

ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS OF AMERICAN DESIS TOWARDS  
ARRANGED MARRIAGE SYSTEMS

by

Maria Tahir, B.A.

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Committee Members:

Rachel Romero, Chair

Debarun Majumdar

Binita Mehta

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The cultural practices of marriage have significantly varied through time and across societies. As a result, marriage remains a dynamic and ever-evolving cultural concept. An example of how marriage and marriage practices expand, change, and develop involves immigration (Al-Johar 2005; Batabyal and Beladi 2002; Salam 2014). During immigration, many marriage practices that differ from the dominant culture, take on a more “global” perspective. Generally speaking, this means that immigrant communities forgo native traditions and assimilate to the culture in which they become immersed. Salam (2014) and Pande (2015) note, that marriage ritual becomes more individualistic and less dependent on familial influence. In South Asian/Desi communities, where cultural homogeneity is vital, marriage rites and traditions are of profound significance. As a result, many first-generation Desi immigrants still engage in the form of marriage most traditional to them: arranged marriage (Pande 2016; Gupta 1976). These marriage practices vary widely depending on the country and culture of origin and should be addressed accordingly. There are many Desi cultures that do not ascribe to arranged marriage processes, though it is widely considered the most common form of marriage (Gupta 1976; Chandrasekhar 1954). Regardless of the specifics of one’s traditional marriage practice, second-generation counterparts take on more Western assimilated approach to marriage (Al-Johar, 2005; Badruddoja, 2006).

Part of the process of assimilating to a new culture includes abandoning traditional methods to make room for new cultural habits. Thus, arranged marriages’ traditions and rigidity give way to looser interpretations of strict customs regarding arranged marriage practices (Badruddoja 2006). These patterns are common in second-

generation immigrants, as they are more assimilated to hegemonic structures of the settled nation (Salam 2014). In addition to creating a culture that borrows from both the dominant and traditional practices, second-generation Desis also create a hybridized marriage (Al-Johar 2005; Pande 2016). However, hybridization of marriage practices is not solely exclusive to diaspora communities and is also becoming common in Desi countries where traditional arranged marriage was once the dominant practice (Shah 1996; Chandrasekhar 1954). In a globalized world, hybridized arranged marriage also is part of the culture it originates from, due to the adaptation of European practices and the legacy of colonialism (Shah 1996). However, a lack of knowledge about arranged marriages in the outgroup obscures cultural understandings about the traditional and hybridized marriage practices, which creates stereotypes in the public eye (Davè 2012; Pande 2016). A clearer and more holistic understanding can be fostered by examining the experiences of American Desis in regards to arranged marriages.

Academic research neglects issues of assimilation and cultural exchange in regards to marriage practices, despite that these social phenomena are of great importance in the lived experiences of second-generation Desis (Al-Johar 2005; Davè 2012). The research that is available on these matters focuses on experiences of Desis within arranged marriage systems and their negotiations of this system, but less on their attitudes towards arranged marriages and their expectations from it (Al-Johar 2005; Badruddoja 2006; Batabyal & Beladi 2002; Bellafante 2005; Davé 2014; Gupta 1976; Jaspal 2014; Khurshid 2020; Pande 2015; Pande 2016; Ralson 1997; Salam 2014; Santhiveeran 2005). This research is also focused largely on Indian culture, though arranged marriage exists in many Desi countries. In this thesis, I explore attitudes towards arranged marriage



practices in second-generation Desis with specificity to Pakistani Muslims. Some of the questions this thesis will engage are: What are the attitudes and expectations of American Desis towards the system of arranged marriage? How do these attitudes and expectations differ from those of their parents/previous generations?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In Western culture, love marriage practices are dominant. Because arranged marriages remain uncommon in the United States and other western countries, xenophobia is attached to notions of arranged marriage systems. Many people believe that arranged marriage practices are archaic, misogynistic, and non-consensual, particularly in Muslim marriages (Pande 2015). The image of an oppressed “third-world” woman is evoked through the public’s imagination, and people stand appalled that such a practice could continue once migration to Western societies occurs (Pande 2015). However, these stereotypes do not apply to most Desi immigrants, and judgment against cultural traditions outside the European standards perpetuates ethnocentrism. As Pande (2016) argues, there is no single definition or practice of arranged marriage that should be accepted as representative of the whole.

Historically, arranged marriage was a common form of marriage (Urlin 1913). Up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this practice was widely adopted even in Western cultures. More specifically, the system of marriage was facilitated through designated matchmakers, parents/family-elders, kingdoms, and tribes rather than individual decision (Quale 1988). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, American Puritans began to encourage love marriage to evade lust. This idea presented itself as a radical marriage practice for the time (Fiege and Fiege 1995). As Western societies began developing and industrializing, many of the preexisting systems that facilitated arranged marriages began to lose relevance. Arranged marriages eventually phased out in many of Western cultures (Quale 1988). Instead, love marriage became commonly adopted in Western societies, and today the practice is the dominant form of marriage (Fiege and Fiege 1995). However, arranged marriages remain

an aspect of human civilization in many parts of the world, as marriage rites are woven into the religious, economic, and social systems (Gupta 1976).

Moreover, negative attitudes towards arranged marriage are a byproduct of European cultural standards, which are pervasive in the US. These standards often denounce other practices that oppose or contradict their hegemonic authority, like that of arranged marriage (Salam 2014). Traditional practices like arranged marriage uphold collectivist cultural values, rather than individualistic ones that are common in Eurocentric nations (Gupta 1976; Santhiveeran 2005). This is not to say that arranged marriages do not include problematic aspects. Forced marriage and child marriage exist under the umbrella of arranged marriage and should be addressed. However, these forms of marriage remain extreme, and often are used as examples to condemn arranged marriage entirely. Instead, it is essential to consider how poverty, education, and disenfranchisement continue to affect marriage processes (Enright 2009).

People engaging in forced and/or child marriage practices often face not having the resources to survive or make a living independently (Sabbe et al. 2013). In marrying off (typically) a daughter to someone with capital, families can: 1) reduce the economic burden; 2) attain social mobility; 3) gain material assets through dowry exchange; 4) ensure financial security (Sabbe et al. 2013; Bravo, Martinez and Ruiz 2014). Forced and/or child marriage limit the opportunities for independence, economic growth, and intellectual contribution a woman can make to society, but the reasons for the practice must be understood in a meaningful way (Bravo et al 2014; Gill and Sundari 2011). Creating more opportunities for families to escape poverty, gain an education, and fight against exploitation would make forced and child marriages less prevalent (Gill and

Sundari 2011; Sabbe et al 2013). Demonizing the entirety of arranged marriages practice does not.

Because arranged marriages remain complex and a core component of many communities, their practice persists and travels with immigrants as part of their heritage. In America, Desi immigrants struggle to maintain a semblance of their tradition and to pass this on to their progeny (Badruddoja 2006). First-generation Desis typically feel a greater sense of belonging to their country of origin, especially if they were raised there (Inman, Devdas, Spektor and Pendse 2014). On the other hand, second-generation Desis widely assimilate to Western standards. In the process, the gap between the first and second-generations of immigrants creates tensions surrounding tradition and assimilation (Inman et al 2014). The children of first-generation immigrants must continuously negotiate their cultural identities to fit both groups. When it comes to marriage, second-generation Desis find themselves choosing between an arranged marriage, like their ancestors, or finding their partner in a love marriage, as is the dominant practice in the U.S. and other Eurocentric cultures (Al-Johar 2005).

### ***Cultural Negotiation for American Desis:***

Previous research on arranged marriage in Western society explains much of the stigma and cultural negotiation experienced by immigrants and second-generation children (Al-Johar 2005; Pande 2015, 2016). Many American Desis face what seems to be a two-pronged attack with one side being their heritage and ethnic community, which often maintains they must reject American practices (dating, pre-marital sex and fraternizing with members of the opposite sex in ways that may encourage romance). The

other side is an American/Eurocentric society, which looks down on those who practice “other” cultural traditions (Badruddoja 2006; Pande 2015). Both sides hold stigmas about the other, often with exaggerating divisiveness (Badruddoja 2006; Salam 2014). As part of Desis’ cultural negotiation and exchange, Desis (particularly women) are often caught in a struggle with expectations to be a “good” Desi while also trying to be a “good” American. These cultural identities often are considered mutually exclusive, meaning individuals can be one but never both (Baddrudoja 2006).

Moreover, the literature engages the evolution of arranged marriage in the United States to a more “arranged-cum-love” marriage, or “assisted” marriage in which the parents make initial introductions to their children and possible mates rather than deciding their marriages for them (Badruddoja 2006; Bellafante 2005; Pande 2016). “Love” marriage is a term used to label a type of marriage in which the husband and wife choose each other without input from their parents or families. This form of marriage can involve a wide array of practices that may or may not include courtship, dating, pre-marital sex and cohabitation before the wedding (Pande 2016). Arranged marriage is a form of marriage in which the parents or elders of a family facilitate matchmaking and are equal or more influential in the decision of marriage as the husband and wife. Arranged marriage is typically marked by a formal courtship and no dating, pre-marital sex, or cohabitation before the wedding, but involves choice and consent of those being wedded in their partner finding process (Gupta 1976). “Arranged-cum-love” and “assisted” marriages identify both European and Desi standards and adopt aspects of both, while fully conforming to neither practice (Badruddoja 2006; Pande 2016).

Some studies about arranged marriage in Desi communities, delve into the level of assimilation and rebellion that the outgroup assumes goes into the decision of choosing an arranged marriage for women who grow up in American/Western society (Badrudjoja 2006; Batabyal and Beladi 2002). Due to xenophobic understandings of arranged marriage, people assume women who choose their match are emancipated from their oppressive culture, and women who have an arranged match are “victims” of oppression (Pande 2015). However, studies show that the decision for second-generation immigrants to choose between an arranged marriage and another type lies within the amount of time they perceive choosing their match individually or finding a match through arranged means would take (Batabyal and Beladi 2002). This is to say, participants in this study estimated the amount of time it would take for them to find a partner compared to the amount of time it would take to have an arranged match and chose the option that takes less time. Batabyal and Beladi (2002) argue that stereotypes of oppression and/or emancipation hold little to no influence over the decision to choose an arranged match or not, especially for second-generation Desis. Further, Pande (2016) adds to this argument by noting that stereotypes about arranged marriage hold little value in the lived experiences of Desis, including the understanding of arranged marriage as an archaic and inflexible system.

### ***Modern Arranged Marriage***

Some of the reasons South Asian cultures use arranged marriage include the religious backgrounds and justifications that still hold influence over the culture (Gupta 1976). Many South Asian cultures can be considered collectivist, in comparison to the

individualistic form of western cultures. Familial living arrangements often consist of joint households, including an extended family that problem-solves and shares labor (Gupta 1976). This system shows to be more financially beneficial for low-income groups because home labor can be divided between the people within the household, and there is a broader pool of income from several breadwinners. These dynamics create less economic dependence on one person in the family and facilitate cooperation and interdependence (Shah 1996). In these cultural systems, households often include extended kin and males are typically the head of the family. Moreover, the system is set up for a bride/wife to be added to the existing family. These family formation patterns are drastically different from Western culture, where individualistic mentalities promote the idea of a wedded couple as an independent familial unit (Shah 1996).

In Eurocentric nations, with an individualistic culture, the familial structure is typically nuclear (Shah 1996). Part of the immigration process is assimilating to the culture and values of the settled country (Al-Johar 2005). With this assimilation to individualistic cultural values and nuclear family structures, second-generation Desis have a different understanding of marriage and family than their predecessors (Badruddoja 2006; Pande 2015). Because of an increasingly globalized world, gravitation towards less strict beliefs about arranged marriage has become more prevalent in Desi communities everywhere (Allendorf 2017; Badruddoja 2006; Salam, 2014). The emerging pattern draws from hybridized practices, which incorporate aspects of “love” and customary tradition in marriage (Pande 2016).

In diaspora communities, cultural habits create a third space or third culture in which the hybridization of two or more cultures occurs (Lijadi 2019). This third culture

also applies to marriage practices; hence, the modern adaptation of arranged marriages gaining prominence in Desi communities (Pande 2016). These newer forms are referred to as “assisted” marriage or “love-cum-arranged marriage” because they depart from the traditional arranged marriage practices, while still maintaining some of its elements (Pande 2016). Often, in this type of marriage, parents may introduce a potential match but leave the couple to decide their own fate. People may also choose to fall in love with someone they know their family will approve and then approach their family to finalize the process in traditional ways (Pande 2016). These practices can include courtship, dating, pre-marital sex, and even cohabitation depending on the family (Pande 2016). In all, marriage practices are changing and being negotiated between first- and second-generation immigrants.

### ***Segmented Assimilation Theory***

Segmented Assimilation Theory grounds the present study theoretically, as its ideas help shed light on the attitudes of second-generation Desis towards arranged marriage. Segmented Assimilation Theory (SAT) is a perspective used to analyze how immigrants are incorporated into different stratifications in their host society (Zhou 1997). This theory advances Classical Assimilation Theory (CAT), which explains the immersive process immigrants experience departing from their own cultural heritage to acquire the culture of the country in which they settle (Park 1928; Stonequist 1935). This process is non-linear and often painful but maintains that for integration and socio-economic achievement to occur, immigrant groups must eventually desert their traditions entirely (Park, 1928). While Classical Assimilation Theory includes many elements of



segmented assimilation, it is considered highly Eurocentric by immigration scholars of Color and does not account for racialized immigrant experiences (Zhou 1997). On the other hand, the Segmented Assimilation Theory accounts for racialized experiences that prevent integration and assimilation, and offers different types of assimilation patterns (Zhou 1997). SAT takes on a multicultural perspective that treats minority groups as members of the society they enter, rather than many other perspectives which treat immigrants as outsiders or foreigners (Greeley 1976; Zhou 1997). SAT challenges its classical counterpart, which maintains any aspects of the country of origin that are retained in an immigrant's identity will inhibit acceptance into the settlement society (Stonequist 1935).

SAT presents three common patterns through which immigrant groups engage in assimilation (Zhou 1997). The first is through acculturation and integration into the White middle-class of America. The second is assimilation into the underclass and a permanent association with poverty (Zhou 1997). Both types of assimilation include a significant loss in source culture and heritage. The third pattern includes the preservation of heritage and cultural values alongside economic advancement (Zhou 1997). SAT discusses socio-economic status, progress in immigrant groups, acculturation, and the factors that influence these processes (Gibson 1988; Gordon 1964; Ogbu 1974; Zhou 1997). This third pattern incorporates Gordon's (1964) work that created acculturation typologies, which include marital identification, as well as culture and societal structure. Gordon's typologies serve to create categories of practices that differentiate immigrants from the mainstream society and how they affect assimilation and integration for immigrant groups (Zhou 1997; Gordon 1964).

The pattern of assimilation that keeps elements of traditional heritage while simultaneously adopting components of the settlement country is known as selective assimilation (Warner, 2007). The degree to which one assimilates depends on many aspects of both the source and settlement cultures of immigrants. Studies show that developing a positive outlook on one's heritage and establishing a collective dignity towards it results in greater performance outcomes than viewing one's source culture as inferior to the settled country's culture (Gibson 1988; Ogbu 1974). Studies also show that the degree to which someone retains their heritage is subject to the approval of the mainstream society they immigrate to (Gibson 1988; Zhou 1997). In other words, if one's traditions and heritage are approved by the mainstream, they are considered advantages of one's identity and culture; and if they are not approved, there is a greater likelihood of the group will distance from that practice (Gibson 1988; Zhou 1997).

### III. METHODS

This study examined the social experiences of American Desis (people with Indian, Pakistani, Gujarati, Nepali heritage) in regards to arranged marriage systems. I conducted personal, in-depth interviews with 14 individuals to understand how their attitudes and experiences differ from traditional arranged marriage ideals and expectations. I was curious to explore the differences between parents and their children (second-generation Desis) in perceptions of arranged marriage systems, and the differences in desirability traits in potential partners between men and women.

To gather the most vivid and detailed data, I used in-depth interviews as method. Employing a semi-structured guide, I began my interviews with an initial set of questions, though I remained open to any spontaneous inquiries depending on the responses shared by participants (Esterberg 2001; Seidman 2006). In addition to the interviews, I used a religiosity scale to engage religion as an influencer of conformity to culture and tradition. The interview questions gauged the participants about their socialization, backgrounds, cultural practices, religious upbringing and their personal experiences with arranged marriages. I was also interested in exploring issues of mates' desirability traits.

My participants consisted of seven women and seven men, all of whom were Desi and English speakers. All of my participants were seeking and/or referred to heterosexual relationships in their interviews. Their ages ranged from 22 to 37 years of age, and their ethnicities spanned from Pakistani, Indian, Gujarati and Nepali. Their religious identities were Muslim, Jainist, Buddhist, and Christian. All of the Muslim participants (eight total) were from a sect of Islam known as Ahmadiyyat, which is known for its tight-knit

community and devout practice of Islam. Five of the total participants were single. Of the married participants, eight of them were in an endogamous marriage (married a fellow Desi, typically one that shared their religion and/or ethnicity). Only one of the participants married someone outside of their racial identity, though they shared a religious identity. Finally, the majority of my participants were second-generation Desi immigrants, however some were 1.5ers-- a term referred to people who immigrated from other countries at a young age and were mostly socialized in and identified more with their settlement country.

Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, participants were met in person at a location of their choice and convenience. During the pandemic, interviews and briefings of the study happened over the phone and online. All interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed through an artificial intelligence software called Otter AI, while I took notes for my reference. For all interviews, I explained the nature and reasons for the study through an informed consent handout, which requested their consent to be audio-recorded. To incentivize their participation, I offered a \$50 Visa gift card that would be rewarded to one of the participants through a random drawing at the end of the research. This gift card was donated by me for the research.

The data was analyzed through a grounded theory approach. Employing analytical induction, I began with the question: what are the attitudes and expectations of American Desis towards arranged marriage? Then, proceeded to open-code the interviews without preestablished categories (Esterberg 2001). At this stage, I began to note emerging themes surrounding matters of how American Desis talked about arranged marriage, its

process, and their general disposition towards the ritual. Once these themes emerged, I did a second round of coding, this time focusing on the quotes from the participants that most embodied the emerging themes. The quotes were then organized into categories. Because grounded theory promotes iterative processes, I continued to review literature during the focused-coding stage (Esterberg 2001). This allowed me to *think* with theory, instead of imposing a specific theoretical frame to the data, and vice versa. In the analysis, I weave the arguments advanced by Segmented Assimilation Theory (SAT) to connect this thesis to the larger body of literature on arranged marriages, cultural assimilation, and the Desi-American diasporic experience.

This study was aided by quantitative research as well. A Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) was used to gauge participants' religious devotion (Huber and Huber 2012). This scale was used to help understand if any correlation existed between religiosity and support for arranged marriage. Participants were given the full scale and their score average was taken and compared between if they had an arranged marriage, if they identified as Muslim and if they were open to arranged marriage in general. Participants' answers were documented in an excel spreadsheet and then imported to IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for a quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistics were run on the data, and graphs were created from it, which were then analyzed in the context of the research.

## *Interview Guide*

### **Arranged Marriage Interview Guide**

**As a reminder, anything you tell me will be kept confidential. You can stop your participation at any time you want, and you can choose not to answer any questions if you don't want to.**

- 1) Tell me about your background: ethnicity, culture, religion, childhood
  - a) Tell me about your first experience with arranged marriage?
- 2) Tell me about your relationship with your parents
  - a) How does this influence your behavior/social life/beliefs?
- 3) Tell me about your experiences with the arranged marriage system.
  - a) Tell me about how your parents were married.
- 4) What are your personal views and feelings about the practice?
  - a) What parts of the system do you agree with?
  - b) What parts do you disagree with?
  - c) What parts of the system are most challenging for you?
- 5) How do your expectations of marriage (arranged or otherwise) differ from your parents?
  - a) How are they similar?
- 6) What do you desire in a partner?
  - a) What are your listed desires, and how do they differ from what you care about in a partner?
- 7) What is expected for you (based on experience with arranged marriage)?

- a) What is desirable for you in a partner and what do you think is desired from you?
  - b) What are your views about these expectations?
- 8) Have you met potential partners who meet your expectations, and how did these experiences go?
- 9) What does your biodata detail, if you have one?
- 10) Is there anything else that you want to talk about pertaining to arranged marriages?
- 11) Can you recommend any other potential participants that would be willing to speak with me on this topic?

*Stefan Huber's Centrality of Religiosity Scale*

1) How often do you think about religious issues?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

2) To what extent do you believe that God or something divine exists?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

3) How often do you take part in religious services?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

4) How often do you pray?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

5) How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine intervenes in your life?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

6) How interested are you in learning more about religious topics?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

7) To what extent do you believe in an afterlife—e.g. immortality of the soul, resurrection of the dead or reincarnation?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

8) How important is to take part in religious services?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

9) How important is personal prayer for you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time



10) How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine wants to communicate or to reveal something to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

11) How often do you keep yourself informed about religious questions through radio, television, internet, newspapers, or books?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

12) In your opinion, how probable is it that a higher power really exists

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

13) How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

14) How often do you pray spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

15) How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine is present?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the Time

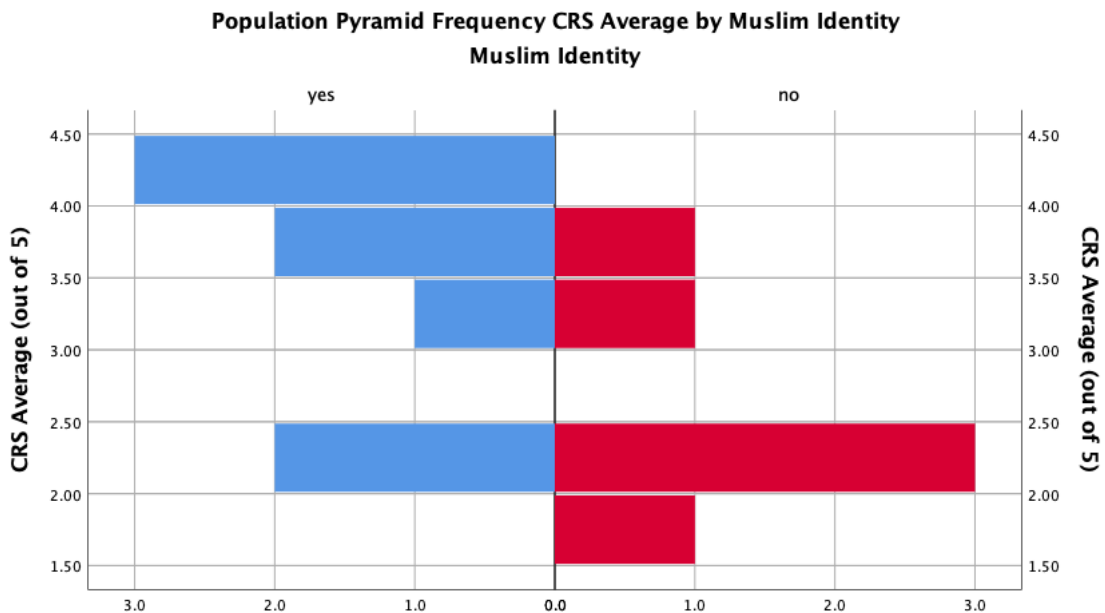
#### IV. ANALYSIS

This study explores the attitudes towards arranged marriage practices in second-generation Desis. The goal of this research was to explore cultural negotiation, hybridization of identities and the immigrant experiences of assimilation across generations within the context of arranged marriage systems. A total of 14 participants were interviewed to answer the following questions: what are the attitudes and expectations of American Desis towards the system of arranged marriage? How do these attitudes and expectations differ from that of their parents'/previous generations? The answers given by the participants to these questions were then organized and analyzed for the purposes of this research.

I employed a semi-structured interview guide to obtain rich and detailed data that gauged American Desis' experiences with arranged marriage. From the analysis of the in-depth interviews, the following themes emerged: 1) American Desis carefully define the term "arranged marriage" in order to address misconceptions about it, and to disassociate themselves from what is considered a stereotypically harmful practice; 2) American Desis talk about arranged marriage in ways that largely depict its irrelevance to their own lives; and 3) American Desis feel largely ambivalent about arranged marriage systems. American Desis simultaneously reject double standards and problematic aspects of arranged marriage processes pushed upon them by their parents, while also aligning themselves with standards and expectations that they agree with from their parents' perspective. In what follows, I overview the quantitative findings of the religiosity scale, and proceed by offering an in-depth analysis of the qualitative findings. Connections to the Segmented Assimilation Theory are weaved through my discussion where appropriate.

### ***Quantitative Research Analysis***

The quantitative portion of my research included participants scores on the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) and demographic information, such as religious identity (Muslim or Non-Muslim), openness to arranged marriage and whether the participant actually had an arranged marriage or not. This information was collected in order to determine trends or patterns between religiosity and conformity to arranged marriage. The findings are as follows:



*Figure 1. CRS and Muslim Identity*

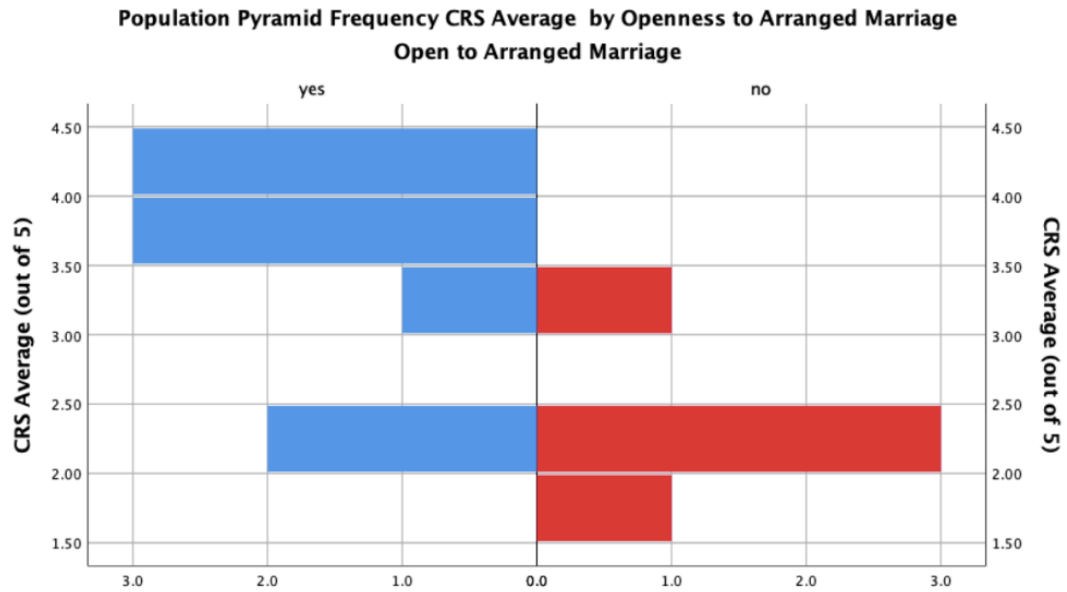


Figure 2. CRS and Openness to Arranged Marriage

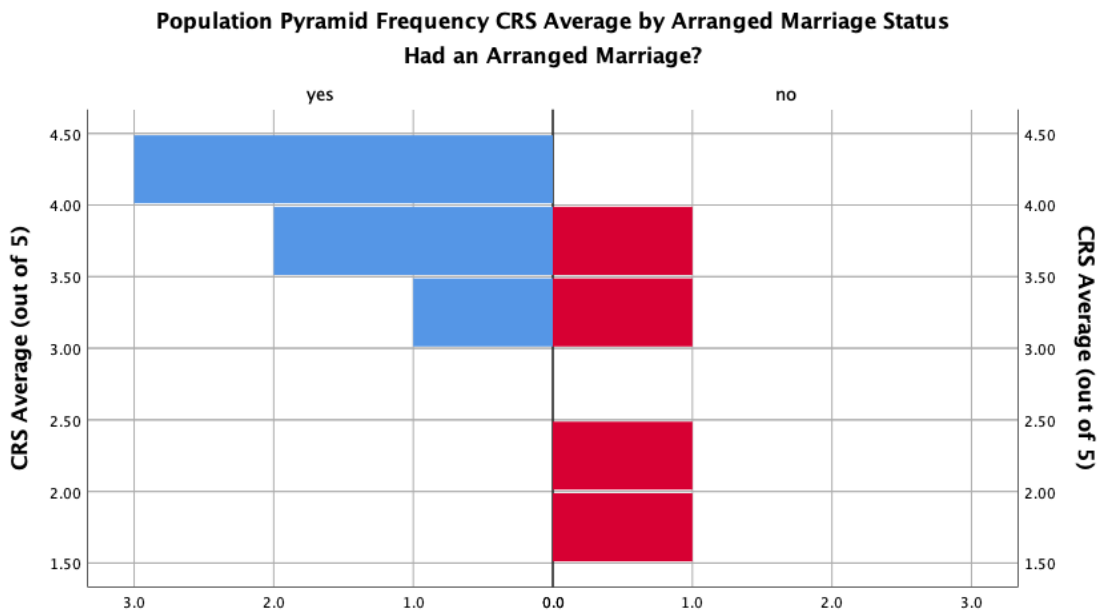


Figure 3. CRS and Arranged Marriage Status

Figure 1 shows a positive correlation between religiosity score and Muslim identity, meaning that those who identify as Muslim are likely to have a higher religiosity score. The logical reason behind this finding is that my Muslim participants were from a

sect of Islam that has a more devout practice of Islam. In addition to this, studies show that Muslim immigrants more closely safeguard their religious identity and practice than other religious groups upon migrating (Considine 2017; Davè 2014; Salam 2014). This safeguarding of religious practice and belief often negatively influences assimilation and integration into the mainstream culture for immigrants (Gordon 1964; Zhou 1997). Figure 1 supports these findings.

Figure 2 shows a positive correlation between religiosity scores and openness to arranged marriage. This is to say that participants with higher religiosity scores were more likely to be open to arranged marriage, and participants with lower religiosity scores were less likely to be open to it. The logical explanation for this correlation is that religious identity is a mediating variable between openness to arranged marriage and religiosity score. Muslim participants reported higher religiosity scores and Muslim participants were also more open to arranged marriage, due to this being common practice for many who identify as Muslim. Because the practice of arranged marriage is taught and emphasized for Islamic marriages, it makes sense that those who identify as Muslim (and thus also have a higher religiosity score) would be more open to arranged marriage.

Figure 3 shows the relationship between religiosity scores and people who had an arranged marriage. There is more variation in the religiosity scores of people who did not have an arranged marriage and the people that did have an arranged marriage generally scored higher in the religiosity scale. This shows that those who are more religious are more likely to engage in arranged marriage, though once again the factor of Muslim identity should be accounted for in this correlation. The sample size in this study was 14

people, which is very small for any meaningful quantitative analysis, however my findings are consistent with research about religious identity, assimilation and arranged marriage (Batabya & Beladi 2002; Davè 2014; Pande 2016; Salam 2014). These findings also fit the theoretical perspective of Segmented Assimilation, as they illustrate the presence of strong religious identity as well as marital identification as impediments to full integration, as classified by Gordon (1964). These quantitative findings serve foremostly to support and enrich the qualitative themes and research, which will be examined in depth in the following sections.

### ***Defining ‘Arranged Marriage’ in No Uncertain Terms***

During the interviews participants seemed hesitant to use the term “arranged marriage.” Many participants shied away from using this term for modern arranged marriage practices, or spent time defining it before referring to it. All participants were well-versed with what an arranged marriage looked like traditionally, and many were hesitant to apply the same historical terminology to the way arranged marriages are practiced among their current networks. For example, one of my participants, Deepika, a married Gujarati woman who identified deeply with both American and Gujarati culture had much to say about the definition of arranged marriage. When asked about why she felt this way, she sheepishly admitted that as a child she was exposed to negative stereotypes of arranged marriage from her White counterparts, and this influenced her choice of words around arranged marriage practices. Deepika said,

I think arranged marriage where you meet the day that you are going to be wed gives me a little bit of pause, because I feel like, at least a few conversations

would be nice. I think arranged marriage in the sense that people who know both of you introduce you, and you have the ability to actually have a say in the decision, I think there's something to that. I think it's similar to getting set up by friends in your life, that know you and know someone else that you might get along with.

Deepika's clear descriptions of the type of arranged marriage she finds desirable and acceptable, versus what she finds less so are examples of the patterns present around using the term. In defining two different styles of matchmaking, when many Desis use "arranged marriage" to describe both of them, Deepika creates a distinction between what some would consider traditional arranged marriage and modern arranged marriage. As mentioned previously, many people refer to these contemporary marriage types as "arranged-cum-love" or "semi-arranged marriage" (Badrudjoja 2006; Ralson 1997). This change in terms shows that people are departing from traditional adaptations of arranged marriage and are negotiating their definitions for terms for this departure. I argue the reasoning behind this results from the negative stigma associated with arranged marriage systems in Western society. This stigma leaves Desis hesitant to use the same terms that elicit negative connotations in others.

Deepika's description of arranged marriage and her distancing it from types of matchmaking she finds less acceptable illustrates a case of segmented assimilation. Segmented Assimilation Theory maintains that minority groups' cultural characteristics are subject to judgement from the mainstream. SAT also states that retainment of specific aspects of minority culture depend on the mainstream's approval (Zhou 1997). If a practice is looked down on by the mainstream, immigrants are more likely to distance

themselves from it to appeal to the wider society (Zhou 1997). In this context, Deepika was aware of the negative connotations around arranged marriage, as she had been exposed to them from a young age. Due to this disapproval from her White peers who served as a representation of the mainstream, Deepika emphasizes a distance from the aspects of arranged marriage that the mainstream looks down upon.

Another example of defining and clarifying the type of arranged marriage referred to was from participant Hrithik. Hrithik is a kindly Nepali man who continuously offers me drinks and snacks during our interview at his house. He thinks carefully about each question before answering it in a rush, as though if he doesn't say his thought in one breath it may disappear from him entirely. Upon being asked about his personal feelings towards the practice of arranged marriage, he responds,

I think it depends on the extent of what is being arranged. I think I'm more okay with like 'hey, you care about your children [referring to the parents of marriageable adults] and you want to introduce your children to other good people that could potentially lead to something.' I think that's good, that's great. I think that helps not just the children themselves, but society in general in being more close knit. But I think on the other side, I think if we get to the more extremes of parents trying to pressure their children into getting married... I'm guessing these parents want the best for their children and all that, but to really put that pressure, I think is kind of unfortunate.

This quote illustrates some vital insights in comprehending Desis' cultural negotiations and understandings of arranged marriage. Hrithik's main concern is that the decision of an arranged marriage, or not, should be consensual between parents and their adult



children. When he says, “if we get to the more extremes of parents trying to pressure their children into getting married” he is drawing a line between consensual and non-consensual decisions for marriage, by defining the non-consensual, pressured situations as “extreme” and therefore depicting it as undesirable. His comment “it depends on the extent of what is being arranged” adds an opportunity for further analysis. This remark creates a distinction on what Hrithik thinks is an acceptable level of involvement and foreknowledge when making a decision for marriage. Hrithik’s idea of an acceptable arranged marriage is parents serving as introductory sources only and having little to no further involvement in the marriage process. This sentiment seemed common among most of the participants, and their definitions of acceptable and unacceptable arranged marriage forms.

Hrithik’s commentary also reveals his acculturation into the mainstream, as his sentiment departs from the collectivist mentality that is common to Desi culture. His mindset is far more Westernized and focuses on an individualistic marriage and partnership process. Like Deepika, Hrithik distinguishes what he considers an acceptable definition of arranged marriage. This definition incorporates assimilated mindsets and practices from the settlement culture he is now immersed in (Zhou 1997).

Another participant who clearly defined what arranged marriage entails to herself was Aishwarya, a young and driven Indian woman. Aishwarya is very worldly, and she believes this thirst for cultural knowledge and growth influences her understandings of her own practices. When she speaks, Aishwarya’s words take on a mind of their own, and it often seems like her tongue is unable to keep up with the speed at which the words want to come out. During her interview, she defines arranged marriage by saying,

This may be the definition of arranged marriage that I like. So for me, when I think of arranged marriage, it's like your parents are helping you find the suitor, but it's not their decision, it's your decision right? So, I guess it's similar to dating apps, because honestly, they're just helping you filter out... they're just doing the swipes for you, right? They're filtering out the people and then you just have to go on the date.

Aishwarya's understanding of what an arranged marriage entails shows the presence of a collective decision-making process between a parent and their adult offspring, with the decision-making power lying with the offspring. This understanding was fairly universal among all participants in the study, as the form of arranged marriage that they accepted as legitimate. Indeed most, if not all participants made the distinction that while an arranged marriage centers agreement between parent and offspring, the final veto power lies with the person being married, and not the matchmakers.

Furthermore, Aishwarya's quote shows the way she interprets arranged marriage as simply one of many forms of matchmaking in which prospective partners are filtered out through some process. Her direct comparison of this process being like a dating app where the parents are "just doing the swipes for you" is reflective of a hybrid American and Desi identity. In this quote, Aishwarya explains a concept that she knows exists rather exclusively in Desi culture in a way that is understandable to a mainstream audience, thus creating an accultured definition of arranged marriage. This explanation is indicative of her own selectively assimilated understanding of it by the way she prefaces it with "this may be the definition of arranged marriage that I like." In addition, by explaining arranged marriage in this way, she normalizes and destigmatizes a foreign

concept that typically has negative associations in American culture. Aishwarya's definition is one that includes aspects of assimilation as well as hybridization, which incorporates aspects of both cultures it emerges from to create a new and more inclusive practice (Anzaldúa 1987; Zhou 1997). Indeed, one of the facets of cultural hybridization is whether intentional or not, it is more palatable to the mainstream than a directly adopted traditional cultural practice (Anzaldúa 1987; Superle, 2010).

### *A Quickly Disappearing and Largely Irrelevant Practice*

From the way American Desis talk about arranged marriage, it is apparent that they consider it a disappearing and largely irrelevant practice. Though many of the participants' parents had an arranged marriage, and they all knew the nuances of this practice, they largely did not feel that it had much of a place in modern society, especially not to themselves. The first quote that explains this example is from Amitab, a Texas-born Gujarati-American who married a woman raised in India without using arranged marriage channels. His insights are thoughtful, and they flesh themselves out as he speaks in a way that indicates that he is making these connections while he is conveying them to me. He starts in high support of arranged marriage, and then changes direction to a more nuanced approach stating,

I think about my sister-in-law, [my wife's] younger sister in India, and I don't think their parents care to arrange her. I just think that concept is kind of dying off. It's like, 'why bother?' Because the problem is access. We didn't have access to other people, now we have access. You know, she gets 15 dudes on Hinge every day and like 200 on Tinder... so I genuinely feel that the concept of

arranged marriage might just be something that will continue to occur in the villages of India, I just don't think the metropolitan folks- the kids there- will have any desire to go down that route.

Amitab's understanding of the foundation of arranged marriage practices is that they serve to connect people who would otherwise be strangers, if not for a network in place that facilitates meeting. Typically, in arranged marriage systems, this network is known as 'the aunties' or '*rishtay walli* aunties' that loosely translates to the match-making aunties. This term simply refers to the women in communities who know many families and keep contacts with others who also know many families to set up eligible bachelors and bachelorettes among them. Amitab's quote implies that because of technological advancements that can present eligible singles to one another, there is no longer a need for the primary networks that once facilitated these connections. When he claims that arranged marriage may lose purpose everywhere except for "the villages of India," he assumes that those with access to dating technologies will inevitably choose them over the networks of aunties that serve as matchmakers.

Amitab's ideas about arranged marriage in contemporary society give off a sense of irrelevance. His perspective of the practice "dying off," paired with his asking "why bother?" makes it clear that in his experience, arranged marriage has little to no pertinence. Amitab's stance overlaps with studies that illustrate how arranged marriages have lost speed in a rapidly globalizing world (Shah 1996; Davé 2012). Amitab explained that access to other marriageable individuals has increased with dating technologies. His mention that "metropolitan folks" would not have "any desire to go down that route," seems to be reflective of his aversion to arranged marriage systems. Amitab's position

towards the practice seems outwardly rooted in pragmatism. However, the general feel of this quote, and his interview largely illustrated some sense of dismissal towards the tradition of arranged marriage, especially in its application to himself and his life. The majority of Amitab's language indicates an outdated practice, and his example of a close relative (his sister-in-law) not feeling inclined to engage in the practice seemed to reflect his own thoughts and feelings about it. Likely, Amitab's appraisal of the practicality of traditional arranged marriage becoming irrelevant, and his acculturation to the American mainstream worked in tandem to create his outlook on arranged marriage as an outdated practice.

Also sharing the sentiment of arranged marriage as a more outdated practice, was Fawad, a second-generation Pakistani Muslim participant. Fawad is a brooding type of man who speaks quickly and directly. He does not mince words and says exactly what he means the first time he is asked about something. Over the phone, his voice comes out a little garbled, and with the speed of his cadence, I have to ask him to repeat himself often. When asked about his position on arranged marriage, without any hesitation, Fawad states, "I feel like maybe way back in the day it had its benefits, but I feel like in today's time and today's society that we live in as Americans, it really doesn't have much of a place." Fawad's phrasing of "way back in the day" in reference to arranged marriage illustrates his belief of the idea that it is an outdated practice. As part of his response, Fawad highlights cultural assimilation by bringing attention to the "American" identity. In the process, he distances himself from the ethnic practices of "outsiders"/"not Americans." His quote hints at a dichotomous understanding of identity, implying that arranged marriage practices are not only outdated, but also un-American, and that these

practices hold no relevance to those who identify themselves as Americans. His example illustrates the burial of cultural practices found less appealing to the mainstream by minority groups. Rather than fostering an understanding that retains source and settlement cultures in which arranged marriage can be practiced alongside one's identity as an American, Fawad is taking a much more assimilated stance than many other participants.

Fawad's straightforward dismissal of the practice departed from other, more neutral references, though it held a similar position. Fawad did not explain how he felt arranged marriage did not "have much of a place" in today's society, however he mentioned that there was an aspect of unjust standards and expectations put upon people taking part in arranged marriage. His attitude departed from the general sentiment of others in the study, though it held its own merits and valid insights.

Another participant, Akshay, reflected a similar sense of irrelevancy of the practice to himself. Akshay was soft-spoken, though thoughtful and intelligent. He sometimes had to be asked to expand on his simple yet simultaneously complex answers to help piece together a full picture of his perspectives. He acknowledged that there are differences in success rates among love matches and arranged matches but he also accepted that he was not going to go the route of arranged marriage because of his progressive upbringing. Akshay said,

I knew that wasn't the norm anymore, but I also knew that was just kind of how things are done in India, you know, for that generation. And as I grew up, I'm pretty data driven, so I lean on statistics a lot and I started realizing: I actually think it's a pretty solid fact that arranged marriages have a higher success rate

[lower divorce rate] than love marriages, I thought that was a fun little fact, but you know, that was never in the cards for us, growing up. Just because we grew up in a pretty progressive area and my parents are really progressive minded. So they just- they would try and connect with the Indian community, but it was never like ‘you’re gonna meet someone that day and then marry them.’

When Akshay says “they would try and connect with the Indian community” he illustrates that while his parents took part in facilitating networks in which arranged marriage was an option, it was not expected of him to go down that path. Also, Akshay’s words, “that was never in the cards for us” was quite blatant rejection of the practice for himself. The implication here is that arranged marriage is a traditional, and even outdated practice that “progressive” people no longer engage. This implication does have a factual footing, as more educated Desi families in the Indian subcontinent lean towards Western cultural practices and less commonly practice arranged marriage traditions (Gupta 1976; Khurshid 2020).

Despite Akshay’s acknowledgement of arranged marriage’s “higher success rate” he shows no inclination towards the practice for himself and indeed married a Desi woman he met in college without the help of matchmakers. Akshay uses this statistic to justify the existence of arranged marriage as a legitimate marriage practice, rather than an argument for engaging in it himself. A reason for this may be the harmful and negative stereotypes in Western societies about arranged marriage. This logic fits with segmented assimilation, which emphasizes distancing cultural identity from practices disapproved by the mainstream. Although his level of assimilation means he may not resonate with the practice himself, Akshay used this logic to defend the marriage practices of his culture to

potential outsiders and to proactively combat xenophobic comments. Indeed, this general attitude of defending and rationalizing arranged marriage in the face of potential xenophobia was frequent throughout the interviews conducted.

### *Unattached and Ambivalent Attitudes*

Most of the participants indicated a sense of ambivalence towards the practice of arranged marriage. Participants simply addressed benefits, shortcomings and their own preferences when discussing issues of arranged marriage. More often than not their own preferences were to choose a match without the help of their parents or other matchmakers (except of dating apps). Indeed, many of my participants had more assimilated attitudes towards marriage and partner finding than their traditional counterparts.

The first example expressing ambivalence towards arranged marriage systems was from Mahira, a Muslim woman who seemed largely disillusioned with arranged marriage practices. She eyes the corner where the far wall meets the ceiling as she speaks in a measured tone. Her posture stiffens before she answers my question, which makes me worried that I have asked too much of her, but then she says,

I've seen it work for a lot of people and not work for a lot of people. I think sometimes going the arranged marriage route becomes a superficial marriage because you only know things that are visibly apparent and it does become about looks, education, career, money. But when you do it with the right intention and with the right reasons, it can work well.



Mahira's admission of mixed results stemming from arranged marriage processes when she says, "I've seen it work for a lot of people and not work for a lot of people" is very telling of her own ambivalence towards the practice. She makes no judgement on the value of the practice itself, and simply states what she has witnessed in her own experience. Subsequently, Mahira explains the problematic aspects of the practice, describing a tendency for it to become "superficial," but maintains neutrality by ending with conditions that enable it to "work well" in her opinion.

Mahira's mention of the possibility of a "superficial marriage" being enabled by arranged marriage systems illustrates an aspect of Western assimilation. The implication that she is making when she says this is that a marriage should be based on a deeper connection than simply meeting standards or expectations of physical and financial desirability. This sentiment was common in many participants and recurred in the previous themes. Traditional arranged marriage systems often focus on traits less centered on fostering a connection between two people and more on surface-level compatibility. Parents who work as facilitators of the system use these residual habits as the basis for matchmaking, despite their offspring finding it problematic. Mahira's statement regarding superficiality reflects her aversion to a major life step being based on these traits and characteristics. It shows a desire for a deep emotional connection that is more commonly associated with love marriages. However, emotional connections are more commonly becoming the trend for many forms of marriage, and in a rapidly globalizing world this desire is more common than not (Santhiveeran 2005).

Another example of ambivalent attitudes towards arranged marriage comes from participant Ranbir, a busy and bustling man with good intentions. He rushes through my

interview, though he takes care to give honest and well thought out answers. When I ask him this particular question, he pauses the longest out of the entire interview before responding with,

I don't think it's a terrible idea. I think there's some benefits to it, I think the good thing is people get married earlier and then they kind of grow together, and their opinions on relationships and stuff like that kind of grow and evolve together... only meeting someone for a handful of times is pretty tough. I think there's certain things that you won't know- you won't understand about a certain person- that you won't get out of meeting someone just a handful of times.

This practical assessment of pros and cons was a common trend among most of the participants, with only one of them completely disregarding the practice. Ranbir's framing of his attitudes about arranged marriage implies a general air of disapproval towards it, however his words create a much more neutral tone. When he says "I don't think it's a terrible idea" his phrasing implies that at some point, someone (be it peers, media or himself) did consider the practice of arranged marriage unacceptable and he has worked to address that perception. At the same time, this choice of words does not imply that arranged marriage is a particularly good thing that Ranbir condones either. In this context, he seems to be using hyperbolic language to overstate his stance on the idea of arranged marriage, and the implication is that he does not consider it a particularly good idea either.

Despite this negative air, Ranbir maintains a neutral attitude towards arranged marriage, like the other participants. Like Mahira, he simply lists good aspects of it and bad aspects as well, while leaving judgement out of it. What is worth noting here, is that

the question asked to participants specifically was “what are your personal feelings about the practice of arranged marriage” and no specific feeling was discussed. Instead, participants who answered the question answered in the most objective way, creating an attitude of ambivalence.

In a similar vein to Ranbir and Mahira, Aishwarya’s sentiments about arranged marriage are as follows,

I think it just really depends on the person... I feel like in some cases it can be very beneficial because I think that a person is a compilation of their past experiences and their influences. And I feel like- specifically looking at the influences part, because our parents influence us so much, I feel like for some people, like I don’t think I can say the same thing- but I do feel like some people who really admire their own parents really would want to strive to have something similar. And if their parents are the ones choosing for them, I think some people would be okay with their parents choosing.

This quote is one that draws attention to concepts of segmented assimilation in overt rather than covert terms. When Aishwarya uses the words “because our parents influence us so much” as the rationale for choosing or not choosing an arranged match, and then goes on to describe those who “admire their own parents” striving “to have something similar,” she is referring to acculturation. In no uncertain terms, Aishwarya explains the transfer of values and customs from parents to offspring by using the term “admire” as the measure by which offspring gauge and adopt or distance from their parents’ customs and traditions. She is implying that the children must themselves find value in these practices, or they will choose not to adopt them. By saying, “I don’t think I can say the

same thing” shows that Aishwarya does not particularly resonate with these practices, as her experiences and acculturation process have led her to not value the practice of arranged marriage for herself.

Aishwarya holds the same view as many other participants when she states that “it just really depends on the person.” Her explanation of this variation from person to person journeys well into sociological territory, when she describes individuals as “a compilation of their past experiences and their influences.” Aishwarya means that their upbringing, particularly their experiences with arranged marriage systems will determine their outlook on it and their willingness to engage in it themselves. Her apt observation easily explains the ambivalence of most participants, as they have a mix of positive and negative experiences within the system, but also find it mostly irrelevant to their personal lives, as explained earlier.

Perhaps the reasons for these ambivalent mindsets can be explained by examining the xenophobic attitudes around arranged marriage in western societies. While most participants expressed neutral attitudes, they digressed with the specification that they did not care to engage in it themselves. It is likely that in hearing misconceptions about the practice, they themselves have internalized this xenophobia, while they are outwardly addressing and refuting it, which leads to them shying away from engaging in the practice (Zhou, 1997). In addition to this, general assimilation trends create a sense of resonance with dominant cultural practices over time, regardless of the type of practice being changed (Shah 1996; Superle 2010). However, another reason for this trend is that there is a global tendency away from arranged marriage and towards self-selecting

matches, thus illustrating the irrelevancy that many participants felt arranged marriage had to themselves.

### ***Disapproval of Problematic Parental Standards***

American Desis discussions about the process of arranged marriage were complex and nuanced. There was a split between how Muslim and non-Muslim participants described arranged marriage, and thus a difference in these groups' understandings of the process. Muslim participants had more specific insights about the process of arranged marriage because they had more experience with it, while non-Muslim participants were more likely to find partners without the aid of their parents. Nonetheless, both groups had valid observations about the process of arranged marriage during their interviews.

American Desis expressed disapproval of their parents' standards when finding potential partners, while also reflecting a willingness to accommodate their parents' desires for their partner choice.

A common trend in American Desis discussions of the process of arranged marriage was their disapproval of their parents' standards in finding them potential partners. This theme was more common among the Muslim participants whose parents sought to find them an arranged match, and thus were more involved in their partner finding journeys. This rejection of parental standards was often aimed towards outdated and unjust cultural expectations, or different levels of assimilation. Sanam, a Muslim woman who is regularly vocal on issues of double standards, sexism and racism within her own community illustrated outdated cultural standards by saying,

I don't agree with the discrimination that is often seen in women. The women are judged not for their personalities, qualifications or values, but rather the color of their skin, where the lighter the skin the prettier they're considered in a lot of the Southeast Asian cultures.

Sanam's explicit statement being "I don't agree" is a rejection of the standards of her parents' culture that contains vestiges of sexism and colorism. These standards are called into question often by many Desis, as vestiges of colonialism manifesting in the form of colorism (Nagar 2018). Sanam's statement implies that standards like this hold no value to the character of a woman, but rather focus on her desirability as the trait that makes her worthy or unworthy of marriage. Her disagreement with this standard reflects that she critically examines and negotiates cultural practices in terms of values, rather than blindly accepting traditions that cause and exacerbate harm to those that fail to meet them.

In addition to this rejection of colorist double standards, Sanam's quote reflects a shift from traditional arranged marriage practices as to what should be looked for when finding a partner. Her focus on being "judged" for "personalities, qualifications or values" reflects a more equal standard across genders as a basis for partner finding. By placing values of character as the central preference in partner choice, she is redefining what is wanted from a wife (a gendered term, that indicates certain roles and expectations) into what is wanted from a partner (a genderless term that can indicate any person in a relationship), and fostering a more equal ideal for a marriage. Rather than one as disparate and arbitrary as the "color of their skin," the distinction Sanam creates is

indicative of a trend of rejecting harmful cultural standards and negotiating different measures of value and desirability in a partnership held for many participants.

Another example of a rejection of traditional standards was participant Hamaima, who has been through a divorce with a previously arranged partner. She spoke with clear eyes and in an honest voice that left no room to be misunderstood when she stated,

The younger generation is often looking for a connection with their spouse whereas our parents want someone that looks good on paper- good career, makes good money. We seek more of an emotional connection which is often overlooked, especially within the arranged marriage system where you are often not afforded the opportunity to get to know the person beforehand. There are also issues in trying to get an arranged marriage when you are not a typical candidate – divorced, elder aged, have a health issue, etc. It becomes much harder because they are not the traditional candidate.

This quote illustrates how second-generation Desis perceive generational differences in expectations and standards of arranged marriage. Hamaima highlights that second-generation Desis are seeking “an emotional connection” in a partner, and describes this as separate and even disjointed from first-generation Desis’ standards. Her mention of parents wanting “someone that looks good on paper” and then defining that by saying “good career, makes good money” illustrates this point of difference, as she does not resonate with it. Hamaima’s quote expresses her desire for the emotional connection and foreknowledge of a spouse that love marriage systems revolve around. Hamaima’s understanding of enacting marriage as a life step reflects a more westernized perception as it focuses on a loving emotional partnership, rather than the sense of duty and role

fulfillment that is centered in traditional Desi arranged marriages, indicating an assimilated attitude (Pande 2016; Ralson 1997). Her thoughts on the process of arranged marriage reflect differences between her own and her parents' standards.

Hamaima's quote also brings to attention non-traditional groups that she feels the system of arranged marriage overlooks or underserves. What she describes as a non-typical candidate is someone "divorced, elder aged, [and/or] have a health issue." Though she does not explicitly describe how the process becomes more difficult, it is clear that these candidates are seen as less desirable in an arranged marriage system. In a culture that values marrying once, typically as a virgin and staying with that person for one's remaining lifetime, the older and divorced candidates would not make ideal matches (Chandrasekhar 1954). Additionally, being introduced to someone on paper rather than in person makes it that much easier to disregard them at first glance based on discriminatory biases. Hamaima's point implies that the system of arranged marriage should make space for people falling into these categories, rather than pushing them to the outer edges of desirable candidacy. This point digresses from the traditional structure of arranged marriage, which is one that parents typically uphold to their offspring.

While more disapproval of the system was called out by Muslim women participants, the men and non-Muslims gave valuable insights as well. For example, Amitab said,

Now I didn't really like their [the parent's] algorithm at times, because it was like 'oh you're a doctor, let's find you another doctor, you're a dentist let's find you another dentist, you're an MBA find yourself another MBA.' It's just like, that's not the way it works. What if I'm an MBA and I want a doctor, or what if I'm a



doctor and I want my spouse to be at home, what if I personally want to be the person raising children and I marry a spouse who's gonna be the breadwinner of the family. Those are the aspects that I don't think they necessarily spend enough time looking into.

In this quote, Amitab draws a parallel to dating apps, by calling the parents' filtering process an algorithm. He uses the term "algorithm" as the process by which the elder generation sorts through and narrows down potential matches between a wide pool of single adults. While he is referring to parents specifically, it should be noted that parents of marriageable adults are considered integral to the process of arranged marriage, as introductory channels and facilitators of marriage to their own children and others (mothers of family units are often the *rishtay walli* aunties themselves). Amitab's quote calls into question the sorting method that older generations use, which seems to be based far more on traditional values to create matches rather than the actual wishes of the people in search for a match. When he describes the system that parents use and then refutes it by saying he "didn't really like" it, his disapproval for this practice is clear. When he says "that's not the way it works" Amitab seems to imply that the filtering method of parents in arranged marriage systems is flawed and too simplistic in its use of superficial matchmaking approaches.

This statement also reflects a more assimilated identity in which Amitab resonates more with people in western cultures that seek deep emotional connections from their partners, rather than desire to be matched up by their qualifications. Indeed, this matchmaking system is more indicative of Desi cultures that often rely on caste systems and religious homogeneity and less on personality traits and chemistry (Santhiveeran

2005; Shah 1996). These inconsistencies between older and younger generation methods for matchmaking and marriage processes in general tended to create tensions between parents and their adult children. The disparities were especially present in Muslim participants as they were more likely to engage in arranged marriage systems.

### *Selective Alignment with Parental Standards*

On the reverse side of this issue, most participants also considered their parents' preferences and standards in a partner when choosing their spouse. A delicate balance was created with the participants' negotiations in partner finding capacities, between themselves and their parents. While participants disagreed with many of their parents' standards, they kept many of them in mind, often citing familial harmony as part of the reason for their partner choice. For example, Sanam said this in regards to her spouse choice,

Having gone through two arranged marriages I can say that I definitely care about how my family feels about my partner and how my partner feels towards my family. It is very important to me that my family love my partner and that he love them as well. The way I found him was not as important to me in that I didn't mind if it was arranged as long as him and I are compatible.

Sanam's quote illustrates the importance of having a partner that gets along with her family and vice versa. Though her quote reflects a personal preference for interaction with her own family this view was shared by many participants, especially the Muslims. It is likely that the reason for this commonality is the close familial structures that Desis are more likely to have, as vestiges of community-centered, collectivist cultures that are

common within the Indian subcontinent (Shah, 1996). This is one of the reasons that arranged marriage is so prevalent in Desi communities and cultures (Shah 1996).

Sanam's desires for a close familial interrelationship between her spouse and parents indicates her parents' own desires for a family-oriented match for her, and thus reflects hers and her parents' shared expectations. If Sanam were to choose a partner that did not match her parents' expectations and standards, the familial harmony she seeks would be harder to come by and may complicate both her relationships with her parents and her spouse. Sanam's words imply that her partner did match her parents' desires and expectations, whether her choice was conscious or not.

Another example of elder generational standards being considered and even catered to came from Hrithik who said,

My parents have this expectation that I marry a Newar girl, who is from our ethnic group, but for my younger brother who is like, completely American, they really wish, at least, that the girl is Nepali, right? So that level of expectation- in a way, that kind of shows that they understand that we have changed.

This quote shows that Hrithik's parents' expectations for him and his brother's future partners, however Hrithik does not clarify his level of acquiescence to these standards. Hrithik's awareness of his parents' standards is still indicative of a desire or perhaps a sense of obligation to consider these expectations in his partner choice. Though Hrithik was open to the idea of an arranged match, he admitted to leaning more towards finding his partner, but still considered the cultural context that his parents ascribe to and expect from him.

Conversely, Hrithik's mention of the difference in the "level of expectation" that his parents hold for him compared to his brother revealed differences in approval of cultural assimilation for parents, depending on their specific offspring. Hrithik's parents accept that his brother will not engage in a partner finding process like they expect Hrithik to, and that their standards for a partner for his brother are much more flexible than his own begs further analysis. Hrithik considers this difference as a sign that his parents are changing and accommodating to the cultural shift that comes with diaspora experiences. A similar pattern of flexible marriage expectations held true for many participants. Some mentioned their older siblings and cousins who trail blazed paths that broke tradition and lessened their expectations. This shift in perspectives enable second-generation Desis to negotiate culture and identity with their arranged marriage. Through patterns like this, Desis can simultaneously reject some cultural standards, while carefully considering and abiding by others based on what they consider compatible with their values. These values reflect some degree of assimilation and acculturation for all second-generation Desis.

The last example of considering and abiding by parental wishes is Syra, a young Muslim participant who had an arranged marriage and is a rare, active supporter of the system. Syra speaks with the quick gab of someone who genuinely loves talking over the phone. Though I can't see her through our phone interview, in my mind she becomes a 90s Rom-Com character who is smacking gum and twirling the phone wire between her fingers as she describes her life in hyperbolic detail. In regards to accommodating her parents' wishes she said,

I feel like it was very beneficial because personally, I don't know if I could have found- well I probably could have if I tried hard enough, but finding someone who's successful and stuff is also a big deal... and that was kind of like a benefit of arranged marriage because obviously your parents want to see you with someone successful.

Syra's quote shows parallels between hers and her parents' expectations. When she says that finding someone successful is "also a big deal" and then draws a link to the arranged marriage system which she interchangeably uses to refer to her parents, she is approving this expectation for herself as well. In this quote, Syra is not only expressing her parents' desires, but aligning her own goals for a partner with them. This pattern held true for most participants, meaning that they followed the standards of their parents that they themselves agreed with, and rejected the standards that did not match their ideals. Syra's acquiescence to arranged marriage practices departed from other participants' as she was the most in favor of it. Her support is reflective of the support she felt she received from her parents, and their emphasis of retaining the cultural and religious practices of their heritage. Syra's example is one that shows an intentional lack of acculturation that she adopted from her parents.

Another point worth analyzing from this quote is the way that Syra frames getting a "successful" partner in terms of arranged marriage. She is using the term "successful" to mean financially stable enough to support a spouse and eventually a family, which is the same context that many Desis use it in when referring to potential partners. Men who are most desirable in arranged marriage systems are typically those with a prestigious job/career and earn more money. Even though Syra acknowledges that it was plausible

for her to find a “successful” spouse on her own if she “tried hard enough,” the implication she makes is that these men are more common or perhaps more easily accessible in arranged marriage systems. However, different people have different types of experiences within the system, and many participants did not resonate with Syra’s sentiment. It is likely that there are not more “successful” men within the pool of arranged marriage candidates, but that parent standard specifications create more access to specific career categories. Syra’s framing of her desires aligning with her parents’ expectations shows how these standards coincide between older and younger generations. However, other examples show that the agreement depends on the offspring’s values, which are not completely traditional.

The themes discussed earlier are significant contributors to the ambivalence of my participants about arranged marriage. A general sense of irrelevance to their lived experience, as well as complicated and often superficial processes that seem needless in our current day have all distanced Desis from the tradition of arranged marriage. Perhaps arranged marriage practices are becoming outdated in contemporary society due to access to other resources, like Amitab mentioned when speaking of his sister-in-law. It is likely that the circumstances that led to the existence of arranged marriage no longer apply, and thus people no longer choose to engage in it. In accordance with this idea, a majority of my participants mentioned other resources like dating apps, being introduced to potential partners through friends, and using online resources like shaadi.com (wedding.com) to find a spouse instead. In fact, many participants even considered shaadi.com an evolution of arranged marriage itself and recalled their own friends and family members that used it to find spouses, though none that I interviewed had used it personally. I argue the

previous themes discussed contributed to the ambivalent attitudes of American Desis found in this study. All of the themes pulled from the interviews collected reflected a sense of assimilation that second-generation Desis engaged in through their arranged marriage outlooks as well as their identity negotiation.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study examines the attitudes and expectations of second-generation Desis towards arranged marriage systems. There were some shortcomings in this study including that the sample size was 14 people, which may not have been enough to accurately portray the diversity of the Desi experience in America. This research also gave specific focus to Pakistani Muslims, particularly Ahmadi Muslims in terms of their experiences and attitudes towards arranged marriage. Another shortcoming of this research is that the Centrality of Religiosity Scale that was employed was Eurocentric and not inclusive of all religions. Future research on this topic can branch in a variety of directions, including understanding how the parents of second-generation Desis feel about arranged marriage, and about the younger generation's assimilation patterns around marriage. Studies detailing different understandings of acculturation practices and how they influence marital choices would be valuable additions to the field. In addition to this, doing cross-cultural research within Desi cultures to understand why arranged marriage is more common in some immigrant communities than others could bring compelling findings, and doing research across different sects of Islam rather than within one specific sect could bring about fascinating findings.

In general, marriage practices of American Desis and Desis across the world are changing as a result of globalization and access to contemporary technologies. There are likely several reasons for these cultural shifts. I argue important factors in the process are acculturation, segmented assimilation, and identity formation that second-generation American Desis experience during their socialization as members of a new culture. This thesis examined previous research about arranged marriage, including that of identity



negotiation and globalizing marriage practices to create a background for the research conducted. The study itself qualitatively interviewed 14 American Desis from various ethnic and religious backgrounds to analyze and interpret their attitudes and expectations towards arranged marriage systems. The questions this study aimed to answer were: what are the attitudes and expectations of American Desis towards the system of arranged marriage? How do these attitudes and expectations differ from that of their parents/previous generations?

From the 14 interviews, several themes and patterns emerged. Patterns showed higher religiosity scores correlated with Muslim identity and with practice of arranged marriage systems. The qualitative themes discussed in depth in this paper are: 1) a general sense of irrelevance of arranged marriage practices to American Desis' lived experiences, 2) selective approval of parental standards paired with rejection of problematic aspects of the arranged marriage process, and 3) a sense of ambivalence towards the practice of arranged marriage itself. These themes were analyzed in depth, in the context of a Segmented Assimilation theoretical framework, that focuses on the patterns of acculturation, assimilation and integration that immigrants take part in.

The research concludes that arranged marriage is losing relevance in contemporary society due to acculturation as well as a number of other reasons, including other potential resources for partner finding, and segmented assimilation patterns that are part of the diaspora experience. The research shows that the immigrant experience impacts the retainment of cultural heritage in meaningful ways. From this study, it can be assumed that there is a gravitation away from arranged marriage by American Desis. In a more globalized world, this practice may steadily decline in all groups over time, as

issues like access become less relevant in determining marriage type. As mentioned in the introduction, marriage is a dynamic and ever-evolving cultural concept. This study documented one of the ways that marriage is evolving in our present day, through immigration processes. Some may regard this change in marital practice mournfully, for loss of a historical tradition, however even old traditions can be negotiated and revised over time. American Desis retain many aspects of their source country's culture, but they also assimilate and acculturate to their settlement country's practices (Zhou 1997). This process of acculturation does not necessitate a total departure from one's heritage, but rather creates a third culture that retains aspects of both and all of the cultures from which it originates (Lijadi 2019). Arranged marriage is one of many practices that undergo change in the immigration process and should be understood within this context.

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