

**Identity in a Love Marriage? Exploring the
Consequences of South Asian Women's Choice to
Take Part in Inter-Racial Relationships**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the challenges faced by young South Asian Canadian women when they choose to become involved in interracial intimate relationships. A feminist intersectional framework was used to analyze the ‘othering’ by home communities and experiences of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status negotiated on a regular basis by the women. Data was collected through a mixed methods approach combining findings from semi-structured in-depth interviews with 10 South Asian women between the ages of 18-30 in Surrey and Vancouver, British Columbia and reflexive autobiographical analysis of the study author’s own lived experience. Secondary sources used to contextualize the findings include sociological and feminist literature on South Asian women in Canada and multiculturalism, race and ethnic relations.

The study findings indicate that South Asian women construct their own racialized and bicultural identities over time and in relation to the stigmatization they experience from both their own community and dominant Canadian society. Self-identification is complex and difficult for some women because of the interplay of the intense cultural socialization most received at home, and the ongoing influence of Western culture as they grew up. Not all of the women experienced the same negative consequences when involved in interracial relationships, but most showed similar emotional consequences such as distress and fear caused by familial and home community pressures to meet culturally prescribed gender role expectations and duties. Most also wanted to balance both the ethnic and Canadian aspects of their lives, retaining their South Asian heritage while adopting Westernized views on subjects such as personal happiness, marriage and independence. Multiculturalism is valued by some and seen as justification of their mixed unions. Others critiqued multiculturalism, seeing it as useful or practiced only in theory.

For the 10 South Asian female participants of this study, the subject of interracial relationships and its impact on young women needs more dialogue. This thesis provides a beginning point.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this thesis I analyze the phenomenon of ostracization from home communities experienced by many South Asian women who have chosen to enter into interracial relationships. Drawing from feminist sociological frameworks (Bannerji, 1987; Smith, 1992; Bailey & Gayle, 1993), I explore the social, cultural, economic, and political factors that shape the construction of insider and outsider categories, and ‘othering’ in such situations. I examine how the women construct their own racialized and cultural identities over time and in relation to the stigmatization they may experience from both their own community and dominant Canadian society (Jiwani, 2011; Kundu & Adams, 2005; Sundar, 2008). The findings fill a gap in current sociological research on gender, racialization and discrimination, and inform policy for support organizations that aid South Asian women in dealing with challenges related to ‘othering’ and discrimination. I mention both ‘intermarriage’ and ‘interracial relationships’ in this thesis as the participants were involved in interracial relationships but were not married at the time of interviews. Many suggested that they would be getting married in the future, thus putting them in the potential category of ‘intermarriage’.

In Canada, the rate of intermarriage (marriage between people of different race, caste, and/or religion) increased from 2.6 percent of all marriages in 1991 to 3.1 percent in 2001 and 3.9 percent in 2006 (Penning & Wu, 2013). By 2009 almost half a million Canadians lived in mixed-race unions (Mitchell, 2009). South Asians make up a large portion of visible minority populations in Canada (Bhanot & Senn, 2007), yet they are the least likely of ethnic minorities to intermarry (Mitchell, 2009). Interracial dating and marriage have increased in North America as a whole (Harris & Ono, 2005; Joyner & Kao, 2005; Penning & Wu, 2013; Qian 1999 & 2005) and the topic has been widely researched in the United States in part due to America’s history of segregation and immigration. In the American context, scholars see the rise of interracial unions as a positive change in race relations (Qian, 1999; Yancey, 2002). Some analysts interpret it as a decrease in racism, since racial distances and barriers are broken down. It is also seen as indicative of positive change in attitudes, laws and norms (Qian, 1999; Penning & Wu, 2013). Exogamy (or marrying outside one’s ethnic group) is also described as a tool of assimilation (Qian, 1999; Kalbach, 2002; Hamplova & Bourdais, 2010). By contrast, other research indicates

a much less positive response to intermarriage for South Asian women. Those who choose interracial life partners often face stigma, exclusion and even violence or death, and in extreme cases, what has been labeled as ‘honor killing’ (Chesler, 2010; Papp, 2010; Welchman & Hossain, 2005).

1.1 Focus of the Study

South Asians are the second largest visible minority in Canada (Malhi & Boon, 2007) and consequently have become the subject of much recent sociological research. However, limited research has been done on inter-racial/inter-ethnic marriages, arranged marriages and dating within the South Asian community in Canada. Surprisingly, there seems to be no analysis of the effects on gender exogamy such as identity changes, community standing and emotional consequences (Inman, Altman, Kaduvettoor-Davidson, Carr, & Walker, 2007). My academic interest in this research comes from a personal standpoint as I have faced ostracization from my own family and community for entering a mixed-race relationship. Searching for sociological literature to better understand the dynamics of gender and racialization in my culture – I am a second generation South Asian woman and was raised Sikh in the Greater Vancouver area - I stumbled onto this gap in the existing literature and decided to pursue research on this much needed topic.

This thesis fills a gap in current research by uncovering what South Asian women experience when they choose to take part in interracial relationships in Canada, and why the women face such consequences. Research indicates that South Asian women can lose their personal and family status within their communities for taking part in unapproved romantic relationships (Manohar, 2008; Samuel, 2010; Uskul, Lalonde & Konanur, 2011), yet what women in Canada may personally experience when involved in interracial relationships has not been examined. There is little or no data on such matters as what women feel emotionally, how they make sense of their situation and/or themselves and how they manage their daily interactions with family, partners and community. In the Canadian context multiculturalism plays a unique role in this topic as diversity and acceptance are considered progressive and crucial to the dominant society. The role of the dominant Canadian culture is also examined adding to existing sociological and feminist research on South Asian women, gender, culture and interracial relationships.

I argue that South Asian women can experience negative consequences after becoming involved in interracial relationships due to the gender socialization they received growing up in their family home. This intense socialization greatly affects concepts such as personal agency, identity, happiness and values. Choosing to pursue personal desires and goals such as finding their own mates, and becoming involved in interracial relationships strongly goes against socialization based on cultural expectations taught in the home, causing emotional distress and a rift between women and their families and communities. The pressure to follow cultural gender expectations and roles while being exposed to Western influences can cause South Asian women to have a complex, multi-dimensional understanding of self-identity. Being bicultural and trying to negotiate between two cultures can cause significant stress for women and their partners and families.

The focus of this thesis on exploring South Asian women's emotions, shifting concepts of identity, lived experiences and often negative consequences of being in interracial relationships is unique. In addition to adding to the growing body of academic literature on South Asian women in Canada, the data gathered in this study enables the researcher to address the types of supports and aids important to the women. With these findings in mind, women's and South Asian community organizations may begin to challenge and address the stigmatization many South Asian women experience from their home communities and dominant Canadian society when living in interracial relationships.

1.2 A Note on Terminology - Defining South Asian

South Asian is a term frequently applied as an identification category in Canadian sociological literature. It is typically used to refer to anyone who can trace his/her origins back to the sub-continent of India (Ralston, 1988; George & Ramkissoon, 1998; Aujla, 2000; Rajiva, 2012). South Asians' presence in Canada began in the early 1900s and rose significantly between the 1970s and 1980s with a large population influx from India. Migrants looking for better work opportunities arrived during this period due to the newly introduced Multiculturalism Policy in 1971 as the Canadian government wanted to promote the importance of immigration to help populate the nation. The policy would later become known as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988 (Naidoo, 2003; Rajiva, 2012). Although many South Asians landed in Canada under the family or business class looking for better opportunities, they were not free from stereotypes and discrimination. A 1993 study found that that Euro-Canadians least

preferred Muslims, Indo-Pakistanis, and Sikhs when asked about ethnic group preferences (Naidoo, 2003; Rajiva, 2012). Negative racial attitudes were projected onto South Asian women with common stereotypes of them being passive, silent, illiterate, and smelling of curry (Rajiva, 2006). Beliefs such as these are the reason many South Asian women have felt out of place in Canada, even if they are Canadian citizens. However, it is important to note that not all South Asian women feel out of place in Canada. Having been born and raised in Canada myself, I identify as a Canadian citizen and have never felt like an outsider. This is also true for many of the young South Asian women with whom I grew up.

1.3 Situating Myself within the Research

I am aware of the negative impacts of the stereotypes of South Asians and Indian culture that we often encounter in the broader Canadian landscape. My own negative experiences of being in an interracial relationship were related to values from the culture, but rather than blaming or stereotyping the South Asian culture I looked to better understand where these ideologies have come from and how they can be addressed to improve other women's lives. The autobiographical account of my experiences helped me to understand issues within the culture, but also concepts such as identity and agency which are important to South Asian women in Canada. Drawing on the theoretical approach of standpoint epistemology (Harding, 2009) I believe my own autobiographical account holds merit and is important to reflect upon and analyze alongside interview data which highlights the voices of other South Asian women. My aim in this research was to discuss South Asian women's subjectivities in a way which enabled the women to share their own experiences, and become subjects rather than objects in research (Smith, 1992; Majumdar, 2007). I believe I accomplished this through using a combination of autobiography and in-depth interviewing that allowed women to share their stories in their own words and to talk about what they felt was most important in terms of their construction of identity.

South Asian women are not a homogenous group. There are different languages, religions, castes and other identifying characteristics (George & Ramkissoon, 1998; Aujila, 2000). However, all the participants shared cultural similarities and ancestry from the same geographical location – the subcontinent of India. In conducting the research and analysis I took care not to project my experiences and life story onto the participants, yet I had an understanding of the social and cultural norms in the women's lives and felt connected to a certain degree with

their experiences because of my own shared history.

1.4 Plan of Study

In Chapter 2 I review previous sociological research on South Asians and South Asian women in Canada and identify key findings and gaps in research in relation to this study such as identity formation, gender differences, and Western influences. I discuss the socialization South Asian women experience from infancy to early adulthood with particular attention to dating, love and marriage, intermarriage/interracial relationships, multiculturalism and identity formation. Theoretical orientations for this study, including work on gender, 'othering', standpoint and intersectionality theories are discussed in depth. Additionally, I highlight the main thematic areas from secondary literature shaping my research question and subsequent analysis.

In Chapter 3 I discuss the mixed methods approach of the study, which combines my autobiographical analysis and data from ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with young South Asian women. After a brief introduction to qualitative feminist methodology the chapter is divided into two segments. Part 1 discusses the autobiography, examining its application as a feminist method, its purpose and use in this study and the employment of Smith and Watson's (2010) techniques of autobiographical analysis to analyze the autobiographical component of my work. Part II focuses on the details of ethics, recruitment, sampling, and research design for the semi-structured interview phase, concluding with a description of my use of thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) to analyze the interviews. Additionally I discuss methodological challenges and limitations of the research.

Chapter 4 presents the summary findings from the two data sets. Beginning with the autobiographical analysis, key themes working from Smith and Watson's framework (2010) consist of agency, audience and addressee, body and embodiment, identity and temporality. The second section provides findings from interviews. I elaborate the key global themes: fear, family, happiness, marriage and independence, trust and policing and multiculturalism. I argue that these themes provide insights into what South Asian women experience after being involved in interracial relationships. Finally data from my autobiography is compared to the interviews elaborating on key themes of agency, identity, body and embodiment, and gender roles/socialization, which were central to the women's narratives. Examples are presented to illustrate similarities and differences between my experience and those of my participants.

The findings strongly suggest that identity is a very important concept for South Asian women and it affects all aspects of the women's lives. Identity formation is a fluid, on-going process that is continuously reconstructed through different situations, experiences and environments. Identity is complex and multi-layered with aspects of ethnic, bicultural and Western influence intersecting in a variety of ways. It stems from early socialization in the home that I argue affects the women's interracial relationships later in life. Socialization also enforces gender roles and expectations that I found to be very important factors intersecting along with race and racialization. Finally multiculturalism plays a unique part in interracial relationships in Canada because of its ideological prominence in the construction of Canadian identities. However, as many of my participants noted, it was often more evident in theory than in practice.

Chapter 5 begins by situating the findings of this study in the larger secondary literature review. I discuss similarities with literature on identity and socialization of South Asian women, and show how my data adds to our understandings of the intersection of identity, gender, racialization and multiculturalism. I also highlight participants' interest in and willingness to discuss their personal experiences of 'othering' within and outside of their home communities and their interest in seeking supports and aid. Based on these findings I make recommendations for women's organizations and their front line workers to help them assist women who may seek aid regarding the challenges of being involved in interracial relationships. Specifically, I argue for adoption of an intersectional approach to the issue, being inclusive and non-ethnocentric and recognizing that interracial relationships involving South Asian women need to proactively be addressed. I also suggest future research ideas arising from this study including work on South Asian women and the lack of sexual communication in their households and gender socialization, and the stigma surrounding female sexuality and its impact on women's sense of autonomy and embodiment. Finally I briefly reiterate the importance of this study and how it contributes to the larger body of sociological and feminist literature on South Asian women's experiences in Canada.

Chapter 2: Understanding South Asian Women's Lives in Canada

2.1 Introduction

In the first part of this chapter I review earlier research on South Asians in Canada with particular attention to work on multiculturalism, identity and interactions with dominant society. I then review work on the socialization that South Asian women go through in their lives before the marriageable age by discussing different life periods, as they are conventionally understood. The sub-topics reflect key themes in the literature: Identity of a South Asian Woman; The South Asian Woman's Body; Dating; Love and Marriage; Intermarriage; and Multiculturalism. All were important in helping me to develop my framework for this study.

The second part of the chapter discusses the theoretical influences shaping my research including feminist intersectionality and standpoint theories as well as work on identity and 'othering'. I explore how South Asian women become 'othered' in Canada in the context of both their ethnicity, and their choices to become involved in interracial relationships. I also introduce the research questions that guide my study and explain how these questions relate to women's experiences of ostracization.

2.2 Research on South Asian Women in Canada

I. South Asians in Canada- A Brief History

Although South Asians began immigration to Canada in the early 1900s, increased sociological interest in Canadian South Asians rose in the late 1970s and early 1980s as immigration hit a high point. In 1976 there were approximately 118,000 Indian immigrants in Canada (Kurian, 1991). By 1986 the number had risen to just over 314,000 with South Asians making up approximately 1.3 percent of the total Canadian population (Kurian, 1991). Researchers became increasingly interested in who South Asians were as an ethnic group, how they were going to adapt to Western Canadian society, and where their place would be in the Canadian mosaic (Naidoo, 1985). Understanding South Asian culture was divided into different areas of interest with topics such as family structure, the role of women, parent-child relations, and their possible contributions to the Canadian economy (Kurian, 1991). South Asian women became a keen topic of interest for some researchers because of the apparent duality in their lives. Researchers were interested in how they were functioning in Canada coming from a

different traditional culture (Naidoo & Davis, 1988). During the 1990s the focus extended to how women's roles were challenged and changed in Canada, along with the arrival of their children (Aujla, 2000; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). South Asian women's roles are still studied today as the next generation adapts a bicultural identity having been socialized by both their mothers and Western Canadian influences (Naidoo, 2003).

II. Research on South Asian Women

Research regarding South Asian women cover several different areas. Existing literature focuses mostly on multiculturalism as policy, concept and ideology, racism and identity formation (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Naidoo, 2003; Sundar, 2008; Malhi, Boon, & Rogers, 2009; Rajiva, 2013). For example, Bannerji (2000) has focused on the experiences of being a female member of a racialized minority and acceptance in a nation associated with imperialism, multiculturalism, and conflicting beliefs on diversity and racism. Zaman (2006 & 2010) has discussed immigrant labor issues and experiences in Canada. Agnew has written on topics such as identity, immigration, migration (2003) the complexity of language (2007), and being a feminist in a culture that strongly values patriarchal beliefs and traditions (2007). Other researchers such as Rajiva have written about South Asian youth and their understanding of bicultural self-identity (2006) influenced by both home culture and broader Canadian society. She also has written on the new realities of generational differences as immigrant parents deal with their Westernized children (2005). Handa (2003) also has focused on second generational issues and conflicts among South Asian Canadian families that stem from girls engaging in Western activities such as dating. It is also notable, and important for my own study orientations, that several of these scholars have drawn from their own life experiences to make sense of the social realities and issues of race and gender they are researching (Bannerji, 2000; Agnew, 2003; Handa, 2003).

Previous work on South Asian marriages and relationships has often focused on understanding family structure, beliefs and the overall culture. Samuel focuses on Canadian South Asian women's status and decision making in marriage practices as they change to incorporate Western values (Samuel, 2010 & 2013). According to Samuel (2010), South Asian women in Canada are rejecting old traditions such as dowries but are still open to the concept of arranged unions. Samuel questioned this rejection of certain traditions over others and examined the practice of arranged marriage. Despite variations of the practice, she argued that it remains a

“central instrument of patriarchy that restricts women’s control and autonomy in matters involving sexuality” (Samuel, 2013). Samuel looks at the patriarchal aspect of marriage and how it is accepted in some forms, but not others by South Asian women in Canada. While her research importantly incorporates South Asian women’s voices, it does not extend to an analysis of interracial relationships or the aftermath of being involved in such unions. This is the gap in literature that my own study aims to fill.

Ralston (1988) applied a feminist approach and began her research with women’s experiences ‘from women’s standpoint’ to uncover experiences of disruption through immigration that left some of her participants feeling lonely and alienated. Rajiva (2012) applied a feminist framework in which she emphasized the importance of interlocking oppressions similar to Sundar (2008) to find women incorporated both traditional gender roles and modern attitudes in Canada, such as becoming a wife but also having a career. Samuel’s (2010; 2013) approach is the most similar to my own in that she applies standpoint and intersectionality theories to guide her research on women’s roles in the patriarchal structure of South Asian culture and women’s attitudes regarding dating and marriage. Samuel (2010) paid attention to the lives of her participants by taking into account individual social relations oriented within and around the family. While some of her participants felt the pressure to marry within the community, others dated in secrecy. She was able to understand how factors such as gender, race, class, generation and sexuality overlapped or intersected and impacted the lives of her participants in distinct ways (Samuel, 2010). Sundar (2008) also applied intersectionality to understand the interlocking oppressions that South Asian female youth experience when constructing personal identities in Canada. She found youth to develop identities based in both ethnic and Canadian experiences, often changing to suit interactions.

As mentioned above existing Canadian literature examines several different aspects of the South Asian woman’s identity. While Bannerji and Agnew importantly laid the foundation for studying the experiences of South Asian women in Canada, Rajiva and Samuel have added to knowledge about the South Asian diaspora in Canada by uncovering challenges and changes through which the younger generations are navigating. These analysts’ work has been conducted through a feminist lens as they questioned existing traditions, values, beliefs and hierarchal order in the home and community. Research has also often been conducted based on women’s personal experiences to gain better understanding of topics regarding South Asian women. My own

study adds to this body of literature by examining previously studied topics of identity, family, culture, multiculturalism and applying them in a new context to help us understand what happens to South Asian women when they choose to engage in interracial relationships in Canada.

2.3 Socialization in Canada

Identity of a South Asian Woman

South Asian women are socialized from an early age in one of the most important institutions of an individual's life- their immediate family. Family plays a major role in South Asian lives, as it is the site for cultural education and preservation. Home life is usually traditional and follows cultural norms and values. Females are socialized at an early age by their mothers and their identities are defined by their parents (Kundu & Adams, 2006). The home environment highly encourages a strong attachment to family with a sense of responsibility to the family unit. The overall structure of the family is normally patriarchal, hierarchical, extended, and interdependent (Inman, Howard, Beaumont & Walker, 2007; Varghese & Jenkins, 2009). Gender roles are clearly defined within the family and men are seen as the primary breadwinners as well as being the decision makers and disciplinarians (Varghese & Jenkins, 2009). This hierarchical structure is further enforced with community involvement in which members outside of the family keep a watch on one another's children. Such surveillance is seen as a method of keeping a family's honor (Varghese & Jenkins, 2009).

Under the fear of being watched, many children feel pressured to behave and uphold their family's name in a positive manner. However, a disproportionate amount of responsibility for a family's honor usually falls on the females (Mooney, 2006; Varghese & Jenkins, 2009). This is due to the patriarchal nature of most South Asian cultures. South Asian cultures rely heavily on religion that promotes gender rules and norms (Inman, 2006; Mahapatra, 2012). Although there are many religions that South Asians follow, almost all follow the same rule sets for gender roles and relationships. Higher religiosity accounts for patriarchal views, disapproval of interracial marriages, and greater control over girls (Inman, 2006). Societal views are sometimes used to justify religious views in order to maintain certain controls, such as power relations within gender. For example, in theory in Sikh doctrine the equality of women and men is promoted. In

practice, however, hierarchical gender relations are typically established, ignoring the very holy scriptures that are used to justify other parts of Sikh life and culture (Mooney, 2006).

Perhaps the most crucial time in which a young girl realizes she is bicultural is during adolescence. A bicultural identity refers to an identity that is embedded in more than one culture (Sodhi, 2008). Adolescence is considered to be a difficult time due to the transition that takes place from childhood to adulthood. Females often have a difficult time during this period because of bodily changes and because of social and cultural expectations they experience from society (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). Women of color face even more complex challenges as they begin the journey to womanhood with expectations to meet from two different cultures. South Asian girls not only deal with Western concerns of growing up, but also the values placed on them by their ethnic culture. South Asian adolescent girls are raised in much more controlled environments than their Western peers. They are more protected, and live sheltered lives when compared to most Canadian teenage girls (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). They also have more rigid rules regarding socialization. Interestingly, rules concerning socialization and individual freedom are placed on South Asian girls, but not on South Asian boys. Normally, boys do not face the same type of surveillance or paternal control as their sisters (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Naidoo, 2003; Varghese & Jenkins, 2009).

Talbani and Hasanali (2000) identified three significant features regarding socialization for teenage South Asian girls in their study in Montreal, Canada. Their participants' spoke about the differential treatment between boys and girls in the house; girls had less decision making power than boys; and there was more control on girls intermingling with the opposite sex. These key elements lead girls to question their identity. Not only did they compare themselves with their Western peers, but they also began to notice the difference between the sexes. While some girls agreed to accept the rules placed on them, many chose to challenge their status within the home. Talbani and Hasanali's (2000) participants not only acknowledged the way they were treated, but also commented on how they questioned their parents' actions.

Dating

Dating is a major life event in Western adolescent's lives. Canadian South Asian girls realize their bicultural identity when they are often not allowed to date like their Western peers. Casual dating is highly discouraged in South Asian culture. While young South Asian males can date and become involved in interracial unions, girls are usually forbidden (Netting, 2006).

Sexual purity also is required of females but not of males (Varghese & Jenkins, 2009). South Asian parents fear dating will lead to sexual activity or sexual assault for their daughters. A female South Asian's sexual purity is important not only for the girl's future marriage, but as symbol of honor for her family. Males do not have the same pressure placed on them (Manohar, 2008; Varghese & Jenkins, 2009). South Asian girls in Canada may feel internal conflict from having both Eastern and Western ideals of dating, love, and marriage. They may feel conflicted over fulfilling their families' desires, and their own desires of Western ideas of romance. This may lead to conflict within the family (Varghese & Jenkins, 2009).

Parents' desire to reinforce cultural gender rules and regulations in a country like Canada can be multicausal. Naidoo (2003) found that many South Asians migrants to Canada wanted to become modernized in their new home, but did not want to assimilate. Some South Asian mothers also felt the need to continue their cultural values after being traumatized by the migration experience (Naidoo, 2003). This caused some families to strengthen the control over their daughters (Gupta, 1997). For some immigrant parents the family is a representation of their home-nation. Once in Canada, they become the sole transmitters of their culture. Since females reproduce the culture, they are seen as vessels of traditions and values and are more controlled than males (Gupta, 1997; Manohar, 2008). As girls enter adolescence, they become more aware of the rules required to be a 'good' woman. Daughters are socialized for marriage by developing the personas of being innocent, obedient, and attentive (Gupta, 1997) traits which are not generally reinforced in Western culture.

Once girls become women the policing of the body does not stop. Rather, there is a double standard with men being able to have more control over their partners than women. While men can continue to date and marry who they choose, South Asian women typically continue to have their parents make decisions on their behalf (Samuel, 2010). In Canada, South Asian women are gaining more freedom with age, as they become members of the labor force and are therefore more financially independent. However, this newfound freedom can be limited. While women are able to earn wages, their parents may still expect to have a say in whom they marry (Samuel, 2010). For South Asian women the appropriate age to marry is between 18 and 30 years of age (Samuel, 2010). Dating once again becomes an issue as South Asian women try to take control of their own identities while dealing with family in finding a suitable mate.

Love and Marriage

South Asian women may feel conflicted when planning a marriage because of the inclusion of Eastern values. Growing up in Canada, South Asian women learn Western ideas of love and desire. Marriage is seen as a union between two individuals with similar interests. The decision to marry is in theory based on a mutual love. Parents and family are expected to accept the union since marriage is the individual's choice (Uskul, Nalonde & Konanur, 2010). This concept is at odds with Eastern values of marriage. In South Asian culture a marriage is seen as a joining of families rather than just two people. Marriage is seen as a collective process. Parents and family members take part in finding mates and planning the wedding (Sodhi, 2008; Uskul, Nalonde & Konanur, 2010). Trying to balance both perspectives on marriage, an individualistic and collective approach, can be a source of stress for South Asian women. While males may feel the same way as females during this occasion, women may be caught between being independent in a Western sense while being told to act modestly during Eastern procedures.

Marriage is a collective event in South Asian society because it is seen as an important life moment in creating a sense of belonging, applying strong ethnic traditions and values, and carrying forth a cultural identity. Parents are thought to have more life knowledge and experience than their children (Sodhi, 2008). For South Asian women the father is still thought to have control of his daughter's life. According to Gupta (1997) daughters posed a serious challenge to paternal authority when they asserted their own plans. In one case a woman explained how her choice in marriage severed communication with her parents. Although the woman had chosen a male from within her community, a partner from the same religion, language, and caste, her father refused to attend the wedding because he had not found her prospective husband. The young woman was an adult, age 26 at the time of her wedding (Gupta, 1997) however, she was still viewed as under her father's control. An example such as this shows the level of patriarchal control that some South Asian women face as adults.

Rejection of Indian marital traditions can be due to several factors. A well-developed individualism from growing up and being influenced by Canadian culture can cause some South Asian women to rebel (Netting, 2006). Girls may start rebelling during adolescence, but it may become more prevalent when reaching the marriageable age. An estrangement from Indian culture can also lead to rejection of traditional ways. Growing up in a country as diverse as

Canada allows for some to venture into different religions and communities which differ from those of their own ethnic group (Netting, 2006). Sometimes parents' own marital experience can be a factor. While divorce is still considered taboo, those who chose their own mates are more flexible with their children's desires. Finally, not being embedded within a South Asian Canadian community is seen by some as providing more freedom with regard to whom they marry (Netting, 2006). Since the community polices females, having no connection to the community can be liberating to some degree.

Intermarriage and/or Interracial Relationships

Once a South Asian woman chooses to enter an interracial relationship, her entire previous history in socialization and identity formation comes into play. A woman may cross several boundaries when she chooses to simply date, but the situation becomes a complex matter of the intersection of race and gender if she dates someone from another culture. Intermarriage is positively viewed as an indicator of changing racial relations by researchers (Qian, 1999; Penning & Wu, 2013) but it is not always accepted by the general population. For example, the rise of interracial marriage does reflect the changing laws, attitudes, and norms in a society. However exogamy can bring forth several changes to a family structure, removing previous traditional norms (Penning & Wu, 2013). Not only can it be discomforting for people to accept change, but also it takes time to adapt new attitudes. Although there are no explicit rules against interracial relationships in Canadian or Indian cultures today, it is considered taboo to some degree by both cultural groups. Barriers to interracial unions are instruments for maintaining a racially stratified society (Yancey, 2002). In many cultures, it is more acceptable to simply date someone from another culture, race, and/or faith than to commit to a long-term relationship through marriage (Yancey, 2002).

Qian's research shows that young adults are more likely to marry interracially than older adults. These young adults are usually well educated, and live in urban areas (Qian, 1999; Yancey, 2002; Penning & Wu, 2013). Students who attended interracial schools tend to date interracially simply due to the fact that they are exposed to a diverse environment (Yancey, 2002). When couples do choose to get married, they can expect to experience unenthusiastic reactions from family. The family unit is an important aspect of South Asian women's lives. Even when a South Asian woman starts her own family, she is expected to maintain a respectable image for her parents. Her decision to marry someone from outside her culture could

affect her parent's standing in the community (Inman, Altman, Kaduvettoor-Davidson, Carr & Walker, 2011). Many parents and grandparents also fear that an interracial marriage would cause a distance between them and their future grandchildren (Inman, Altman, Kaduvettoor-Davidson, Carr & Walker, 2011).

Reactions from family, friends, and community are known to have caused psychological distress among interracial married couples (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006). According to Bratter & Eschbach (2006) women tend to have higher levels of stress than men. Women may feel more psychological distress due to reduced social support. For South Asian women it can be difficult to seek out social support because of cultural socialization, which encourages keeping feelings to oneself (Mahapatra, 2012). South Asian women may also feel unsure of how to communicate their concerns because of cultural differences. For example, while I was working at a women's organization in Vancouver, B.C. a few years ago, a fellow co-worker observed that South Asian women often called in for aid, and were evidently very upset, but struggled to find words to explain what they were experiencing, or what types of supports and help they desired. The co-worker (who was not South Asian) admitted that she herself was unsure how to be culturally sensitive or how to respond in such cases. In this study I hoped to learn from women how they would like to be helped and what actually works in rebuilding their confidence, self-esteem, identity, and mental well-being. As I will discuss in depth below, I found most simply wanted an ear to listen and someone to be open minded and not ethnocentric or judgmental when hearing of their experiences of patriarchy, gender expectations and other dynamics in the home.

In Canada past research on intermarriage has often been based on national census data (Kalbach, 2002). Quantitative data is used in studies on exogamy and interracial relationships, but it is often only applied to comprehend statistical data on how many people are involved in such relationships. Details on why or who is involved and what the couple may be experiencing are left out. My qualitative study answered questions about who is involved, why they chose to engage, and what happened on a daily basis or what has happened after the relationship was formed (Yancey, 2002; Bratter & Eschbach, 2005; Varghese & Jenkins, 2009; Uskul, Lalonde & Konanur, 2010). This approach helped provide in-depth understanding of how South Asian women may become othered by their own culture and/or community, and/or the dominant society.

Research shows that many South Asian women face discrimination from the dominant culture that deeply contributes to their construction of self-identity (Gupta, 1997; Naidoo, 2003; Rajiva, 2006; Sundar, 2008; Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2007 and 2009). Many women grow up wanting to take part in the Western culture, but do not feel fully accepted because of cultural and racial differences. At home they may feel disconnected with their own culture as well, wanting to associate more with dominant Canadian culture. As women of color they may also feel like outsiders or imposters when with their partners, especially if their partners are Euro-Canadian. A central aspect to understanding social discrimination from the dominant society is looking at the 1971 Multiculturalism Policy (Naidoo, 2003). Canada officially sanctioned a plan to encourage immigrants to keep their traditions and cultural identities as part of their Canadian identity. Sections 15 and 27 of the 1982 Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* protect the rights and heritages of all Canadians (Naidoo, 2003). While an official policy, as many analysts have argued, the doctrine of multiculturalism has not eliminated racism and not been fully realized in Canadian society (Malhi & Boon, 2007).

Multiculturalism and Identity

Some analysts have argued that multiculturalism in Canada is more of an idea than an actual practice. Although Canada is thought to be a 'raceless' nation, racism lives at individual, institutional, and ideological levels (Malhi & Boon, 2007). For South Asian women this can cause conflict through an intersection of race, gender, and class as they are seen as having lower status than other ethnicities. Despite a strong historical background and being the second largest minority in Canada, South Asians are still thought to be outsiders (Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2007). As mentioned before, I have never felt out of place in Canada as a Canadian. I have experienced racism yet my self-identified nationality is Canadian rather than Indian. However, I also refer to myself as a woman of color, which can be considered a somewhat negative term. Some women find terms such as referring to the culture and/or themselves as "Brown" to better incorporate the complexity of ethnicity and color differences in comparison to the dominant Western society. I discuss this more in Findings Chapter 4.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

I. A Feminist Framework

My research is guided by a feminist framework (Blaikie, 2007) which was chosen for multiple reasons. The consequences that South Asian women experience when being involved in interracial relationships are largely due to gender differences within the culture (Inman, 2006; Mahapatra, 2012). Feminist research often focuses on the theme of gender domination within a patriarchal society (Creswell, 2012). My personal goals for my research also correspond with that of a feminist research paradigm. Feminist research aims to establish collaborative and non-exploitative relationships and to place the researcher within the study to avoid objectification (Creswell, 2012). Feminist research takes insights from the struggles and lived experiences of women and marginalized people (Bromley, 2012). I added to the existing literature by drawing on the lived experiences of a marginalized group, in this case South Asian women.

Feminist perspectives are informed by theory and practice (Bromley, 2012). In the context of qualitative research, I was able to focus on the participants' answers and provide data that would be based on the perspectives, feelings, and experiences of South Asian women (Bromley, 2012). Feminist qualitative researchers question their positions, assumptions, and personal biases throughout the research process (Bromley, 2012). I reflected on my own biases by taking and reviewing personal notes throughout the process, especially after interviews. As mentioned above, I had an insider role since I belong to the community being studied. Being an insider did allow me easier access to speak to participants. It allowed a level of trust that I believe I would have not gained so easily had I been an outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). My social location as a South Asian woman also afforded me a common ground from which I could begin the research and interview questions (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In order to make sure that I did not fall victim to making assumptions based on similarity of experiences and social location, I employed self-reflexivity through my note taking (Hennink et al, 2011)

II. Standpoint

Sandra Harding's standpoint epistemology argues that those who have less privileged social positions are likely to have perspectives about the world that are less distorted than those who hold the most privilege and power (Pohlhaus, 2002; Rolin, 2006). By virtue of their standpoint they see the world both through the eyes of the privileged (or dominant ideologies) which they must negotiate in everyday life, as well as through their own lived experience of

marginality. People who share social locations often share meaningful experiences that can generate shared knowledge (Harnois, 2010). Thus, those who belong to groups that are oppressed may see the world differently, and perhaps more fully than those who are privileged (Pohlhaus, 2002; Intemann, 2010). Early standpoint theorists focused on class while recent work has shifted to focus on race and gender (Harding, 2009; Harnois, 2010; Mitra, 2011).

My choice to apply standpoint epistemology stems from Sandra Harding's work. According to Harding (2009), standpoint begins at the daily lives of the oppressed, exploited or dominated. The goal is to 'study up' by starting with the oppressed group and explaining what the group needs and wants. The process is a collective achievement as it relies on others experiences (Harding, 2009). My sociological stance is influenced by Dorothy Smith who insisted on beginning with women's experiences as a starting point in research in sociology (Smith, 1992; Harding, 2009). I also applied standpoint in the construction of my autobiography, which connected my personal experience to the study.

III. An Intersectional Approach

Feminist research begins from the experiences of women (Bailey & Gayle, 1993) and has been commonly used in research relating to South Asian women's life experiences. Some researchers combine feminist analysis with a poststructuralist approach (Ghosh, 2000; Rajiva, 2006) or a postmodern approach (Malhi, Boon, & Rogers, 2009) while others apply standpoint and/or intersectionality theories as a means to explore the links between gender, race and culture (Bhopal, 1997). This thesis draws on feminist theories of intersectionality and 'othering' (Said, 1978) to analyze and better understand the dynamic complexities of South Asian women's experiences of identity and oppression (Nash, 2008).

From an intersectional perspective inequities are shaped by the interaction of different social factors (gender, race, class, sexuality, age etc.) power relations, and experience rather than being the result of single distinct factors (Hankivsky, 2014). According to Hankivsky (2014):

Intersectionality promotes an understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations (e.g., 'race'/ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, religion). These interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments and other political and economic unions, religious institutions, media). Through such processes, interdependent forms of privilege and oppression shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism and patriarchy are created. (2014: 2)

Most often associated with its American origins, intersectionality was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw when she addressed Black women's experiences in the 1980s (Davis, 2008; Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). Crenshaw focused her theory on the various ways race and gender interacted to create Black women's experiences in the United States (Nash, 2008; Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). According to Crenshaw, race and gender were the two social factors that marginalized Black women. She argues that, "contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider intersectional identities such as women of color" (Crenshaw 1991: 1242-1243). In the early 1990s Patricia Hill Collins introduced the concept of intersectionality to sociology and further extended its analytic utility by showing how intersecting oppressions are organized through interpersonal, hegemonic, structural and disciplinary domains and matrices of power and domination. Collins stated that gender must be understood in the context of power relations embedded in social identities (Collins, 1990; Shields, 2008). Feminists and womanist scholars of color later urged this need to intersect gender with other social identities such as race to create more represented voices (Davis, 2008; Shields, 2008).

In a Canadian context the theory of intersectionality is a valuable and useful construct because it helps us to examine social issues experienced by diverse populations in an environment with mixed tensions around multiculturalism and Canadian identity formation (Jedwab & Donaldson, 2003). According to Hankivsky (2014) 29-32 % of Canadians could belong to a visible minority group by the year 2031. Currently Canada is home to more than 200 different ethnic groups and more people are identifying with multiple ethnicities (Hankivsky, 2014). Canadians simply cannot be reduced to single identity categories (Jedwab & Donaldson, 2003). An intersectional approach explores the ways aspects of social category integrate with one another to create unique social locations that vary according to time and place (Hankivsky, 2014). To better understand the process of inequity and differentiation at macro and micro levels, and in examining structures, identities, and representations, a multi-level dimension is needed in an intersectional approach (Hankivsky, 2014). As previous research has shown, South Asian women in Canada have faced oppression in their own patriarchal culture, and in the dominant Canadian society. I argue that using an intersectional approach enables me to better describe and understand women's social locations at both macro and micro levels, recognizing their unique positions as women of color involved in interracial relationships.

2.5 Understanding “Othering”

South Asian women can find themselves in a complex situation when they are ‘othered’ (Said, 1978) by their own community because the relationship choices they have made can be seen as a betrayal to the intense endogamous socialization they received growing up (Kundu & Adams, 2006). This may contribute to why Mitchell (2009) found South Asians the least likely to take part in interracial relationships. Isolation, segregation, and marginalization are applied to ‘other’ individuals according to Edward Said (Said, 1978; Samuel, 2004). In Sociology and Gender Studies, ‘othering’ refers to discrimination and exclusion by a group towards individuals who do not fit the moral, cultural and societal codes of the dominant group (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). Those who are othered are thought to be inferior to the dominant society and often belong to marginalized groups. Being othered by the dominant group is a form of oppression that sends othered individuals into “symbolic exile” (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). South Asian women may be othered from dominant Canadian society because they are viewed as immigrants despite being born in Canada or living here for years (Bannerji, 2000). Stereotypes such as those mentioned in Chapter 1 can affect South Asian women daily in places such as school (Aujla, 2000; Samuel, 2004) and work (Ralston, 1988; Malhi & Boon, 2007). Researchers such as Malhi and Boon (2007) argue that many South Asian women face discrimination at individual, institutional or systematic levels simply due to racism causing feelings of being unwanted or othered.

2.6 Research Questions

As part of my analysis on ‘othering’ (Said, 1978), I looked at the discrimination that South Asian women may feel from the dominant Canadian society to better understand the complex nature of constructing one’s self-identity as a female member of a racialized minority. Identity and embodiment are key factors in this research. Women involved in interracial relationships in the past or present were interviewed. The research questions I focused on included: How do South Asian women construct and reconstitute their identities? What happens when their support systems disappear? How do they deal with the emotional consequences of negative responses to their relationships? Do the women still feel that they embody a South Asian identity, or what is their new identity? What do the women think is the origin of ‘othering’, i.e. does it come from their own culture, or dominant Canadian culture? And how do they construct and reconstruct their notions of self-identity over time and in different contexts?

To understand othering I also explore discrimination from the dominant society by looking at democratic racism, an ideology that proposes egalitarian values along with racist attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that are expressed by the dominant group of society through a discourse adapted by individuals (Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2007) and that is felt by many non-European Canadians. Both first and second generation women were referred to as a collective since research shows that Canadian born South Asian women can feel similar, if not the same disconnect as those who have immigrated (Rajiva, 2006; Sundar, 2008; Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2009). This is often due to the racial discrimination produced by the dominant culture, which causes identity conflict for many racialized individuals. There are also no studies on whether first or second generation South Asian women are more likely to take part in exogamy, as there are with other ethnic groups in Canada (Qian 1999; Yancey, 2002), thus I have included both groups in my research. As previously mentioned research does indicate generational differences in some issues regarding South Asian women (Handa, 2003), but as I discuss in the next chapter, my participants were all in the same age group and shared similar characteristics.

2.7 Conclusion

To provide a context for this study and to explain why South Asian women may feel othered by their culture and community, there are several factors of identity formation that were examined in this Chapter. I began by looking at previous research on South Asians in Canada which led to a discussion on work focused on Canadian South Asian women. I then explored how South Asian women are raised in the home in Canada, the impact of religion, patriarchal ideology, and embodiment of cultural honor to understand the consequences that South Asian women face for taking part in interracial relationships. I justified my choice of applying an intersectional approach, including standpoint theory to this study by briefly explaining the historical background of intersectionality and its application in a Canadian context. The next Chapter discusses the mixed method research design used in this study, as well as details of sampling, recruitment and data gathering and analysis.

Chapter: 3 Methods

This project utilized a mixed qualitative methods design. Primary data sources included a reflexive autobiography of my experiences as a young South Asian woman living in an interracial relationship and in-depth interviews with ten South Asian women in lower mainland British Columbia who were currently, or in the recent past, had been in inter-ethnic/inter-racial relationships. Secondary data included previously published research on South Asians in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom from Sociology, Women's Studies and cognate fields with a focus on gender dynamics, family socialization, and intra- and extra-community responses to mixed-race and inter-ethnic marriages. This material was important to the research because it allowed me to understand the socialization of South Asian women before they engaged in romantic relationships, their experiences of identity formation and learned gender roles, and the ways in which they were impacted by interracial and inter-ethnic dynamics of their home communities. Building from previous studies on South Asian women I was able to address why women's choices to engage in interracial/intra-ethnic relationships were often viewed negatively by family and community. Secondary data was also crucial to contextualizing the importance of the study's findings in the limited body of literature on South Asian women in Canada.

The decision to incorporate autobiography along with interviewing was influenced by previous research conducted by South Asian female researchers whose comparative reflections have greatly aided our understanding of the dynamics of gender and culture in the South Asian community in Canada. It was also motivated by my desire to better understand my own experiences and compare and contrast them with those of other South Asian women of my age cohort. The study was qualitative in nature and followed principles of feminist (Blaikie, 2007; Bromley, 2012) and intersectional (Hankivsky, 2014) research, which bring marginalized women's voices from the periphery to the center (Hooks, 2000).

3.1 Qualitative Feminist Methodology

Qualitative research techniques, such as in-depth interviewing, aim to provide rich, descriptive answers to get at the meaning and significance of events and ideas for people (Del Balso & Lewis, 2012). This study employed the in-depth interviewing to record the perspectives, feelings, and experiences of a group of South Asian women in lower mainland B.C. and analyze their experiences within the larger Canadian context (Bromley, 2012). Additionally, reflexive

autobiography allowed me to position myself in the study using my background knowledge, experience, cultural similarity and personal history to help interpret the research (Creswell, 2013). Since I belong to and had grown up in the community I interviewed, I was able to draw on my insider role to provide additional insights to the data (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

3.2 I: Autobiography

Autobiography as Method

An autobiography is a life narrative that can be written in many different ways depending on genre and purpose. In a sociological sense an autobiography can be accepted as a text, or a topic that can be investigated (Stanley, 1993). Sociological autobiography is a personal exercise in producing knowledge based on the interplay between an active agent and the social structure (Stanley, 1993). Reflexivity is important and fundamental to being true to events, memory and understanding what has happened because of social position; in this case gender and race. Autobiography uses memory as its central source of inspiration (Cuesta, 2011). This can be imperfect because the writer claims authority of experience that produces knowledge. However, as a methodology in the context of feminist scholarship, personal memory can be an important part of interrogating and understanding lived experience (Stanley, 1993).

Situated knowledge from autobiographies comes from the documentation and analysis of experience (Marcus, 1995). Experience is created based on a lived social reality Experience is “social being”- the lived realities of social life. Women’s lived experiences brought focus to inequities and oppression based on gender (Scott, 1991). Many of these experiences would have included how the women felt and were made to feel. Experience can be accessed through feelings (Scott, 1991). Emotion is important in feminist research. For one, reflexivity in itself is a highly emotional task. According to Smith (1993) the female body among other things, is open to foreign influences, meaning and control. Reflecting on these in an autobiographical sense creates emotional responses that are both cognitive and analytical which can produce important sociological insights (Wilkins, 1993).

Why Autobiography?

My autobiography was originally written in March 2014 for a feminist methodology course research exercise with the aim of gaining a different type of understanding from a unique methodological approach (see Appendix F). A sociological autobiography involves the process

of putting personal experience under a sociological gaze (Kebede, 2009). As I wrote, I found that my lived experience accessed through emotion led me to create situated knowledge, but I did not realize the challenges of employing these concepts. I wrote about my life to create knowledge with an understanding that there were others like me. I was careful to acknowledge that my experience was my own, but at the same time I was speaking as part of a larger group. I was never the voice for an entire group. What I found was that in fact there were others like me who experienced similar events yet we were separated by other social factors. I found writing my autobiography first allowed me to discover how difficult it can be to organize thoughts, disclose information and re-live experiences that brought up uncomfortable emotions.

Data Analysis

To analyze my autobiography I relied on Smith & Watson's (2010) strategies for reading life narratives. Reviewing the transcript, I chose five major themes; agency, audience and addresses, body and embodiment, identity, and temporality based on what caught my attention as I re-viewed my own writing. What I thought mattered most to me was chosen based on what could be easily pulled from my autobiography and fit an evident theme. For example I realized that I had spoken in great detail about my identity, thus the theme 'identity' was an obvious fit.

Following Watson and Smith (2010), my autobiographical experience was read, coded and later analyzed in relation to the findings from the in-depth interviews (see Chapter 4). In reviewing the interview transcripts, I relied on 3 of the same themes I had identified for the autobiography - agency, identity, and body and embodiment. This allowed me to make consistent comparisons between the two types of data. I did not apply the frames of audience, address and temporality to the interviews, as these themes were better suited to autobiographical analysis rather than interviewing. I included a new theme, gender roles and socialization, to accommodate information that arose from interviews. I was able to compare my autobiography to this new theme since I had written about roles and socialization but originally had not created a separate theme for it.

Challenges

Challenges were experienced with the autobiography process as reflected in my research journal. The reason I wanted to reflect on my autobiographical journey was because I wanted to be aware of my thought process in writing a personal, detailed, important piece. Writing about

the process allowed me to explore the difficulties and unseen challenges that arose when I was actually writing an autobiography. It was important in understanding autobiography as it brought to attention issues that may not be predetermined when using this approach as a research method for the first time. I discuss the findings from this process in the next chapter. I chose to include some original work written months prior to better showcase the difficulties of a seemingly simple methodology

3.3 II: Interviews

Interviewing in Previous Literature

Interviewing was the second modality of my research. Interviews are often used to access personal thoughts and experiences of South Asian women since the culture often silences its women. Talbani and Hasanali (2000) spoke to young South Asian females to find out how the girls felt about growing up with cultural expectations. Other researchers also relied on in-depth interviewing to analyze how South Asian women felt about themselves and what was expected from them at home and in the larger dominant culture (Netting, 2006; Rajiva, 2013). In-depth interviewing was the best method to truly comprehend how South Asian women are socialized as the participants explained their personal experiences, emotions, and issues. Additionally, Manohar (2008) used interviews to gain information about the secret actions of youth dating in a South Asian community. The youth spoke about dating taboos in their community, and how they secretly took part in relationships without their elders knowing. Without these interviews Manohar (2008) argues she would likely not have gained access to details on culture, generational conflict, traditions and gender relations.

Reik's concept of "listening with the third ear" (Anderson and Jack 1991: 19- 25) was applied to both my autobiographical analysis and the interviews to carefully understand the multiple layers of information shared with me. I discuss this technique in more detail in the findings from Chapter 4 when explaining how I employed it in analyzing my own autobiography. In conducting interviews (see Appendix D) I listened carefully to what participants said to me, asking to clarify answers and provide more details when needed. According to Anderson and Jack (1991), women often leave out particular things when telling their life experiences to follow socially acceptable scripts or ways of expressing experience. Since "good women" do not publicly share their personal issues, certain things regarding a woman's life may be left out or implied (Anderson & Jack, 1991). I remained attentive to this

both during the interviews and in the analysis phase. Where possible, I explored submerged themes through additional prompts during the interviews and found that in general most women were very happy to address such issues in more depth once a good rapport had been established.

Ethics

I followed the guidelines set out by Lakehead University's Ethics Review Board as required by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. Additional approval was received from Kwantlen University to post recruitment posters around the campus (See Appendix A). All participants read and signed the forms that included an information letter (See Appendix B) and consent form (See Appendix C) and each chose their own alias to ensure confidentiality. Participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any point during or after the interviews. Minor adjustments to the study's recruitment process were approved by Lakehead University's Ethics Review Board before the 2nd phase of recruitment began.

Recognizing the potential sensitivity of the topics explored and that participants might wish some support or assistance after participating in the research, I ensured that all participants were informed of counseling services in the area. Some of the services were ones that I was familiar with through my own previous employment (Battered Women's Support Services) and others through accessing supports and counseling for myself in the past. Some of the women expressed interest in the counseling services provided, not due to any distress related to the interviews, but as a future place to talk about situations for which they had previously had no supports. Several of the women stated how difficult it was to not be able to talk about their lives with others. All of the participants gave me positive feedback about the study and emphasized that it was a topic that needed to be discussed. This supports other research findings which suggest that interviews can be enjoyable and therapeutic for participants (Hennink et al, 2011) particularly when experiences of marginalization may be challenging to address in their home communities. I found this to be the case with my participants.

Research Design

Once in the field I began with recruitment plans at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. At Kwantlen Polytechnic I had obtained permission from past professors to provide mini presentations to their classes. I met with and presented my research to eight Sociology classes

that ranged from first to fourth year. I handed out flyers (See Appendix A) and provided information on who I was, what my research was about, with whom I was looking to speak, and why I was pursuing my research topic. Interviews were set up through my email address provided during presentations and on flyers. I accommodated participants in meeting locations and ensured that they would be comfortable. All participants met with me on Kwantlen's campuses regardless of whether they were students. It was simply an easy location to access for both parties and participants felt comfortable in the public space.

Due to changes at the women's organization that I had planned to use as a recruitment site, I found additional participants through contact with other organizations. My recruitment flyer was displayed on my personal Facebook, on the social media site Craigslist Vancouver, and I posted recruitment posters around Kwantlen's three campuses. I also contacted Kwantlen's women's club called WOOW - Women Organizing Opportunities for Women. The recruitment sites were approved by ethics (#149 13-14). Snowballing was the primary recruitment method. This assured me that the participants trusted me as an interviewer when discussing a sensitive topic. Women felt much more comfortable passing information on after speaking to me in person. One participant passed information onto clubs she was involved with on campus.

Locating Participants /Sample Source and Details

In-depth semi structured interviews were conducted between May and July 2014 with 10 first and second generation South Asian women between the ages of 18-30 in Surrey and Vancouver, British Columbia. Data suggests this age group is most likely to be in a serious relationship leading to marriage (Samuel, 2010). Women in this age group also are often attending post-secondary education where they encounter and engage with the opposite sex from different cultures. All participants self-identified as South Asian. Seven women were students, while three were working full-time. I applied purposive sampling that involved selecting the sample based on pre-set parameters deriving from the literature (Del Balso & Lewis, 2012). Participants were chosen based on the study criteria of gender, age, race, and experience. I also asked participants to spread info about the study and to ask others if they wanted to take part, thus adding snowballing as a second method of recruitment (Del Balso & Lewis, 2012). The median age of participants was 25, with the median length of their relationships being 2.75 years.

Other characteristics of the participants are discussed in detail in the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Twelve women showed initial interest and ten followed through to interview. One participant chose to not be recorded because she felt self-conscious of how her voice sounded on the recorder. I agreed to take hand written notes to accommodate her. Conversations also took place before and after the tape recordings, with the latter being more informal. Participants wanted to hear about other women's experiences or compare their own experiences with mine. I checked with participants about whether they wanted information from the informal portion of our meeting to be included in the data set. Only data from those who agreed to this was added. This primarily included information the women noted they had forgotten to mention. Interviews ranged from 60 minutes to four hours and were transcribed verbatim soon after interviewing.

The interview schedule consisted of three sections that asked 28 open-ended questions. Each section focused on key areas chosen from previous literature and/or based on my own personal experience. In the first section I asked questions regarding demographics such as age, language, and religion. The second section focused on more personal questions regarding the participant's identity, family and romantic relationship. These questions led to the final section that focused on the emotional, social, cultural and political consequences of being involved in the interracial relationship. The full interview schedule is appended (See Appendix D).

Data Analysis for Interviews

The interview data was analyzed using thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic network analysis is a popular method of examining and presenting qualitative data as it allows researchers to map connections between key themes and to visually present the process of text to interpretation (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The first step in a thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) is to reduce the data by coding meaningful text. I listened for specific topics or words and paid attention to detail in the interviews. Once the text had been coded, I pulled out common significant themes by rereading the previously coded text. In order to create a network I would take themes and place them into groupings, which allowed me to determine the relationships between basic, organizing, and global themes. A basic theme is the closest to the data and usually is comprised of common terms or words that are utilized by the participant. Basic themes must be read within the context of other basic themes as on their own they say very little of the text (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Organizing themes, the next level up, in

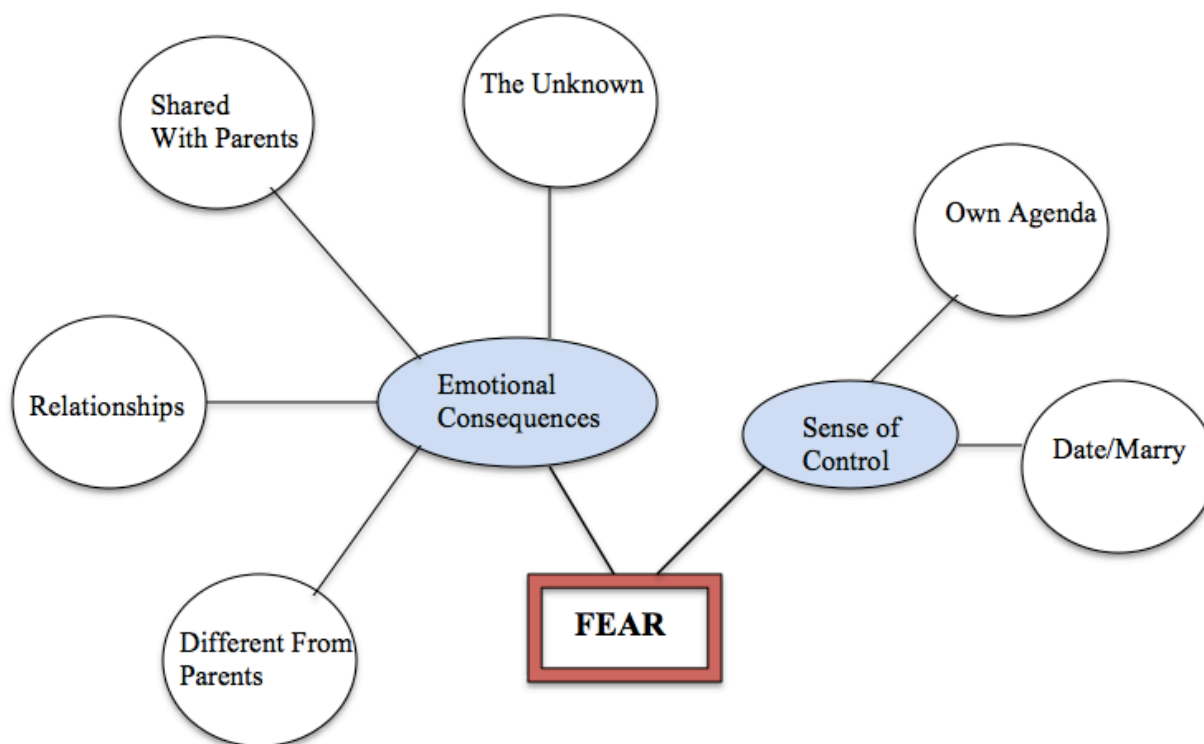
the thematic network analysis, group basic themes into clusters of similar issues. Together they show the significance of what was found in the text. Global themes, the final step, are macro themes that summarize and make sense of the other themes and tell us what the text as a whole is about (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 388-389). The global theme represents the concluding claim, leading to the organizing themes that present an argument or position and are backed up with the basic themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Once groups are selected as basic, organizing and global they can be represented visually as a web-like illustration (See Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. Example of Thematic Network Analysis Mapping Codes to Themes

Circles = basic themes

Blue ovals = organizing themes

Red rectangle = global theme



I listened for specific topics or words and paid attention to detail in the interviews. For example, I found the code ‘worry’ based on the emotional reaction or tone that women had

towards different aspects of their situations. From codes such as ‘worry’ I looked to see what circumstances caused the women to experience worry and who expressed it towards them. I found issues such as ‘getting caught by parents’ as a source of ‘worry’. From there I identified themes such ‘worry’ actually meaning a fear of being caught, because it was a fear of the unknown for many of the participants. I concluded that this meant an emotional consequence (an organizing theme) that came from being in the relationship and finally it was a global theme of ‘fear’ since ‘worry’ led to or meant fear. In the above example, ‘sense of control’ was an organizing theme that led to the global theme of fear. Through this process I identified the following global themes: fear, family, happiness, marriage and independence, multiculturalism and trust, and policing. I discuss these themes and the related basic and organizing themes in detail in the next chapter.

Challenges with Interviewing

Overall the interviews went very well with participants engaged and deeply interested in the topic. As mentioned above, the women were happy to discuss their lives simply because they wanted to share their stories. Their voices added to Canadian sociological literature on several topics including South Asians and identity, women’s cultural roles and expectations and racialization within a multicultural nation. Most importantly in the context of my study, their openness to speak and answer questions helped fill a gap in understanding complex issues within interracial relationships in Canada. Because it is a small and selective qualitative study, the research did not aim to generalize all South Asian women who are or have been in interracial relationships. However, participants shared similar experiences of being in such relationships allowing common themes and issues to be identified. Negative experiences were expected based on my personal standpoint and secondary data that is present in literature in the United States and the United Kingdom on South Asian women’s experiences in interracial relationships, strengthening my findings and expected outcomes. Limitations of this study include geographical region and sample size. Although the location and sample size were appropriate for an in-depth qualitative study for an MA thesis, further research could include a larger sample size and make comparisons across other regions across Canada.

3.4 Summary

As noted at the outset of this chapter, this study used a mixed methods design combining insights from a reflexive autobiography of my own related experiences of growing up as a South Asian woman in Canada and in-depth interviewing with a sample of ten young South Asian women in lower mainland B.C. My mixed methods qualitative approach produced two data sets: the autobiography and the interviews. I chose this combined approach to gain a better understanding of the topic. Challenges with autobiography were overcome by working through and understanding the method and despite a small initial set back with recruitment once in the field, recruitment and interviewing were very successful. In the following chapter key findings from autobiography and in-depth interviews are presented and discussed.

Chapter 4: Findings – Autobiography and Interviews

The findings are organized into three sections in this chapter. Part I begins with a contextual discussion of the autobiography followed by an analysis of its key themes based on Smith and Watson's (2010) method of reading narratives. I present the autobiographical analysis as it was originally done to preserve its authenticity. The key themes addressed are: agency, audience and addressee, body and embodiment, identity and temporality. In Part II of this chapter I present the thematic network analysis of the ten research interviews focusing on the global themes of fear, family, happiness, marriage and independence, trust and policing, and multiculturalism. To aid with visual conceptualization of the multi-layered thematic analysis a web-diagram accompanies the detailed presentation of findings. In Part III I compare the autobiographical findings with key findings from the individual interviews again drawing on Smith & Watson's framework (2010). The key themes addressed include: agency, identity, body and embodiment, and gender roles/socialization.

4.1 I: Engaging with the Autobiography

Written for a graduate Women's Studies methods course, my original autobiographical piece (see Appendix F) discussed my firsthand experience in taking part in an interracial relationship as a South Asian female. As described earlier, South Asian females do not share the same freedom in dating and spousal choice as males (Varghese & Jenkins, 2009). When I first thought about using an autobiographical approach to share my story, I thought the process was going to be an easy one. I love reading autobiographies. I thought I would be able to write up my experience quickly and easily. I was very wrong. Once I began the actual process of typing up my story, I found that I had hit an emotional block. I knew what I was going to write about, but I wasn't sure where to begin, what to share, what to leave out and I felt vulnerable and almost exposed. I knew sharing my story would empower me in taking away any shame associated with being a woman from a culture that promotes silencing. However, I still felt conflicted and suddenly unsure how I was going to even begin. During a class presentation, guest speaker Brenda Sedgwick (2014) asked, "who am I?" in the context of her role as an Indigenous woman and a feminist researcher. I reflected on this question wondering how I wished to present myself on paper.

I further pondered Sedgwick's (2014) question as I went through her handout on locating oneself in theory/research. I asked myself what was the purpose of the autobiography other than just writing about my experience. I settled on the idea that an autobiography is a narrative that allows writers to understand their experience, their relationships, and the connection between their own lives and the world around them (DeGloma, 2010). Coming from the discipline of sociology, a sociological autobiography situates the narration under sociological scrutiny (Kebede, 2009). I would view my personal experiences in the larger context of the world around me and apply sociological concepts. Writing with a sociological lens made me feel better as it better situated who I was and where I was coming from. I had felt uncomfortable when I read about autobiographical methods as used in literary analysis. I felt unsure about the language and techniques, and was irritated by the fact that Virginia Woolf's work was often used as an example. It was not one I could identify with and I did not want to use it as reference in writing. I felt lost trying to connect what I read about Woolf to the sociological approach I wanted to take in writing my autobiography.

Although I did not want to write in metaphoric and poetic language, I wanted to express emotion in my autobiography. I used Loic Wacquant's work as a guide since he is a sociologist who writes in a formal manner, but applies reflexivity and situates himself in an ethnographic context. In the article I brought to a research class, Wacquant (2005) expressed emotion in his research and incorporated feelings such as vulnerability in a way that suited his writing style. Once I figured out how I wanted to express myself through the appropriate language, I relied on Smith and Watson's (2010) look at subjectivity in autobiography. This included memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment, and agency. I relied heavily on memory. As Smith and Watson (2010) state, my memory is associated with trauma and so there are particular moods that come up with certain memories. I wrote one draft using a process of simply recording memory onto paper. I wrote in chronological order and found myself struggling with details. I felt uneasy trying to access details and did not end up keeping the draft.

Through feminist research my 'truth' is made valid because I experienced it firsthand. However, lived experiences provide more than an individual thought process. They provide insight into ideologies that frame the events, and as social beings, our lives are constructed by influences of the social institutions, beliefs, and systems around us (Scott, 1991). Experience can also be the start of a process that allows for a deeper analysis of our lives due to the realization of

our conditions though social consciousness (Scott, 1991). Through my experience I started the process to better understand my position as a woman of color as I realized more than ever what was expected of me and what gender roles I needed to fulfill. I did find it difficult to look beyond the surface of just having an experience. I found analyzing experience to be a difficult task for me.

Feminist theory does validate women's voices, but I am still in the process of understanding that our voices are starting points in understanding issues. With the application of intersectional theory I will be able to access multiple aspects of my identity (Hillsburg, 2013). Feminist research draws on the insights of marginalized people and knowledge of such people is taken as being "valuable and real" (Bromley, 2012). I wrote knowing I was a woman of color from a particular culture that influenced my social reality. The intersectional approach, which takes into account the complex interplay of identities that cause oppression such as age, sexuality, race, and gender, also allowed me to connect back with the question of "who am I" (Hillsburg, 2013). I am a woman of color who was affected because of my gender and race. Reflecting on the spaces I occupied (Smith & Watson, 2010) during the original experience and occupy now helps remind me how far I have come and how my views have changed through time and experience. As a feminist I now view my past as an oppressive situation based on my gender within a patriarchal culture.

I found that I was emotionally affected as I wrote. I felt stressed and uncomfortable. I believe having to remember and relive the experience made me feel similar emotions to those I felt years ago. I had blocked out many of the memories associated with the original situation. Overall I felt physically tense which surprised me since I thought I had healed over the years. I knew that I would feel relief and I am glad that I was aware of my emotional and bodily changes as I wrote. Had I not reflected, I might not have truly understood what a unique and strong method autobiography is. I am nowhere close to finishing but I have finally begun which is the step in the right direction. I now know that it is important to be in tune with how I feel as I write and to take breaks to breathe. I certainly did not think it would be such an emotional and complex method, but I do believe that I needed to write my story in order to give voice to the person I was years ago who was too ashamed to speak out. After finally writing the autobiography I set forth to analyze it. The following section discusses the themes of agency,

audience and addressee, body and embodiment, identity, and temporality which I identified through my analysis.

Agency

The main reason for choosing to do an autobiography was to share my story. I wanted to share my personal experience to not only begin dialogue but to bring attention to a matter that many South Asian women face. Writing the autobiography came from exercising my own agency (Smith & Watson, 2010). I could have chosen to completely leave out my personal story, yet I felt a need to tell it; it was a personal action I wanted to take. For me “writing back,” (Smith & Watson, 2010) meant I could change how I felt I was represented years ago and how I was supposed to represent my culture and place as a woman. Telling my story my way was a strategy for gaining agency (Smith & Watson, 2010) as I wrote what I perceive to be my truth. Writing about my story disrupted previous social arrangements (Smith & Watson, 2010) in which I had a place as a “good” South Asian girl who followed cultural rules: “I began...[to] understand the role of caregiver while my Western peers were beginning to understand their own identities rather than care for others”. My agency was taking a back seat to what was socially expected of me.

I later wrote, “I could have become rebellious...but I was much too timid and afraid” (Appendix F p.94). Even though I acknowledge that perhaps I could have taken control of my needs and desires, I couldn’t do it because I was socialized to be meek. Further on I wrote that an “ascribed status did not fit with my own agency”(Appendix F p.95). I felt that I had been given a status; a South Asian female who is a “good girl” who was quiet, submissive and took care of others rather than herself, and yet she did not match up to the person I wanted to be. Closer to the end I wrote about how my parents may have begun to accept the fact that I have agency. This shows how important the theme of agency was in my life story (and still is). For years I did not know the word ‘agency’. Rather I thought of what I wanted as ‘wishes’. I chose to use the language (Smith & Watson, 2010) I now know because of my educational background and new found knowledge gained through exercising agency. My educational background helped me write my narrative as I wrote with a particular audience in mind.

Audience and Addressee

Reading through the autobiography, the reader will notice that sociological terms are employed to explain things. As a sociology student, I wrote the piece using a sociological lens,

yet at the same time I did not want to limit myself to writing for someone just from that field of study. Rather, I wrote thinking about myself as a student trying to make sense of what I was going through. I imagined students, those with enough skill to understand what I was saying and not be distracted by complex language. The autobiographical piece has no dedication (Smith & Watson, 2010) yet it is aimed to inform the audience reading it and aid anyone going through a similar situation. Before discussing the actual piece, there is a small disclaimer that states that this “is an account of my personal experience” (Appendix F p.94). I acknowledge the danger of stereotyping South Asian and Indian culture. There is a sense of knowing that people outside the culture will read the piece. On the other hand, I wrote in a way in which information flowed and I did not cite sources to back up my claims. I stated my life story as if there was no need to provide evidence to claims such as being a part of a “patriarchal culture” that “silenced its women”. There is a sense that another South Asian female reader will understand and connect to the assertions.

Implicitly a feminist audience is addressed (Smith & Watson, 2010), as there is focus on gender. Reading through the piece I realized how I wrote words such as “gender”, “gender expectations”, “gender norms”, “women’s issues” and I explicitly wrote about being a feminist. Feminist research is built on the idea that lived experiences help build knowledge and foment change (Hesse-Biber, 2004). In the disclaimer I had written that I would be writing from an approach of standpoint epistemology. An epistemology is a theory of knowledge that describes assumptions about the social world (Hesse-Biber, 2004). I wrote based on how I experienced my social reality making my knowledge and truth subjective and created with experience, emotions, and feelings (Hesse-Biber, 2004). This does not mean that my story can be accepted as just truth in itself, but it provides insight to knowledge building and that is accepted by feminism.

Smith and Watson (2010) asked what an autobiography asks from the reader through its text. Since I am engaging with my own piece, I could not tell if the reader is being asked to be empathic, critical or so on. Thus, I asked a friend and peer to describe what he thought was being asked of him as a reader. As a reader who had little to no knowledge of my background, he said that he felt that he was being asked to be empathetic, to reflect on his own experience of being othered, and he felt proud to have read that I kept my morals. I never thought about making statements regarding my morals or personal values. However, I found such statements as I read the narrative. I begin to discuss morals and values as I wrote about adolescence. I stated

that my peers and I were “beginning to adapt Western ideas of adolescence and the freedom associated with it” (Appendix F p.94). Freedom was a value I sought since I felt that I had none. I thought Western values were better than traditional ones as I associated traditional ones with religion and patriarchal control in my culture. Morals and values were taught to me and I did not develop my own until I chose to be with my partner. Before the relationship my morals were tied to being a “good girl”. Later on I wrote about my agency, which had become an important value. Agency and feminism were introduced to me formally through education. I wrote about school and my education’s impact on my life decisions, showing it to be valuable to me.

I certainly did not ask for empathy from my audience, but I do not consider it to be negative. Instead I am pleased that the narrative provoked emotions, as it was an emotional piece to write. Furthermore, I am also satisfied that my reader felt that he needed to connect what I wrote to his own experience as that allowed a human connection between writer and reader through text. My friend stated that my narrative reminded him of what he once went through both mentally and physically. Although I wrote mostly about what was going on in my mind, my body was certainly part of the journey which I discuss next.

Body and Embodiment

According to Smith and Watson (2010) when interpreting an autobiography, one can ask, “when does the body become visible in the writing?” Although I did not write about the physical body, it was always present in the autobiography. It was what housed my emotions, feelings, experiences, and it represented who I was supposed to be and who I have become. I began my story “having been born” and I quickly move onto how I had “grown up” with Western influences. Before stating anything else I chose to begin with my physical existence. This is important because I am a female and my gender socialization impacted the life experiences I encountered. I write often about gender as I discovered what my place in the world was as a South Asian female. I was to embody what a “good” South Asian girl would be; “silenced”, “quiet” and able to provide meals, do laundry, and clean. I mentioned how my peers were able to “wear makeup” while I could not due to “traditional values” imposed on the female body.

I embodied the South Asian culture and its values through the “language I spoke at home, the food I ate, and sometimes the clothes I wore”. When I wrote that I “met my partner” a change occurred. I wanted to make my own choices to pursue a relationship. Suddenly I listened to my body; its desire, its need for love, and to listen to my heart. I wrote that I was

“symbolically exiled” which was physical in the sense I was no longer a part of the community, and also mental as I was left emotionally distraught. A female co-worker would blame me by saying that I had “turned my back” on my own culture. My reaction to everything would cause me to enter therapy as I was trying to gain control of the body I felt was being labeled by others. Cultural meanings were being attached to my body because I was engaging in actions and behaviors I should have not been (Smith & Watson, 2010).

I wrote that over time “the shame began to fade” and used the word “growth” to explain how I changed. I believe this is when my body, who I am, became visible. I began to talk about my experiences and, of course, wrote the autobiography. My visibility was once tied to the community I came from, where women were taught to be quiet (Smith & Watson, 2010). According to Scantlebury (2005) finding and expressing one’s voice is a gendered notion because males are encouraged to verbalize their thoughts and ideas, while females are not. The final statement made in the piece was taken from author Gloria E. Anzaldua (1987) as I wrote, “I will have my voice”. I realized as I was reading that I still do not feel that I fully have my voice yet. I wrote, “I will overcome the tradition of silence” and the term “serpents tongue”. My body is closely tied to the usage of my voice. The entire passage points to the power of having control of one’s voice, learning to gain the confidence to speak up, and the negative concept of a woman speaking her mind. Finally, my body was a site of knowledge as memory itself is embodied. The entire autobiographical piece was written by relying on memory. My memory was not as clear as I had hoped it would be with certain events, but I did remember major concepts such as the development of my identity. Identity is a key concept in my thesis, and it played a key role in my personal growth.

Identity

My autobiography began with a given identity (Smith & Watson, 2010). I wrote about how I was born into and grew up in a “strict, traditional Sikh family”. I wrote how my peers were figuring out “their own identities” yet mine was fused with my family, community, and culture. I wrote about the freedom I associated with my Western peers because they were able to learn about themselves. I do acknowledge that I could have controlled my identity by being rebellious but I was too afraid. Being a “timid”, “quiet” girl who did chores was my identity. Reading the piece, I realized how often I wrote about identity. It was created for me, I had a “limited idea” about it, “I identified with my ethnicity”, and I was a well-behaved girl with a

“good record”. Since my ethnic identity was connected to my culture and its values with social status, I wrote that I was “stripped” of my ethnic identity. This left me to figure out who I was. At the time “I felt like I was living a double life” because of conflicting identities (Smith & Watson, 2010). I was still South Asian but, as I mentioned, I did not feel like I had an ethnic identity.

Sedgwick’s (2014) guest lecture, “Who am I?” best describes my understanding and process of self-identification. I asked at one point in the narrative “who was I: what did I want? What made me happy? Could I trust my own voice; why was I afraid?” The autobiography is written in a confident, almost matter of fact, manner. It shares a journey of discovering an identity that I created for myself. Some factors of my identity will be from what I was born with; I forever will be a racialized, ethnic, female (Smith & Watson, 2010). Other factors I can change and have changed by taking control of my life decisions and exercising agency. My identity is intersectional as several social factors of who I am cross one another to create my social location (Hillsburg, 2013; Scantlebury, 2005). The ending of my narrative describes an identity that is not fully developed but well on its way as I stated, “part of my own growth includes this paper (thesis)”. Yet, I chose to end the piece with confidence in going forth with a voice.

Temporality

The autobiography was written at a stage in my life where I am no longer ashamed of my past. This is evident in how I ended the piece stating that I would “have my voice” (Appendix F p.96). What characterizes the moment of telling is the use of language, how I spoke about my life rather than being quiet about it, and the piece had a beginning and an end (Smith & Watson, 2010). The stages of the story were told in chronological order, yet with further analysis I realized that I would venture backwards to my childhood to explain how I was socialized. After I had begun writing about my adolescence, I wrote about my grade school years at a religious educational institution. This was a way to give further evidence to how I was socialized, but it may also show how my memory was functioning.

While mentioning my youth I also stated that I cringe when I remember back to certain things. This shows the strong emotional reaction I could not disregard as I wrote about my past. The times of past, present and future are still organized in a chronological order despite some minor reflection on youth. The ending touches on a future yet most of the emphasis is on the

past. Overall the feel is like a flow where conflict occurs yet it leads to hope and future goals regarding an ongoing personal issue with gaining a self-identity.

Anderson and Jack (1991) recommend, “listening with the third ear,” a term they borrow from psychologist Theodore Reik. In reflecting on their experiences of oral history interviewing, they noticed how a researcher could easily begin to think she knows what the participant is saying without actually hearing the participant. Rather than actually listening, the researcher may begin to place the participant’s answers into existing schemas, turning the participant’s answers into what the researcher *wants* to hear. In order to avoid this, Anderson and Jack (1991) discuss the importance of asking questions to clarify terms, or attend to what is missing which includes making audible or visible what is left unsaid but implied. What is implied or absent (Anderson & Jack, 1991) is what women leave out when being interviewed. Rather than state things how they are, women leave out certain things when describing their life experiences. Women do this as they adapt to the culture they live in, one that promotes “good” women who do not publicly discuss their problems (Anderson & Jack, 1991).

I discuss Anderson and Jack’s (1991) interview findings because the same concept of the “third ear” can be applied when interpreting my autobiography. I did not take part in an interview, yet I wrote about my life experiences. Interestingly, as the researchers mentioned I discussed certain things about my life, yet left other things out. The silences and gaps within my narrative mostly consistent of a lack of details and the taken for grantedness of certain kinds of information. I never wrote about what my parents did, my relationship with my sibling, what I looked like as a young “good” girl, or how I really fit into my family structure. Since I wrote and interpreted my own work, there is bias in what I felt comfortable discussing. I believe I would have offered more information in any interview conducted by another researcher, had I been asked directly about the things I chose to leave out. I wrote my narrative as the information flowed, without too much pressure on myself to remember after I realized how difficult the task was going to be. Through analyzing the text, I realized that I focused the attention on myself rather than my family because I wanted to exhibit the control I finally have in my life. Although my family obviously plays a major role in the entire experience, the narrative is about me.

I also did not include some details because of the draining process of having to retrieve them. Most of my memory surrounding my youth had been blacked out in an effort to emotionally protect myself. As a coping method I had set aside several details that I decided

were not worth the effort at this point in time. As stated in the narrative, I am in the process of growing and changing. While some memories are slowly coming back to me, some are better left in the past. I do not think that my choice to leave out information has anything to do with keeping the narrative comfortable and acceptable (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Instead, my interpretation of what I left out only shows me how some things are still raw and need to be worked through before I can provide fuller disclosure.

Throughout the autobiography I took breaks and commented on what I had just written about. Anderson and Jack (1991) referred to this as making as meta-statements. In their interviews they found participants would “spontaneously stop, look back and comment about their own thoughts or something just said” (1991:21) during interviews. My own meta-statements took longer for me to find since I was reading what I had written rather than hearing my voice, which may have helped had I paused or changed my tone or flow, and I simply had a difficult time separating my previous thoughts from newer ones. According to Anderson and Jack (1991) meta-statements alert the researcher to someone’s awareness between what is expected and what is actually being said. The statements present how a person socializes feelings or thoughts according to certain norms (Anderson & Jack, 1991). One way to locate meta-statements is by paying attention to moral self-evaluative comments. These comments show the relationship between how we are told to act and how we feel about ourselves when we do or do not act that way (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Concepts of self-image and the interaction between self-image and cultural norms are exposed.

In the narrative I wrote about the roles I had to learn as a girl. I then wrote that “none of these role expectations seemed strange, although I often felt that certain duties were unfairly placed on me because of my gender”(Appendix F p.94). I knew how I felt as a young girl but I also knew the cultural norms of accepting my fate as a female and the duties that came with it. The comment points to my self-awareness of not being happy with the roles I was given and expected to take. I did not think the roles were “strange” yet I felt that they were “unfair”. In the second paragraph I make another meta-statement regarding the same topic. I wrote about being a “good girl” which would fit both Indian and Western cultural expectations of women; I was quiet and agreeable. I was feminine. I did whatever was needed to take care of my family and home. Right after stating these things, I wrote “the feminist I have become cringes remembering back to my youth” (Appendix F p.95). It was a sudden realization that I had done things I was unhappy

about. I made a moral statement on how I now felt about my past right after my moral self-evaluation of when I was younger. Clearly my morals have changed.

I continued with my moral self-evaluation as I stated in the next paragraph “I failed to realize the gender differences”(Appendix F p.95). I acted as I was expected to when I was younger, yet it would be years later that I would notice what I failed to see. This statement was at the end of paragraph three, making three paragraphs in a row with meta-statements. All of these paragraphs had to do with my youth and growing up. I wrote about my past explaining how I acted the way I was supposed to act, even if it meant I was unhappy, and then would mention how I was unhappy or how I failed to notice something. These statements showed how my self-awareness has changed. I believe I was always aware, but I never expressed my feelings and /or thoughts (Anderson & Jack, 1991). The last meta-statement I will discuss is regarding the co-worker who shamed me for my choices. I wrote about her negative comment towards me. I then wrote that I now understand “the fear and shame” (Appendix F p.96) my coworker may have been going through. I now understand that she too was trying to negotiate her feelings, how she wanted to act, and how she was expected to act as a South Asian woman.

Interpreting one’s own autobiography is a difficult task. I wrote about what I was drawn to. I chose certain themes over others for reasons I cannot give other than that they made sense to me. I felt connected to them. Some of my findings were surprising to me. I did not realize how much identity meant to me or what an important role my body played. Many of these themes played important roles in the narrative because of how they were once lacking in my life and now are a crucial part of it. Agency for example, was not even in my vocabulary for years, yet I *felt* it. Writing my autobiography was not an easy task either, but I knew I had to go beyond the “constraints of acceptable discussion” (Anderson & Jack, 1991) to truly understand my research topic. I needed to share my story, and interpreting it had implications for more dialogue than I anticipated.

I began my personal narrative with simply wanting to tell my story. I did not realize how difficult it would be to analyze my own writing. Beginning with the choice of sharing my story, agency was a major theme in my life narrative. Audience and addresses were important, as I had to figure out how to share the story and to whom it would be told. Expressing what it meant for me to grow up in Canada as a South Asian woman was articulated through the themes of body and embodiment, identity, and temporality. I explained my emotions, experiences, and who I

was through stages of life. In the next section I begin by briefly revisiting the importance of my insider position to help me understand my role as an interviewer. After this, I share the findings from my interviews with ten South Asian women in lower mainland B.C. conducted in the summer of 2014 after which I compare and contrast the two sets of findings.

4.2 Findings from the Research Interviews

As previously noted, during the spring and summer of 2014 I interviewed ten South Asian women who were between the ages of 21 and 28, with the median age being 25. Seven of the women were still in school and three were working fulltime in various office settings. The median length of their interracial relationships was 2.75 years. Overall I found my insider position as a South Asian female to be of great value to the interviews. While the participants did not initially know details about my personal experience, I found it easy to establish a rapport with the women and they seemed comfortable responding to questions and discussing their experiences with me. I found my position of commonality to be useful as we shared an understanding of vocabulary, culture, and emotional experiences. For instance, all of my participants understood themselves to be South Asian whether or not it was the term by which they referred to themselves in daily life. All of the women also understood the term ‘love marriage’ regardless of religion, caste, class, age, and other social differences. All also understood the concept ‘arranged marriage’ and its variations in a Canadian context. That is, some women thought of it to be strictly non-dating, while others thought of it as being set up by family members, both correct definitions of the practice. No one really thought of it as an act of force, a popular misconception in Western culture (Samuel, 2010). Regardless they had a good understanding of the terms.

Being female was important in gaining the women’s trust to allow them a space to freely express the frustrations of being a South Asian woman. Often interviewees would comment “you know” when speaking about issues and/or we would both agree in union over shared experiences or knowledge of cultural practices. The women were able to criticize certain factors of their culture without worrying about my responding in an ethnocentric or judgmental fashion. They could explain gender differences, for example, without worrying that I would dismiss the entire culture as ‘woman hating.’ One woman felt comfortable to use ethnic (Punjabi) words to express herself instead of losing meaning through translation, explaining the importance of religion in her father’s life which greatly affected her (i.e. him being *amritshak*, attending the *gurdwara*,

and doing *parth*). Finally, the women felt comfortable to talk about emotions that they have experienced because of their relationships. I believe my position did affect this because I could understand simply what they meant by being a woman of color in the South Asian culture.

4.3 II: Understanding the Consequences - Interview Findings

As previously discussed core themes were identified in the individual interviews through thematic network analysis. The global themes were: fear, family, happiness, marriage and independence, trust and policing, and multiculturalism. These themes reflect the ways the women described their emotional distress and how they felt and dealt with different aspects of their experiences of being in interracial relationships.

Diagram 2 - Fear

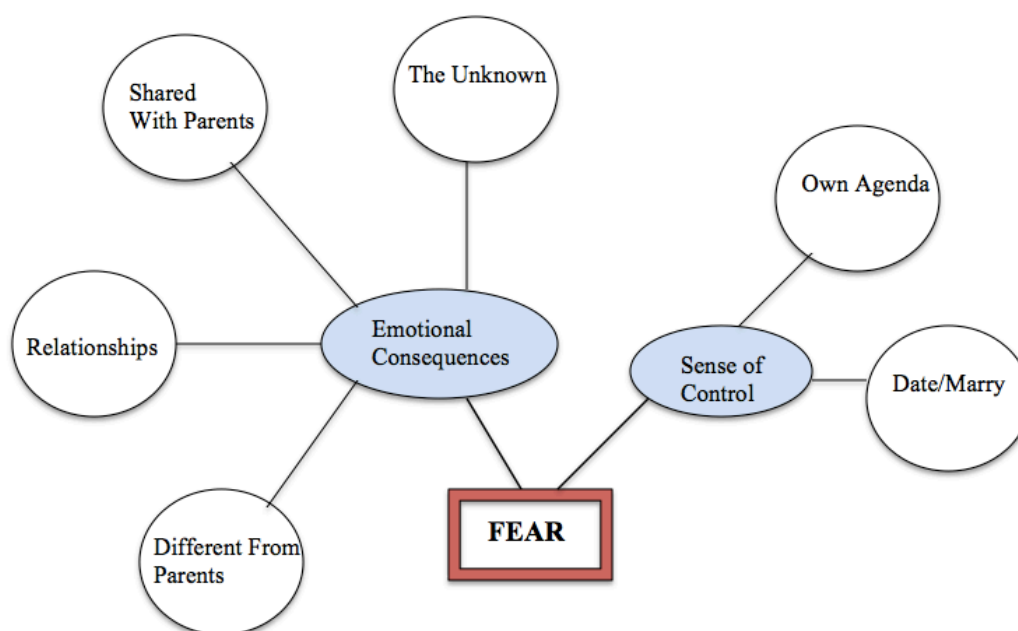


Diagram 2 illustrates the relationship between the global theme “Fear”, the organizing themes, “Emotional consequences” and “Sense of Control” and the basic themes associated with each of these. Fear of having their relationship discovered by their parents was a commonly expressed sentiment. Half of the women had not told either of their parents about their relationship. Two women had told their mothers but still harbored concerns about their fathers finding out. Some women were afraid of the unknown, as they were uncertain how their fathers

would react to the relationship, while others simply wanted to avoid causing disappointment. Tiffany explained how her family had no clue about her relationship and dealing with the situation had been very stressful. On her parents finding out and reacting negatively, Tiffany explained:

...[T]here was like moments like last week where I'm just like reflecting really hard and I think oh yeah I would be completely ostracized from everyone right and then I don't know it's really hard. Its really hard just because I think it just becomes um yeah when, when my mom keeps saying you know no way you're going to marry someone outside of Islam it and then again just thinking about it deeper scares me a little bit...So I do have a little bit of fear. Um but then like the next day comes and its like okay that didn't even happen but then it keeps getting being brought up again bringing so much negativity and I don't like that. (Interview #6, Tiffany, age 24)

Tiffany's method of comprehending the situation seems to include avoiding the reality of potential consequences since her personal reflections are emotionally draining and frightening to her. She understands what may happen to her in a realistic, rational manner, but she tries to forget her fear until it's brought to her attention again. Unfortunately for her, her mother keeps bringing the issue of marriage to her attention almost daily. Veera shared a similar fear where she often feared being caught while with her partner, but she sometimes feels frustrated enough to not care. Yet, the fear always returns once she starts thinking about possible outcomes of being discovered. Veera fears being caught when she comes across older South Asians while with her partner since they may know her parents. Tina felt the same way causing strain at one point in her relationship. She too was afraid of being seen with her partner, to the point that they had to have particular areas to hang out. Tina's mother knew about her relationship, but Tina didn't quite feel comfortable telling her father. While talking about this, Tina mentioned that her father had told her years ago that he didn't agree with divorce. Tina agreed that she didn't want to ever get divorced, a concern that many women had.

While divorce is something no one wants to think about before marriage, it is a fear of South Asian parents who believe that cultures other than theirs lack in terms of commitment, values or morals. Sonia explained this by voicing her family's fears regarding her:

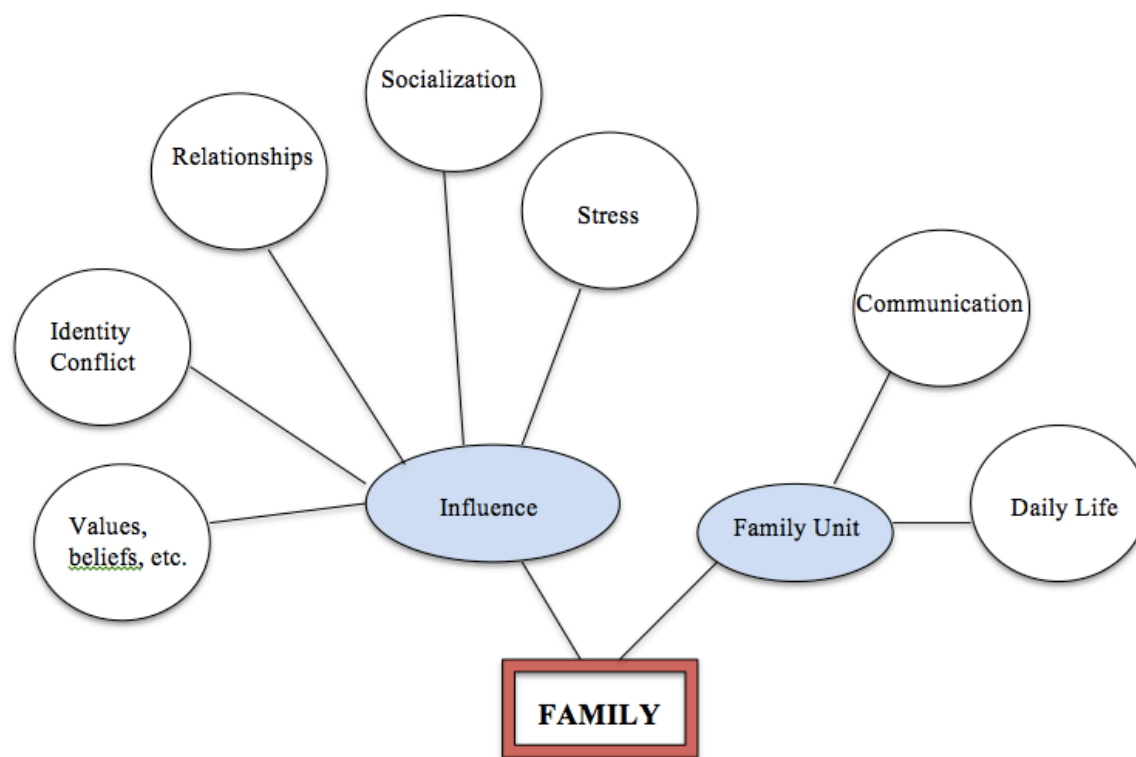
[A]nd what is she going to do like in the future, like these White people don't have values of marriage and they're just going to leave her. (Interview #7, Sonia, age 25)

It's interesting to note that while her family spoke about Sonia, they referred to not just her partner leaving her, but rather his entire family. According to Indian values, marriage is a joining of families. Sonia would not be divorced just by her husband; rather her husband's family would be considered a major part of the separation. Sonia's family may have feared that her partner's family would be unwelcoming towards her, influencing her partner to leave her. Tina felt the fear of families joining by stating that she was afraid of the families meeting. She was unsure how either side would react to each other.

For those whose mothers knew about their daughters' relationship, there was a fear of sexual activity leading to pregnancy. Anrup's mother was afraid of her daughter becoming pregnant, alone and left to be gossiped about in the community. Zoey's mother shared the same fear, telling her daughter to simply "be careful". Veera's mother also shared this fear, but I found Veera's own fear of marriage to be the most complicated. Veera was unsure about marriage and what it would do to her. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the women were not in a hurry to get married. They were only looking to marriage to either satisfy their families or to establish the seriousness of their relationship to their parents. Veera talked about her thoughts on marriage differently. When asked what she was afraid of:

I think it's just the commitment. Like I feel like if I mm, and I've always felt like this, I feel like if I get married to someone I lose my freedom. And I feel like I would start to suffocate or I'd lose my, my identity or something. And I just wouldn't be whole.
(Interview #2, Veera, age 21)

Fear was present in several of the women's lives in a variety of ways. It was a complex, multi-layered emotion as the women were afraid of getting caught, but also afraid of what might happen when caught and the consequences that might follow. For example, if a woman was caught by her parent and told she was a disappointment, would she then have to marry her partner quickly to avoid further shame to her family? While most of the women had plans to get married, no one was in a rush to do so. Veera was unsure about marriage anytime soon, Tina was worried about families meeting and all the women wanted to make sure that once married, there would be no divorce. Fear seemed to be a constant emotion that caused one concern after another. Interestingly most women's fears were connected to their families, a main cause of stress.

Diagram 3 - Family

She, they don't have a clue...it's been really, really difficult.

(Interview #6, Tiffany, age 24)

On dealing with her parents/family.

Diagram 3 illustrates the relationship between the global theme “Family”, the organizing themes, “Influence” and “Family Unit” and the basic themes associated with each one. Family was a major source of stress for the women, as they wanted to please their parents but also make their own choices regarding romantic relationships. Although the women all were being independent in their choices of mates, they still held family values such as respecting elders (Inman et al, 2001). All of the participants mentioned family in one way or another. Veera’s fear of losing her identity partly stemmed from how she saw women treated in her culture as wives. It only made sense that the examples of marriage she had seen were those of her family including her parents, which seem to be a bit dysfunctional from a Western view. Zoey was the only participant whose family fully accepted her partner and were very supportive of her decisions.

However, even she insisted that it was very important to her that her family liked her partner. Family is a major aspect of the women's lives as many of them still live at home. This made for a difficult situation as the women would have to lie about their partners daily. Anrup talked about how this made her feel about herself, explaining that the situation was "terrible" and taking a toll on her mental and physical health.

Anrup had originally cancelled her interview but agreed to meet a few weeks later after I had emailed her and told her to take care of her wellbeing and that I was still interested in meeting. She had been recovering from a fight with her mother in which she was trying to negotiate her place within her family structure. Tiffany felt similar emotions as her mother had been asking about marriage plans. Like some of the other women her parents had been receiving marriage proposals, not knowing that their daughters were in a serious relationship. Sonia talked about her family causing stress right from the moment she told her parents about her relationship.

Uh quite honestly in the beginning it was a lot of hostility between me and my parents. Um, they thought that it was just a phase I was going through and I couldn't really say anything back to that because I didn't know myself if it was going to be a long-term serious relationship. And so they didn't really budge on it in the beginning and then after it got serious, probably in 6 month, then they started asking all the questions and all their worries and all their concerns and it was definitely difficult for probably 3 months after that. (Interview #10, Anrup, age 25)

After establishing the fact that her relationship was serious, Sonia's parents did relax a little but continued to focus on the cultural differences whenever they had a chance. Many women expressed their frustration at their parents for finding reasons to blame their partner's difference. When asked about how she felt about everything Sonia continued:

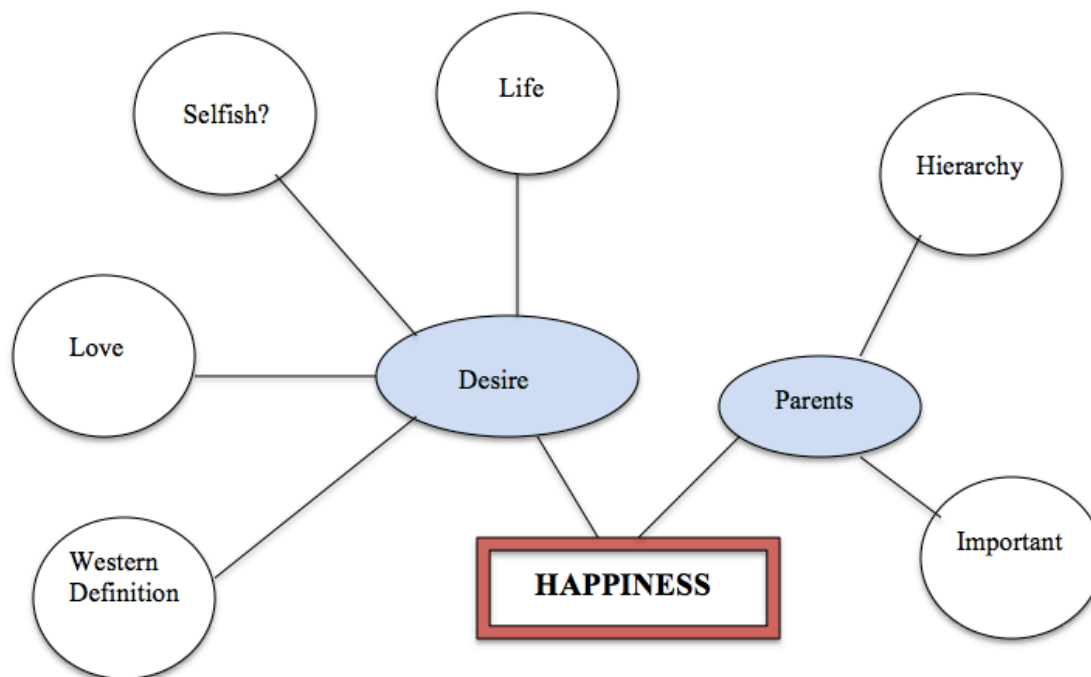
Uh it makes me feel really bad. It makes me feel like I've lost the closeness to my family and this aspect that they're not very open with me anymore, I always feel like they're thinking something but not always saying it. And so there's a lot of like quiet and hostility between us all the time. I feel like I cannot go to them with my problems I'm having with my boyfriend. I can't open up to them because they're always going to be like oh we told you so. So that's definitely, I feel like I don't have support in that aspect like I can only go to them with the good news and not the bad. And that sucks because then my sister is now getting engaged to a Sikh guy and I see like how they're so excited and they're all like telling everyone and letting everyone know and it just sucks in the fact that I know that when my turn comes around or even if I speak about marriage with

them, they just have this super like disappointed face on them and they don't even want to talk about it. (Interview #7, Sonia, age 25)

Tina mentioned another stressor within her relationship regarding family which was how the concept of family was valued. Family to Tina meant a very close relationship with her parents, sisters and cousins. Although family communication isn't always open, South Asians rely on strong family bonds that include extended members (Deepak, 2005). Tina explained the difference between her connection to her family and her partner's:

I recognize there's differences in terms of family dynamics. Right I can see it myself because I've grown up very close to my family and my boyfriend's not close to his family at all really. And so um and you know we're a very tight knit family so obviously you don't want to, you want someone who understands the meaning of family to be.
(Interview #9, Tina, age 26)

Grewal and colleagues found that immigrant women from India placed high importance on the institute of family. Family was the center of their participants' lives creating the women's identities, affecting their actions, conduct, and emotional and physical wellbeing (2005). The women regardless of age were directly and indirectly influenced by their family members. Women's roles, responsibilities, family duties, and relationships with family members affected how the participants made decisions about their lives including personal matters such as health (Grewal et al, 2005). The women in my study learned about the importance of family from their mothers. Thus they understood the expectation of including family as a major part of their lives. This was the main source of stress within their relationships. Either their parents didn't know about the relationship, didn't support it, were disappointed, and/or their partners never quite understood their loyalty in keeping family, especially parents, happy.

Diagram 4 - Happiness

I think a lot of girls feel like, you know, they want to make their families happy. And they want to, to be like the girl that cause I know that's a lot of my friend's cases. They're like oh you know I just want to see them happy and want to.
(Interview #7, Sonia, age 25)

Diagram 4 illustrates the relationship between the global theme “Happiness”, the organizing themes, “Desire” and “Parents” and the basic themes associated with them. All of the women were pursuing their happiness by being in their respective unions. However, they were also keeping track of their parents’ happiness by trying to not disappoint their families. This proved to be difficult for several of the women. Kelsey understood the possibility of her parents being unhappy with her, but it mattered more to her be happy in life. As Talbani and Hasanali (2000) mentioned in their research, South Asian girls referred to Western concepts such as love and happiness as norms despite what they were learning at home. As Talbani and Hasanali (2000) suggested, my participants most likely understood the concept of happiness from what they learned from Western influences such as school during adolescence. Sonia thought South

Asian parents were now being forced to accept their daughters' relationships rather than happily accepting it. This could mean that parents are becoming more aware of Western ideology and have to deal with it rather than ignore or ban it in the home.

Not all of the participants felt that their parents didn't understand happiness. Sara thought her parent's acceptance of her partner was partly based on the fact they had her happiness in mind. Tina thought the same way with how her parents were accepting her sister's mixed union and ultimately would accept hers. On the other hand Veera and Melissa felt that their mothers were at odds about their daughters' happiness. Veera's mother supported her love for writing and decision to switch majors at school but was vocal about her daughter's love interests. According to Veera, South Asian women are forced into situations to keep others happy such as parents. She felt that her choices regarding marriage were closely linked to her mother's personal happiness while her dad's sense of joy was based on how others saw him and his family. Melissa's mother also relied on her children for her happiness as she often asked her daughter if she wanted her parents to be happy. Yet when Melissa broke up with her partner, her mother was upset for her daughter before being happy that the interracial union had fallen apart. While the women navigated their sense of happiness in connection to their families, Sonia expressed gratitude in her experiences and how it had brought her personal joy:

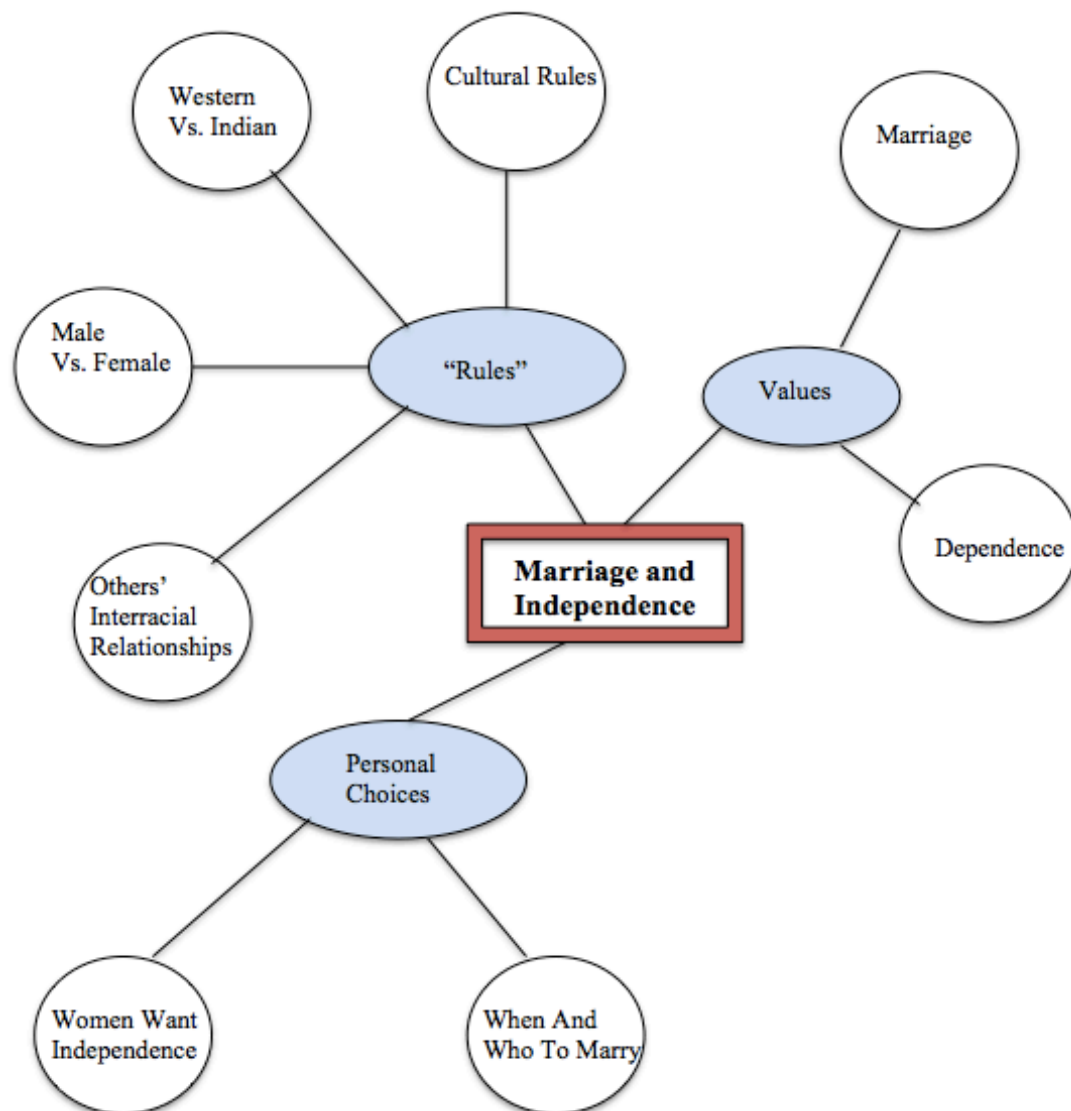
Yeah I think I've I personally think I've matured a lot more. I if anything I've become headstrong, I've become more opinionated, I use to be the kind the person I hated conflict, I hated confrontation and I use to just go by what everyone else said. And now I'm complete opposite. I say my opinion and I do what I want. I actually feel almost more complete in the way that I'm pursuing something that makes me happy and I know I'm not doing it just to make other people happy.... I feel happy that I'm just maturing into my own self and not having being told what to do in a way.

(Interview #7, Sonia, age 25)

Sonia was happy in her relationship and the decision she had made to be in it. Melissa's breakup had made her mother very happy. Now she considered her mother's happiness when thinking about future romantic relationships. Keeping their families and parents in particular happy was important to the women. All of them thought of their parents' happiness when thinking about their lives and hoped to find a balance in keeping everyone satisfied. Realistically

this would be a difficult task as each party thought of happiness in marriage and independence differently.

Diagram 5 - Marriage and Independence



Yeah, yeah but I mean I think for a lot of brown parents that know when they find out about the relationship with their daughter, like to have a boyfriend or whatever, they want to put a label on it like that either want them to get engaged soon and married.
(Interview #10, Anrup, age 25)

Diagram 5 illustrates the relationship between the global theme “Marriage and Independence”, the three organizing themes, “Values”, “Rules” and “Personal Choices”. Each of these three connects to the basic themes. All of the women interviewed expressed interest in marrying their partners, if they weren’t already engaged. Choosing their future husbands is an act of independence since marriage is a collective concept in Indian culture. Choice of partner is often left to elders in the family and sometimes community (Inman et al, 2001). The emphasis on marrying someone from the same community, ethnicity and religion is implemented to stop cultural obliteration (Inman et al, 2001). Going against these rules can be seen as rebellious and an act of independence. Independence is a positive trait in the West, but isn’t seen as a desirable female trait in Indian culture. Women face difficulty in dealing with two conflicting value systems. The women had varied levels of independence that their parents were comfortable with. Education was encouraged for all the women, but parents still had a say in what they thought would be appropriate work. It was unclear whether education was simply a part of a woman’s marriage value. For example, Veera’s father was extreme in his views about his children’s marriage prospects, but he would be interested in Veera having her own business. Veera’s mother, who was against her daughter’s relationships, also urged her daughter to follow her goals of writing.

North American ideology of independence promises individual freedom and self-fulfillment (Netting, 2006). The women I spoke to all believed in this ideology as they had grown up in it and thought it to make better sense than traditional beliefs. Finding their own mate was simply a norm in the Western cultural they grew up in. The idea of being an equal partner in marriage was a belief held by all the women. Some of their parents thought marriage meant that the woman would be dependent on her husband, similar to how she was dependent on her parents. Anrup knew that her parents didn’t want her to be independent and told her that her partner would have to have their full approval. Tiffany’s mother believed that Tiffany needed a husband to be truly happy in life rather than have hobbies of her own.

All of the women knew about family members who had gotten married outside their culture, but most agreed that although their parents supported their unions, they did not wish for their own children to be so independent in their spousal choice. Veera expressed annoyance that her strict father supported others mixed unions, while enforcing stern marriage rules on his own children. The general belief was that parents supported others interracial marriages by attending

weddings and offering well wishes just to look good in the community. However, there was a more lenient attitude towards males than females. As mentioned before, many women noticed the difference in how their brothers were treated in comparison to them. What did separate the parents' views was whether they themselves were involved in arranged or love marriages. Three of the women's parents had gotten married because they were in love. Alisha's father's second marriage was a love marriage as well. Zoey's parents were supportive of their daughter's choices and Alisha's father had opened up to her partner. Kelsey's parents supported one of her sister's chosen marriage partners, and were okay with all three of their daughters dating but her sisters had chosen mates from the same culture. Oddly Anrup's parents were very strict despite their own love marriage. Anrup believed this to be because of her mother's intense fear of disappointing her family and community. Sara's parents' marriage had been arranged but she thought their somewhat relaxed behavior regarding marriage stemmed from how they were treated:

Yeah, um in, in yeah I guess in a way it like, my parents were never forcible like "its not gonna happen, absolutely not, you're gonna listen to us" they were never like that. They, they tried convincing me otherwise but they were never forceful and I think that steams from like, their parents never forced them either so. (Interview #5, Sara, age 24)

Although Sara admits that her parents were not sure about her chosen mate, they never resorted to hostility. Netting (2006) found parents' marital history affected what was expected from their children. I found parents own marital experience to be inconsistent with my participants. Community standing, gender roles and level of Westernization all played a role in determining if parents would accept their daughter's interracial relationships. For example, Tina's parents were in an arranged marriage but the two had ended up falling in love. According to Tina they shared a romantic love similar to the Western concept of marriage, with actions such as public displays of affection. Her father understood dating but still was unsure of his eldest daughter's relationship and Tina was not quite ready to disclose hers. Tina wanted to get married eventually but felt she needed to be absolutely sure before telling her father. Until then she, like many of the women, would have to date in some level of secrecy trusting a few close friends and family.

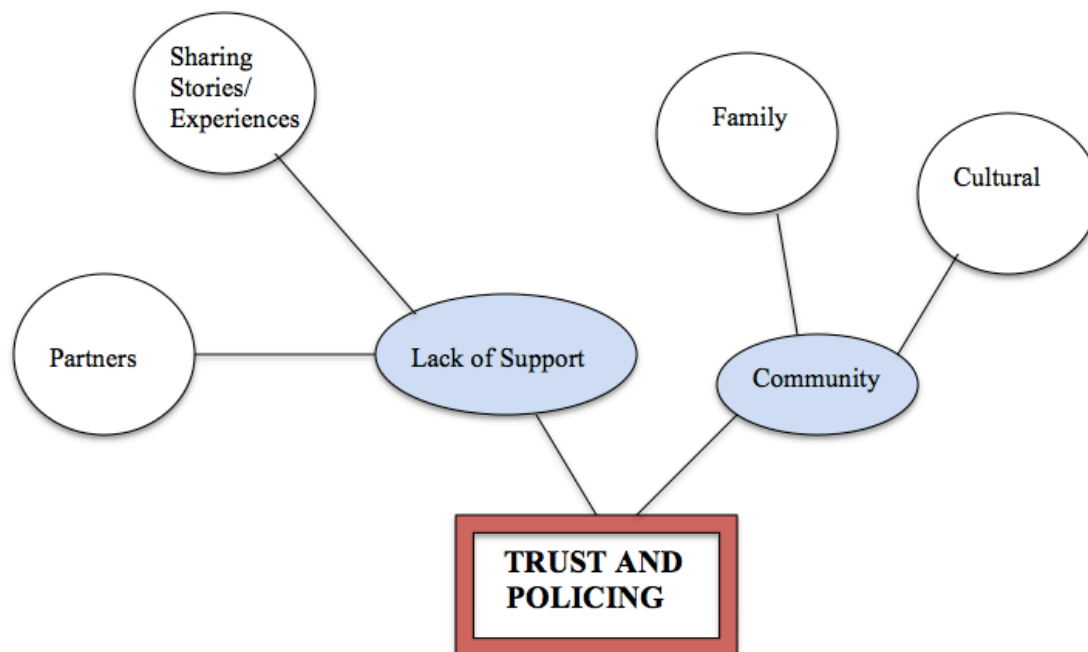
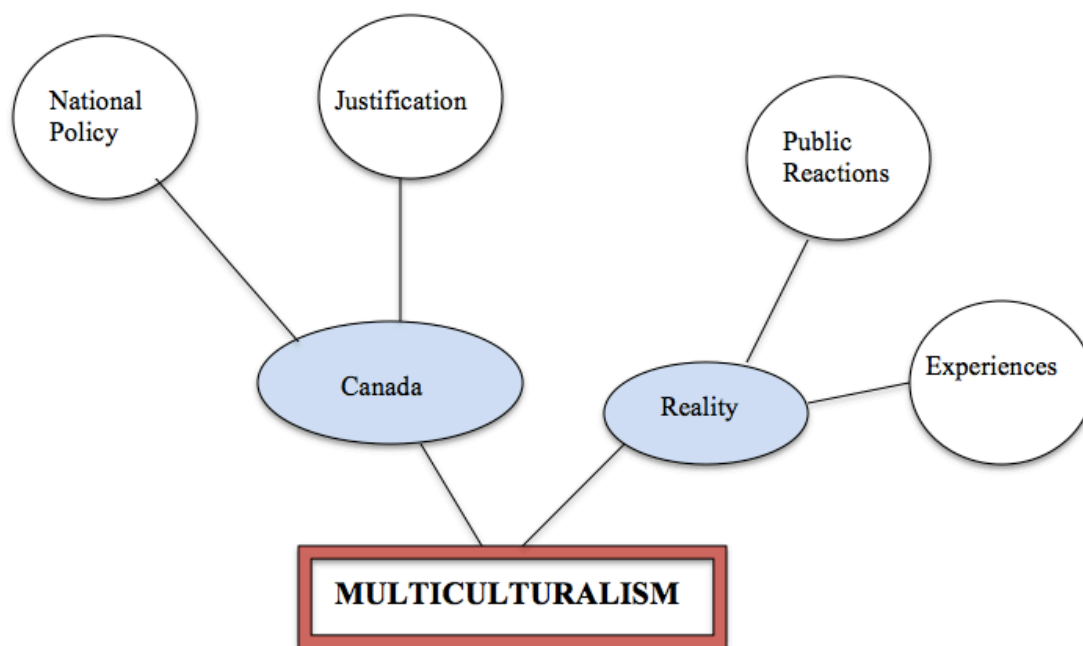
Diagram 6 - Trust and Policing

Diagram 6 illustrates the relationship between the global theme “Trust and Policing”, the organizing themes, “Lack of Support” and “Community” and the basic themes associated with each of these. The women seemed to trust me with their stories because they were very interested in the research I was conducting. Trust was a major part of the women’s’ lives; who they trusted with disclosing their relationships, who they spoke with about their issues and concerns, who they complained to about parents and cultural expectations, and with whom they were willing to discuss emotional consequences. As mentioned previously I believe my insider position allowed me to earn the participants’ trust. I understood the stress that some of the women felt in deciding who to welcome into their inner circle and the emotional pain they felt when a trusted family member would disapprove of their life choices. Tiffany had disclosed her relationship to her sister- cousin, thinking that she would have some sort of family support. While her cousin was supportive at first, she quickly began to talk down to Tiffany and discourage her relationship. According to her cousin, Tiffany had changed as a person:

And apparently I've changed. I've changed as a whole person. I guess I can't see that but she can. She's seen me as a baby and now right so that's the only um sort of family bond that's been very rocky. (Interview #6, Tiffany, age 24)

The age difference between Tiffany and her cousin wasn't a major gap, yet being the younger of the two meant she would be the baby, which meant that she would always be treated as one. By making her own choices she wasn't seen as a woman coming into her own, but as a completely changed person. The lack of trust with friends and family members meant stronger bonds with partners. The women found support and emotional care from their partners who tried to understand the cultural differences. The males may not have completely understood the politics of being a South Asian woman, but they knew what their partners were going through based on the precautions the women took. One of these measures is being aware of others watching. As mentioned previously, surveillance is kept on South Asian women from when they are young girls to protect family honor and preserve cultural values (Varghese & Jenkins, 2009). This means that both family and community take part in policing women. Many of the women expressed frustration in being hyper aware of their surroundings when out in public with their partners. Many of them feared being seen by friends of their parents and their actions being reported to their families. Even though she was engaged to be married, Sara told of an incident in which her parents received a call from a distant family friend late at night. Sara had been out getting groceries with her fiancée when she ran into the family friend, an older woman. The woman proceeded to go home and call Sara's parents, telling them that their daughter was out late with a boyfriend. Sara's mother called Sara right away to ask about the man, only to find out that it was her future son-in-law. The parents were aware of the relationship at the time.

Diagram 7 - Multiculturalism

It's just I think we like to pat ourselves on the back as Canadians because we actually have multicultural policy and it's like that doesn't mean shit. (Interview #9, Tina, age 26)

Diagram 7 illustrates the relationship between the global theme “Multiculturalism”, the organizing themes, “Canada” and “Reality” and the basic themes associated with each of them. Multiculturalism was a popular theme that came up in interviews. Participants felt that being in Canada where the national policy promotes equality of cultures normalized their relationships. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Canada prides itself in being multicultural by welcoming diversity. The South Asian population has grown vastly with approximately 1.3 million Canadians tracing their ancestry to South Asia (Zaidi, 2014). However despite high rates of immigration and the presence of large and diverse ethnic communities, the women I interviewed were at odds about themselves. They were Canadian and Westernized, surrounded by others like them yet they didn’t always feel like they fully belonged because of the socialization in their homes and how others reacted to them public. This was a conflicting position to be in. While some of the women referred to multiculturalism to justify their relationships, they also acknowledged how they still

weren't quite accepted by the dominant culture either. The best example of this was when I asked the women about being out in public with their partners. Each woman except for Zoey felt some level of discomfort from members of either one or both cultures.

Melissa felt judged by older South Asians and avoided certain areas. On a trip to Alberta she felt more accepted by a larger White population. She believed that due to Canada's multicultural environment one should be allowed to fall in love with whomever they want and be accepted. Veera felt judged by older South Asians as well while she thought the younger generation didn't care too much. Alisha also felt discriminated by South Asians especially in the Vancouver night scene. She mentioned incidents in which she was harassed by males for being with her White partner. Alisha did experience racism in Montreal by an older White female, which she believes was because she was walking on the street, holding hands with her partner. She also experienced more stares from White people. Sara, like Zoey is fair skinned and so felt less judged in public. She thought any stares from older South Asians were due to her partner being fairer than her and being able to pass as Caucasian. Tiffany felt the same as the other women and avoided Surrey. Sonia also avoided Surrey and shared a story of how younger South Asian males yelled obscene things at Sonia and her partner during a public event in Vancouver. She mentioned how such experiences bothered her:

...[B]ut when we come to Surrey or areas where there is a lot of East Indians then definitely I feel really awkward. I feel like they're all staring and they have they make a point of staring at you. And I've had certain times where like I see a family with their little kids and they like hardcore turn them around and don't even want them to see us. Like they don't want their kid to maybe get ideas. (Interview #7, Sonia, age 25)

Sonia felt that her actions were judged and feared by the community, as she would be setting bad examples for children. As a woman in her culture she is a 'keeper' of her heritage and responsible for representing her entire people's principles and family (Zaidi, 2014). Since Kelsey had not been out in public with her partner yet, she had no experiences on the matter. She did rely on multiculturalism and found comfort in the belief that the relationship would be supported because of the acceptance of interracial relationships in Canada. I found this hopeful outlook to be a stark contrast to what the other women had witnessed. Tina told a story of how a South Asian classmate had instructed her White partner to 'date one of your own kind'. The classmate told her partner that Tina was a "good girl", which meant that she certainly wasn't the

type to date outside her culture or perhaps date at all. I find it interesting that South Asian males were often the ones to vocally reveal their dissatisfaction to South Asian women in interracial relationships. It further expressed the level of patriarchal control in the culture.

Tiffany and Tina pointed out discrimination not from their own community but from the dominant Canadian culture. Reactions to them from their partner's family made them feel othered in addition to how they were perceived by their own family. Tiffany's partner's parents were cautious and told their son to be careful and safe. They had heard about an interracial relationship in the area that ended in violence once the families had discovered their children dating. Tiffany's partner's parents were afraid their son could get caught up in something similar because of her ethnic and religious background. Tiffany calmed the parents down by reminding them that her cousins and brother knew about her relationship and no one was upset. Her parents didn't know about the union but she didn't think they would ever resort to violence towards her partner. Tina understood the dynamics of being in an interracial relationship in Canada and how multiculturalism is often left as just a theory. She explained, "we're multicultural but multiculturalism doesn't really exist. It's, you're given enough leeway to be able to do the things that are traditions".

According to Tina her partner's parents were upset when they found out that Tina had not disclosed the relationship to her parents. They didn't understand Tina's culture yet prided themselves on being diverse. Tina felt that her partner's parents thought themselves to be accepting because of where they lived, and the ethnic food they had tried. At a deeper level they were still ignorant of others' ways of life and were angry when challenged. On Valentines Day Tina tried to explain her family's cultural views on marriage, dating and what it meant for her to be careful in how she disclosed her relationship. She found her partner's parents unwilling to truly understand her, having ethnocentric views on South Asian culture. At the end of the day Tina thought they were ignorant people that she would have to work with. She mentioned similar experiences with her partner's friends and did not think it was racism.

To these women multiculturalism was an important aspect of their lives and relationships. The nation's policy was supposed to protect them in a way, allowing them to date whom they chose without anyone criticizing or questioning the union. In reality multiculturalism's notion of acceptance in diversity was not helpful to the women, and some women like Tina even described it as worthless. The women's parents did not apply the concept of multiculturalism to their

perspectives on interracial relationships. It was the women who either focused on it as a justification or reasoning of their relationships or mentioned the realities of multiculturalism when speaking of personal experiences. Keeping in mind the difficulty in sharing my story through the autobiography, I was empathic and patient with my interviewees as they told me about their lives. I found some of the same themes to be present in their life stories. I compare these themes and introduce new ones in the next section.

4.4 III: Interviews Connecting Autobiographical Themes

As discussed earlier the interviews began by asking participants basic demographic questions such as age, location of birth, language and religion. The point was not only to gather demographic data, but also to ease the participants into the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Most participants indeed began to relax and answer the next set of questions as if in a conversation, often leaving me to follow along, nod, and say ‘hmm-mm’ or ‘yeah’ in agreement to their statements. Often I would find several of my questions answered, as the participant would discuss in-depth experiences of dating or growing up in their household. Participants appeared to be comfortable and interviews flowed in conversational terms.

Agency, Identity and Being a South Asian Woman

Like if a girl is dating outside her culture, her caste, what does it matter? Like what is, what does caste do for her anyways? It doesn't do anything for her right? Or religion, like is she religious to begin with? If not, then why what does it matter? And I feel like a lot of people don't think about that. (Interview #2, Veera, age 21)

Based on Smith and Watson's (2010) method of reading narratives four key themes were found in all ten of my interviews; agency, identity, body and embodiment, and gender roles and socialization. I found these themes to be the most prevalent in the study as they brought forth key issues in what these women and I experience as South Asian women taking part in interracial relationships in Canada. As I go through these themes they don't always explicitly connect with the topic of interracial relationships. Instead they give background to the women taking part in the relationships by explaining who they are and what they are going through. The women's personal lives are valuable indicators to what they go through as South Asian women. Their experiences show the complex process of constructing an identity. To better comprehend complex experiences, some themes have sub-categories as explained in each section.

Agency

The women made their own choices to do what they thought was best for them, sometimes going against their families and cultural beliefs and values regarding women. The women were constrained in one way or another in their lives, and telling me about their life experiences was an act of their personal agency. Agency is described through 3 topics: religion, traditional roles, and the marriageable age. Each topic details the importance of personal agency in the women's lives.

Agency through Religion

As I began my interviews I asked the participants what religion they were, if they practiced their religion and if their parents practiced a religion. I asked these questions since religion is strongly intertwined with Indian culture (Inman, 2006; Mahapatra, 2012). I wanted to know if the women were religious and if that affected their relationships. Out of 10 women five women said they were religious yet interestingly no one answered with a definitive "yes" or "no". Through additional questioning two women clarified that they were religious but only in a cultural way, while two others said they were not religious but were cultural. This meant that they would take part in cultural events that were centered around or based on religion to either stay connected to their heritage or to spend time with family. *Vaisakhi* for example is a Sikh event that is also considered cultural because it brings the community together and people can dress in ethnic clothes, eat ethnic food and spend time with one another. Veera, 21, explained how she took part to satisfy her family:

I haven't really done it in the last few years just cause I'm...kind of more critical of how the religion is these days. So I try not to like, (inaudible) do anything for Vaisakhi but my family does. For Rakhi my family does things and I just do it because, if I don't then its sort of like oh she's not participating. So. (Interview #2, Veera, age 21)

While some of the women distanced themselves from religion, some had to take part in it to please family, which went against their personal choice. It's also important to note that although Veera said she was critical of religion, she stated she was Sikh when asked what religion she was. Religion plays a huge role in South Asian families and culture (Zaidi et al, 2014). Only one woman stated that she didn't have a religion while her parents were Sikh. I did find that some women were almost uncomfortable to say that they were agnostic or atheist when

asked. Perhaps it was a concept too far from what they had grown up with. On the other side of the spectrum there were women who connected deeply with their religion. This too was a personal choice since their religion condemned their relationship choices. Tiffany, 24 explained how her religion sets different roles for men and women:

Well in our culture anyways its, its okay. Because in um Islam actually it's um a male is allowed to um you know bring another woman of a different religious background and uh cultural to be married like she's allowed to be married to him cause at the end of the day its his religion that he's grounded to and she's following his footsteps. Whereas um a woman if she marries outside of Islam, she loses her status as a Muslim- woman right because she's bonded to the man whose a man believer. Right so um yeah I guess, I guess it is more acceptable really for a male to yeah be someone who is a non-believer. (Interview #6, Tiffany, age 24)

Tiffany's partner was a white male who practiced Christianity. Marrying him would strip her of her status as a Muslim. However, Tiffany confidently stated that she would keep her religion. I wrote in my autobiography how "my upbringing was heavily influenced by religion and the patriarchal ideology it promoted". I later continued that I identified with my religion like Tiffany does. Looking at my autobiography I noticed that I forgot to (or purposefully?) left out that I would eventually leave the religion I was brought up in and doing so would cause a rift between me, my community, and family. I would take this step to do what's best suited to me and makes the most sense to me rather than accept ideology that was forced onto me.

Agency through Traditional Roles

A similarity of all my participants was that none of them identified with traditional views of women. All of the women took charge of their lives by doing things they wanted to, with the most obvious being that they chose to take part in interracial relationships. Apart from the relationships, the women talked about what was socially expected of them or what their parents wanted and how they chose to do things their way. Melissa summed up expectations the best:

Ever since I was growing up, it was drilled in my head like, you know, marry an Indian guy. You know, and then I mean, go to school, get a job, marry an Indian guy, then have kids, then you know. I was told um, how I should live my life and who I should be with. And so...it's been a constant struggle for me. (Interview #1, Melissa, age 25)

Tiffany explained how she was often told what ‘good Muslim girls do’ or wear. Sonia, 25, stated that she thought people considered her independent actions to be childish, selfish and that she wasn’t thinking straight. Anrup, 25, described her parents’ reactions to her as doing what they thought was best because she as girl wouldn’t know. Whenever a woman decided to take control of her life she faced opposition. Ghuman (1994) found South Asian young women trying to achieve the ‘best of both worlds’. His subjects wanted to stay connected to their home culture but they also wanted to experience and enjoy Western culture. The women in my study wanted to do what would be considered normal in Canada, they wanted to date, have fun, go to school, put off marriage, and of course have a choice in matters such as life partners.

The women’s acts of agency were reacted to negatively because they went against the traditional norms of the culture, and often this meant going against gender norms. As the literature described, women face challenges because of the expectations placed on them by culture. Girls are much more protected and sheltered than boys (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). Tiffany expressed her frustrations with how her parents reacted to her after a relationship failed:

Um they're scared that I'll make the wrong decision they don't think that I'm smart enough to make my own decisions and that I'm not going to do the right thing so they feel like they have to control me and to make my decisions for me. Here's thing which is pretty embarrassing actually but my mom is still like, like still she so afraid that I'll do something stupid. (Interview #6, Tiffany, age 24)

While it is completely acceptable to have a failed relationship in Western culture, and children are often encouraged to learn from their mistakes, in South Asian culture a mistake can be taken as a massive failure that cannot be repeated. Tiffany had broken up with her boyfriend of whom her parents disapproved, but instead of allowing her to move on with her life, they decided to take control of it. Admirably, Tiffany continued to fight for her rights and was now in a new relationship with a mate of her choice. Once again, like the others, she wanted to live her life her way despite facing challenges with her family. Tiffany and her new boyfriend shared the same religion and cultural background as her, but the other women’s choices of mate did not indicate their agency in being with who *they* wanted to be with regardless of race. As previously noted I reflected on my own lack of action in my autobiography “I could have become rebellious...but I was much too timid and afraid”. I knew that I wanted different things for

myself than what was expected but I was too scared. By doing what was required of me I didn't enact my potential agency.

Agency and The Marriageable Age

Surprisingly none of the women were married or expressed any concerns about getting married soon. A lot of them expressed interest in getting married to their mates, but no one was in a hurry to fulfill cultural requirements of marrying at a young age. Rather the women discussed their parents' desires for them to be married soon. Sara, 24, was engaged but recalled how her father felt about her getting past what he thought was acceptable age:

...[W]hen I think I turned 22, 23 my dad started to freak out. He's like its too late now, like you have to get married, you its too much. You've reached this age. And for me it was more like no, I'm fine, I'm just 23. You know I haven't even finished my school and stuff like that. Like how can you expect me to get married right now? My mom was more like its okay, 24 she can get married. Um my aunt and my, my aunt was more liberal. 25 is fine. So there was this whole like very...um expectation to get married. (Interview #5, Sara, age 24)

Despite the debate on a reasonable age, at 24 Sara doesn't plan on getting married for another couple of years. She admitted that if it weren't for her family she would have taken her time to get married. All the women stated that dating meant marriage so they often hid their dating lives from their parents, a common practice (Manohar, 2008). I discuss this in more detail and in a different context later. As for agency, the women tried to dictate when they wanted to get married despite cultural norms. The women ranged from ages 21 to 28 and although some spoke about future children, it was also a topic that was of low priority for many. What I discovered from these types of personal choices was that agency was closely linked with identity. The women in this study wanted their own identities, apart from culture, family, and even mates. By choosing to wait to get married or putting off having children they were free to attend school, have careers, and have fun. In my autobiography I wrote about how in adolescence "...western peers were beginning to understand their own identities rather than care for others" (Appendix F p.94). I would uncover my identity by taking on Western beliefs of identity and personal choice. The women did the same thing. Their actions helped construct who

they were, thus they were creating their unique identities with their acts of agency. This leads me into the next major theme of identity.

Identity

All of my participants spoke to me at what they described as a crucial point in their lives. They were adult women who were making life choices that constructed their identities. Like other adults they were attending post-secondary schools, choosing careers and life partners but unlike others they were making decisions that caused rifts between themselves and their families and communities. Only one participant had no issues with her parents. Zoey, 28, believed her parents' relaxed attitude came from being modern and liberal. She was also the oldest of my interviewees and perhaps her age allowed her more freedom than she had when she was younger. The other women had to navigate through different issues and figure out what they wanted to stand up for in their lives. A major source of internal conflict was the juggling of two cultural identities. On one hand the women had an ethnic background and were connected to it via language, food, religion and cultural values and beliefs. On the other hand they were Canadian and had Western desires and influences. The complex nature of a bicultural identity was further enhanced by the participant's beliefs about multiculturalism (more on this later). The women thought of themselves as not only a part of a religious or cultural group, but also Canada. Experiences surrounding identity are categorized under two segments: being bicultural and living double lives.

Identity and Being Bicultural

Being both a member of an ethnic group and Canadian was important to the women in how they saw themselves, and nothing made it clearer than when they self-identified. Each woman was asked to self-identify. Interestingly most had no idea what the concept meant or how they would define themselves beyond the simple statement, "I'm Canadian". None of the women self-identified as a woman of color or as feminist. Melissa, 25, admitted that she had never thought of who she was before. She simply acknowledged herself to be Canadian. When asked if she used the terms Indo Canadian or South Asian, she reasserted that she was Canadian. Five women stated that they were Canadian. Through more questioning three said that they would call themselves Indo- Canadian or East Indian. I found some of the women in this group to react strongly to being questioned about how they perceived themselves. For example, they

wanted me to accept Canadian as the main or only term that they identified with to a point where I felt that the conversation might turn uncomfortable or frustrating if I probed further. These women had a strong ethnic identity that they referenced in their interviews, and indeed it was the main reason they were recruited for and agreed to the interviews, yet it was clearly a sensitive topic which they did not raise on their own until I asked specific questions with regard to it.

The other five participants openly expressed their bicultural identities. These women were more relaxed and I felt more comfortable talking with them about their ethnicity. Two women referred to themselves as Indo-Canadian while the other three incorporated their bicultural identities to create Sri Lankan Canadian, Pakistani Canadian, and a religious combination of Canadian and Muslim. No one referred to themselves by the global term South Asian which was also interesting to note. What I found intriguing about the strong connection with being Canadian was the choice of the women's aliases. Three women chose non-English names, two of which could be considered European or Indian. Only one individual chose an Indian name. All of the other women chose what would be considered very European names. By this I mean that the chosen names are not at all common for South Asians. More so only one individual did not speak another language at home. Kelsey, 24, mainly spoke English but her grandmother who lived with the family spoke Punjabi. Therefore no one's family spoke only English.

Interestingly, despite how westernized some of the women saw themselves as being, they all wanted to keep a connection to their South Asian culture. Melissa, 25, strongly defined herself as Canadian yet when asked if she worried about losing her cultural values by being in an interracial relationship, she answered that she did indeed want to keep her heritage:

It is important. Every relationship I've been in I always incorporate that because it's a part of me, right? It's How I was growing up, so I will cook Indian food, like I will um, you know talk about all the traditions and events that we participate in, like you know, there's *Diwali* and *Rakhi* day and um, I definitely do yeah. Especially the food.
(Interview #1, Melissa, age 25)

Wanting to include their ethnic identity and yet only define themselves as Canadian could be a desire to fit into both worlds. As previous research has indicated (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000) the women were balancing different aspects of who they were and this process began in adolescence. Most young people ask "Who am I?" during their teenage years but for South Asian

women it's a question they may not be able to answer in their 20s as seen from some of my participants. Some of the women began questioning their identity as children, before the age of 10. Veera, 21, was very comfortable with her heritage yet she explained that she never quite fit in:

I've always been kind of like, not really fitting in with like the brown people, like you know how there's like those kids, like how brown kids are here? I've never fit in with those and I've never been like (pause) white washed either cause of my parents they're, from India right? So I've kind of just grown up on my own. If that makes any sense. Like just with my siblings and we've had our own interests and stuff like that. So, I've kind of made friends with like everyone. (Interview #2, Veera, age 21)

Alisha, 27, was also very connected with her heritage and yet felt awkward jumping in and out of two cultures. However she had managed to embrace both aspects of her identity:

When I was a kid I defiantly like I obviously grew up here so when before, like I moved to Sri Lanka then I moved back. But before I moved I probably would've said I was more Canadian like I spoke the language but I still considered myself Canadian. And then when I moved there and then moved back I considered myself both cause there's things are about me that are very Sri Lankan but there are things about me that are very Canadian. (Interview #3, Alisha, age 27)

However, Alisha still felt conflicted at times, and her experiences are confirmed as common for other South Asians as other studies note (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Inman et al, 2001; Zaidi et al. 2014). Alisha explained that despite her connection to her ethnicity, a part of her still worried that she would lose her culture. She had noticed that she would sometimes have to take a moment to remember words in her ethnic language and was afraid she might end up like her aunt who had married outside the culture and now didn't remember their language. Tiffany, 24, identified more with her religion than with her ethnicity. She summed up her thoughts best by saying that the process got confusing and she was still trying to "apply bits and pieces to me". This statement fit for several of the women. Sara, like Alisha and Veera, was confident in her bicultural identity. She gave herself the title Pakistani-Canadian because she felt that she was equally both. She seemed to be the most prepared to deal with accepting her partner's culture. For her it was important to embrace one another's differences and to provide her future children with stability.

Identity and Living Double Lives

Another aspect of identity was based on whether the women's parents knew about their interracial relationship. Four women had kept their relationship secret from their parents. One had told her mother, but not her father. This created tension as the women created two separate lives. Kelsey, 24 talked about how her parents discussed future marriage plans with her, not knowing she was already seeing someone. While keeping her mother believing that she was single, she was trying to figure out how to tell her parents about the partner that she hoped to marry. Sonia, 25, expressed another example of living a double life although her parents knew about her partner:

Yeah definitely there's two sides of me for sure. With my family there's no PDA there's you know, there's him and there's me and we'll be far away, no touching. No kissing. Um I'm very, we're proper. We're very, I'm very like low tone and just I act very differently cause I'm really concerned. I want him to make the best impression and if I'm myself always acting very different just to make a good impression for both of us. Which is, I find it's weird I wanna stop that. I want to be more myself. And with his family, it's a lot more relaxing we're just who we are and we don't really have to second guess anything like you know someone's watching us and has been talking behind our back or will go tell our parents something. Like oh we saw so and so doing this and that. (Interview #7, Sonia, age 25)

Sonia brought up policing by the community as a concern. She worried that someone would tell her parents about her inappropriate relationship with a boy of another race. She felt she had to behave a certain way to fulfill gender values in her culture. As previous studies have pointed out, being a 'good Brown girl' is something that most South Asian women are aware of when growing up (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Naidoo, 2003; Varghese & Jenkins, 2009). The women I interviewed were not interested in keeping a 'good girl' image, but understandably they didn't want to deal with the consequences of doing things they wanted to such as dating. Anrup, 25, talked about how she was enjoying her newfound independence despite her parent's anger regarding it. She wanted to find herself and enjoy life while taking care of herself but this meant disobeying her parents' wishes of relying on their advice and care. She didn't want to deal with the arguments that arose from her actions, but she also wanted to be her own person.

My autobiography began with my identity being a part of my family identity. Like my interviewees I was born into a home and assigned my religion, values and beliefs. And like these

women I began to create my own identity through a maze of confusion. I expressed that my peers were figuring out their identities when I was younger while I was as yet unable to. None of the women spoke about their peers in the same way. Veera's comment showed that she noticed other children with established identities and that she didn't quite fit in with them, but no one reflected on when they began to create their identities. Rather they seemed to be in the process now. I did write that "I felt like I was living a double life" (Appendix F p.96) and many of the women felt this by either keeping their relationships secret or dealing with them with their families. I stated that I didn't know I had an ethnic identity and I see now that it was a crucial piece to better understanding myself. The women who had a good acceptance of an ethnic identity were more likely to discuss identity than those who simply wanted to be called Canadian.

As these examples demonstrate, identity was a complex theme in this study. I was originally surprised to find that many of the women did not know how to self-identify. I ended up finding that the women were in the process of understanding who they were and what they wanted. Not only did they have their ethnic identity, but also they saw themselves as Canadian and some were in the process of including their partner's cultures. Only one participant's ex was not accommodating to her religion. She was no longer with him at the time of interviews and had a new partner of the same religion. All of the other women found acceptance in their relationships, but not always with their parents. Parents were a source of frustration for some of the women because of what was expected of them as females. I next discuss body and embodiment, and gender roles/socialization in the culture. These topics came up often in understanding identity in terms of gender. In the next section I go over what it means to be female in the South Asian culture.

Body and Embodiment

The women never referred to their physical bodies during interviews. However, they all spoke about their bodies by speaking about experiences as women. Not all of the women had negative experiences as females growing up, some were treated fairly in the home equal to their brothers yet everyone had something to say about the gender difference in the culture. The women housed their emotions, feelings and experiences of being female in their physical bodies. Some of them told me where they were born and grew up. As discussed above almost all the women understood the 'good girl' image and expectations. They embodied it, rebelled against it

and/or knew about it in detail and what it meant in the culture. They had desires and wanted to love, but they also felt the focus on their bodies from their parents and the larger society. Veera, 21, explained how she felt as a female:

I feel like there's more, much more pressure because I am a girl. And I'm seen as like a weak person, like I don't know what's good for me and I won't be able to you know protect myself if anything happens. And I think it's just unfair. Cause I mean, I'm looking at my brother right now and it's completely different. Like my dad is always talking to him about marriage. Always talking to him about, you know, talk to the opposite gender and going out. But with us its like I can't even tell them if I have friends that are boys. (Interview #2, Veera, age 21)

To Veera, 21, being in a woman's body meant she was considered weak both mentally and physically. To her parents she's too weak to protect herself and so she shouldn't be dating or even have male friends. Her brother is allowed to date and discuss marriage plans with his parents because as a male he can protect himself (the belief would be that a woman would not be capable of harming him) and is intelligent enough to not get himself in any trouble. Trouble might be pregnancy as Veera's mother told her to not do 'anything bad'. As a woman Veera has to embody purity by not being physically intimate before marriage (more on this later). As previous research has shown, females reproduce their culture. Their bodies are carriers of traditions and values controlled by family and community (Gupta, 1997; Manohar, 2008). Alisha, 27, is not allowed to stay over at her partner's house even though her family accepts him and she's positive the relationship is headed to marriage. Her body is still controlled by her parents even though she's an adult woman. Interestingly her father felt more relaxed with her because she was in a serious relationship. He felt that she had someone to take care of her. Gupta (1997) found that even as adults South Asian women could be treated like children by their fathers. It is understandable that Alisha's father's belief in her being 'taken care of' is an act of love, but it's arguable that males in the culture are not thought of in the same way. Like Veera stated, women are seen as weak and in need of protection.

In my autobiography I never referred to my physical body yet like these women I spoke about experiences as a woman. I wrote that I embodied the South Asian culture through the "language I spoke at home, the food I ate, and sometimes the clothes I wore". The women all did this as well. Like me they also became more aware of their bodies by becoming involved

with their partners. One of the ways this occurred was by how people reacted to them in public as discussed next in the context of being stared at.

Body and Embodiment and Being Stared At

None of the women felt that they had been exiled. The women I talked to either had not told their parents yet or were in the process of making the relationship work with their family. Their sense of being ostracized was from possible outcomes of getting married to their partners or coming out to their parents. What they did notice was how other people saw them when they were out in public with their mates. I discussed this in greater depth previously in this Chapter under multiculturalism; here I'll discuss how the women felt. Almost all of the women experienced being looked at in public with their partners. Zoey, 28, was the only woman who said she did not feel stared at. This was attributed to the fact that Zoey, like her partner, was light skinned and often wore colored contact lens. She could pass as the same ethnicity as her boyfriend. All of the other women physically were aware of their being in public. Tina, 26, was the only woman who talked about how she felt about her body when stared at by White females. Her partner was white:

...[I]f its girls that are our age and um I'm getting a negative reaction to them, I get, I, I almost will internalize that and kind of feel very bad about myself because I grew up with all White girls and I think it took a really long time to accept having darker skin and darker features and still thinking I'm attractive because you know you should be blonde and you should have blue eyes and I grew up with Barbie and so it was just kind of like even thought that kind of stuff is changing but I get really upset about it because I almost want to be like you're not hot shit just cause your you know, blonde. And so I think Ill feel, I'll end up feeling bad about myself. Like it's almost like he's blonde, he's White, he has blue eyes, like I am not on his level. So I should just, but in terms of race, not even in terms of looks and being superficial. (Interview #9, Tina, age 26)

Tina brought up an interesting concept that none of the other participants mentioned. Regardless 9 out of 10 women had something to say about being out in public. Some stated that it wasn't uncomfortable but I argue that the fact that all were looked at for being in interracial relationships show how it is uncommon and perhaps unaccepted. The public noticed racialized bodies and was aware of the situation and space occupied. All were aware of what they represented and how others may perceive them as they were socialized to behave a certain way.

None of the women felt “symbolically exiled” which was both physical and mental, like I had. Yet I know exactly what the women experienced when out in public. I had never felt what Tina did, but I was more concerned with what other South Asians thought of me and what I was representing in public. This is why I felt separated from the community. The next section goes over this by looking at gender roles in the culture, a topic that all the women knew either through experience in the home or what they learned from the community.

Gender Roles/ Socialization

...Yeah because, cause he’s a boy. Right? (Interview #6, Tiffany, age 24)

All of the interviews discussed gender differences in the culture since South Asian women are socialized differently than men. A large part of a family’s reputation and honor falls on the women in the family (Varghese & Jenkins, 2009; Mooney, 2006). In this section I discuss gender differences that the women experienced or knew about in the culture. I share the women’s thoughts on male privilege and why they may think family and community treat males better. I go over the women’s experiences of being women in comparison to their brothers, and discuss different themes that affect attitudes on gender. Along with the topic of religion, there are topics in this theme that previously also fit under agency and identity. After all, the women’s self – identity came from how they perceived themselves and how they were treated as women. The following experiences show where these women may have constructed parts of their identities.

As previous research indicates, patriarchal roles were enforced through religious ideology on several of the participants (Inman, 2006; Mahapatra, 2012). Melissa, 25, talked about the connection between religion and gender when she mentioned how males were treated better:

And that’s basically because, you know, that’s just how my religion is like. Everything is always favoured towards the guy. And they give them more slack. (Interview #1, Melissa, age 25)

Melissa made this comment after she talked about how her parents had reacted to an interracial relationship. Her experience had been negative and she thought that if her brother was the one dating a White person, her parents would have been more accepting. I asked Melissa if she thought it was the religion or the overall Indian culture that promoted this gender difference and she agreed that it was the culture. As Mooney (2006) has found, religion often promoted

equality but that was ignored and replaced with gender preference and control. Mooney (2006) found this to be especially true in the Sikh religion with which Melissa identified. I further asked Melissa if males are given more freedom and she answered yes since they are the ones who carry on their family's name. I agree with Melissa's response and also find it strange. If a woman does not carry on her family's name in marriage, then why be upset at her choices? Women are expected to represent their father's family yet once they are married they are to move on to represent their husband's family.

Veera, 21, spoke about her frustration about gender and religion as she told me about how the most religious men don't treat their wives equally. Veera's father identified as Sikh and she knew the religion well. She was annoyed at how people who claimed to be religious put down women by saying that they weren't as "smart as men" and refused to question where such beliefs actually came from. Veera also talked about an issue she was having in her relationship where she found it difficult to explain to her partner why women were treated a certain way. Her partner was outraged at how he thought women were treated in her culture, but Veera couldn't explain her thoughts on the matter. She felt sympathetic towards her mother while she also disagreed with her own treatment. Veera didn't want to be negative towards her culture and where she came from yet she was also aware of the realities of being a woman in that culture.

These realities were known even if the women were treated well in their homes. Zoey, 28, was treated the same as her brother growing up. She thought her parents treated her brother differently only because she was the first born and they were unsure of a parenting style. Once they had their second child they were more lenient with both children. However, Zoey was treated differently from her brother because of the places she grew up in. She was born in India and then grew up in Dubai. Her parent's reactions to her dating or staying out late were based on fear of what would happen to their daughter in conservative societies. Thus although Zoey's parents treated her well, she was aware of gender differences.

Alisha, 27, had a similar experience. Her parents accepted her partner yet she was fully aware of how others felt about her dating outside the culture. She felt that males in the culture had more freedom and could date whomever they wanted to. More so males would be congratulated for finding White women. Sonia, 25, agreed with this as she talked about how excited some families got when their sons married White women. She expressed her annoyance at how these families dressed up the women in Indian outfits and treated them as living dolls.

They were accepted into the culture with open arms. There could be several reasons for this behavior. Perhaps the women are treasured for their Western beauty that some South Asian women like Tina are highly aware of, or the women are accepted because the families' precious sons chose them. There may be several reasons, but my focus for the purpose of this study is to simply point out the differences that exist and that they negatively affect women. Sonia thought women were disciplined when they didn't do what was expected of them, but men could get away with their actions.

Apart from whom they wanted to marry, Alisha also thought freedom for males meant that they could choose *when* they wanted to marry. While women were to marry young, males weren't questioned about settling down until "in their late thirties". As mentioned before Sara had issues with her father wanting to have her married before 24. She had said earlier in the interview that her parents didn't really differentiate between genders, and later told me that she had never been taught gendered chores. She had never been taught to socialize in a particular manner as a female, but this could be based on her class. Sara, 24, had grown up middle-upper class in Pakistan and had what she called "servants" to cook and clean. Walton-Roberts and Pratt (2005) found that class could be a major influence on gender beliefs based on their case study. The other women were from modest backgrounds and held similarities in how they were treated.

Tiffany, 24, saw a difference in how she and her brother were treated. Her brother was younger, just having graduated high school. He had been dating a Spanish woman and while Tiffany had problems with her mother trying to control her love life, her brother was allowed to date his mate. Her mother had told him to not date his mate earlier in the relationship but then stopped interfering. Kelsey, 24, had a younger brother as well and although he wasn't dating anyone at the moment, she thought that he would be treated differently because of his gender. Like Melissa she said that the Indian tradition relied on the son to carry on the family's legacy. Kelsey did express her parent's desire for a proper wife for her son one day even though she lived in a westernized household. Her parents hardly spoke Punjabi in the house but for some reason marriage brought out traditional values in them. Kelsey explained how she wasn't allowed to have male friends when she was younger but her parents stopped being concerned once they realized that Kelsey was going to school and mingling with both sexes. It wouldn't

make sense for them to stop her from seeing half of her classmates outside of school. Hence their attitudes about marriage and their daughter seemed out of place even to Kelsey.

Anrup, 25, told of the differential treatment she grew up with in her home and still deals with today. Her experience was telling of what is expected from her because she's a female:

Yeah I've always been brought up like girls need to do this, girls need to do that and like I would have fights. I would be like you know my brother is super spoiled still like this is still going on in my house. It's like I, I make dinner for the thing with me is that I enjoy cooking so I don't mind but it's always girls job like you need to do dishes and I used to say why can't like you know I call my brother B, so I was like why can he do it? Why can't he make his own food? Or like why can't he pour his own food. Right. Because he'll be hungry and my mom will be like oh make him a sandwich, I'm like why can't you make himself a sandwich? (Interview #10, Anrup, age 25)

In my own autobiography I chose to not go into details about my experiences, only stating "I would take care of the family and myself by providing meals, doing laundry, and cleaning". Like Anrup, I was expected to do these chores because they were thought to be feminine and reserved for females. Some of my participants had completely opposite experiences where like Sara they didn't do house chores at all, or like Sonia who was taught to do chores not because she was female, but because she needed to learn life skills. What I found interesting was all the women had some point of reference to how women are treated differently from males in the culture. All the women discussed gender differences when it came to dating and marriage but the other examples in this section varied. Anrup experienced the difference in how she was treated in comparison to her brother in regards to cooking; Zoey dealt with how society saw her as a woman outside her home; Kelsey saw her gender becoming a concern with upcoming marriage questions; and Sara dealt with pressures of marrying at an 'appropriate' age even though her gender had never affected her before.

4.5 Summary

The research questions presented in Chapter 2 were answered through the mixed method approach I took with an autobiography and interviews. Findings showed that South Asian women continuously negotiate their identities through their actions and how others view them because of such actions. Several of the women began to question their values, desires, hopes and tradition. The women constructed and reconstituted their identities in a fluid, ongoing manner

that was constantly dealing with external forces. Some women acted differently in the presence of their families in comparison to their partners. Others connected their self-identities to their agency and the actions they took to pursue personal happiness. I further discuss these findings in detail in the next Chapter.

The first part of this Chapter summarized my autobiographical findings, the second section focused on the in-depth interviews and the final section compared my autobiographical experience to those of the interviewees. Based on the thematic network analysis, I found global themes of fear, family, happiness, marriage and independence, trust and policing and multiculturalism. I applied Smith and Watson's (2010) method to analyze my autobiography and compare findings of agency, audience and addressee, body and embodiment, identity and temporality, to interview findings of agency, identity, body and embodiment, and gender roles/socialization. The findings show that these women not only had to deal with their personal concept of identity, but also they had to deal with how their families, communities, culture, partners' families and Canadian society viewed them. The next Chapter provides a discussion of this study's findings in the context of the broader literature as well as a consideration of ways this information can be used to inform support organizations for South Asian women.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion

...I'm really glad you're doing this study cause I feel like this is a growing thing right now. (Interview #7, Sonia, age 25)

In the final chapter I situate my study's findings in the broader literature review on South Asian women in Canada to address the primary research questions: How do South Asian women construct and reconstitute their identities? What happens when their support systems disappear? How do they deal with the emotional consequences of negative responses to their relationships? Do the women still feel that they embody a South Asian identity, or what is their new identity? What do the women think is the origin of 'othering', i.e. does it come from their own culture, or dominant Canadian culture? I discuss how the South Asian women who participated in this study construct and reconstruct their notions of self-identity over time and in different contexts. I then discuss implications of the study findings for organizations helping South Asian women deal with being involved in interracial relationships and suggest directions for future research building on the findings of this study.

5.1 Findings Discussion

As discussed in Chapter 4, the South Asian women I interviewed were consistently negotiating their identities through their actions and the reactions of others towards them. Participants constructed and reconstituted their identities over time and in different contexts and their narratives suggested that their sense of identity was always a factor in how they saw themselves, dealt with family, made their life decisions, and their romantic relationships. The women were not simply reconstituting their identities *after* being involved in interracial relationships; rather identity construction was ongoing from a young age. Like Kundu and Adams (2006) I found the women's identities were first shaped by their parents. From their parents the women learned about who they were with concepts such as religion, language, and gender. Tiffany, for example, was influenced by her mother's deep connection to being Fiji Muslim. She was often reminded to be a good representation of that image by what she wore and how she spoke. Melissa was reminded of her cultural expectations from a young age to the point that she stated that concepts were "drilled" into her. Socialization began for these women

in the home with a lesson on who they were in relation to their culture. According to Inman (2006), Mooney (2006), Varghese and Jenkins (2009), this is due to the burden that falls on females to provide an authentic representation of their tradition and customs. I found this to be true since the women were reminded of what being a good girl in their culture meant, and strongly encouraged to embody that good girl image. This was true regardless of the differences among the women (Inman, 2006).

The identity changes that these women went through came as a natural progression into adolescence and as they interacted with the influences. Sundar (2008) found South Asian women to change due to personal interests, evolving relationships with those in and outside the community, and factors from the broader society. Their families and ethnic communities had taught the women but it had been done within the dominant Canadian culture. As adolescents the dominant influence began to affect them more strongly. Kelsey explained how her parents had to accept their daughters having male friends because they realized they could not ignore common Western practices. Dating is a Western activity that the women noticed reflected who they were as South Asian females. As found by researchers such as Talbani and Hasanali (2000), Naidoo (2003), Varghese and Jenkins (2009) and Tummala-Narra (2013) South Asian women are discouraged from dating due to their gender. I found this to be true as several of the women compared their experiences of dating to their brothers. While the women were discouraged to date yet expected to marry those they dated, their brothers had freedom to take part in the Western custom without any concerns. During this time in life the women adapted bicultural identities to balance their ethnic and Western characteristics. Hearing how the women dealt with emotional consequences from their interracial relationships shed more light on the topic.

According to researchers Penning and Wu (2006) and Inman and colleagues (2011) difficulties are often faced by those in interracial relationships due to lack of familial support. This was true with the participants as many faced disapproval from families. When some of the women's support systems such as family disappeared, they relied on themselves and their partners to deal with emotional distress. Bratter and Eschbach (2006) found that coping strategies for interracial couples are not monolithic and women faced higher levels of distress than men. I found that the women communicated their distress to their partners, which research (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006) indicates to be helpful in strengthening a relationship. However, I found that some conversations with partners left the women more stressed as they felt they could

not fully explain the distress their families were causing them. For example, as mentioned previously Veera, 21, had a difficult time explaining why women were treated a certain way in her culture to her partner. Other women like Sonia, 25, found it challenging to explain to their partners why their parents would react negatively to their relationships. Regardless, some of the women admired their partner's strength in dealing with outsiders' stares and negative responses. Emotionally some of the women dealt with negative responses on their own as they felt their families would not understand or approve of their situation.

Overall the women still hoped for a positive relationship with family and friends, and did not want to cut ties. Their desire to keep a connection with their families and to their culture showed that the women still felt connected to their South Asian roots. As Tummala- Narra (2013) mentions the family unit is very important in a South Asian female's identity development. Cutting out family would be an extreme, unwanted action for the women. The women still felt that they embodied a South Asian identity, creating the bicultural identity that embraced Canadian values and customs. While some of the women were quick to explain how they self-identified using labels (such as Indo-Canadian), some women found it more difficult to neatly explain what they would like to be called. Only one participant had not thought about self-identification.

Interestingly none of the participants in the study referred to themselves as 'women of color'. Rather they saw themselves as either Canadian or specifically the ethnic, racial, cultural or religious group to which they felt they belonged. Bannerji (2000) found herself questioned by fellow South Asian women about the term 'woman of color' as they found it to be racist and segregational. To them it closely followed the language of the American South with Black women being referred to as colored women. While understanding this perspective, I see the term as a positive way to refer to my obvious physical appearance and my solid union with fellow minority women. Despite the women's mixed views on how they saw themselves, they all felt comfortable referring to themselves and their culture as "Brown". Malhi, Boon and Rogers (2009) stated that those who self-identify as their ethnic self (i.e. South Asian) had positive feelings towards their ethnic group. However Sundar (2008) stated that bicultural identity has been linked to mental health problems based on an inability to fit in with a solid group. As mentioned previously, I found the women to use "Brown" as a less complex way for the women to state their identities as women of color and not worry about the politics of labeling identity.

They were “Brown” and that meant different things for different women, but the general belief was that it represented their South Asian side in a Western society.

Using color to distinguish themselves helped explain whatever they thought was non-White, or part of the hegemonic Canadian culture. Use of such language and terminology illustrates how these South Asian women do not simply refer to themselves as Canadian. They take precautions to explain how they are Canadian, yet they still are not clearly recognized as such in the multicultural nation in which they live. This is surprising since Canada is largely an immigrant country with an increasing number of immigrants continuing to flow into the nation from non-European jurisdictions (Hamplova & Bourdais, 2010). The lack of studies on interracial relationships in Canada is surprising because of Canada’s immigration rate. The absence in research could be due to lack of data by Canadian statistics that did not systematically collect information on race or racialization. Instead the only information on ethnic origin, immigration status, or place of birth was collected (Hamplova & Bourdais, 2010). This is further complicated by the ambiguity of wording on surveys and the fact that many respondents choose the category of ‘Canadian’ regardless of their length of time in Canada or their ethno-cultural background. Recent surveys do include a ‘visible minority’ category yet it does little to elaborate on or help us understand interracial unions. Another explanation is that the topic merely was not seen to be of importance until recent interest in minorities, such as South Asians, due to their growth as a population.

Topics and experiences regarding self-identity, ethnic background, emotional support, living in Canada as a minority, and being in an interracial union helped the women explain their “othering”. They understood how their actions as females were considered negative by their culture, and some also understood how they were seen by Canadian society as a minority with a different belief and value system, thus considered an “other”. Almost all of the women admitted to feeling either awkward or uncomfortable when out in public with their partners. Some women found people to be simply curious about their relationships, while some thought people had racist reactions. The women’s interpretations of being stared at while out in public with their partners did vary. As Manohar (2008) found, gossip is a strong form of social control and the women knew this. Those who hid their relationships were careful when out in public with their partners. Sonia’s parents knew of her relationship yet she was still very aware of her surroundings and the public. Inman and colleagues (2011) found that interracial couples experienced discrimination in

public from both the ethnic South Asian and dominant communities in the United States. This issue is of greater importance in the Canadian context because of contradictory notion of multiculturalism. Only one participant did not notice any sort of public reactions. However, she did note that this might have been because she most closely resembled the ethnicity of her partner.

My findings show that South Asian women have similar experiences and reactions because of their shared location involving gender and race. Identity is a complex concept for these women since it was consistently changing as the women navigated adulthood. The women also relied on different aspects of their identity to adapt to different environments. Similar to Sundar's (2008) findings I found the women's identities to be flexible, ever changing and fluid. They needed to adjust who they were daily to connect with different people in different environments. For example, a family event would mean the women would have to be "Brown" to achieve a sense of belonging and to meet expectations of the environment. Understandably this could prove to be difficult. Dealing with this constant change and awareness was exhausting to some women creating emotional distress and physical stress. Some of the women had already accessed counseling and some showed interest in finding a therapist to speak to. I found this to be very positive since literature indicates that South Asian women usually do not search for aid outside their close-knit family. Mahapatra (2012) argued that women do not ask for aid for emotional concerns or even domestic violence because of the culture's belief in discouraging women from disclosing issues that occur within the home. Later in this chapter I present recommendations to help women seeking aid.

Race and gender were significant themes throughout the study. With the theoretical approach of intersectionality I was able to better understand underlying themes and patterns and how they connected with one another in particular ways. Race and gender are inseparable when researching South Asian women. The women's experiences of being involved in interracial relationships had to be analyzed from an intersectional lens. All of the participants discussed both race and gender and how it affected their situations. For example, some were aware of the fact that race was a major factor in their relationship to outsiders, but being a female meant equally negative connotations. They worried about racial differences along with gender roles and expectations in their romantic and family relationships. Another example of race and gender was evident in the women's desire to get married to their partners. According to some researchers

such as Yancey (2002) the characteristics of those who date are different than those who interracially marry because there is a difference in dating and the seriousness of getting married. I found all my participants serious about marriage with their racially different partners. All participants saw their partners as future husbands. The women felt that family would accept them if they could prove how serious they were. For example Sonia felt that her parents relaxed a little bit after realizing her boyfriend was not just a fling. Race *and gender* were crucial in this finding because the women knew that males in their culture are less serious about dating due to the freedom they enjoy as men (Netting, 2006; Manohar, 2008). Thus males would seem to fit with Yancey's (2002) statement.

In summary the study found similarities with existing literature, agreeing with several factors of identity formation through socialization and consequences of being involved in an interracial relationship. I found identity to be very important in South Asian women's lives and not just altered by being involved in their romantic relationships. Rather, it is a daily part of the women's lives. It is a fluid on-going process that is continuously recreated and negotiated based on different situations, experiences and environments. Findings show identity to be a complex, multi-leveled concept for South Asian women as it consists of ethnic, bicultural and Western influenced characteristics. An example of the complexity of identity for South Asian women in Canada was through the usage of the term "Brown" which meant different things for different women. Identity was also connected to socialization, which I argue greatly affects South Asian women's involvement in interracial relationships later in life based on previous gender roles and expectations taught in the home. Gender was found to be a crucial factor in the consequence of being in interracial relationships since the women had less freedom than males in the South Asian culture, yet they also had an expectation to marry their partners unlike their brothers who were allowed to date but not necessarily marry. Finally as mentioned above, multiculturalism played an interesting role in the women's relationships. It was referred to by some women as a means to justify their relationships, while others spoke about how it was only useful in theory and the reality of others reactions towards interracial relationships proved a less accepting nation. This brings attention to the realities of being involved in an interracial relationship in Canada as a South Asian woman with the uniqueness of the national policy of multiculturalism, which does not truly provide societal acceptance to South Asian women and their racially different partners.

Through their agency and actions the South Asian women I interviewed are willing to bring change to traditional roles and expectations, along with challenging stereotypes of what or who South Asian women are in Canada. They are willing to speak about their experiences in a safe environment and even seek aid. In the next section I make recommendations in helping women with the consequences of being in an interracial relationship, providing insight into how South Asian women would like to be helped.

5.2 Implications for Women's Organizations

Understanding the consequences that South Asian women experience when involved in interracial relationships is not only an academic contribution to sociological and feminist research; it is valuable in its practical applications. Despite the setback with my original plan of working in conjunction with a specific South Asian women's support organization, I was able to successfully collect and analyze data which will be of benefit to front line workers and the women they aid by providing experiences from the women themselves. Although some implications may seem simple and straight forward, one must remember that the topic itself can be sensitive and front line workers often have a short amount of time to build trust and help women when contacted. Below, I present implications I found important based on findings, personal experience, and my own familiarity with front line work:

1) Adapting an Intersectional Approach. The intersectional approach I took is needed for front line workers to adapt in order to fully understand their client's concerns. Intersectionality in aid work allows an understanding that humans have multi-dimensional and complex lives. People's lived realities are created by different factors and social dynamics working together (Hankivsky, 2014). My participants shared similar experiences as South Asian women yet they also had other different social factors. The women changed to adapt to their environments and experienced privilege and oppression simultaneously based on their situations (Hankivsky, 2014). For example, Sara belonged to a higher economic class than some of the other women and had a supportive family but she still had to deal with gender expectations as a female from her community. Another important aspect of intersectionality is for front line workers to consider their own social position, role and power (Hankivsky, 2014). This reflexivity allows workers to be aware of any possible bias when helping others. This leads into the next implication of taking on an anti-racist framework.

2) Anti-racist Aid. My insider role helped me secure a level of trust with participants that I believe would have been more difficult to obtain had I been an outsider. While the participants were open to talking about their experiences with me, they felt more relaxed once we began to agree on certain shared knowledge about the culture. As Veera explained, she had a difficult time explaining the expected role of women to her Caucasian partner. He only saw South Asian women to be oppressed, while Veera understood why the women had to behave in the manner they do. Fear of being spoken to in an ethno-centric way can be an issue for women when speaking to front line workers who are not from the same culture. Tina discussed this topic when explaining the ignorance of some non-minority Canadians towards South Asian customs:

Like when someone challenges what you think is right and wrong, that's when you're like oh crap like how accepting am I really. (Interview #9, Tina, age 26)

Simply knowing basic common cultural practices, that are relevant to front line work, can help build trust and provide comfort to clients. Such examples include knowing women's roles, importance of family, community, and marriage, the concept of honor, and accepting the cultural normalization of actions such as policing. While none of the women I spoke to have dealt with dangerous cases of violence (such as honor killing) many had known about violent incidents in their communities through the news and had knowledge of women being shunned from the community. Understanding that these actions are extreme and do not represent the entire culture is crucial, yet it is equally important to know that these are valid fears that women have. It helps women feel less judged and allows them to open up.

3) The Topic needs to be Talked About. Taking an intersectional, anti-racist stance when helping South Asian women can also allow front line workers to know that women are taught to be silent, yet it does not mean that all South Asian women are unable to talk about their issues. All of the participants wanted to talk to me about their experiences because they wanted to share their stories and hear about others like them. Since a lot of the women were making sense of their own identities within their South Asian and Canadian context, they felt better knowing they were not alone. Sonia explained the confusing nature of being in her situation:

There's quite a few girls at work that who're in interracial relationships and we find it that in Surrey in particular, its huge its like or generation kids have the crazy traditional values that our parents would have and it doesn't make sense to us cause we are suppose to be moving towards like not being discriminating ...Our generation is, there's a lot of people who look down at me when I ...dating a White guy and they stop really... talking me in particular and making jokes so I don't know, I find that you, I find people who were inter- in interracial relationships, connect more and end up going away from the very traditional Brown... (Interview #7, Sonia, age 25)

5.3 Future Research

Further research would be beneficial on several topics arising from the interviews as it would add to our understandings of Canadian South Asian women's lives and experiences. Several participants talked about the role of mothers, relationships with mothers, communication in the household/family, and questions involving sexuality and sexual education as central to their experiences. All of the participants mentioned their mothers in one way or another, however, relationships with mothers varied considerably and were often not presented as positive or supportive. Considering that South Asian families are closely knit (Kundu & Adams, 2006; Inman, Howard, Beaumont & Walker, 2007; Varghese & Jenkins, 2009), it was surprising that none of the women had a very close connection to their mothers. The women respected their mothers yet did not see them as role models or supports. Rather women like Veera were afraid to become like their mothers by getting married and reproducing gender roles. Females reproduce the culture and are seen as vessels of traditions (Gupta, 1997; Manohar, 2008). It is possible that the women felt disconnected from the values their mothers were passing down to them and a certain level of distrust was experienced. This distrust was demonstrated by the women choosing not to disclose their relationship details to their mothers, knowing that their mothers were loyal to their husbands' patriarchal belief systems. The relationship between mothers and daughters left me wondering how my participants would raise their future daughters and if or how they were planning to end some values and customs which would be interesting to explore in a subsequent study.

Communication was also described as challenging in the South Asian household for women. While women can rely on each other for support, some topics are considered inappropriate or unneeded. The lack of communication meant parents and children were unable to understand one another. Women felt uncomfortable sharing aspects of their lives such as dating and where they were hanging out. Parents often ignored the situation rather than have conversations with their daughters. Sonia shared an example of how she wasn't afraid to tell her

parents where she was and didn't think twice in calling her mother to pick her up if she had been drinking. Her friends wouldn't dare ask their parents to pick them up. The fear of being unladylike or being a disappointment often stops women from speaking to their parents about their lives. A method of understanding needs to be established in which parents and daughters are able to speak to one another openly in a respectful manner. I understand that this can be a difficult task in a culture where women are silenced, but communication needs to be encouraged to engage both sides. Often communication is left vague and women are left to figure out things on their own which can be a very scary situation.

Sexuality and women's sexuality in particular is a topic that is rarely discussed openly in South Asian culture. A particularly interesting issue that arose in the research was the negative experiences and/or relative absence of sexual education for young South Asian Canadian women and its impact on their sexual identities and future relationship experiences. Several of the participants chose to date in secrecy from their parents, but expressed feelings of ambivalence and discomfort about doing so because of fear of their parents' reaction when their relationships were eventually discovered or declared. Not only is this connected to a lack of communication and the discomfort surrounding open dialogue in the home, it also relates to a lack of sexual education and stigma surrounding sexuality for women. There is a gap in literature on heterosexual sexuality involving Canadian South Asian women that could be filled to provide insights into how these women construct and negotiate their embodied sexual identities.

5.4 Final Thoughts

There is a growing body of literature on South Asians in Canada. In recent years academics have studied the lives of Canadian South Asians to gain a better understanding of the culture, its people and the complex natures of identity, immigration/migration, gender roles and expectations, and generational differences. Previous studies have examined marriage and family as part of understanding the South Asian female, but this thesis fills an important gap in research by examining the consequences of interracial relationships for women. In particular this research looked at how South Asian women constructed and reconstituted their identities throughout their lives including when they became involved with partners outside of their culture, dealing with reactions from both their home communities and the dominant Canadian society and the challenges and negative consequences they often experienced within their own families and cultural communities.

In addition to the academic contributions of this study, my project's research findings contribute to conceptual, empirical and applied work in the field. I welcome front line workers to use this study's findings in aiding women who may need support. Another practical application is that these results are now available to South Asian women themselves who may benefit from hearing the experiences of other women in similar circumstances. At a conceptual level the research adds to research on the complexities of intersectional experiences of gender, racialization and multiculturalism in a Canadian context from a topic that has not been studied before. Finally this study listened to the voices of South Asian women who wanted their personal experiences heard, providing a significant contribution to feminist based research and opening dialogue on an important sociological topic in Canada.

Appendix A: Flyer

Are you a **South Asian** woman who is now, or has in the past been in a relationship with a male from outside of your culture/community?

Share your story!

- I am a student in the Master's of Sociology with a specialization in Women's Studies program at Lakehead University studying South Asian women's experiences of inter-racial/inter-cultural relationships.

I'd like to hear about your experience if you are:

- Between the ages of 18-30.
- South Asian – anyone who traces her ancestry to the subcontinent of India.

Interviews will be private and will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Your identity and comments will be kept confidential.

For further information or to participate contact Sim at



sbadesha@lakeheadu.ca

Appendix B: Information Letter

Dear Potential Research Participant:

My name is Sim Badesha and I am a student at Lakehead University. I am inviting you to participate in the study “Identity in a Love Marriage? Exploring the Consequences of South Asian Women’s Choice to Take Part in Interracial Relationships”. The study explores the experiences of South Asian women between the ages of 18-30 to better understand a topic that has not been researched in Canadian literature. Providing insight to this topic will create dialogue in understanding gender roles and expectations in South Asian culture in regards to interracial relationships. Thus, your experiences will be extremely valuable to this research. Results from this research will be used towards the completion of my thesis for my Master’s degree in Sociology with a specialization in Women’s Studies.

Interviews for this research will take approximately 60 -90 minutes. The location of the interview is agreed upon by you and I. You are free to suggest a place that you feel comfortable with and I will try my best to accommodate. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, you are free to answer questions in any way you choose, decline any questions you do not wish to answer, and withdraw from the study at any time. There may be minimal psychological risk by participating in this research. This may occur from feeling discomfort when speaking about your experiences. I will be providing a list of support services in Vancouver and Surrey, BC for you to contact if any emotional distress arises. Both services provide free, confidential support and are culturally sensitive.

To ensure that information is gathered accurately, I am requesting to audiotape the interview. If you prefer I can take hand written notes instead. Before interviewing you will be asked to chose an alias name to keep your identity anonymous. The audiotapes will be transcribed following interviews to aid analysis. All audiotapes and notes will be secured in locked cabinets at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. They will be held for a period of 5 years. After 5 years they will be destroyed. All data will be kept confidential and you will not be identified in any written reports.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study please don’t hesitate to contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Pam Wakewich at (807) 343-8353 or pam.wakewich@lakeheadu.ca. If you wish to receive a summary of the project after its completion please contact me at (778) 908-2972 or sbadesha@lakeheadu.ca.

This study has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca

Thank you for your time!
Sincerely,

Sim Badesha

Appendix C: Consent Forms

By signing this sheet I agree to participate in the research study “Identity in a Love Marriage? Exploring the Consequences of South Asian Women’s Choice to Take Part in Interracial Relationships” being conducted by Sim Badesha, MA student in Sociology and Women’s Studies, under the supervision of Dr. Pamela Wakewich.

I have received an explanation of the nature of the research, its purpose, and procedures. I understand that:

- 1. I am a volunteer and I can withdraw from this research at any time without any penalty or consequences.
- 2. There is minimal risk of psychological harm to participating.
- 3. I will be asked questions of a personal nature, but I am under no obligation to answer any questions that I am uncomfortable with.
- 4. The data I provide will be kept confidential and my identity will remain anonymous.
- 5. My interview will be tape-recorded or if requested, hand written notes will be taken. No one except Sim Badesha and her supervisor, Dr. Pam Wakewich will have access to the data. All audiotapes and notes will be stored in a secure location for 5 years accessible only to Sim and Dr. Wakewich.
- 6. I will be emailed the transcripts of the interview to review (unless I ask not to be contacted again) and I may choose to edit my responses or withdraw my contribution without any penalty.
- 7. I will receive a summary of the research, upon request, following the completion of the project. My personal information (i.e, email address) to receive the results will be kept confidential.

Signature of the Participant

Date

Yes, I would like to receive a copy of the results. _____
Email Address

Sim Badesha
Graduate Student at Lakehead University
Department of Sociology
(778) 980-2972
sbadesha@lakeheadu.ca

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Demographics:

1. What is your age?
2. Where were you born?
3. What languages do you speak at home?
4. Where were your parents born?
5. What religion are you?
6. Do you practice your religion?
7. Do your parents practice any religion?

Personal Questions:

1. How do you self-identify? (Canadian, South Canadian, Indian etc.) Has that changed over time?
2. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your family background.
3. Are you currently in a relationship? How long have you been in this relationship?
4. Tell me more about your partner. (Religion, caste, ethnicity etc.)
5. Do your parents know about the relationship?
6. How have your parents responded to your relationship with this person? Has this changed over time?
7. What do your family and friends think about the relationship?
8. How do people's reactions (positive/negative) to the relationship make you feel? Why?
9. Do you think there's a difference in your culture in expectations for girls and boys? Can you give some examples?
10. Do you think that people's responses to you would be different if you were a boy dating someone outside your culture, rather than being a girl?

Dealing with consequences.

1. Have you experienced negative reactions to your interracial/intercultural relationship? How have these made you feel? How have you and your partner dealt with them?
2. Has your romantic relationship affected your relationship with family, friends, and/or community?
3. Do you feel differently about yourself after becoming involved with your partner?
4. Does your identity differ in different settings (i.e. with family and relatives, versus peers, or with other interracial couples)?
5. Some studies indicate that South Asian women in interracial relationships may experience stigmatization and ostracization from their families and communities. Have you experienced this? Can you give an example?
6. Has anyone you know experienced this?
7. How have you/they handled it?
8. Why types of programs/supports do you think are necessary to assist women experienced difficulties in this situation?
9. Have you accessed any such services? If not, why not?

If so, what was your experience of them? Would you recommend them to someone else?

10. What other supports do you think would be helpful for women in this situation?

11. Are there any other questions that I should have asked? Or is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and your participation.

Appendix E: Support Services

For students at KPU:

Kwantlen Polytechnic University Counseling Office
Surrey Campus
Surrey Main Building Room 160, 12666-72 Ave., Surrey, B.C.
(604) 599-2044
The office is open from 8:00am to 4:00 pm Monday to Friday.

Open to public:

Battered Women's Support Services
Vancouver, BC
BWSS Crisis Line (604) 687-1867
Monday to Friday 10 AM – 5 PM & Wednesdays 10 am – 8 pm
Trained workers staff crisis Line.
You may speak via phone or request an appointment to speak to a worker face to face.
Location's address is given upon approval of appointment date/time. This is to ensure safety of women accessing services.
Location is a women only space.

Both of the above services provide free service and confidentiality in a safe environment.

Appendix F: Autobiography

The following is an account of my personal experience. As a South Asian woman I am aware of the danger of stereotyping South Asians and Indian culture. However I believe my own autobiographical account therefore holds merit as well as other South Asian women's voices under the theoretical approach of standpoint epistemology.

Having been born and raised in British Columbia, Canada I had grown up with strong Western influences. Like my Western peers, I too had hopes of finding my own mate and building my future with a life partner. However, I also grew up in a strict, traditional Sikh family that enforced cultural expectations onto me. I remember having to embrace these cultural norms, mostly regarding gender, when I reached adolescence. I began to learn how to cook, clean and understand the role of caregiver while my Western peers were beginning to understand their own identities rather than care for others. None of these role expectations seemed strange, although I often felt that certain duties were unfairly placed on me because of my gender. Most, if not all, of my friends were South Asians and it wasn't uncommon to hear them speak about the gendered chores they had to learn and conduct. I say gendered, since the chores focused in and around the kitchen and within the home. I was the youngest with one older brother. I remember my childhood being decent, but once I became an adolescence I had to take on the duties of womanhood.

Regardless of our cultural differences, my friends and I were beginning to adapt Western ideas of adolescence and the freedom associated with it. Luckily for some of my peers their parents also began to adapt Western norms allowing their daughters to go out with friends and wear makeup. I on the other hand still had very traditional values I had to follow. My upbringing was heavily influenced by religion and the patriarchal ideology it promoted. I could have become rebellious and carved out my own path, but I was much too timid and afraid. I had grown up in a culture that silenced its women. I was much more preferred if I was quiet than if I spoke my mind. Having spent four of my grade school years in a private religious school, I had been socialized to be a 'good girl'. This meant I was best to keep quiet, be agreeable, and take care of my family. Interestingly my mother worked outside the home for years so I would take care of the family and myself by providing meals, doing laundry, and cleaning. Not knowing

any better, I sought praise for my hard work and took pride in doing what I was supposed to do. The feminist I have become cringes remembering back to my youth.

Throughout this time I had a very limited idea about my identity. I identified with my ethnicity since it was an obvious factor in my life through institutions such as school and religion, but it was also embedded in the language I spoke at home, the food I ate, and sometimes the clothes I wore. I went through my adolescence fulfilling the stereotype of a 'good' South Asian girl. I had no plans to actively challenge that label. I looked the part as I did not wear makeup or have stylish haircuts. I was too busy with school and chores to do anything else. When I met my partner, who is European Canadian, I did not think my choice to take part in the relationship would cause a major reaction. As a female in my culture, I had been ascribed a status that did not fit with my own agency. A part of me knew that my family would have issues with our relationship, yet I was hopeful that my previous good record would prove that I was capable of making my own choices. I also relied on the fact that my older brother had been permitted the possibility to choose a wife that could be outside the culture. I failed to realize the gender differences.

I had known my partner for a while, and feminist discourse was telling me something was off about my upbringing. While making sense of my past and trying to gain control of my future, I disclosed my relationship to my family. To say it went poorly would be an understatement. I was verbally abused, othered, and stripped of my ethnic identity by the very people who were supposed to protect and love me. Since community is an important factor with family, due to social status and standing, I knew that I was symbolically exiled. After an exhausting effort of trying to negotiate my life I chose to disconnect from my family. I knew if I gave in, I would have to continue a life of following rules set out, which reinforced gender norms that I had learned to hate. I had become unhappy with my gendered role in my early teens but had accepted it as fate. By the time I had been othered, school had been a major role in my life introducing feminism, along with my partner who encouraged me to do what made me happy.

While going through the separation from my family and community I looked for literature to help guide me. Not only did I find little aid from academia, I found the shame associated with women's decisions in the culture was being reflected onto me by other females. Other females did not understand what I was doing or why I was doing it. I had a co-worker, a South Asian female; tell me that I had turned my back on my culture. She herself switched back

and forth from praising my choices and then warning me of what I was doing was wrong. She was against the patriarchal values in our culture, yet she would admit that she was afraid of taking control of her own desires and needs. I now look back at this incident and understand the fear and shame my co-worker may have been going through as she navigated her way into adulthood. At the time, however, I was left hurt. I entered therapy and began the long process of figuring out my identity and who I was; what did I want? What made me happy? Could I trust my own voice; why was I afraid?

I felt like I was living a double life. At school I felt like I had to cover up my past and keep secrecy on what I was going through. At home I felt happy as I learned more about myself. Over time as a crisis line worker I began to share my struggle and past story. I listened to other women's stories and my biography became historicized. I connected with the women through the pain we shared. This began to seep into my life as I slowly began telling people about myself at school. I began to write about women's issues and slowly the shame began to fade.

After two years of not communication with my parents I finally met with my mother after I finished my degree. Although it was awkward at first, we began to catch up and finally have conversations where I was treated like an adult. Previously I had been treated as a child. My family believed that it was best if my choices were made for me. I am not quite sure why I was thought to be incapable, but I believe it has to do with the fact that I am female. Women in the culture are treated secondly to men. Often females are taken care of by family until they are married off at which point the husband takes responsibility of his new wife. My educational attainment had established me as an independent and intelligent person in the eyes of my family. Going on to my masters, I have kept in touch with my family. Fortunately my parents have gone through their own reflexivity where they have decided to leave the past in the past, and focus on building a better relationship with me. I still do not know what the future holds for our relationship as I still am with my chosen partner, but at least we have begun to create a better future together. Perhaps part of the process for them has been to accept my newfound freedom and belief in following my own agency. Part of my own growth includes this paper by sharing women's voices about how gender expectations and roles create hostile environments for women who choose their own life partners. As author Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1987) stated, "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice...I will have my serpents tongue- my women's voice...I will overcome the tradition of silence".

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