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Sonal Himat Soni  
Negotiating the Self: An  
Exploratory Study on the  
Gender Identity Formation of  
Second-Generation Asian  
Indian American Women

## ABSTRACT

This purpose of this study was to explore how second-generation (defined in this study as immigrants' children born in the United States or brought here under the age of ten with their parents and raised in the United States) Asian Indian American women understand, negotiate and perform gender roles. In particular, the study examined the dating rituals and practices of second-generation Asian Indian women in order to ascertain how these women have understood messages about dating from their parents, friends, the broader dominant culture and other sources to construct their gender identity. It also examined how Asian Indian ethnic identity is tied to the notion of gender. Twelve second-generation Asian Indian American women were interviewed who's age ranges were between the ages of 19 to 29. The sample age range was chosen because adolescence and young adulthood in the United States marks an important moment for engaging in questions of identity. The thesis argues that the notion of gender is inextricably linked to the ideas of nation, culture and ethnicity. Mainstream culture in the United States, the parents of second-generation Asian Indian women and the Asian Indian community each in its particular way offer essentialized versions of the authentic "Indian" woman. Second-generation Asian Indian women are able to construct a narrative of their identity around gender, nation, culture and ethnicity with which they are relatively comfortable and which represents their own understanding of their place in society.

NEGOTIATING THE SELF: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE GENDER  
IDENTITY FORMATION OF SECOND-GENERATION ASIAN INDIAN  
AMERICAN WOMEN

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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## *CHAPTER 1*

### *INTRODUCTION*

In 1965 the United States revised old immigration policy that discriminated against Asian immigrants and an unprecedented number of immigrants from India arrived (Fisher, 1980). Under the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, the United States issued visas by national origin in seven preference categories including family relatives, professional occupation, and refugees (Leonard, 1997). The majority of the first waves of Asian Indian immigrants arrived through the occupational preferences category. Hence, the majority of Asian Indian immigrants that arrived in late sixties and seventies were comprised of many well-educated, highly-skilled Indians. Asian Indian immigration will be outlined in more detail in the next chapter.

Many of the post-1965 Indian immigrants had little family base or a community to ease them in the transition to American society (Das Gupta, 1997). As these immigrants began to settle in the United States and raise families, they were faced with the challenge of explaining their culture to neighbors, friends, associates, and their children (Das Gupta, 1997). In India, where these immigrants were more or less part of the majority culture, they perhaps had never been asked to articulate their beliefs. In response to the pressure to assimilate to American society and as a form of resistance, Indian immigrants, including people from various distinct regional, linguistic and cultural affiliations in India, were thus compelled to recreate identities, pasts, and histories in their adapted country (Rayapol, 1997). Through the importation and reproduction of culture,

language, and rituals in their new country of residence, these immigrants imagined themselves to be connected to people across the globe in the 'homeland' from where they emigrated (Anderson, 1983). The immigrant parents may have wanted to think of themselves as interacting with the natural sociocultural identity rooted in locality and community of their Indian region regardless of the difference in space and time. However, they were no longer subject to the daily interactions with the culture of India or the minute changes that occurred over space and time. Even though there were elements of Asian Indian culture available in the United States, the immigrants' importations were rooted in and filtered through an American context. Thus, the immigrant Indian American cultural customs were different in quality than the cultural customs of the Indian region from where they emigrated.

The children of these immigrants, born into a borderland, between here and there, must negotiate an identity from at least two (if not more) cultural reference points: the constructed cultural norms of their parents, and the constructed cultural norms of the US. Moreover, as the literature suggests and the following study supports, identity formation for a second-generation Asian Indian child is gendered ( Maira, 2002; Das Gupta 1997; Das Gupta 1998; Das Gupta & Das Das Gupta 1996; Gupta; 1999; Espiritu 2001; Bhattacharjee 1999). That is to say that identity formation is different for male and female children. Even though, identity formation may be gendered for all cultures and subcultures to some degree, it is gendered in a particular way for second-generation Asian Indian American women. Women are required to marry an Indian man, cook Indian meals, teach their children about the "Indian" values, culture and identity. Asian Indian women are asked by their families and communities to bear the weight of

signifying the Indian community's identity because women and their sexuality are inextricably linked to the idea of nation. The second-generation child, if she is somehow sexually deviant, does not only anger and shame the family, but shames an entire nation and culture. She also, thus, jeopardizes her standing as an "authentic Indian" and risks being referred to as Americanized. The connection of women to nation will be further developed in the following chapter.

While there have been some studies that have focused on immigration patterns and culture of the post-1965 Indian immigrants (Fisher 1980; Leonard 1997; Portes & Zhou 1993), very few studies have focused on the second-generation, defined in this study as the children of Asian Indian immigrants born here or who arrived here under the age of ten and were raised in the United States. Studies that have focused on the second-generation, have focused on how the group has progressed on the continuum from "Indian" to "American," offering distinct monolithic categories for "American" and "Indian" (Portes & Zhou, 1993). In fact, the issues of second-generation Asian Indian women are rigidly defined in terms of a conflict between "tradition" which is equated with the sexually repressive Indian culture of the immigrant parents and "modernity" which is equated to the sexually liberal U.S. mainstream popular culture (Maira, 2002). However, critiquing Asian Indian or South Asian patriarchy without also examining U.S. sexism and racism is also dangerous because it upholds racist binaries that maintain erroneously that US culture is a liberal panacea for all the women of the world oppressed by the savage men of their culture and thus far superior to repressive cultures of places such as India (Maira, 2002). Furthermore, Indian parents and mainstream American culture's attempt to construct monolithic categories such as "American" and "Indian" in



the first place is problematic because it is difficult to tease out what is “Indian” and what is “American” and to do so essentializes both cultures.

Literature of the past two decades has discussed the gender and sexual identity formation for the second-generation Asian Indians, but focuses mainly on intergenerational conflict around sexuality and regulation of femininity in immigrant communities (Das Gupta, 1998; Gupta 1999). Conflicts may exist between generations, but, there may also be more peaceful blending of ideas, cultures, and identities than is allowed for in some of the literature as the findings from this study will illustrate. Also, the literature offers critiques of Indian systems of patriarchy without offering a critique of U.S. systems of patriarchy and racism that impact the construction of gender for second-generation women. There has been some literature that critically examines gender identity construction among Indian immigrants, including the impact that US systems of sexism and racism have on its construction (Bhattachjee 1999; Das Gupta & Das Das Gupta 1996). However, the literature remains limited on this topic of gender identity construction for second-generation Asian Indian American women.

Thus, this study examines how second-generation Asian Indian American women understand, negotiate and perform gender roles. One of the salient moments in which gender roles for second-generation Asian Indian women become most transparent for these women is in regard to the beliefs and practices surrounding dating, romantic relationships and marriage (Das Das Gupta, 1998). Therefore, my primary research question was: What are the dating rituals and practices of second-generation Asian Indian American women and what do these practices reveal about how the women understand, negotiate and perform gender roles? Other questions that are addressed in the course of

this study include: How do second-generation Asian Indian American women understand messages about dating from their parents, friends, the broader dominant culture and other sources to create an understanding about their gender identity? I pursued this research from a postcolonial theoretical lens that imagines that immigrant and second-generation identities are hybrids, encompassing multiple identities and blending them to construct a new form that is neither one nor the other but a complicated mix that perhaps cannot be neatly disassembled into cultural parts that can be labeled “Indian” or “American.” This is possible because of the liminal space that a second-generation individual inhabits; a site, as Homi Bhabha (1994) explains, is rife with ambivalence but also possibility. Bhabha’s notion of hybridity will be more fully discussed in the next chapter.

The lack of research in academia on minority populations in general and on second-generation Asian Indian Americans compelled me to do this study. I hope that in some way the research study will offer a voice to second-generation Asian Indian women to articulate their experiences and how they understand themselves. I also hope that the study will be a useful tool for clinicians that are interested in learning about the complexity of gender and ethnic identity construction for potential clients.

I conducted a flexible qualitative method study interviewing twelve second-generation Asian Indian American women from the ages of 18 to 30. The sample age range was chosen because adolescence and young adulthood in the United States marks an important moment for engaging in questions of identity. Also, it marks a time of increased individualization as children move away from their parental homes and gain an increased awareness of their position in social structures and relationships. I used purposive snowball method to build the sample. The process began by recruiting

participants through university-based organizations in the Philadelphia area. Also, I recruited participants through personal contacts such as friends and colleagues. I contacted potential participants over the phone to describe my study and assess their interest in participating. After gathering participants, I scheduled a one-hour interview with each participant using an interview guide and taping the conversation that ensues. For a full discussion of methodology please refer to Chapter III of this study.

The following chapter of this study will review the existing literature on second-generation Asian Indian women. Chapter III will detail the methodology used in the study. Chapter IV will discuss the findings and analysis of the data obtained from the interview and Chapter V will offer a discussion of the findings and compare it to the literature review. Also, Chapter V will outline the limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review focuses on the available literature regarding second-generation Asian Indian American women and the construction of gender identity. First, the foundational concept for this study, identity including gender identity is defined. Next, it traces the history of Asian Indian immigration to the United States. Then, it will focus on immigrant nostalgia. Also, the literature review will attempt to understand how the notion of women is linked to nation. Finally, it will consider how these notions affect second-generation Asian Indian women and the strategies they use to negotiate identity.

#### *Defining Identity*

Identity is the central concept of this study and thus a brief review of the theoretical literature surrounding identity is essential.

The concept of ‘identity’ has produced a number of intense debates in the field of human and social sciences. It is difficult to summarize the multitude of theories on identity. However, I will for the purpose of this study, loosely categorize conceptualizations of identity that arise out of schools of thought that include the subject-as-language approach and the post-colonial approach (du Gay, 2000). The term “subject-of-language” is borrowed from *Identity: A reader* (2000). The term incorporates an overlapping body of knowledge from post-modernism and post-structuralism. It should be noted that these schools of thought do not necessarily offer one definitive perspective.

Rather, there are many different arguments and theorists with varying levels of overlap in these fields. Many post-colonial theorists would readily agree with some of the assumptions of the postmodernism and post-structural theorists, as the literature review will show. In short, these categories are merely a heuristic device for the purpose of this study.

### *Subject-of-Language Approach to Identity*

The subject-of-language approach has enjoyed a great deal of attention in intellectual projects for the past few decades (Redman, 2000). The theorists that fall into this category each have nuanced theories about identity that are far from uniform with one another. However, Stuart Hall (1996) in his essay, *Who Needs Identity?*, indexes a number of themes that reappear in this approach to understanding identity and identity production. He begins by explaining one of the major themes in this approach which is that there is no essential, true, or pre-social self. Rather, “identities are constituted or ‘performatively’ enacted through the subject positions made possible in and through subject positions made available in the language and wider cultural codes.” (Redman, 2000, p.10). That is to say, identities are not a transcendent trait existing in a person prior to the person’s socialization. Identity is always contextualized, meaning it arises out of discourse which is defined as a system of society’s power relations, meanings and symbolism all constituted through language. The subject encounters this discourse-already constructed meaning-when born into the world. Identity coalesces as the person takes part in the discourse of the society that she inhabits. As discourse changes, so does identity. This is a point with which the influential thinker Michel Foucault would agree.

Foucault (1976) adeptly traces how subjects and identities are historically bound to discursive practices. In his introduction to the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault states:

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power. (p.104)

Foucault offers a discussion of sexuality as a strategy that produces specific subjects such as the hysterical woman or the perverse adult, by using his genealogical method to trace how the notion came into existence through various power relations. The idea of sexuality is produced and propagated in and through discourse-through the collective meanings that have come to hold sway over society; that which does not rest within this normative definition, is the ‘other’, outside and therefore problematic precisely because it does not “fit”. Society rejects this “other” because it is not recognizable or categorizable in discourse.

For an explanation about why that which does not fit into the normative definition is problematic, a turn to Judith Butler can help. Butler (1993) in her essay, *Critically Queer*, focuses on “citation” as the means of acting in the world. Discourse contains a certain set of meanings. Individual actions call upon those meanings-we are considered part of society when we do things that are recognizable by others-when we “cite” acts that already have meaning. If a certain action does not have an established place in discourse, then it is “other.” Discourses existent terms are the preconditions for acceptable, nameable, recognizable behavior. Discourse’s structure-it’s rules, terms, and

meanings are the guidelines for the formation of identity. For instance, according to Butler (1993), when a child is born and is pronounced “a girl,” the act of naming produces a girl, initiating a process by which ‘girling’ is compelled, and does not describe a natural state. In other words, a ‘girl’ is not actually a girl until she has been named as such. As Butler notes, the symbolic power of the term governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity. Again, discourse has the power to create and construct identity.

Hall (1976) further expands on the notion of identity and notes, using Derrida’s notion of *differance* that identities are constructed through that which they are not, through difference, and thus are destabilized, or fragile and incomplete by what they leave out. Identity is destabilized because it relies upon differentiation from that which it is not or the excluded. This reliance makes the excluded other-the object-necessary. If an identity always depends upon the other, which is supposedly meaningless, than that other haunts the identity, making it less complete. Also, if the object or other is either shifting or unknown then the identity that relies on it will also be shifting and unknown-hence, destabilized. In short, identities are not fixed and thus not essential. For instance, the identity of the ‘civilized European’ is constructed in relation to others such as the ‘exotic Oriental’ (Redman, 2000) Hence, identities thus constructed are always haunted by the liminal presence of the ‘other’ from whom they attempt to differentiate themselves (Redman, 2000). Also, if identity is derived mainly through discourse, those in power have the power to construct identity. The identity of the ‘other’ non-European cultural subject and the power of discourse in the construction of identity are of great importance to the post-colonial theorist and author.

### *Post-Colonial Approach to Identity*

One of the major projects of the subject-of -language approach derived from post-modern and post-structuralist theories is the deconstruction of the centralized master narratives of European culture and the dissolution of the bourgeois subject (Ashcroft et. al, 1995). The post-colonial concern with identity does share a similar concern with de-centering the European bourgeoisie subject and discourse and acknowledging the significance of language and writing in the construction of identity (Ashcroft et. al, 1995). However, the post-colonial authors and theorists are still concerned with how present-day imperial processes continue to impact colonial and neo-colonial societies and examine processes to subvert the discursive effects of that process (Ashcroft et. al, 1995).

Furthermore, many post-colonial theorists find some post-modern claims problematic. There are three overlapping critiques of the postmodern approach that this literature review will discuss including 'postmodernity' as another master narrative, the discourse of the 'other,' and the problem of agency and resistance for the subject.

Some post-colonial authors note that imposing postmodernity's epistemological claims on the world is essentially making a universalizing claim on the world that past European movements have made (Ashcroft et.al, 1995; Minh-Ha, 1989; Sangari 1987; Chakrabarty 1993). Kumkum Sangari (1987) notes that postmodernism can be short-sighted in the sense that the crisis of meaning is not the crisis of everyone in the world or that there are different ways of de-essentialization which are socially and politically grounded and arbitrated by separate perspectives, goals, and strategies in different countries. Echoing Sangari's sentiment, Gayatri Spivak (1988) also asserts that the project of many postmodernism thinkers continues to center the "West" as subject,



particularly naming Foucault and Deleuze as culprits. However, she further cautions that post-colonial theorists can sometimes also unwittingly collude with an essentialist and neo-colonial project of domination. Although she is sympathetic to those that support subaltern studies such as Ranajit Guha, she states that the attempt to create a unified “voice” for the subaltern person is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, subaltern is a term that defines a heterogeneous group of people that defy one unified voice or one unified subject position. Second, to speak for a subaltern person is to filter the voice through the elite western academic position and consequently silence the subaltern voice. For Spivak, the post-colonial theorist’s agenda must be to clear space for the subaltern person to speak for herself.

Another critique by post-colonial theorists is around the concept and identity of the other. The discourse of the ‘other’, as bell hooks (1990) notes, is a way of “othering” and further marginalizing the already marginalized. It is, in a sense, another way of silencing the ‘other’. Also, there is the question of power that is raised in the discourse of the ‘other.’ The person or group that has the power of discourse can have the power over constructing identities. If that is the case, is the ‘other’ just constantly at the will of colonial invaders? Who has the right to speak for the ‘other’?

Homi Bhabha (1990) a notable post-colonial theorist, in his work, *Interrogating Identity: The Post Colonial Perspective*, offers a possible place of resistance from the colonial gaze that wishes to silence or marginalize the self of the colonized. Bhabha introduces his work by citing two poems that convey the migrant’s experience of marginalization or more specifically of invisibility. The ‘self’ of the colonized is absent as a subject in language. That is to say that the stereotypes of colonial representation do

not provide the migrant with a secure place to speak of the 'self' (Redman, 2000). Thus, the argument is that there is no authentic migrant experience, just representation.

However, in these two poems, the migrant author is able to subvert the gaze of the colonizer, the discriminatory look that would deny cultural differences, by turning the look back on itself (Bhabha, 1990). This is done by undermining the colonial gaze; a gaze that can never see the invisible 'other' or 'self' (fully represent this self in language) will also never be able to fix an Anglo-European or white identity in terms of the different 'other' migrant identity (Redman, 2000). If identity is created through *difference* as Hall and Derrida say then white colonizer identity relies on being able to differentiate itself from colonized identity. However, if the colonized is elusive or resistant, she escapes the colonizer's gaze and also escapes that discourse. Without the necessary other from which to differentiate, the colonizer's identity is not a fixed normative identity.

Some post-colonial authors and feminist authors critique post-structuralist conceptions of identity that deny the existence of an intentional subject because they work against the political interest of women, minorities and postcolonial subjects (Ortner, 2005, Bhaskran, 1993). According to Bhaskran, post-structural theorists, such as Judith Butler, in an act of radical deconstruction, may argue that there is no natural category 'woman.' Rather it is understood to be a constructed category and because it is a constructed category it is unstable. Bhaskran further explains, in her interpretation of post-structuralism, that the naming of the category 'woman' is to fix or naturalize it making all the characteristics under the category 'woman' inherent traits and labeling anything outside that category as 'other'. Thus, in the heterosexual-patriarchal naming scheme it would be deemed "natural" or normative, for women to pursue motherhood and

wifhood (Bhaskran, 1993), and conversely, deviant not to do so. Natural facts or laws of nature constructed by the heterosexual-patriarchy would carve out roles for women (Bhaskran, 1993). However, minorities, including women are, in a position of objective non-identity (Ortner, 2005). That is to say, minority women are already invisible in discourse. The place of objective non-identity is not a place of liberation, rather it is damaging to the subject and self of the minority, migrant, woman. Denaturalizing the minority, migrant, woman from the master narratives of the West is crucial, but to de-materialize the self fragments positions of emancipation (Bhaskaran, 1993). It leaves the self without a way to resist, struggle against real forms of racism, sexism and real forms of discrimination.

Post-structuralist theories and theories of postmodernism have made important contributions to understanding that identities are discursively constructed through difference and that there is a need to de-center the European bourgeois subject. However, postcolonial theorists highlight that many theories of postmodernism still attempt to impose on the world its master narrative of the 'postmodernity.' Also, by deconstructing the subject to a position of nominal identity, post-structuralism de-materializes the subject or in other words banishes an intentional subject that has agency and makes it impossible to resist real forms of racism, sexism and discrimination because it is a completely passively constructed by discursive practices. Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd articulate the problem well in the following:

But where the point of departure of post-structuralism lies within the Western tradition and words to deconstruct its identity formation "form within," the critical difference is that minorities, by virtue of their very social being, must begin from a position of objective *non-identity* which is rooted in their economic and cultural marginalization vis-à-vis the "West." The non-identity which the critical Western

intellectual seeks to re(produce) discursively is for minorities a given of their social existence. But as such a given it is not yet by any mean an index of liberation...On the contrary, the non-identity of minorities remains the sign of material damage to which the only coherent response is struggle, not ironic distanciation. (qtd. in Ortner, 2005, p.8)

Considering these critiques, this study will use a postcolonial approach to identity. That is to say, the postcolonial approach seeks to define identity by 1) finding the gaps in the existent discourse of minorities, 2) reclaiming the objectified other, 3) in the process, destabilizing the dominant subject identity. It will still employ some of the notions of identity theorized by postmodern and post-structuralist thinkers such as the notion that identity is constructed through discursive and signifying practices. However, since the representations of the self in literature and language have relegated the migrant, woman, minority to the margins, the postcolonial identity has the political agenda of redefining itself through discursive acts of resistance. Furthermore, the study will use the notion of hybridity developed by a postcolonial author, Homi Bhabha (1994), and the notion of borderland culture developed by chicana feminist author Gloria Anzaldua (1999). The next section will discuss these notions more in depth.

### *Hybridity and the Borderland*

Before beginning a discussion about identity in terms of nation, hybridity and borderland culture, it is necessary to discuss and define briefly the notion of culture.

The discussion of culture like identity has received a great deal of attention in the past few decades in the human and social sciences. Interlinked with the construction of identity, culture is difficult to define. Culture, a key concept or symbol within the discipline of anthropology, has been considered to be a “system of symbols” or “structure of relations” shared by all member of a given society and relatively fixed or slowly

changing over a given period of time (Dirks, 1994, p.4). However, recent theorists, informed by postmodernism, have questioned who shares the culture (what about one's race, gender, power in what ways, under what circumstances, and how stable or timeless is it? (Dirks, 1994,)). An alternative definition of culture, as defined by Dirks, and one useful to this study might be culture "as multiple discourses, occasionally coming together in large systemic configuration, but more often coexisting within dynamic fields of interaction and conflict" (p.4). As abstract as this definition is, what is most important is that it underlines the constant state of flux of culture. It is not a stable entity and is informed by a myriad of situations. Thus, the codes of manner, dress, language, religion, rituals, beliefs, etc. are in constant state of flux, interaction and conflict. Clifford Geertz, as Dirks notes, adds to the definition of culture as a way in which a social actor constructs meaning from the experiences that she has. Clearly, an agent does not have absolute free will and is still subject to the discursive practices of the society at a certain place and time. However, the subject is still within this framework able to form meaning or make sense of her situation to a degree and indeed that meaning making thus enacts culture. Culture, thus, has a great deal to do with making meaning of one's experiences including interactions and way one lives and acts.

Having defined culture, we can take a look at how cultural identity has been constructed in the academy. When considering immigrant or second-generation culture, assimilation theorists construct cultural identity as an either/or dichotomy, namely an individual as either American or ethnic. Assimilationists believed that the first generation immigrant groups would identify and live in accordance with their home culture and subsequent generations would eventually assimilate and become integrated

into the host culture (Portes & Zhou, 1997). However, the concept of hybridity challenges these assumptions. Homi Bhabha (1994) explains in *The Location of Culture*, that immigrant groups can construct an identity that incorporates multiple cultural identities creating a new cultural form that is neither one nor the other. Bhabha explains that colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, as a place of in-betweeness that defies easy definition and categorization produced ambivalence in the colonial masters and thus challenged their authority and power. Furthermore, postcolonial identity, Bhabha explains, is characterized by living in a liminal, in-between space that is “beyond” simple identifications and is open to the possibility of hybridity or the blending of multiple identities to form a new identity so that immigrant individuals and the subsequent generations can be attached to both pre-migration and post-migration cultures at the same time. Thus, the concept of hybridity defines the process of blending that is already occurring but seeks to make it conscious so that individuals can see explicitly how they are already experiencing hybridity. The Asian Indian American individual is situated between and beyond at least two identities and may acquire contradictory characteristics because she lives on both sides of the false binary but is a blend of both. The blend may not necessarily be equal nor easily attributed to one side of the binary or the other because neither side is necessarily a stable or monolithic entity.

Gloria Anzaldua (1999) also presents a similar notion of blending of cultures to create a new cultural form or identity in her important work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. As Anzaldua writes:

...Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under,

lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (p.4)

The borderland is not just a place for immigrants and second-generation individuals, it is a place occupied by a great many groups and subcultures. It is, however, a particularly useful notion for understanding immigrants and second-generation individuals who may be consciously aware of living in a borderland, a liminal space that is in-between. For, Asian Indian American immigrants and their children the borderland has a particular history with particular contours that will be discussed in the following sections.

The liminal space can be rife with internal conflict, as Anzaldua explains, living between two or more cultures, immigrants get different messages and these messages often are contradictory causing internal conflict. However, the space of in-betweenness also offers the possibility of going beyond the binary and offering a different way of seeing the world, perhaps bridging extremes of these cultures. For Anzaldua, blending cultures, bridging two or more cultures is a conscious choice and desired goal for those that live in the borderland. It is within the space of in-betweenness, the place of strife and difficulty but also pregnant possibility within which one can choose to create a new consciousness. Anzaldua differs somewhat from Bhabha in that she asks the people in the borderland to consciously and proactively make the effort to bridge the various worlds and recognize the in-betweenness as a place of creative possibility.

Das Gupta (1997) also uses Gloria Anadulza's idea of borderlands to understand the third hybrid space that is constructed by immigrants and their children. The borderland is a space that is a self-consistent whole that erase the external and internal conflicts and turn the ambivalence of living between here and there into a new

consciousness (Das Gupta, 1997). Hence, it is the desired goal. In other words, as mentioned earlier, it is a space that allows people to create its own understanding, its identity, rather than seeing identity as a constant conflict between being Indian and being American. Even though hybridity takes place at times without the actor knowing it, this essay will borrow from Anzaldua's notion that the second-generation can consciously desire to blend cultures as well. Just as first generation immigrants constructed an identity of what it means to be Indian, the second-generation will also be able to form an understanding of what it means to be a hybrid of multiple cultural influences.

Having reviewed the notion of identity it is necessary to situate Asian Indian immigrants in the history of the US. Also, it is important to note how Asian Indian immigrants who, otherwise living in a pluralistic society both in India and America and having ties to both, have strategically used the idea of 'nation' to resist the dominant structure. This strategy has also resulted in some negative collusions with the dominant culture of the U.S.

#### *A Brief History of Asian Indian Immigration to the United States*

Indian immigrants have lived in the United States since the late 1700's (Fisher, 1980). Notably, however, between the years of 1904 and 1914 there was a marked increase of Asian Indian immigration (Fisher, 1980). During this period many of the immigrants who came to the U.S. were men from the British Indian Province of Punjab (Fisher 1980; Leonard, 1997). These immigrants came predominantly from farming backgrounds and worked in agriculture in California (Leonard, 1997).

Then in 1917 Congress passed the 1917 Immigration Act that denied entry to people from the Asiatic "barred" zone." The zone included South Asia through Southeast



Asia and the islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, but excluded the U.S. possessions of the Philippines and Guam (Brazien, 2000). This effectively excluded immigration for Asian Indians. Asian Indian immigrants already in the United States attempted to obtain citizenship. Notably, in 1924, Bhagat Singh Thind attempted to become a naturalized citizen of the United States. Taking his case to the Supreme Court, he hoped that because the members of the Indian subcontinent were anthropologically defined as members of the Caucasian race that he could be successfully obtain citizenship (*United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*). In an earlier case of *Takao Ozawa v. United States* the court had ruled that a light-skinned native of Japan could not be considered “white” because he was not “Caucasian” (*United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*). The basis of this decision was the Naturalization Act of 1790 passed by Congress that set up specifically racial categories and limited citizenship to “free white persons” (Brazien, 2000). After the Civil War and the successful challenging of this act and the installation of Amendments 14 and 15 on the behalf of blacks, it was the Asian immigrants that became most notably excluded from citizenship (Brazien, 2000). In the *Bhagat Singh Thind* case, the court seemed to contradict itself in terms of the *Takao Ozawa* case and ruled that even though Thind was Caucasian he was not a “white person” as used in “common speech and understood by the common man” (*United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*). The decision had profound consequences for Asian Indians in the United States. The inability to naturalize was used retroactively to strip Indians who had been previously naturalized of their American citizenship (*United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*). Without citizenship Asian Indians were under the mercy of racist laws including the California Alien Land Law, and had their land purchases revoked. The *Bhagat Singh Thind* decision combined with the 1917

Immigration Act saw to the departure of half the population of Asian Indians who left the United States by 1940 (*United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*).

After World War II, the recognition that political boundaries were changing and independence movements, particularly in India, were dismantling colonial occupation, and after heavy lobbying by Indians in the US, the government changed citizenship laws (Leonard, 1997). In 1946, the Luce-Cellar bill allowed citizenship through naturalization for Asian Indian Americans and Filipino Americans and re-established immigration from India and the Philippines (Leonard, 1997). Perhaps the most significant piece of legislation came in 1965 when the United States revised the old immigration policy that discriminated against Asian immigrants and an unprecedented number of immigrants from India arrived (Fisher, 1980). The new immigration law increased the visa limit for Indians from 100 to 20,000 per year (Das Gupta, 1997). These laws were designed to show preference to Eastern Hemisphere immigrants in seven categories including: 1) unmarried adult sons and daughters of citizens; 2) spouses and unmarried sons and daughters of permanent residents; 3) professionals, scientists, and artists of exceptional ability; 4) married adult sons and daughters of U.S. citizens; 5) siblings of adult citizens; 6) workers, skilled and unskilled, in occupations for which labor was in short supply in the United States; and 7) refugees from Communist-dominated countries or those uprooted by natural catastrophe (Brazien, 2000). The first wave of Asian Indian immigrants arrived to the states under the professionals, scientists and artists of exceptional ability preference category. Hence, socioeconomically, the immigrants that arrived in mid to late sixties and through the seventies were comprised of English-speaking, well-educated Indians who easily joined the ranks of the middle class in the

United States. As Monisha Das Gupta (1997) astutely notes, “The resources and the cultural capital that this group of immigrants brought allowed them to fight job market discrimination and achieve a certain amount of economic mobility until they hit the glass ceiling” (p. 576). These immigrants used their skills to ensure that their children receive higher education and career opportunities. The middle-class ethics this group brought from India to the United States may have a great deal to do with the “model minority” paradigm that was later assigned to them (Das Gupta, 1997, p.576). The notion of model minority stereotypes Asian Indian immigrants and their children as a group that has attained financial and educational success without necessarily burdening the dominant culture with ‘problems.’ According to this paradigm if Asian Indians can maintain success than all minority groups can if they just remain silent and do the work that is necessary.

After the 1980’s, Asian Indian immigrants entering the United States has steadily increased. Since then there have been various waves of immigration from India each with varying socioeconomic characteristics and circumstances that are not within the scope of this study because for the most part they have not produced a second-generation that has come of age, yet. The first wave of Asian Indian immigrants will be referred to hereafter as the post-1965 immigrants.

#### *Nostalgia and the ‘Homeland’*

The political boundaries of India include a vast multitude of distinct cultural, regional, religious and linguistic affiliations analogous in some ways to a united Europe. In fact, present-day India was not necessarily a united nation until the British colonial period Benedict Anderson (1991) explains how the census, one of the institutions of

power used by colonial forces was one mode that impacted the classification and identification of people and the creation of a national “Indian” identity. Anderson discusses what he terms the ‘fiction of the census’: is that everyone is included in it, and everyone has only one place in it; there are no fractions (Anderson, 1991, p.166).

Censuses do not capture the complex relationships between place of birth, ancestral origins, language, physical characteristics, and cultural affiliations (Bhattacharjee, 1999). He describes, using Charles Hirshmann’s analysis of census classifications, how the identity categories, imagined by the classifying mind of the colonial state, show rapid and superficially arbitrary series of changes in which categories are recombined, intermixed, and reordered (Anderson, 1991, p.164). He gives the example of South Asia to illustrate two principal conclusions of racial categorization:

The first is that, as the colonial period wore on, the census categories became more visibly and exclusively racial. Religious identity, on the other hand, gradually disappeared as a primary census classification, ‘Hindoos’-ranked alongside ‘Klings,’ and ‘Bengalees’-vanished after the first census of 1871. ‘Parsees’ lasted until the census of 1901, where they still appeared-packed in with ‘Bengalis,’ ‘Burmese,’ and ‘Tamils’- under the broad category ‘Tamils and Other Natives of India.’ His second conclusion is that on the whole, the large racial categories were retained and even concentrated after independence, but now redesignated and reranked as ‘Malaysian’, ‘Chinese’, ‘Indian’ and other. (p.165)

Returning to the notion that identities are discursively produced, we see how colonial technologies such as the census construct oversimplified classifications and identities.

One problem of the census is that it oversimplified the identity of a vast multitude of people. Furthermore, through the census and other colonial mechanisms one monolithic “Indian” identity came into existence, one that perhaps had never existed before.

However, even though ‘Indian immigrant’ as a category can be misleading because it entails a heterogeneous group of people with different cultures, customs and

linguistic affiliations, it is still an identity that is embraced by Asian Indian immigrants that settle in the United States and other countries around the world for reasons that will be explored later in the review . It is also a term used in this study to loosely categorize all immigrants that arrive from the political boundaries of the nation of India, bearing in mind the heterogeneity of this group.

Having acknowledged the heterogeneity of India and its people and keeping the above discussion in mind, we can turn to a brief discussion of nation and nationalism. Both are important terms and concepts to understand for the majority of the bourgeois post-1965 Asian Indian immigrant construction of nostalgia and homeland. A web of complex processes intermixes in the construction of national identity among all people, but particularly among immigrants. As Benedict Anderson explains, nationality or nationalism itself is a relatively new construction beginning perhaps in the eighteenth century, “the dawn of the age of nationalism” (1991, p.11). They came into existence as the religious faith became territorialized, kingships declined, capitalism enjoyed a particularly important relationship with print and newspapers, and as vernacular language of the state developed. As Anderson (1991) further states, nationalism is a particular type of cultural artifact that has aroused deep attachment; people love, live and die for the state and are memorialized for the state (i.e. the tomb of the unknown soldier, (p. 4)).

Anderson provides an important definition of the nation as:

an imagined political community...imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign...imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion... (p.6).

The making of the post-1965 Asian Indian immigrant nationalism has particular contours that will now be discussed in detail.

We begin the discussion at the point that immigrants become self-aware of their difference in the host nation in a particular form. Clearly, in India, these immigrants were aware of differences between subcultural groups such as the differences between Gujaratis and Bengalis, but that in the U.S., that which they become different from changes. As mentioned earlier, the bourgeois post-1965 Indian immigrants had never been asked to explain themselves as Indian in their homeland. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1994), writing from a different kind of theoretical stance than the ones that have been covered so far, describes through the notion of *habitus*, how a subject who grows up and lives everyday life within the patterns and rhythms of work, eating, sleeping, leisure, etc. comes to embody the assumptions of gender, age, and social hierarchy that are embedded in the organization of the patterns and rhythms in the community and so takes them for granted. Even though, he is discussing the French working class and the petite bourgeoisie, *habitus*, is a concept that is useful in understanding why the Indian immigrants never had to explain themselves as Indian in their homeland.

The majority of the post -1965 Asian Indian immigrants, as noted earlier, is well-educated, highly skilled and is part of the bourgeoisie class. Bhattacharjee (1999), who in her article, "The Habit of Ex-nomination," writes on the intersection of domestic violence, women and nationality, poses a particularly convincing argument as to understanding how the "habit of ex-nomination" constructs a particular form of Asian Indian immigrant nationalist culture. Bhattacharjee explains, using Roland Barthes

theory of ex-nomination, that the bourgeoisie class is the class that does not want to be named and needs no name because it views itself as the universal. She explains further:

It needs no name because it names everything, or as Barthes puts it, it is at 'the locus of an unceasing haemorrhage: meaning flows out of [it] until its very name becomes unnecessary'. The power of the bourgeois ideology, which spreads over everything, lies precisely in the bourgeoisie's ability to name but itself remain un-named. Barthes calls this characteristic of the bourgeoisie's power to remain ideologically un-named, 'ex-nomination.' (p.230-231).

Although, as Bhattacharjee (1999) points out, Barthes is discussing the French bourgeoisie the notion is useful in understanding the life-worlds of the Asian Indian immigrant bourgeoisie. The Asian Indian immigrant bourgeoisie upon migrating and settling to the United States is displaced from the nation of origin and experiences subordination to the native bourgeoisie. Since the Indian immigrant community in the United States is predominantly highly educated, the subordination is defined through nationality, race and culture rather than class. The displacement and subordination results in the loss of power of ex-nomination, or the ability to remain unnamed, because it is perceived as different and perceives itself as different (Bhattacharjee, 1999). The immigrant bourgeoisie desires to regain its power and grasps for familiar essentials to remain un-named and thus forges a relationship to the nation and the past (p.232). The construct of woman and family also becomes one of the essential and central elements in forging this relationship.

Bhattacharjee demonstrates how some of the bourgeois post-1965 Asian Indian immigrant organizations have a desire to create an all-Indian community for several reasons including but not limited to an organized method of resisting intrusion by dominating American culture and as a method to regain bourgeoisie power which was

lost from the migration to another country. These associations and members within these associations across the United States invoke an all-India essence or one-ness. These calls for an all-Indian identity mimic many of the Indian nationalist beliefs of the 1920's. Indian nationalist beliefs are not monolithic by any means; however, both Gandhi (the charismatic leader and emancipator of India) and Nehru (the first prime minister of Independent India) among other Indian nationalists invoked an idea of Ancient India, a timeless and changeless India (Bhattacharjee, 1999). These rallying calls by the Indian nationalists in India were one way to unite India to overthrow the colonial occupation by British and win its freedom. Salman Rushdie (1980) eloquently notes the birth of the nation of India in his novel *Midnight's Children*:

A nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will-except in a dream we all agreed to dream. (p.129)

Ironically, a united India was only a reality after British colonial occupation. India united under one government had never existed before this time and not since, as such, since Pakistan and Bangladesh are no longer part of India.

Invoking an all-Indian identity, culture and heritage in the United States, however, has similar functions and problems. Invoking one national identity is an example in which the ex-nominating operation functions. According to Bhattacharjee (1999), these institutions attempt to create the notion that there is one Indian culture and the unity of India is something all Indians possess by the magic of their being Indians; it is part of their essence. Under the banner of 'one' national identity, the Asian Indian immigrant



bourgeoisie can take refuge from being named and losing power. Since the bourgeois immigrant has created the national identity, they are the ones who develop and fix the contours of what it means to be 'Indian.' Allying themselves with one national identity which has specific contours is a way to center themselves and name all things that fall outside this identity as 'other' or not 'authentic.' The bourgeois immigrant is able to deny the existence of such things as domestic violence against Asian Indian women, Indian homosexuality or the low-paid Indian immigrant laborer as not 'Indian.' Since it is not Indian, according to the bourgeois immigrant, it must be an intrusion from the outside, from the transgressive western American culture. Thus, ironically, the bourgeois immigrant and community, perhaps borrowing from colonist thought, proclaim that there is one "authentic" identity. Can there be only one authentic identity that can encompass a diverse group of people? Much of postcolonial theory critiques the notion of only one "authentic" experience.

Bhattacharjee further adds to the notion that one "authentic" identity is problematic. Nationalist thought in the U.S., Bhattacharjee notes, equates the West with material wealth and production, and the East, or India with nostalgic cultural purity, God and spiritual essence, constructing monolithic identities for the East and West. Thus, preserving one's national Indian identity, which does not exist, is a way to resist intrusion by the dominant white American culture in the US while participating fully in the economic life. One cost, of course, is the creation of a stilted cultural view that sets up a monolithic binary of East versus West, further reinforcing the stereotypes of the East and stereotypes of the West, and further reinforcing patriarchy. Furthermore, the terms of cultural preservation are set by the American dominant culture (Bhattacharjee, 1999).

The preservation and negotiation of identity and an untouched ancient Indian heritage is partly a response to the universalizing nature of white American culture. Bhattacharjee (1999) asserts that the approving and compelling model minority image that stereotypes Asian immigrant communities, including the Asian Indian immigrant community can be seen as an inducement for building an image of model India that equals the minority image in the United States . According to Bhattacharjee, the term model invokes notions of excellence set by the predominantly white and wealthy dominant culture that is perhaps erroneously construed by the bourgeois immigrant Indian as an invitation to join the majority. However, the desire for a model history ignores the not-so-model Asian Indian immigrant history that begins not in the 1960's but much earlier and includes a time when Asian Indians were more obviously discriminated against through laws preventing citizenship, immigration quotas, etc.

The 'authentic,' 'traditional,' or imagined culture in the United States constructed by the many of the bourgeois post-1965 Asian Indian immigrants include the essentials of a close-knit, interdependent family, with clearly differentiated gender roles, familial hierarchy, recognition of insiders (Indians) versus outsiders ( all other Americans) (p.114). Not only are these ideas partially set by the dominant culture, they also lead to a "museumization" of practices and culture that do not necessarily resemble the dynamic contemporary middle-class attitudes in India (Das Gupta, 1997, p.580). That is to say, the Indian culture that is created in the United States by the post-1965 bourgeois immigrant parents is upheld as "authentic" does not reflect the changing value system of contemporary middle-class Indians in India. Focusing on the post-1965 immigrants, Saytantani Das Gupta and Shamita Das Das Gupta (1998) remark in their work, "Sex,

Lies, and Women's Lives" that this group attempted to maintain the values, traditions, and rituals of their homeland. In attempting to maintain these values they became stripped of the dynamism, diversity, and local idiosyncrasies present in the native land and become generic and flat (Das Gupta & Das Das Gupta, 1998). Das Gupta and Das Das Gupta offer one example how the dynamism, diversity and local idiosyncrasies are not always transferred to the United States. When she was growing up in Calucutta, Das Das Gupta (1998) discusses that even within the narrow confines of "good" moral behavior where a woman's sexuality was kept under strict control; there existed a woman's place. The "*andar-mahal*" (woman's quarters) was a place where women of all generations from grandmothers, aunts, sisters, daughters would discuss all sorts of topics including but not limited to neighborhood gossip, sexual advice, seduction techniques and birth-control tips (p.117).

Sunaina Maira (2002) also addresses the issue of maintaining beliefs of the home country in a stilted manner, ignoring the changes that have occurred since the 1960's. The immigrant parents maintain this cultural nostalgia as a means to control the activity of children and induct them into a cultural script that is familiar instead of the narratives outside the family that can be less familiar and perhaps more threatening (Maira, 2002). Maira goes further with the notion and suggests that for some immigrant communities the cultural nostalgia can be a form of resistance, a way to recover from a life of suffering and hard work by recalling the past and protecting an identity. She nonetheless maintains that nostalgia is a means of controlling and monitoring the bodies of their children (Maira, 2002). Perhaps all parents of all cultures would like to control and monitor the bodies of their children. However, for second-generation Asian Indians the control of

bodies takes on a certain significance and emphasis that it may not in other subcultures. Parents invoke cultural nostalgia as a means for constructing what is “authentic” Indian identity. In constructing the monolithic “Indian” identity that is supposed to be virtuous, chaste and pure they link Indian identity to the nation. Thus, the second-generation child, if she is somehow sexually deviant, does not only anger and shame the family, but shames an entire nation and culture. She also, thus, jeopardizes her standing as an “authentic Indian” and risks being referred to as Americanized. The next section will will develop the contours of this idea further.

*Asian Indian Women, Nation and the Postcolonial*

Women are inextricably linked to the idea of nation (Das Gupta 1997; Bhattacharjee, 1999). As Parker et.al (1992) note in the Introduction to *Nationalisms & Sexualities*, “Whenever the power of a nation is invoked-whether it be in the media, in scholarly texts, or in everyday conversation-we are more likely than not to find it couched as a love of country: an eroticized nationalism” ( p.1). They further note that even though Benedict Anderson never explicitly states the connection between woman and nation, much of his analysis of nation does raise issues about gender and sexuality. For instance, when Anderson explains why national space is intrinsically limited, he observes that “in the modern world everyone has a nationality as she has a gender”(p.5).

The connection between woman and nation is apparent. However, the question remains, how does the nation come to embody gender and then subsequently impose restrictions on women? Lati Mani(1990) in her essay, “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India,” explains that the British colonial power in India used the symbol woman to relate the backwardness of “Indian” culture and the oppressive

nature of Indian patriarchy. Women become the symbol for tradition and the reworking of tradition is done through debating the rights and status of women in society. Mani explains that these negotiations “are not primarily about women but about what constitutes traditional culture” (p.90).

In order to resist and defend against oppressive colonial discourse, Indian nationalists in India attempted to reappropriate the image of the Indian woman and glorify it. Bhattacharjee (1999) explains how Indian nationalism uses a fixed notion of woman to “stabilize” the all-important idea of nation that unites. She explains that part of the theme of Indian nationalism in India and the U.S. has been re-processing, or re-making the image of the Indian woman and her role in the family based on the models of ancient Indian womanhood from “the distant glorious past”(p.238). She further explains, “The woman becomes a metaphor for the purity, chastity, and sanctity of the Ancient Spirit that is India” (p.238). Das Gupta (1997) explains that Indian nationalists reworked the notions of chastity and female propriety influenced by middle-class Victorian views and promoted by the British. Indian femininity, as constructed by the Indian national movement in India and the US, with all its attributes, including sacrifice, benevolence, devotion and religiosity, stands as a sign for the nation (Bhattacharjee, 1999). Anything that disrupts this sign of the imagined nation such as homosexuality, the domestically abused woman betrays it and the community because it risks unmasking the bourgeoisie community that wants to remain un-named and have the power of ex-nomination, or the power to control and construct identity (Bhattacharjee, 1999).

Thus, as Das Gupta (1997) argues, immigrant women bear the weight of signifying their communities’ identity. Women are required to marry an Indian man,

cook Indian meals, teach their children about the “Indian” values, culture and identity. She adds further that there is no rupture in the patriarchal power with migration from India to America (Das Gupta, 1997). For women there is a layer to identity formation that requires them to navigate the patriarchal system that exists in the United States and that is transmitted by their parents’ conceptualization of Indian “tradition.” Thus Das Gupta (1997) argues that identity formation is gendered in a particular way for second-generation Asian-Indian women-children of the post-1965 immigrant. She offers a brief ethnography mapping the lives of four Asian Indian Hindu women living in the Northeastern United States and discusses the roles that they have been forced to comply by their families. She explains that identity formation for second-generation Asian Indian women include having stricter guidelines about if they can date (never); who they can marry (an Indian man); etc. than their brothers or male counterparts.

Maira (2002) echoes Das Gupta (1997) in arguing that identity formation is different for male and female second-generation Indian Americans. She further argues that for second-generation Indian Americans ideas about gender roles and sexuality are constructed in both local and global contexts by youth cultures, mainstream media, immigrant parents, and the ethnic community. As far as the global context is concerned, Monisha Das Gupta (1997) provides an insightful way of imagining the formation of gender identity for second generation Asian Indian American living in the U.S. Das Gupta argues that given the recent history of colonization, decolonization and globalization, it is necessary to consider identity formation in the context of current and historical links that have been forged between nations. That is to say, the United States is not the only point of construction of identity because the postcolonial immigrant has

already been exposed to the centuries of contact that has produced knowledge about both cultures. First generation identity itself is not necessarily fixed either. It is a mixture of different elements from different cultures at different moments in history. As Das Gupta (1997) notes, “an intersecting social forces and discursive moves, modernity and tradition have shaped South Asia for 200 years of British domination and in the postcolonial era” (p.582). That is to say, for a country such as India that is a pluralistic community consisting of many languages, cultures and traditions, a transnational (defined as the heightened interconnectivity of people around the world across nations and the ways in which people maintain and propagate relationships to people in the nations of origin and settlement (Maira, 2002, p.21)) lens makes more sense for understanding identity construction even though and maybe because it complicates the notion of identity. In fact, some researchers report that since many second-generation children have the chance to travel abroad to India to visit family or for vacation, many are given the opportunity to notice the discrepancy between their parents’ version of India and what Indians in India are actually doing. The second-generation is exposed to another point of construction of identity (Das Gupta, 1997; Maira, 2002).

Dating and marriage can be particularly volatile issues because they are inextricably linked to the continuation of the cultural group and the group boundary, or who is an insider and who is an outsider (Maira, 2002). The purity of the boundary should not be contaminated by outside influences of American culture. It is similar in intent to the miscegenation laws that once governed the United States which were fueled by a rampant fear of mixing and perhaps the ultimate loss of a fixed identity. Furthermore, women are considered the purveyors of “Indian tradition” to their families

and children. Thus, the restrictions that women face around the monitoring of sexuality are very different than male Indian American youth. However, second-generation Indian-American women, Maira argues, are still able to find agency within these restrictions and negotiate an identity with which they are comfortable.

As a mother-daughter writing team, Sayantani Das Gupta and Shamita Das Das Gupta (1998), offer a personal account of immigration and second-generation identity formation and discuss the museumization of old ideas in terms of the control of female sexuality. As they discuss in their article, immigrant parents are more interested in controlling the sexuality of their daughters rather than their sons because it is women who are called upon to preserve the “old ways” by their immigrant parents because women are designated to maintain the identity in the precarious new community (Das Gupta & Das Das Gupta, 1998, p.113). In addition, the authors discuss how conflicting stereotypes for Indian American women coming of age translate into a complicated construction of the self. Indian American women are bombarded by images of what is beautiful by the American media that upholds white, blond-haired, blue-eyed women as the premier example of beauty. Indian American women, however, fall short. On the other hand, they also confront a somewhat contradictory orientalist fascination with the “mysterious” East that casts Indian American women as exotic and with sexualized energy (Das Gupta & Das Das Gupta, 1998). Indian American women must contend with the racist notions of the United States, their parents’ recreation of an authentic Indian identity, and the experience that they receive from global media and their own travels to India. This essay by Das Gupta and Das Das Gupta is one of the few that considers the racism and



patriarchy experienced by second-generation Asian Indian women in the United States by the dominant culture.

*Asian Indian Women and Negotiating Identity (Empirical Studies)*

How do Asian Indian women negotiate the complicated demands made by them from internal and external influences to enact an identity with which they feel comfortable? There are several strategies that become apparent in the empirical studies that have been conducted on this topic including the performance of situational identities, the continual creative interpretations that leads to the blending of the cultures and the strategy of nondisclosure of practices and open confrontation with parents.

First, Sunaina Marr Maira (2002) discusses in her study on second-generation youth culture that they perform situational identities that not only require an actual change of clothes and social codes but are attuned to the responses they receive from other social actors. In other words, second-generation Indians, men and women (or perhaps immigrants and second-generation from a variety of ethnic backgrounds), may act differently at a mostly white school than they do at home or out in an Indian community function.

As already noted women, in particular, must contend with the policing of their movements, particularly their sexuality, and thus confront different challenges than their male counterparts. Maira notes that even though the identity is more complicated than just the battle between the binary of “old, chaste” Indian culture and “new, seductive” American culture, second-generation women use that mode strategically to understand the intersection and contradictions of gender, sexuality, nation and race in their lives (Maira, 2002, p.152). The notion of conflict internal and external is described in many

studies and autobiographical accounts of second-generation Asian Indian women (Kallivayalil, 2004; Gupta 1999; Maira, 2002; Das Gupta 1997; Bacon; 1996). Das Gupta (1997) explains that according to Anzaldua, living in a borderland can be a violent shuttling between cultures “where the third world grates against the first and bleeds” (p.588). The nationalist sanctions constructed by the post-1965 immigrant Indian community that are supposed to protect the marginalized community, such as the Indian immigrant community from dominant American culture, distort the lives of women (Das Gupta, 1997). Women are ‘othered’ in both cultures. Dominant culture in the U.S. discriminates against those that are different from itself. However, the conflict does not erase the subtle blending of cultures that take place to create a new form of identity. For instance, Das Gupta (1997) notes that the women in her study valued many of the cultural notions presented by their parents. They had a selective appreciation for the ideas their parents taught. Contrary to what assimilationist theorists would assert, there was not a rejection of one culture in favor of the other or the slow rejection of one in favor of the other. Rather, many of these women took what they could from both and forged an identity from the creative cultural space of liminality.

Also, according to several studies, women are required to be chaste, obedient, and attentive to the needs of the family (Kallivayalil, 2004; Gupta 1999; Maira, 2002; Das Gupta 1997; Bacon; 1996). As Das Gupta (1997) notes of the second-generation Indian American women in her study, they were subject to strict curfews, needed permission to go to parties and had to have their friends screened by their parents. Women were also groomed on how to prepare a meal and serve male guests first in order to teach them ‘Indian womanliness’ (p.580). In contrast, some of the participants had brothers who

were allowed to stay out as late as they liked and were not questioned about their whereabouts, causing the envy in the female siblings (Das Gupta, 1997).

According to S. D. Das Gupta's (1998) study, *Gender Roles and Cultural Continuity in the Asian Indian Immigrant Community in the U.S.*, Mothers became more conservative regarding women's roles as their female children matured. She further notes that since the mother's own age did not make a difference in this slant towards conservatism, what made the difference was that as female children grew into adolescence, there was a pressure to socialize them into the constructed gender roles according to the notion of 'old' Indian ways. Adolescence, of course, marks the moment of biological sexual awakening; perhaps it is no wonder that mothers become more concerned with and controlling of daughters' activities during this time.

It is not surprising, then, that in several studies parents forbid the female children to date at all or only after a certain age and then only to a potential Indian husband, whereas, for a son it was either okay to date or the age to date was lower or the parents turned a blind eye to the dating done by the son. Dating, always presumed to be in a heterosexual context, the parents fear, will lead to premarital sex. Chastity, of course, is a prized value for daughters (Maira, 2002; Das Gupta, 1997, Das Gupta, 1998; Gupta, 1999; Kallivayalil, 2004; Bacon, 1996; Leonard; 1999; Das Gupta & Das Gupta, 1996). Furthermore, one of the most effective means of control was through the use of gossip. A person's conduct that was considered suspect or was outside the norms of propriety for the small Indian community were subject to gossip as a means of reprimanding the person and controlling others' behavior (Maira, 2002). One strategy employed by the female second-generation was not to disclose romantic relationships to parents,

particularly if the partner was of a different race or ethnicity. Karen Leonard (1999) discusses the cases of several women who married white American men without their parents' knowledge because they feared hurting them and feared the abandonment by their parents. Leonard (1999) explains that this was a strategy of resistance against how their parents attempted to control their lives with the threat of the withdrawal of love.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter reviewed and offered a working definition for identity. Also, it traced the history of Asian Indian immigration to the United States. Next, it discussed the construction of identity in the Asian Indian community in the United States. Finally, it discussed the strategies used by second-generation Asian Indian women to negotiate identity, specifically reviewing empirical studies on the subject matter.

Although there is some rich discussion around theory and second-generation gender identity formation, there is still a paucity of research about second-generation Asian Indian Americans in particular. Thus, my study can begin to bridge this gap.

*CHAPTER III*  
*METHODOLOGY*

The purpose of this study was to build on and add to existing empirical research and theoretical knowledge about Asian Indian Americans. The study explored, in particular, how second-generation (defined in this study as immigrants' children born in the United States or who were brought here with their parents under the age of ten and were raised in the United States) Asian Indian American women understand, negotiate and perform gender roles. One of the salient moments in which gender roles for second-generation Asian Indian women become most transparent is in regard to the beliefs and practices surrounding dating, romantic relationships and marriage (Das Das Gupta, 1998). My primary research questions therefore were: What are the dating rituals and practices of second-generation Asian Indian American women and what do these practices reveal about how the women understand, negotiate and perform gender roles? How have they understood messages about dating from their parents, friends, the broader dominant culture and other sources to create an understanding about their gender identity? Additional questions included: How is the Asian Indian ethnic identity tied with notions of gender?

Although there have been some studies that have focused on the immigration patterns and cultural notions of the post-1965 Asian Indian immigrants, the first-generation to immigrate to the United States and become citizens, there are very few studies that have focused on the second-generation. Due to the lack of research in

academia on this particular minority population, second-generation Asian Indian Americans, I choose a flexible qualitative method design for this research study. As Anastas (1999) explains, flexible method research is particularly helpful when investigating an understudied group or a topic in its formative stages, and thus this choice of research method suits the study of second-generation Asian Indian American women and the topic of gender identity formation.

Furthermore, Anastas (1999) notes, “What such studies [flexible method] offer are often characterized as ‘rich,’ ‘thick,’ or ‘experience-near’ depictions of social and psychological phenomena in context” (p.61). Thus, the flexible, qualitative study provides a useful, rich, engaging and complex narrative data from which to derive meaningful data that will enhance what is known about second-generation Asian Indian women.

Finally, the flexible method design of interviewing offers, to some degree, second-generation Asian Indian women a chance to voice their experiences in their words and from their perspectives, providing the much needed—yet not always given—space for minority involvement in academic research. Hopefully, this study will be a useful tool for social workers that are interested in learning about the complexity of gender identity construction for potential clients.

### *Sample*

Twelve Asian Indian American women were interviewed between January and March 2007. Since the study focused on Asian Indian American women, the participants were of Asian Indian descent defined by the current politically and internationally recognized borders of the country of India. Also, the initial age ranges of the sample

were between the ages of 18 to 30. The sample age range was chosen because adolescence and young adulthood in the United States marks an important moment for engaging in questions of identity. Also, it marks a time of increased individualization as children move away from their parental homes and gain an increased awareness of their position in social structures and relationships. The sample was either born here or immigrated with her parents to the United States before the age of ten and was subsequently raised in the U.S. The purpose of this requirement was to select women who were exposed to American culture for the dominant period of their lives. Since I was currently living in the Philadelphia area, I attempted to locate a sample of participants in the area. However, those outside this area were not necessarily excluded from this study. Ultimately, Asian Indian second-generation women from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Washington, D.C. and Florida comprised the sample for this study.

A purposive snowball technique was used to build a sample. I began by posting fliers around the University of Pennsylvania and contacting the presidents of the South Asian organizations on campus to ask them to email the fliers to their listserv. However, these recruitment venues proved fruitless. I sent the flier to personal contacts, friends throughout the United States and work colleagues, and asked that they send the flier on to those who they thought might fit the inclusion criteria. The personal contacts proved to be the most useful, resulting in my first participants for the study. I asked those who participated in the study if they would be willing to pass the fliers onto other potential participants, resulting in several more participants for the study and ultimately filling my goal for the sample.

Potential participants were screened by phone to ensure they met the study's criteria and to schedule interviews.

### *Participants*

The sample is comprised of twelve Asian Indian second-generation American women. Seven of the participants were currently living in the Philadelphia area, two were residing in Northern New Jersey, one was living in Florida, one was living in Washington D.C. and one was living in New York City. Ten of the participants' parents had emigrated from the state of Gujarat in Northern India, one participant's parents were from the state of Kerala in Southern India and one participant's parents were from the capital city of Delhi in Northern India. Ten of the participants identified their religious background as Hindu, one identified as Protestant Christian and one as Jain. All the participants identified as middle class or upper middle class. The youngest participant was 19 years old. Four participants were between the ages of 23 and 25. Seven of participants were between the ages of 27 and 29. Six of the participants had received a master's or doctorate degree. Three were working towards a master's or doctorate degree. Two had completed a college degree. One was working on an associate's degree. Eleven of the participants were single. One participant was married.

### *Data Collection*

The data collection plan for this study was approved by the Human Subjects Review Board of the Smith College School for Social Work (Appendix A). Informed consent letters were sent to all participants (Appendix B) prior to being interviewed. The letter described the study and defined the selection criteria for participants in addition to outlining the risks and benefits of participation in the study. Informed consent was



obtained before the interviews began. The participant and researcher each kept a signed copy of the informed consent document. In order to assure participant confidentiality, demographic questionnaires, researcher notes, transcripts, and audio recordings are kept separate from informed consent documents and are numerically coded.

Both demographic and qualitative data was collected for this study in the 12 interviews conducted from January to March 2007. Prior to the start of the interviews, a pilot interview was conducted to test the clarity of the questions and the length of the interview. Seven face-to-face, individual, semi-structured, 45 to 60 minute, audio taped interviews were administered in mutually agreed-upon locations, (e.g., the researcher's office or a room in a public library). Five over-the-phone, individual, semi-structured, 30 to 60 minute, audio taped interviews were administered as well. Each participant was asked to complete the demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) prior to the interview and either bring it with them to the interview or send it via email. The purpose of gathering demographic data was to obtain a general description of the sample population. An interview guide (Appendix D) was used to inquire about how the participants understand, negotiate and enact gender roles through dating practices, romantic relationships and marriage. Questions were posed in three categories that included family background and influences, social influences and personal dating practices. These questions were formulated based on previous research. At times, the researcher asked additional questions for clarification and asked for further elaboration of answers. Thus, each interview varied to the information that came out of the discussion. In addition, information gleaned from the initial interviews was used to re-structure interview questions going forward.

### *Data Analysis*

The semi-structured narrative data collected for this study was audio taped on a digital recorder. Interviews were transferred to the computer, and then either transcribed by me or a professional transcriber. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix E) prior to transcribing the interviews. The data was analyzed manually, using coded content analysis. In this process, I reviewed the written transcripts of raw data and developed a set of themes that emerged through commonalities in the interviews. These themes both emerged within the general categories of the research questions posed and outside expected categories.

While it was my hope to be able to extend the results of this research to the larger Asian Indian second-generation women population, generalizability may be limited due to the qualitative method chosen and the small sample size. Nevertheless, I hope that the findings from this flexible research design that promoted the gathering of rich narratives of the individuals involved will inspire social workers to consider the complexity of identity development for future clients and will inform future research.

## *CHAPTER IV*

### *FINDINGS*

This chapter contains the findings and analysis from interviews conducted with twelve second-generation (defined in this study as immigrants' children born in the United States or brought here under the age of ten with their parents and raised in the United States) Asian Indian American women between the ages of 19 and 29. The study explored how second-generation Asian Indian American women understand, negotiate and perform gender roles, focusing on beliefs and practices surrounding dating, romantic relationships and marriage. In accordance with this focus, the interview questions elicited information on familial background and influences regarding dating, marriage, relationship practices and gender; social influences regarding the same; and personal dating, marriage, relationship practices and gender. Each participant completed a demographic questionnaire and in one-on-one interviews answered open-ended questions within these three overlapping categories.

The interviews were conducted either in person at a designated meeting place or over the telephone. The interviews conducted over the phone averaged 30 minutes in length, whereas the interviews conducted in person averaged 45 minutes in length. My disclosure of some basic information about myself, including my identification as a second-generation Asian Indian woman appeared to provide me with "insider" status. Participants often used simple Gujarati words; made references to Indian television, such as ZTV, without further explanation; or used "our" culture during the interviews.

The data and analysis from these interviews are presented in the following sequence: demographic data of participants, dating: beliefs, practices and gender differences, marriage and gender roles, and identity. Although the data is divided into different categories, these sections are deeply connected to one another. To protect confidentiality, names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

### *Demographic Data*

The study was comprised of twelve Asian Indian second-generation American women. Seven of the participants were currently living in the Philadelphia area, two in Northern New Jersey, one in Florida, one in Washington D.C. and one in New York City. Nearly all of the participants were in their mid to late twenties, except for the youngest participant who was 19 years old. Only one participant was married.

Ten participants identified their religious background as Hindu, one identified as Protestant Christian and one as Jain. Seven participants reported Gujarati, one of the native languages of India, as their first language. One reported Malayalam, another native language of India, as her first language. Two reported English as their first language. Two did not answer the question for no known reason. All of the participants had visited India, so there was at least some awareness or connection to their parents' country of origin. Six had visited India 2 or 3 times. Three had visited India 4 or 5 times. Two had visited India 6 times.

Overall, the participants were a very well-educated group. Six of the participants had received a master's or doctorate degree. Three were working towards a master's or doctorate degree. Two had completed a college degree. One was working on an associate's degree. Four of the participants stated that their occupation was "student."

Seven of the participants had professional careers: two were attorneys, one was a physician, one was a pharmacist, one was an optician, one was a project coordinator, and one was a journalist. One participant identified as a “stay-at-home mom.”

All of the participants came from middle or upper-middle class families. Fathers of eleven of the participants’ and mothers of nine participants held at least a bachelor’s degree. All participants came from families in which at least one parent was a well-paid professional. In the majority of the families (n=9) the father was the highly paid professional. In a few of the families (n=3) the mother was the highly paid professional. In eight of the families both parents worked. These demographics are consistent with the literature in terms of the class and professional skill level of the parents which reflects the recent immigrant demographic for the post-1965 Asian Indian immigrant.

All participants had been raised in a household with married parents, all of whom were still married at the time of the study. This is typical of most Indian families in the US that have divorce rates well below the national average. Ten participants answered that their parents had an “arranged” marriage and were introduced by a close relative such as grandmothers, aunts, uncles, etc. One participant described her parents marriage as a “love marriage” in which her parents were not introduced by relatives but met on their own and formed a relationship. One was not sure how her parents met and married. All the participants had at least one sibling. Eight of the participants had at least one brother. Six of the participants had at least one sister.

Due perhaps to the snowball sampling method used by this study, the sample was somewhat unbalanced in terms of the geographic, linguistic and religious origins of the participants’ Indian heritage. Ten of the participants’ parents had emigrated from the

state of Gujarat in Northern India, one participant's parents were from the state of Kerala in Southern India and one participant's parents were from the capital city of Delhi in Northern India. I am not sure what affect this may have had on the outcomes.

### *Dating: Beliefs, Practices and Gender Differences*

This section details the participants' responses and analysis to questions pertaining to dating practices. Dating is a site of negotiation for second-generation Asian Indian women as will be shown in the results and analysis that follows. Participants were asked about their parents' views on dating and their personal practices in order to ascertain how beliefs around dating and sexuality were passed along to women from their family and how social circles influenced their personal dating practices. Several commonalities emerged among the participants: a "no dating" policy, a lack of any direct discussion about the issue until a certain age, the importance of community in setting norms about dating and relationships, and a "don't ask/don't tell" policy. Also, although the sexual orientation of the participants was never questioned, all the participants discussed dating with an underlying presumption of heterosexuality.

The participants were not given an operational definition of dating. Dating seemed to have different borders for each of the participants, or more precisely, parents attempted to curtail social activities of their daughters in varying degrees. Some did not allow their daughters to have male friends call or come over to their house, whereas others allowed friends to come over the house but did not acknowledge or sanction romantic sexual relationships. Thus, the outer limits of dating included no male friends at all. When it was time, however, to find a life partner, many parents encouraged their daughters to begin to date to find a husband.

The prohibition on dating was pervasive. Eleven of the participants stated that their parents were uncomfortable with or opposed to the notion of their daughters dating when in high school and most of college. As one of these participants, Reena recalled, “They don’t have views, because it doesn’t exist to them at all. Dating is just nonsense to them. It’s just an excuse to have sex.” The prohibitions on dating also included a more pervasive curtailing of social activities for women. Devi, who went to a high school that had few Indians enrolled, mentioned this about the difficulty of prohibitions on her:

I think in terms of high school I had no friends that were Indian, nothing identifiable in terms of my culture, so it was all-it was hard, very, very difficult, because when your girlfriends’ parents let them go and hang out ‘til 2 and 3 in the morning, or when having a beer at the age of 17 is not a big deal, and for us, you know, you have to be home at a certain time, and you can’t go here with So-and-So, or you can’t do this with So-and-So, it-I think it’s a huge-has a huge impact.

Perhaps observing the dating norms of a non-Indian peer group was partly the reason some participants questioned dating rules. As one participant noted:

Well, I always dated secretly. I just never told ‘em about it. And then as I got older, I’m like ‘You know what? I was born in the United States of America. I’ve been here like all my life, raised around people like that all my life. Like, it’s just something that should be normal for me.’

Nine participants, stated that despite knowing the prohibitions to dating, they did date when they were younger, in high school,. Two participants stated that they had never dated thus far because they were following the wishes of their parents. Many of the participants who dated stated that in order to perform different situational identities—in front of parents and another for peers—they made the boundaries between these worlds opaque. Deception was the strategy of choice within this group; seven were deceptive with their parents in terms of not telling them about dating practices. Siblings, male or female, if aware that their sister was dating, would also not tell the parents. Parents also

may have been somewhat aware of the dating practices of their daughters, and either denied it or looked the other way, in a version of a “don’t ask/don’t tell” policy. The participants may have dated, and their parents may have been suspicious, but the parents did not ask any questions to verify their suspicions and the children kept their dating practices to themselves. As Devi explained:

I think my parents did know that I talked to guys. You know, like I would tell my parents, “Oh, I am going out with So-and-So tonight,” and I don’t know whether they knew it was like, “Oh, she’s going out one time, or are they going out over and over again like it’s a steady relationship, like it’s a serious relationship,” so it was never clarified, and it was never asked, because I think more in my house it was like “Don’t bring anybody home unless you know you want to marry the person, because I don’t want to hear about it.”

Reena and Vaishali had both been upfront with their parents about dating boys in high school and both had suffered from their parents’ shame. Vaishali’s stated that her parents were ashamed of her because she was a single mother and “had a child out of wedlock.” Reena had been sent away to military school when her parents felt she was being “bad” by cutting school. They both mentioned that they do not play the “deception” game with their parents as other Indian children do. Vaishali noted:

...everybody [Indian] kind of tries to do things the way-they do things in front of their parents-like the way their parents want, yet behind their back, they’re out drinking, smoking or whatever-doing this, that, and the other thing-but then to their parents’ face, you know, they’re like the perfect kid. So then that’s what my parents-they don’t know what goes on behind closed doors, so to speak-and we’re like a disappointment. And I’m just like, “If you only knew.”

Reena noted:

I mean, they look-like they do what their parents want them to do. So they look at me like, “Why do you do that?” But they do it, too. They just do it behind their parents’ back, and I don’t like doing that.

The strategy of deception appeared pervasive. Reena is cajoled by her Indian friend for not taking part in what seems to be— for some second-generation Asian Indian



American— a way of being. Non-disclosure or deception was not always unproblematic for the participants, however. Monisha explained that she would want circumstances to be different for her children:

When I have children, I don't want them to be dating early, but when they do start dating, I want to know about it. I don't want it to be like when we were younger; when we were sneaking around the house.

One participant, Sita, was open with her parents about dating. She stated that she was allowed to date and her parents knew about her dates: "They are not opposed to it [dating], maybe when I was a young teenager. But I have had boyfriends since I was 15 or 16 and they have known about it. I would bring them home and stuff."

The importance of the "Indian community" in the transmission of beliefs around dating and sexuality emerged during these conversations. The majority of participants stated that they knew what their parents expected of them in terms of dating because of what they said about other Indian children in the community. These participants also discussed the importance of the Indian community with whom the parents and family regularly associated in setting norms and expectations for their children. As Sapna explains:

You grew up in a community of essentially all Gujarati people who, for whatever reason, are in the same place and you have dinner parties and whatever. You hear them talking about their kids and their kids-and all this stuff. That's where the generals and all their expectations of marriage and stuff. I don't think they've ever told me directly, but I just hear what they say about so-and-so's marriage or so-and-so's thing. I know that that's how they feel about something.

Thus, the social circle to which the parents and family belonged set the normative behavior for their children. The social circle, comprised largely if not exclusively of other first-generation families, monitored their children's activities. The social circle of

Indian friends also provided a link to “Indian” culture, or what they constructed as Indian culture. One of the most effective links, as discussed by a majority of the participants, including Sapna, was “gossip.” Gossip was an indirect method of communicating to their own children what they believed was “right and wrong,” which was linked to “authentic and inauthentic Indian behavior.” The fact that gossip was effective as a means of communication and monitoring points to the importance and attachment of the parents and children to the small Indian community itself. Transgressions against the proper “Indian” behavior could result in shame for both parents and children and disappointment in the community. Vaishali discussed her brother’s divorce and the shame his parents experienced because of it:

He [my brother] had that urge to have kids, so he told them [my parents], and they wanted him to marry an Indian girl. So he actually had and arranged marriage. My mom and brother went to India, and they saw girls and stuff, and he chose one. They met in September and got married in November. They’re divorced now, and they have a daughter-I just think that my parents aren’t strong enough to stand up to people. And they let people dominate and influence them, and make them feel like they’re shrinking and getting smaller, rather than just like telling them...So my brother and I have to pay the price for that.

She explained that her parents have become rather “anti-social” because of the shame brought on the family. Vaishali’s remark further highlights how the small “Indian” community plays a part in creating the “authentic” culture and that when one’s standing within it is impaired, one risks shame and questioning of cultural authenticity. The shame affects both parents and children within the community. The community is ultimately concerned with maintaining its stand within broader society by presenting an ideal and authentic image of the Asian Indian. Vaishali, her brother and, by association, her parents had violated a cultural code within the community, and thus faced these

consequences. However, Vaishali's brother was still willing to risk questioning cultural authority.

Devi remarked that her family and the culture of the small Indian community that they belong to had shaped her beliefs:

Like, I said, I think the strongest influence has probably been my family in the way I view things, and for the most part, the [Indian] culture as we know it, not Western culture but our [Indian] culture, our family friends, our, you know, our tight-knit group of society and the way they view things. I think that has a lot to do with it.

Devi's remark also hints at the idea that the culture constructed by the community in the U.S. is unique to that Indian community and does not necessarily correspond to the changing practices in India. Several (n=4) participants commented that their parents' version of India and dating practices in India were more "conservative" than what they experienced when they visited India. Sara was recently on a trip to India and was surprised by the dating practices in the country. They were different than what her parents and the community had presented to her and her second-generation Indian friends. Sara explained:

Everyone dates in India and not a lot of people are virgins. [There are] a lot of misconceptions about India, players here go back to India to find a nice girl. Not how it is anymore, everyone dates. When I went out to restaurants I would see a boy and girl out in the restaurants who were not married sitting in a restaurant eating. All my friends from here are surprised when I tell them because that is not the conception that we get from our parents. My friends are like, "We can get an innocent girl or good guy from India," but it's not like that. It's changed and no one wants to acknowledge it.

Sara's observation is consistent with the notion that the Indian community and first-generation parents attempt to present a "museumized" version of "Indian" culture that did not correspond to the changing practices in contemporary India (Das Gupta, 1997).

Interestingly, parents discussed dating directly with seven participants when they became older, usually after college around the age of 22 or 24 and usually with the idea that it was time to find someone to marry. As Devi noted:

I think nobody really talked about it [dating] until I started-until I was like 24. My mom was like, you know, "Maybe you should start talking to some people. I have some people in mind," and my dad was like, "You know maybe you should start thinking about meeting people." And I think both of them had people in mind, and you know it was like friends of friends and guys whose families they really liked or, you know, like had like what they consider great educational backgrounds and stuff like that...

Thus, dating, as a direct pathway to marriage, became permissible at a certain age. .

All of the participants had parents who viewed premarital sex as absolutely prohibited.. Even Sita, whose parents were open to the idea of dating, stated that they would not want her to have sex before marriage and she never talked to them about those issues. Discussions about female sexuality, perhaps, aroused the most parental anxiety because it is viewed as intimately linked with the continuity of the ethnic group. To have premarital sex outside marriage was deemed the worst of transgressions. Devi explained the struggle that women of the second-generation face:

I don't think that-I guess in our [Indian] culture you're kind of taught if you have sex with more than one person or outside marriage that, you know, like society does look down upon you or that you're some kind of like backstreet whore or something like that...

The majority of the participants said that their parents did not discuss sex at all, unless it was to equate it with dating. As one participant stated, her parents did not understand, "that you could go out at night with a guy and not be physical." One participant, Devi, stated that her mom, a doctor, had a discussion about sex with her that was "biological"

and arose out of a situation in her family. The conversation itself was more a discussion about the negative repercussions of sex such as pregnancy and STDs.

When the participants were questioned about their views on sex, the responses varied. Three of the participants answered rather personally and stated that they had never had sex. However, that does not mean that they were necessarily opposed to premarital sex. Eight of the participants stated that they believed that premarital sex within a serious relationship was acceptable. Sita offered a statement that was typical among these women, linking her ideas on sex to nation and culture and placing herself and her second-generation friends somewhere between their first-generation parents and “American” women. Sita, who identified her friends as all second-generation of different ethnicities, said:

...we are all less conservative than our parents but we are certainly more conservative than your average American girl, like we all have sex within a relationship if it is serious. We are certainly not into having casual sex or into one-night stands or anything.

Shanti was sympathetic to her mother’s beliefs about waiting for sex until you get married. However, she does not believe it is realistic for her generation. She remarked:

I’m cool with it [sex]. All parents say “Don’t do it before you get married,” but they got married at a much younger age than we did and are. Our generation gets married such-our moms got married 18, 19, 20. We’re getting married in mid-to-late twenties sometimes into the thirties. Sometimes, it just isn’t realistic. I don’t think people should delude themselves.

Headed not reveal her own sexual status but did remark on her beliefs about sexuality which were similar to those of her parents. She also associated views on sex to issues of “Indian” culture and authenticity:

I see girls and other girls who are loose and stuff. I would never think of, well I would never think she’s Indian. When you grow up Indian you grow up with

certain ideas of what is supposed to happen. I mean Indian girls are supposed to get married and then have sex and then have kids. That's what my parents instilled in me. But then you see other Indian girls not doing that, and then you think, "Why aren't they doing that? What happened?"

Hema clearly associates the "authentic Indian woman" as someone who is chaste and acts in accordance with the notions of dating outlined by her parents. She questioned the cultural authenticity of women who did not act in that manner.

An important way for women to make sense of the dating practices and gender expectations is to understand and contrast their parents and the community's expectations for second-generation male siblings. Eight of the participants had brothers with whom the parents were more "lenient" in terms of dating and relationships. Their brothers were allowed to stay out later without questions asked, bring home girlfriends.

Shanti noted:

When we were younger in high school my brother was allowed to go out all the time. He was allowed to go to the movies. There were no questions asked about who he was going with and stuff like that. Whereas with me, I had to be home at a reasonable time all the time and they had to know who I was going with and I was not exactly allowed out very much. Yeah, so there were different rules for me and my brother.

Occasionally, parents would joke around with the boys about dating and sex, something they certainly would not do with their daughters whose sexuality could not be taken lightly. This levity may point to the fact that within the U.S. Indian community, as it is outside of it, a man's sexuality is not inextricably linked to the reputation of the family in the same way that a woman's sexuality is. Monisha noted:

I have a little brother. They were more lenient with him. My dad and brother had a more open relationship in terms of dating and stuff. He had female friends and girls in the house, my parents never cared. My brother had a girlfriend; my dad never said anything but I think he knew about it. She was not Indian or

anything like that, but my father joked about it asking him, “Did you get lucky?” They joke about stuff like that with him.

Three of the participants said the parental prohibition on dating, sex and going out were equally applied to their brothers. Moreover, , two of these three noted that their brothers were expected to study harder than they were. Sita, a journalist, remarked:

My parents would ideally like both my brother and I to marry an Indian, you know an Indian guy or girl. And I think that they would expect that he should be a caretaker and have a stable job and be able to take care of his family in that sense of course, [there are] a different set of rules [for him] than me that has more to do with gender. My parents still expect my brother to behave in the same way that I do but the only expectations that I think would be different are whereas I don't work in a lucrative industry and they're not as concerned about that because I think they feel like well it's old school and sexist, but they feel like, like her husband will take care of her. If my brother wanted to be a journalist they would not be very happy about that.

This response points to the gendered expectations for sons and daughters that operate in at least some families. Women and men are both expected to be well-educated. For some families, however, the burden of providing for one's family and continuing the middle-class success that the parents had forged, rests upon the sons. Women can pursue different careers because the expectation is that she will marry and that her husband will bear the financial responsibility for her; the husband will “take care of her.”

Parents and their “Indian” community appear to endorse an essentialized chaste identity for their children, particularly for their daughters. The chaste identity is linked to the notion of the authentic “Indian” woman. In order to ensure chastity, women are more closely monitored in their social movements until the parents deem that it is time for them to marry. Many second-generation Asian Indian American daughters use different strategies to negotiate the dating practices, with non-disclosure, or deception being one of the major strategies. Individually, each woman accepts and rejects the notions of

authentic “Indian” culture presented by their parents and the community. They also negotiate through American mainstream culture and other cultural influences from friends and media to construct their individual identity. In the next section, the results and analysis will continue to focus upon the gendered messages women receive about appropriate marital behavior and how they continue to negotiate identity.

### *Marriage and Gender Roles*

The discussion about marriage highlighted several messages that these women received from their parents both implicitly and explicitly. The women who observed the dynamics of their parents’ marriage formed notions of what their parents believed to be appropriate gender and cultural behavior for “Indian” women. All of the participants’ parents wanted their children to marry and have children. All but one participant discussed marriage as inevitable and desirable

In observing the dynamics of their parents’ marriage, eight of the participants remarked that their mothers were always expected to do the household cleaning and cooking even if they worked outside the home, and typically their fathers made the major household decisions that ranged from finances to vacation destinations. They attributed this dynamic to the patriarchy many saw as inherent to “Indian” culture. Sita stated:

My parents have a very traditional Indian marriage in which my dad-you know he’s not a modern American domestic guy-he works and comes home and doesn’t really help out around the house. My mom really takes up that role in addition to her job, which she’s fine with and he’s fine with and it works for them... I think my dad is more of a decision maker. He makes the plans in their life. My mom much more goes with the flow. Sometimes I think they have a very traditional Indian dynamic.

On the other hand, two of the participants mentioned that their mothers “ran the household,” referring to the fact that their mothers were “breadwinners” and also made



the major decisions in the home, and that their fathers actually did the household chores.

One of these two attributed the reversal of roles to the fact that her mother is a doctor.

She also remarked on what she saw as the uniqueness of the situation in terms of a

Gujarati household. Sapna remarked:

It's unusual to have a situation like my father and mother, which honestly, it's probably 60/40 in the other direction or 70/30. We grew up in a community where my father was the only person who did any of the stuff he did. All the Gujarati moms were like "Oh, he is good, da, da. You should do what he does. Look, he washes the dishes."

The other participant equated the dominant role the mother played in making decisions in the household to the fact that her mother "grew up with five brothers." One remarked that her mother would do all the household chores but her mother also played a dominant role in making decisions in the house; gender roles were complicated in her family.

Devi, whose mom is a doctor, stated:

...although I think my mom is very traditional, she is-the gender roles in my house are very-there's not a black and white line where one starts and one ends. My mom is a very strong person, a very dominant person, and my dad is more laid back, like docile kind of individual, so I think gender lines get really blurred in certain areas in my family.

One participant remarked that her father was malleable. She stated that he definitely had the "mentality that Indians of his generation had, the patriarch." However, his own ideas about gender roles had evolved in the sense that he helps out in the household chores, cutting up vegetables and doing the dishes. He did not do these things when the participant was younger. She believes that he is now more "progressive" due to the pressure the children place upon him to behave differently towards their mother. Even among the first-generation, gender roles, behaviors and expectations were changing..

From observing these marital dynamics, or from the statements that parents made to their daughters explicitly about household duties, the majority (n=10) of the participants claimed that their parents also expected them to do the household chores such as: cooking; cleaning and taking care of any children. Many reported that their mother stated that it was important to learn to cook Indian food in particular because when “you get married you will have to cook for your husband.” At least some participants shared this view. Monisha stated, “So what if you can cook enchiladas or pasta, if you can’t cook Indian food that isn’t good.”

A majority of the mothers did do the household cleaning and chores and expected the same for their daughters. However, there were a few that did not necessarily do household chores and still expected their daughters to do them. The reasoning behind this may have something to do with the larger Indian community with whom the family would socialize and their influence in setting many of the norms for appropriate behavior. It may be that parents felt it necessary to enforce this rule with their daughters since the community deemed it important to continue this gender role for women,. The ability to boast about her abilities in household chores may have been a way for parents to communicate to the community that they had, indeed, raised a “good Indian daughter”

On the other hand, even though parents were interested in their daughters learning to do household work, they also wanted their daughters to be well-educated and financially competent. All of the participants said that their parents wanted them to be “well-educated,” “career-oriented.” Nine of the participants used the words “financially independent” to describe the importance their parents placed on education for their daughters and for their professional development. As Monisha, reported:

The woman is supposed to be educated yes, she's supposed to be smart yes, she's supposed to make money yeah, but according to my mother she has to cook and clean and bear the children and so it's double. She wants me to be both educated and smart but when it comes to housework the woman's supposed to do it. And yeah, the husband can help out but you are supposed to do the bulk of it. I think I was taught to cook when I was 12.

Many of the women were expected to compete economically in the public sphere.

However, within the private sphere of the home, the majority of women were expected to adhere to the rule that women do the majority of the household work. Sunaina Marr Maira (2002) discusses the contradictions of achieving economic success and yet also maintaining certain household expectations. Maira surmises that immigrant parents are caught in a conflict. The parents have perhaps a fundamental belief in upward mobility through participation in the capitalist system. On the other hand, they like to maintain a family arrangement that worked in another social and economic system and is a source of pride for the family. The conflict is then passed along to women in gendered terms so that they experience guilt or conflict over their parents' economic strategies. Also, the women are expected to do double the work since they need to have two sets of competencies.

A couple of the participants also discussed that they confront gendered expectations that also pervade their own peer groups. Some Indian men of their generation evidence in their own world view, beliefs of authentic female sexuality and gender roles that their parents hold. Reena mentioned:

He said...he wants to have an arranged marriage...He does, and it's really weird. I'm like, "Why?" And he's like, "Cause I"-I won't say exactly what he said, but he was like, "I want a girl from India that knows what she's doing and knows how to cook and this and that."

Sapna discussed that some of her Indian male friends and acquaintances espoused gender roles for women that were similar to their Indian parents, particular in terms of household duties and power dynamics. She felt that they too were looking for a woman who may have a career but is still willing to play into more “traditional” gender roles. She explained:

Well, I definitely feel like there are a lot of Indian guys in the U.S. who are well-educated and relatively attractive [and] feel like they can have any Indian girl they want...I definitely feel like there's a lot of sort of pressure on them to pick sort of the trophy wife of the Indian community, “relatively well-educated, but not too well-educated that she can't stay home and take care of my kids. Really cute, really pretty, so I can show her off to my guy friends and my business associates or my doctor friends.”

The participants in the study, however, negotiated these expectations on their own terms, creating beliefs and identities with which they are comfortable. In terms of gender expectations, a majority of the women discussed the importance of education in terms of being “financially independent” or “being able to take care of myself.” Many had lucrative careers and were ambitious, choosing, perhaps, in part what their parents wanted for these women.

Many (n=7) participants stated that they would like an egalitarian relationship in terms of household duties with their husband. However, they surmised that as women, because they bear the children and would likely stay home to raise them that they would perhaps inevitably do more of the household chores. Nina, who is studying to be a doctor, explained:

I wouldn't want to feel that I couldn't pursue what I wanted to because I was staying home. I would never want that to detract. But eventually it will. I mean I'm being realistic. If I wanna have a family I definitely have to pick a career that's gonna balance that. If I don't want it [a family] then I don't need to. But it's something I definitely want.

Four of the participants specifically stated that they “did not want to be controlled by a man” and wanted to be opinionated and not “submissive.” Two of the participants, Sita and Monisha, were comfortable with splitting financial and household duties along traditional gender lines, and perhaps giving their husbands or partners a little bit more authority in the relationship. Monisha stated:

I don't mind it being 60/40. I don't mind if the guy has a little bit more authority. I guess in that sense I am old fashioned. If I could never work again for some reason, I do think the guy should provide for the family.

Devi reported that even if she were to “stay at home” and “raise a family,” that did not mean that she wanted to have a submissive role in the family or fall prey to “traditional [Indian] gender roles.” Devi explained:

I don't think that, you know, somebody staying home and taking care of two kids is necessarily a horrible thing, but I definitely think that my ideal woman, she would be able to do it all, you know have an amazing family...I think just having good children on the whole and keeping a tight-knit family and being independent enough so she never has to—she never has to be a victim of gender roles and the way they kind of are played out in our culture.

Sapna, a doctor whose mother is a doctor, hoped to find a man like her father who would be willing to take care of the home and the children while she was at work.

Shanti, who was married and had a career, reported that she had an egalitarian relationship with her husband. They made decisions together and both took part in household duties.

On the contrary to the notion presented by some literature of the conflicted relationship of second-generation children to their parents, not all of these second-generation women were in conflict with their parents ideas of appropriate gender roles for Indian women. In fact, a few women were interested in replicating their parents' power

dynamics. One woman was negotiating an identity that included being wife and mother, but also included an opinionated presence within the family.

This section explored the some of the essentialized gendered notions of “authentic Indian families” presented by first-generation parents that influenced by complex social and economic ideas. The section also explored the participants’ negotiations of social and familial influences. The final section will discuss how the participants made sense of the various social and familial influences on the construction of an identity that intersects gender, culture, ethnicity and race.

### *Identity*

The recruitment poster for this study, asked for the participation of “second-generation Asian Indian American women” During the pre-interview screening process, definitions for these terms were clarified for the potential participant before they decided to participate. However, when each participant was asked how they identified ethnically and culturally during the actual interviews, participants, on the whole, answered some hesitancy and with much consideration, indicating the complex nature of the question and perhaps the complexity of their personally derived cultural identity. The responses to this question illustrates the dynamic, multi-layered, situational and, at times, contradictory nature of personal ethnic and cultural identity.

Initially, a majority of participants identified as “Indian” or as Indian in addition to a specific regional affiliation such as “Indian, Malayali” or “Indian, Gujarati.”

Cultural and ethnic identity was also reported in religious terms. Three participants stated that they were “Indian, Hindu.” However, in explaining their cultural and ethnic identity more extensively, seven of these eight women offered more complicated notions

of this identity and explained that they were “outside at both ends” and “it [how they identify culturally] depends on the context.” For instance, Devi remarked:

Like definitely it's-I definitely a lot more identify with an Eastern culture than I do a Western, even though I was born and raised in the United States, but I think it's also different. My recent trip to India, it kind of reminds you how Western you are, you know, so I think it depends on the context. I mean, comparatively to living in the United States, I definitely identify a lot more with an Eastern culture, but once you get back into the Eastern culture, you realize how much your mindset is so Western.

In terms of “identity in context,” the second-generation was particularly attuned to the different “selves” that its members had to perform in front of parents and the Indian community. Although “being good” in front of one’s parents may not be unique to second-generation Asian Indian American culture, what is unique for this second-generation subculture is that “being good” is also linked to the idea of nation. For instance, Sara remarked that she was a particular kind of person in front of her parents and other authority figures in her community in which she showed her “Indian” side:

I feel like I only show them [my parents] my Indian side. I feel like I have two sides and it helps that I have two names. My middle name is what Indian people call me. I am known as “Suja.” Sara is my first name. When I am around them I am quiet. They think of me as the quiet one, the person who does a lot of church work.

Devi explained the importance of learning that takes place as part of the process of blending cultures. Gloria Anzaldua (1999) asserts that the third space offers the possibility of going beyond the binary in order to create a different way of seeing the world, ultimately bridging extremes. Devi seems to echo some of Anzaldua’s sentiment in the following statement:

...Otherwise, I –otherwise, I feel like there’s no learning that happens if you don’t-if you don’t blend the two. I always tell my parents this. You know, people that came here came here for a better life, and, you know, you have to know that

there were certain things that you'd be giving up coming here, you know, and that's what you do. You can't live exclusively just, you know, knowing what you know and sticking to what you know. Like, you know, I think that that plays a big part in just your survival as well as your cultural survival.

The remaining four participants identified as either "Indian American," "South Asian American," or "Gujarati American." They all described that they were a "mix" of these cultures. Although there may be moments of dissonances, there was also a level of comfort with the mix of cultures. The contradictions that were part of second-generation cultural and ethnic identity could be brought together into a relatively comfortable narrative of identity. Smriti remarked:

I guess I would consider myself Indian-American...because I really love both aspects, you know, of my-like both of my cultures so much, and, I don't know, I think I'm lucky that I get to have two, two completely distinct but, you know, that can co-exist...It's funny. I love doing Indian things, but I feel ambiguity in things.

The majority of the participants did use the notion of "two cultures" to discuss their identity. However, many of them also lived daily lives that showed a complex mix of cultural influences as evidenced in the negotiations of dating and marriage. Many were aware of the multiple identities and multiple cultural influences in their lives. Even in the initial responses to this question. Even within the Indian identity they ascribe to, the participants pointed to multiple identities that were informed by regional, linguistic and religious cultural influences, using terms such as "Gujarati, Hindu, and Malayali." Furthermore, a few participants complicated the notion of identity to an even greater degree, saying that there was more to their personal identity than just "being Indian" and noting the multiple identities that were performed on a daily basis. Smiriti noted:

I would say I was a Gujarati Hindu woman but I wouldn't say I was devoutly religious or anything like that. I identify with the culture, but it isn't the only



thing that defines me. I also identify with my work, my education, my family and my friends. I am not just an 'Indian woman.'

Radha, explicitly described herself as an “amalgamation of different cultures.” She explained that she was not just working between two cultures but that, in fact, she was part of many cultures and subcultures with which she interacted on a daily level and which informed her ethnic and cultural identity. Radha remarked:

I guess it's like a mix of Gujarati and, then, like, American, but then not like any kind of American- like specific kinds of Americans like Asian-American, specifically, Vietnamese-American, Chinese-American, like subcultures, too, like the rave culture and a little bit of goth subculture, and I mean, I've always hung out with subculture kids, so it's just like this weird amalgamation of different cultures.

Suinana Marr Maira (2002) explains that perhaps the “two worlds” rhetoric is a strategy used by second-generation children to understand the contradictions that are felt when moving across different cultural fields. Furthermore, the discourse of “two worlds” may become partly internalized because it is the framework that is offered by different ethnic institutions, the family and mainstream media. Maira (2002) believes that this framework is a result of two ideologies of difference. One is what she refers to as “American nativism” that supports orientalist notions of Asian “traditions” and seeks to keep alive the dichotomy of “us-American” and “them-Indian” in order to maintain their power relationship to immigrants coming into U.S. and guard the borders of nation and citizenship. The other is the immigrant nostalgia that recreates its own versions of “Indian” culture and also perpetuates the dichotomy in order to resist dominant culture and maintain power of its own (Maira, 2002).

### *Summary*

This chapter presented the findings and analysis from interviews conducted with 12 second-generation Asian Indian American women. The interviews illustrated how dating, marriage and relationship practices reveal complex identity negotiations for second-generation Asian Indian American women. The chapter also illustrated that immigrant parents and the community with which they socialize put forth notions of “authentic Indian culture” that no longer necessarily correspond to cultural norms in India. Second-generation children develop various strategies to perform identities and practices with which they feel comfortable, such as non-disclosure. Some second-generation women also incorporate notions of authenticity developed by parents into their own identities illustrated by their adherence to marital gender roles.

## *CHAPTER V*

### *DISCUSSION*

The purpose of this study was to explore how second-generation Asian Indian American women understand, negotiate and perform gender roles. In particular, the study focused on how beliefs regarding dating, marriage and relationship practices revealed the negotiation of gender roles. In this chapter, I will compare the interpretation and analysis of the findings from the interviews to the literature review. I will also discuss the limitations of the study and the implications for social work practice and research.

For the study, I interviewed twelve second-generation Asian Indian American women. The demographic profile of the participants and their families corresponded with the socioeconomic profile of many of the post-1965 Asian Indian immigrant. That is to say, the majority of Asian Indian immigrants after 1965 were highly educated, highly skilled professional workers. The families, or at least one parent, of the women in this study was highly skilled and professional. The parents in these families also used the capital in terms of economic status to ensure higher education opportunities for their children. The majority of the participants who were well-educated and professional seemed to have realized their parents' economic dreams.

The role of the community and also the first-generation parents in constructing norms for dating practices and beliefs is also consistent with the literature. Many of the participants discussed how their families and community wanted their daughters to

remain chaste and sexually pure and thus prohibited dating until the marriageable age of 22 to 24. After the college years, many of the participants were encouraged by their parents to find a partner to marry. Premarital sex was also discouraged by parents and the Indian community which is consistent with the literature. These notions of socializing and dating presented by the first-generation were not consistent with socializing and dating practices in present-day India as several participants noted. The notion of the “muesuemization” of culture and practices by the first-generation discussed in the literature review is supported by the interview data (Das Gupta, 1997; Das Gupta & Das Das Gupta 1998; Maira 2002). Consistent with the literature (Bhatacherjee, 1999; Kallivayalil, 2004; Das Gupta, 1997; Das Gupta & Das Das Gupta, 1998; Gupta 1999; Maira 2002), the parents of participants held a relatively essentialized view of what was “authentic” Indian culture, linking appropriate dating practices to appropriate “Indian” behavior. .

The “authentic Indian” culture was a way to resist intrusion by the “impure American” culture for the parents of the women in this study and for their Indian community. In the minds of many of the first-generation, their children, particularly, their daughter’s, behavior reflected the family’s standing within their Indian community that in turn reflected the community’s standing in larger society. Although this was never directly stated to the participants, their discussions of what they observed in their parents behavior and overheard through community gossip indicated that the notion of “authenticity” was a way of monitoring daughter’s behaviors. Appropriate dating and sexual behavior for women was constantly linked to authentic Indian culture by the parents and at times by the second-generation women as well. The risk of inappropriate

behavior deemed “inauthentic” was shame from the Indian community for both parents and children, because, perhaps, it risked the standing of the greater Indian community in the larger U.S. society. The notion of shame and the disappointment of parents which can feel like abandonment, discussed in the literature in the study done by Karen Leonard (1999), appeared to have affected the dating and sexual behaviors of the participants.

The particular contours of the identity formation for second-generation Asian Indian women were gendered. These women did have to contend with restrictions from their parents that were different from their male siblings. Authentic “Indian” identity was linked to nation.

However, the second-generation women in this study used different strategies to resist or navigate the ambiguity present in their lives by the multiple shifting social and familial influences on their lives. One strategy discussed in the findings and in the literature review was the practice of deception and non-disclosure by second-generation Asian Indian American women. This strategy can best be described as a strategy of resistance. Even though there may have been commonalities, the execution, the amount revealed to parents, differed for each individual. Also, it was a way to make the boundaries between their situational identities opaque in the eyes of their parents, at least when they were younger. This strategy also points to the fact that these women did indeed perform multiple identities. That is to say, they acted differently in different situations depending on the social actors involved, and thus their identities were fluid. For instance, in front of the parents and the community, they were slightly different than in front of peers. Suinana Marr Maira (2002) suggests that perhaps the constant switching of cultural codes itself could be the unique *habitus* of the second-generation

who perhaps does not question the constant switching or performance of identities until they are questioned by their people such as their peers.

Even though, their cultural identity was formed in a specific way that differed from males in the same subcultural group, the participants were not slowly rejecting one culture for another as some of the literature would have you believe. These women as the findings suggest were also engaged in blending different identities together. All of the participants, when asked about how they identified culturally, discussed that they were in some way a mixture of cultures. Many of the participants seemed relatively comfortable with the blend. One participant, in particular, was emphatic about how she loved being part of “both cultures.”

In fact, their discussion of gender roles also revealed that many women were not necessarily in conflict with their parents’ perspective nor were they choosing one culture over another. As already mentioned, all participants identified in some way as Indian when discussing their identity. A few of the participant wished to replicate their parents power dynamics that they attributed to “traditional Indian” gender roles. Also, even many of those who wanted an egalitarian relationship understood why their parents’ relationship was perhaps unbalanced. Not to mention that in some instances the unbalanced relationship favored their mothers.

Even though, there were instances where the women attempted to trace certain acts to “Indian” or “American” culture, it was not always easy to distinguish the origination of certain desires or acts. As Bhabha (1994) notes in hybrid culture it is difficult to trace the points of origin for the blending that occurs. For instance, many of these women were very well-educated as were their parents. It could be that this desire

was an “Indian” desire that their parents advocated but also it could also have its origination in “American” capitalist economic systems that would favor those who are professional and well-educated. However, perhaps it was a blend of at least two cultures.

Also, even though they shared some commonalities, each of these women was a unique blend of culture and cultural forms. There was, as Gloria Anzaldua noted, a conscious effort on the part of some women to blend cultures. Devi, for instance, described the importance of blending cultures in order to learn and survive in society.

Finally, post-colonial theory, particularly Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the “third space” and Anzaldua’s (1999) notion of “borderland” culture was used to interpret and understand the data. In the study it was apparent that the notion of identity was fluid and changing for both the first-generation and second-generation. Even though, the first generation attempted to present and portray essentialized versions of “Indian” culture their practices and beliefs were and always have been shifting as one of the participants noted of her father’s behavior. The participant’s father did no household chores when he first arrived in the United States but after some time and the pressure of his children he began to change his behavior. This is consistent with Bhabha’s(1994) notion that hybridity or the blending of cultures is taking place for all people whether or not they are aware of it. Also, the second-generation identity was also constantly changing. They were negotiating identities with all of the multi-layered influences and contradictions into a narrative with which they felt comfortable. The way in which this narrative was woven did have particular contours for the second-generation that was perhaps somewhat different than for other groups and subcultures that was discussed in the literature review and the data from the interviews. The second-generation Asian Indian American women

were at times consciously aware of the blending in which they were engaged and considered it an important source of learning in their lives.

### *Limitations*

There were several limitations to the study that will be discussed in this section. First, I disclosed to each participant that I am a second-generation Asian Indian American woman which granted me an “insider” status with many of the participants. It is not clear to what degree this may have affected their responses to interview questions. For instance, some of the participants may have believed that because I am a second-generation Asian Indian American woman that I must share a mutual understanding of practices, ideas or terms and thus they may have omitted some explanations to questions. Also, on the other hand, my own experiences and biases as an Asian Indian American woman may have affected the interpretation and analysis of the data, in particular the themes that I chose to highlight in the analysis section of this study.

Also, there are limitations in the generalizability of the study because of the small sample size and the snowball sampling method. The snowball sampling method resulted in participants who were closely connected to one another from similar Gujarati communities. Since they were so closely connected, their experiences may have been rather similar. The themes that emerged in the analysis may not represent the diversity of experiences and opinions of the population as a whole.

Finally, another limitation may have to do with my methodology. I interviewed five of the participants face-to-face and the other half over-the-phone. I found that the phone interviews resulted in shorter interview times overall as compared with the face-to-face interviews. The participants that I interviewed face-to-face were more willing to



expand on their responses than the participants interviewed over-the-phone. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that people are less distracted and more engaged with the interviewer when they are in the same location at the same time in a face-to-face interview. It is uncertain what impact the phone interviews may have had on the study.

### *Social Work Implications*

Perhaps this study will convey to clinicians the complicated nature of identity for second-generation Asian Indian American women. Second-generation Asian Indian women negotiate identity whose origin can not easily be broken into the monolithic categories of “Indian” and “American”. Furthermore, the subjective identity of each individual is not necessarily on a progressive continuum from “Indian” to “American.” Clinicians need to be sensitive to the complicated intersections of nation, culture, gender and ethnicity that these women deal with on a daily level.

As far as future research is concerned, there are some questions that emerged that were beyond the scope of thesis that may be interesting to address. In particular, it would be interesting to study the different waves of immigration from India after the 1980’s to understand how they differ in character and understand the impact that those differences in socioeconomic realities has on the second-generation.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter illustrated that the major findings from the data were consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter II. This chapter also explained the limitations of the study and the implications for social work in general.

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Appendix A

**Human Subjects Review Committee Approval Letter**

December 22, 2006

Sonal Soni  
4819 Cedar Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19143

Dear Sonal,

Your revisions have been reviewed and all is now in order. We are glad to give final approval to your study. I do think you may have overdone your deletions on your third set of questions: the ones about your participants' experiences and attitudes. You might want to add some of them back in. For example, isn't it important to know whether they are actually dating? Feel free to change your questionnaire if you find you wish to and just send us a copy of the changes.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your study.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

## Appendix B

### **Informed Consent Form**

October 27, 2006

Dear Research Participant:

My name is Sonal Soni, and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a research study to learn about the dating/relationship/marriage practices of second-generation Asian Indian women and how this reflects how they understand, negotiate and perform gender roles.

Your participation is requested because you are a second-generation Asian Indian woman. If you are interested in participating in this study you must be the child of Asian Indian immigrants born in the United State or relocated to the United States when you were under the age of five. If you choose to participate I will interview you about your dating practices, social relationships, familial background, your parents' beliefs in terms of gender, and how those beliefs have impacted you. In addition, I will ask you to provide demographic information about yourself. I will ask you to fill out the demographic information sheet prior to the interview and bring it along with you to the scheduled interview. The interview will be conducted in person, will be tape-recorded, and will last approximately one hour. I may also telephone you after the interview for the purposes of further clarification and/or elaboration if necessary.

The risk of participating in this study may be that some interview questions could elicit disturbing thoughts, feelings, or memories. Enclosed in this mailing is a list of psychotherapy resources for the Philadelphia tri-state area that you may refer to if you experience psychological distress as a result of participation in this study.

The benefits of participating in this study are that you have the opportunity to contribute to an area of research that has been neglected and to offer a voice in understanding the experience of second-generation Asian Indian women. Unfortunately, I am not able to offer financial remuneration for your participation.

Your participation in this study is completely confidential. I will label audio tapes and interview notes with a pseudonym instead of your real name. After information has been labeled with pseudonyms, my research advisor will have access to the data collected. I will lock consent forms, audio tapes, and interview notes in secure location during the thesis process and for three years thereafter, in accordance with federal regulations. After such time, I will either maintain the material in its secure location or destroy it. In the written thesis, I will not use demographic information to describe each individual; rather I

will combine the demographic data to reflect the subject pool in the aggregate. In this way you will not be identifiable in the written work. When brief illustrative quotes or vignettes are used, they will be carefully disguised. Finally, if an additional data handler, transcriber or analyst is used in this study, I will require her/him to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question(s). You may withdraw from the study at any time during or after the study without penalty until March 1, 2007 when I will begin writing the Results and Discussion sections of my thesis. If you wish to withdraw you may email me at [ssoni@smith.edu](mailto:ssoni@smith.edu) or telephone me at 856-816-5601.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

---

<b>Signature of Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>
---------------------------------	-------------

Please return this consent form to me by January 31, 2007 to indicate your intention of participating in the study (I suggest that you keep a copy of this consent form for your records). If I do not hear from you by then, I will follow up with a telephone call.

If you have any further questions about this study, participation, rights of participants, or this consent form, please feel free to ask me at the contact information below.

Thank you for your time, and I greatly look forward to having you as a participant in my study.

Sincerely,

Sonal Soni  
313 S 16th St.  
Philadelphia, PA 19102  
(856)816-5601  
[sonalhsoni@hotmail.com](mailto:sonalhsoni@hotmail.com)



Appendix C

**Demographic Information**

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where did you grow up?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Where in India are your parents from?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Where did your parents immigrate to the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is their religious background?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your religious/spiritual affiliation?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What are your parents' levels of education and occupation?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What is your educational background?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. How would you best classify your class status? \_\_\_\_\_
10. If you have any, what is your family's caste background? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
12. List the languages you speak. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. What was your first language? \_\_\_\_\_
14. How many times have you visited India? \_\_\_\_\_
15. List any siblings you have and their ages and gender.

## Appendix D

### Interview Guide

#### Familial background and influences:

1. How did your parents meet and marry?
2. What are your parents' views on dating?
3. Which of your parents talk to you about dating, if either?
4. What are your parents' views on marriage?
5. What are your parents' views on love?
6. How do your parents feel about sex?
7. What are your parent's views on gender?
8. How have their views on love, sex, marriage and gender influenced you?
9. If you have male siblings, do your parents have different set of rules for them? If so, what are these different rules?

#### Social influences:

1. Who are your closest friends? How did you meet?
2. What are their views on dating?
3. What are their views on sex?
4. What are their views on marriage?
5. What are their views on love?
6. What are their views on gender?
7. How have your friends' views on love, sex, marriage and gender influenced you?

#### Personal dating practices:

1. How do you identify culturally and ethnically?
2. What are your views on dating?
3. What are your views on marriage and love?
4. What are your views on sex?
5. What are your views on gender?

## Appendix E

### **Transcriber's Assurance of Research Confidentiality**

#### **STATEMENT OF POLICY:**

This thesis project is firmly committed to the principle that research confidentiality must be protected. This principal holds whether or not any specific guarantee of confidentiality was given by respondents at the time of the interview. When guarantees have been given, they may impose additional requirements which are to be adhered to strictly.

#### **PROCEDURES FOR MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY:**

- All volunteer and professional transcribers for this project shall sign this assurance of confidentiality.
- A volunteer, or professional transcriber should be aware that the identity of participants in research studies is confidential information, as are identifying information about participants and individual responses to questions. Depending on the study, the organization participating in the study, the geographical location of the study, and the hypotheses being tested may also be confidential information. Specific research findings and conclusions are also usually confidential until they have been published or presented in public.

It is incumbent on volunteers and professional transcribers to treat information from and about research as privileged information, to be aware of what is confidential in regard to specific studies on which they work or about which they have knowledge, and to preserve the confidentiality of this information. Types of situations where confidentiality can often be compromised include conversations with friends and relatives, conversations with professional colleagues outside the project team, conversations with reporters and the media, and in the use of consultants for computer programs and data analysis.

- Unless specifically instructed otherwise, a volunteer or professional transcriber upon encountering a respondent or information pertaining to a respondent that s/he knows personally, shall not disclose any knowledge of the respondent or any information pertaining to the respondent's testimony or his participation in this thesis project. In other words, volunteer and professional transcribers should not reveal any information or knowledge about or pertaining to a respondent's participation in this project.
- Data containing personal identifiers shall be kept in a locked container or a locked room when not being used each working day in routine activities. Reasonable caution shall be exercised in limiting access to data to only those persons who are working on this thesis project and who have been instructed in the applicable confidentiality requirements for the project.

- The researcher for this project, Sonal Soni, shall be responsible for ensuring that all volunteer and professional transcribers involved in handling data are instructed in these procedures, have signed this pledge, and comply with these procedures throughout the duration of the project. At the end of the project, Sonal Soni, shall arrange for proper storage or disposition of data, in accordance with federal guidelines and Human Subjects Review Committee policies at the Smith College School for Social Work.
- Sonal Soni must ensure that procedures are established in this study to inform each respondent of the authority for the study, the purpose and use of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, and the effects on the respondents, if any, of not responding.

**PLEDGE**

I hereby certify that I have carefully read and will cooperate fully with the above procedures. I will maintain the confidentiality of confidential information from all studies with which I have involvement. I will not discuss, disclose, disseminate, or provide access to such information, except directly to the researcher, Sonal Soni, for this project. I understand that violation of this pledge is sufficient grounds for disciplinary action, including termination of professional or volunteer services with the project, and may make me subject to criminal or civil penalties. I give my personal pledge that I shall abide by this assurance of confidentiality.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Sonal Soni, Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_ Date