

"To all the little girls who are watching this, never doubt  
that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance  
and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams." – H.C.

THE EDUCATIONAL CHOICES OF SECOND GENERATION  
SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN IN ONTARIO: HOW AND TO WHAT  
EXTENT DOES PARENTAL PRESSURE INFLUENCE THEM?

by

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A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Education

in the Graduate Academic Unit of Education

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This report is accepted by the  
Dean of Graduate Studies

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

August, 2018

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## **ABSTRACT**

South Asians make up the largest visibly minority in Canada, and South Asian women are the most likely of all female visible minorities in the country to achieve post-secondary education. Little is known about the challenges this group faces when making choices about their education and career. Parental pressure can be seen as a major force behind how these choices are made and can often alter the course taken by these young women. This study looks closer at second generation South Asian women in Ontario, their experience with parental pressure when making educational and career related choices, and how the group can be assisted in reaching their true and full potential based on their own dreams and aspirations. Findings indicate that parental pressure regarding educational and career choice is prevalent among South Asian youth in Ontario. Second generation South Asian women struggle with managing parental pressure and seek help in communicating and navigating difficult conversations with their parents, as well as assistance from counsellors and South Asian mentors in helping them make more informed choices for themselves while managing conflict at home. Finally, this study finds that South Asian women feel a sense of suppressed potential stemming from cultural barriers, genders roles, and pressure to get married.

## **DEDICATION**

Asher, bedankt voor al jouw liefde, geduld, aanmoediging, steun, en je bereidheid om de laatste twee jaren het eten te bestellen. We hebben samen zo veel plekken bezocht, maar nergens is het beter dan thuis om samen met jou in de sofa te genieten van witte wijn en chips. Je bent de wind onder mijn vleugels.

To Mikhail and Malaika, for teaching me to be unabashed in the pursuit of knowledge.

May your sky have no limit.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To the inspiring young South Asian women involved in this study, your words are enlightening and energizing. This research project would not have been possible without your willingness to share your stories and reflections, which through my research, I hope to share with the world.

I would like to thank my research project advisor, Dr. Ellen Rose, for her guidance and support not only during this research project but throughout my Master's degree. I would also like to acknowledge Professor Alan Sears and Professor Liz Sloat for all their guidance, feedback, and expertise during the process of my writing. To my classmates, and professors, I would like to thank you for your time, input, and advice, during various stages of my Master's degree. I am privileged to have had the opportunity to learn from and with you.

To my family here in Toronto, and friends all over the world, your encouragement and support have been a constant and much needed source of energy and motivation over the last few years.

Finally, I would like to thank my father, Rashid Raza, for coming to this amazing country, so that I could be born and raised here and be able to live a life of freedom, liberty, and opportunity.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

I cannot recall when exactly it was that I was first asked at school about what I wanted to be when I grew up. I was old enough to understand that if I wanted to become something I had better start planning, but young and naïve enough to not understand that I needed to seek the permission of my parents before making this choice. I have vivid memories of telling my family that I wanted to become an archeologist, or possibly a pilot. There were many such careers that I oscillated between, and while they were as different from one another as the career choices of a middle-school-aged child could be, they had one thing in common- they were all rejected by my parents. I was told, years before I had even been in a relationship, that such careers, which did not allow a woman to be at home and take care of her family, were not suitable choices for me.

My family felt, like many in the Indian, Hyderabad, Muslim, Shia community with which my parents associated may have, felt that an archeologist travelled much too far and long to be able to cook for, feed, and raise her family. A pilot traveled and enjoyed a presumably luxurious life and career, which was seen as promiscuous and noncommittal. A career which led you to meet so many people, in so many places, was counter-beneficial to a stable family life with a husband and children. Every few months, I would change my mind and try to find something more suitable to the life that I was told I destined for.

Ultimately, I was accepted to a world class program for a Bachelor of Mathematics at the University of Waterloo, one of the best universities in Canada. It was a program which I applied to and attended mostly because I had high enough grades and



because it sounded great to be able to tell people that that was what I was going to be doing, not at all because I wanted a career as a mathematician. At that point, I still didn't really know what I wanted to be when I 'grew' up. After much pleading to allow me to live on campus, my family reluctantly obliged, and also soon pulled me out when they discovered that I was romantically involved with someone. My only option was to transfer to any program, at any university within a commutable distance from home, which offered a relatively employable degree. It wasn't until 15 years later, after almost a decade of marriage, having lived in four countries, and becoming a mother to two children, that I really asked myself again – 'what do I want to be when I grow up?'. After much thought, in 2015 I decided to return to school to pursue a Master's degree in the field of education.

### **Contextualizing South Asian Diaspora and Family Dynamics**

South Asians trace their origins to eight countries, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Véron, 2008). Post 1960s, many South Asian migrants built up strong communities in Canada, mostly settling in large urban centers such as Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal (Rajiva, 2013). My parents moved to Toronto in 1976, with a one-year old son (my elder brother, who incidentally is now a physician) and very little money. During that era many South Asians discovered that their education and work experience were deemed almost worthless in Canada and they found themselves having to go through costly and time consuming re-training (Rajiva, 2013). Some however, chose to turn to what may now be clichéd professions, such as driving taxi cabs or running grocery stores, because they

could not afford the expensive commitments of upgrading or acquiring more/better education (Rajiva, 2013, p. 18). This is perhaps where the seeds of educational dreams were sown, not for themselves, but for their children, who may not have even been born yet.

During my childhood I was often reminded of the importance of family and relatives. We made numerous trips back ‘home’ to India in the summer, or school year - often missing weeks of classes so that we could meet our extended family and see where our parents were born and raised. South Asian culture promotes the welfare of the family, which usually includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Shariff (2009) states “individuals are expected to sacrifice their personal desires to ensure the well-being of their families when individual and group goals conflict” (p. 37). This is often the case in many immigrant families who may even send money back home monthly to ensure the financial well-being of their parents and younger siblings. Prior to 1993, when Canadian immigration regulations changed making it difficult to sponsor family members other than the ‘nuclear’ family (Dench, 2000), many South Asian immigrants would sponsor family members/siblings for immigration to Canada so that they could be together and provide their children with the feeling of being raised around relatives and extended family members. It was my father’s eldest brother, who lived in Montreal, who had sponsored him, my mother, and brother to come start a life here.

As many immigrants soon realize, the journey to Canada is perhaps the easiest part of their new life. Like my own parents, many immigrants struggle with unemployment, underemployment, multiple jobs, and shifts in gender-based economic and domestic roles, and as a result their children may not get the attention they deserve

(Tyyskä, 2008). This however had an opposite effect in my home, and the homes of many families in our social community (which at that time consisted largely of Indian Muslim families from Hyderabad). Among South Asian diaspora, the pressure for children to succeed and provide redemption for the hard work that parents had devoted their whole life to has always been paramount. Shariff (2009) posits that “South Asian parents often perceive their children’s individuation as a loss of control, and encouraging adolescent autonomy is not considered desirable” (p. 37). For children being raised in a bicultural environment – which for some could mean South Asian at home and Canadian outside the home, this results in heavy influence from their parents and families in many of their life decisions (Shariff, 2009). Regulations may be placed on anything from dress code and sleepovers during middle school, to dating and attending prom and parties in high school, to what they will eventually study, where they will live, and even who they will marry, or not marry.

My hometown - Brampton, Ontario has a population that is nearly 40 percent of South Asian descent (Ahmed-Ullah, 2016); a very different city than the one I grew up in, where I was often the only ‘brown’ student in my elementary class. As I grew up, more and more South Asian students filled the seats of my classes, and by high school, I can recall, my chemistry class had 25 South Asian students, in a class of 30. This phenomenon may be common across the country. According to Statistics Canada, Canada’s South Asian population will represent up to 9.2 percent of the country’s population by 2031, growing from 1.6 million in 2006, to 4.3 million (Statistics Canada, 2010a).

When looking at the educational aspirations of this group it can be seen that Canadians of South Asian origin are more likely to achieve undergraduate and graduate degrees than the average Canadian (Statistics Canada, 2001). In 2011, the largest portion of all visible minority women in Canada, just above 24 percent, were South Asian, and Ontario is home to 28 percent of those women (Statistics Canada, 2016). At par with other visible minority women, approximately 40 percent of South Asian women are successful in achieving a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree at bachelor level or above (Statistics Canada, 2016).

### **Statement of Research and Importance of Study**

With the statistics and cultural issues mentioned thus far in mind and drawing from my own personal experience as a second generation child born in Canada, to Muslim parents from India, I began looking at parental pressures, fueled by cross-cultural factors, and how those pressures affect second generation South Asian women's choices regarding education and career outlook. This report includes a review of literature on the topic of South Asian women and educational choices. The methodology and method for this study are also examined, including participant recruitment strategy and interview questions. Finally, design limitations as well as directions for future research, are highlighted. For the purpose of this paper, I refer to the definitions of generational status provided by Statistics Canada, which explains that first generation refers to people who were born outside Canada, second generation includes individuals who were born in Canada and had at least one parent born outside Canada and third generation (or more)

refers to people who are born in Canada with both parents born in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Review of literature on this topic shows that researchers vested in South Asian diaspora, and education studies are looking at the phenomenon of education and career choices of this demographic. Many theses and articles on this topic, which are reviewed later in this paper, show that post-graduate South Asian female students face challenges in managing the demands of their parents, not just with regards to their studies but also when it comes to culturally complex issues like dating, marriage, and gender roles. Much research has been done in the UK and some important studies done in Canada as well, which analyze the experiences of second generation university students who are of South Asian heritage. Some studies break down the South Asian demographic by religion, focusing on Pakistani and/or Muslim women only, or divide findings by religious affiliation (Hindu/Sikh vs Muslim women). It is important to see that research done in American, Canada, and the UK, all places with a significant South Asian diaspora ('Mapping migration', 2011), found that students face challenges regarding multi-cultural identities, parental pressure regarding education and cultural conformity, and conflicting perspectives within their homes on gender roles.

This study examines if and to what extent issues found in the literature exist in the lives of second generation South Asian women in Ontario who are pursuing post-graduate studies and how those women can be supported in their decision making process. Ultimately, the intent is to expand on what can be done to assist these women in managing any pressures or challenges presented by the bi-cultural reality of their lives. It is important to find ways to help young South Asian women in Ontario, who are making

hard choices about their future, education, and life, and provide support and guidance on how to navigate parental pressure, manage choices that are culturally conflicting, and make decisions about their lives that are driven by their own desires, ambitions, and goals.

This study focuses on South Asian women in Ontario and will attempt to not only determine if this group faces challenges in managing parental pressure regarding educational and career choices, it will also look at understanding whether support and assistance is needed for this group to be able to manage these challenges and decisions, which not only impact their lives but ultimately shape our society. If we wish to grow at the rates proposed by Immigration Canada, and maintain our stable economy, education systems, and quality of life, we must capitalize on the potential of not just immigrants but also children of immigrants and ask ourselves whether we are helping them reach their potential and supporting them in taking advantage of the amazing opportunities for which their parents came to this country. This study analyzes the effects of parental pressure on educational choices of second generation South Asian women in Ontario, and provides insight on the issue through seeking answers to the following question - *Do parental pressures affect second generation women of South Asian descent in Ontario with respect to their educational and career choices, and if so, to what extent?* In addition to this question this study goes on to ask the following questions in an attempt to unearth potential resolutions to this issue:

1. *How, if at all, do second generation women of South Asian descent in Ontario manage parental pressures with respect to their educational and career*

*aspirations?*

2. *Can this group be assisted in making choices that are more aligned with the vision they have for themselves, as opposed to that which the community and their parents may have for them? And if so, how?*

3. *In cases where a member of this group has chosen to give in to pressure and make alternative choices, how can we help them realize their full potential within the cultural restraints placed on them by their multicultural identity?*

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review analyzed second generation South Asian women in Canada and determined what research exists describing factors which may affect their educational and career choices. Literature analyzed in this review includes articles from 2000 to present which encompass studies done in the recent past. Articles reviewed originate in countries with high South Asian diaspora, United States, United Kingdom, and Canada ('Mapping migration', 2011). I was able to find ample literature from the UK which looked closely at higher education and career aspirations of South Asian women, and also divided this group along geographic and religious lines. There is some valuable Canadian research on this topic as the South Asian immigrant population is growing substantially and community members find themselves experiencing challenging interactions between multiple generations tackling issues like identity, cultural conflict, and gender equality.

Literature selected informs the primary research question, how and to what extent does parental pressure influence the educational choices of second generation South Asian women in Ontario? Three themes were identified based on the literature reviewed: prevailing encouragement from South Asian parents towards their daughters' pursuit of higher education; parents' influence in channeling their daughters' choices towards stable and practical education and career options, such as medicine, law, business management, or engineering and finally; parental pressure on children to fulfill high expectations and to serve as a source of pride among the community.



## **Prevailing Encouragement Towards Pursuit of Higher Education**

My initial assumption was that research would show a lack of support from South Asian parents for their daughters' pursuit of higher education; however, I found that research in the UK, Canada, and the USA shows the contrary. Parents not only encourage but often pressure young South Asian women to attend university and pursue Bachelor's and Master's degrees. According to one UK study done by Abbas (2003), South Asian women feel that their parents and community provide them with support and encouragement for the pursuit of higher education. Abbas (2002) also infers that most South Asian families wish to empower their daughters, so they can obtain better opportunities in the job market as well as in the 'marriage market' (p. 423). In his study, only a small portion of women faced resistance towards carrying on with their post-secondary educational goals.

Researchers Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) identify that Muslim women from this demographic in the UK seek to pursue higher education for reasons including personal interest, financial stability, greater respect from the community, and better options when considering marriage (p. 12). Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) also found that obtaining a degree was the core aim of both daughters and their parents, as both felt that parents tried to give children what they didn't have. Focusing on a smaller subgroup in his studies in the UK, Abbas (2002) mentions a young Muslim Indian woman in his study who expressed her parents' continuous support of her work and ambitions. She also mentioned that most people in her family had high educational qualifications.

It is interesting to note that the enrolment of South Asian women in higher education institutions in the UK has been increasing over the last few decades. A study

by Bagguley and Hussain (2014) shows that attendance in university among British South Asian women went from exceptional to routine. They found that this has resulted in upwards social mobility among this group, changes in gender roles and community perception of women. Their findings challenge prevailing perceptions of South Asian women as being uninterested or perhaps passive when it comes to higher studies or destined for arranged marriages (Bagguley & Hussain, 2014).

When attempting to find information on this topic in the North American context, I came across similar findings. In the United States, second generation South Asian women are encouraged to pursue higher studies, despite heavy involvement by parents in their choices and options (Eveland, 2012). When looking at this trend in Canada, South Asian women are under immense pressure to perform well academically (Aurora, 2015). In her study, Aurora found that the main reasons behind this pressure was the obligation of young women to utilize opportunities to which their parents had limited access and somehow redeem the sacrifices made by their parents. In Canada, South Asians along with Chinese immigrants are seen as the “model minority”, pursuing higher education more often than similar children of native-born parents living in Canada (Somerville & Robinson, 2016, p. 101). Aurora (2015) concludes that South Asian parents are driven by a desire to open doors for their daughters’ futures, and to uphold the “minority model” image. Often, immigrants are more educated than the Canadian-born population as a whole, but regardless of their own educational qualifications, South Asian parents place a high level of emphasis on education and in particular university attendance (Somerville & Robinson, 2016). Aurora (2015) finds that some parents may even pressure daughters to perform academically as a means to steer their daughters away from social engagement

outside their home and exert control over how their time is spent after-school, ultimately limiting time for a social life. Parents often remind their daughters that time for socializing will come after completing their studies and achieving success (Aurora, 2015).

Although research findings indicate much support and encouragement from South Asian parents toward their daughters' pursuit of higher education, as I anticipated and as the research I analyzed confirmed, there is a caveat to this support and encouragement. Tyrer and Ahmad (2016) explain how some parents believe that education can enhance marital prospects, or conversely hinder them. The possibility of becoming too educated or too career oriented was seen as a set back in the 'marriage market' and this often is a factor in discussions regarding career choice (Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006).

Many South Asian woman make compromises regarding what they will study and also where they will study (Bagguley & Hussain, 2014). Knowing that relocation to far away universities will not receive parental approval, some young women apply for secondary choices closer to home as insurance. For some, the option to move away for studies did not exist even if the program was exceptional (Bagguley & Hussain, 2014). As a result, complex negotiations can ensue, and compromises made to ensure choices are in accordance with parental expectations.

Navaratnam (2011) reports that some South Asian youth in Toronto face pressure to choose careers that are worthy of the sacrifices made by their parents when they migrated here. However, there was leeway for the daughters; it was almost as if they wanted daughters who were educated but did not have a career (Navaratnam, 2011). Some participants from her survey stated that in the long run even being unemployed was

acceptable, as long as they acquired a degree first (Navaratnam, 2011). This theme repeated itself across the research reviewed in all three geographic regions: while most South Asian parents did encourage their second generation daughters to study and attend university or college, it was within the boundaries that were laid out by the parents. Many compromises are made by young women who seek to somehow fulfill their own desires while treading on the path set for them by their parents.

### **Channeling Choices Towards Stable and Practical Educational and Career Options**

South Asian immigrants in the USA value material security (Eveland, 2012, p. 7). As Eveland (2012) discusses in her research findings, these parents value financial success and consider it the highest priority when planning one's education and career. In her study, Eveland reveals that parents' desire for financial success is fueled by the struggles of their early years as immigrants in a new country. South Asian parents therefore discourage their children to pursue careers they perceive as volatile or risky. Additional stipulations for daughters are that a career must allow for fulfilment of all other familial duties as defined by South Asian culture (Eveland, 2012). In her study, Eveland (2012) came across participants who expressed that careers such as hairdresser, considered non-traditional in South Asian culture, are often discouraged or even forbidden from a young age. However, if the stability and financial potential can be justified parents were inclined to give in and allow their daughters to pursue something other than science or law, although this was not the case with their brothers.

Studies in the UK had similar findings. Some parents extended the list of permissible careers to include teaching, but only for women. British women discussed

how teaching was seen as a stable and practical career for women by South Asian parents as it does not ‘interrupt’ family life and is considered a noble profession, allowing a good balance for a girl (Butt, MacKenzie, & Manning, 2010). Other South Asian parents from Britain stuck to the traditional favorites often suggesting their daughters pursue alternatives within those fields, like optometry, dentistry, architecture, all suggestions that would fulfill their expectations but perhaps provide some variation (Bagguley & Hussain, 2014). Young women in the UK stated that they often form a hierarchy of career options to choose from which would likely be permissible by their parents (Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006).

South Asian parents in the USA pressure their children to pursue careers in fields they view as stable, respectable, traditional, risk free, high paying, and employable and do not want to think of their children as wasting the opportunities they have provided for them by choosing alternative career options (Eveland, 2012). Some South Asian women even feel ‘brainwashed’; their minds shaped from a young age to believe that they should only consider options like medicine, engineering, law, or business management, which have been advocated by their parents (Eveland, 2012). In the UK, a Bangladeshi participant of a study by Abbas (2002) expressed feeling torn between cultures, having always been told ‘you can’t do this’ or ‘what will people say’. These women either rebel, or give up and give in, like one participant did when she agreed to get married at 19 (Abbas, 2002).

While research shows that South Asian youth are pressured toward choosing stable and practical careers, an additional requirement for women was to ensure that the pursuit of these choices did not clash with their domestic duties and responsibilities of

having a family and raising children. Many South Asian women in a Toronto-based study done by Aurora (2015) expressed that their parents often want daughters to achieve some perfect balance of domestic skills and academic achievement, often a tug of war between the mothers and fathers with the daughter in between. The pressure of domestic responsibilities begins from the time these women are in high-school and does not always apply to their brothers.

In her study on South Asian youth in Toronto, Navaratnam (2011) discusses a system of negotiation among South Asian families where options are weighed, and everyone must come to an agreement regarding the path to be pursued. These conversations can be difficult if parents do not understand the education system, the programs, and options available. Navaratnam (2011) also found that a career in medicine was given top priority and that Torontonians women of South Asian descent surveyed said their parents feel the program options in Canada are too flexible and often get confused with the different paths and tracks available to choose from. Ultimately, the subject - business, science, or arts - is what matters and emphasis is placed on choosing the 'safest bet' – which ultimately were the careers with which South Asian parents were most familiar (Navaratnam, 2011, p. 68). Navaratnam (2011) found that 80 percent of her interviewees responded that medicine was the preferred choice for South Asian youth and that South Asian parents expect that sons and daughters will pursue professional careers which guarantee employment upon graduation (p. 68). In another study focusing on South Asian women in Toronto participants also described being pushed to pursue careers in medicine, perhaps to fulfill unrealized desires of the parents, while some were clearly bullied into choosing a 'real' science (Aslam, 2011).

Aslam (2011) goes on to explain that mothers of participants in her study often push their daughters to acquire higher education in order to impress potential suitors, while fathers may encourage their daughters to become financially stable and pursue careers allowing them to provide for themselves if need be. This scenario, however, is the least preferred. Women are often reminded that it is their husband who will provide for them and that there may even be no need to pursue anything too ambitious for fear of being perceived as too smart and turning away potential matches who may not want a career minded wife (Aslam, 2011). South Asian youth in all three countries felt pushed to pursue careers which provide a 'comfortable' life, and the pressure largely revolves around careers in medicine, engineering, law, or business.

### **Pressure and Emphasis On Careers That Fulfill High Expectations and Provide A Source Of Pride Among The Community**

In South Asian families non-compliance toward educational expectations can result in shame and loss of prestige, and alternatively compliance can be a source of pride (Somerville & Robinson, 2016). Fear of gossip among the community regarding what their daughter does or does not do is a major reason why barriers and control mechanisms exist in the first place, to gear them towards a path that will produce pride for family (Somerville & Robinson, 2016). Eveland (2012) reports that first generation South Asian parents are often proud of the "model minority" stereotype and "seek to perpetuate it in order to push their children to upward mobility" (p. 6). In her study in the USA, Eveland's findings show that most South Asian students felt that their parents would be unsupportive of an unconventional career as it would not invoke pride and allow parents

to compete within the community. American students of South Asian descent expressed that parents were solely interested in career choices that would allow their children to earn a lot of money (Eveland, 2012). Students expressed frustration that parents did not understand or care about the importance following one's own passion, as educational goals for their children were fueled by a culture of competition among the community to have the most successful children. It seems as though parents are competing to see whose hard work paid off the most, by evaluating whose children earn the most. Navaratnam (2011) reports that participants in her study were frustrated that their parents could not explain their arts careers to friends in the community and that there was a deep lack of interest to learn about these non-traditional careers as they were not perceived as something that could be bragged about.

South Asian women in a study done by Aurora (2015) in Canada express that their parents' desire for them to pursue higher studies is often fueled by a need to achieve or maintain a social status among friends and community, either helping them move up the social ladder by having a son or daughter who is a doctor, lawyer, or other high-profile professional, or helping maintain their social status among friends whose children are pursuing medicine or law. Aurora (2015) states that academic expectations come from social systems and values rooted in family, community, and culture, and that academic status often means social status among the community. In her study, Aurora (2015) concludes that pride, reputation, dignity, and status are all words that can be inflated or deflated with educational achievements. Navaratnam (2011) asked South Asian students in Toronto the difference between guilt and shame and found that students referred to guilt as an emotion resulting from disappointing their parents or not meeting



their parents' expectations, whereas shame was when everyone else in the community knew about it.

For some women living away from home is not an option. Often when accepted to multiple universities South Asian women are pressured to choose the nearest option to avoid moving away and living on campus (Abbas, 2002). This can often mean giving up a dream opportunity only because it does not fit the geographic preferences of their parents. They may be seen as uncultured if they move away and ultimately it is the reputation and image that must be preserved within the community, that is at stake (Aslam, 2011). When community norms require that women live with their parents till they are married, deviating from this would mean losing face in the community; however, some exceptions can always be negotiated. In her study, Aslam (2011) notes that some women are sometimes matched with a marriage partner prior to joining university, perhaps to remind them that there is a husband or fiancé waiting for them, and some are betrothed to prevent them from finding boyfriends of whom the family would not approve. In an effort to balance the goals of education with the timeline of finding and marrying a husband some women stated that they were allowed to live away from home if accompanied by a brother or male cousin (Aslam, 2011). Some liberty may be given to study away from home if conditions of the family are fulfilled, for example, betrothal, engagement, so as to have an answer to give to the community when questions are raised as to why cultural protocol may have been broken. South Asian parents feel that while there is pride in having a daughter studying one of the prescribed subjects, the pride is negated if she does not promptly marry (Navaratnam, 2011). Family dynamics also play a large role in how South Asian women choose their educational paths and careers (Aslam,

2011). Children are seen as an extension of the family and thus a source of pride or shame to the family unit, and since many of these young South Asian men and women are the first generation to achieve post-secondary education, the pressure to fulfill the dreams of their parents is tantamount (Mani, 2011).

Despite the pressures and challenges faced by South Asian women in the studies reviewed, it is evident that most do give weight to the input of their parents, and seek advice regarding educational choices (Eveland, 2012). Whether this consultation is done out of fear, admiration, or as a means of disaster prevention, is still to be discovered. It is important to remember as well that any inability to fund their own education can often provide little ground on which to stand and negotiate with parents (Aurora, 2015).

### **Conclusion of Literature Review**

The vast majority of research reviewed used qualitative research methodology and open-ended interviews as a primary method of collecting data. Most interviews were conducted in small university settings with less than 20 participants. It would be interesting if ethnographic research could be undertaken where researchers could analyze the home environment and interactions between parents and children, which may provide a more holistic perspective into the lives and choices of this group. In some instances, surveys and interviews were conducted, while one researcher took the bold step of interviewing parents separately in addition to the children.

While literature reviewed includes studies in countries with large a South Asian diaspora, here in Canada we have a unique environment in which trends show increasing numbers of immigrants coming to our country yearly. By 2036, over 25% of Canadians

will be foreign born (O'Doherty, Katem, & Turner, 2017). It is also projected that the number of immigrants belonging to South Asian religions, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism, will rise (Cain, 2017). Toronto and surrounding areas remain the first choice of residence for the over three million South Asian immigrants anticipated to arrive in the region by 2036, and this group will maintain their status as the largest visible minority group in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). Considering these statistics, we can infer that cross-cultural and cross-generational issues will remain prevalent in the lives of young multi-heritage Canadian women.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### Theoretical Framework

This study follows a qualitative research methodology that is influenced by a constructivist/ interpretivist paradigm. Constructivist/interpretivist researchers attempt to understand social phenomena from a context-specific perspective (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006, p .8). The aim of the researcher is to understand the context in which participants' viewpoints and experiences exist (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Challenges faced by immigrant children, and children of immigrants are less known to non-immigrant Canadians, and in particular, those faced by South Asian youth, can be better highlighted in our society. Clashes that occur as a result of South Asian cultural values conflicting with more individualistic Euro-Canadian ones, can result in huge challenges among South Asian youth and affects their ability to manage their dual identity (Shariff, 2009). In an attempt to understand the perspectives and experiences of second generation female South Asians with respect to educational and career choices, it is important to determine what participants feel about parental pressure in their lives, to what extent it exists, if at all, and how it may influence their choices. However, to do this, it is first necessary to understand the context of their multi-ethnic identities and experiences.

Thanh and Thanh (2015) indicate that research within the constructivist/ interpretivist paradigm predominantly uses qualitative methods. Qualitative research asks broad research questions, attempts to explore, interpret, and understand social context, and involves data collection techniques such as interviewing and observation, in which research is gathered directly from the participants, by researchers who are immersed

within the research settings and interactions (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). It is crucial to select a research method which is supportive of gaining deep insight into participants' lives and assists in acquiring a better understanding of their past experiences and visions for their future. Lodico et al. (2006) assert that the use of qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews, brings researchers close to the participants. It is this close connection which facilitates learning about the personal experiences of the participants in this study. One of the advantages of the constructivist/ interpretivist approach is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participant, while enabling participants to tell their stories (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). The requirement of discovering personal, intimate, and likely confidential details about participants' experiences with their parents, families, and life choices, steered me to follow a constructivist/ interpretivist paradigm, and to explore further qualitative research methods.

### **Recruitment and Participants**

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) state that “the quality of a piece of research stands or falls not only by the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy that has been adopted” (p. 100). For this study, volunteer sampling combined with snowball sampling were used (Cohen et al., 2007). In order to access a sample of the demographic group, South Asian/ Indian/ Pakistani and Bangladeshi students' associations were approached to solicit volunteer participants. Potential volunteers were also invited from a network of South Asians, whom I know from my own life and experiences with the South Asian Community in the Greater Toronto Area. Tilley (2016) posits that “recruitment success is necessary to begin

research and this process should consider if the research is designed in a way that will encourage individuals to want to participate” (p. 102). Participants who may be invited through relatives, classmates, and friends, may feel more comfortable with volunteering their time and personal stories. Once connection with a willing and eligible participant was made, snowball sampling was used, to identify, contact, and invite additional participants in their social and professional networks who have characteristics which fit the requirements for this study.

Due to the scope of this research project, four young women were recruited for study participation. The aim of interviewing this small sample is to understand not just how parental pressures affect educational choices among this demographic, but to also understand how we can help this group with the challenges they may face. Participants’ age ranged from 18-26 (age of average post-secondary students (Statistics Canada, 2010b). They were females of South Asian heritage currently enrolled in a full-time post-secondary program in Ontario. As per the criteria, interviewees were Canadian by birth or must have immigrated to Canada by age 6 – Senior Kindergarten. This requirement ensures that participants had completed all schooling in Canada and not in the country of origin of their parents, or other locations. All parents of potential participants should be born and raised in South Asia, of South Asian descent, and have immigrated from South Asia to Canada. This is to ensure that the primary cultural influence on the family dynamic is South Asian, and not perhaps resulting from a combination of cultures if the family has lived in multiple regions around the world.

## **Data Collection**

Within the qualitative paradigm, interviews have been used extensively in the past and continue to be used when conducting research involving human participants in education (Tilley, 2016). Interviews were the data collection tool of choice for this study as it aims to determine the participants' feelings, interpretations, and reactions to a set of life experiences (Lodico et al., 2006). For this study semi-structured interviews were used. Semi-structured interviews establish a core of issues to be covered, but at the same time leave the sequence and the relevance of the interviewee free to vary (Freebody, 2003). In order to maintain more control over the environment and interactions, interviews were done face to face – one on one, scheduled for 60-90 minutes with additional time scheduled to accommodate any requirements for more discussion. Appendix A attached provides an interview guide for this study, which includes an initial set of questions that served as guiding probes to the interview. Open-ended questions were used to allow participants to lead the conversation to issues they may have felt were important to discuss in relation to the research focus (Tilley, 2016).

Locations of interviews can themselves influence the interview and discussion. Elwood and Martin (2000) suggest that the interview site produces “micro-geographies of spatial relations and meaning, where multiple scales of social relations intersect in the research interview” (p. 649). For this study, interviews were held in a quiet semi-private setting. Considerations were: semi-private sections of campus, meeting rooms on campus, quaint coffee shops off-campus at or near post-secondary institutions in the Toronto-Waterloo Corridor, which has a significant South Asian heritage population to

recruit participants from (Gee, 2017). These semi-private settings helped provide a neutral place to conduct interviews in which power dynamics between the researcher and interviewee was intended to be more balanced (Elwood & Martin, 2000). Sites were chosen to provide an environment in which interviewees would not feel a sense of interrogation or questioning but rather be in a place where they can open up, feel comfortable and relaxed to speak about their experiences. Notes were taken during and after interviews, but to achieve a verbatim account of the interviews, they were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded once they were completed. Each participant was interviewed only once, and was contacted again as part of ensuring validity through member checking, which Cohen et al., (2007) suggest helps assess intentionality, correct factual errors, and offer respondents the opportunity to add further information.

Tenni, Smith, and Boucher (2003) explain that there is a growing trend for researchers to view themselves as both subject and researcher and collect data about themselves in addition to the interviewee. In this study my own answers to interview questions are included as data, providing my own experiences as a South Asian woman making decisions about education and career. I completed the interview before the participants and my responses were typed to allow immediate transcription as I answered the questions.

### **Data Analysis**

The goal of qualitative data analysis is to uncover emerging themes, patterns, and concepts (Suter, 2012). In order to ensure data is in a form that can be analysed, interviews were transcribed from audio recordings (Lodico et al., 2006). In order to



capture data during the interviews, I compiled field notes, which contributed to analysis by capturing verbal/non-verbal aspects of the interaction such as facial expressions, environmental contexts, behaviors, and other nonverbal cues (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Suter (2012) states: “Words combine into meanings, but meanings must be sorted, interpretations considered, and conclusions reached” (p. 350). Raw data from field notes and interview transcripts must be processed before they can be analysed (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Data collected for this study were coded to identify emerging themes and patterns. Common themes in each interview as well as across interviews were grouped to identify important issues which may be relevant to the questions asked in the study. In addition to Descriptive Coding, which assigns nouns as code labels, InVivo coding, was also used which uses words and short phrases from participants’ own language, and is suitable for studies that prioritize the participants’ voice (Miles et al., 2014). Codes were grouped into a thematic network of global, organizing, and basic themes, where the global theme informs the overarching question asked in this study, organizing themes relate to the three sub-questions, and basic themes were derived from data collected in the interviews (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The three questions that are analysed in this study ask about negotiating parental pressure, assistance in making choices, and guidance to reach educational and career potential. In the crucial step of synthesizing data, every attempt was made to represent findings and participant stories as faithfully and respectfully as possible (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Findings are supported with quotes from interviewees, providing evidence that any emerging themes have come from the participants’ interviews and not the mind of the researcher. Data synthesis was followed by reporting of findings, limitations of the

research, recommendations and other topics as defined by the research advisor for fulfillment of this Master's Research Project.

Suter (2012) posits that “many researchers argue that the most important criterion for judging a qualitative study is its credibility” (p. 363). Credibility of this study was enhanced in two ways. First, a data analyst other than the researcher reviewed the data collected from the interviews, in order to address potential biases and selective perception of one lone analyst (Patton, 2002). The second strategy to enhance credibility was to engage in member checks, so that those who provided the data can point to irregularities (Suter, 2012). Yet another critical element of credibility which was applied in this study is reflexivity. Tilley (2016) reminds us that “within a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm, researchers recognize the impossibilities of separating self from research and the importance of recognizing and accounting for the bias that does exist, to ensure that credible research is conducted” (p. 159). Reflexivity is a researcher's conscious effort to be aware of their own reactions to respondents and the way research is constructed (Berger, 2015). I am aware that similarities between my own cultural background and that of the participants' positions me as an 'insider' (Tilley, 2016). In this regard, as Berger (2015) points out, I may be able to hear the unsaid or interpret what may not be overtly communicated to me. To address this challenge and minimise the impact of my position as an insider, who is all too aware of the issues related to this study, I kept a three-part journal, which Berger (2015) suggests can help document what was said by the participant, what it may mean, and what they felt about it (p. 230). Differentiating between actual data derived from the interviews, and assumptions that may be made by

the interviewee is critical to avoid contaminating the stories of the participants with the hypotheses of the researcher.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Each participant received an information letter and signed a consent form prior to the start of the interview. Copies of transcribed interviews were sent to participants to review and correct if required. Copies of the final report were sent to all participants who indicated that they would like to receive a copy. All names were replaced with pseudonyms in interview transcripts, and all identifying information was removed. All data collected relates to participants' views about parental pressure regarding educational choices and how women can be supporting in this decision-making process. Once interviews were transcribed, the audio files were deleted. Data was stored on a password-protected computer and will be deleted two years after the completion of the research.

## Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data

Following the data analysis procedures described in Chapter 3, I identified nine basic themes which are categorized under three organizing themes. Profiles for each participant are provided (names replaced with pseudonyms), followed by details of themes which emerged during data analysis.

### Participant Profiles

**Participant 1.** Sana is in her early twenties, studying arts and business at a university in the Southern Ontario region. Her roots are Muslim-Pakistani. Religion and culture play a big role in her family life. Both Sana's parents have post-secondary education. Sana has older male siblings who are both university graduates. She discusses support received from her siblings in influencing her parents regarding her educational choices. Sana feels there is a lack of ethnic representation in the workplace for female South Asian women. She feels that South Asian women often do not seek their full potential.

**Participant 2.** Indra is a student at a university in the Southern Ontario region. She is now studying health sciences and psychology after switching her major earlier in her degree. Indra is in her early twenties and comes from a Hindu-South Indian family. Her parents hold post graduate designations. Her heritage plays a big part in her household. Her educational plans align with her parents' goals for her. She speaks passionately regarding lack of gender equality in South Asian culture, which results in different expectations for sons and daughters when it comes to educational goals.

**Participant 3.** Rabab is a sociology student in her early twenties. She attends

university in the Southern region of Ontario. Rabab comes from a Muslim-Pakistani family and has a large family comprising of all female siblings. Her parents' education is unclear to her; however, she has always felt pressure to achieve high grades and educational success. Rabab discusses how many of her friends are leaving school to marry in their final year or are marrying shortly after graduation. She discusses the need for South Asian parents to recognize their daughters' autonomy and let them lead independent lives in which they make choices for themselves.

**Participant 4.** Vaani is a university student in Toronto, completing her B.A. in environmental studies. She is in her early twenties. Vaani has an older male sibling who has completed his undergraduate studies. Vaani's parents hold post graduate designations. She comes from a Hindu-North Indian family. Education is very important in her home, which at times has caused her anxiety and stress. She speaks of seeking support and guidance from her sibling and older friends regarding educational decisions, as well as gender bias in South Asian culture.

**Participant 5.** Mariam Raza, I am a Masters student, working as a college Professor. I have been married for over 10 years and have two children age 5 and 6. I have an older male sibling who is a doctor, and a younger male sibling who is a journalist. I come from a Shia-Muslim South Indian family. South Asian culture and Shia religion played an extremely important role in my household growing up. Particularly I experienced a lot of pressure regarding marriage, and cultural and religious conformity. I experienced challenges with gender roles, cultural conformity and ethnic identity conflict.

## **Emerging Basic Themes**

Data analysis for this study breaks down findings into nine basic themes which are organized according to the three sub-questions identified earlier.

### **Organizing Theme 1 - Managing Pressure.**

Interviewees were asked if parental pressure existed during the process of discussing or making educational choices. Many topics and themes surfaced in their reflections; however, overall three basic themes connecting to this topic prevailed. Participants discussed parental influence and pressure in their lives, they explained how parents pressure children to pursue higher studies at the best schools, and they also brought to light the consequence of choosing majors which align more with parents' choice and the struggles of pursuing those choices and potentially switching majors later in their degree.

*Parental Influence.* As seen in the literature reviewed, South Asian parents typically play a large role in the educational pursuits of their children. Participants of this study discussed how parents are an influencing factor in their educational choices, not only at admission time but throughout their secondary and even elementary schooling. They reflect on how this pressure steers their choices and ultimately limits their options.

“I just think overall parents have a huge influence especially on South Asian children’s lives...” ... “I think that we- a lot of girls pursue majors in sciences or health sciences again, that’s because that’s what our parents tell us to do. I think the types of majors that are chosen by South Asian females are very much in line with what our parents want us to do...”  
(Indra)

“...what I said earlier about [how] talking to your parents [about majors] is being the common factor in all of them switching - we literally just had

to have that one hard conversation with our parents – and that was that. But I know that’s not the case of a lot of people where it’s like because parents will just be like- ‘No. That’s not how it’s gonna go down.’”  
(Sana)

“They still have big influence on my life too and maybe because they want me to continue education, they want me to do Masters. But they’re very risk averse, they don’t like me taking risk, they don’t want me to drop out of school, they don’t want me to take a year off, they like that traditional path, and those are some values that I think never break for them. Those are the things where both my brother and I have just respected. We’ve pushed a lot of the limits constantly, but this is something that we can’t argue with them on.” ... “I think money also plays a big role in it too.”  
(Vaani)

My own responses regarding parental influence mimic those of some of the respondents, I explain, “My parents wanted me to finish fast and get married. There were no positive influences – just trying to get by and finish a degree of some sort”. Parental influence is commonplace in the lives of the young women involved in this study. Participants also speak of pressure to choose educational paths which parents feel are suitable options for their children. This involvement begins often in elementary school and secondary school, when pressure for high grades, after school tutors, and comparisons to others in the family and community, can be a source of stress and anxiety for South Asian youth. Pressure is often unmanageable and can result in students compromising by finding solutions which they have little motivation to follow. Often majors and study paths are tweaked, changed, and altered to suit the requirements set by parents of these young women.

*Pursuit of Higher Education at Reputable Universities.* Two of the participants in particular spoke of how their parents' expectations of them to attend a reputable university influenced their educational choices:

“For us I remember college wasn't even an option. You would just - every single South Asian student in our school went straight to OUAC [Ontario University Application Centre], and I realize there's no alternative schooling promoted to us at all. It was just like- oh Waterloo, UofT, Queens that's it.” ... “But, they did definitely want me to get into a professional degree. They wanted me to get into pursue higher education like everyone else has done. I think combined in our family [we have] like ten PhDs or something ridiculous like that. So that was again something that they wanted me to do as well.” (Vaani)

“For me, my parents were just like- you need to get a higher education and go to professional school. It wasn't necessarily a set career path and they want me to be successful, but they value education a lot so it – it's almost never- it was never an option for me not to pursue higher education” ... “they [were] always like undergrad isn't a higher education- for them, they wanted me to go to professional school or graduate school. So, I think for them they were like- whether that's doing your masters or whether that's doing something else, you just need to do more education.” (Indra)

In my own case, moving away from the city or country was never an option, in fact I was encouraged to apply to the university or even college campus which was closest to me home, and complete the shortest possible program. But, it is interesting to understand what fuels the desire for many South Asian parents to push young daughters into higher education at reputable universities. None of the four participants discussed considering colleges in Ontario during their applications or pursuing vocational studies, nor did they discuss any of their siblings pursuing such options. All four participants had siblings who had pursued or were pursuing studies at reputed universities in Southern Ontario or United States.



*Changing Majors.* All participants spoke of awareness of South Asian peers in their educational settings who had considered changing or had changed their major subject of study as a result of initially choosing a field which did not align with their own aspirations. Vaani, Indra, and Rabab mentioned that as children they had believed that they wanted to become doctors but realized during high-school and university that it was in fact what their parents had pressured them into, and that they had no real interest in pursuing studies in medical science. Participants felt that the preferred path in South Asian parents' perspective is almost always to become a doctor or lawyer and as a result students are often found changing majors later in their degree. When discussing changing majors, the participants described their experiences:

“...I wanted to become a doctor at a very young age, of course....like those classic ones” ... “and then I slowly realized that sciences obviously wasn't really my thing so I decided law was the option, because that was one of the four choices that we actually had” ... “they were pretty disappointed but I think obviously again they do everything out of love so it took them time, for them to understand that I didn't want to go into a science degree.” (Vaani)

“So, a lot of them, so many of them were in science because their parents were like – this is great you're in a great science program” ... “and then so many of them switched to arts degrees because they were like we just hated it. Like we didn't like it – it wasn't what we wanted to do.” (Sana)

“So that [becoming a doctor] was something that I was like – ya this is totally what I wanna do and then I got to biology class and I had to dissect animals and I did not like it, so I realized that that wasn't for me” ... “I kind of didn't really tell them” ... “but eventually they found that I was doing sociology and what not and they were not that happy. But they kind of expressed their disagreement with what I had chosen, and I didn't really engage in conversation very much, and I just kind of left it at that.” (Rabab)

“So I actually went to [name of university] doing med-sci as my first year and I hated it so much, and that was again, I thought I wanted to be a doctor and then I hated it a lot and then I came back after first year and

told my parents, I was like- I absolutely hate this, I can't do it and they were like- ok no worries – second year just explore options.” (Indra)

Sana, Vaani, Rabab, and Indra all went on to discuss how being forced, coerced, or pressured to choose a major which is based on the choice of parents can result in students disliking their educational journey, feeling pressured, confused, and even depressed during their degrees. The interviewees mentioned students feeling cornered and not knowing what to do after two or three years in a degree which they have no interest in completing. Many times, the only way to manage pressure regarding choice of major is to simply begin first year in a program of your parents' choice and switch later on when you have built confidence or support to do so, or to just give up on your dreams.

When discussing subject majors, in my own responses to the interview questions, I reflect, “I simply chose a relatively employable program at a nearby university. I realized upon graduating that I did not at all relate to the program that I took...”. While I did not change majors during university, I ended up making a career change and returning to school 13 years after graduating from my undergraduate program, taking three years off to restructure my career, change industries, and really focus on what it was that I wanted to pursue as a career. It is evident that young women participating in this study experience parental pressure regarding choice subject and/or major of study. Their coping mechanisms include, allowing parental involvement to reduce stress and conflict, accepting their parents' wishes regarding program and/or institution, or even changing majors during undergrad in order to find something more suitable to their liking.

## **Organizing Theme 2 - Where Is Help Needed?**

There were a few themes that prevailed when participants discussed how South Asian women can be assisted in making better aligned choices. Rabab, Vaani, Indra, and Sana all agreed that little assistance was available for young South Asian women who wanted to obtain help navigating educational paths and parental pressure. They discussed the need for high school and university counsellors to be aware of South Asian culture and the conflicts that come with living a multi-ethnic life. Further, the need for female South Asian role models was discussed, along with how skewed participation in ‘traditional’ career paths meant that future generations who needed role models in ‘newer’ fields did not have any mentorship available from women who they can identify with and feel represented by. Finally, the need for guidance and coaching on how to communicate with parents regarding educational choices was also brought up.

*Need for South Asian Counsellors.* Participants suggested similar trends exist in the area of academic counselling in high school as well as university, despite attending institutions with largely culturally diverse student bodies.

“The support I got in high school in terms of choosing my career options, even though my high school was like 99% South Asians- I felt like the conversations that were being had about university and everything weren’t really addressing the specific struggles that South Asians face. So, you know they did mention like- oh don’t give into pressures from your family about what you wanna do because it’s your career. But when it’s coming from an older white woman who obviously maybe had a little bit of push back from her family and then they said, ‘oh were happy for you’, that’s not really the narrative that goes on in South Asian households” (Rabab)

“But I don’t feel like South Asian students reach out any sort of like educational [counselling]. I just feel like we don’t because we don’t think they’re going to understand. Cause why would a white counsellor understand your South Asian problems at home?” (Sana)

“I don’t know like at least at [name of university] academic counselling is like terrible. So, I think like changing those types of services would be really really helpful.” ... “... maybe having more personalized support to different ethnic groups would be beneficial.” (Indra)

Reflecting on my own high school years, approximately 20 years ago, I recall very little support offered to those who attempted to manage any mental health related issue. I comment, “educational institutions did nothing for support in my day”. While most guidance counsellors at my ‘very South Asian’ school were white, I had hoped to see some change in this phenomenon when embarking on this study. However, participants of this study noted that they felt seeking counselling services was a waste of time or hopeless effort, either due to lack of sufficient resources (according to Draaisma, 2018, the average ratio of Ontario student to guidance counselor is 396 : 1), or lack of appropriate resources- counsellors are rarely South Asian and white counsellors are seen to have little understanding of the complex cross cultural issues which these young women need to discuss. Participants discussed hesitation in seeking academic counselling both in high school as well as university due to receiving advice that was inapplicable or irrelevant to their lives and the challenges they were seeking to address as second generation South Asian women.

*Need for South Asian Role Models.* When asked if they feel South Asian women need assistance in managing pressure, participants reflected that there was a need for role models who they could identify with. In particular, there is a need for South Asian role models in most fields which are not typically pursued by South Asian women. Sana spoke of her astonishment at discovering American comic book creator and writer Sana

Amanat, who is a director and editor for Marvel comics. She mentioned that she was surprised that there was such representation of South Asian women in the comic industry. She discussed the need to see more South Asian women in a variety of fields not only for purposes of mentorship but also to provide parents with an example of an ‘unconventional’ career that was pursued by a successful South Asian female. This topic was also brought up by other participants:

“Support from other South Asian women who have been through the same thing is really really important cause you’re kind of told that you know this uh, cousin of yours and this niece that your mother has and everything like that- is a perfect South Asian women who does everything right so then you kind of believe that you’re the anomaly and you’re the only one making waves and you should just sit down and be quiet. But once you see that there’s other South Asian women that have been doing the same thing having the same thoughts as you, you get a little more encouragement and you feel more empowered to speak your mind.” (Rabab)

“For me it was seeing other South Asian women doing things that I wanted to do and getting that energy and that inspiration was awesome. Seeing a senior classmate going into Bachelor of Arts, I finally saw a lot of myself in that. So, I think, seeing like those kind of role models. Especially in education.” (Vaani)

“And it’s funny cause I find myself looking for -like it makes me feel so much better if I see like a South Asian woman at work - an older South Asian woman at work. And I don’t see that very often no matter where I go [names of three large multi-national companies where she has worked for her co-op placements]” ... “and I think I would love to see more of that ‘cause I think it kind of like- something in you is just like- oh if she can do it I can do it too- ‘cause it’s like visual representation...” (Sana)

There seems to be a chain reaction- where the phenomenon of South Asian women being pushed into what are traditionally acceptable careers according to their parents results in a total absence of role models for young women who are seeking mentorship from women in careers that are unconventional and uncommon. In my own response, I comment on not only the desire to have been able to connect with a South Asian role

model, but also other South Asian parents who had parented those successful women and who could speak to my parents, I reflect,

“I would have loved for an older Indian aunt or uncle to [speak] to my parents, but there was no one. No one to tell my parents they were being unreasonable. I also had little guidance, few South Asian women who I could speak to in confidence about my choices, few role models in the community or outside, very few examples of South Asian women who pursued their dreams and got married and succeeded by measures that I would value and my parents would value as well.”

While participants did not express wishes to connect with other South Asian parents as I had, the desire to speak to and connect with older South Asian women who have gone through similar experiences, or who are leaders in fields that are perhaps conventionally appealing, is still, it seems met with a dearth of role models and mentors in the South Asian community through whom they can gain inspiration, advice, and guidance. This can be a source of frustration and can point young South Asian women towards abandoning the choices they once hoped to pursue, which in turn can lead them to continue in fields that are less appealing to them, but at least please their parents.

*Need to Communicate with Parents.* Participants were asked how their relationship with their family was. While responses varied, some mention of strained familial relationships was brought up. Rabab mentions that she has a very formal relationship with her parents, which results in little dialogue regarding her life and education. Sana mentioned that her brothers step in to eliminate the disconnect between her and her parents at times. She speaks about friends who are often too scared to talk to their parents. Vaani mentions pressure from her traditionally mannered father being a source of anxiety until recently when he began realizing he had been very harsh on her

and her sibling in their upbringing. I reflect in my interview responses on the struggles of being the first child to break barriers, despite being the second born. I reflect,

“[you are] considered a rebel and deviant because [you] unapologetically make choices about [your] life according to what [you] want.” ... “[It takes] some time to do that and [can cause a] lot of trouble and problems...”

When discussion moved on to how strained relationships and culturally conflicting views can inhibit dialogue between young South Asian women and their parents and whether assistance was needed in this area, participants said:

“A lot of my friends- when I went to [name of university] for example, they could never drink in front of their parents so that was like completely taboo.” ... “I find that my other South Asian friends can’t do that with their parents like I feel like a lot of my other South Asian friends are like almost scared of them or they like- their relationship’s not as open as mine is with my parents.” (Indra)

“If it was a high school the one thing I would stress would be like talk to your parents. And I think a lot of people don’t do things because like- I was like this too where I just didn’t think my parents would understand so I just didn’t talk to them. But surprisingly our parents also have brains, and they have the capacity to listen. Um, [talking to them] which has helped me a lot. So, I think it would help someone a lot too cause I just- I’ve heard my friends mentioned- oh I’m too scared to talk to my dad about it, which it’s like- just do it, just get it out and rip the band-aid off. Have that conversation which is really tough but it’s so worth it in the long run.” (Sana)

“If they see how committed and dedicated you are to what you’re doing and there’s no insecurity on your end I think that will- ya that will definitely [convince them] cause in the end of the day I realize more of our parents hopefully just want the best for us.” (Vaani)

Further discussion revealed that lack of communication between young South Asian women and their parents can stem from fear, guilt, or anxiety. Some participants mentioned that older siblings play a big role in easing the discomfort of difficult

conversations, and that they were thankful that it was the older sibling who had “broken” the rules, which made life easier for the younger siblings. Young South Asian women often need guidance, perhaps from older siblings, cousins, or classmates, or other older South Asian women, on how to navigate conversations with their parents, how to approach the topic of educational and life choices. One participant mentions that she never would have even applied to a university away from home if it wasn’t for her brothers stepping in and speaking to her parents, ultimately gaining their approval for her. It can be seen that many opportunities are lost from poor communication between daughters and parents. Communicating with parents on conflictive and challenging topics may be seen as more difficult than just giving in to pressure.

### **Organizing Theme 3 - Suppressed Potential.**

Participants were asked what South Asian women who have pursued educational choices which were not fully driven by their own choices should do to realize their full potential based on their own aspirations. The four young women spoke about cultural restraints that come in the way of South Asian women pursuing goals for themselves as the initial issue. They named cultural barriers, gender roles, and marriage as issues that restrain South Asian women from realizing their potential.

*Cultural Barriers to Reaching Potential.* A common theme across interviews was that participants felt young South Asian women in Ontario (and elsewhere) were not reaching their full potential. While the reasons given varied, there existed a consensus on the fact that cultural barriers prevented young women from making the choices they



needed in order to live their life on their own terms. When asked- what is the biggest outcome of parental pressure, participants said:

“I guess they just -that they don’t reach their full potential. So, even if there’s something that they’re good at, if it’s not something that they themselves are passionate about, they’re never gonna give that 100% percent. So instead of having a bunch of mediocre doctors in the world we could have you know tonnes of really really great environmentalists and sociologists and stuff but we don’t have that because they’re pressured to be in a certain [educational] environment that they don’t want to be in.”  
(Rabab)

“I think if anyone puts like a negative expectation on you or like something that’s if you grow up in the same household as a boy and their expectations are set differently it would make a female feel worse. I think if any one is treated unequally- inequality kind of makes people just not like -like, achieve their highest potential.” (Indra)

With so many options unexplored, and pressure to choose from a small pool of majors, South Asian women often give up on what they dream of and as stated by Sana and myself, settle for the best option in a given circumstance.

“But it kind of I feels like South Asian Women have yet to seek their full potential and I think parents are like – just – not even in a negative way but they’re just kind of like this like road blocker” ... “I think they definitely have negative impacts... like not letting them achieve their full potential” ... “I think the biggest outcome is just like, there’s a word I’m thinking of. Um, I don’t know if its stagnant but like not like- or like mundane but not just being, like - just settling I think yes, that’s the word I was looking for. I think we settle.” (Sana)

“Too many girls not reaching their potential, selling themselves short. Giving up on their dreams and doing things the way their parents want.”  
(Mariam)

*Gender roles.* Another issue that was discussed during interviews with participants was that of gender roles and gender inequality in South Asian culture. I bring up this topic in my own reflections as well, saying

“...[family] focused only on my brother’s education as a medical school student.” ... “they wanted me to finish fast and get married.” (Mariam)

Participants spoke of being treated differently by parents, family, and community when comparing to their brothers or other male counterparts. On being asked if culture plays a big role in her household Rabab answered:

“Definitely so there’s a lot of restrictions in terms of what I can do. And um, especially as a female there’s a lot of certain roles that are expected of me to fulfill.”

Sana, Indra, and Vaani discuss cultural barriers and being treated differently than South

Asian males:

“I think the older I get the more I realize um, that um, being a Pakistani, Muslim, woman I think there’s so many doors that you don’t realize have been closed for you that you feel like you to work so much harder to get to.” (Sana)

“I do think it needs to be changed. Um. I think sometimes my parents don’t see me as smart as my brother or like as able as my brother. [Interviewer: Do you think that’s an age thing or a gender thing?] I think it’s both. Sometimes I think it’s more gender because I feel like I’m mentally the same age as him.” (Vaani)

“It literally enrages me. I think- I just think if you have -it’s fine if like that’s your expectation for both boys and girls, but I think if your setting different expectations for your sons and your daughters that’s like completely ridiculous and I think its irritating that it’s so embedded in South Asian culture obviously as we know, that boys do have different expectations than female and I hope that changes.” (Indra)

Long durations of studies, options which require young women to live away from home, and careers that are seen as limiting to a young woman’s ability to manage a career with

family, are all crossed off from the lists of young South Asian daughters, but this is not always the case for their male counterparts. Participants discuss this issue as one that has a huge role in limiting their ability to realize their potential and achieve what they may dream of achieving.

*Marriage.* Moving on from gender roles, some participants mentioned expectations for young women to marry after their education is finished and how that can affect the choices of young South Asian women. In my own reflections, I often comment on arranged marriage and the pressures I felt to finish my studies and get married. I comment on feeling that education was just a stepping stone to getting married, feeling that not getting an education was ok but not getting married was not. I also comment that simply studying and remaining single was an impossibility. The two participants who spoke of marriage expectations have religious affiliation in common with me, as they both come from Muslim families. They stated:

“My friends who do have brothers will notice that a lot more pressure was put on them in terms of getting a good career and everything. [Interviewer: on the boys?] Yes, where as for the girls they could have chosen, you know I know it’s a stereotype, but like psychology at York University drop in third year and then get married to your cousin from Pakistan. So that’s definitely quite normal in the South Asian community and I feel like that’s not really taken as a serious problem like it’s super normal and I would see tonnes of my friends getting married and nobody really says anything about it.” (Rabab)

“I think the main expectation is get your bachelors and get married, because I have so many -even I have friends who are literally getting married like in -so were all graduating next year...they’re getting engaged this summer or things are happening for them to prep them for that. Um, cause I think it’s like- I feel like when a South Asian woman is born there is like a checklist. And like parents are just checking off the boxes as they go along. And for men the checklist is very short. For them it’s just- get your education, get a job.” (Sana)

All participants spoke about how important it is for South Asian women to live their own lives and make their own choices. Rabab states that despite immigrant parents making sacrifices to raise children in a new country, it is still her life to live and that South Asian parents need to recognize “the autonomy and agency of your own children”. Sana also feels that women need to “just do the things you have to do because this is your life”. Indra’s advice is to listen to your parents but also listen to yourself. She feels it’s important for parents to realize that no one else is living their daughter’s life, and that South Asian women still need to find what is best for them. Discussion elaborated on the existence of road blocks in the paths of South Asian women who aspire to become more than what their parents may plan for them, and that overcoming these barriers is a difficult task even for those who have the courage to navigate through them.

## **Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusions**

### **Discussion of Research Findings**

This section will reflect on the questions asked in this study as well as findings in comparison to literature reviewed.

#### **How, if at all, do second generation women of South Asian descent in Ontario manage parental pressures with respect to their educational and career aspirations?**

Participants of this study described parental influence over educational decisions in their lives as well as coping methods such as, allowing influence and interference, pursuing higher studies at universities which their parents would approve of, and choosing majors which would please their parents – even if later they would change to a different major. Similar to the participants in studies reviewed, participants in this study also describe how parental expectations limited them from considering career options and educational paths that they may have found fulfilling and better aligned with their own aspirations.

Literature reviewed discusses research participants in studies in North America and the UK feeling pressured to pursue medicine and other professional degrees such as Law and MBA (Bagguley & Hussain, 2014; Eveland, 2012; Navaratnam, 2011). This phenomenon exists across the South Asian and even Asian diaspora. When looking at data for Asian students in the United States, it can be seen that the fields with the highest total graduate enrollment as of Fall 2013, were Engineering (12.7%), Mathematics and Computer Science (11.9%), and Biology and Agricultural Sciences (8.7%), compared with much lower enrollment numbers for fields like Public Administration (3.3%), Education (3%), and Arts and Humanities (4.4%) (Allum, 2014). Studies describe how

reputation and pride play a large role in the way South Asian parents set expectations for their children (Mani, 2011; Navaratnam, 2011).

Findings of this study show that parental pressure for higher studies, discouragement from vocational education, and shortlists of elite universities, are some ways that parents can lead their children on a path which can provide a source of pride and comparability among community and family members. All participants said that they were encouraged and some at times pressured to pursue post-secondary studies which is a theme seen in the literature reviewed from the UK and USA as well. Discussions around risk aversion, financial stability, and career success are themes found in prior studies that align with the findings of this study.

**Can this group be assisted in making choices that are more aligned with the vision they have for themselves, as opposed to that which the community and their parents may have for them? And if so, how?** One of the themes that came up in this study was the need for South Asian Counsellors. Challenges regarding suitability and availability of counselling services for South Asian youth is a topic that is also seen in other studies on South Asian diaspora. A study done on South Asian perspectives on mental health and related services in the Peel Region of Southern Ontario found that participants felt there is a lack of South Asian mental health professionals in the field, as well as a lack of representation of people of South Asian background in mental health promotion (Islam, Multani, Hynie, Shakya, & McKenzie, 2017). Participants in a study done by Aslam (2011) and Shariff (2009) also discuss the lack of available counselling services specifically suitable for South Asian youth, and the stigma associated with mental health and culturally compatible interventions. The need for South Asian

counsellors, or counsellors who were able to counsel to culturally relevant issues was one that was discussed by participants of this study as well, who at times did not consider counselling services as a suitable option to navigate parental pressure.

Vaani, Indra, Rabab, and Sana also mentioned the lack of female South Asian mentors and representation in non-traditional fields. The importance of role models or mentors is a concept discussed in studies done by Aslam (2011), Bagguley & Hussain, (2014), Navaratnam, (2011), as well as Mani (2011). Research reviewed discusses the importance South Asian women place on seeking mentors, as well as being mentors. However, no research elaborated specifically on mentorship across study subjects or industries/ career fields. Mani (2011) finds that many South Asian men and women find their first role models in older siblings, and that connecting with role models in relevant educational or career activities influences efficacy in career decision-making.

When looking at where help is needed for youth South Asian women to be able to make more fulfilling choices regarding education and career, themes found in this study mimic those found in a study by Aurora (2015), who briefly discusses that South Asian parents do not communicate effectively with their children and do not view them as different between childhood and adolescence.

**In cases where a member of this group has chosen to give in to pressure and make alternative choices, how can we help them realize their full potential within the cultural restraints placed on them by their multicultural identity?** Participants in this study, as also seen in the studies reviewed, were encouraged and supported in their pursuit of post-secondary education. Further similarity of findings with literature reviewed occurs in the areas of cultural barriers acting as a repressor of potential, gender

roles, and marriage pressure. Similar to Sethi & Williams (2015) who find that cultural barriers can impeded on visible minority women's economic progress, this study finds that cultural barriers limit the educational and career potential of South Asian women. Findings also mimic those of Tyrer & Ahmad (2006), who discuss that while South Asian families support their daughters' pursuit of higher studies, there exist some discourses of South Asian and Muslim family structure which situate them as inherently oppressive and as presenting barriers to women's participation in higher education and the labour market.

Literature reviewed in the UK discussed gender roles when referring to suppressed potential and lost opportunity (Bagguley & Hussain, 2014; Butt et al., 2010). Both studies compare the roles of South Asian boys and girls and the expectations on them to fulfil these roles as well as the educational expectations parents may have for them. The women interviewed for this study all discussed their frustration with expectations based on gender roles and differences in treatment of sons and daughters by South Asian parents. Navaratnam (2011) finds that different expectations, rules, and definitions of gender roles all affect career choices of South Asian youth in Canada, a phenomenon that was also analysed in this study.

Although not a topic which was asked in this study, two of the four participants discussed marriage, marital expectations, as well as the occurrence of marriage happening in their friends' circle in the last year of school or right after graduation. Literature reviewed reflected these themes as well (Aslam, 2011; Butt et al., 2010; Mani, 2011; Rajiva, 2013; Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006). Studies also went on to discuss the "marriage market", marriage expectations for daughters, fitting marriage into an



educational timeline, as well as issues related to dating, pre-marital sex, and children. Participants in this study felt that there still exists inherent pressure for young women to marry during their university years, and fulfill traditionally domestic roles, making it hard to prioritize between personal life and career or professional life.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study provides data and insight into how we can support second generation South Asian women in Ontario, who are pursuing post-secondary studies. While a majority of the research reviewed for this study came from the UK, there were also some contributions from North America. Over the last decade research from Canada and particularly Ontario seems to be materializing on topics such as educational goals and feminist issues among South Asians. The following are limitations that existed in doing this research, and recommendations for future research which I feel will assist in taking research on this issue further towards conclusive findings.

#### **Access to secondary school students**

Secondary school students, who are in the process of choosing their academic study path, are an important group that is not included in this study. Ethical considerations create challenges in including members from this group in the participants interviewed. Tilley (2016) confirms that “when minors are asked to participate multiple consents, including institutional and individual, may be required” (p. 80). The requirement to obtain parental consent before participation from minors is permissible, can complicate matters and delve into sensitive territory since in this study participants discuss issues related to the parents themselves and provide intimate and confidential

insights about their relationship. Nonetheless, the inability to include students who are in the process of choosing their post-secondary academic programs and are having the very discussions and interactions that our study questions, is very limiting. The major studies done on this subject have not explored this group and current findings reflect data collected from students already pursuing post-secondary education.

### **Breakdown of Demographic Group**

South Asians represent a diverse group, with some estimates counting over 1.7 billion inhabitants (World Bank, n.d.). Not only is this a populous group, it is an extremely varied one with large demographic, religious, and socioeconomic disparities (Véron, 2008). Linguistically, India alone has 448 living languages, of which 64 are institutionally used, and 18 provincially (SIL International, n.d.). Shariff (2009) points out that “it is important to remember that the South Asian community, like other cultural groups, is not homogeneous; beliefs, values, and behaviours will vary based on religion language, country of origin, social context in host country, and individual experiences” (p. 36). With this diversity comes different perspectives on acculturation and education. While the literature reviewed largely grouped South Asians together, researchers have begun to break this group down further. Some articles focus on Muslim women among this demographic, while some articles survey Indians and Pakistanis separately, or Muslims separately from Hindus and Sikhs. Abbas (2003) points out that “past research has tended to focus on the positions of a single South Asian group, with few studies taking into consideration the different experiences of the three main South Asian groups [Hindu, Muslim, Sikh]” (p. 412). The subtle but significant differences in research

findings resulting from the declassification of the group along religious, and geographic lines is very interesting and certainly needs to be built upon. In this study the South-Indian participant spoke of little opposition from her parents regarding educational decisions, while the North-Indian student discussed some challenges, the two Pakistani participants spoke of impending marriage as an issue which young females in university face as well as. A larger study may be able to collect more data which can be divided along regional, religious or linguistic lines.

Further studies should also differentiate social class of the participants, particularly educational qualifications and professions of parents, and perhaps delve further into how the mother's role in particular affects the family unit and how that may change the environment at home for these young women. Abbas (2002) finds that "factors of social class and the education levels of parents explain some of the levels of variation between South Asians" (p. 292). Abbas (2002) goes on to state that there are many factors which affect the educational achievement of South Asians, some of which include social class, gender, parents, parents' religion and culture. Research reviewed showed varied responses with regard to parental support for pursuing higher education, I am interested to know what factors affected those young women who did not receive such support from their parents, although there were some indications that religious beliefs and educational level of parents could be a driving factor. While studies reviewed largely discussed cultural issues, investigation must be done to compare religiosity with acculturation and parents' educational qualifications with support given to their children. At this time, both aspects have little data to substantiate any claims.

## **Long Term Educational and Career Statistics**

Little data exists on current employment trends among the female South Asian diaspora in Canada. Considering the anticipated growth of this visible minority group in Canada and their geographic locations, much research is required on their educational goals and long-term career aspirations. Valuable information can be obtained to make better decisions about higher education planning, curriculum planning, university and college program offerings, program subjects and length of programs, as well as employment equity, labour market research, and unemployment. In addition to these, efforts can be focused on career counselling, academic support, and mental health assistance for young women who may often face challenging circumstances. While, in studies like one done by Sethi and Williams (2015), we can see that issues like wage gaps, poor economic welfare, and language barriers are all factors that affect employment among visible minority immigrant women, much needs to be discovered about career and employment trends among second generation South Asian women in Canada. There is little research on the future of these women after they achieve their post-secondary education. It is interesting to consider how many of them continue to work in their field of study and/or eventually change careers, and how many of them do not work at all after graduation, as well as what factors contribute to these decisions.

## **Inclusion of Generation 1.5**

Finally, I suggest that participants from generation 1.5 be included in research on this topic. The term ‘first generation’ is widely agreed to represent immigrants who arrived in the country of residence as adults, while the ‘second generation’ refers to

children born in the new/host country to first generation individuals (Statistics Canada, 2011). This method of labelling generational status leaves out an important group of immigrants who arrive as children or teenagers, referred to as generation 1.5 (Asher, 2011). In my opinion, this group is perhaps the most vulnerable as they may feel more connection with the culture of their country of birth, but equal desire to assimilate into the culture of the country where they will now be living. Women from generation 1.5 are a valuable addition to the participant group in research regarding not only South Asian women, but any studies involving immigration and diaspora issues, due to that fact that they are likely to journey through important milestones such as secondary and post-secondary education, graduation, marriage, and motherhood in the host country.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Growing up as a young, second generation, South Asian girl in Toronto, I experienced substantial pressure from my family to pursue educational choices that would lead to a career which was considered, in the South Asian cultural context at least, suitable for a wife and mother, and I was limited to a few traditionally acceptable options. It wasn't until much later in life that I had the chance to reflect and act on what exactly it was that I wanted to pursue. Considering the involvement of family in the educational decisions of South Asian women when choosing an educational or career path, as brought up in studies reviewed, and reflecting on my own experiences I conducted this study which asks the question - *How and to what extent does parental pressure influence the educational choices of second generation South Asian women in Ontario and how can*

*these women be assisted in making choices that are driven by their own goals and desires?*

This study highlights that issues brought to light in previous research also affect second generation South Asian women in Ontario, and that much needs to be done to help them overcome these challenges. The themes discussed in this study helps us gain awareness and understanding of some of the complex issues which affect young South Asian women in our province. Identification of these themes and issues is a vital part of helping these young women make important decisions regarding how to lead their lives and reach their potential. When reviewing immigration patterns and projections for Canada, it can be seen that South Asians will remain the largest visible minority in the country (Statistics Canada, 2017), and South Asian women in this group will continue to participate considerably in post-secondary education as they are more likely to obtain a degree than the average Canadian (Statistics Canada, 2001). This study provides insights on how support can be provided and what measures can be put in place for second generation South Asian women to re-evaluate their educational ambitions and career plans while navigating conflict and challenges resulting from their multi-ethnic identity.

When looking closer at whether parental pressure exists and how South Asian women in Ontario manage it, the findings of this study show that parental influence plays a large role in the educational decision-making process. Participants of this study reflect on pressures to achieve high grades, gain admission to reputable universities, and major in a subject which is to be selected from a small pool of preferred fields promoted by the parents. Any deviations are typically frowned upon or met with resistance. As a result, young South Asian women often find themselves changing majors later in their degree or

changing degrees altogether. The frustrations and anxiety that result as a result of this process need to be looked at closer and potential solutions found. These findings imply that parents may require assistance in understanding modern day career options, potential salary data for these careers, and be provided with examples of South Asians who have chosen unconventional paths and still fulfilled the expectations of success, financial stability, family live etc., which are often placed on them by their parents. Perhaps data on mental health among South Asian youth can also provide insights for parents.

Upon reviewing if South Asian women need assistance in pursuing educational and career goals it was discovered that there exists a void in the offering of ethnically relevant counselling services. This prevents young South Asian women from seeking assistance, and when they do they are often disappointed with the advice they received. When they try to find other sources of guidance in the form of female South Asian mentors or role models who have gone down an unconventional path the options are few and far between. This need for seeking guidance and advice from outside the home can be seen to stem from the lack of communication that occurs in the household. Generational and cultural gaps contribute to reduced communication on difficult topics such as educational and life choices between South Asian parents and their daughters.

Connecting counsellors (who are either South Asian themselves or are familiar with and trained to handle issues related to cultural conflict, South Asian culture, and current issues among South Asian youth) with young women from South Asian backgrounds is an essential first step to help them start conversations and seek guidance regarding issues they face. Connecting South Asian mentors with younger women from the same background through ethnically focused mentorship programs, or alumni

programs at universities can help young women gain much sought-after advice and guidance from those who have perhaps walked in their shoes. Communication with parents can possibly be improved by focusing on the previous two themes, suitable counselling, and mentorship, however these resolutions perhaps should not just be limited to the young women seeking them but also to the families with whom they struggle to explain themselves.

Cultural barriers limit South Asian women's ability to fully achieve their potential. Gender inequality and varied expectations for sons vs daughters are also a cause for frustration and stress in the lives of young second generation South Asian women. Pressure to get married may begin during undergraduate studies with some female students getting married soon after undergraduate studies are complete. Larger more culturally rooted issues such as these reflect a generational divide among parents who immigrate to Canada from South Asia and their second-generation daughters who are born and/or raised here. These issues are perhaps the most challenging ones to address as they may require profound discussions with South Asian immigrant families and parents, in order to really understand how South Asian traditions and cultural dynamics affect domestic conversations and ultimately the personal decisions of their daughters.



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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Guide**

In order to find answers to the overarching questions of this study, the interview will begin with a semi-structured interview with the following questions, while others may come up during the process itself:

#### **Introduction Questions**

1. Tell me a little bit about the program of study you are in, the subject, length of time, current year?
2. What is your age/sex? Where were you born and/or when did you start schooling in Canada?
3. What is the level of education of your parents? What language do you speak at home? Do you live with your parents?
4. Can you tell me a little bit about where your parents are from in South Asia, their culture, religion, heritage and language, and what role these play in your household?
5. When you were a child, what did you say you wanted to be when you grew up?

#### **Targeted Questions**

6. Did your parents have any goals for your career or education while you were growing up? Tell me about whether or not their goals align with your own?
7. Are you currently following either your own aspirations, or those of your parents, or something else?
8. If you are: can you tell me a bit about the role your parents played in your pursuit of those goals?

9. If you are not: can you tell me a bit about the role your parents played in the choice you ultimately made regarding your career and/or education?
10. What was the biggest influence on your educational choices?
11. How do you feel about your current educational choice and career plans?
12. How would you say your relationship is with your family?
13. How would you say your relationship is with your community?
14. Can you tell me a bit about your South Asian heritage and how you think it influences your life, particularly your educational aspirations?
15. What are your thoughts on the influence of parents on South Asian women choices about their education and career?
16. What expectations do your parents/South Asian parents have in regard to how you/daughter's make choices about life, particularly education?
17. What are your thoughts on expectations of South Asian immigrant parents with respect to their children's and in particular their daughters' career and education?
18. Do you think this perspective needs to be changed and if so how does it need to be changed and how can it be changed?
19. Do you think these expectations have any negative impacts on young women?
20. In your opinion what is the biggest outcome of parental pressure for this group?
21. Do you think South Asian youth need support to manage the pressures from their parents? And if so what kind of support?
22. What advice do you have for South Asian women who may struggle with pressure from their parents regarding educational choices? During the time they are choosing their paths? After they have already chosen a path?



23. What do you feel about the support South Asian students receive during the time in which they choose their post graduate educational options? From their educational institutions? From their family?
24. When do you think is the right time for this group to receive support regarding their educational choices and do you have any thoughts on what kind of support would be best?
25. What is your advice for South Asian women who have pursued an educational or career path which may not have been driven by her own choices?
26. What are your thoughts on support from outside the family unit for women who were not able to pursue education/career choices of their own? Where do you think it can/should come from and in what form?

**The Educational Choices of Second Generation South Asian Women in Ontario: How And To What Extent Does Parental Pressure Influence Them?**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Data collected from Question #</b>
How, if at all, do second generation women of South Asian descent in Ontario manage parental pressures stemming with respect to their educational and career aspirations?	7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17, 20, 21, 22
Can this group be assisted in making choices that are more aligned with the vision they have for themselves, as opposed to that which the community and their parents may have for them? And if so, how?	6, 10, 15, 15, 17, 21, 23, 24
In cases where member of this group have chosen to give in to pressure and make alternative choices, how can we help them realize their full potential within the cultural restraints placed on them by their multicultural identity?	7, 8, 9, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25, 26

## Appendix B

### Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name), have read the information sheet describing the purpose and nature of the research study, 'The Educational Choices of Second Generation South Asian Women in Ontario: How and To What Extent Does Parental Pressure Influence Them?'

I hereby consent (please check the boxes):

- to participate in a face-to-face interview at a time and location convenient to me
- for the interview to be audio-taped
- to allow the data from the interview to be used in journal articles and conference presentations

I understand that:

- my participation in this research is voluntary
- I may refuse to answer any questions
- I may withdraw from the research at any time, even after signing this consent form
- all information gathered will be treated confidentially
- I will not be identifiable in any document or presentation resulting from this research

I hereby agree to participate in this research:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

<p><input type="checkbox"/> Please provide me with a copy of a report on this research at the following address:</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>E-mail: _____</p>
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## Appendix C

### Request for Participants

Are you a second-generation South Asian woman, between the age of 18-26 and enrolled full time in post-secondary studies? I am looking for volunteers to participate in an audio-recorded, face-to-face interview of approximately one hour focusing on:

- your experience with decisions regarding education and career choice
- the effects of parental pressure on your choices
- availability and categories of support which may be needed to help you make educational/ career choices which are aligned with your own aspirations

This research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a Master of Education degree with the University of New Brunswick. Confidentiality of all data and participant identity is ensured.

Interviews will be conducted at a time and location convenient to you. If you match the criteria below and would like more information and/or would like to participate, please contact Mariam Raza ([mariam.raza@unb.ca](mailto:mariam.raza@unb.ca)) - Please share if you know someone who may be interested.

- Female between the ages of 18-26
- Currently enrolled in a full-time post-secondary program at a College/ University in Ontario
- Born in Canada, or migrated to Canada as a child (5 years of age)
- The participant must have completed all schooling in Canada (Senior KG-Grade 12)
- All parents must be born and raised in South Asia, of South Asian descent, and have immigrated from South Asia to Canada.

## Appendix D

### Research Information Sheet

#### **The Educational Choices of Second Generation South Asian Women in Ontario: How and To What Extent Does Parental Pressure Influence Them?**

Thank you for considering participating in this research study. South Asians make up the largest visibly minority in Canada, and South Asian women are the most likely of all female visible minorities in the country to achieve post-secondary education. Little is known about the challenges this group faces when making choices about their education and career. Parental pressure can be seen as a major force behind how these choices are made and often alter the course taken by these young women. This study intends to look closer at second generation South Asian women in Ontario, their experience with parental pressure when making educational and career related choices, and how this group can be supported in reaching their true and full potential, based on their own dreams and aspirations.

In order to answer these research questions, I will conduct face-to-face interviews with approximately 3 people who are currently enrolled in post-secondary studies and are second generation women of South Asian descent. The interview will last approximately one hour and will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Participants will not be identified in any way in the transcriptions and nothing will connect them to their responses. Following transcription, the audio-recordings will be destroyed. All data will be stored in secure computer files accessible only to the researcher until completion of the study report, at which point the files will be destroyed.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may choose to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. You are free to withdraw at any time for whatever reason, and to withdraw the information you have contributed, even after signing the consent form. Once the study is completed, a summary will be distributed to participants who indicate on the consent form that they would like to receive a copy. Additionally, the data from this study will be used in journal articles and conference presentations. If names are used at all in these articles and presentations, they will be pseudonyms.

If you have questions or concerns about this research, please do not hesitate to direct them to me ([mraza@unb.ca](mailto:mraza@unb.ca)) or if you would like to contact someone not directly involved with this study, please contact Dr. Ellen Rose, Acting Associate Dean of Graduate Programs, ([erose@unb.ca](mailto:erose@unb.ca) or 452-6125).

This study has been approved by the UNB Research Ethics Board and is on file as REB2018-060. Thank you. Your assistance with this research project is greatly appreciated.

Mariam Raza,  
Master of Education Student,  
University of New Brunswick

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

Candidate's full name: Mariam Raza

Universities attended: Ryerson, B.Comm, 2004

Publications: None

Conference Presentations: None