounding marriage practices (Samuel, 2010; Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). Many first-generation SAI are accustomed to an “arranged marriage” system in which individuals’ spouses are selected by their elder family members. In contrast, their children have become accustomed to the dominant “love marriage” system in the US in which individuals independently select their spouses after engaging in a courtship process (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002).

These competing attitudes may have created a divide between the two generations, evident in some of the labels that each generation uses to refer to the other (Tummala-Narra, 2013). For example, many first-generation individuals refer to their children as “ABCDs,” or “American Born Confused Desis” (Tummala-Narra, 2013), the word desi referring to individuals of South Asian descent. Second-generation individuals often choose to paint their parents as foreigners, referring to them as “FOBs,” or people who are “Fresh Off the Boat” (Tummala-Narra, 2013). These labels, while not necessarily divisive in and of themselves, speak to the potential attitudinal divide between the two generations. Furthermore, previous research suggests
that this divide is causing psychological distress among the SAI population in the domain of marriage (Samuel, 2010; Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). The present study sought to understand this potential intergenerational conflict by examining the shifting attitudes toward arranged marriage and love marriage that are permeating South Asian communities in the US. We used the following research questions to guide our inquiry: (1) What are first-generation SAI’s current attitudes towards marriage, broadly? (1a) What are their attitudes towards arranged marriages? (1b) What are their attitudes towards love marriages? (2) What factors have influenced SAI’s attitudes towards marriage? and (3) What are SAI’s attitudes towards their children’s marriages?
SECTION ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 has led to a substantial increase in the South Asian population in the United States over the past several decades; however, psychological research regarding SAIs has remained modest (Inman, Devdas, Spektor, & Pendse, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Inman et al. (2014) provide a summary of several factors that have contributed to the paucity of research on the SAI community in the US, including a) the diverse subgroups that make up the South Asian community (e.g., individuals with ancestral roots in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal), b) the disagreement in the appropriate designation for this population (e.g., South Asian, Asian Indian, East Indian), and c) the “model minority” status ascribed to this population, which leads to misperceptions about the psychological health of individuals in this group (Inman & Tummala-Narra, 2010; Masood, Okazaki, & Takeuchi, 2009). The model minority status accorded to the South Asian population in the US comes from the general portrayal of Asians, both in the media and in the general public, as successful, particularly in the domains of wealth and academia (Rastogi & Wadhwa, 2006). This positive stereotype obscures the fact that the South Asian community has historically suffered from, and continues to suffer from, minority-related stressors that often manifest in the form of psychological distress (Inman et al., 2014; Tummala-Narra, Alegria, & Chen, 2012). Tummala-Narra (2013) suggests that “the internalization of the model minority myth has been found to be related to higher levels of emotional distress and negative attitudes towards help-seeking” and that this myth “neglects the heterogeneity of Asian American groups” (p. 183). Despite the various stressors that the South Asian population experiences in the US, they continue to underutilize mental health services due to the limited availability of culturally
competent services and practitioners, as well as stigma surrounding seeking help for mental distress (Arshad & Falconier, 2019; Panganamala & Plummer, 1998; Tummala-Narra, 2013).

SAIs are forced to grapple with feelings of loss, alienation, separation, and anxiety about adapting to a foreign environment (Frey & Roysircar, 2006). These negative feelings and emotions are collectively associated with acculturative stress (AS), a term that refers broadly to “the emotional burden of adapting to a new culture” (Berry, 2003). Among Asian communities, research has shown that family cohesion serves as a protective factor against AS (Lueck & Wilson, 2010), and that immigrants are more likely to experience psychological distress when they feel a lack of support from their extended families (Masood et al., 2009).

In SAI families, each individual must go through the acculturative process in their own unique way (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Younger family members are naturally quicker to adopt qualities and aspects of the mainstream American culture than their elder family members, which effectively creates an “acculturation gap” between generations (Prathikanti, 1997). This acculturation gap often becomes the source of intergenerational conflicts among SAI families, including families that have strong emotional bonds and feelings of close attachment (Tummala-Narra, 2013). These conflicts can have deleterious effects on the family unit by causing psychological distress for both the older and younger members of the family (Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldsteine, 1990; Tummala-Narra, 2013).

One important intergenerational conflict that may be taking place in this community due to an acculturation gap lies within the domain of romantic relationships and marriage. Given that South Asian communities are rooted in collectivist culture, the principle of familism is dominant and highly valued (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). A common quality in collectivist culture is that the needs of the family ought to be prioritized over the needs or desires of the individual (Zaidi &
Shuraydi, 2002). In the US, where individualism is more highly valued, the principles of autonomy, self-expression, and personal fulfillment are more widespread and encouraged (Hui & Trandis, 1986; Trandis, 2001). In American culture, parents often encourage their children to make autonomous decisions and rely less on the family unit as they grow into independent adults (Hui & Trandis, 1986; Trandis, 2001). Given that these two cultures broadly prioritize such disparate ideals, it is unsurprising that such values bleed into the types of romantic relationships that are common to each culture. Western couples in the US engage in love marriages and tend to place value on finding partners with whom they can be emotionally intimate and individually satisfied. The courtship process in American culture encourages individuals to independently select and court several possible partners before entering into a marriage (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007). In contrast, South Asian culture generally discourages individuals from courting multiple people (Samuel, 2010). Instead, it is common for one’s elder family members to select a suitable marriage partner for them, a process which ends in what is referred to as an arranged marriage (Pande, 2014).

A common misperception is that an arranged marriage is synonymous with a “forced marriage” in which the prospective spouses never meet before marriage. In reality, forced marriages are quickly disappearing in South Asian culture, especially among educated and high-income families living in urban areas (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). Instead, when arranging a marriage, elder family members look for a potential partner who shares common characteristics and values with their own families, such as religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, and ethnic background, and they allow the prospective spouses to meet before getting married (Sastry, 1999). As opposed to the bonds created between partners in a Western relationship based on feelings of romantic love, the strong bonds between individuals who come together as a couple
through the arranged marriage process are based more heavily upon “the sense of filial commitment and an indelible adherence to cultural tradition” (Sastry, 1999, p. 137).

Given their exposure to American culture, many second-generation SAI children are at least equally, if not more, accustomed to the dominant pattern of love marriage in American society as they are to the arranged marriage system (Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995). Many second-generation immigrants struggle with the idea of allowing their parents to select their spouses for them (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). Zaidi and Shuraydi (2002) conducted qualitative interviews with second-generation Pakistani immigrant females between the ages of 16 and 30, and they found that 15 of the 20 women expressed discomfort with the idea of an arranged marriage even though they recognized that their parents engaged in an arranged marriage. One participant in the study expressed the belief that “[m]arriage shouldn’t begin with marriage and end in love, it should begin with love and end in marriage,” highlighting her preference for love marriages. Another participant noted that she felt uncomfortable with the idea of someone’s marrying an individual that they do not love, and she went on to express her belief that feeling true love and learning to love are distinct emotional processes.

Zaidi and Shuraydi (2002) found that the majority of their sample was in favor of at least modifying the arranged marriage system, if not replacing it. Participants in their study who wished for more freedom in the spousal selection process noted that allowing more time to get to know a prospective spouse was one of the most important conditions presupposing their willingness to engage in a “semi-arranged” marriage. Within semi-arranged marriages, elder family members choose a prospective spouse for the individual but allow the individual the latitude to spend quality time with the prospective spouse and decide if they wish to pursue marriage without feeling intense pressure from elder family members (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002).
This modified system of creating semi-arranged marriages is already in place in some South Asian communities; however, it must be noted that there is not yet any extant research indicating the prevalence of this system across the US.

These sentiments against more traditional arranged marriages are not necessarily shared by all South Asian second-generation immigrants. Some individuals pursue an arranged marriage because they view it as a life-enhancing decision (Salam, 2010). These individuals believe that an arranged marriage not only allows a couple to maintain their ethnic culture and intergenerational harmony but also that arranged marriages allow couples to create fulfilling marriages built on a shared cultural bond (Salam, 2010). In addition to the perspective that arranged marriages are intrinsically beneficial, some individuals choose to engage in an arranged marriage due to the belief that their parents know best, because of the filial obligation to parents, or on account of the inability to find suitable marriage partners on their own (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002).

First-generation SAI parents may wish to continue the pattern of arranging marriages for their children for several reasons. Immigrants are typically aware that their children will naturally develop bicultural identities (Daneshpour, 2009; Tummala-Narra, 2013). In response to their children’s shifting identities as well as external pressures to assimilate to Western culture, these parents are forced to adjust their own traditional parenting attitudes and styles so that they fall more in line with American culture (Inman, Howard, Beaumont, & Walker, 2007). However, because many first-generation parents have limited access to their extended families, they often feel that they are not able to receive enough guidance from the elder members of their family system concerning parenting practices (Tummala-Narra, 2013). This lack of guidance may cause first-generation parents to “unconsciously and consciously make choices that reflect a desire to
retain their cultural identity and sometimes an idealized image of traditional South Asian values” (Tummala-Narra, 2013, p. 184). First-generation immigrants may be attempting to retain their cultural identity by promulgating the arranged marriage system for their children (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002).

Another likely reason these parents may fear giving their children latitude when it comes to choosing a spouse is that it opens the possibility that their children will choose individuals who are of a different race, religion, and/or cultural background than their own. Given that immigrant parents must often work hard to pass down important aspects of their native culture to their children, they may view their children’s marriages to “outsiders” as another way they will “lose” their children to American culture. They may fear that the introduction of love marriages in their families will result in the dilution of their ethnic culture and the loss of intergenerational harmony (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000).

Yet, similar to other immigrant populations, first-generation SAIs experience varying degrees of acculturation and assimilation (Tummala-Narra et al., 2012) and thus have different experiences raising their children in the US. As noted by Mehrotra (2016), “there is no static or unidimensional South Asian community as meanings and experiences are deeply informed by the intersections of immigrant history, class, caste, gender, sexuality, religion, geography, and a whole host of other individual and structural factors” (p. 351). It would be inaccurate to assume that all first-generation SAIs are unilaterally in favor of arranged marriages for their children, as it is problematic to assume that any subgroup’s attitudes represent the attitudes of the entire larger group that they belong to (Cole, 2009). As with research on any underrepresented community, research on the SAI community must be conducted in a way that allows for the participants’ complex attitudes to be represented with accuracy and nuance.
A content analysis of psychological studies conducted on the SAI community published between 1980 and 2012 notes that research on this community has a disjointed, “fragmented nature” (Inman et al., 2014, p. 364). The content analysis, spanning three decades, reveals that most of studies conducted on the SAI community a) exclusively sampled Asian Indian individuals, b) used quantitative methodologies, and c) provided limited data as to the psychometric properties of the quantitative measures used (Inman et al., 2014). Given the inherent difficulty in conducting research on minority communities that avoids “perpetuating stereotypes or promoting the exoticization or essentialization of a particular minority experience” (Mehrotra, 2016, p. 351), as well as the limited extant research representing SAIs, it is critical for future research on this community to reflect proper contextualization.
SECTION TWO

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study aims to expand upon extant literature surrounding first-generation SAIs’ attitudes toward marriage to gain a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the potential cross-cultural and intergenerational conflict that is taking root and causing possible psychological distress among South Asians. Much of the extant literature presents South Asian attitudes toward marriage as static and stereotypical, and the subjective experiences of South Asians concerning dating and marriage choices remain underrepresented given extant literature’s predominantly quantitative nature. The aims of the present study are to a) provide a more nuanced understanding of South Asian attitudes toward marriage that are underrepresented in the extant literature, b) “productively complicate” the understanding of marriage in the US by including minority perspectives that have been historically excluded, and c) facilitate proper representation of the SAI population in psychological research (Cole, 2009, p. 173). The present study allows for the personal, lived experiences of the SAI community to come to the fore and allows individuals in this community to become subjects rather than objects in research (Majumdar, 2007). Instead of operating from a “top-down approach” in which the lead researcher may misidentify social processes taking place within the community, the present study was designed to operate from a “bottom-up approach” that allowed participants the opportunity to identify salient issues and processes taking place within the community (De Las Nueces, Hacker, DiGirolamo, & Hicks, 2012, p. 1364).
SECTION THREE

METHODOLOGY

Grounded Theory

Given the exploratory nature of this study, we utilized grounded theory as the theoretical framework to interpret the data. Grounded theory is an iterative, concurrent process in which new data is constantly being analyzed and compared to existing data to shape the emerging theory. As opposed to a quantitative, reductionist approach in which variables are abstracted from a broader context, grounded theory is an inductive approach in which researchers move from identifying specific observations found in the data to more abstract general categories or overarching themes (Fassinger, 2005). In other words, grounded theory provides steps that “successively lead the researcher from studying concrete realities to rendering a conceptual understanding of them” that can be used to develop robust theories (Charmaz, 2003, p. 311). The ultimate aim of grounded theory is to “produce innovative theory that is ‘grounded’ in data collected from participants on the bases of the complexities of their lived experiences in a social context” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 157). Grounded theory was ideal for the present investigation because the existing understanding of South Asian attitudes toward marriage is limited in the extant literature, and grounded theory is a rigorous method of exploratory qualitative research that supports flexibility in terms of data analysis. Grounded theory does not comprise a singular approach to qualitative inquiry; instead, it consists of “several flexible strategies for constructing theory through analyzing qualitative data” (Charmaz, 2017, p. 299). For the present study, the specific grounded theory approach we followed was a social constructivist grounded theory approach.
**Social Constructionism**

We followed a constructivist grounded theory approach as the guiding theoretical perspective for the present study as opposed to an objectivist grounded theory approach. An objectivist grounded theorist assumes that there is an “external reality awaiting discovery” and that the role of the researcher is to act as an unbiased observer who records facts about said reality (Charmaz, 2003, p. 313). The constructivist paradigm, in contrast, suggests that reality is not a single objective entity that can be “found,” but rather that there are multiple, equally valid realities (Schwandt, 1994). Researchers, as well as research participants, are asked to acknowledge their “multiple standpoints, roles, and realities” when following a constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2017, p. 299). Constructivism builds upon the assumption that a research participant cannot be realistically asked to produce a single objective reality since people cannot be separated from the experiences that lead them to define what their reality looks like (Ponterotto, 2005). Instead, this paradigm espouses the idea that individuals can co-create meaning through deep reflection with the researcher, who is an interactive member of the meaning-creation process (Ponterotto, 2005). As noted by Devault and Gross (2012), interview researchers need to acknowledge the bidirectional relationship between the participant sharing their experiences and the researcher conducting the interview. In line with constructivist theory, they suggest that when participants are sharing their experiences during an interview, their narratives are emergent in the moment and shaped not only by their own telling of the stories but also by the interviewer’s ability to actively listen, process, and reflect back the information they are receiving.

Given that the lead researcher is a member of the SAI community and thus holds an *emic*-status (i.e., ingroup status) with the participants in the present study, participants may have
felt more comfortable sharing their “inside perspective” on marriage which they may not reveal to a member of the outgroup who holds an etic-status (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999, p. 781). This emic-status may have conveyed to participants that the lead researcher was aware of culturally- and historically-bound norms and values that would be unfamiliar to a researcher holding an etic-status (Morris et al., 1999), thus allowing for the creation of richer data within the interviews.

Additionally, a possible strength of using a convenience sample for the present study was that participants may have been familiar with the lead researcher given the relatively small size of the SAI community in Knoxville. Familiarity with the lead researcher may have prompted individuals to share more personal opinions that they would feel uncomfortable sharing with a stranger who did not share a similar background. This familiarity may have fostered a sense of safety and validation for participants that could have potentially led to richer discussion and data than that which would have been created if participants were unfamiliar with the lead researcher. The drawbacks of using a convenience sample for the present investigation will be discussed in the Limitations section.
SECTION FOUR

METHODS

Overview

The study was approved by the institutional review board at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Participants \( n=10 \) were recruited through email and snowball sampling to participate in individual semi-structured interviews with the lead researcher. The interviews were conducted in person and remotely, and the audio from the interviews was digitally recorded for analysis. The interviews explored participants’ personal marriage experiences, their attitudes towards marriage broadly, their attitudes towards love and arranged marriages specifically, the factors that have influenced their marital attitudes, and their attitudes towards their children’s current or future marriages. Additionally, participants discussed what they considered to be qualities of a healthy marriage, what they are most anxious for their children to face in marriage, and what they are most excited for them to experience in marriage. Interviews were transcribed by trained research assistants and were analyzed by a data analysis team consisting of the lead graduate student author, another graduate student, a post-doctoral research associate, and an undergraduate student using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Fassinger, 2005), which was advised by the faculty investigator.

Positionality

The lead graduate student researcher, who also conducted the interviews, identifies as a South Asian, cisgender, heterosexual, Muslim, second-generation immigrant woman. The faculty investigator identifies as a White, cisgender, heterosexual, progressive Christian, non-immigrant (i.e., beyond third-generation immigrant) woman who serves as a professor and Clinical Psychologist. The following descriptions are of the individuals who served alongside the lead
graduate student researcher as members of the data analysis team. The postdoctoral researcher identifies as a White, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, non-immigrant woman, and a marriage and family therapist. The additional graduate student researcher identifies as a Black, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, non-immigrant woman. Finally, the undergraduate student researcher identifies as a White, cisgender, queer, agnostic, non-immigrant woman.

Participants

A total of 10 first-generation SAIs participated in the present investigation. These participants met the following inclusion criteria: they must (1) be first-generation immigrants from a South Asian country, defined as people who were born in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or Nepal and immigrated to the US, and (2) have children who are second-generation immigrants. Participation was limited to first-generation immigrants who have children because the intergenerational conflict at the center of the study was likely to be more salient to them than members of the SAI community who do not currently have children. Though participant responses were likely affected to some degree by social desirability given the interview format of the present study, individuals with a close pre-existing relationship with the lead graduate student author were excluded from participation in an effort to limit this problem to the extent possible. Participant demographics, including pseudonyms used to protect anonymity, are detailed in Table 1 following the order in which participants were interviewed.

Data Collection

As noted above, participants were recruited via email and the snowball sampling technique. The lead graduate student researcher contacted local leaders in the SAI community in Knoxville and asked them if they would be willing to share an email containing a short
Table 1.
*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Personal Marriage Experience</th>
<th>Current Marriage Status of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divya</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imran</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Arranged</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murad</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Married and Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aziz</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salman</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Married and Unmarried</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*Divya and Imran were a married couple. Their interviews were conducted separately and on separate days.*
description of the proposed study as well as a recruitment survey with other first-generation SAIs in the community. Participants who completed the interviews were also explicitly encouraged by the lead researcher following the interviews to recruit others they knew who met inclusion criteria for the study. The recruitment survey was created through QuestionPro, an online software program licensed by the University of Tennessee that is used to create web-based surveys. QuestionPro is HIPAA-certified to collect and store data for research purposes. The survey items included on the screener asked potential participants to indicate (1) if they were 21 years old or older, (2) their gender, (3) if they have any children, (4) if they identify as a first-generation SAI, (5) which South Asian country they were born in, (6) if they were fluent in English, (7) their attitudes toward arranged versus love marriage for their child(ren), (8) whether they would be interested in participating in the study, and (9) their contact information needed to coordinate the interview times and locations. Following the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, an item was added to the screener asking participants if they would prefer to participate in the study via Zoom or via telephone.*

Data collection took place between February and November of 2020. At the beginning of each interview, the lead graduate student researcher and participant engaged in the informed consent process.† Prior to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lead researcher provided a physical informed consent document that was to be signed by each participant. Once the study transitioned to remote interviews, the lead graduate student researcher created an online version of the informed consent document through QuestionPro, and participants were asked to sign the document digitally. Following the informed consent process, all interviews were audio-recorded. The average interview duration was 40 minutes. Interviews were transcribed by trained

* See Appendix A.
† See Appendix B.
undergraduate research assistants and were checked and corrected by the lead graduate student researcher before beginning analysis. All interviews were conducted by the lead graduate student researcher who used the same prompts to guide each semi-structured interview; however, two prompts were added to the interview schedule following the first three interviews. After engaging in open and axial coding of the first three interviews, it became apparent to the data analysis team that the participants held various understandings of what constitutes a love marriage or an arranged marriage and that they were not drawing upon shared definitions. Thus, the two prompts that were added to the original interview schedule were, “How do you define an arranged marriage?” and “How do you define a love marriage?” Adding these two prompts allowed the research team to gain critical and rich data regarding the various ways in which members of the SAI community conceptualize these two marriage systems.† The tenth interview was the third consecutive interview in which no new themes emerged, and the data analysis team determined that saturation had been reached following analysis of the tenth interview.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Fassinger, 2005). The data analysis team engaged in the three levels of coding that comprise the grounded theory approach, as described by Fassinger (2005). Further sampling of participants and reflexive modification of the emergent theory was conducted until the data analysis team agreed that saturation had been reached. Team members first analyzed each transcript through two rounds of coding, open and axial, and engaged in an iterative, reflexive process wherein new data were consistently compared to emerging concepts and themes until theoretical saturation had been reached. In open coding, “transcribed data are broken down into units of meaning

† See Appendix C.
(concepts), labeled (often with words close to those of the participant), and interrogated (for alternative interpretations, conditions surrounding the meaning, and gaps left unfilled)” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 160). In this phase of coding, coded units were consistently compared to other units and were eventually grouped together into categories that encompassed the units or concepts. These categories were compared to existing data throughout the data collection process and were continually recategorized and modified in order to incorporate the incoming data. In axial coding, the “relationships among categories are organized and further explicated” so that the categories can be grouped into more encompassing key categories (Fassinger, 2005, p. 160).

When the data analysis team conducted open and axial coding on three successive interviews and found no new concepts or themes, they determined that saturation had been reached.

During a coding process that lasted from April of 2020 to February of 2021, the data analysis team began coding each transcript by first engaging in open coding. Each team member downloaded a password-protected version of the interview transcript from a secure shared Google Drive. They then engaged in open coding individually to not be biased by other team members’ codes. Once every team member completed the open coding process, the lead graduate student researcher uploaded a version of the transcript onto the shared Google Drive. The uploaded transcript presented the lead graduate student researcher’s open codes on the document’s margin as comments that were connected to the given sentence(s) it was associated with. Prior to meeting as a group, each team member went through the document and provided comments where their own open codes differed or disagreed with the open codes of the lead graduate student researcher. The team then met as a group, usually weekly, to discuss each transcript holistically, the process of coding each transcript, and any coding differences or disagreements in order to settle on an agreed-upon list of open codes. Following the open coding
process, the lead graduate student researcher organized each transcript’s open codes by frequency in an excel spreadsheet document. The data analysis team would then meet to discuss the high-frequency open codes and engage in a collaborative axial coding process of the high-frequency open codes. During axial coding, the team organized the open codes into categories and worked to identify recurrent themes and interrelationships between the categories. The axial codes were compiled into a master document that was subject to modification throughout the open and axial coding processes. Following the second round of coding, the team discussed the list of concepts that emerged from open and axial coding and determined which concepts related to the present investigation’s research questions and would contribute to theory development (i.e., selective coding). The faculty investigator met with the lead graduate student researcher consistently to provide consultation and guidance throughout the data collection and analysis process. Given that the data analysis team was comprised of individuals with differing levels of expertise and experience with the present study’s population of interest and grounded theory methodology, the team was able to have consistent open and honest discussions about both the content of the data and the data analysis process.
SECTION FIVE
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

First-Generation SAI’s Broad Marriage Attitudes

Revelation of One’s True Nature

A prevalent theme that emerged in our analyses was the belief that spouses tend to reveal their true nature over the course of marriage and that this revelation can either be to the benefit or detriment of their marriages. Participants remarked that factors including time, the presence of children, cohabitation, and difficult life experiences will reveal a person’s nature over the course of a marriage. “Sanam” (female-identifying, Indian immigrant) commented on the matter, stating:

If you are a super good, great human being, your spouse will know. If you’re a monster? Your spouse will know. It just naturally comes out. So, be it arranged or love, um, or semi [arranged], you don't know… Marriage is always a big, huge—I'm lacking the word, but gamble I would say.

“Divya” (female-identifying, Indian immigrant) explained that while people attempt to predict how their spouses will behave in marriage or what their marriages will be like, their predictions are unlikely to come to fruition because people tend to behave in unexpected ways once they have become spouses:

Until you build that life, how things work out are different from all the conversations you might be having prior to that, because, [before marriage], it is all, “What if? What if this happens?” But at the moment when things happen, then how both of you are going to
react to it or come together might be entirely different from all the conversations…

Living, sharing the same bathroom, sharing the same bed. Living together. It’s different. Some participants viewed this kind of inevitable revelation through a relatively hopeful lens, suggesting that it allows for the possibility of marital growth. Sanam shared, “[Marriage] is kind of a process. You grow together… If you're lucky, God willing, your love and respect increases.” Other participants expressed that this ability to change allows for the possibility for the marital relationship to devolve over the course of a marriage. For example, “Fatima” (female-identifying, Pakistani-immigrant) described the shift that couples may experience when transitioning to marriage and cohabitation, stating:

Things are different when they're living together. You know, they were talking only before, but then you start living with somebody. It's completely different…I mean, it's not the same person who [they were] talking to.

“Karan” (male-identifying, Pakistani immigrant) provided the following analogy to describe the potential disappointing revelation an individual may have about their spouse within the first few years of their marriage:

If you go for marriage, you might end up in trouble. Like, there is some dust over the rocks. One rain will clean all the dust away and you will see nothing. So, like one or two seasons later, you say, “Oh my God, there is nothing there. All the dust is gone.”

In sum, participants consistently indicated that people will inevitably change and reveal who they truly are once they find themselves in a committed marital relationship. They also described various ways in which these revelations can help bolster or deteriorate the quality of one’s marriage.
The Sensitive Nature of Marriage

Another prevalent theme was participants’ belief that marriages are sensitive in nature and require effort and respect from both parties. Participants viewed marriage as a major investment and expressed the idea that marriages cannot function properly if spouses do not treat these relationships with consistent care. For example, “Aziz” (male-identifying, Pakistani immigrant) equated relationships and marriage to the care required by a newborn infant:

You have to treat a marriage like a human body. The moment you’re born, you have a perfect body, no scars, smooth skin, nothing, you know? As you live your life and you get hurt, you start to get scars and imperfections in your body. And the bigger the scar, the uglier it looks. Okay? The relationship is just like that. A new relationship is like a brand-new baby. A perfect body, no imperfections. As the relationships goes on, with time, as you get trauma to the relationship, you get scars. And the bigger the scar, the harder it is to hide it. And we must make sure—we cannot take it for granted. We have to minimize the scar.

He cautioned against the tendency to diminish one’s partner and explained that the consequences of doing so can be likened to “termites eating up on the very slab of your marriage.” He further argued against the idea that a healthy marriage requires completely unfiltered communication, suggesting instead that spouses must be especially thoughtful in how they choose to communicate with one another in order for their marriages to thrive:

The other thing I would very highly recommend to everyone would be, whoever said, “The perfect marriage is where you can say anything to the other person.” Whoever said that—if I could find that guy, I would beat that person up. That is the worst thing anyone can do. We have to remember somethings are best unsaid…Loving someone does not
mean you can say whatever you want. That is not a healthy relationship. That is an extremely unhealthy relationship. We are social animals. Just because there is something in our mind does not mean it has to come out of our mouth... If you love someone, you should do everything you can to not hurt their feelings. Right? To me, my loved ones’ feelings are more important than whether I should be honest or not.

Furthermore, participants consistently deemed respect to be a critical and necessary component of a healthy marriage. They suggested that respect is paramount to the success of a marriage because feelings of love cannot be sustained unless they are built upon a foundation of respect.

On the topic of respect, Fatima shared, “If you don't have respect for your spouse, I don't think love plays any role. For me, respect comes first.” According to Fatima and other participants, respect often comes in the form of small acts of sacrifice for one’s spouse. Fatima shared:

You have to keep on giving [marriage] the fuel it needs. And the fuel is sacrificing a little bit also. You know? If you're always wanting and not sacrificing, just know the other person is doing all the sacrificing. Small little things. Small little happiness, you know? Oh, you know what? I want to go to...let's say Chick-Fil-A. And he's like, “I want to go to McDonald's.” And I'm like, “No, we are going to Chick-Fil-A.” And every time I see that he doesn't want to go to Chick-Fil-A but I'm making him go, even small sacrifices like these…I mean, I'm like, “Okay, you know what? We went to Chick-Fil-A last time. We should go to McDonald's. It's fine if you like McDonald's.” So, these things. Nothing major when you talk about sacrifices. People just think of something huge and major. Small things, you know? Small things that make your day better. You know, you don't have to… kill your happiness all the time because of the other...because then that's not
love. Because you know, I'm giving my hundred percent. You want hundred percent from the other one also.

Other reported qualities of a healthy marriage included, but were not limited to, communication, compromise, harmony, trust, emotional connection, and patience; however, these qualities were not reported as consistently as respect for one’s partner. Participants consistently shared the belief that marriages are fragile and easily damaged if each partner does not take care to provide them with the fuel that sustains them.

First-Generation SAIs’ Attitudes Towards Arranged Marriage

Benefits of Arranged Marriage

Participants commonly attributed two distinct benefits to the arranged marriage system. One benefit was that individuals who enter arranged marriages are more likely to expect marital struggle and are thus more adept at handling setbacks and difficult experiences in their marriages. “Salman” (male-identifying, Pakistani immigrant) described the resolute mindset individuals who enter arranged marriage tend to uphold:

If you say, “This is the deal I have, this is the hand I’ve been dealt, and I have to deal with it…’ Back home, in arranged marriages, that’s how people make it work. Both the parties say, “Okay, I am going to get this girl’ or ‘I am getting this boy, and we are going to make it work.” So, both of them go and try their best to make it work, and you know what, a lot of times those marriages succeed and work okay.

Participants indicated that individuals who have arranged marriages often spend limited time with their spouses before marriage. They argued that, as a result, these individuals are acutely aware that they will undergo the process of getting to know and deeply understand their spouses.
while simultaneously learning how to navigate and build a life as a unit. These experiences can be perceived as highly challenging in isolation and perhaps doubly so when they are occurring in tandem. Notably, participants did not argue that only couples who have arranged marriages go through the difficult processes of learning who their spouses are or creating a life together; instead, they argued that these couples tend to better anticipate the challenges that are often associated with these processes.

The second benefit commonly attributed to the arranged marriage system among participants was that the elder family members who arrange the children’s marriages will generally be better able to assess shared values on a family system level relative to the potential spouses themselves. Participants explained that elder family members’ greater life experience and knowledge allow them to assess a potential spouse through a more holistic, balanced lens.

“Nadia” (female-identifying, Pakistani immigrant) explained:

I think there is a lot of wisdom in [elders arranging marriages] because they know, they’ve seen the world, they’ve been there, you know, lived a life. And they can make more sound decisions, I think. And it’s not—in our culture—it’s not purely about love. Of course, that’s a huge, component of having a healthy relationship… But they look at, you know, education, they look at the family background, socioeconomic strata, whatever. They, you know, they consider all those factors.

Several participants expressed that these elder family members were less likely to make decisions based on temporary positive or negative emotions and that they could thus serve as valuable assets during the spousal selection process.
Drawbacks of Arranged Marriage

Our findings indicated that one of the commonly perceived drawbacks of the arranged marriage system is that individuals who experience a failed arranged marriage can potentially place blame on others for the dissolution of their relationship, whereas couples who pursue love marriages usually must take greater responsibility for their spousal choices and the fate of their relationships. “Imran” (male-identifying, Indian immigrant) explained that placing blame on others in a failed arranged marriage is relatively common from his experience. He shared:

Putting the blame is like, you know, the easiest thing… because, you know, whenever a marriage fails… [the] bride’s friends will have one reason, [the] groom’s friends will have another… and if there’s a third person, he will have some other reason, so it’s so many reasons… then people just blame the easy fall guy… That happens. They will be like, “Oh, this person had arranged this marriage?” “Yeah.” “What did that person see in that person to arrange this marriage?”

Another drawback of arranged marriages that participants voiced was the possibility that parents may not know their children and their personalities well enough to know how to pick an appropriate spouse for them. On this matter, Divya remarked, “Even if your mother knows you very well, no one knows anyone that well.” Several participants remarked that the major deterrent for parents who might otherwise seek to arrange their children’s marriages is the possibility of mismatching their child with a spouse and having to observe their child deal with the consequences of their poor parental judgment in married life. For these reasons, participants expressed that having to make such a critical and lifelong decision on behalf of their child could feel like more of a “burden” than an opportunity.
First-Generation SAIs’ Attitudes Towards Love Marriage

Benefits of Love Marriage

Participants remarked that one of the substantial benefits of the love marriage system is that those who have love marriages must take responsibility for their spouse selection and the quality of their marriage. Participants indicated that when one autonomously selects their spouse, they do not have to expend time and mental energy imagining how their life could be different if they were to select their own spouse. Fatima explained that in a love marriage:

You don't blame anybody. You don't have this tender spot in your heart or [think]

‘Somebody did it for me. I wish I could have done it.’ You know, ‘I would have chosen a person and life would have been different.’

Similarly, when Imran was asked why he is of the opinion that individuals should choose their own spouses, he expressed, “I think that they will live and die by their decision, they cannot blame it on someone else.” Participants expressed that having a love marriage eliminates the couple’s ability to blame any marital troubles on others. Our analyses indicate that this was the only benefit attributed to love marriage that was commonly expressed across participants; beyond this benefit, participants tended to share more idiosyncratic perspectives on the benefits of love marriage. For example, Divya suggested that couples who can build their marriages on pre-established foundations, as is usually the case in love marriages, may fare better in terms of conflict resolution relative to their arranged counterparts:

If you know somebody you are going to get married to, and you have established some kind of foundation of a relationship prior to marriage, it is easier to build on that. Because every marriage will have some issues. Every time, you will have some problems in your marital bliss, so to say, so to go back from where you started and remember the times you
were actually madly in love with that person, to go back there and build on that, is so much easier than going back to what your parents thought this guy was going to be.

“Murad” (male-identifying, Pakistani immigrant) also outlined his personal rationale for favoring love marriages and expressed that he feels each person is best equipped to select their own spouse because they are most in touch with their unique personal preferences:

We're all unique… Each person likes a different kind of person for their life. So, I think it is necessary that you get to know the person real [sic] well before you form a commitment that will last a lifetime. That will only happen in a love marriage, I think.

It is worth noting that while participants indicated that they more heavily favored the love marriage system, they more consistently described the potential benefits of arranged marriages than love marriages. The implications of this finding will be explored in the Discussion portion of the present investigation.

**Drawbacks of Love Marriage**

Participants perceived two common drawbacks to the love marriage system. Multiple participants remarked that they view love marriages as higher maintenance relative to arranged marriages; they explained that individuals who enter love marriages tend to have significantly higher unrealistic expectations for their partners and marriages because they have only seen their spouses behaving in socially desirable ways prior to marriage. Salman explained:

I think with love marriage, you expect more. Because you love the person, you think once I get married everything will be so nice and so good. So, probably, you are less prepared for the setbacks than you are when you do not know the person at all. [In an arranged marriage], you are prepared for the worst, that ‘I have to deal with everything.’ But otherwise, you think you are so happy with the love marriage coming to fruition, you’re
going to get married, your love has been successful. So, you expect a lot from each other, and I think that leads to trouble at times.

Aziz provided an analogy to best explain how he perceived the different level of maintenance required by love marriages relative to arranged marriages:

You know what the best example would be? An arranged marriage is like when you buy a Camry. You buy a Camry because you want a dependable car which, you know, it runs good [sic]. It will not break down on you. It has a good reputation, you know, and it’s a dependable car. A love marriage is basically like you’re buying a Cadillac or an S Class Mercedes which has a lot of bells and whistles. And those bells and whistles go bad. So, with the S Class Mercedes, you know there could be problems with the suspension. Maybe the massage seats will not massage anymore. You know what I’m saying? So, you buy that car with the expectation that the massage seats will always give you the massage. But that massage seat is going to break down. But in a Camry, the power windows will still work, it will still be automatic, it will still be air-conditioned, it will still be dependable… It depends on what you enjoy. Some people don’t care about the massage seats. Some people just want the dependability. Some people want the bells and whistles. They enjoy that and are willing to take that risk… I think love marriage is more high maintenance.

Thus, couples who have love marriages may enter them under the false pretense that their marriages will always be imbued with excitement and novel pleasures. Building upon this issue, participants explained that, in love marriages, poorly matched self-selected couples can be left in a state of lifelong dissatisfaction once the initial feelings of romance and lust that love marriage
couples experience in the ‘honeymoon phase’ of their marriages fades. Karan described this potential negative marital trajectory:

So, sometimes when you're young… your hormones are kicking in and that shapes you. That makes for a natural course for falling in love. And you'll basically like somebody and then you have emotional bonding and you fall in love, and you enjoy his or her company… That is not love, that is basically emotional bonding between the two. People think it is love, okay? And since you are young and energetic, and you have a hormonal surge, or you always enjoy each other's company, you joke and talk and think. Because you have not faced the difficulties… Everything's colorful, colorful, before the marriage when you fall in love. And slowly, gradually, when reality kicks in, that color is faded away… At that time when you say “Hey, I'm not happy with this stuff.” Where is love? Love is gone.

In this sentiment, Karan is suggesting that love marriages are often built on lust as opposed to genuine, long-lasting feelings of love and commitment. He and other participants suggested that couples who have arranged marriages do not as easily fall prey to committing to lifelong relationships based on fleeting feels of lust.

Factors Influencing First-Generation SAI’s Marital Attitudes

Parental Messages about Independence

The messages participants received from their parents on the topic of financial independence before marriage appeared to have significantly shaped participants’ attitudes towards their own marriages and towards marriage more broadly. Participants commonly reported that their parents heavily encouraged them to be financially independent before they
seriously considered getting married. For example, Divya stated that a message she consistently received from her father was that she needed to be financially self-sufficient before he would consider her equipped or ready for marriage:

He was like, “My daughters need to be very independent and be able to support themselves before they say yes to any kind of marriage…” I think growing up that is something I constantly heard, “Don’t let marriage define you, because you need to be independent.” He used to say that it is better not to be married, and being [sic] by yourself, even if it is a lonely life, rather than being stuck in a marriage that you cannot handle.

Divya shared that her father had witnessed several women struggle to escape unhappy marriages because they were financially dependent on their husbands and that his observations of their struggles propelled him to emphasize the importance of financial independence to his daughter. She went on to state that she believes parents need to continue to pass down this message about premarital independence to their children, especially to daughters. She expanded upon this statement by saying that parents need to foster their daughters’ sense of independence and their sons’ sense of respect for women. Murad also discussed the kind of messages he received from his parents regarding premarital independence. He described his parents’ reaction when he informed them of his plans to pursue a relationship with his now-wife, stating, “First of all, when they heard about me seeing—us, seeing each other—and that we were not settled professionally, that was a big no-no, you just can't do that.” Murad went on to say that his parents advised both him and his now-wife to “wait” until they were of the age that they were able to support themselves financially before they pursued a serious relationship with one another; he further explained that there was a cultural taboo around being engaged in a serious, long-term, non-
marital relationship, especially for women, at the time he received this advice. He shared that his parents wanted him to be financially settled so that he could not only pursue but also quickly marry the woman he was interested in so as to not prolong their pre-marital relationship. He explained the negative consequences that can be especially harmful to a woman’s image if it becomes known that she has had a long-term relationship that ended in dissolution:

Let's say that, you know, a boy and a girl have a relationship that goes up to five years and people see them together, and then something happens and then they cannot proceed further, and they separate. Then it becomes very difficult to—at least it used to be very difficult and I think it's true in today's environment in that society also—for that girl to find another guy. Because, in that culture, the girl is supposed to be pure, untouched, you know all that stuff that goes on with that.

Participants consistently expressed that their parents encouraged them to establish financial and emotional independence prior to pursuing marriage. The gendered aspects of these findings will be discussed further in the Discussion portion of the present study.

Messages Received from Others

Participants, specifically female-identifying participants, also described the ways in which messages from individuals in their social circles affected their attitudes towards marriages. For example, Sanam shared that her decision to marry at a young age was negatively perceived by her friends because it enforced the prevalent stereotype in South Asian culture that Muslim women tend to marry at a younger age than non-Muslim women and that an element of force is often involved in such marriages. She shared that her friends were quick to voice their disapproval of her decision to marry:
So, my Muslim friends were like, you know, “You kind of proved it. And you're marrying at such a young age and because of you, everybody's going to say to us that, “See,” you know, “she went to a convent school and this and that and this is where she ended up.” It was, like, considered a negative thing. So, at that time, it got very hard for me to convince my friends, to convince the acquaintances, you know, the people you see in college, and uh, school friends that, you know, [that] I am marrying this person willingly [laughs]. I'm not forced into marrying him. And um, yeah, that was hard. And, of course, I didn't think I had convinced anyone because that's what they wanted to think.

Sanam went on to describe how hearing others’ disapproving thoughts was an overwhelming experience that caused her to struggle emotionally during her transition into marriage:

Because that's such a young age when you go through that thing. It's too much. You know, I mean, I was like, “Something good is happening in my life. Why is everybody after my life?” And if they have accepted it, okay. You're very happy for me now. So, don't create new problems for me… They should've given me some time to adjust to the new thing rather than me trying to cater to everyone else.

“Aisha” (female-identifying, Pakistani immigrant) described the pervasive negative attitude toward women who were not married when they were societally deemed of marrying age that she witnessed while growing up:

So, before, in Pakistan, marriage was something that you have to do. ‘Oh, you’re going to die alone and you are not going to have kids, you’re not going to have a family. You’re going to be a mental case.’ That’s a very specific word used for women that don’t get married. Yes, mental case (emphasizing with heavier Pakistani accent). Or you will be a
responsibility of your father or brother, you know. There was no concept of, you can be an independent woman and not marry, right?

The women in our study frequently shared their experiences of being subjected to critical messages from others regarding their marital decisions, whereas the men in our study did not share such experiences. This pattern suggests that women in South Asian culture are more heavily scrutinized within the domain of marriage and that their marital attitudes are more likely to be affected by such negative messaging from others relative to men.

**Exposure**

Finally, exposure to diverse individuals, marriage systems, and cultures was found to be a significant influence in shaping participants’ attitudes towards marriage. Unlike the *Messages Received from Others* described above, which were explicit verbal communications participants received from individuals in their social network, the exposure experiences participants described were framed as relatively indirect information-gathering experiences in which others were not directly sharing marital opinions with them. For example, Fatima reported that her exposure to “different people every single day” in her career has taught her that “everybody has different perceptions” and that patiently working to understand others is an important quality not only in marital relationships, but in all interpersonal relationships. Nadia stated that she has shifted to becoming more accepting of love marriages after observing her friends and the children of her friends engaging in the love marriage system. She noted:

> It’s taken time. I think as I am seeing my friends and their daughters getting married, I’m believing maybe that’s the route to go, as long as they follow certain principles, guidelines, or morals… that we have imparted to them.
Aisha reported that moving to the United States and observing the way unmarried women in the US tend to live allowed her to develop a new perspective on marriage that no longer revolved around the idea that women who marry must be financially and emotionally dependent on their spouses. When asked what factors led her to develop this new perspective, she replied:

Different school of thought, different people. Especially [in the US] I see, I see women who are not married… and they are living a happy life. They are living a very meaningful life. On the other hand, if I were in Pakistan and not married, which I am, but if I were in Pakistan and not married up until now, I would have so much social pressure. I would be thinking, “What’s my purpose in life?” But when I came here, I saw you can be single. You don’t have to have the institution of marriage define yourself.

Thus, participants’ attitudes towards marriage were shaped in unique ways depending on their personal exposure experiences.

First-Generation SAIs’ Attitudes Towards Their Children’s Marriages

Individual Choice in Selecting a Spouse

Participants unanimously believed that their children should (or did, in the case of participants who have children who have already married) ultimately decide who to marry. When asked how they would respond if their children asked for an arranged marriage, most participants initially remarked that the chances of their children requesting arranged marriages are highly unlikely. Eight participants indicated that they would arrange their children’s marriages if their children requested it, while two indicated that they would feel extremely hesitant to do so even if their children wanted arranged marriages. Exemplifying the perspective of the majority on this
issue, Murad described how he would proceed with arranging his children’s marriages if he found himself in such a scenario:

If they request that, then I will honor that. If they request that. There are kids who are very busy these days, they don't have time to meet and they are open to being introduced to their partner through their parents, to see and evaluate. But I would still tell them that, “You know, I can introduce you to some people but, you know, spend the time, don't rush, make sure that you spend the time with them, and make sure they are the kind of people you want to be with.” But if they request [and say], “I want you to bring someone,” I would never say no. I would say sure.

Aziz shared a contrary perspective on the same issue, highlighting the perspective of the minority:

I would be very, very nervous. Because if I was to get them married and God forbid for any reason, if it wouldn’t work out, oh my God, I would be absolutely devastated. That would be a huge responsibility on me, huge responsibility. I would be so stressed out. I would not want that… I want them to be happy… I don’t want them to suffer because of my mistake. Because I would never be able to forgive myself then.

Participants tended to say that, even if they were to arrange their children’s marriages, they would defer to their children regarding the final decision to move forward with a potential spouse. When asked how he would respond if his child wishes to have an arranged marriage in the future, Karan remarked:

I say [my son’s] liking is most important to me, alright? I will say to them [sic], ‘Arranged marriage? Okay? This is what the girls are like.’ If he likes one, then I will go for it. His liking is important to me.
Furthermore, participants indicated that they wish for their children to have autonomy in their spousal selections because they recognize that their children have individual personalities and preferences, regardless of their shared upbringing. On this topic, Murad expressed:

I have four boys, four sons, and each has his own personality, although they come from the same genetic structure and the same environment … each has his own personality, and each has his own likings [sic] and dislikes.

Notably, participants consistently cited their religious beliefs when they explained why they feel their children ought to be able to individually select their own spouses. All participants who discussed their religious beliefs identified as Muslim, and these participants expressed that Islam grants individuals the right to select their own spouses. They shared that South Asian culture may have historically looked down upon people autonomously selecting their own spouses, but that these cultural attitudes ought to be separated from religious teachings. Fatima explained her understanding of how Islam gives people open permission to meet with potential spouses and select their own spouses:

Islam has given the right to both the girl and the guy to meet each other in limits… So you can meet each other and talk to each other briefly and… even if somebody is hijabi [a person who wears a headscarf] … Islam has given you a right to take your hijab off briefly so the guy can like see how you look… And the guy can reject you on the basis of your appearance, and you can reject the guy on the basis of [his] appearance. It's not a sin or something. That's Islam. That's real Islam. I have talked with scholars and that's what it is.

Sanam shared a similar understanding of Islamic teachings and shared that, “Islamically, you have all the rights to choose your own life partner.” Participants shared these types of examples
of Islamic teachings to support their primary assertion that their children ought to select their own spouses.

*Perceptions of and Marital Expectations for Second Generation SAI*s

In addition to having individual personalities and opinions, participants felt that their children are generally strong minded as opposed to deferential. In describing her children’s personalities, Nadia expressed that she perceives her children’s confidence and outspoken nature as a mark of cultural difference between children raised in South Asian culture and children raised in Western culture:

They are so emboldened in that they can discuss these matters that I’ve never discussed with my parents, ever… We typically don’t do that, at least at [a young] age, we don’t tell our parents who we want to marry… They’re very strong willed, they’re not just going to go by what we say, so they’re going to have to look for their own life partners, I think. But of course, with our approval (laughs). I’m hoping, I’m hoping.

In this sentiment, Nadia shares a hope commonly expressed by other participants as well: while she believes her children will not blindly abide by her or her spouse’s wishes, she still has the desire to be consulted by her children while they are engaged in the spouse selection process. She and other participants expressed that while they are comfortable with their kids pursuing love marriages, they still wish for their children to choose spouses who have certain traits or that meet specific criteria. Nadia explained:

If anything, one thing that does worry myself and my husband, having said everything that I did… that [my children] will probably end up having a love marriage and all…If you can marry somebody, ideally, with a similar culture, it may not be the same religion necessarily [but similar] culture, so that you’re all able to understand each other… I
worry—in my old age, or my husband’s— I want them to be connected well, I don’t want them to be going further away from us… You cannot generalize, but typically, the Western culture is known for this, that when your kids… separate, the distance gets bigger and bigger. And I don’t want that to happen, that worries me… I still want to be able to hold on to them, or you know, be closer to them, and I just don’t want this culture to separate them from me or my husband, and [I] want that proximity. And even more so with age, and you know, because who knows whoever their spouses are. [I hope] they will be accepting of us.

Imran similarly shared that while he does not think his children will ask him about important spousal criteria, he hopes that they will choose “educated” and “decent” spouses. Others shared their desire for their children to choose spouses that share their religious faith. For example, Fatima shared that she still expects her children to choose spouses that share her family’s religious identity:

I will definitely let them [have love marriages] within limitations, and those are, you know, some religious obligations. Otherwise, you know, they have right to choose somebody.

Thus, while participants indicated that they wish for their children to ultimately select their own spouses, they held nuanced attitudes regarding their own advisory roles in their children’s spousal selection processes and regarding the specific criteria they hope their children’s spouses will meet.
Discussion

In the present investigation, we sought to better understand first-generation SAIs’ attitudes towards marriage broadly, their attitudes towards love marriage and arranged marriage specifically, the factors that have come to influence their attitudes towards marriage, and their attitudes towards their children’s future or current marriages.

Theme 1: Narrowing the Gap between Love and Arranged Marriage

In agreement with recent literature, our findings suggest that the gap between arranged marriage and love marriage has likely been overdrawn. In a doctoral dissertation, Mir (2013) argues that “arbitrary distinctions of ‘love’ or ‘arranged’ marriage are vestiges of the past, and such categorizations are no longer socially or psychologically meaningful,” and the present investigation echoes and builds upon this sentiment (p. 163). Engaging in binary thinking obstructs our ability to properly uncover, engage with, or make meaning of rich, complex data or phenomena; participants in our study consistently reported that approaching conversations about love and arranged marriage from a binary perspective impedes one’s ability to grasp the commonalities between the two marriage systems. Our findings suggest that SAIs do not perceive these systems as diametrically opposed and that they believe that the “shades of gray” that exist between the two systems must be realized. Instead of attempting to understand these marriage systems through a categorical lens, our data suggests that approaching and engaging with these systems from a dimensional framework increases accuracy and allows for a more fruitful understanding of both of the love marriage and arranged marriage systems. This perspective also leaves room to acknowledge the subsystems that may exist between them, such as the semi-arranged marriage system, which has received little attention in the extant literature.
Furthermore, our findings indicate that the term ‘arranged marriage’ can be applied more flexibly than what much of extant literature on the topic implies; in doing so, our study answers a call made by Pande in an article published in 2014 in which Pande states that “new research needs to acknowledge the diversity of arranged marriage forms and their acceptance by South Asians” (p. 82). Participants in our study frequently explained that the definition of arranged marriage is broader than its most conservative form. For example, Aziz shared:

I think arranged marriages do come in different shapes, forms, and color. It’s not just where you meet the person for the first time on the wedding night and that’s it.

Similarly, Salman described how the South Asian community in the US has generally evolved to be more encouraging and accepting of one’s autonomy in the marital process, including within arranged marriages:

So, if you want to arrange a marriage and you say to your son, “This is the girl I want you to meet and see what you think.” That’s how arranged marriages go these days. The girl and boy meet and communicate with each other and the boy can come back and say, “You know what Dad, thanks but no thanks.” Or the girl may come back to her parents and say “No, I absolutely won’t have that man.” That should be the end of the story. The problem comes if you don’t take their opinion, which I think in this day and age, in this country at least, it doesn’t happen.

Participants also consistently stated that arranged marriages can vary in terms of family involvement and the amount of interaction spouses may have prior to their wedding day. For example, some families prefer for their children to interact with their future spouses in presence of other family members whereas other families are comfortable with their children meeting their future spouses alone and outside of the home environment. Participants expressed that while
there are still arranged marriages in which couples meet for the first time on their wedding day, there are also arranged marriages that allow spouses to get to know each other in advance of their wedding. These findings suggest that there may be greater similarity between the current arranged marriage and love marriage system than was described in previous studies that may be more dated. Additionally, these findings work to combat the prevalent notion in Western society that the ‘universal arranged marriage’ exists (Pande, 2014) and posit that love and arranged marriages are better conceptualized as existing on a continuum.

**Theme 2: Increasing Acceptance of Love Marriages**

Our sample’s acceptance of the love marriage system works to break the potential stereotype that all first-generation SAIs are uncomfortable with their children pursuing love marriages. Murad and Salman indicated that they have children who have already married and that each of these children chose to pursue love marriages; thus, these two participants were able to reflect on their real-life experiences of their children pursuing love marriages whereas the remaining eight participants shared their thoughts on how they anticipate feeling in the future when their children begin to approach marriage in the future. Our findings diverge from the extant literature on the issue of first-generation SAIs attitudes towards love marriage; much of the extant literature that explores this area of interest that suggests this population is not accepting of love marriages was published in the 1990s and early 2000s. Furthermore, though there have been relatively few recent empirical studies that have been published on the topic of SAIs and their marriage attitudes, some of these studies continue to suggest that first-generation SAIs are against love marriages. For example, Hickey (2020) posits that “love marriages continue to be discouraged among U.S. South Asian families” (p. 383). Given that our results
indicate that some first-generation SAIs are welcoming of love marriages, it is worth examining potential factors that may be involved in producing such a disparity. The snowball sampling recruitment method used in the majority of qualitative studies on SAIs’ marital attitudes, including the present study, may be involved in creating this discrepancy. This recruitment method encourages participants to recruit subjects similar to themselves using their personal social networks; thus, it is likely that participants are maintaining relationships with and recruiting individuals who they perceive as like-minded. It is highly plausible that there are certain pockets within the broad South Asian community in which group members are more traditional and opposed to love marriages than others. It may be the case that, relative to the samples in previous studies, the participants recruited in the present study live in subcommunities that are more accepting of love marriages and that these participants have consequently adopted more accepting attitudes themselves. The diversity that exists within the global South Asian community inevitably makes the task of finding commonalities across subcommunities quite challenging. Highlighting this challenge, Khera & Ahluwalia (2021) suggest that “what [South Asian] parents value in partners for their children may vary according to country, region, religion, and family” (p. 22). Additionally, first-generation SAIs’ attitudes towards love marriage may have shifted towards greater acceptance in recent years as a consequence of having more time to acclimate to Western culture and marital ideals. It may also be the case, as previous research suggests, that the effects of Westernization processes that have occurred in South Asian countries as well as the rest of the globe have led to greater acceptance and movement towards the love marriage system in South Asian culture (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). Finally, as noted in the literature review, the majority of studies that have been conducted on the SAI community have sampled exclusively Indian immigrants (Inman et al., 2014). Given
that the present study sampled seven Pakistani immigrants and three Indian immigrants, perhaps country of origin also plays a role in the attitudinal differences observed between our sample and the samples analyzed in previous studies. As noted in the literature review, previous research has indicated that second-generation SAIs are usually quicker to adopt elements of Western culture than their first-generation parents (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Our study expands on this finding as it suggests that first-generation SAIs’ cultural attitudes towards marriage and family are shifting and evolving as well, though perhaps at a slower pace than that of second-generation individuals.

**Theme 3: Desire to Defend Native Culture**

Participants were aware of the stigma surrounding arranged marriage in Western culture, and they came to the defense of the arranged marriage system even when they generally indicated being more heavily in favor of the love marriage system. In the present investigation, all participants indicated being either neutral or in favor of love marriages in the screener portion of the study; yet they consistently spoke more to the potential benefits of the arranged marriage system relative to the love marriage system in the interview portion of the study. We hypothesize that participants may have felt the desire to emphasize the benefits of arranged marriage out of a sense of allegiance or respect to their native culture. Furthermore, given that love marriage is dominant in Western culture, they may have felt that their reasoning behind favoring love marriages required less explication and attention than what was required to illustrate the nuances around arranged marriages that have been historically misunderstood and misrepresented by Eurocentric perspectives (Pande, 2014). Additionally, participants were quick to delineate between forced and arranged marriages, conceivably out of the same instinctive reflex to protect aspects of their native culture that have been historically misrepresented and disparaged. In line
with previous research, they reported that forced marriages have fallen out of favor in South Asian countries (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). Pande (2014) notes that “arranged marriages are regarded as the other of Western marriages, and an ‘obvious contradiction’ is believed to exist between South Asian and Western views of marriage” (p. 77). While this experience of being othered or ostracized may drive some SAIs to further assimilate to Western culture, it may propel other SAIs to defend elements of their native culture about which they may not have otherwise been passionately supportive. Perhaps speaking to their more collectivist upbringings, the participants’ desire to protect elements of their native culture that have been historically criticized in some ways superseded their desire to emphasize their own personal views on marriage. The research and clinical implications of this finding will be discussed below.

**Theme 4: Similarities between South Asian and American Marital Attitudes**

Participants consistently expressed the belief that couples who have love marriages maintain higher expectations for their partners and their relationships than couples who have arranged marriages, as highlighted by Aziz’s analogy illustrated in the Results section in which he compares arranged marriages to a Camry and love marriages to a Cadillac or Mercedes. Participants suggested that couples who have arranged marriages tend to have more realistic expectations about how challenging marriage can be relative to their love marriage counterparts, and their arguments share similarities with relationship research that has predominantly focused on American couples and marital attitudes. For example, Finkel and colleagues (2015) posit that contemporary American couples look to their partners to fulfill their intimacy, passion, autonomy, and personal growth needs whereas in earlier eras of American history, partners were generally only expected to help fulfill economic and political needs. These researchers suggest
that American marriage has become an “all-or-nothing institution” in which couples expect their marriages to help them fulfill several higher order needs, which is analogous to how participants in the present investigation conceptualized love marriages in South Asian culture. Finkel et al. (2015) and the participants in our study appear to be in agreement that individuals enter love marriages with a great deal of expectations regarding the personal fulfillment they will gain from these relationships and that this can be a potentially deleterious attitude to maintain given that many couples are unable to invest the time and effort it takes to meet these higher order needs.

The discussion of how American marriages have evolved over time also warrants a closer examination as it further highlights historical commonalities between South Asian and Western marriages that are often overlooked. Finkel et al. (2015) describe the “institutional era” of American marriage which lasted approximately from 1776 to 1850 in which “the primary function of marriage, both directly and indirectly through familial ties, was to help spouses fulfill need like food production, shelter, and protection from violence—the sorts of physiological and safety needs toward the bottom of Maslow’s hierarchy” (p. 239). Expanding upon this description, Pande (2014) argues that there is “a short-sightedness on the part of Western viewers to regard the development of the basis of marriage based on romantic love as a timeless norm and not as an evolving product of a particular path taken by the West in its economic and social development” (p. 77). Pande goes on to contend that “the socio-legal understanding of marriage is still essentially that of a form of contract between two people” in both South Asian and Western societies (p. 77). Thus, while some Westerners may be of the opinion that arranged marriage is unique to South Asian or other non-Western cultures and negatively exoticize or other couples who pursue arranged marriage, as noted in the discussion of Theme 3 above, both Western and South Asian culture share a history of pursuing marriage for prosaic reasons.
Participants in the present study indicated that arranged marriages are formed with variables such as class, religion, ethnicity, and education in mind, and it is worth noting that individuals who pursue love marriages, including Western individuals, often continue to consider these variables as they pursue love marriages as well (Pande, 2014).

**Theme 5: Gendered Stigma Around Divorce Influencing SAIs’ Cautious Approach to Marriage**

Our analyses suggest that many first-generation SAIs perceive the construct of marriage through a relatively cautious lens. As described in the Results section, our participants consistently expressed two beliefs, the first being that people do not reveal the entirety of their true natures until they are married and the second being that marriages are easily susceptible to injury and require consistent effort from both partners. We hypothesize that the prevailing negative attitude that first-generation SAIs observed towards divorce in South Asian culture may be a factor contributing to first-generation SAIs’ tendency to maintain a cautious approach to marriage. According to participants in the present study and the extant literature, divorce is still heavily frowned upon in South Asian culture, especially for women (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Participants in our study explained that divorce is a particularly difficult challenge for South Asian women to navigate because South Asian culture still attaches a great deal of importance to women’s sexual purity. If a woman has been married once before, she is no longer seen as “untouched,” thus making it difficult for her to find another spouse. As described in the Results section, participants were often told by their parents to establish financial independence prior to marriage; we posit that the pervasive stigma around divorce has likely prompted many South Asian parents to encourage their daughters to seek financial independence for pragmatic purposes should they find themselves facing divorce. As Divya shared:
You have to be independent enough that if you, God forbid, get into a situation where you can’t deal with that man, it is easier to get out of that relationship.

Salman explained the ways in which women are usually dependent on their spouses and the way they may be treated post-divorce in South Asian countries relative to the US:

So, the divorced girls are basically in bad shape because they don’t have… unlike here, where you have to pay alimony and take care of your wife, even when you’re divorced and all that, there is no such thing back home. So, the girl is left high and dry without any money or any home, and nobody likes the idea of marrying a divorced girl. It is not a very popular idea. So, people don’t like getting married to girls who have been divorced. So, the chances of them getting married again are very, very low, extremely low. So, their life is … not very pleasant. So, you think about, “What I am going to do once I get divorced? I am going to be in a much worse situation than what I am now.

Murad expressed a similar perspective on the different ways men and women are perceived after relationship dissolution:

If something went south with this relationship, the girl in that society has to carry a lot more baggage.

According to our participants, while South Asian culture is evolving on several fronts, the stigma around divorce is still prevalent enough that parents continue to tell their children, especially their daughters, that they must “make it work” in their marriages in order to avoid the lifelong negative consequences of divorce. Participants suggested that while women are entering the workforce at higher rates and gaining independence, they are still subject to a great deal of stigma if they divorce their spouses. Notably, two of the three statements included in this discussion of divorce were shared by male-identifying participants who observed the ways in
which women are often treated post-divorce in South Asian countries. This suggests that first-generation SAI men and women share similar perceptions that marriage and divorce is riskier for South Asian women than men and that there is a differential experience of marriage and divorce for South Asian women relative to South Asian men founded on the basis of gender.

Furthermore, the perceived risk around marriage and divorce may be contributing to some first-generation SAI’s fear of arranging marriages for their children. As discussed in the Results section, the majority of the participants in the present study indicated that they would help arrange their children’s marriages if their children requested it. However, they each stated that they would ultimately defer to their children in such circumstances and that they would want their children to meet with their potential spouses prior to moving forward with marriage. Participants expressed concern and fear that they may choose the wrong lifelong partner for their children if they did not let their children consult in the matter of their own marriages, highlighting the perceived risk they inherently associated with marriage. While their fears applied to arranging marriages for any of their children regardless of gender, they may have felt that the consequences of poorly arranging their daughters’ marriages could lead to greater negative consequences. Given the stigma around divorce in South Asian culture, it is unsurprising that immigrants continue to perceive entering a marriage as entering a risky, high-stakes situation, especially for women.

Contributions to Literature

The present investigation works to address several gaps in the existing psychological literature on SAI community. First, it is unique in that it is one of the few empirical studies that works to comprehensively examine first-generation SAI’s attitudes towards marriage across multiple dimensions: broad marriage attitudes, attitudes around specific marriage systems,
influences that have affected their attitudes, and attitudes towards children’s marriages. Second, this study’s predominantly Pakistani immigrant sample expands upon the current body of psychological literature that primarily relies upon and draws conclusions from the experiences of Indian immigrants (Inman et al., 2014). Third, this study’s sample consisted of four participants who had arranged marriages and six participants who had love marriages; this distribution allows for greater generalizability of our findings as they are grounded in the experiences of participants with both backgrounds. Fourth, previous research has often focused heavily on the negative aspects of the South Asian experience, particularly centering around the ways in which South Asian women have struggled or been oppressed (Majumdar, 2007). In contrast, this study shares perspectives of South Asian women that suggest that only illustrating South Asian women’s negative experiences provides an incomplete and inaccurate framework. While participants in the present study shared ways in which women can be potentially oppressed in South Asian culture, as highlighted above in the discussion of the gendered stigma around divorce, the women in our study also shared their lived experiences and several insights that go against the stereotype that women are inherently oppressed in South Asian culture. For example, each of these women indicated that they had agency in selecting their spouses and that they were not forced into their marriages. Majumdar (2007) discourages researchers from focusing solely on examining and highlighting the negative aspects of South Asian culture, as doing so would be reproducing “essentialized notions of South Asian communities” (p. 317). The present study addresses this potential pitfall by adhering to a grounded theory methodology that allowed for complexities to emerge from within the data regarding our participants’ attitudes and their perceptions of cultural norms. Our findings draw attention to the complex ways in which participants shared sentiments of both praise and criticism in their discussions around marriage, family, and culture. For
example, participants provided contradictory perspectives regarding how their personal knowledge would affect their abilities to select their children’s spouses. As discussed in the Results section, some participants expressed that a benefit of the arranged marriage system is that it allows elder family members who have greater life experience and knowledge to make the marital decisions on behalf of the younger family member seeking a spouse, while others argued that the involvement of elders is precisely one of the drawbacks of the arranged marriage system because elder family members and parents can be out of touch with the child’s personality and spousal preferences. Thus, our findings suggest that what is perceived as a benefit to a particular marriage system by some is perceived as a significant drawback to others.

Clinical Implications

South Asians make up one of the fastest growing Asian American groups in the United States, and the South Asian American population has increased by more than 60% between 2010 and 2013 (Inman et al., 2014; Tummala-Narra, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In 2013, White psychologists made up over 80% of the active psychology workforce, whereas Asians accounted for 4.3% of the workforce (APA, 2015). Similarly, Arshad and Falconier (2019) state that marriage and family therapists (MFTs) in particular are "among the least ethnically diverse mental health professionals” and that “the majority of MFTs affiliate with various denominations of Christianity” (p. 55). Thus, SAIs who choose to pursue therapeutic services will likely encounter or work with therapists who hold different religious, racial, and ethnic identities than their own. Given that the stigma around seeking mental health services continues to function as a barrier to care for members of the South Asian community, it is crucial that members of this community who do make their way into therapy are treated by clinicians who are comfortable with consistently engaging in cultural humility and who practice therapy from the multicultural
orientation (MCO) framework (Davis et al., 2018; Owen, Tao, Leach, & Rodolfa, 2011, Owen, 2013). The MCO framework extends upon the construct of cultural competence and is “concerned with how the cultural worldviews, values, and beliefs of the client and therapist interact and influence one another to cocreate a relational experience that is in the spirit of healing” (Davis et al., 2018, p. 90). Therapists must consider several factors and potential social identities that SAIs may hold when working with members of the SAI community, such as “wave of immigration, immigrant generation, the context of reception upon arrival in the United States, access to support from family and community, experiences of racism and other forms of discrimination (e.g., sexism, homophobia), English language fluency, education, social class, religious and cultural beliefs, sexual orientation, and physical dis/ability” (Tummala-Narra, 2013, p. 191). Each participant in our study shared unique accounts of how these factors and identities have influenced their personal immigrant experiences, family systems, and marital attitudes, and it is critical for clinicians to keep in mind the innumerable ways in which factors and identities can intersect to create unique experiences and stressors among the SAI community. Our study’s findings suggest that there are perspectives and concerns specific to first-generation SAIs that warrant careful consideration by therapists, and it is essential for therapists to work from a stance that allows them to see the ways in which the SAI community is both similar to and unique from other communities in terms of their attitudes and their psychological stressors.

Finally, it is important for clinicians to bear in mind our finding that first-generation SAIs may often defend aspects of their native culture even if they do not necessarily personally agree with them because they feel pulled to defend the tenets of their native culture that have been historically been othered or disparaged by Eurocentric perspectives. While clinicians may assume that a first-generation SAI is in favor of a particular South Asian cultural tradition if the
client takes time to explicate the potential benefits of that tradition, our results suggest that this could be a faulty assumption that could be deleterious to the therapeutic relationship and the quality of care provided to the SAI client. In order to create accurate conceptualizations of their SAI clients, clinicians must work alongside their SAI clients to understand how their SAI clients’ personal beliefs and attitudes both align with and diverge from beliefs that are commonly held in their native culture. Additionally, it is imperative that clinicians who are unfamiliar with common South Asian traditions do not “use their client as the cultural teacher” and that they instead work to “gain knowledge about general cultural values, expectations, and customs on their own and ask clients to share their own experiences” (Khera & Ahluwalia, 2021, p.28). This practice allows the nuances of the client’s individual perspective and experience to emerge from within a grounded cultural context.

**Research Implications**

Findings from the present investigation ought to be considered in the development of future quantitative psychological measures that aim to better understand the SAI community’s marital attitudes. Specifically, our results suggest that participants found several benefits and drawbacks to both the love and arranged marriage system; therefore, a Likert scale measure that asks members of the SAI community to rate their preference for one system or the other on a bipolar scale would lead to overly reductive and inaccurate data. Instead, future measures used to probe first-generation SAIs’ attitudes towards love and arranged marriage will collect more accurate data if they present them measures that allow for the reflection of their nuanced marital attitudes.

Given that our results contain intricate and sometimes contradictory results, it is important for future quantitative and qualitative research to allow for such intricacies and
contradictions to continue to emerge. Allowing first-generation SAIs to co-create the data in research studies allows for these individuals to more openly and accurately share their psychological perspectives and complexities, and such co-creation experiences may work to lower the stigma that many first-generation SAIs broadly associate with psychological research. Researchers need to continue to be aware of and account for how this stigma may influence the types of responses they receive from participants in research studies. For example, in the current investigation, the lead graduate student author consciously attempted to be as verbally transparent as possible about the aims of the present investigation during the informed consent process in order to assuage any of the participants’ potential fears concerning ulterior motives; Saldaña (2011) encourages letting “the participant know the backstage operations of interview mechanics and the purpose of [one’s] study” as doing so “demystifies the process and potentially creates a more equitable relationship” between the researcher and the participant (p. 41). Future researchers ought to continue to engage in such practices as much as possible to gain more honest perspectives from SAI participants and to slowly destigmatize psychological research for the SAI community.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

A potential limitation of the present study was its reliance on a convenience sample. A major drawback of using this type of sample is that participants may have worried that the lead researcher, whom they may know, might judge their contributions negatively. Though this is a possible drawback for any study relying on interview data, it could be a particularly salient issue when the participants are familiar with the lead researcher. This fear of judgment may have led participants to engage in positive impression management behaviors, shaping their responses during the interview in order to create a positive impression on the lead researcher, which would
in turn have compromised the honesty of their responses (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). In order to try to ameliorate this risk, the lead researcher modeled behaviors that suggest to the research participants that all of their contributions were valid and welcome. These behaviors included having a dialogue at the beginning of each interview with the participants to clearly establish the point that the lead researcher was not attempting to covertly conduct any kind of psychological evaluation on the participants, thanking participants for their contributions, reflecting their contributions back to them to make sure they feel that they were correctly understood, and exhibiting physical expressions of acceptance and non-judgment (Flyan, 2005). It is important to recognize that in this study, familiarity with the lead researcher served as a double-edged sword. This familiarity may have led participants to monitor and shape their responses to create a positive impression during the interview process, but it may have also allowed participants to share feelings and responses they would otherwise feel uncomfortable sharing. It may be helpful for future research on this area of interest to use probability sampling methods as opposed to convenience sampling in order to avoid the potential drawbacks that are associated with the convenience sampling method.

Another limitation of the present investigation is the demographic makeup of the current sample. There were no SAIs of Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, or Nepalese origin included in the study, and the majority of participants were Pakistani immigrants. In order to generate more generalizable findings, future research should attempt to include immigrants of Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, and Nepalese origins. Additionally, only one of the male-identifying participants in our sample reported having an arranged marriage. Future research would benefit from including more male-identifying participants who have personally had arranged marriages in order to gain a more accurate understanding of the potential perspectives held by this subcommunity within
the larger SAI community. Furthermore, given the convenience sampling method, most participants in the present study indicated that they live in the Southeastern region of the United States during the interview portion of the study; however, we did not formally collect information about participants’ geographic location in the study and we therefore cannot make inferences about how their experiences related to specific geographic locations and community involvement may have influenced their experiences and marital attitudes. It would be advantageous for future research to recruit a larger, more diverse sample in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how first-generation SAIs’ marital attitudes may shift according to various demographic differences.

Finally, future research needs to be conducted to better understand and contextualize the potential intergenerational gap around marriage from the perspective of second-generation SAIs. In order to properly explore any generational issue, individuals from each generation must be seen, heard, and represented in the psychological literature. Future studies could specifically target second-generation SAIs and explore their own marital attitudes and their perceptions of this potential generational divide. Although more in-depth studies are necessary to better understand SAIs perceptions of and attitudes towards marriage, the present study begins this exploratory process and provides potential directions for future studies to continue to build upon and update this line of research.
CONCLUSION

Results from the present investigation indicate that the generational divide between first- and second-generation SAIs on the issue of marriage may not be as pronounced as previously indicated in the extant literature. Each of the participants in the present study indicated that they are comfortable with the love marriage system and did not share sentiments of significant distress when discussing the topic of their children pursuing love marriages nor express the belief that their children must propagate the arranged marriage system. Our analyses indicate that first-generation SAIs often conceptualize love and arranged marriages as existing on a continuum as opposed to starkly disparate marriage systems. Participants in the present study consistently outlined the benefits of arranged marriages in spite of their greater general preference for love marriages, suggesting that they feel an urge or desire to safeguard their native culture from Eurocentric criticisms that have been waged against it on the basis of marital practices or attitudes. Additionally, our findings indicate that first-generation SAIs often believe that couples who have love marriages hold higher expectations for their partners and their relationships than couples who have arranged marriages. This attitude towards love marriages aligns with research that suggests that Americans who have love marriages also tend to expect their partners to fulfill their higher order needs, highlighting the ways in which first-generation SAIs’ marital attitudes may be akin to American marital attitudes. Finally, our analyses suggest that many first-generation SAIs perceive the construct of marriage through a relatively cautious lens, and we posit that a potential factor contributing to first-generation SAIs’ tendency to maintain a cautious approach to marriage is the prevailing negative attitude towards divorce in South Asian culture. We highlight the ways in which clinicians and researchers ought to understand and engage with
first-generation SAIs’ marital attitudes in order to provide culturally sensitive services and conduct well-informed studies with this community in the future.
LIST OF REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A

- Link to the recruitment survey: https://marriageattitudes.questionpro.com

- Initial prompt of recruitment survey:

  Hello,

  You are invited to complete this survey if you (1) are a first-generation immigrant from a South-Asian country (which means you are a person who was born in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or Nepal who immigrated to the United States), (2) have a child who was born and has been raised in the United States, (3) are fluent in English, and (4) are 21 years old or older.

  This survey is part of a research study, and the purpose of the research study is to better understand first-generation South Asian immigrants’ attitudes surrounding marriage and family. This survey takes approximately 3 minutes to complete. If you agree to complete this survey and indicate at the end of this survey that you wish to participate in the research study, you will be contacted to participate in an interview with the principal investigator of the study, Zahra Amer.

  Completing this survey is up to you. You do not have to complete the survey and can exit it at any time. Even if you indicate that you want to be in the study at the end of this survey, you can change your mind at any time. If you change your mind, feel free to contact Zahra Amer at zamer@vols.utk.edu.

  This survey poses minimal risk to you. Any information you provide in this survey will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to the principal investigator. We will not keep your information to use for future research. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted at the end of the research study. Your survey data will be stored on QuestionPro, a HIPAA-compliant online software program. You will not be paid for completing this survey, and you will not be charged anything to complete this survey. We do not expect you to benefit from completing this survey. However, your participation may help us better understand marriage and family attitudes within the South Asian immigrant community. This kind of research is severely lacking, and we hope the findings of this research study can help psychologists better understand and serve members of the South Asian community.

  We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future. If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers (Zahra Amer, zamer@vols.utk.edu; Kristina Gordon, kgordon1@utk.edu, 865-974-3347). For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:
Questions on survey:

1. Please indicate whether or not you consent to participating in this survey.
   - I consent to participating in this survey.
   - I do NOT consent to participating in this survey.

2. Are you 21 years or older?
   - Yes
   - No

3. Please indicate your gender.
   - Male
   - Female

4. Do you have any children?
   - Yes
   - No

5. Are you a first-generation immigrant who was born in a South Asian country (defined as a person who was born in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, or Nepal who moved to the United States)?
   - Yes
   - No

6. Please indicate which country you have emigrated from:
   - Pakistan
   - India
   - Bangladesh
   - Sri Lanka
   - Nepal
   - Other (text box)

7. Are you fluent in English?
   - Yes
   - No

8. Are you more in favor of your child (or children) engaging in a love marriage or an arranged marriage?
- I am more in favor of my child(ren) pursuing a love marriage.
- Neutral
- I am more in favor of my child(ren) pursuing a love marriage.

9. Would you be interested in participating in a research study in which you would be interviewed regarding your views on arranged marriage versus love marriage?
- Yes
- No

§10. Would you like to do the interview over phone or Zoom?
- Phone
- Zoom

11. Please provide your information so that we can contact you to participate in the study.
- First Name (text box)
- Last Name (text box)
- Phone (text box)
- Email address (text box)

- Message upon survey completion:

  Thank you for filling out this survey!

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§ This item was added to the screener survey following the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Appendix B

- Initial information provided:

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Love Before Marriage or Marriage Before Love?
Researcher(s): Zahra Amer, B.A., University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Kristina C. Gordon, Ph.D., University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?
We are asking you to be in this research study because (1) you are a first-generation immigrant from a South-Asian country (which means you are a person who was born in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or Nepal who immigrated to the United States), (2) you have a child who was born and has been raised in the United States, and (3) you are fluent in English, and (4) you are 21 years old or older.

What is this research study about?
The purpose of the research study is to better understand first-generation South Asian immigrants’ attitudes surrounding marriage and family.

How long will I be in the research study?
If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last for 2 hours.

What will happen if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research study”?
If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to participate in an audio-recorded interview with the principal investigator of this study, Zahra Amer.
- You can decide whether you would like the interview to take place via phone or Zoom, which is a videoconferencing software supported by the University of Tennessee.
- Only the audio from the interview will be saved for the study, even if you choose to participate via Zoom and show yourself on camera.
- During the audio-recorded interview, you will be asked to discuss (1) your experience growing up in your country of birth, (2) your experience moving to the US, (3) your experience getting married (if this applies to you), (4) your thoughts on which qualities define a healthy marriage, (5) your thoughts on where your attitudes surrounding marriage come from, (6) how you feel about your child(ren) pursuing a love marriage or an arranged marriage, (7) what kinds of worries you have when you think about your child’s (future/current/past) marriage, and (8) what kinds of things you are most excited for your child(ren) to experience in their marriage if they do decide to get married or are already married. You may skip any questions you feel uncomfortable answering.

What happens if I say “No, I do not want to be in this research study”?
Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won’t affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.
What happens if I say “Yes” but change my mind later?
Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to stop before the study is completed, feel free to contact Zahra Amer at zamer@vols.utk.edu. Any information we have already collected from you will be destroyed. However, data cannot be destroyed once it is de-identified and the code key linking participant names and ID’s is destroyed. The code key will be destroyed once the study is completed. We estimate that the study will be completed by 12/31/2020.

Are there any possible risks to me?
It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form. Possible risks include feeling uncomfortable or vulnerable during the interview. We have a list of resources available in case you would like to receive a higher level of care after the interview, and you are also free to contact Dr. Kristina Gordon, a licensed clinical psychologist, following the interview if you wish.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?
We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. However, your participation may help us better understand marriage and family attitudes within the South Asian immigrant community. This kind of research is severely lacking, and we hope the findings of this research study can help psychologists better understand and serve members of the South Asian community. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?
We will protect the confidentiality of your information by assigning you a unique ID number when you agree to participate in the study. Only the principal investigator will have access to your identifying information. Know that if you choose to do the interview at your home, the research assistant accompanying the principal investigator has been trained to maintain your privacy and confidentiality and has signed a contract stating they will maintain your confidentiality. All other members of the research staff will only be able to identify your data using your ID number. All physical data (including your informed consent record and any printed transcripts of your interview) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator’s research lab. Only the research staff will have access to this research cabinet. Any printed transcripts will be shredded following analysis. The audio-recording of your interview will be destroyed after it is transcribed. The transcript will only refer to you using your ID number and will remove all other identifying information. All transcripts will be stored as password-protected documents on a UT-sponsored Google Drive, which is a secure file storage system. All transcripts stored on Google Drive and all informed consent documents will be destroyed 7 years after the study is completed, as required by the American Psychological Association (APA).

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:
- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

**What will happen to my information after this study is over?**

We will not keep your information to use for future research. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study. We will not share your research data with other researchers.

**Will I be paid for being in this research study?**

You will not be paid for being in this study.

**Will it cost me anything to be in this research study?**

No, it will not cost you anything to be in this research study.

**What else do I need to know?**

If we learn about any new information that may change your mind about being in the study, we will tell you. If that happens, you may be asked to sign a new consent form.

**Who can answer my questions about this research study?**

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers (Zahra Amer, zamer@vols.utk.edu; Kristina Gordon, kgordon1@utk.edu, 865-974-3347).

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
1534 White Avenue
Blount Hall, Room 408
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

- Participant responses:
  - First and Last Name [text box]
  - Date [text box]
Appendix C

Prompts for Semi-Structured Interviews

1. Tell me a bit about your own marriage story and what that was like for you (if applicable).
2. "How do you define an arranged marriage?"
3. "How do you define a love marriage?"
4. What qualities define a healthy marriage to you?
5. Where do you feel your attitudes surrounding marriage come from? What factors have impacted your views on marriage?
6. How do you feel when you imagine your child pursuing a love marriage or if your child has already pursued a love marriage?
7. How do you feel when you imagine your child pursuing an arranged marriage or if your child has already pursued an arranged marriage?
8. What kinds of things worry you most when you think about your child’s (future/current/past) marriage?
9. If your child does decide to get married or is already married, what kinds of things are you most excited for them to experience in their marriage?

** These prompts were added following open and axial coding of the first three transcripts.
VITA

Zahra Amer was born in Knoxville, Tennessee to the parents of Dr. Syed Amer and Sadia Amer. She attended the Webb School of Knoxville for high school, followed by the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. She received her Bachelor’s in psychology with a minor in French in 2018. In the fall of 2018, Zahra began the Clinical Psychology doctoral program at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, studying with Dr. Kristina Coop Gordon.