Uncovering Messages of Intimacy in Urban, Educated, and Middle-income Married Indian Couples: A Phenomenological Study Using Pictures as Metaphors

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this dissertation study was to investigate the lived experiences of intimacy in married couples in India. The researcher specifically explored the couples' intimacy experiences in six dimensions: emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment and social intimacy. The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), an innovative method of data collection was used to collect pictures as metaphors from 11 couples (N=22) and the researcher conducted 45-90 minutes in-depth phone interviews. Phenomenological approach was used for data analysis and five themes (description, positive and negative experiences, barriers and strategies used, changes over time and perceived societal norms) provided information on the six dimensions of intimacy. The findings confirmed that intimacy is experienced in married Indian couples in each of the above mentioned dimensions. In addition, when intimacy is experienced they are viewed positively and lack of intimacy is viewed negatively in each dimensions. Couples also perceived barriers to their achievement of intimacy and developed strategies that helped them maintain intimacy in their marriage over time. Gender differences were present, for wives, emotional closeness and self-disclosure was more important, whereas for men, commitment was more important. The findings have implications for marriage education programs and clinicians working with married Indian couples.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

UNCOVERING MESSAGES OF INTIMACY IN URBAN, EDUCATED, AND MIDDLE-INCOME MARRIED INDIAN COUPLES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY USING PICTURES AS METAPHORS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Problem

Marriage is believed to be a lifelong commitment in the Indian community and divorce is associated with social stigma (Amato, 1994; Bose & South, 2003; Myers, Madathil, & Tingle, 2005; Nath & Craig, 1999; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). All married couples are confronted with ordinary difficulties, but when these ordinarily manageable difficulties become unmanageable, they threaten the stability and sustenance of the marriage. Many families continue to exist intact even if intimacy between husband and wife has ceased or never existed in the first place (Anant & Raghuram, 2005; Nath & Craig, 1999). Divorce rates are not high in India (Amato, 1994), and many marriages continue in the presence of marital distress. One of the reasons for low divorced rates in India is the lack of adequate documented data (Amato, 1994; Bose & South, 2003; Pothen, 1989). Moreover, divorce is a lengthy legal process and not an economically viable option (Anant & Raghuram, 2005). Low divorce rates could be attributed to the sex composition of the children; in a patriarchal and patrilineal Indian society, giving birth to sons over daughters reduces the chances of marital disruption through divorce, separation, and desertion (Bose & South, 2003).

Contrary to the popular belief that marriages are supposed to last a life time, there has been a gradual increase of divorce and marital disruption due to separation and desertion. The 2005-2006 National Family Health Survey-3 (International Institute for Population Sciences, India and ORC Macro Calverton, 2007) reported that 0.3% women were divorced, 0.8%

separated and 0.3% deserted; where as for men 0.1% were divorced, 0.3% separated and 0.2% deserted. Higher rates for divorce, separation and desertion were reported for urban women as compared to urban men. Out of 40,817 urban women, 0.3% were divorced, 0.9% separated and 0.3% deserted. From a total of 25,504 urban men, 0.1% were divorced, 0.2 % separated and 0.1% deserted. Similarly in the rural areas, out of 83,568 women, 0.3% divorced, 0.8% separated and 0.3% deserted whereas for rural men out of 44,247 0.1% divorced, 0.3% separated and 0.2% deserted. The rates for divorce, separation and desertion were higher among urban and rural women as compared to men from urban and rural areas (International Institute for Population Sciences, India and ORC Macro Calverton, 2007).

Media sources such as newspapers have been raising alarm over the increasing rate of divorces and have challenged the national statistics on low divorce rate in India. A newspaper article reported that there are discrepancies between the reported national statistics and the actual increase in divorce cases. Even with the increase in the number of courts dealing with divorce cases, a court-ordered divorce may take 15 years, so the number of divorced couples will be less than the registered court cases. The national statistics may not be an accurate representation of the divorce rate in India ("India: Divorces Become," 2011). An accurate estimation of divorce rates have been the court records, which researchers Amato (1994), Pothen (1989), Ranga Rao and Shekhar (2002) have used to assess the prevalence of divorce in the Indian society. Another newspaper article reported that there has been an increase in demands for courts dealing with divorce cases in the nation's capital New Delhi in the northern part of India, which resulted in the increase of courts dealing with divorce cases from just two in the 1980s to 16 (Naqvi, 2011). Similar concerns about increasing demand for divorces have been raised in other parts of India. The north eastern state of Assam has witnessed an increase from 200 divorce court cases per year

in 2000 to 449 court cases per year in 2005 ("Alarming Rise In," 2007). Second marriages have become popular, and a new Indian matrimonial matchmaking website called "Secondshaadi.com" has been created to help divorced and widowed men and women find potential marriage partners (Naqvi, 2011).

What Do We Know About Couple Relationship In Marriages In India?

In the Indian society, marriage is considered indissoluble (Bose & South, 2003) and a universal phenomenon (International Institute for Population Sciences, India and ORC Macro Calverton, 2007). The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) for the year 2005-2006 reported that 74.8% of women and 62.4% of men are currently married in the age group of 15-49 years. The 2011 national census data gave a relatively different estimate of the marital status of the population: 47% are married, 47.8% not married and 5.2% of the total population is widowed or divorced or separated (Census of India, 2011). Many researchers have attempted to understand the couple relationship in Indian marriages such as Allendorf (2012; 2013), Yelsma and Athappilly (1988), Myers et al., (2005), Chawla (2009), Sandhya (2009), Sharangpani (2010). Some of them focused on cross-cultural comparison of marital relationships by recruiting couples from India and United States (Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988; Myers et al., 2005) whereas others primarily centered on Indian marriages (Chawla, 2009; Sandhya, 2009; Sharangpani, 2010).

Early on researchers Yelsma and Athappilly (1988) compared marital satisfaction and communication in three types of couples: (a) couples in the normative arranged marriages in India (b) with the couples in non-normative love marriages in India (c) with married couples from United States. They proposed that Indians are bound in marital relationship through cultural traditions, family obligations, and commitment unlike American couples who prefer a marital

relationship based on spousal intimacy and love. Yelsma and Athappilly stated that intimacy is a Western concept. On the contrary, Sandhya (2009) found that intimacy and conflict are an integral part of the experience of marital happiness in couple relationships in India. Furthermore, Sandhya (2009) added that globalization has changed the experience of couple relationships; Indian couples aspire for support, empathy and validation in marital relationship. Similar findings were reported by Netting (2010) and Allendorf (2013). They found that patriarchal trends have changed in India with the acceptance of intercaste marriages, romance, divorce, educational advancement, industrialization, and influences of the West.

Typical relationship problems reported by clinicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists in Indian marriages included: infidelity, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, sexual problems, distress in relationship due to spousal expectations, problems in decision making, problems related to family-of-origin and in-laws, mental illness, child-rearing, and issues related to equality and competence (Mittal,1998). Some couple relationship problems stemmed from cultural practices such as the dowry system where the bride's family paid an amount in cash or kind to the groom's family during marriage (Babu & Babu, 2011; Rastogi & Therly, 2006) and disagreement related to the dowry amount resulted in violence and abuse in the spousal relationship, violence inflicted by the extended family on the bride, or murder of the bride by the groom and groom's family or the bride committing suicide as a result of the abuse (Babu & Babu, 2011; Rastogi & Therly, 2006). Primarily, women were the victims of dowry related domestic violence, abuse and death.

In general, women, as compared to men, held inferior status in the patriarchal society of India (Ghosh & Roy, 1997). Further, irrespective of socio-economic class women were burdened with the responsibility of initiating resolution of marital conflict by accepting their conflictual situation whether it is husbands not involving them in major decisions or husbands spending less

time with family or having problems with wife's employment, or mother-in-law and sister-in-laws interfering with their marriage (Arora & Chadha, 2012). Divorced Indian women suffer more emotionally and economically (Amato, 1994). Though comparatively married women were considered better off economically but married womens' ability to make choices and their freedom were highly dependent on the quality of the relationship with husband and in-laws (Allendorf, 2012). Such marital conflicts were present irrespective of educational, racial and socio economic status (Arora & Chadha, 2012).

Impact of Unhealthy Marital Behaviors

Persistent conflicts and distress in marital relationships impact the physical and emotional health of the partners (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997) regardless of whether the marriage lasts or not. Intergenerational studies have confirmed that parental marriages influence the adult offsprings' behavior in romantic relationships (Amato & Booth, 2001). Parents' marital quality influenced the marital quality of young adult offsprings' through the following experiences: by observing the quality of parental marriage, the number of arguments, nature of positive and negative interactions, and presence of violence. Such events can influence the young adult's perception of marital quality, which consequently can influence the young adult's experience of poor marital quality with his or her partner (Amato & Booth, 2001).

Feng, Giarrusso, Bengston, and Frye (1999) offered a similar explanation for the intergenerational transmission of marital quality and instability. They stated that if parents served as poor role models, children would develop behavioral problems which might affect their selection of mates and their relationship quality. Anant and Raghuram (2005) conducted a case study analysis of adolescents diagnosed with severe conduct disorder in India, a psychiatric condition where the concerned person demonstrated antisocial and aggressive behaviors. They

reported that persistent and long term marital conflicts in the parental relationship can affect the family functioning, and the adolescent development and adjustment over time. In short, parental marital relationship had the potential to influence other significant relationships. One such marital conflict is domestic violence, the National Family Health Survey 2005-2006 (NFHS-3) results revealed the presence of domestic violence in 35% of the women population in India. Moreover, the report confirmed the likelihood of intergenerational transmission of domestic violence as women whose mothers' experienced domestic violence are twice as likely to experience domestic violence in their marriage (International Institute for Population Sciences, India and ORC Macro Calverton, 2007).

Intimacy in the Couple Relationship

Intimacy, a broad term has been defined differently by various Western researchers. This is a widely researched topic and different researchers have taken various approaches to studying intimacy. These include development of scales for measurement of different aspects of intimacy (Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Waring & Reddon, 1983); measurement of a particular aspect of intimacy such as social intimacy (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982), love (Sternberg, 1997), fear of intimacy (Descutner, & Thelen, 1991). Some have focused on a particular aspect of intimacy such as self-disclosure (Reis & Shaver, 1988); contribution by other researchers Heller and Wood (1998), Laurenceau, Barrett and Piertromonacov (1998), Laurenceau, Barrett, and Rovine (2005) and Lippert and Prager (2001) have extended knowledge about self-disclosure. A few researchers have focused on commitment in relationships (Weigel and Ballard- Reisch, 1999). Other researchers used two or three different intimacy scales in combination to capture the multidimensional nature of intimacy (Hook, Gerstein, Detterich & Gridley, 2003; Merves-Okin, Amidon & Bernt, 1991; Waring & Chelune, 1983).

Several researchers, such as, Schaefer and Olson (1981), Waring and Reddon (1983), Sternberg (1997), Miller and Lefcourt have developed scales that operationalized and measured intimacy constructs. The Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR), developed by Schaefer and Olson (1981) compared the expected and actual degree of intimacy in five areas: emotional, social, sexual, intellectual and recreational intimacy (Schaefer & Olson, 1981, p. 51). Waring and Reddon (1983) developed eight intimacy subscales: conflict resolution, affection, cohesion, sexuality, identity, compatibility, autonomy, and expressiveness. Miller and Lefcourt's (1982) Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS) assessed social intimacy that is the importance of developing closeness with others, i.e., spouse, friends and family members.

Several researchers continued to evolve and explore various aspects of intimacy and its impact by combining different constructs of intimacy as developed by previous researchers (Hook, Gerstein, Detterich, and Gridley, 2003; Van den Broucke, Vertommen, and Vandereycken, 1995; Waring & Chelune, 1983). One such study by Waring and Chelune (1983) provided a comprehensive understanding of intimacy in couples by using the Victoria Hospital Intimacy Interview (VHII) scale. A standardized structured five-point Likert scale measured eight dimensions of intimacy: affection, cohesion, expressiveness, compatibility, conflict resolution, sexuality, autonomy, and identity. In addition, the researchers gathered data on self-disclosure. Several researchers used scales in combination to understand intimacy. Some were not convinced that each individual measures, such as Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS), Fear of Intimacy (FIS), and Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR) captured all the aspects of intimacy. They found that together these measures captured the multidimensional nature of intimacy but alone they failed to capture different aspects of intimacy (Hook et al., 2003).

Reis and Shaver (1988) proposed a different approach to understanding intimacy. The interpersonal process model viewed intimacy as a dynamic interactional process between two people and self-disclosure was perceived as an important component of intimacy. In addition to self-disclosure, partner response to disclosure, understanding, validation and care influenced the reciprocity and maintenance of intimacy in the relationship. Laurenceau et al., (1998) expanded Reis and Shaver's interpersonal model of intimacy. They proposed that there were two types of disclosures: emotional and factual disclosures; the first refers to disclosure of feelings and the later refers to disclosure of facts. The emotional disclosures facilitate and strengthen closeness between partners allowing partners an opportunity to share and get their feelings validated in this process resulting in intimacy. Partner's responsiveness to self-disclosure mediated the experience of disclosure in close relationship. The above interpersonal process of connectedness through self-disclosure, partner disclosure and partner responsiveness, fulfilled an important need of feeling understood and validated. Finally these researchers (Laurenceau et al., 1998; Laurenceau et al., 2005) described intimacy as a transactional and interpersonal process between partners, where self-disclosure and partner disclosure played a crucial role in maintaining closeness in the relationship. Couples who reported high intimacy were satisfied and happy in their relationships.

Some researchers took a positive psychology view of intimacy in relationships. Such researchers like Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (1999) emphasized the need for research to focus on behaviors that maintain couple relationship. Their work elucidated the dynamic and reciprocal nature of maintenance behaviors, such as commitment to stay in the relationship and satisfaction of both the partners in the relationship. In addition they emphasized that individual perceptions of the partners are important in maintaining relationships.

Gender Differences in Intimacy Experiences

Gender differences in experience of intimacy have been reported by several researchers. For example, Merves-Okin et al., (1991) compared the attitudes of husbands and wives towards perceptions of intimacy and self-disclosure and confirmed the presence of gender differences. Contrary to previous research, they reported no differences in attitudes towards verbal expression of feelings and self-disclosure in husbands and wives. They reported that the wives' satisfaction in intimate relationship was more influenced by their perception than that of their husbands. Similarly gender differences in perception of intimacy were also reported by Heller and Wood (1998). Wives' were better in predicting the husbands' emotional, recreational and intellectual intimacy where as husbands' were better in predicting the wives' level of intimacy in sexual and social domains.

Similar findings were reported by Indian researchers. Sandhya (2009) found that Indian men reported their wives high in sensitivity and responsiveness as compared to wives who comparatively rated their husbands lower on attention, responsiveness and helpfulness. Allendorf (2012) mentioned that quality of relationship of an Indian woman is dependent on the warmth and support received from the spouse and the extended family members; irrespective of whether a woman lives in a nuclear or an extended family after marriage it is the quality of the relationship per se with her husband and the in-laws that determines the marital quality of the relationship. Contrary to this view, Sandhya found that couples' living arrangement impacted their relationship. For example, couples living in nuclear families or couples who earlier lived with extended family but presently living in a nuclear family are happier than couples living with extended family. .

Though many Western researchers have studied intimacy, very few researchers have explored relationship satisfaction, intimacy and love cross-culturally (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000). Some researchers perceive that intimacy is a difficult construct to assess; it can mean different things to different people and different cultures may have a different understanding of intimacy (Hook et al, 2003). Therefore many researchers have encouraged and emphasized the need for further research in this area. Two such researchers, Badiger and Krishnaswamy (1999), and Sandhya (2009) stated that future research should elaborate on the experiences and meaning of intimacy in the Indian culture. Moreover understanding the differences in relationship and criterion for satisfaction across different cultures is important information for counselors (Myers et al., 2005).

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, I will use an integrative framework to understand the intimacy experiences of Indian couples. The two compatible frameworks are (a) multicultural feminist theory and (b) family systems theory. I will enumerate the similarities and differences between these frameworks and explain how they are helpful in understanding the intimacy experiences of couples in India.

Multicultural Feminist Perspective

The first theoretical approach is multicultural feminist theory, which relates to the culturally filtered everyday cognitive, emotional, societal, and relational experiences of people (Hurtado, 2010). This approach uses a culturally sensitive lens for understanding the experiences of people with different cultural practices. The three core concepts of this theory are: (a) intersectionality, (b) self-reflexivity, and (c) accountability (Hurtado, 2010).

Intersectionality. According to Hurtado, the first core concept, intersectionality, refers to the multidimensionality of human experiences. It means culture influences the experiences of individuals and a cultural lens is used to process the social identities such as, gender, class, race, sexuality, ethnicity and nationality. Social identities refer to the multiple identities of an individual that are created by being a part of a group or society. These identities are fluid in nature, and are socially and culturally constructed; experiences of people vary according to gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, class and location (Hurtado, 2003). For example, Ghosh and Roy (1997) stated that globalization, urbanization and development have affected women from different socioeconomic classes differently. Gender is viewed as oppressive in the Indian patriarchal society, as a wife a woman holds an inferior position as compared to the husband. This inferior status affects the woman's access to health care facilities and decision making ability about her own health. But education and location have empowered women in urban areas as compared to women in rural areas. Urban location increases access to health care facilities and education increases the ability of the women to make better health care decisions such as voicing their concerns about health problems with their doctors, reducing risks of frequent pregnancies and decisions about family planning. Therefore, education and location affects women's health care decision differently.

This framework recognizes that the oppressive nature of these social identities is contextual and transient (Hurtado, 2010). For instance, arranged marriages have been viewed as oppressive as young men and women did not choose their partners and were expected to marry the person selected by their parents (Yelsma and Athappilly, 1988). Parents may have valued their son's input in the selection of the partners but usually daughters did not receive the same privilege as the sons (Allendorf, 2013). But with globalization, industrialization, increased

education and Western influences, arranged marriages in India have undergone changes. For example, some young urban women along with their parents select their potential partners and are involved in the decision making process (Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003). For some women, arranged marriages have been empowering; this process allowed them to narrow down potential spouses who could bear their financial responsibility (Chawla, 2009). Whereas for others who do not have the choice, arranged marriages may still be an oppressive experience. This framework recognizes that the oppressive nature of some social identities (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity) is contextual and transient (Hurtado, 2010) and recommends use of innovative and multiple methods to represent the diversity of human experiences (Hurtado, 2003; 2010).

  Self-reflexivity. The second concept, self-reflexivity, relates to awareness and acknowledgment of the researcher's multiple identities, power and privilege as a result of multiple social identities and its influence on knowledge production. The researcher is to address these biases by involving the participants in the meaning making process (Hurtado, 2010). In addition, the researcher is guided to reflect on his/her thoughts and personal experiences. Self-reflexivity means that the researcher uses multiple tools to present multiple perspectives (Hurtado, 2003; 2010). Use of innovative and multiple methods are highly recommended to represent the diversity of the human experiences (Hurtado, 2003; 2010).

  Accountability. According to Hurtado (2010), the third core concept of multicultural feminist theory is accountability. Accountability means knowledge produced as a result of research should not be limited to publication; it should be disseminated to the people for their welfare. Therefore, the findings from this study will be disseminated in premarital and marital workshops and will be made available to Indian couples through an article in the national newspaper.

Family System Theory

The second theoretical approach is the family systems perspective, which offers a broad contextual definition of different family interactions (Becvar & Becvar, 1982). The most important concepts from the family systems theory guiding this study are: family as a whole system, flexibility, boundary, reciprocity and self-reflexivity.

Wholeness. Wholeness is an important characteristic of the family system (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). An individual is perceived as a part of the larger system which is family and community. A family has several subsystems, which are organized by hierarchy and order (Guttman, 1991; Cox & Paley, 2003). Within a system there are several subsystems; hence a system cannot be understood clearly by studying its individual parts (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Therefore, family systems theory offers a clear conceptualization of the whole system: individuals, interactions between individuals, and between subsystems such as between family members like in-laws, parents, and community (Cox & Paley, 2003). In an ethnographic study of 30 respondents in the Darjeeling Hills of India, Allendorf (2013) found that the community had been more accepting of the changes in the marital system from traditional arranged marriages to acceptance of love marriages and their elopement. Furthermore, the respondents identified the advantages and disadvantages of both types of marriages for the couple. They offered a new form of ideal marriage which is a combination of an arranged and love marriage called *arranged love marriage* where the young men and women choose their partners and then they are approved by their family

Flexibility. Changes in relational patterns can be well understood by the family systems perspective, which acknowledges that stability and change are an important part of daily interactions (Guttman, 1991). A healthy system balances a steady state of functioning with

change (Becvar & Becvar, 1982); therefore flexibility is another important characteristic of the family system (Doherty & Baptise, 1993).

Boundaries. Other key characteristics of the family system are boundaries; these determine the family's openness or closeness to change (Becvar & Becvar, 1982). Other systems like the community, culture, family members, such as parents, siblings, and in-laws, can impact the intimacy interaction in Indian couples. Anant and Raghuram (2005) found that in a case study of a 16-year-old Hindu boy diagnosed with conduct disorder, an exploration of the family functioning revealed that even though the parents were in a marriage of choice, they had significant differences since the beginning of their relationship and they lacked joint decision making in their relationship. The son witnessed the parents fight over such issues since childhood. Such persistent conflicts impacted the way they disciplined their son, with father handing out frequent punishments and mother protecting the son. Their marital conflicts influenced the inconsistent and conflicting disciplinary measures handed out to their son and played a detrimental role in the adolescent's development and adjustment. A systemic view allowed the clinicians to tease out the fact that the adolescent's behavior was a part of the problem and is intrinsically connected to the ongoing dysfunctional relationship in the parent's relationship.

Reciprocity. A system is characterized by its reciprocity and circular feedback (Guttman, 1991; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). This kind of reciprocity can be understood by using the descriptive and organismic family systems theoretical approach (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Klein, 2005). For example, Jatin and Gita, an elderly couple, experienced jealously, powerlessness and disrespect when their newlywed son spent a lot of time with his wife behind the closed door of his room in the same house. This led to increased distance between the father

and son, and increased conflict between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law (Sonpar, 2005). This is an example of family members being interdependent and mutually influencing each other's behavior (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

Self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity is a significant quality of the human system (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993) because humans have the ability to objectively analyze their behavior and that of other human beings (Guttman, 1991). Family members are capable of reflecting on their behavior and making changes (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). This type of reflexivity is observed in the intimacy interactions of couples (Lippert & Prager, 2001). Lippert and Prager (2001) found that couples who perceived themselves as intimate perceived their self-disclosure, partner disclosure and partner responsiveness as important transactional characteristics of their relationship. Similar findings were reported by other researchers (Heller & Wood, 1998; Laurenceau, et al., 1998; Laurenceau et al., 2005). Heller and Wood (1998) believed that self-disclosure and mutual understanding increased the similarity of intimacy experiences. This influenced the accuracy of prediction of partners' responsiveness, and through circular feedback resulted in increased intimacy and self-disclosure in couple interaction.

Lastly, stability and change are relational processes; families adapt and reorganize themselves in response to external influences (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993) and during normative and nonnormative changes (Cox & Paley, 2003). Therefore the basic tenets of the family systems approach provide a framework to understand the relational dynamics and conceptualize the intimacy processes at the "whole-family level" (Cox & Paley, 2003, p. 193), in the Indian cultural, situational and geographic context.

Integrated Framework

I have created an integrated framework with these two theories: multicultural feminist theory and family systems theory to provide a holistic view of the intimacy experiences of Indian couples. Couples are embedded in their family culture and relationship with extended families, which is embedded in the culture of the community and the country. Therefore a multicultural feminist perspective and family systems perspective provides a flexible lens to understand and review the intimate interactions in Indian marriages. Below is a narrative of how I have conceptualized these two frameworks, their similarities and differences. Both frameworks have similarities and differences and can compensate for the other's limitations. Both frameworks emphasize intersectionality, self-reflexivity, context and change but they differ in their understanding of these concepts. The multicultural feminist perspective refers to intersectionality of social identities and how these impact the lives of the people in that culture (Hurtado, 2010). On the other hand, a family systems theory view of intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness between the subsystems, family system, and the outside world or the suprasystem (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

The multicultural feminist theory focuses on the social identities while the family systems perspective focuses more on the reciprocity between the family members and their influence on each other. The multicultural feminist perspective also includes the social identities, such as, gender, race, ethnicity, class, education, immigration, nation, and economic situations as different in distinct cultures (Hurtado, 2003). In addition, the oppressive nature of the above mentioned social identities, their perception and experiences may be filtered through culture (Hurtado, 2003; 2010). The family system perspective provides a macro as well as micro view with its emphasis that "the whole is more than the sum of its parts", each individual is a part of a

system and should be viewed in the context of its family system (Cox & Paley, 2003;

Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

Both multicultural feminist and family systems theory focus on self-reflexivity, which is

awareness of bias. The former focuses on the researcher's bias because researchers by virtue of

their position have power and privilege over their participants (Hurtado, 2003). A researcher

should be aware of this bias and should take steps to minimize it through such means as keeping

a self-reflexive journal, and using nontraditional methods that allow the participants to tell their

stories (Hurtado, 2003; 2010). In the family systems perspective, the observer may be aware of

his/her biases. By being a part of the system the observer influences the system and is in turn

being influenced by the system; hence the observer ideally should be aware of this bias (Becvar

& Becvar, 1982; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

Both perspectives place importance on contextual understanding of experiences and

change, but they differ in the degree to which they value their acknowledgement of oppression.

Multicultural feminist perspective views oppression as transient and culturally influenced

(Hurtado, 2003; 2010). Family systems, on the other hand, have been heavily criticized for its

neutral stance towards gender stereotypes and oppressions (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

Diverse experiences related to cultural differences, racial discrimination, ethnicity, immigration,

social and economic challenges significantly influence the relationship between family members

(Rastogi & Thomas, 2009). Culture determines rituals and family structures; families develop a

miniculture (Ariel, 1999). In short, family, culture, and intersectionality of race, gender,

education, class, and age are powerful constructs that influence the dynamics of the couple

relationships. Mahalingam (2006) mentioned that the experiences of Indian immigrants are

influenced by perceptions of their cultural practices, and intersectionality of their experiences.

Therefore the multicultural feminist theoretical lens is used to understand intimacy in the marital relationship of Indian couples. Family systems theory, on the other hand, provides a broader perspective of the couple interactions (Cox & Paley, 2003). It also provides an understanding of the direct and indirect nature of interactions and explains how relationships develop and how they can be maintained (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Klein, 2005). The reciprocal nature of feedback, the interdependent nature of the interactions between the family members (Guttman, 1991) and community are crucial in understanding the intimacy patterns in couples in India.

Figure1: An Integrated Theoretical Model

Purpose of the Study
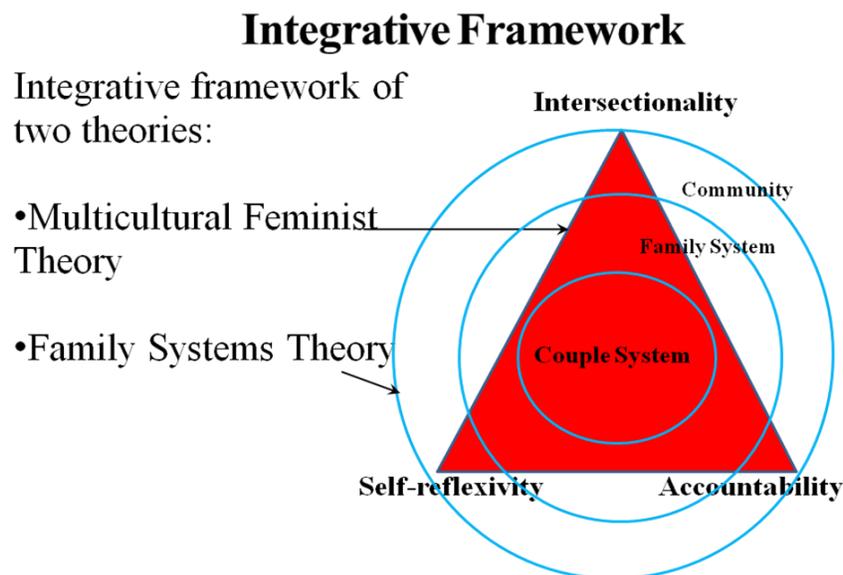
Definition of Key Terms

The following are a list of terms from the extant literature that are associated with the intimacy experience of a couple:

    a.   Intimacy:

           i.   Emotional closeness: Emotional closeness – the ability to be close to partner

               or ability to express feelings of emotional closeness or ability to express

verbally and non-verbally feelings or the ability to express the affective

component of intimacy (Merves-Okin et al., 1991; Schaefer & Olson, 1981;

Van den Broucke et al., 1995; Waring & Reddon, 1983)

ii. Self-disclosure: Sharing or communication of personal information and

feelings associated with the personal information or the readiness to share and

be authentic in the relationship (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). In other words, it

is the disclosure of information and feelings with one's partner, disclosure of

private information and being validated in the exchange by the partner either

through the pleasantness or positive feelings associated with the exchange

(Lippert & Prager; 2001; Reis & Shaver, 1988).

iii. Openness or intellectual intimacy or shared ideas: This is also referred to as

intellectual intimacy (Schaefer & Olson, 1981); receiving encouragement and

support (Merves-Okin et al., 1991) or the experience of shared ideas. It also

includes the ability to share thoughts, attitudes, feelings and beliefs with one's

partner and be authentic in the relationship (Van den Broucke et al., 1995;

Waring & Reddon, 1983).

iv. Sexual intimacy: Ability to share affection and sexual desires or passion with

one's partner (Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Sternberg, 1997)

v. Conflict resolution or intimacy problems: Conflict resolution referred to the

couples' ability to manage differences of opinions or the inability of the

couples to achieve intimacy due to certain differences (Van den Broucke et

al., 1995; Waring & Reddon, 1983). They also referred to the couple's ability

to resolve and accept the least pleasant or less tolerable aspects of the other

(Merves-Okin et al., 1991). It could also include both positive and negative

behaviors or skills that couples use to maintain their relationship (Weigel &

Ballard-Reisch, 1999)

vi.   Commitment: Commitment or cohesion referred to the couple's conscious

decision towards long-term commitment to the relationship (Sternberg, 1997;

Van den Broucke et al., 1995).

vii.   Social intimacy: Ability to share friends and network with partner (Schaefer &

Olson, 1981)

b.   Arranged marriages refer to marriages where suitable partners are recommended by

parents depending on caste, religion, location, educational achievement, economic

and social status of the families (Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). Earlier young men and

women were not allowed to choose their marital partners (Netting, 2010) but in recent

times, parents seek approval from their child in the mate selection process (Chawla,

2009; Sharangpani, 2010).

c.   Love marriages refer to marriages of choice, where young men and women choose

their spouses (Netting, 2010). Such marriages are also referred to as the "self-

selection" process or marriages of choice (Myers et al., 2005). These marriages may

occur between people of different religious backgrounds, castes, educational and

socio economic status (Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988).

d.   Arranged love marriage refers to a marriage where the couple chooses each other and

then informs the parents about their choice and the family then arranges for the

marriage according to the cultural traditions (Allendorf, 2013).

e. Joint family: "A joint family includes kinsmen, and generally includes three or four living generations, including uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, and grandparents living together in the same household" (Avasthi, 2010, p. 113)

Intimacy has been extensively explored in the western culture in the couple relationship but very few studies have addressed this issue in Indian couples, although Indian marriages have been studied by many researchers (Allendorf, 2012, 2013; Arora & Chadha, 2012; Chawla, 2009; Myers et al., 2005; Nath & Craig, 1999; Sharangpani, 2010; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). Sandhya (2009) explored intimacy and conflict in urban, Hindu couples in India, and recommended further exploration of intimacy in Indian couples. Maintaining healthy marital behaviors is important (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999) and needs further exploration in India, in spite of low official divorce rates. Consequently, further research is essential to confirm and elaborate on the messages of intimacy in the lived experiences of Indian couples and the way they perceive and negotiate intimacy needs in their marriage. Moreover, it is important to learn more about how these experiences might differ among Indian husbands and wives. The present study will attempt to understand the intimacy experiences of Indian couples and the findings will have implications for premarital and couple counseling in India.

Research Questions

In the present study, I will examine the subjective experiences of intimacy in the dyadic interaction of married couples in India. For the purpose of this study, couples were interviewed about six aspects of intimacy: Emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment and social intimacy. The following have been defined based on extant literature.

a. Emotional closeness and self-disclosure: Emotional closeness and self-disclosure refers to feeling close to one's partner through verbal and nonverbal expression of feelings; sharing something very personal about oneself; feeling vulnerable by sharing one's feelings, worries and fears with one's partner.

b. Shared ideas and support refers to sharing ideas and opinions with one's partner; feeling supported and encouraged by partner; giving words of encouragement and support to one's partner.

c. Sexual intimacy refers to being physically affectionate with your partner; communicating sexual needs to your partner; initiating and engaging in sexual activities with your partner.

d. Relationship skills refers to resolving differences of opinion with one's partner; building consensus or agreement with one's partner; tolerating the less pleasant aspects of one's partner.

e. Commitment refers to commitment to improving the relationship; experiencing trust with one's partner; experiencing loyalty or faithfulness or fidelity in the relationship,

f. Social intimacy such as, having mutual friends, or similar networks with one's partner; shared interests in hobbies or joint participation in activities or sports with one's partner.

This study focuses on four research questions:

a. How do couples relate to emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationships skills, commitment and social intimacy?

b. What happens when couples experience or do not experience emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment and social intimacy in their relationship?

c. How do couples make sense of their experience and the changes over time in emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationships skills, commitment and social intimacy?

d. What are the similarities and differences in the experiences of husbands and wives?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on the literature review and will provide (a) an introduction to the extant literature on intimacy, (b) a brief summary of the cultural traditions surrounding Indian marriages and couple relationships, (c) a review of research that suggests changing trends in Indian marriages, (d) research directions, (e) clinical significance and implications for future research in this area.

Introduction to Intimacy from a Western Perspective

Intimacy is a familiar term in the Western literature. It has been widely researched over a span of six decades and researchers continue to evolve their understanding of intimacy from multiple perspectives. Another term, "closeness" has been interchangeably used with intimacy in the western perspective. Below I will present multiple views expressed by intimacy researchers in the western literature.

Measuring Intimacy

Intimacy or closeness is a valued trait in couple relationships in the West and clinicians have used this term loosely in their work with couples. It also has been an extensively researched topic and considered a multidimensional concept (Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Waring & Chelune, 1983). Intimacy researchers have used measurements (Descutner, & Thelen, 1991; Miller & Lefcourt, 1982; Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Sternberg, 1997; Waring & Chelune, 1983) to assess intimacy in couple relationships. Schaefer and Olson (1981) described intimacy as an ongoing long-term process of intimate interactions in an intimate relationship. It is not a one-time achievement but a continuous process of development. Researchers have attempted to capture dimensions of intimacy through a variety of empirical measures.

The Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships. The Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR), an assessment tool, was created to provide a comparative understanding between the actual and the expected levels of interactions in an intimate relationship particularly in six areas: emotional intimacy, intellectual intimacy, sexual intimacy, social intimacy and recreational intimacy. Briefly, PAIR is an interpersonal versus intrapersonal assessment of intimacy interactions using six subscales. Each of these subscales operationalizes and assesses a particular component of intimacy in the couple relationship (Schaefer and Olson, 1981). The emotional subscale captures the ability to share feelings and experience closeness in an intimate relationship. The assessment is in the form of Likert-scale responses to intimacy related questions (e.g., "my partner listens to me when I need someone to talk to" or lack of emotional closeness through such questions: "I often feel distant from my partner") (Schaefer & Olson, 1981, p.53). Intellectual intimacy items assess the expected and actual sharing of ideas through responses to such questions as: "my partner helps me clarify my thoughts" or "my partner frequently tries to change my ideas" (p.54) whereas sexual intimacy assesses the discrepancy in exchange of physical affection and sexual expressions through such questions as: "I feel our sexual activity is just routine" or "I am satisfied with our sex life" (p.53). Social intimacy assess the ability to have mutual friends and a network of friends through such questions as: "we enjoy spending time with other couples" or "my partner disapproves of some of my friends" (p.53). Lastly recreational intimacy assess shared interest in activities and hobbies with such questions as: "we like playing together" or "we seldom find time to do things together" (p.54). These subscales represent the basic constituents of intimacy and serve as an overview of how Schaefer and Olson operationalize intimacy.

Waring Intimacy Questionnaire. Another assessment tool, the Waring Intimacy Questionnarie (WIQ), comprised of several subscales, assess for intimacy in a dyadic relationship (Waring & Reddon, 1983). These eight subscales are: (a) conflict resolution which measures couple's ability and ease with which they settle their differences, (b) affection, which measures expressing feelings and closeness, (c) cohesion measures commitment to be in the relationship, (d) sexuality, which measures the mutual sharing and fulfillment of sexual desires and needs in the relationship, (e) identity, which assesses couple's self-esteem and self-confidence, (f) compatibility, which evaluates the couple's ability to work and play together, (g) autonomy, which assesses the couple's level of intergenerational independence from family of origin and dependence on their children, (h) expressiveness, which measures sharing of feelings, attitudes and beliefs and (i) desirability, which assesses the degree of desirable responses of the couple irrespective of the content (p.54).

Other assessment tools. Different from the above scales, a few assessment instruments focus on exploring love and behaviors in the couple relationship; these include Scale for Feelings and Behavior or Love scale developed by Swensen (1972) and Sternberg's (1997) triangular theory of love. Love scale used a three point Likert-scale to assess couple's perception and understanding of intimacy in six areas: verbal and non verbal expression of feelings, ability to accept and tolerate partner's undesirable characteristics, self-disclosure, material evidence of love and the degree of support and encouragement received in the relationship (Merves-Okin et al., 1991; p. 112). While other researchers narrowed down the components of intimacy into different subscales, Sternberg (1997) on the other hand, used a geometric shape of a triangle to present love in the couple relationship. Sternberg's (1997) triangular theory of love considers intimacy as one of the components of love. Love in couple relationships has three different

components: intimacy, passion, and commitment; together they form the crux of the couple

relationship. At the base of each triangle is each concept defined by Sternberg. Together they

form the triangular theory of love. Intimacy is considered a "feeling of closeness, connectedness

and bondedness in loving relationship" (p. 315). Passion is referred to as the sexual longing,

affection, romance and attraction towards the loved one. Commitment is perceived as a

conscious decision to love someone in the long-term. These components of love are considered

fluid and interactive in a relationship and they vary over time.

Other measures that assess problems with intimacy are the Fear of Intimacy (FIR) Scale.

FIR was developed to capture the inability to relate to one's intimate partner in three areas:

inability to communicate personal information to one's partner (content); inability to express

strong feeling about the content of personal information (emotional valence); and lastly,

vulnerability, which relates to the partner's having high regard for the other (Descutner &

Thelen, 1991). The lack of these components, in theory, leads to lack of intimacy in the

relationship; on the other hand, their presence leads to the experience of intimacy. This scale

provides information in one area, that is, the couple's inability to develop intimate relationships.

Similarly, another instrument, the Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS), assesses social intimacy,

that is, the extent of closeness with friends (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982).

Commonalities and differences in intimacy measurement tools. The above mentioned

assessments, PAIR, WIQ, Swensen's Love scale have some dimensions of intimacy that are

common. For example, PAIR's emotional intimacy scale and WIQ's affection scale both

measure emotional connectedness and closeness to one's partner. In PAIR, the term emotional

intimacy is used whereas in WIQ the concept was termed as affection. Both, PAIR and WIQ

measures of affection and sexual expression are similar to Sternberg's (1997) concept of passion.

PAIR and WIQ also assess sharing of ideas, beliefs, and attitudes in couples, and the ability of the couple to work and play together and maintain mutual friends and networks. Sternberg's concept of commitment in a relationship is similar to the WIQ cohesion subscale. Swensen's Love scale measures the degree to which one partner can tolerate the other's difficult characteristics which is somewhat similar to conflict resolution in WIQ as they both assess the couple's ability and ease of sorting out differences. It is explicit from these studies that some researchers use different terms for similar dimensions of intimacy. Although there are similarities in subscales of these intimacy assessments, there are some differences. For example, the WIQ has additional components such as identity, autonomy and desirability scales unlike the others. Others, like FIR primarily focuses on exploring problems in developing and maintaining intimate relationship and MSIS's main focus is on exploring social intimacy. Each of these scales measure one aspect of intimacy.

Replicating previous work. Intimacy researchers also have replicated the works of previous researchers and expanded the concept of intimacy to include certain components such as problems related to intimacy, ability to develop consensus, openness with one's partner and commitment, in addition to sharing affection with one's partner. One such research team, Van den Broucke et al., (1995) created a self-report questionnaire based on the Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ) and assessed intimacy in 93 couples. They replicated their findings with 102 couples. The MIQ assesses intimacy in relationships at three different levels: dyadic, individual and social. Similar to these concepts, Van den Broucke et al., (1995) created five concepts of intimacy: (a) intimacy problems which assesses the lack of intimacy or inability to achieve intimacy with such questions as, "I think I have little to offer my partner"; (b) affection, which measures the affective component of intimacy. A sample item is "my partner and I try to

please each other"; (c) consensus, which assesses the cognitive and instrumental aspects of intimacy such as "my partner and I agree on most issues"; (d) Openness, which measures ability to be authentic, with such items as "I can be myself in the relationship with my partner", and (e) commitment, which assesses faithfulness and loyalty in the relationship with items such as, "my partner and I remain faithful to each other".

Criticisms of intimacy assessment tools. A few researchers have challenged the notion that any one assessment was capable of measuring all the dimensions of intimacy. For example, Hook et al., (2003) administered three intimacy measures to 360 undergraduate students in a counseling course. These measures were PAIR, MSIS, and FIR and the results indicated that together the measures captured the following aspects of intimacy: self disclosure, personal validation, trust, and love and affection. Self disclosure referred to disclosure of personal information whereas personal validation addressed the manner of being with one's partner, sharing partner interests, understanding and meeting partner needs. Love and affection referred to expressions of affections and behavior toward one's partner whereas trust referred to making one's partner feel comfortable and providing support in the relationship. Hook et al., concluded from the findings that individually these measures failed to capture the important components of intimacy, i.e., personal validation, love and affection, self disclosure and trust. Each assessment only provided information regarding a particular aspect of intimacy. For example, PAIR alone measured personal validation, FIR measured self disclosure and trust and MSIS measured love and affection. Together, these measures provided a deeper understanding of the intimacy experience. This research team reported the presence of gender differences in the intimacy experiences of couples, particularly in two aspects of intimacy, love and affection, and personal

validation. Women scored higher than men in these two aspects of intimacy and therefore they were more important to women than men.

Intimacy is an Interpersonal Process

Perspectives discussed so far involve researchers operationalizing intimacy and developing scales to assess the multiple dimensions of intimacy. Another perspective in the field is that "intimacy is an interpersonal process" and self disclosure is an essential part of this interpersonal process (Lippert & Prager, 2001; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Waring & Chelune, 1983).

Self-disclosure. Early researchers, such as Reis and Shaver (1988) described self disclosure as disclosure of information and feelings. The disclosure was connected to the manner in which they are received by the partner. If they were received with warmth and empathy by the other partner, then the partner disclosing information and feelings gets validated in the exchange. This resulted in a circular feedback process, where continuous exchange of support and warmth was retained in this nurturing process by both the partners. This line of thinking was expanded by Lippert and Prager (2001) who used the interpersonal process model of intimacy to extend knowledge about intimacy in the daily experiences of couples. They referred to daily experiences of intimacy as "working definitions" which meant "definitions people used on a daily basis to classify and evaluate what happened in their relationship" (p. 284). For their study, a sample of 113 cohabiting couples was recruited and was asked to keep daily diary of their interactions for a week. They also completed a questionnaire assessing their wellbeing and self-disclosure. The findings provided information about the daily interactions of intimacy: disclosure of emotions, personal and private information, pleasantness of the exchange, positive feelings about the partner and feeling understood in the process. These characteristics made the interaction

intimate, and they maintained positive feelings in the relationship. In addition, couples experiencing satisfaction in their relationship perceived themselves as high on intimacy.

Intimacy versus self-disclosure. Some researchers questioned whether self disclosure was a component of intimacy or if it was separate from intimacy or if intimacy and self-disclosure were one in the same. Waring and Chelune (1983) compared intimacy and self-disclosure. They used the Victoria Hospital Intimacy Interview (VHII), an operationalized standardized structured measurement scale, to collect quantitative behavioral data on five-point Likert scales in the following eight areas: affection, cohesion, expressiveness, compatibility, conflict resolution, sexuality, autonomy, and identity. These researchers compared the results with quantitatively analyzed self-disclosure data from 10 clinical and 10 nonclinical couples, who were approximately 38.5 years old, married for 17 years and had 2.3 children. Self-disclosure was described as "(a) expression of emotion; (b) expression of need; (c) expression of thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and fantasy; and (d) self-awareness" (Waring & Chelune, 1983, p.188). Both expression of thoughts, believes, attitudes and fantasy, and self-awareness were referred to as cognitive disclosure. They concluded from the findings that intimacy and self-disclosure are not the same. In fact, self-disclosure was an important determinant of intimacy in the couple relationship but intimacy had other dimensions such as affection, cohesion, conflict resolution, sexuality and autonomy. Particularly, self-disclosure had a strong connection with compatibility, expressiveness, identity and intimate behaviors dimensions but it should not be equated with intimacy. Compatibility referred to sharing information with one's partner that is pertinent about one's ideas, attitudes, background; their expressiveness scale measured ability to talk to the partner about the relationship, attitudes, feelings, and beliefs. The identity scale measured the ability to talk as a couple in relation to their own relationship and that of others.

Finally, they proposed that couples can be helped in confiding with each other, which can improve the relationship.

Intimacy a dynamic reciprocal process. Intimacy was also perceived as a dynamic process that involved similarity and reciprocity of feelings in the couple relationship (Heller & Wood, 1998). These researchers suggested

> We propose that intimacy consists of levels of intimacy reported by each partner (measured objectively), similarity of intimacy experiences between partners (measured subjectively), and mutual high prediction, or understanding between partners (measured objectively). Reciprocity of understanding and similarity of intimate experience are dimensions that address the importance of the mutual, co-created process of intimacy (Heller & Wood, 1998, p. 274).

Heller and Wood recruited two groups of couples: the first group of 25 couples were born, raised and identified as Jews. The other group of 25 couples comprised of one partner who identified as a Jew and the other partner identified with a different religion. In this quantitative study, both groups of couples shared the following characteristics: they were recruited from a city; they were in their first marriage, both groups had no children and married for 5 years or less. These couples were administered the PAIR questionnaire. The findings revealed that when couples expressed similar feelings of intimacy they experienced more intimacy whereas couples who expressed dissimilar feelings experienced low intimacy. In short, couples' accuracy of predicting the partners' scores and similarity of intimacy experiences influenced the other partners' accuracy and similarity of intimacy experiences. Moreover, it was a mutually influencing process.

Gender differences. The authors, Heller and Wood (1998) reported gender differences in their findings; men were able to accurately predict the intimacy level of their partners in two areas, social and sexual intimacy, whereas women fared better than men in accurately predicting intellectual, emotional and recreation intimacy of their partners. Conversely Merves-Okin et al., (1991) found lack of gender differences in particularly two areas: verbal expression of intimacy and self-disclosure. The authors conducted a quantitative study assessing 75 couples' attitudes towards marital satisfaction, intimacy and self-disclosure. In addition, the researchers were interested to understand how gender differences influenced marital satisfaction in these couples. The couples ranged between 21 and 80 years with an average age of 36 years. These couples were administered several questionnaires such as the Interpersonal Relationship Attitude Scale (IRAS), Intimacy Attitude Scale (IAS), Level of Verbal Self Intimacy Perception (LOVSIP), and Swensen's Scales for Feelings and Behaviors. Furthermore, they noted that for the women their satisfaction was closely connected to their own perception of intimacy in the relationship as compared to that of their husbands'. They also referred to a selection bias in the recruitment of couples. That is, they were more likely to recruit couples who were confident, positive and secure about intimacy in their relationship then those who were not (p. 116). This finding is similar to the concept of desirability assessed by WIQ (Waring & Reddon, 1983).

Relationship Maintenance Behaviors or Positive Behaviors

Briefly, the above studies suggested that intimacy or closeness is a desirable trait and enabled healthy functional behaviors in the couple relationships. Alternatively, lack of intimacy or inability to develop and maintain intimacy may be deemed problematic. Some researchers used the term maintenance or positive behaviors for healthy functional behaviors in couple relationship (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999). These researchers used measures to study the

presence of commitment, love (such as, caring, intimacy, and attachment to partner), marital quality and engagement of relationship maintenance behaviors (such as, being cheerful, being uncritical towards their partner, being optimistic, sharing tasks or responsibilities and using support networks) in 129 married couples with an average age of 39 years. Findings further confirmed the influence of gender differences. The wives' own perception of maintenance behaviors influenced their experience of maintenance behaviors in the relationship such as love, satisfaction, and commitment, unlike that of the husbands'. This is consistent with the findings reported by Merves-Okin et al., (1991). Furthermore, wives' were likely to use more maintenance behaviors (doing tasks together) if they were satisfied with the relationship as compared to the husbands'.

Contrary to the above view, even negative behaviors which are functional (such as minor disagreements, arguments, openly expressing difference of opinions) do not threaten the existence of the couple relationship, and have a positive impact on the couple relationship. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that couples engaging in conflicts in a functional way benefit longitudinally from engaging and resolving conflicts. On the contrary, dysfunctional longitudinal behaviors in partners such as stubbornness, withdrawl, and defensiveness result in unhappy couples and marital dissatisfaction in the long run. In addition, these researchers mentioned that there were gender differences in marital behaviors and these influenced marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction declined over time for wives who express fear and sadness and husbands who demonstrate behaviors such as stubbornness and withdrawl. Overall, they recommended that both husbands and wives should express their contempt and disagreement in a conflict in a functional manner but they should refrain from defensiveness which is an unhealthy dysfunctional behavior (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Gottman and Silver (1999) reported four

forms of negative interactions (criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling). A stable marriage may have these negative interactions, but what separates happy and unhappy marriages is that couples in happy marriage make attempts to repair their relationship. This feedback loop is missing in unhappy marriages. Gottman and Levenson (1992) stated stability of a marriage is based on the ratio of positive interactions to negative interactions and couples who have five times more positive interactions compared to negative interactions have stability in their marriage. Furthermore, Gottman, Coan, Carrere and Swanson (1998) mentioned that couples' marital happiness was dependent on their ability to maintain positive affect and de-escalate negative reciprocity in their couple relationship.

Summary

Intimacy is a positive interpersonal experience, and a dynamic ongoing process in couple relationships. Overall, intimacy encompasses these aspects in a relationship: emotional closeness; intellectual closeness or sharing of ideas; affection; sexual intimacy; verbal and non verbal expression of feelings; social intimacy or maintaining support networks or mutual friends; ability to disclose personal information to partner and the manner in which they are communicated and received by the other; ability to resolve conflicts; ability to manage discrepancies between expectation and reality; and ability to use positive behaviors to maintain the relationship. Finally, intimacy is a multi-dimensional term; it is a fluid, ongoing, interpersonal process. Despite the presence of some conflict and negative emotions in the relationship, intimacy, which involves positive thoughts, attitudes and behaviors maintain the couple relationship.

Traditional Views on Marriage and Couple Relationships in India

This section provides an insight into the age old cultural traditions and practices related to Indian marriages. In addition, I will review how these cultural traditions and practices influenced the formation of marital relationships in India.

Religious Influence

Historically, Indian religious institutions approved and propagated the institution of marriage. The three major religions of India provided a distinctly religious purpose for marriage. The Hindus viewed marriage as a holy union; since it was not a contract it could not be dissolved. Marriage mainly served three purposes: to fulfill dharma (duty) by getting married, giving birth to sons, and providing enjoyment. The Muslim law viewed marriage as a civil contract which served the purpose of procreation of children. For Christians, marriage served three purpose, it was a means for procreation, a means to benefit the society and lastly to act as a barrier from engaging in sexual relationships outside of the marital union (Mookherjee, 1986).

Arranged Marriages

Traditionally, marriages in India were decided by the elder family members (Ranga Rao, Sekhar, 2002; Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003; Yelsma and Athappilly, 1988) and young couples were expected to respect this tradition. Mostly men and women did not meet each other until the day of the marriage (Bloom & Reddy, 1986). "Marriage is a lifelong commitment" (Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988, p. 48); the community instilled this outlook in couples in the beginning of the relationship. Arranged marriages were common; love marriages were uncommon but not nonexistent (Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). Couples who were in love marriages or marriages of choice were seen as disrespecting the cultural traditions and faced consequences such as loss of family support whereas couples in arranged marriages received family support as a result of

following traditions. Yelsma and Athappilly in 1988 compared three types of couples, 28 couples in arranged marriages in India, 25 couples in love marriages in India, and 31 couples in marriages of choice in the United States. They concluded from their findings that external factors such as family support influenced the experience of happiness and satisfaction in couples in arranged marriages. The norm was to be in an arranged marriage which was seen as establishing a bond between two families instead of a bond between two individuals (Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003).

Closeness in the Husband-Wife Relationship

The growing closeness or romance between husband and wife in marriage was discouraged in India and was considered a potential threat to the family's unity (Chawla, 2009; Sandhya, 2009; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). Families were organized by hierarchy and age in the patriarchal Indian society (Shah, Varghese, Udaya Kumar, Bhatti, Raguram, Shobhana, Srilatha, 2000). The newly married couples became a small part of the larger family system and were not deemed as a separate entity from the whole family. The couples were expected to maintain their obligations and sacrifice their interests for the greater good of the joint family that included the bridegroom's parents, brothers, and sisters, other extended family members such as grandparents, uncles and their families (Avasthi, 2010; Shah et al., 2000; Sonpar, 2005). Kakar (1978) explained that any attempt to develop closeness in the husband-wife relationship was discouraged and shamed:

Any signs of a developing attachment and tenderness within the couple are actively

discouraged by the elder family members by either belittling or forbidding the open

expression of these feelings. Every effort is made to hinder the development of an

intimacy within the couple which might exclude other members of the family, especially

the parents. Oblique hints about 'youthful infactuations', or outright shaming virtually guarantee that the young husband and wife do not publicly express any interest in (let alone affection for) each other; and they are effectively alone together only for very brief periods during the night (Kakar, 1978, p. 74).

Bearing Children

Bearing children was believed to be an important goal of marriage for the newlywed couple (Bloom & Reddy, 1986) and physical demonstration of affection was restricted to short periods at night when the couple was alone (Kakar, 1978, 1988). Wives were powerless and encouraged to be submissive in the spousal relationship (Avasthi, 2010; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). On the whole, women were groomed to keep their sexual desires under control and accept their husband's wishes as their own (Avasthi, 2010). "If your husband calls, you have to go, because sex is what men need. You just have to accept it." (Pande, Falle, Rathod, Edmeades & Krishnan, 2011, p. 106). This is a statement by a respondent who expressed her lack of agency in sexual communication with her husband. Pande et al., conducted a mixed method study of 747 young married women to assess sexual communication between husbands and wives in India. These women were between the ages of 15 and 49 years old and they were from the slums of Bangalore. Kakar mentioned that marital intimacy developed in Indian couples much later in life through the sharing of common experiences of parenthood and responsibilities for the children (Kakar, 1978, p. 75). The status of a woman is elevated by motherhood. Giving birth to a male child further enhances this respect; a male child is considered responsible for his parent's liberation or salvation (Kakar, 1978).

Child Marriages

Other oppressive and stereotypical features of the Indian marriage system includes: child marriages and the dowry system. A national fertility survey in 1975 revealed that child marriages were prevalent (Bloom & Reddy, 1986) and women were married off at a younger age of 18 years or below (Bloom & Reddy, 1986; Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003) and men at 23 years or below (Bloom & Reddy, 1986). Child marriages, particularly for girls in their early adolescence were founded on fear. Kakar (1978) mentioned that 'the traditional ideas hold that a girl should be married soon after her first menstrual period, for it is feared that "if she remains long a maiden, she gives herself to whom she will".' (p.78). Children, particularly girls, were married before they reached puberty and they dropped out of school after marriage (Bloom & Reddy, 1968). Bloom and Reddy (1968) examined the age of marriage in married women between 15-49 years. They conducted a quantitative analysis of a 1975 population survey of 1300 households from rural and urban areas of the southern state of Karnataka.

Dowry System

Another social custom is the dowry system which refers to unidirectional exchange of gifts or wealth from the bride's family to the groom's family (Babu & Babu, 2011; Rastogi & Therly, 2006). Marriage is a "rite of passage" (Bloom & Reddy, 1986, p. 511) and a means of improving social class through the acceptance of a dowry and it is the duty of the young adult to marry the person chosen by the elders in the family. The selection of the marital partner depends on the religious, social, caste, economic and social standing of the families (Ranga Rao & Sekhar, 2002) and the dowry amount varies according to the social and financial position of the groom's family and education (Bloom & Reddy, 1986). Rastogi and Therly (2006) present an extensive review of the dowry custom and its implications for women. They mentioned that the

practice of taking a dowry became an entitlement rather than a gift and has been the cause of many dowry related deaths of Indian women. Brides are burned, or murdered or abused by the husband and his family due to dissatisfaction with the dowry amount (Rastogi & Therly, 2006). Although this practice was rendered illegal in 1961, it is still prevalent across varied socioeconomic status in India (Bloom & Reddy, 1986; Rastogi & Therly, 2006). Dowry is a social evil and has disruptive influences on the couple relationship and has been associated with domestic violence and abuse (Babu & Babu, 2011; Rastogi & Therly, 2006).

Summary

Over all, the above studies reveal that religious practices did not encourage closeness in the couple relationship. Similarly, the cultural practices (such as the dowry system, subordination of the wife in the couple relationship, low literacy rates, child marriages, and fear that growing closeness in the couple relationship could lead to the breakdown of the joint family) were not conducive and did not encourage intimacy or closeness in the couple relationship. Nevertheless, a few couples did engage in marriages of choice or love marriages.

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Changing Trends in Marriage and Couple Relationships

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Though no set period marks the visible changes in the mindset of people about Indian cultural traditions related to marriage and couple relationships, gradual changes have been acknowledged by different researchers over a period of time. In addition, certain factors have been responsible for gradual changes such as education, technological advancements, expanded meanings of arranged and love marriages and divorce as an option for Indian couples.

Education

One such factor which is believed to have brought about gradual changes in the marriage system is education (Allendorf, 2013; Bloom & Reddy, 1986). Education changed the

perspective of the people towards child marriages and this lead to a decrease in child marriages and an increase in the age of marriage (Bloom & Reddy, 1986). Education also impacted the prevalence of the dowry system. Babu and Babu (2011) analyzed the national data set available from the following sources for the period between 1995-2007: the third National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2005-2006, Census 2001, Planning Commission of India and the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for 15 states of India. They found that dowry related deaths were more prevalent in states that had low literacy rates. Alternatively, dowry related deaths were relatively low for states that had growth in the following areas: higher rate of education for women, higher rate of exposure of women to media, and increased age of marriage. These acted as protective factors in marital conflict related to dowry and death. Women who were married at later ages were emotionally and physically more mature than women who were married at younger ages. To a greater extent, the women who married at later ages were able to resist the negative experiences and atrocities imposed on them by their husbands and in-laws in the name of the dowry system. Women who married at young ages were more likely to commit suicide as a result of these negative experiences (Babu & Babu, 2011).

Education lifted the status of the young men and women in India and reduced the intergenerational hierarchy between parents who were less educated than their offspring. Education and autonomy have been associated with changes in marriageable age in women. Women were allowed to pursue higher studies and were consulted in the mate selection process (Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003). Because of the strongly held notion that "education is an important marker of status and prestige" (Allendorf, 2013, p.464), educated people were believed to be capable of making better decisions about marriages (Allendorf, 2013). Allendorf explored changes in perception and family behaviors over the past 20-25 years, particularly related to

marriage, household composition and bearing children in an ethnographic study in an Indian village in the Darjeeling Hills. This place was perceived to have a mix of traditional and modern Indian culture. Thirty semi-structured interviews were collected from 15 men and 15 women at different life stages (10 respondents were unmarried, 10 married with a child below 10 years, and 10 married with an adult child who was married). These participants were also from different age groups; 18 were between 20-34 years, 3 between 35-49 years and 9 between 50 and 70 years. Participants from different age group and different life stages provided a broader perspective of the changes related to marriages and family behaviors over time. Findings revealed that education was perceived as one of the instruments of change and provided opportunities for love marriages as youth had to move away from home for their education and that provided them with the scope to meet peers and potential romantic partners. There is a growing acceptance of love marriages and elopements and some respondents further outlined certain benefits and fallout of both love and arranged marriages.

Technological Advancements

Technological advancements, industrialization and globalization have been considered responsible for changes in society, marital trends, life style, family composition, increased education of women and employment, increased marriageable age, changes in interpersonal relationships and marital quality (Netting, 2010; Ranga Rao & Sekhar, 2002; Sandhya, 2009; Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003). Technological advances like television and mobile phones (Allendorf, 2013) have influenced accessibility and mobility of people and have influenced marital trends. For example, respondents in Allendorf's (2013) study reported that mobile phones provided the younger generation with increased mobility and interaction. Mobile phones

afforded privacy for young men and women; they could schedule meetings with their romantic partner without the knowledge and supervision of the elders in the family.

Impact of television. Babu and Babu (2011), mentioned that television and media exposure have also helped women to be aware of their rights and to resist oppression in their marital and family relationships. Ahmed (2012) reviewed the impact of television on the depiction of women. He found that television was a vehicle for promotion of information, entertainment and knowledge; particularly soap operas, a special genre of program that are transmitted through television channels and cable television and have reached the masses both in urban and rural areas. Some soap operas have presented stereotypical male and female characters. Others have presented characters that challenge traditional gender roles of husband and wife; and have spread awareness of the negative effects of the dowry system; awareness of the benefits for education for women; awareness of women's rights; and have portrayed women characters with successful careers, divorces, and remarriages. These soap operas influence the beliefs and attitudes of people who relate to the characters in the soap operas, both positively and negatively.

Internet. Another technological advancement is the use of the Internet. India ranked fourth in the world in Internet usage with 81 million Internet users in the country (Internet World Stats, 2009). Pal (2010) reiterated that technology has influenced marital trends in India. The Internet has revolutionized Indian marriages by creating online matrimonial and matchmaking sites. Popular matrimonial sites shaadi.com, bharatmatrimony.com and jeevansathi.com were founded in 1996, 1997, and 2004 respectively. These matrimonial sites allow parents as well as young men and women to register and share their information with others, and search for their desired life partner (Pal, 2010). A recently launched matchmaking site called

"secondshaadi.com" allows widowed and divorced men and women to look for potential partners (Naqvi, 2011)

Expanded Meanings of Arranged and Love Marriages

Over time love marriages and elopement have increased, although arranged marriages are still common (Allendorf, 2013). But changes are visible, young women are asked by their parents their opinion about potential spouses. Sheela and Audinarayana (2003) mentioned that women were married off at later ages and had some autonomy in selecting their life partner in arranged marriages. They could assist their parents in narrowing down potential grooms, even though parents made the ultimate decision about the selection of the partner. These authors base this on a quantitative study they conducted of 200 married women between 15 and 49 years old from rural and urban areas in Tamil Nadu.

Arranged marriage is a choice. Likewise, in an ethnographic study of 20 women in arranged Hindu marriages in New Delhi, a metropolitan city, Chawla (2009) reported that the employed and unemployed women created new discourses about arranged marriages in recent times. They defined arranged marriages as a means of locating suitable husbands who could bear their financial responsibility. Women were empowered in their selection of life partners. They had a say to whom they married; they looked for partners who had good income, could offer them comfort and support them if they ever decided to quit their job. Although all the females in this study were in arranged marriages, they described their first meeting with their husband before marriage as a romantic encounter and the days before the marriage as courtship. This study reflected an attitudinal shift in the perception of arranged marriages and interactional patterns between spouses in arranged marriages. These women identified the experience of romance in arranged marriages inconsistent with the religious and cultural prescriptions ascribed

as the purpose of marriage. Presently, there is an acceptance that (a) marriages could be of two categories: arranged and love marriages, and (b) there are positives and negatives of both types of marriages (Allendorf, 2013). Furthermore, respondents in the Allendorf study stated that an ideal marriage would be a hybrid of the two (p. 463) which combined the best of both types of marriages. Allendorf named this type of marriage an *arranged love marriage*, where "young people choose each other on the basis of love, but then they approach their parents for approval and go through the formalities of an arranged marriage" (p.463).

Empowerment of women in arranged marriages. Chawla (2009) used a feminist perspective to understand the agency and autonomy that 20 urban women from Delhi experienced in the selection of their mate and in the marital interactional patterns in arranged marriages. These women were between 27 and 44 years of age and married between the 1980s and 2000; some were employed some were not; all participants were Hindus. These women negotiated the characteristics of their potential spouses, shared them with their parents and were involved in the matchmaking and decision making process of an arranged marriage. One such respondent, a professional, mentioned that she had expressed to her parents her desire to marry a man with a professional degree. Other areas of marital interaction that were negotiated were the expectations of the in-laws from the wives. If a couple lived in a joint family with the in-laws, they had to abide by the rules of the kinship such as wearing Indian attire at home as opposed to western wear, which was disapproved of by the elders. Women empowered themselves by resisting the pressure to wear Indian traditional clothes at home. They experienced verbal or non verbal altercations, but still resisted the rules imposed on them by the parents-in-law. One respondent shared her resentment to the imposed rules and expressed to her husband that she has the right to wear what she wanted. Likewise, another respondent conveyed to her husband that

their time alone is more important than spending time most often with in-laws. Women were carving new rules and roles for themselves; negotiating how they selected their husband; involved the husbands and invited them to be mediators with the in-laws; and negotiating sharing time with husband and in-laws (Chawla, 2009).

In the same manner, in an ethnographic study, another researcher, Sharangpani (2010), explored why arranged marriages existed among educated urban middle class Hindu women from Mumbai. These women were financially independent but preferred to be in arranged marriages rather than love or self-selection marriages. These women were reforming the traditional definition of an arranged marriage by expressing their choice of the mate selection process. In addition, they were redefining their identity as Indian women, their views of the family and their roles as wives. These women helped their parents select spouses depending on their expectations, such as, educated men, men who were liberal and would not object to their wives' pursuing an education and career. Love marriages, on the other hand, were seen as less empowering since one had no control over whom they would fall in love with. Marriage was still viewed as a bond between two families (Chawla, 2009; Sharangpani, 2010) similar to the popular traditional belief. Compatibility with joint family members was viewed as important in maintaining compatibility, peace and stability with one's spouse, even if the couple lived separately from the extended family (Sharangpani, 2010). Expectations from marriage were redefined, Netting (2010) in a qualitative interview of 30 unmarried educated young men and women from Vadodara, found that intimacy was perceived as one of the basic goals of the marital relationship irrespective of the type of marriage they entered into: arranged marriage or love marriage. Besides emotional connectedness, equality in the marital relationship was another important aspiration. These young men and women valued mutual respect, support and joint

decision-making on major issues such as career and bearing children with their potential spouses. They also aspired for openness to communication between spouses, and decrease in hierarchy between husbands and wives. This openness was also desired between the newly married couple and the older family members such as the groom's parents and mutual respect for opinions across generations (Netting 2010).

Divorce as an Option

Earlier divorce was a disgrace and brought shame to the family but gradually it has become a more acceptable option of ending distressed marriages (Ranga Rao & Sekhar, 2002). Both men and women are gradually opting for divorces. Ranga Rao and Shekhar interviewed 117 divorced women who were recruited from information accessed through court records in the Family Court of the city of Vishkhapatnam between 1995 and 1997. Approximately 5% of the women in this study reported that both spouses initiated separation and another 24% of the women said that divorce was filed jointly by both spouses. Mutual consent separation and divorce where both husbands and wives make the decision to separate or divorce is gradually taking place. Although in majority of the cases (55.5%) women reported that their husbands were the first to propose divorce. The majority of the divorced women were younger, that is, 56.4% of divorced women were between 21- 30 years old and 32.4% were between 31-40 years old.

Reasons for divorce. One reason that was cited for divorce was multiple separations of different lengths of time where the spouses did not get along with each other and resided in different homes (Ranga Rao & Shekhar, 2002). These researchers mentioned that 70% of the 117 Indian women had experienced at least one separation before their divorce. The younger respondents mentioned that extended families had interjected to settle their dispute but they had also contributed to the divorce. Before marriage, 75.2% of women lived in nuclear families and

after marriage 77.8% lived with extended family members. Women from nuclear families had difficulty adjusting to the joint family after marriage when the parent-in-laws tried to maintain a strong hold on the family (Juvva & Bhatti, 2006; Ranga Rao & Sekhar, 2002; Sandhya, 2009). Contrary to the popular notion that educated women were more likely to divorce and be less tolerant of incompatibility, acrimonious marriages and interference of in-laws; this study reported that 61.5% of the women who were divorced were less educated and did not have a college degree. Ranga Rao and Shekhar concluded that education levels, power differences as a result of gender, and lack of financial security are some of the reasons for the women not initiating divorce and in most of these cases men proposed divorce. In cases where the less educated women initiated divorce, it was an effect to end a hostile marriage. This is similar to findings reported by Amato (1994) and Badiger and Krishnaswamy (1999).

Badiger and Krishnaswamy (1999) qualitatively analyzed 22 interviews from ex parte divorcees (men and women who were given a divorce by the court in their absence or in the absence of their legal representative in the court). The person who initiated the divorce in 90.9% of the cases was the husband (the petitioner) and the ex parte divorcees were the wives. The majority (54.54%) ex parte divorcees were women from rural areas; they were homemakers, childless, ignorant of the divorce proceedings, fearful of the legal system and deprived of any alimony. Divorce as an option has been used by men and women differently. Highly educated women have used divorce as an alternative to end incompatible and distressed marriages; some less educated women have used it to end hostile marriages.

Gender differences. Studies on divorce in India, have confirmed gender differences. Divorced Indian men bear less negative consequences as compared to Indian women, who suffer more psychologically, economically and socially. Comparatively, divorced men received more

support from family then divorced women who were generally more stigmatized. Amato (1994)

reviewed the available literature about divorce in India and interviewed judges and counselors

from family courts, social workers and divorced individuals. He compared the impact of divorce

on men and women in India and the United Status. Amato mentioned that, in general, education,

support from family, and financial security acts as protection for men and women who have

experienced marital disruption irrespective of culture. But Indian women fair poorly compared to

Indian men and compared to divorced American women. Due to marital disruption, women in

India, not only lose their relationship, they also lose their home, financial and family support.

Divorced men continue to live with their parents and receive family support from them. In short,

the impact is more severe for Indian women than it is for Indian men and worse if they have less

education, limited financial resources, and lack family support.

Duration of marriage. Pothen (1989), Badiger and Krishnaswamy (1999) and Ranga

Rao and Shekhar (2002), have noted that divorced couples were married for short duration less

than five years. Ranga Rao and Shekhar mentioned that couples' expectation of marriage may be

different than that of their parents and couples may fail to develop emotional and physical

closeness during the short period of their marriage. This period has been viewed as critical for

the development of intimacy, adjustment (Badiger & Krishnaswamy, 1999) and marital stability.

Various reasons for divorce include: ill-treatment by husband, interference by in-laws, refusal to

share residence in the same house with the spouse, extra marital affairs, mental or physical

cruelty, sexual abuse and incompatibility, wife's attachment to her family (Badiger and

Krishnaswamy, 1999; Pothen, 1989). Hostile couples married for less than five years were more

likely to end their marriage in divorce than couples married for more than sixteen years if they

were unable to develop an adequate emotional and physical connection (Ranga Rao & Shekhar,

2002). Many couples also have identified sexual dissatisfaction as an important area of conflict in the couple relationship (Pothen, 1989).

Marital Conflicts

Couple's expectations from each other in the spousal relationship have been the source of conflicts for many Indian couples. Also a factor is the husband's primary loyalty to the family-of-origin. Pothen (1989), who studied 200 divorces cases from the city of Indore reported that 46% of men and 23% of women in this sample were educated. The men's expectation from their wives in the couple relationship was to be submissive, to be attentive and affectionate towards the spouses and their needs. Wives were expected to be good cooks and take care of the household duties, and get along with the in-laws and extended family. Husbands also expected their wives to bring home income to add to the family income. On the other hand, women expected their husbands to side with them as opposed to the in-laws and extended family, take care of their financial needs, treat them well and treat them as equals. In addition, husbands were expected to love and be sensitive to the needs of their wives, take them for outings and shower them with gifts.

Another researcher, Arora and Chadha (2012) explored marital conflicts across different economic sections in the city of Jammu. They recruited 240 couples from three socio-economic statuses: higher, middle and lower. These levels were based on the educational qualification, social standing, profession, income, caste, method of communication with each other, and family composition (p. 2). In the higher economic status group, most conflicts (25%) related to age differences between the spouse; next 21.2% related to husbands' excluding wives from decisions related to their homes; 19.2% reported interference of the in-laws, and 11.2% of the times conflicts related to the women participating in the work force. In the middle economic status

group most conflicts (42%) related to dual roles of women, responsibilities at home and at work place. For 25% of the couples conflicts were about husbands' work place demands and unavailability at home. Also couples (13.7%) pointed out lack of joint decision-making and interference of in-laws as a source of conflict. In the lower socio economic status group major conflicts were related to income (35%), alcoholic husbands (26.2%), in-law interference (17%) and lack of joint decision making (12.8%). Some reasons were common across socio-economic status. Their degree of prevalence varied across the sections of the population in this sample.

Summary

To summarize this section of the review, with the changing cultural traditions Indian men and women are facing the challenges of work-family balance, along with negotiating demands of equality and distribution of labor (Arora & Chadha, 2012; Sharangpani, 2010). Arranged marriages offer women the platform to select men who fit their expectations (Chawla, 2009; Sharangpani, 2010). Urbanization, industrialization, globalization, increased age at marriage, and employment of women have created changes and challenges in private lives of modern men and women (Juva & Bhatti, 2006). Modern women often view arranged marriages as empowering, because they can select their partner based on their expectations, and fulfill their personal desires of a professional career and comfortable life (Chawla, 2009; Sharangpani, 2010). In spite of the above mentioned changes in perspective about arranged marriages, marriage is still viewed as a bond between two families and not two individuals (Chawla, 2009; Nath & Craig, 1999; Sharangpani, 2010). In addition, couples' ability to resolve conflicts and accommodate to changes has important implications for their relationships (Arora & Chadha, 2012).

Research Directions On Indian Marriages And Couple Relationship

Research on Indian marriages have mostly focused on marital satisfaction (Myers et al., 2005; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988), marital happiness (Sandhya, 2009) communication patterns (Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988), attitudes towards premarital relationships (Basu & Ray, 2001; Hendin & Hendin, 2009), age at marriage (Bloom & Reddy, 1986; Ranga Rao & Sekhar, 2002) comparisons of different types of marriages: arranged versus self-selection marriages (Chawla, 2009; Myers et al., 2005; Netting, 2010; Sharangpani, 2010; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988), cross cultural research on divorce (Amato, 1994; Badiger & Krishnaswamy, 1999; Pothen, 1989; Ranga Rao & Sekhar, 2002) and gender roles and marital adjustment (Issac & Shah, 2004) but few have focused on understanding intimacy in the marital relationship of Indian couples. Future research should explore the subjective experiences and gender differences in intimacy experiences of Indian couples through qualitative research (Sandhya, 2009).

Components of Intimacy

Although, only one study Sandhya (2009) has focused on exploring intimacy in couple relationship in India, other studies have presented some information related to the couple relationship such as expectation and conflict, resolution of conflicts, sharing of information and opinions, views on love and partner's role which are mentioned below.

Communication- verbal, non verbal, self-disclosure. A closer look at the couples from the Yelsma and Athappilly (1988) study reveal the following differences: most of the couples in love marriages were more educated and were mostly from urban areas whereas the couples in arranged marriages were comparatively less educated and lived in rural areas. In addition, the arranged married couples had less verbal and non verbal communication as compared to the love married couples in India. Measurement of communication using the Primary Communication

Inventory (PCI) revealed the following information about Indian couples in arranged marriage:

Non- verbal communication--the spouse did not expresses his or her self through a glance or

gesture; verbal communication--the couples discussed things before making important decisions;

sexual communication--couples discussed sexual fantasies. The Indian couples in love marriage:

verbal communication-- talked about pleasant things, avoided certain topics that may cause

conflict and did not disclose what would make them look bad to the other. Non verbal

communication – couples could predict the type of day their spouse had; sexual

communication—the couples discussed matters related to sex and intimate topics (Yelsma &

Athappilly, 1988, p. 47). Self disclosure, verbal, non-verbal and sexual communication existed in

Indian couples but they varied among couples in arranged and love marriages.

       Physical and emotional intimacy, love and loyalty. Consistent with the above view,

Badiger and Krishnaswamy (1999) recommended further research on Indian couples with respect

to physical and emotional intimacy in Indian marriages. They perceived that when marriages

were of shorter duration and couples either separated or divorced, they failed to develop

emotions and skills important for marital adjustment and the decision to commit to the marriage.

Myers et al., 2005, have also referred to certain characteristics related to arranged marriages in

their research. They have concluded that love and loyalty have different meaning in Indian and

American cultures. More specifically, the researchers mentioned that in arranged marriages love

happens after the marriage and is considered less important in marital happiness. Whether love

was a precursor to marriage or developed after marriage, presence of a love connection was

mentioned by these researchers in the Indian couples they studied. Moreover, the researchers

also cited that love and loyalty were present in both Indian and American couples. But their

significance was different across these cultures and their relative values should be understood in

the context of each culture. Irrespective of when love and loyalty became a part of the couple relationship, these couples did not differ in marital happiness. Again, it is to be noted that the Indian sample in this study were highly educated and 98% of them had a Bachelor's degree. The researcher's recommended that future studies in the area of couple relationship should extend beyond the mate selection process and focus closely on adjustment and closeness in couples in India (Myers et al., 2005). Further, Pothen, (1989) confirmed that the majority of the Indian couples (75%) had experienced emotional, physical and mental connection with each other during their honeymoon after marriage. This feedback was received from divorced men and women who reported the above positive connections in their relationship. They also reported the presence of conflicts related to in-laws, sexual dissatisfaction and discrepancies between the expectations of the husbands and wives in the sample.

In a cross generational study (Allendorf, 2013), respondents were asked about the characteristics and the advantages and disadvantages of both arranged and love marriages. One characteristic of love marriage is that love develops before marriage whereas in arranged marriage love develops after. Love was considered an essential component of the relationship but the timing differed depending on the type of marriage. Love marriages were considered better than arranged marriage by most because couples were expected to have developed love and understanding before marriage, which was viewed as advantageous in the couple relationship after marriage. Alternatively, some respondents said that arranged marriages were not good since they generally lack the characteristics outlined above and might lead to bad marriages. Some respondents, however, admitted that love could develop in the couple relationship after marriage (Allendorf, 2013).

Equality, understanding and respect. More recently, Netting (2010) explored young unmarried men and women's expectations from marriage and their partners. The findings revealed that regardless of the type of marriage the expectation of the young men and women were similar, that love should develop gradually in the relationship. They believed that marriage should involve intimacy between the partners; passion, understanding and respect were considered important elements of an intimate relationship. They expressed the desire for an equal partnership and power between the couple and their in-laws. This is contrary to the hierarchical structure predominant in traditional Indian culture, where the parents have more power than that of the children and their spouses. Lastly they indicated that couples should be considerate of each other in terms of their career goals, marriage and children. All participants in this study expected that after marriage they would be living with the husband's family, although women expressed concern about this arrangement. For example, some had concerns about objections in-laws might make about them wearing jeans instead of the traditional Indian saree, objection to their careers and going out alone. Women more than men, believed that a love marriage would be an egalitarian marriage for them. They would be able to express their concerns, get support from their husbands and assign the husband the responsibility of managing his family's expectations from the wife.

Chawla (2009) and Sharangpani (2010) provided information about the changing expectations of the wives as compared to their husbands in arranged marriages in India. Some respondents mentioned that they expected their husbands to respect their decision to keep working or quit working. Some participants expressed voicing their concerns to their husbands and expecting their husbands to understand them and support them. Moreover, in both of these studies, women felt empowered to have chosen their spouses in arranged marriages with the help

of their parents. In addition, they had chosen spouses based on their expectations of a life partner.

Support, validation and empathy. Only few researchers such as Sandhya (2009) investigated marital conflict and intimacy in Indian couples and its impact on marital happiness. Self-report measures and interviews were used to capture the experiences of 91 urban married Indian couples. The findings revealed that spousal support, validation and empathy were critical in the intimacy experiences of Indian couples. Even though, intimacy and resolution of conflict influenced the experience of marital happiness, unlike American couples, Indian couples did not self-disclose to their spouses. Couples with high intimacy also enjoyed happy marriages; happy couples enjoyed being married and spent time in each other's company, and were supportive of their partner in decision-making. The number of positive interactions in the couple relationship influenced their marital happiness. In addition, living arrangements of the couples had an impact on their intimacy and marital happiness; couples in nuclear families were happier than couples in extended family.

Areas of Conflict

Some researchers have outlined the topics of conflict in couple relationships. The below review of studies provide insight into the nature of conflicts reported in Indian couples.

Support from husband and extended family. In one such study, Allendorf (2013) mentioned that couples' relationships with the extended family could be a source of conflict. The respondents from this study mentioned that in an arranged marriage, couples were more likely to experience support and acceptance from extended family from both husband's and the wife's side of the family, whereas in a love marriage, this might not be the case. Families still perceived arranged marriage as honorable whereas love marriages were perceived as not so honorable. In a

study of 2444 married women between the ages 15-39, Allendorf (2012) explored family support and its impact on women's ability to make choices. The data for the study were drawn from the Women's Reproductive Histories Survey (WRHS) from Madhya Pradesh. In all, 95% of the sample was laborers. A quantitative analysis of the data revealed the following findings about couple relationships. The women who had support from their husbands and extended families felt more empowered to make choices (such as the decision to go to different places outside the house, or purchase small and big household items) than women who did not receive that support. Moreover, the researcher found that the husband's loyalty to the wife determined the relationship quality of the couple relationship. Even if the couple resided in a joint family, if the husband's primary support and loyalty was to the wife; the couple experienced better marital quality. Therefore, women in joint families who received support from both husbands and extended families felt more empowered than women in nuclear families. On the other hand, women who had poor relationships with their husbands did not experience good marital quality and did not feel empowered.

Living arrangement. Contrary, to the above findings, Sandhya (2009) found that family structure influenced the marital happiness of the couples. Couples in nuclear families were happier than couples who lived in joint families. Moreover, couples in the nuclear families rated themselves similarly in happiness in their relationship. If couples were more in agreement then the happier they were. If couples were more in disagreement about happiness, then the unhappier they were in their relationship. Most of the couples in this study were from higher socioeconomic status and were highly educated. Similarly, women from the Chawla (2009) and Sharangpani (2010) studies were also from higher economic status and highly educated. These women

expressed concern about their in-laws interference and objected to such interference in their spousal relationship.

Resolution of conflicts. More insight into the connection between socioeconomic status and couple relationship were provided by Arora and Chadha (2012). They elaborated that the degree of issues in couple relationship differed across high, middle and low socio-economic statuses. Moreover, this study also provided information about resolution of conflicts in the couple relationships. Extended families provided support to resolve conflicts across the different socioeconomic statuses, they were slightly more in higher socioeconomic status and similar in middle and lower socio-economic status (57%). The middle socioeconomic group ranked higher in resolving their conflicts themselves (42%), followed by lower socioeconomic status (40%) and then higher economic status (32%). Additionally, 2% of the couples in the higher economic status group reported that they also reached out to friends to help them solve their conflicts. Over all, women took initiatives to resolve the conflicts irrespective of socioeconomic status by adjusting and accepting their situation. Conflicts are a normal part of couple relationships (Sandhya, 2009) but the difference in the degree of the perceived conflict may result in reduced or lack of intimacy and happiness in couple relationships in India.

Summary

In sum, then, in the extant literature, education, technological advances, urbanization globalization and socioeconomic status have influenced the cultural traditional practices and couple relationships in India. They have gradually and will continue to influence changes in the family traditions and behaviors surrounding marriage and couple relationships. As couples are redefining their roles and challenging customs, research focused on exploring these changing dynamics are essential. In several of the above mentioned studies, particular aspects of the

couple relationship have been discussed which were crucial for the couple relationship: sharing affection, exchanging ideas, empathy and support, loyalty to the couple relationship, sexual communication, sensitivity to each other's needs and comforts, disclosing information to one's partner, verbal or non verbal communication, personal validation, and managing conflicts. Though, most of the above studies, except for Sandhya (2009), did not directly explore the intimacy experiences of Indian couples, but they provided rich information about the expectation and characteristics of the couple relationship.

Clinical Significance of the Study

Understanding intimacy in couple relationships in Indian marriages has implications for cross-cultural research and couple counseling (Myers et al., 2005). In short, the above review suggests that gradual and ongoing changes have been influencing the couple relationship. Increase in marriageable age among young men and women, education, technological advancements and divorce have changed the dynamics of the traditional couple relationship in India (Avasthi, 2010). Men and women have revised their expectations about the couple relationship (Netting, 2010; Pothen, 1989). Women are negotiating their roles outside and inside the home, with their partner and with their in-laws (Chawla, 2009; Netting, 2010; Pothen, 1989; Sharangpani, 2010). Further exploration of intimacy in the couple relationship will shed light on the challenges and adjustments that Indian husbands' and wives' are incorporating amidst changes in marital behaviors in Indian society. Furthermore, the present study will elaborate on the components of intimacy that have been barely addressed by research on Indian marriages, such as, self-disclosure, verbal and non verbal communication, affection, sexual communication, conflict resolution, sharing ideas, personal validation, developing consensus, giving and receiving encouragement and support, loyalty and commitment to the couple relationship,

equality and emotional closeness. This information will be useful for marriage educators and therapists who would be able to explore positive and negative intimacy interactions in Indian couples and how couples' have managed or are managing or will manage these interactions in the context of their living situation (joint or nuclear family), socioeconomic status, education, and single or dual income couples.

Findings from the present study should serve to educate the counselors working with couples in India or Indian couples abroad about the culturally assigned meanings to intimacy or closeness in couple relationships. Moreover, this study will extend how couples are negotiating and communicating their expectations and needs in their daily experiences, which would be helpful for therapists working with this population. In addition, as Pothen (1989) mentioned many Indian women feel that their husbands are not sensitive or considerate of their desires and wishes. Such issues should be addressed in couple therapy. Therapists would benefit by learning more about the women's experience of disempowerment and dissatisfaction in the relationship. Given the lack of intimacy and closeness in marital relationship, women may experience isolation and depression if unable to voice their concerns (Waring & Patton, 1984). Hence, therapists should explore such issues with couples in counseling. Moreover, therapists and marriage educators working with Indian couples would benefit from knowledge about the presence and role of dowry in the couple relationship. Rastogi and Therly, (2006) mentioned that clinicians should be aware of the role of dowry and its impact on the couple relationship. Such concerns should be addressed by clinicians when working with this population, if it has presented itself as a concern in the couple relationship. Dowry and other conflicts have resulted in high suicide rates in Indian women (Rastogi & Therly, 2006). Others, like Mayer and Ziaian (2002) have stressed gender differences in suicide rates in Indian men and women. Suicide rates

have been higher among married Indian men as compared to married women. For women marriage may act as a protective measure but for men it hasn't. Therefore, understanding the presence or lack of intimacy or intimacy-related problems would help therapists minimize the risk of suicide in couples experiencing marital conflicts or disturbance.

Intimacy is experienced in a dyadic couple relationship where both partners experience a positive or pleasant experience; decreased or lack of intimacy may result in negative experiences in the couple relationship. For example, the joint family may not be an issue for some couples who share good quality relationships with their husbands and extended families. Allendorf (2012) mentioned that the husband-wife relationship can serve to empower some women and not others. In such cases, perceptions of the husbands and wives about each other's role and support are important information for mental health workers who work with this population (Sandhya, 2009).

In addition, sexual communication in Indian couples, have been presented as an important concern (Pande et al., 2011; Pothen, 1989; Santhya, Haberland, Ram, Sinha & Mohanty, 2007; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). Santhya et al. (2007) reported that higher education, and supportive husband-wife relationships reduced the risk of unwanted sex and intimate partner violence in newly married couples in India. Marital conflicts are a result of unwanted or coerced sex, where husbands force their wives to have sex with them either through use of physical force, threat, or fear of abandonment (Pande et al., 2011; Santhya et al., 2007). Such issues should be addressed in therapy. Santhya et al., (2007) have recommended future research to focus on intimacy and communication in Indian couples, so that couples can be coached on respecting the rights of the partner, positive sexual practices and communication in relationships.

Findings from the present research study should be helpful in assisting married Indian men and women to develop agency in negotiating their rights in marriage, such as, dealing with marital conflicts, stress, communication difficulties related to affection and sexual communication (Pande et al., 2011; Santhya, et al., 2007; Stanley, 2008), perception about arranged marriages (Chawla, 2009; Sharangpani, 2010), expectations about closeness, validation, gender roles, equality, sensitivity, and support (Arora & Chadha, 2012; Netting, 2010; Pothen, 1989). Therefore, further research exploring intimacy or closeness in Indian couples in their cultural, relational and geographic context would has implications for improving couple counseling in India.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Rationale for the Approach

To investigate the experiences of intimacy in married Indian couples, I conducted a qualitative study using multiple forms of data collection. Patton (2002) mentioned that a qualitative approach is a good fit if the researcher intends to uncover the meaning of an experience, understand people's experiences in their context and when very little is known about a phenomenon under study (p. 33). Therefore a qualitative approach complements my research objectives.

Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological approach is a qualitative method with its roots in philosophy. This approach accepts multiple perspectives and has undergone modifications since the initial works of Husserl and other phenomenologist's such as Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty (Giorgi, 2009). The purpose of this method is to understand the participant's lived experiences from their perspective and less from the researcher's world views (Moustaka, 1994). Although researcher's biases are unavoidable, they can be minimized (Creswell, 2007; Moustaka, 1994).

Transcendental approach. For the purpose of this research, I have used the transcendental phenomenological approach. This approach of interpretive inquiry is based on the understanding that the people included in the study are experiencing the phenomenon and that there is no one way of experiencing the phenomenon under investigation (Dahl & Boss, 2005). Piercy and Benson (2005) stated that researcher's selection of a method of qualitative inquiry is reflective of their theoretical orientation. The transcendental phenomenological approach is consistent with my approach to understanding others best. All the couples are actively involved in meaning making (Dahl & Boss, 2005) and this approach permits the researcher to capture the

phenomenon (Gilgun, 1992), that is the intimacy experiences of Indian couples in their present relational and situational context (Dahl & Boss, 2005).

There are eight philosophical assumptions that influence the researcher's approach to phenomenological inquiry and they are classified into three basic categories- "How we know", "what we need to know" and "where we locate ourselves in the research process" (Dahl & Boss, 2005, p. 65).

How we know. Dahl and Boss explain that the first category concentrates on the creation of knowledge. (a) This assumption is based on the understanding that reality is subjectively constructed through social interactions; (b) as reality is socially constructed, different people may perceive different meanings of the situations, objects and events; (c) a researcher can gather insight into the participant's experiences through various means of expression, like stories, drawings, and plays; (d) researcher and the respondent work in collaboration towards deciphering the meaning of the phenomenon under study (Dahl & Boss, 2005); (e) the participants are actively involved in the process of interpretation, and the researcher captures this active process by observing the participants and what they share about a particular phenomenon (Dahl & Boss, 2005; Schwandt, 1994); (f) the researcher may have biases or prior assumptions about the phenomenon and is allowed to share them; (g) the researcher is encouraged to explore the "real world" or the natural setting in which participants maintain their daily interactions (Dahl & Boss, 2005, p. 65); and (h) the goal of the researcher is to focuses on the participant's perspective and the context in which the perspective is expressed (Dahl & Boss, 2005).

What we need to know. According to Dahl and Boss (2005), the second category of philosophical assumptions focuses on the significance of ordinary everyday interactions in the family. It is important for researchers to focus on understanding the daily interaction patterns.

This provides a new perspective, which is different from the one developed on the basis of studying families who are studied under duress only. In short, the focus is to understand the lived experiences of the people experiencing the phenomenon by understanding their everyday interactions.

Where we can locate ourselves in the research process. The last category emphasizes the importance of researcher's stance in the research process. The researcher is acknowledged as a value laden person and cannot be separated from the research process. The above perspective acknowledges that the researcher is involved in the meaning making process and brings his or her perceptions, values, and beliefs to the process of inquiry. This perspective assigns ownership of the expertise to the people experiencing the phenomenon. Just as families can describe better what they are experiencing, a researcher can describe his or her feelings through self-reflexivity (Dahl & Boss, 2005). This process of self-reflexivity allows transparency and acceptance of researcher bias.

Summary. The philosophical assumption of phenomenological approach is consistent with my work as both a family therapist and a family therapy researcher. As a researcher I am interested in describing what and how the participants experience what they experience (Patton, 2002, p. 107). Intimacy in marital relationship in India is a highly sensitive and private topic. Because of the private nature of the topic it is difficult to recruit participants and at times the researcher is faced with ethical concerns. Therefore, a researcher experiences methodological challenges when he or she solely relies on one method, interviews or narratives as a method of data collection (Sharangpani, 2010, p. 254). Using a non-traditional method, a researcher can capture the lived experiences and multiple realities of the population, a suggestion by Hurtado, a multicultural feminist theorist (2003). This recommendation is consistent with the philosophical

assumptions of the phenomenological approach, that is, a researcher can use new methods drawn from science and arts for investigating a phenomenon (Dahl & Boss, 2005).

Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique

I have used the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) (Zaltman, 1996) as a data collection method to investigate and capture the lived experiences of intimacy in the daily interactional patterns of married couples in India. ZMET is a non-traditional and multidisciplinary approach (Catchings-Castello, 2000; Zaltman, 1996). ZMET method is derived from multiple disciplines, such as, neurobiology, semiotics, philosophy of mind, cognitive neuroscience, literary criticism, psycholinguistics, art therapy, visual anthropology, art critique, and visual sociology (Zaltman, 1996, p.13). This method is not entirely new to the area of marriage and family therapy research. Matheson and McCollum (2008) explored the experience of powerlessness in 13 women in the Twelve-Step substance abuse recovery program. These authors requested their participants to bring pictures that represented their subjective experience of powerlessness in the program. Given that powerlessness is an abstract term and difficult to articulate, the pictures selected by the participants served as metaphors and helped the women explore their thoughts and feelings associated with powerlessness (Matheson & McCollum, 2008, p. 1029). In another study Piercy, Mcwey, Tice, James, Morris and Arthur (2005) collected data in the form of poetry, adjectives, metaphors, critical experiences and free associations (p.364) from 14 doctoral students to understand their positive and negative research experiences in a doctoral marriage and family therapy program. So, it is a flexible methodology that has been previously used in the field of marriage and family therapy (Matheson, 2005; Piercy et al., 2005). This method has been used to explore life experiences and has been perceived as beneficial in investigating issues which have received little or no attention before (Catchings-Castello, 2000;

Eakin 2002). Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, a non-traditional method such as

ZMET can offer a deeper insight into the contextual and multidimensionality of the intimacy

experiences in Indian couples, which may not be truly uncovered by traditional means such as

surveys, and interviews (Hurtado, 2003). The method includes collecting pictures and follow-up

questioning related to the selected pictures to understand both superficial and deeper

understanding of participant experiences.

ZMET was originally developed by Gerald Zaltman, a business professor at Harvard

University. Zaltman used metaphors to uncover thoughts and feelings about consumer

involvement in a product (Zaltman, 1996, 2003). Zaltman's initial thoughts about this method

were shaped by his experience of using ZMET with a culturally different population. He used

ZMET to explore thoughts and feelings of villagers in a remote village of Nepal while on

vacation with his wife in the 1990s. Zaltman's work with using visual images in exploring and

understanding people's experiences was highly influenced by this experience in Nepal. Eakin

(2002) published a review of the ZMET method in the New York Times along with an excerpt of

Zaltman's interview about his experience.

"We were in very remote areas of Nepal, where tourists typically don't go," Mr Zaltman

recalled. "And we gave people cameras and assignments. One was: assume you're going

to leave this village and move somewhere else and you wanted to tell people in the new

place what life was like here. What pictures would you take to show then?"

After travelling to Katmandu to develop the film, the Zaltmans returned to the villages to

distribute prints. With the help of a translator, they interviewed the local photographers-

many of whom were using a camera for the first time—about their work. "What it

revealed to me was the inadvertent arrogance of the idea that unsophisticated people

didn't have sophisticated thoughts," Mr Zaltman said. "In fact, the stories these people told about these images were amazingly complex."

In many photos, for example, he noticed that people's feet were cut off. Initially, he blamed the photographers' inexperience for the phenomenon. But in discussing the images, he learned that the effect was deliberate: bare feet were a sign of poverty, a condition the local photographers were loathe to reveal". (Eakin, 2002, pp. 2)

According to Zaltman, ZMET allows the participants to be aware of their own thoughts and share the thoughts and connections between them in a user-friendly manner (Catchings-Castello, 2000). In order to tap into the conscious and the unconscious thoughts, feelings, beliefs, attitudes and memories, ZMET uses pictures as metaphors. When participants select their own images more accurate information is collected about the participant's experience as opposed to researcher providing the pictures and requesting participant's to select from them (Zaltman, 1996, p. 14). ZMET is based on the premise that the unconscious is a storehouse of our cognitive structures, such as beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, feelings, memories, and images of experiences. All these influence how we perceive our experiences and their meaning (Christensen & Olson, 2002). Respondents are asked to describe and explain the meaning and significance of the pictures they choose, and in this manner participant's inherent thoughts, feelings and embodied experiences towards a topic are captured. Such a method of data collection allows the researcher to understand the participants' views by capturing cognitive symbols or metaphors (Christensen & Olson, 2002).

Metaphors are a part of our mental imagery; they are our symbolic understandings of experiences (Zaltman, 2003). ZMET has two underlying theoretical assumptions: (a) the unconscious is not easily accessible and metaphors can serve the purpose of uncovering the

unconscious as they are not restricted by words. They are abstract and can reveal hidden feelings which may not be accessible through a simple interview and (b) our thoughts exist as images and using pictures "fleshes out" (Christensen & Olson, 2002, p. 483) feelings and thoughts about a particular phenomenon (Zaltman, 1996). Previous researchers have reported that the advantage of using metaphors is that it helps the respondents access both their conscious and unconscious understanding of experiences that includes their feelings, cognitions, beliefs, past experiences, attitudes, memories, and expectations (Christensen & Olson, 2002; Zaltman, 1996) regarding a phenomenon.

ZMET method is based on the following principles (Zaltman, 1996, pp. 13-14; 1997):

a. Most social communication is nonverbal: Nonverbal expressions such as, physical gestures and space, attire, facial expression, frequency of touch, scent and speech qualities such as, pitch, resonance, tone, rhythm, and syllabic duration convey about two-thirds of all information reaching the brain (Zaltman, 1996, p.13). These nonverbal expressions can verify the information that is communicated verbally in an interaction. The most important task of a researcher is to capture both the verbal and the nonverbal expressions (Zaltman, 1996).

b. Thoughts occur as images: Our thinking occurs nonverbally, in terms of images and the meanings of these images are conveyed through words. Therefore it is important to help the participants use nonverbal expressions, such as images, so that the accurate description of the participants' experiences can be conveyed verbally (Zaltman, 1996).

c. Metaphors are central to cognition: Metaphors are used frequently on a daily basis and on an average, people use six metaphors in one minute of speech (Zaltman, 1996,

p. 14). They are figures of speech or symbols and allow greater insight into people's thinking and feeling. Metaphors offer symbolic meaning, and represent understanding and knowledge of an experience. Being attentive to the metaphors participants use provides an in-depth understanding to both the participant and the researcher.

d. Cognition is grounded in embodied experience: Bodily experiences such as senses and motor experiences shape our perception and thoughts; thereby influencing the metaphors that we use to express our experience and understanding of interactions. (Catchings-Castello, 2000; Zaltman, 1996)

e. Reason, emotion and experience co-mingle: Reason, emotion and bodily experiences are interdependent and coexist; they equally influence the process of healthy decision making in humans (Zaltman, 1996).

f. Deep structures of thoughts can be accessed: Special methods using images and follow-up questioning regarding images are useful in accessing deep thoughts which are otherwise not easily accessible (Zaltman, 1996; 1997).

g. All people have relevant hidden thoughts: This premise acknowledges that human beings have relevant thoughts which may be unconscious and not readily available. These unconscious thoughts can be made conscious through the use of special methods such as, phototherapy and art therapy which helps people articulate their hidden thoughts (Zaltman, 1996).

For example, Christensen and Olson (2002) adapted the ZMET method to understand consumer's mountain biking experience. The participants were asked to bring eight to ten pictures that reflected their thoughts and feelings about mountain biking and captured these associations (p. 483). ZMET is a hybrid method which employs images, probes or follow-up

questioning otherwise known as laddering techniques, interviews, and Kelly Repertory grid to understand the deeper meaning of a concept (Christensen & Olson, 2002; Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh & Deschenes, 2009; Zaltman, 1996). ZMET method can be tailored to meet the needs of the research project (Christensen & Olson, 2002; Joy et al., 2009; Piercy et al., 2005; Matheson, 2008). The researcher uses follow-up questioning or probes, otherwise known as the laddering technique to delve deeper into the metaphor and access the participants' values, ideas, experiences, thoughts and feelings (Christensen & Olson, 2002; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2009; Zaltman, 1996) regarding each selected picture. In addition, participants are asked to describe any missed images, pictures that they liked to have added to their selection but could not obtain which helps to explore the relevance of the experience. Kelly Repertory grid allows the researcher to explore the participants' thoughts about connections between the images (Joy et al., 2009). During the interview, the participant picks any three pictures from the initially selected group of pictures. The researcher then explores which two pictures are similar and how they are different from the third. This helps the researcher explore participant's ideas of the topic in a different way (Zaltman, 1996, p.15) and explore the connections between the images perceived by the participant which may not have been discussed yet. In short, ZMET method offers the opportunity to explore participant's lived experiences visually and verbally. Participants are engaged in an insightful, narrative, and meaning making process of exploring their cognition, feelings, and perceptions of their embodied experiences (Catchings-Castello, 2000), which helps to minimize researcher's influence and bias.

Sensitizing Concepts

As discussed earlier, intimacy is a widely researched topic by western researchers. They have conceptualized intimacy as made up of several components. Patton (2002) states that a

researcher benefits from gathering knowledge about concepts previously identified in the literature in the exploration of a phenomenon. These sensitizing concepts provide initial directions to the researcher about what and how a researcher may engage in investigating a phenomenon. The concepts are usually drawn from a literature review, evaluation studies and social science theories. Patton refers to sensitizing concepts as "categories that the researcher brings to the data collection" (p. 436) and analysis process of qualitative inquiry. The purposes of the sensitizing concepts are to guide the researcher and make sense of the data. They are not forcefully superimposed on the data. Sensitizing concepts have been used by both experienced and beginning researchers as a source of information to design initial questions, the data collection method and the data analysis process (Patton, 2002, p.279) of qualitative inquiry. In the present study, I reviewed the intimacy literature (particularly five intimacy measurement scales) to familiarize self with the concepts repeatedly associated with the experience of intimacy. In addition, I reviewed unpublished thesis and dissertation research on Indian marriages and couple relationships in Mumbai to get acquainted with concepts that have emerged in the context of intimacy in Indian marriages. Since few researchers have primarily focused on intimacy in Indian couples, the sensitizing concepts are drawn from a broader marital literature which focused on couple relationships. Both lists are by no means exhaustive but present a familiarity with concepts that are often used in the context of intimacy and Indian marital relationships.

Intimacy sensitizing concepts. For the purpose of this research project, I reviewed research studies on intimacy measurement instruments to outline the concepts that were associated with the intimacy experiences of couples. Below are mentioned the scales and the intimacy concepts they have explored.

PAIR. The PAIR instrument (Schaefer & Olson, 1981) makes an intrapersonal and interpersonal assessment of six dimensions of intimacy. These are (a) emotional intimacy which assesses how close an individual perceives himself or herself to be with partner and how close the person expects to be with partner? (b) The intellectual intimacy assesses the ability of the individual's actual and the expected sharing of ideas with partner; (c) sexual intimacy measures individual's actual and expected sharing of affection and sexual activities with partner; (d) social intimacy subscale captures the individual's actual and expected assessment of sharing of social networks and friends with partner and lastly; and (e) the recreational intimacy subscale measures the actual and expected sharing of the individual's hobbies, activities and interests with partner.

Love Scale. Similarly, the Swensen's Scale For Measuring Feelings and Behavior of Love (Love Scale) also has six subscales of love which measures (a) feelings and affection that are verbally expressed, (b) feelings and affection that are expressed nonverbally, (c) self-disclosure shared with the partner, (d) ability of the individual to tolerate the least pleasant aspects of the partner, (e) the expression of moral support, concern, encouragement and attention shown to partner and (f) expression of material support or actual support shown to partner (Merves-Okin et al.,1991; Swensen, 1972; Swensen, Eskew & Kohlhepp, 1984). Unlike PAIR, the Love Scale measures an individual's ability to accept the least pleasant aspects of the partner. In addition, this scale assesses the moral and material support and self-disclosure in the couple relationship.

WIQ. Different from the PAIR and Love Scale the Waring Intimacy Questionnaire (WIQ) assessment has eight dimensions of intimacy (Waring & Reddon, 1983). They are (a) the conflict resolution sub scale, which measures an individual's ability to resolve conflicts (b) the affection subscale, which measures the degree of emotional closeness in the relationship similar

to PAIR's emotional intimacy subscale, (c) the cohesion subscale, which measures commitment (This is a new concept, different from the PAIR and Love Scale concepts of intimacy). Another WIQ subscale (d) the sexuality subscale measures communication of sexual expressions and needs similar to the sexual intimacy concept of the PAIR instrument, (e) the compatibility subscale measures how effectively partners can make work and play adjustments, similar to the PAIR's recreation subscale. The other subscales of WIQ are (f) the identity subscale that assesses self-confidence, (g) the autonomy subscale, which measures independence, (h) the expressiveness subscale, which is sharing of thought, beliefs, and attitudes in the relationship. An additional dimension that has also been included is the desirability subscale, which measures desirable responses given irrespective of the content (Waring & Reddon, 1983, p.54). WIQ had additional concepts such as autonomy, identity, desirability and commitment. There is some degree of similarity between PAIR's intellectual intimacy scale, the Love Scale's moral support dimension and WIQ's expressiveness subscale.

A self-report Marital Intimacy Questionnaire. Next, I reviewed concepts that were outlined by Van den Broucke et al., (1995), who created a self-report questionnaire which measured marital intimacy and was based on the Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ). The intimacy concepts included (a) intimacy problem, which assesses problems associated with developing closeness, sharing and relating with partner (b) consensus, which assesses ability to share cognitive and behavioral dependence with partners (c) openness, which measures ability to openly share with one's partner and be authentic (d) commitment scale, which measures readiness to share long-term commitment with one's partner and (e) the affective scale which assesses one's ability to be emotionally close to one's partner.

FIS. Another assessment instrument, Fear of Intimacy (FIS), measures an individual's inability to form intimate relationships. It has three subscales: (a) content, which assesses sharing of personal information, (b) valence, which refers to an individual's strong feelings associated with the content of the personal information shared, (c) vulnerability, which assess the high regard with which the person views his or her partner and the extent of perceived risk of being vulnerable by sharing information with one's partner.

Summary. Overall, these studies capture the perceived expressions of intimacy experiences in couple relationships. All three intimacy measuring instruments, FIS, the Love Scale and the self-report marital intimacy questionnaire by Van den Broucke et al., measure self-disclosure but the FIS measures self-disclosure and problems with self-disclosure to a greater degree than the others. WIQ's expressiveness subscale and PAIR's intellectual intimacy subscale were similar. Below is a table that lists the sensitizing concepts from the above mentioned studies. These scales vary in the degree to which they capture similarly worded or conceptualized dimensions of intimacy. Similar subscales or subscales from different intimacy instruments which were closer to each other in terms of what they assessed were grouped together. The six prompts were named keeping in mind the most common terms for simplistic purpose. Along with these terms a short description of the each of the six prompts were developed based on the review. Though six aspects of intimacy were developed for this study, they were developed based on the most popular and the most common dimensions measured by the different intimacy scales.

Table 1: Intimacy Sensitizing Concepts from Four Intimacy Measurement Scales

Six Prompts	PAIR	Love Scale	WIQ	A self- report marital intimacy questionnaire	FIS

Emotional Closeness and self-disclosure	Emotional	Verbal expression of feelings Non verbal expression of feelings Self-disclosure	Affection	Affection Openness Intimacy Problems	Content Emotional Valence Vulnerability
Shared Ideas and Support	Intellectual	Encouragement and support (moral support) Material evidence of love (chores or actual help)	Expressiveness Identity	Consensus	
Sexual Intimacy	Sexual		Sexuality		
Relationship Skills		Tolerating of less pleasant aspects of one's partner	Conflict Resolution		
Commitment			Cohesion	Commitment	
Social Intimacy	Social Recreational		Compatibility Autonomy Desirability		

Sensitizing concepts about Indian couple relationships. In a qualitative inquiry, sensitizing concepts provide initial information to help understand the people or group being studied. They are not the main focus of the study (Patton, 2002). They help to make sense of the data but not to pidgenhole data if the sensitizing concepts are not found to capture all of the information collected. The purpose of a study as this one is to guide the researcher's understanding of the population under study. Consistent with this idea, I explored unpublished

research in the areas of marriages and couple relationships in India. I prepared a list of sensitizing concepts that, in same ways, go beyond those collected from western sources. None of the studies primarily explored intimacy in Indian couples, but they presented some information about the intimate couple relationship. Presented below is my review of each individual research study.

       Kulkarni, G. (2004). The current marital expectations of married partners (without children, with 0-3 years of marriage) of each other and their satisfaction with the level of fulfillment of these expectations. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai. In this study, marital expectations were termed as the wishes and desires that the partners had from each other in their relationship. Kulkarni (2004) examined marital expectations and satisfaction in a mixed method study of 15 Hindu and 15 Christian middle class married working couples in the age between 21 to 35 years and married between three months to three years. Different types of marital expectations were assessed in the couple relationships. These were marital expectations related to (a) recreation- expectations of spending time, money in shared activities with one's partner; (b) friends-expectations regarding the type of friends, meeting friends and investment of time and money on friends; (c) personality related expectations were related to the psychological, behavioral and physical attributes of one's partner; (d) work expectations were associated with expectations of division of labor at home, amount of professional work involvement and time spent in both; (e) finances were expectations related to expenditure, investments, saving, income, and financial resources; (f) in-laws related expectations refer to expectations of freedom, living arrangement, respect and spending time with in-laws; (g) child-related expectations relate to expectations when to have children, how many, time spent on child care and discipline of children; (h) communication-expectations

relates to expectations about the frequency, quality, content and method of communication; (i) expectations related to marital relationship, such as compatibility, fidelity, trust, equality, permanency of the relationship, problem solving and decision making; (j) expectations related to sex, such as frequency, duration, initiation, method and time spent on intercourse; and (k) expectations about religion, such as religious values and beliefs. (Kulkarni, 2004, p. 27-28).

Other important contextual concepts from this study were types of marriages, such as arranged marriages. Partners are chosen by parents with or without the permission of the bride or the groom and self-choice marriages were love marriages, in which the bride and groom choose each other with or without the consent of their respective parents (Kulkarni, 2004, p. 26). Couples in this study lived in two types of living arrangements, joint families where the couple lived with their parents or other family members from either sides of the family, and nuclear families where the couple resided in a different home than that of their parents (Kulkarni, 2004, p. 26). Couples where both partners were engaged in some sort of paid employment were called dual earner couples. (Kulkarni, 2004, p.26). There were gender differences in the expectations of the husbands and wives, such as wives' had more expectations in marriage than their husbands'. Expectations related to the marital relationship was highest for both groups where the couple expected to be in a long-lasting, compatible, loyal (fidelity, faithfulness) and equal relationship with their spouse. In addition, problem solving ability and shared decision making were preferred (Kulkarni, 2004) by both. The least expectations were related to religion and sex for both husbands and wives. Wives wanted more detailed (communication of thoughts, feelings and views with the partner) and frequent communication as compared to their husbands. In addition, finance-related expectations were more of a concern for wives than the husbands.

Hegde, A. (1998). Areas of conflict in marriage. (Unpublished dissertation). Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai. Another researcher, Hegde (1998) explored areas of conflict in a marital relationship in 30 Hindu couples married up to ten years. Conflict was termed "difference or incompatibility experienced by couples within one or more areas of the marital relationship which may or may not have focused on a specific issue and raising from a slight difference to an uncompromising affair" (p.50). Similar to the Kulkarni study, this researcher explored areas of conflict in finance, work, child, personality, in-laws, recreation, friends, sexuality and communication. The definitions of each of these concepts were similar to the ones explored in the Kulkari (2004) study. Both husbands and wives perceived the most conflicts related to personality differences, work, children, in-laws and recreation. Over time both husbands and wives reported that the problems decreased in these areas. For the wives, work and in-laws were more conflicting areas compared to the husbands where personality was a bigger concern.

Jain, S. (1999). The expectations of never-married men and women (30 to 35 years) from their prospective partners in mate- selection and their well-being: Are these expectations a reason for singleness? (Unpublished master's thesis). Nirmala Niketan. Mumbai. Jain (1999) investigated the expectations of 60 single men and women in the age range 30 to 35 years and found that most men and women were seeking companionship and compatibility (men 52% and women 64%) and security (66% men and 24% women) from marriage. The other reasons for marriage were pressure from family, desire to have a family of their own, procreation, personal happiness, love and sex. More men aspired to have security from marriage. This expectation was an exception and contrary to previous findings. This expectation was specifically for this sample of men who were not living with their families. They were residing in a temporary accommodation and aspired to have a family of their own through marriage. Females in this

study were less inclined towards marriage as compared to the men. More women were seeking companionship and compatibility in marriage. Increased female education, financial independence and living with families were cited as reasons for the comparatively lower interest of women in marriage than the men. The researcher inquired about the importance of the presence of 26 traits in the partner. These traits were: honesty, loyalty, responsibility, kindness and understanding, being affectionate, gentle, broadminded, confident, industrious, practical, ability to make decision easily, independent, optimistic and positive in outlook. Others were having a sense of humor, being sensitive, assertive, willing to take risk, ambitious, soft-spoken, modern, traditional, submissive, shy, aggressive, and dominating. Both men and women gave equal and high importance to traits such as being honest, loyal, adaptable, responsible, kind and understanding. Other traits, which were given equal importance by both men and women, were industrious, willing to take risk and being submissive. More men compared to women expected their partners to have the following traits: being affectionate, gentle, broadminded, independent, soft spoken and traditional. More women compared to men expected their partners to have the following traits: confident, practical, makes decisions easily, have a optimistic and positive outlook, sense of humor, sensitive, assertive, ambitious and modern. The least desired traits were shy, aggressive, and dominating in the case of both men and women.

Mehta, D. (1998). A study of self-esteem: Communication and marital satisfaction of married couples in Mumbai. (Unpublished master's thesis). Nirmala Niketan. Mumbai. Mehta (1998) investigated marital communication, self esteem and satisfaction in 60 Hindu couples who were married for shorter duration (0-10 years) and longer duration (11-20 years). Couples married for longer duration reported higher levels of communication. Most couples (73% in shorter duration and 80% in longer duration) had arranged marriages. The author also referred to

semi-arranged marriages, where a marriage is either arranged by the bride and groom or their parents with complete involvement of the bride and groom and their parents. Both husbands and wives in this study placed high importance to marital communication in their relationship. No significant differences were found between couples in shorter and longer duration of marriage which was inconsistent with previous literature. Marital communication was assessed through these questions-"How often do you and your spouse talk about the pleasant things that happens during the day? Do you avoid telling your spouse things that put you in bad light?" (p.55). Marital satisfaction was assessed using these items- "I feel that my partner is affectionate, I feel that I can trust my partner" (p.58). Items that assessed for self-esteem were," I feel that I am a beautiful person, I think that I am a dull person" (p.60). The husbands in the longer duration (11-20 years) marriages reported more satisfaction than husbands in shorter duration (0-10 years) marriages. For the wives, both in shorter and longer duration marriages, there was no difference. Mehta (1998) mentioned that social desirability is a cause of concern as participants were likely to give favorable responses to present a better marital relationship.

Bhuta, K. (1987). Perception of marriage: An assessment of marital adjustments in marriages of long duration. (Unpublished master's thesis). Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University. Mumbai. Another researcher, Bhuta (1987) investigated marital adjustment in 60 couples married between 0-30 years. Both husbands (75%) and wives (73%) mentioned that they make adjustments in their marriage due to mutual love. Some other reasons cited were marital stability, to avoid conflict and to avoid splitting up. Both husbands and wives initially adjusted to each other's family relations, daily routine, working time, beliefs, wants ideas, likes, and dislikes. As time passed by the adjustments were related to coping with a new situation as a couple (p. 62). For both husbands and wives, companionship was the foremost

rewarding aspect of their marriage. In addition, other rewarding aspects included were: to love, being needed, economic security, sharing common interests and physical needs being taken care off in the relationship. For women, being needed and mutual love was more rewarding as compared to men. Compared to men, difference in values and life's philosophies were one of the most troublesome aspects for the wives, next to relationship with in-laws. For the husbands, difference in values and philosophies and frequent disagreements were equally troublesome aspects in their relationship. Next was lack of mutual interests, in-law relationship and unsatisfying sexual relationship. Both husbands (57%) and wives (58%) considered respect as the most important characteristic of marriage. Emotional closeness was more important for wives (50%) than husbands (33%) whereas sharing common interests was more important for husbands (38%) as compared to wives (32%). Similarly, sexual satisfaction was more important for husbands (22%) than wives (18%). Personality growth was equally considered as another characteristic of a successful marriage. Husbands and wives equally perceived being in love as an important factor in achieving marital success. For husbands, compatibility and personality were more important than their female counterparts. In comparison, wives perceived determination and efforts made in the relationship as factors that ranked higher for marital success.

Table 2: Sensitivity Concepts from Unpublished Indian Research Studies

Expectations	(Recreation, friends, personality, work, finances, in-laws, children, communication, marital relationship, sex and religion)
Conflicts	(Compatibility, companionship, love, security, emotional closeness, sharing common interests, self-esteem, respect, disagreements and social desirability)
Contextual factors	(Socioeconomic status, education, dual income families, joint families, age, duration of marriage, gender differences)

Type of marriage   (Arranged, self-choice marriages, semi-arranged marriages)

Summary. A brief review of the above mentioned Indian studies reveals that none of them primarily focused on exploring intimacy in Indian couples, but they touched upon certain aspects of the couple relationship. These include respect; tolerating each other's personality; love; being supported in sharing work at home and in taking care of children; emotional closeness; affection; sharing common interests; friendship; companionship and compatibility; loyalty; security; and conflicts. Most of these concepts were similar to the intimacy concepts drawn from the Western literature. In addition, other contextual concepts that emerged were type of marriages, living arrangements, duration of marriage, education, religion, age group, and socioeconomic status. The contextual concepts were included in the background information that was collected from participants. These concepts influenced the data collection process which will be discussed later in this chapter in detail.

Overall summary of sensitizing concepts from Western and Indian literature. The above review of the sensitizing concepts, both the intimacy literature from the western perspective, and the couple relationship literature from India had similar concepts that were combined. They helped narrow down the sensitizing concepts to six. These are concepts that relate to some terms explored in the marital literature in Indian studies. These were (a) emotional closeness and self-disclosure, (b) shared ideas and support, (c) sexual intimacy, (d) relationship skills, (e) commitment, and (f) social intimacy. These served as prompts during the data collection process and the interview protocol was designed to gather information about participants' experiences (conflicts, expectation), even though, such terms were not included as prompts for this study. Further, Indian marital literature influenced the contextual information that was collected from the participants in this study. Background information collected from the

participants were age, education, religion, caste, social class, profession, type of marriage, years

of marriage, number of family members living with the couple and annual household income.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

"Triangulating data sources and analytical perspectives" (Patton, 2002, p. 93) are means

of ensuring credibility in qualitative research. Anfara, Brown and Mangione (2002) suggested

several strategies to maintain accountability and credibility of the research process and findings.

Depending on the research method, researchers choose strategies that suite their needs in the

prolonged engagement in the field. Prolonged engagement in the field and multiple forms of data

collection and analytical approaches help a researcher establish credibility and rigor (Anfara et

al., 2002; Rodger & Cowles, 1993). Triangulation removes biases that emerge when a single

means of data collection is used (Anfara et al., 2002; Koch, 1994). The researcher in this study

triangulated multiple sources of information from the participants, such as pictures, captions,

background information and interviews. This removed reliance on a single data source and

verified information received from different sources of information (Anfara, et al., 2002). In

addition, the researcher documented her personal thoughts and biases and entered them

periodically in the journal, mentioned below in epoche or bracketing. Creswell (1998)

recommended that a qualitative researcher engage in at least two of the validation strategies to

maintain credibility and trustworthiness of the data.

Other forms of documentation that helped the researcher account for the research process

were field notes, methodological documentation and analytical documentation which were

maintained periodically (Rodger & Cowles, 1993). The field notes were short notes that the

researcher made recording her comprehensive observations of the interview. Methodological

documentation included notes that the researcher made throughout the development of the

questionnaire, during the process of data collection and any changes made during this process. Lastly, analytical documentation was used to record analysis made by the researcher during the time of the transcription and data analysis. Any similarities and differences that the researcher noted were entered in this documentation. By maintaining such documentation, the researcher was able to record her thoughts, process of data collection and data analysis, and audit her process of engagement in the research study (Anfara et al., 2002; Rodgers & Cowles, 1993). These documentations were entered on an ongoing basis. To maintain the dependability of the analysis, the researcher used peer audits or examinations of segments of the data for possible clusters and theme development, audit trail and triangulating the analysis with existent literature (Anfara, et al., 2002).

Epoche or Bracketing: Epoche, a Greek word used by Husserl, means "to stay away from or abstain" (Moustaka, 1994, p. 85). Although the researcher is not free from bias, a phenomenological researcher can minimize the influence of preconceived notions, suppositions, and judgments through the process of epoche or bracketing. Bracketing, then serves as a venue where a researcher gives voice to his or her experiences and thoughts regarding the phenomenon under study. This allows the researcher to take a fresh perspective when analyzing the data (Moustakas, 1994). I documented my experiences and thoughts regarding intimacy. I practiced credibility by bracketing my personal experiences and my need to explore the lived experiences of intimacy in married couples in India. Bracketing is a way of voicing researcher's presuppositions, bias, and concerns. The (a) first form of bracketing was a journal, where I addressed questions like why am I so interested in this topic? I documented my thoughts and perceptions. The second form of bracketing was in the form of pictures as metaphors. This expressed my understanding of the six concepts of intimacy (emotional closeness and self-

disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment, and social intimacy).

My first documentation included bracketing of my personal experience as an insider. A short excerpt from my journal:

My world transformed – I grew up in a home where my parents had the traditional husband-wife relationship, where the husband made all the major decisions and had all the power in the relationship. A wife comparatively had less power in the relationship. There was no physical display of affection between my parents. But my world changed when both my siblings, females, highly educated professionals, married men of their own choice. These were like the love marriages (Netting, 2010) or self-selection marriages (Myers, et al., 2005), where the bride and the groom choose themselves and then the couple seeks the consent of the family. My siblings practiced a different sort of a husband-wife relationship, one that is on par with each other, expressing their opinions, sharing and demonstrating affection in their couple relationship. Relationships have changed for some young men and women. I have witnessed marriages, where on one hand, husbands and wives have shared traditional roles; on the other hand, I have seen marriages where husband and wives view marriage as an equal partnership.

In addition, I reflected on my experiences as a therapist in India. How difficult it was for couples to share their problems with a therapist? At the same time, I recollected some positives of being a telephone counselor and how anonymity provided the opportunity for couples; men and women could share their problems over the phone. Some statements that stood out for me from those years were -"my husband does not understand me, we do not spend time together" "she is so busy with children", "he is always busy at work" "we fight a lot", "my in-laws create

problems in our relationship". These were common complaints of the couples. Some other thoughts that I shared in my journal were "the telephone provided anonymity to clients and many individuals were able to discuss the lack of sexual communication in their marital relationship. Women have shared, "I want something different but cannot say that to my husband". I have heard male clients share that it is easier to pay for sex and share what they would like but it is difficult to share such communication with spouse. Presently as a therapist, I am maintaining my client's confidentiality. As a researcher, I will be mindful of maintaining my participant's confidentiality. In addition, having a list of names of therapists, agencies, help lines and non-profits will help me provide the information to participants who can benefit from them. In the event, there is domestic violence or marital conflicts; I will be able to provide information about where participants can seek help if they needed. As a therapist and researcher it is important to be aware of ethical concerns when working with people on confidential and sensitive topics.

I also felt, like an outsider to the Indian culture given my experiences. I am a privileged Indian woman: "I am privileged because I have the education, freedom, the choice to be who I am, what I want to say, how I want to say it, where I want to say it, how I negotiate my roles and rules of the Indian society, and who can influence my thoughts". Therefore, voicing my opinion is my right, but it is a privilege too. Not all Indian women have the awareness of their rights, the freedom, or the choice to voice their opinions and negotiate how they would like to be in a relationship. My opinion stems from the fact that I have an education and a voice. In addition, as a result of my travelling and education abroad, I have interacted with people from different cultures and races. Such experiences have changed some of my thoughts and perceptions about intimate couple relations, which may not fit with the people who have had different experiences than mine. Having lived in the United States for the past five years, I am somewhat out of touch

with the Indian culture. Moreover, being a single woman my perspective and experiences might be different from a married woman, raised, married and living in the Indian society. As a woman I cannot speak for the experiences of the married Indian men. I am afraid of the following: (a) that I would be biased by my social standing, my education, my financial status, and my single status; (b) that these would influence my expectations of a couple relationship; and (c) my perceptions of intimacy may not fit with the Indian way of thinking about couple relationship.

I also reflected on the suggestions that I received from my dissertation committee to review western perspective on intimacy and unpublished dissertations and thesis on couple relationship in libraries in Mumbai, India. I viewed these actions as helpful. They helped me familiarize with the concepts of intimacy derived from the Western literature and become aware of the extent of literature available on this topic in India. I also voiced my thoughts and feeling about the data collection process in my journal. For example, because of the time difference between the two countries, United States and India, phone interviews offered the flexibility to contact participants for the short phone call and the interview, at their convenience. At the same time, it was hard for me as a researcher to wake up late at night or early in the morning for the scheduled call. Keeping myself alert and functioning during those times was challenging. The strategy that helped me during the data collection process was waking up an hour or more before the intended appointment and having a cup of strong tea. It helped me be organized and alert before and during the phone interviews.

As discussed with my dissertation chair (Fred Piercy), I bracketed my understanding of the six concepts of intimacy: emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment and social intimacy. This was done by selecting pictures that represented my understanding of each of these concepts. When I selected the six

pictures, I also added captions that represented a one line understanding for each concept. In addition, I was able to test whether pictures were easily located from the internet. I and my dissertation chair (Fred Piercy), reviewed the pictures that I had selected. We discussed how and what these six concepts of intimacy meant to us. For me, this was another way of being mindful about my prejudices; how I relate to the literature of intimacy and Indian marriages; and how they influence my understanding of intimacy. In this manner, I was transparent about my ideas and experiences about the six concepts of intimacy. The figure below represents my understanding of commitment. I provided a caption stating my understanding of this concept. I also reflected on the process of data collection in my journal.

Figure 2: Commitment: Working together, being committed to a joint task and trusting each other

Citation: Untitled photograph of two rock climbers. From

http://www.microsoft.com/global/eu/publishingimages/humantrustimage_Page.jpg

Research Design

The original plan for this study was to investigate the intimacy experiences of married Indian couples by recruiting participants from India. Without the use of sensitizing concepts as prompts for data collection, participants were to be requested to select eight pictures that reflected their intimacy experiences. The data was to be collected from Mumbai (India) using

snowball sampling; pictures and face-to face interview with participants. In a discussion with the

dissertation committee (Chair and three other committee members), this plan was revised to

include sensitivity concepts derived from the Western literature on intimacy; and from Indian

literature on intimacy or couple relationships from unpublished dissertations and theses from

Mumbai (during the researcher's visit to India). As per the discussion, the researcher was

encouraged not to limit herself to recruit participants from one city of India, but try to recruit

participants from other parts of India. Safety and accessibility to potential participants were also

discussed. Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) mentioned that often time's safety of the researcher is

not considered. In addition, researchers should consider methods that were cost effective method

if it suits the purpose of the study and increased accessibility to potential participants. In keeping

with this discussion, the researcher visited Mumbai and reviewed hard copies of the unpublished

dissertations and theses available from four libraries in India (Nirmala Niketan, SNDT

University, University of Mumbai and Tata Institute of Social Sciences) and made notes. A short

summary of a few studies have been listed above (under sensitizing concepts about Indian couple

relationships).

The researcher also immersed herself in the Western intimacy literature and closely

reviewed research studies that focused on measuring intimacy and its multiple dimensions. These

dimensions are mentioned above (under intimacy sensitizing concepts). PAIR, WIQ, Swensen's

Scale for Measuring Feelings and Behavior, FIR, a self-report Marital Intimacy Questionnaire as

outlined by Van den Broucke et al., was reviewed for the similarities and differences between

their dimensions and what they assessed. Over a period of four meetings with the dissertation

chair, sensitizing intimacy concepts that could be used as prompts for data collection were

reviewed and discussed thoroughly. There was a consensus that similar concepts could be

grouped together and the most prevalent concepts could be used as prompts. The pre-interview instructions should be revised to include the eight prompts and should be accompanied by a short description of each prompt. One of the concerns discussed was that if more prompts are used the interview may become too lengthy for the participants. Feedback from Indian men and women were sought who reviewed the pre-interview instructions. They gave feedback on the pre-interview instructions to select pictures; specifically regarding their ease of use and understandability. Some tested the instructions and selected pictures from the Internet following the instructions. They found that the instructions were easy but the task was lengthy. They had to put in considerable effort to select pictures that fit with their perceptions per concept. They voluntarily shared their pictures with the researcher, and the researcher shared it with her chair with the volunteer's permission. These Indian men and women were not living in India and were not included in the study and the pictures were not included in the present study.

Upon further discussion with the chair, it was decided that the researcher should personally test the pre-interview instructions to select pictures. The researcher selected her eight pictures from the internet and added quotes with her pictures per concept. These were then discussed with the chair. Based on the feedback from Indian men and women and the researcher's personal experience of selecting the pictures, the sensitizing concepts were further narrowed down to six concepts of intimacy. The pre-interview instructions were revised and the six concepts were accompanied with short descriptions. The researcher again tested the same instructions by selecting pictures with her quotes that represented her perception of the six concepts of intimacy and shared them with her chair. It was mutually decided that this would serve as the pictorial bracketing of researcher's understanding of the six concepts of intimacy. Finally, the pre-interview instructions were revised to include the researcher's selection of the

pictures as an example for the participants. Although participants would select their own pictures, providing an example would increase clarity of the instructions for the participants. Participants would be required to select at least one picture per concept and provide a quote or caption with their picture. For simplicity, if participants selected more than one picture per concept, they would still be viewed as one for that particular concept. The interview protocol was revised keeping in mind the six concepts of intimacy. These series of changes were recorded in the methodological documentation maintained by the researcher. The researcher also prepared a list with names of counselors, agencies, helplines and nonprofits that offer mental health services in different cities of India. The purpose of gathering this information was to provide the same information to participants who were at risk of domestic violence or would like to avail of the therapeutic services.

The consent form, participant information to gather contact information, and participant questionnaire to gather background information were created electronically using a secured site, survey.vt.edu. The consent form clearly outlined the purpose the study, procedures, risks, compensation and confidentiality for participant's review. Therefore, from the original study, the data collection procedures were revised to recruit participants electronically from different parts of India. Participants were offered the opportunity to be interviewed over the phone or Skype. Furthermore, the researcher met with the Coordinator for the Institute for Distance and Distributed Learning at Virginia Tech to set up the Scholar site for the project, where participants would submit their word document with their pictures for the six concepts. The Institutional Review Board approved the study. For the purpose of the recruitment, flyers and email were sent to the listserv of the Counselor's Association of India, Virginia Tech Indian Student Association, and network of friends in India, United States and other parts of the world. They were requested

to pass on the information to Indian couples in India. Initial recruitment for this study was slow; some participants provided their information but upon contact did not respond. Some participants who submitted their information lived outside India and therefore did not meet the eligibility criteria for recruitment. Some participants completed either the consent form or the contact information form. If participants completed the contact information only, they were requested to submit the consent form. Reminders were sent again to the organization and network of friends. When participants completed both forms, email was sent to both spouses and they were requested to complete the participant questionnaire and were requested for a time for a short call. They were informed that the short call was to discuss the pre-interview instructions and to address any queries they had about the process. In addition, the researcher confirmed consent with each individual spouse and assured them of confidentiality. She also requested each individual participant to not share their pictures with their spouse till both have been interviewed. Participants were gradually recruited for the study and a Scholar guest account was created. They also were sent instructions on how to access Scholar and upload the Word document with their selected pictures (Appendix H). The purpose of using the Scholar account was to maintain confidentiality which was explained to the participant during the short call.

The first participant during the short phone call, requested the researcher to send the Word document with the two columns. In the first column on the left, prompts were listed and the right side column was blank for the participant to put his pictures next to the prompts. This request was documented in the field notes, another form of documentation that the researcher kept throughout the data collection process. Though the instruction to create the columns was already provided in the pre-interview instructions, the participant mentioned that it would make his task easier, if he had one from the researcher. The researcher prepared this template for the

participant (see Appendix I). Similar template was provided to all participants. Before each interview, the researcher confirmed if the pictures were shared with the spouse and if the participant would permit the researcher to record the interview. During the interview, both researcher and participants had access to the Word document with the participant's selection of pictures.

Another change, recorded in the methodological documentation was that during the interview when the participants ranked their pictures the researcher noted them down on the document. This change excluded the additional step that the participants were required to do, that is, rank the pictures and upload them on the Scholar site. During the first interview, the phrasing of a probing question was rephrased for simplicity, "What causes it to exist in your relationship?" was revised as "How do you maintain it? Or how do you keep it going in your relationship?" Before conducting her second interview, the researcher worked with two Indian students, one postdoctoral and the other a doctoral student, who were well versed with Bangla to translate the interview protocol in Bangla. The participant alternatively used English and Bangla during her interview which was recorded in the field notes. Other participants used English or a combination of English and Hindi. The researcher was well versed in these languages. Similarly, for each participant, the researcher maintained a field note after each short phone call and interview. This interview was conducted 12 days after the short phone call, which was different from what was listed on the pre-interview instructions, where it was mentioned that participants would be interviewed a week after the short call with the researcher. Participant's availability was kept in mind when scheduling the short phone call, and during submission of pictures and scheduling of the final interview.

To increase visibility and recruit more participants, minor changes were made to the recruitment flyer. The contact information survey link was listed before the consent form survey link and information about the compensation was moved to the end of the first paragraph of the recruitment flyer. Again emails with the new recruitment flyer were sent out. An individual who was separated from her spouse expressed interest in participating but was not recruited as she did not meet the eligibility criteria. Another individual expressed interest. She mentioned that she and her spouse were thinking of separation. They had been seeking therapy and would like to be included in this study. The researcher consulted with her chair and together they agreed that the participant meets the inclusion criteria but will be a negative case. The individual could be invited to participate but it should be mentioned that participation in this study should not be considered seeking therapy and if they would like a name of a therapist, the researcher would be happy to provide them. The potential participant thanked the researcher and withdrew her interest. She mentioned that her spouse was not interested in participation and that they already have names of therapists.

Other potential participants were gradually recruited for the study. The researcher gathered feedback from her network of friends from different age groups, who had been involved in helping in the recruitment process. Their feedback provided some insight into the difficulties in recruitment. Some reasons included one spouse being interested but the other was not; some mentioned that participation may open conversations that they are not willingly to have; and others said that their marriage may not survive the participation. As discussed earlier, intimacy is a sensitive topic and the researcher faced challenges recruiting potential participants. The researcher herself found that some participants who were interested but could not participate, cited the following reasons such as lack of time, travel and unavailability of self and spouse.

Apart from the methodological documentation, the researcher kept field notes and analytic

documentation. Most of the recruited participants expressed interest in the findings of the study

and considered it to be interesting. Such observations were documented in the analytical

documentation along with observations made during the data collection and analysis stage.

       Sample description and selection. In order to establish transferability, I used criterion

related sampling and snowball sampling to recruit 22 participants or 11 couples from four

different metropolitan cities of India. Patton (2002) mentioned that even a small sample can

provide rich description and deeper understanding of the experiences of the people. Criterion

related sampling has been used to study a specific culture or group or participants having

predetermined characteristics. Sampling strategies are directed towards recruiting participants

who meet the standards and excluding participants who fail to meet the criterion (Patton, 2002).

The following were the inclusion criteria (a) married couples residing in India, (b) couples

married between one to fifteen years, (c) participants who have access to computer and internet

at home or work place, (d) participants with the basic ability to use computer and internet to find

pictures, and (e) couples where both partners voluntarily consented to participate in the study.

The exclusion criteria for the study were (a) people who suffered from severe mental

impairment, (b) people who had physical and psychological disorders, (c) couples who were

separated, and (d) couples who had initiated divorce proceedings in court. In addition, snow ball

sampling was another sampling strategy used to recruit participants; few participants themselves

recommended names for other potential participants who fit the criteria. They were then

recruited for the present study.

       Demographics. A total of 22 participants (11 couples) were recruited for the present

study. The couples were recruited from four metropolitan cities in India: Bangalore, Delhi,

Kolkatta and Mumbai. Three couples lived in Bangalore, three in Delhi, one in Kolkatta, and four in Mumbai. Participants were between the ages of 23 and 42 years; among them, twelve (54.5%) participants were between 20-29 years; nine (40.9%) between 30-39 years and one (4.5%) between 40 and 49 years. The maximum age gap between a couple was seven years and the husband was usually older than the wife; only one couple reported being of the same age. Among the participants, 15 (68. 2%) were Hindu, four (18.2%) were Muslim, two (9.1%) were Christian and one mentioned that she did not believe in religion. Out of the 22 couples, two couples mentioned that they practiced a different religion than their spouse. In both cases the husbands were Hindu and their wives were Christian. One couple stated that even if they were Hindu, they do not believe in religion. All of the couples were from middle class families except for one couple who were from the upper class. Participants were highly educated with seven (31.8 %) having achieved a bachelor's degree; thirteen (59.1%) had a master's degree; one (4.5%) had a post graduate diploma and one (4.6%) had an M. Phil degree.

Participants were from different professions. Three worked in academia (one in teaching and two in research); three women mentioned they were home makers (of which two had previous work experience); two were social workers; one was a student; one was a advocate; one was a businessman; one was a software engineer; one was from human resources; one was from information technology; one was an architect; one was in corporate sector; one was in development; two was in media (communication and freelance work); and three worked in mental health (counseling, clinical and public health).

Couples were asked whether they were in love or arranged marriages, or both. Five couples mentioned that they were in love marriages; one in an arranged; one couple mentioned both love and arranged marriage; three couples, where one spouse stated they were in love

marriage, and the other said both. Finally, one couple said they were in both a love and arranged marriage. Although one couple reported an arranged marriage when completing the participant questionnaire, during the interview one of the spouses revealed that they had a love marriage. However, they acted in their community as if they were in an arranged marriage, which is why they had mentioned arranged marriage originally.

Couples who participated were married between one and fourteen years and only three couples had children. Six couples lived in a joint family (living with other family members such as mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, and brother-in-law), four couples had nuclear families (where they lived with their spouse, or spouse and children), and one couple mentioned that they were temporarily residing in separate accommodations on their university campus. They stated that they were waiting their turn to receive joint accommodation in university housing. The annual household income of each couple ranged from a minimum of $ 7,739 to a maximum income of $142,970 US dollars with a mean annual income of $ 41,718.45. See Table 3 for demographic information.

Table 3: Sample Demographics

Sl. No	Pseudonym	City	Age	Religion	Social Class	Education	Profession	Type of Marriage	Years of Marriage Approx	Family Members Living with the Couple	Annual Household Income (US Dollars) Approx
C-1-H	Amar	Kolkatta	28	Hindu	Middle	M.Phil	Teaching	Love	2 and half	Husband, Wife, Daughter, Mother-in-law	8186
C-1-W	Anu	Kolkatta	28	Hindu	Middle	Masters Degree	Housewife	Love			
C-2-H	Balu	Delhi	29	Hindu	Middle	Masters Degree	Research Scholar	Love	1		8846
C-2-W	Bani	Delhi	28	Hindu	Middle	Masters Degree	Research Scholar	Love			
C-3-H	Chetan	Bangalore	29	Hindu	Middle	Bachelor Degree	Software Engineer	Love	2 and half	Husband, Wife	73,707
C-3-W	Charu	Bangalore	27	Hindu	Middle	Post Graduate Diploma	Human Resources Business Partner	Both			
C-4-H	Dhruv	Delhi	33	Hindu	Middle	Masters Degree	Social Work: Disaster Management	Both	7	Husband, Wife, Father-In-Law, Mother-In-Law, Brother-In-Law And Sister-In-Law	40,535
C-4-W	Dolly	Delhi	32	Do Not Believe In Religion		Masters Degree	Mental Health/Public Health	Love			
C-5-H	Edi	Mumbai	30	Hindu	Upper	Masters Degree	Media & Communication	Love	5	Husband, Wife, Son, Mother-in-law and Father-in-Law	142,970
C-5-W	Eva	Mumbai	28	Christian	Upper	Masters Degree	At Home	Both			

C-6-H	Firoz	Mumbai	28	Muslim	Middle	Bachelor Degree	Business	Arranged	3	Husband, Wife, Father-in-law and Mother-in-law	7739
C-6-W	Fida	Mumbai	27	Muslim	Middle	Masters Degree	Counseling Psychologist	Love			
C-7-H	Geet	Delhi	38	Hindu	Middle	Masters Degree	Advocate	Both	4 and half	Husband, Wife	11,056
C-7-W	Gina	Delhi	34	Christian	Middle	Masters Degree	Social Worker	Both			
C-8-H	Hari	Bangalore	42	Hindu	Middle	Bachelor Degree	E-learning Architect	Arranged	14	Husband, Wife and Two Children	33,165
C-8-W	Hema	Bangalore	39	Hindu	Middle	Bachelor Degree	Home Maker	Arranged			
C-9-H	Iqbal	Mumbai	26	Muslim	Middle	Bachelor Degree	Information Technology Analyst	Love	1 and half	Husband, Wife, Mother-in-law, Father-in-law and Sister-in-law	11,976
C-9-W	Isha	Mumbai	23	Muslim	Middle	Masters Degree	Student	Love			
C-10-H	Jai	Mumbai	32	Hindu	Middle	Bachelor Degree	Free Lancer (Media)	Love	2	Husband, Wife and Father-in-law	10,135
C-10-W	Jati	Mumbai	25	Hindu	Middle	Masters Degree	Clinical Psychologist	Love			
C-11-H	Kunal	Bangalore	36	Hindu But Not Practising	Middle	Masters Degree	Corporate	Love	3	Husband, Wife	110,588
C-11-W	Kavi	Bangalore	32	Hindu But Not Practising	Middle	Bachelor Degree	Development	Love			

Procedures and data collection. The recruitment process began after receiving approval from the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were recruited online given the extent of Internet usage in India. The rate of Internet activity has increased, such that three out of four Internet users are online daily (Juxt Consult, 2009). At this rate, by 2010, the number of Internet users reported will reach 100 million (Internet World Stats, 2010). A nationwide survey of Internet users in India revealed that the Internet is widely accessed from the workplace and from home (Juxt Consult, 2009). According to this report, a majority (57 %) of all Internet users in India have a graduate degree or higher, and average monthly income of 18,930 INR ($ 425. 21). Moreover, 84 percent of the existing 46.5 million Internet users are from urban areas. Fifty-eight percent of the Internet users in Mumbai are between the age group of 25-45 years and 30 percent between 19 and 24 years (Juxt Consult, 2009, p. 147).

An email template (Appendix A) and flyers (Appendix B) were sent to the listserv of the Counselor's Association of India (CAI), Virginia Tech Indian Student Association, and networks of friends living in India and abroad. They were contacted to advertise for participants among couples living in India. In addition, recruited participants recommended names of potential participants for the study. The flyer provided links to the consent form (Appendix C) and participant information survey (Appendix D). The consent form was a web survey link. Consent was implied once participants read through the text in the consent form, entered their printed name and date and checked the box to signify their consent to participate in the study. The participant information survey collected the following information from the participants: name, contact information- phone and email address, gender, age and city of residence and the same information was requested for the spouse. In most cases, participant information was provided by one interested spouse who provided information for self and partner.

Participants who completed both the consent form and participant information form were contacted through email. If participants only completed the participant information form, they were requested to complete the consent form to continue participation in the study. Both husbands and wives completed the consent form separately. Participants were requested to complete the survey link with the participant questionnaire (Appendix E). This collected background information (education; profession; household income; religion; caste; social class; years of marriage; whether it is participant's first marriage or if married before or divorced before; number of children and family members at home; type of marriage- arranged or love or both; and participant's ratings of themselves as traditional or modern on a Likert scale and the reason for their perception). Each husband and wife completed this form separately.

Next, couples were contacted to schedule a short phone call to discuss the pre-interview instructions and to address any queries they had about the process so far. The pre-interview instruction (Appendix F) requested participants to select at least one picture for all the six concepts listed, that is, emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment, and social intimacy. A short description of each of the concepts was provided in the pre-interview instructions: (a) emotional closeness and self-disclosure such as, feeling close to partner using verbal or nonverbal expression of feelings, sharing something personal about self, worries, fears, and feeling vulnerable; (b) shared ideas and support such as, sharing of ideas and opinions, giving and receiving support and encouragement from partner; (c) sexual intimacy- being physically affectionate, communicating, initiating and engaging in sexual activity with partner; (d) relationship skills- such as, resolving differences of opinion, building consensus, agreement, or tolerating the least pleasant aspects of the partner; (e) commitment such as, experiencing trust, loyalty, fidelity, faithfulness or

commitment to growth of the relationship; and (f) social intimacy such as, sharing mutual

friends, networks, shared interests, hobbies, or participation in activities or sports with partner.

These served as prompts and participants selected their own pictures for each concept. They

could select these pictures from Internet sites (Flikr.com, images.google.com,

http://www.bing.com/images, images.search.yahoo.com, gettyimages.com, and dinodia.com),

family albums, take their own pictures. It was also mentioned that during the interview

participants were needed to have access to the Word document with the pictures. Participants

were added to the Scholar site. The pre-interview instruction for collecting pictures (Appendix

F), and instructions on how to access Scholar and upload the word document with their pictures

(Appendix G) were sent via email to participants once the time for a short phone call had been

scheduled. Sometimes, both husband and wife were available at the same time and they took

turns to speak to the researcher (Manjushree Palit or MP). At other times, both husbands and

wives scheduled separate time depending on their availability. The short phone call lasted

between 15-20 minutes.

During this short call, each participant's consent and participation was confirmed

verbally over the phone. Participants were explained that they could terminate their participation

in the study at any point in time. Participants were assured confidentiality and that the identifying

information will be changed to protect their confidentiality. It was also reiterated that Scholar

and survey.vt.edu were secured sites where they will submit their information. In addition,

husbands and wives were requested not to share their pictures with each other. A couple can

experience the same event and develop disparate views (Gilgun, 1992). The process of selecting

the pictures was explained individually to each spouse and each participant was explained how to

access Scholar site. Scholar is a secured site and it was used to maintain confidentiality.

Participants were explained the steps to upload the word document with their selected pictures in the Scholar site.

Participants were informed that the interview may approximately take 60-90 minutes of their time. Some minor changes were made to the pre-interview instructions to make it simple for the participants. In addition, the first participant requested for the template with columns where the pictures could be copied and pasted. The researcher created a blank table and sent that to the participants so that they could copy-paste their pictures on to the template and upload it to Scholar (Appendix I). Most participants selected at least one picture per concept except for a few who selected two or more pictures. The Scholar site was set up in such a way that once a document with the six pictures and captions had been uploaded, the researcher got an email informing her of the submission. In addition, most participants said that they would like to schedule the final interview only after they had selected their pictures. Once they selected the pictures, they sent an email to the researcher (MP) with a time and date for the final phone interview. Although participants had the option of a phone or Skype interview, if participants scheduled a call over the phone, the researcher called them over the phone for the interview. Sometimes internet speed was slow. Therefore the researcher used the phone as the medium for conducting the phone interview. Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) mentioned that telephone interviews can be used for qualitative research to gather rich data, particularly, when researching a sensitive and embarrassing topic. Moreover, telephone interview can provide the anonymity that participants may want. It is a cost effective and flexible mode of collecting data when it is difficult and expensive to reach participants (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). These researchers recommend that the suitability of the mode to collect rich data depends on the above mentioned concerns.

Even though couples were recruited for the study, each spouse selected the pictures and was interviewed individually (see Appendix H for the interview protocol). Interviews were scheduled as per the convenience and flexibility of the participants. Most of the participants spoke in English; some a combination of Hindi and English; and a few spoke a combination of Bangla and English. Bangla translation of the six concepts is attached (see Appendix K). The researcher was well versed with each of these languages and was able to conduct the interviews in these languages. During the interview, the researcher confirmed with the participant whether he or she had shared the pictures with the spouse and once confirmation was received, the researcher proceeded with the interview. Both the researcher and the participant had access to the pictures (for the six concepts of intimacy selected by the participant) throughout the interview. Each picture was a metaphor. The participants reflected on their thoughts and feelings related to the pictures, captions, and gave examples from their daily life during the interview. Zaltman mentioned that "eliciting metaphors helps researchers explore ideas that are deeply held as well as surface ones" (1996, p.14).

Each of the pictures related to the six concepts were explored. Participants were asked to reflect what they saw in the picture and the meaning of the picture. They were asked to share examples that reflect their experience; what they think and feel about the experience when it occurs and when it does not. Participants were probed about how they maintain that experience as outlined in the picture or the lack of it. They were asked about any change they have experienced over the years, and if they could share an example of what change looked like for them. Participants were also asked about the importance of the experience. All the six concepts were similarly explored with probing and examples. Christensen and Olson (2002) mentioned that using pictures as metaphors helps participants explore their feelings and thoughts related to

each picture. During the interview participants were also asked about any missing images and its relevance or any images that they would have liked to add but were unable to locate. Moreover, connections between the concepts were explored during the interview, when the participant ranked the pictures in order of their importance. Next, the participant also created the Kelly Repertory Grid. Each participant picked three pictures out of the six selected for each of the concepts. Even if there were more than one picture selected for a specific concept, they were treated as one single picture for that concept for the rank order task and the Kelly Repertory Grid. These tasks delved into the associations perceived by the participants among these concepts. In Kelly Repertory Grid, the participant selected three pictures associated with any three concepts and explored the similarities and differences between these concepts. Such tasks help explore the associations and connections formed by the participant (Catchings-Castello, 2000). During the interview, the researcher made notes on the assigned rankings to the pictures as outlined by each individual participant on to the picture document submitted by each individual participant. Therefore, another step that was initially requested that participants submit their rank ordered pictures (as mentioned in the pre-interview instructions) was removed. It removed another imposition on the participants.

Some participants had difficulty uploading their documents or accessing their account or forgot to use Scholar. Such changes were documented in the methodological documentation maintained by the researcher. At the end of each interview, again to reinforce confidentiality, participants' were asked if they would like to keep their pictures confidential or would permit the researcher to use their pictures for research, conference presentation and journal publication. Upon completion of the interview, each participant was thanked for their participation and they received a Shopper's Stop gift voucher INR 1000 ($ 18.85) and completed the W-8BEN form

(see Appendix L). In addition, each participant completed the online receipt once they received

the gift voucher (Appendix J). One participant did not provide examples and this was

documented in the field notes. Hesitations and pauses, participants having difficulty coming up

with examples, such notes were also documented. Other field note entries included disturbances

in the background, and if call lost connection or background noise could be heard. Each

individual interview was completed within that day, except one, where the participant was sick

and agreed to continue participation the next day.

Data analysis. Prior to data analyses, the researcher made her final entries in a self-

reflexive journal where she bracketed her experiences, shared her biases and impressions.

Although biases cannot be completely eliminated they can be minimized by the process of

bracketing the researcher's experiences and biases (Creswell, 2007; Moustaka, 1994). In

addition, field notes were entered immediately after each short interview call and after each

interview. These documented the researcher's observation of the participant responses during the

phone interview. All the recorded audio tapes were transcribed. When transcribing, I replayed

the tapes several times to transcribe participants' responses. In cases, where participants

responded in Bangla or Hindi, I transcribed and translated the audio recordings. In addition, I

cleaned the transcription, and read them several times. The transcripts were analyzed using the

following procedures that were initially developed by Colaizzi (1978) and later in 1994

Moustakas modified the steps for data analysis (Creswell, 2007). The researcher (a) read through

the transcripts to familiarize herself and have an overall sense of the transcripts; (b) selected and

identified significant statements that pertained to the participant's experience, Moustakas

referred to this process as horizonalization; (c) formulated meanings (Creswell, 2007, p. 89) in

keeping with the essence of the selected significant statements;(d) removed any overlapping

statements and created clusters of these statements (otherwise called cluster of meanings or themes) that offered the textural and structural description (or the description that captured the what and how) of the participant's lived experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 159) of intimacy.

The researcher reviewed and selected the significant statements for one transcript and compared it with the selection of significant statements that stood out for the Chair (Fred Piercy). The researcher also requested peer reviewers to review segments of her data. These were other transcripts with their significant statements and formulated meanings. She requested these researchers to create clusters and themes that they thought emerged for the portion of the data and the researcher compared the same with hers. Further, the researcher revisited her data, reviewed her significant statements and formulated meanings, and created clusters. These helped the themes to emerge from the data. In the next chapter, the researcher will present her findings from the present study and highlights the themes with rich description of what and how married Indian couples experienced different aspects of intimacy.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The main objective of this dissertation study was to investigate the lived experiences of intimacy in married Indian couples. I examined six aspects: emotional closeness and self-disclosure; shared ideas and support; sexual intimacy; relationship skills; commitment and social intimacy. My purpose is not to generalize the findings to all married Indian couples' experience of intimacy but to present an understanding of the shared lived experiences of intimacy of selected married couples living in urban India. I will present descriptions of the findings for each dimensions of intimacy, in the form of stories of participants' experience in each dimension rather than themes.

The Six Dimensions of Intimacy

The six dimensions of intimacy explored in this present study are (a) emotional closeness and self-disclosure; (b) shared ideas and support; (c) sexual intimacy; (d) relationship skills; (e) commitment and (f) social intimacy. These individual aspects of intimacy are equally important. They may occur simultaneously, have overlapping features and may influence each other. Participants stated their positive and negative experiences in each dimension. They also reported experiencing difficulties in maintaining these aspects and narrated strategies that they used to improve each of these aspects of intimacy. These six aspects were interactive and fluid in nature and changed over a period of time. Therefore these six aspects cannot be clearly delineated from each other although each may have some individual components. One participant used a metaphor to explain the connection:

> **"**These 6 things are so important. I can give an example, it's a house or it's a home,
> where one is the electrical connection, one is the plumbing, third one is ventilation, fourth
> one is the design of the home. If any one of them doesn't perform, then your plumbing

will be an issue or your electricity will be an issue. So I will say everyone is playing a

role in your life and you should give equal importance, equal weightage in maintaining

social intimacy, in maintaining commitment, communication, relationship skills. And one

will affect the other – these are not 6 different compartments. For example, if you are not

sharing ideas, if you are not sharing an emotional thing, your sexual intimacy will be

affected. If your relationship skills are not good, your social intimacy will be affected. So

these things are all overlapping."

There follows descriptions of each of the six dimension of intimacy, by 22 Indian participants

(11 husbands and 11 wives). Five main themes provide a description about participant

experiences in each dimension of intimacy and under each main theme there are several sub-

themes. The main themes are (a) description, (b) positive and negative experiences, (c) barriers

and strategies, (d) change over time, and (e) perceived societal norm. In this section below, I

have presented each dimension of intimacy and discussed the themes under each dimension

instead of presenting the themes sequentially as mentioned above. See Table 4 for themes in six

dimensions of intimacy.

Table 4: Themes in Six Dimensions of Intimacy

Themes in Six Dimensions of Intimacy	Description (Theme 1)	Positive and Negative Experiences (Theme 2)	Barriers and Strategies used (Theme 3)	Change over time (Theme 4)	Perceived Societal Norms (Theme 5)
Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure (First Dimension)	1. Description of Emotional Closeness and Self-disclosure *Partner's response is crucial* *Perceived as "soul of the relationship in the context of marriage*	2. Positive and Negative Experiences in Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure	3. Barriers and Strategies used in Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure	4. Change over time	5. Perceived Societal Norms
Shared Ideas and Support (Second dimension)	1. Description of Shared Ideas and Support *Perceived as "being present in a give and take relationship in the context of marriage*	2. Positive and Negative Experiences in Shared Ideas and Support	3. Barriers and Strategies used in Shared Ideas and Support	4. Change over time	5. Perceived Societal Norms
Sexual Intimacy (Third dimension)	1. Description of Sexual Intimacy *Perceived as the "body of the relationship" in the context of marriage*	2. Positive and Negative Experiences in Sexual Intimacy	3. Barriers and Strategies Used in Sexual Intimacy	4. Change Over Time	5. Perceived Societal Norms
Relationship Skills (Fourth dimension)	1. Description of Relationship Skills *Perceived to "hold the relationship together" in the context of marriage*	2. Positive and Negative Experiences in Relationship Skills	3. Barriers and Strategies used in Relationship skills	4. Changes over time:	5. Perceived societal norm

Commitment (Fifth dimension)	1. Description of Commitment *Perceived as the "foundation" of the marital relationship in the context of marriage*	2. Positive and Negative Experiences in Commitment	3. Strategies used in maintaining Commitment	4. Change over time	5. Perceived Societal Norms
Social Intimacy (Sixth dimension)	1. Description of Social Intimacy *Social intimacy perceived as 'connecting with others' in the context of marriage*	2. Positive and Negative Experiences in Social Intimacy	3. Barriers and Strategies used in maintaining social intimacy	4. Change over time	5. Perceived Societal Norms

Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure

Below the first dimension, emotional closeness and self-disclosure, is explored through five themes: (a) the description of emotional closeness and self-disclosure, within which there are two sub-themes: partner response is crucial, and emotional closeness and self-disclosure is perceived as "soul of the relationship" in the context of marriage; (b) positive and negative experiences in emotional closeness and self-disclosure; (c) perceived barriers and strategies used in emotional closeness and self-disclosure; (d) change over time in emotional closeness and self-disclosure and (e) perceived societal norm.

Description of Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure

This theme focuses on the description of emotional closeness and self-disclosure. There are two subthemes listed under this category. They are (a) partner response is crucial, and (b) perceived as "soul of the relationship" in the context of marriage. The majority of participants used the term 'sharing' (n=18) to describe emotional closeness and self-disclosure. Other terms used were discussing, communicating, talking, and expressing, sometimes in combination with sharing or exclusively. Sharing provided the opportunity for partners to behave freely with each other, to listen, understand, support and depend on each other. Geet, a male participant, defined emotional closeness and self-disclosure as "related to the way they lead their life, behavior with each other, their love and affection for each other and caring for each other". Couples talked about their emotions, thoughts, behaviors, wishes, needs, likes and dislikes, information, worries, fears and secrets with their partner. Secret refers to information that the participant valued and viewed as important. The person sharing the information may or may not feel vulnerable depending on the information that is deemed a secret and the context in which the sharing occurred. For example, Hari shared information about the likelihood of losing his job, whereas

Iqbal referred to the secret as sharing his selection for possible on site project at work. On the other hand, Dolly referred to secret as information pertaining to her friends only, and she does not share it with her husband because it is not hers to share. In each of these cases, the secret had a different significance for the person concerned. Therefore, sharing can be about "deep things" (emotions, personal information, professional work, good and bad aspects of the day or life in general, regarding conflicts, family members, stress) or "simple things" (such as which movies to watch together, which place to visit or where to go, schedules, and jokes).

Emotional closeness and self-disclosure primarily involved sharing verbally and non-verbally. Communicating verbally involves talking to each other. Non-verbally, it means facial and eye expressions, and touch in the spouse's presence. This is represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Verbal and non verbal sharing

Citation: Saeed Adyani (Photographer). The Ugly Truth. [Photograph]. From http://www.ew.com/ew/gallery/0,,20198001,00.html?xid=rss-feed-todayslatest-40+bad+romantic+comedies+%28part+1%29

Participants also reported that they shared using other media, such as emails, texts and phone calls when not in the presence of their partner. For example, Kavi states that talking to her husband Kunal is "generally followed by letters, emails, texts, followed by phone calls and then face to face discussion." Below is a picture that represents her sharing (See Figure 4). Another

participant, Dhruv, reported that his wife shares in writing and verbally. He states: "her writing skills and my verbal skills are ways of communicating to each other our intense feelings…. She really expresses well her worries/concerns."

Figure 4: Using several mediums to share

Citation: Ted S. Warren (Photographer). Untitled photograph of a women using the phone and laptop. From http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/the-monitors-view/2012/0816/Romney-Obama-must-call-a-truce-on-nasty-campaigning

Assertion: Participants described emotional closeness and self-disclosure as sharing emotions, thoughts, behaviors, personal information, and secrets with partner- verbally, nonverbally and electronically (through phone calls, text messages and emails).

Partner's response is crucial. Participants also discussed that one's sharing is dependent on one's partner's response. This response determines if sharing will continue in the relationship (n=11). The partner's attitude, behavior, thoughts and emotions to sharing are important determinants (See Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Partner's response is crucial

Citation: Beautiful woman whispering to boyfriend's ear [Photograph]. From:

http://www.shutterstock.com/pic-99167315/stock-photo-beautiful-woman-whispering-to-boyfriend-s-ear.html

Some common responses expected from partners were: listen nonjudgmentally; understand and support; value and guard information; help or teach the partner if needed; and respect individuality and space. For example, Chetan mentioned that, as a partner, he was expected to do "a lot of listening and explaining." One's partner's response was crucial in creating an environment for sharing and determined whether sharing would continue in the future. Hari, a male participant, shared an example of disclosure to his wife Hema and the circumstances in which he made the disclosure:

> I have not been doing well in my job because of some situations in the office. So I have to work more in the office or quit the job. Still that's one reason, and there are a lot of other factors, external factors. Actually I told my wife about that, and she listens to it and she just says it doesn't matter; it's not a big deal. Anyway you can get another job; it is too stressful here. That was some sort of disclosure very personal to me, and I would not have disclosed it to her if I were not sure that she would not have supported me.

In this mutually engaging process of sharing both partners were involved verbally and non-verbally. Isha expected her partner to understand her "eye expressions." None of the participants referred to the expectation that the partners respond to them electronically and hence it has not been included here. In fact, Dhruv who reported that his wife shares both electronically and in-person, mentioned that he is not good in writing and hence does not respond to her email and his preference is face-to-face discussion.

Assertion: One's partner's response to verbal and nonverbal sharing influenced participant's experience of emotional closeness and self-disclosure.

Emotional closeness and self-disclosure perceived as the "soul of the relationship" in the context of marriage. Participants were asked to reflect on the importance of emotional closeness and self-disclosure in their marital relationship. This aspect of intimacy is crucial to keep the partners connected, compatible and transparent with each other. A female participant, Jati, presented a picture that represented her emotional connection with her husband Jai (see figure 6 below). With him, she can be herself. With this connection partners could continue to rely and support each other, exchange different perspectives and convey care, and awareness of each other's feelings. According to Edi, this aspect of intimacy keeps the relationship "green and alive". They described emotional bonding as the "soul of the relationship". Anu reflected that "when we are living under one roof this kind of bonding is very important". In this manner, emotional closeness and self-disclosure strengthened the bond in the couple relationship and helped maintain a long-term marriage.

Assertion: In the context of marriage, emotional closeness and self-disclosure keeps the relationship alive by keeping the couples emotionally connected, compatible and transparent with each other.

Figure 6: Be self with spouse

Image used with permission of the owner.

Positive and Negative Experiences in Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure

Participants described positive and negative emotional and relationship experiences in sharing. Positive experiences refer to positive emotional and relationship connection between spouses. Likewise, negative experiences refer to negative emotional and relationship connection between spouses.

Positive experiences. Participants viewed sharing as providing positive emotional experiences such as happiness, relaxation, satisfaction, and comfort. Sharing also removed negative emotions such as anxiety and displeasure. One participant selected two pictures as representations of positive experiences in sharing (See Figure 7a and b below). Amar described his positive experience with sharing this way:

I believe it lowers my blood pressure, and a certain level of tension and anxiety that is outside. And this closeness to her gives me the strength and cheers me up somehow. It gives me a sense of belongingness and gives me a sense of possessiveness that I feel with her.

Figure 7: Positive experiences

Citation: 7a (image on the left): Affectionate couple finding out results of a pregnancy test in their bedroom [Photograph]. From http://www.shutterstock.com/pic.mhtml?id=49051519&src=id, and 7b (image on the right): Thinkstock Images. Couple walking on beach. [Photograph]. From:

http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/couple-walking-on-beach-royalty-free-image/86482201

Some relationship benefits of sharing are being comfortable within the partnership; improved understanding trust and respect; faster resolution of arguments; and assurance that one can depend on one's partner and partner's judgment. Jati shared that "I am comfortable with this one individual. I can be myself".

Assertion: Emotional closeness and self-disclosure invokes positive emotions (satisfaction, comfort) and behaviors (compatibility, dependability) in some participants. Others reported a decrease in negative emotions (anxiety) and behavior (arguing with the partner).

Negative experiences. When sharing does not occur participants reported negative emotional and relationship experiences such as feeling disappointed, irritated, uncomfortable, unhappy, sad, disconnected, and not peaceful. For instance, Iqbal, Firoz and Kunal mentioned the following respectively when sharing does not happen with their respective partners: "…if I

don't share anything with her I actually feel uncomfortable"; "…we could not share our feelings for that day, it's a disappointing feeling" and "…it feels sad. I mean you feel things that are not true; you don't feel peace. You feel.... disconnected."

Assertion: When participants do not experience emotional closeness and self-disclosure they report negative emotions (dissatisfaction, unhappiness) and relationship experiences (discomfort and disconnected) in their relationship.

In other words, positive experiences created an atmosphere that strengthened emotional closeness and self-disclosure, whereas the inability to share seems to have created negative emotional or relationship experiences in the couple relationship.

Perceived Barriers and Strategies Used in Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure.

Barriers. Participants shared a wide variety of factors that interfered with their emotional closeness and self-disclosure. Sometimes the barriers were intrapersonal, interpersonal and situation-based. Each of these individually interfered in the sharing experience of couples. Other times, it was the culmination of one or two of these factors that prevented or reduced emotional closeness and self-disclosure in the relationship.

First intrapersonal barrier was personality characteristics. For example, an extrovert may find sharing easier than an introvert. Kunal and Kavi reported that they both have different personalities and ways of thinking; they both partners thought it was important to assert their individuality in the relationship. This caused arguments and shutting down of communication between them. Their emotional closeness and self-disclosure suffered as a result. Secondly, one's negative emotions and attitude towards one's partner such as anger, irritation, hurt, indifference, and disagreement can hinder sharing. Interpersonal barrier was anticipation of a negative reaction by one's partner hindered emotional closeness and self-disclosure in couples. Apart

from his anger, Hari mentioned another reason when he does not share with his wife, namely his anticipation of his wife's anger.

> See there have been situations where I would not have shared, for instance if my mother says something about my wife and if it has a negative connotation, even though it is real, even if it is the truth, I would not want to come and tell her. Because I know that she will be very upset; because she also has a quick temper. So I would not have told her sometimes.

When a partner anticipated a negative reaction from the other such as anger, jealousy, lack of support and understanding, conflict or failure to listen, then he or she felt distant, and sharing could not take place. For example, Gina reported two reasons that limited their emotional closeness and self-disclosure intimacy experience. They were (a) her not feeling supported by her partner Geet when she has problems with his family members and (b) Geet's reluctance to share his feelings and thoughts.

Another barrier was situation-based. For example, factors such as couples being busy with work or travelling; spouse's availability; other family members being present or other things taking priority such as taking care of children's needs and not having time for each other prevented sharing from happening. Anu mentioned that when she is sharing with her partner, and if a family member walks in, then she has to "tone down" her sharing. Sharing is problematic when one partner is traveling or if both partners are traveling or have busy work schedules. Kunal mentioned that he and Kavi travel a lot, and they miss each other's calls. Kavi believes that travelling limits their sharing of "anecdotes, personal and professional experiences" with each other. This leads to conflicts which further diminish their emotional closeness and self-disclosure.

Assertion: Barriers were of three types intrapersonal (personality characteristics, one's negative emotion), interpersonal (anticipation of a negative reaction from partner) and situation-based factors (lack of time, presence of other family members, lack of availability of partner). These interfered with the couples' experience of emotional closeness and self-disclosure.

Strategies used. In order to explore the means used to maintain emotional closeness and self-disclosure in their relationship, participants were asked how they maintained emotional closeness and self-disclosure in their relationship. In spite of the challenges faced, participants mentioned various strategies that they had used or perceived as helpful in maintaining the emotional closeness and self-disclosure. Like the barriers, the strategies were of three types, intrapersonal, interpersonal and situation-based. In no particular order they are (a) sharing despite the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the content and emotions to maintain transparency; (b) informing their partner of secrets; (c) receiving shared material positively; (d) maintaining communication and making time to share daily, weekly, every fortnight, or occasionally or as and when needed despite challenges such as busy schedules, lack of time, and other priorities demanding their attentions; (e) respecting each other's space and need for personal time to share; (f) either partner taking initiative to engage the other; (g) consciously reminding self and spouse that the relationship is more important than their individual selves; (h) engaging partner in a conversation about the positive impacts of sharing on their relationship and (i) accepting and accommodating each other's medium of sharing whether over the phone, email, text, or in person.

A few examples of how couples used these strategies are outlined below. According to Hema, despite their busy schedules and demands of parenthood, her husband on an ongoing basis

helps her cut vegetables. They use that time to share openly with each other. Hari also confirmed that he maintains continuous communication with Hema: "I don't wait for things to develop before I tell her. I typically share with her on an ongoing basis." Another participant, Jai, said he and his wife share their daily schedules and keep each other updated either in person, over the phone or through text messages daily. When there is a serious concern or problem, they make time every weekend, or every fifteen days to catch up with each other. Isha reported that when it is difficult to share with her husband Iqbal in the presence of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law she shares over "Whats App", a text messaging application on her phone. Mutual appreciation and discussion about the effects of appreciation also helps couples feel emotionally close to each other. For instance, Edi mentioned that he and his wife Eva not only appreciate each other but also talk about the effect of appreciation on their relationship. In their case, it is appreciating and respecting each other's religion and making sure that their own family-of-origin does the same.

Maintaining emotional closeness and self-disclosure is a circular process. Participants recommend being deliberate about mutual sharing and responding positively. Many participants used more than one strategy in their relationship.

Assertion: Many participants used more than one strategy, like the barriers the strategies were of three types: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and situation-based

Change Over Time in Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure

Participants were asked if they noticed any changes over time in the emotional closeness and self-disclosure dimension of their relationship. Some participants perceived improvements; some mentioned there was no change while others perceived this dimension had decreased in their relationship over time. Some participants reported changes in self or their partner or both or

changed circumstances over time that had influenced their emotional closeness and self-disclosure.

Three participants mentioned that there was no change in this dimension over time except their emotional closeness and self-disclosure was disrupted at times by conflict or interference by extended family members. For example, Anu did not perceive any change before and after her love marriage with Amar, except their moments of closeness and sharing have been interrupted by family members at times. Similarly, Firoz perceived that his closeness with Fida is the same but occasionally disrupted by their fights. Jai too noticed no change.

Assertion: For some participants, emotional closeness and self-disclosure did not change over time but was occasionally interrupted.

Eleven participants, (five couples and one individual) reported improvement in their emotional closeness and self-disclosure because of an increase in openness to mutual sharing; increased understanding; supporting, appreciating and giving space to each other; one accommodating the other's medium of communicating feelings, thoughts, and behaviors; and decrease in insecurities in one or both partners over time. Both Bani and Balu reported that in the one year of their marriage, emotional closeness and self-disclosure have improved because communication, understanding of each other's likes, dislikes and expectations have increased. Improved understanding may extend to one's self, and one's partner's family-of-origin, which may reduce an important source of conflict in the couple relationship that is fighting over family-of-origin. Both Charu and Dhruv perceived that their insecurities have reduced with time in their respective relationship with their spouse. Husbands and wives may highlight different aspects that have changed over time.

Assertion: Some couples mentioned improvement in their relationship over time due to positive changes (respect, understanding) and removal of negative emotions and behaviors in self and partner.

Three participants reported a decrease in their emotional closeness and self-disclosure over time because of parenting and other responsibilities, lessening of openness in one's self or one's partner, and lack of time for each other. Hema, who has been married for fourteen years, perceived that she and Hari had more time for each other before their kids arrived. Now their time together has decreased because of parenting and other responsibilities. Gina said that, over time, she has become more open, but Geet has become reluctant to share. Another participant, Kunal reported that lack of time has created disconnect between him and his spouse:

> We try to call and talk but to tell you the fact that in recent months or times that have not happened much seriously. It has been very hectic, in that sense, different time zones, different time periods, and the kind of work is also different. She is very dedicated to her work so the whole day she will do that and when she is free and she thinks that I am free, and that very moment I am extremely busy. It could be that I call, and she is busy and when she calls I am busy. There is a lot of disconnects over there. So to tell you the truth, the past 6 months or 8 months we have not found that effect.

Assertion: Some participants reported decrease in emotional closeness and self-disclosure due to decrease in positive behaviors (such as openness) and changed circumstances (lack of time).

Overall some participants reported no changes; some perceived improvements in self, partner, or the relationship over time; whereas others reported decreased emotional closeness and self-disclosure with partner.

Perceived Societal Norms

Four participants (two males and two females) described societal norms and expectations that had impacted their relationship with their spouse. In Indian society, the expectations of a daughter-in-law are comparatively greater than those of the son. Often when there is a problem between the daughter-in-law and the husband's family, it is not unusual that the husband fails to provide emotional support and understanding to the wife. Though no pictures representing the perceived societal norms were presented by participants, some participants shared their perceptions during the interview. When both Charu and Gina had problems with their in-laws, they experienced less support or no support from their spouse. The husband, wife and the husband's parents form the nuclear family. The husband's parents are as significant as the spouse in the family system. Chetan said that the joint family system (including extended family members) has changed to nuclear family system but the values have not changed. His nuclear family includes his parents and wife and in this nuclear family system, each one has a role to play and the important function of the nuclear family (husband, wife, father-in-law and mother-in-law) is to make sure that they are spending time together, helping, supporting and meeting each other's demands.

Assertion: Some Indian wives experience less support from their husbands, when there is a conflict between the daughter-in-law and husband's family of origin. Some husbands consider their family-of-origin as a part of their nuclear family.

Another perceived norm is that the wife in the Indian society needs to seek her husband's permission, rely on her husband for minor and major decisions in life and play the role of the listener in the couple relationship. Hari reported that because of his wife's upbringing she believed that "women were only listeners and the men actually are ruling the roost." Hema, for

example, asked for Hari's permission to visit her family and had difficulty accepting the freedom and choice he gave her to make those decisions herself. On a similar note, Kunal said that the couple relationships in India are expected to be smothering which reflects a lack of respect for individual space between spouses. He emphasized an Indian husband and wife relationship is "too smothering" although he like that of Hari preferred a relationship that encourages spouses to be together yet be independent as individuals.

Assertion: Husbands and wives were not expected to express their individuality in marriage, especially women; they were expected to depend on men for decisions.

Shared Ideas and Support

The second dimension of intimacy explored with participants relates to shared ideas and support. Five themes have been listed below; they are (a) description of shared ideas and support, which includes a sub-theme, shared ideas and support perceived as 'being present in a give and take relationship' in the context of marriage; (b) positive and negative experiences; (c) perceived barriers and strategies used; (d) change over time and (e) perceived societal norms.

Description of Shared Ideas and Support

Participants referred to this dimension of intimacy as sharing, discussing, supporting, encouraging, and making decisions together. This form of intimacy allowed couples to "match intellectually" or maintain intellectual connection, complement each other, share responsibilities and maintain equality in their relationship. The two representative pictures presented in Figure 8 (a and b) were provided by two participants. One represents sharing of ideas and the other sharing of responsibilities between partners.

Figure 8: Shared Ideas and Support

Citation: 8a (image on the left): Outcome in the exchange of a wondrous idea [Illustration].

From: http://www.ideachampions.com/weblogs/archives/2010/09/lets_cut_to_the.shtml, and 8b

(image on the right): An attractive man and woman holding cleaning supplies [Photograph].

From: http://www.shutterstock.com/pic-22937353/stock-photo-an-attractive-man-and-woman-

holding-cleaning-supplies.html

Some ways in which shared ideas and support were expressed in the marital relationship

were supporting each other's career and education; planning for the future; professional

experiences; jokes; ideas regarding making modifications to the couple's home, sharing equal

household responsibilities and parental duties; encouraging each other in pursuing hobbies and

exploring dreams; celebrating each other's festivals, and being supportive of each other and their

family-of-origin. One participant described this aspect of intimacy as "what you do in reality,

what are you doing for yourself and for each other" and "how much involved one is in the

other's life." Some examples include Anu referring to providing moral support for her husband

Amar during his struggles to achieve his doctorate degree. In turn, Amar supports Anu by

helping her take care of the baby when she is crying. Edi reported supporting his spouse Eva

with taking care of their child. Similarly, Bani reported that Balu encourages and support her

when she is lagging behind or feels stuck when completing her assignments for graduate school.

Balu reported that he and his wife discuss financial constraints and share ideas about exploring their dreams. An example of sharing ideas related to his profession was provided by Eva who said:

> Everything that I do - projects, assignments, and events- we discuss with each other. Similarly, in his work career move, his development path, office politics you may say, anything and everything, he discusses that with me. I am lucky to say that I can match the understanding that is required to understand his profession and his career path that he is going.

Also, husbands shared responsibilities at home so that their spouses could maintain a career or manage the stress at work. For example, Charu states that her husband understood that she was doing everything at home and has started supporting her in the kitchen:

> I cannot spend a lot of time in the kitchen, and he understands that. He understands the fact that 'she is working too hard, she is going out on her own she is doing everything'. He has started supporting me in the kitchen.

Similar views were shared by Firoz, who helps Fida with household responsibilities. Another participant Isha reported receiving support from her husband for continuing her education against his family's wishes.

Assertion: Participants described shared ideas and support as complementing each other, sharing intellectual connection, maintaining equality and sharing responsibilities with partner.

Shared ideas and support perceived as "being present in a give and take relationship" in the context of marriage. Participants revealed their perceptions about the shared ideas and support dimension of intimacy in the context of marriage - "marriage is not

about one person managing it. It's sort of two people there", "being present" and having a "give and take relationship" with their partner (See figure 9 below).

Figure 9: A representative picture of a give and take relationship
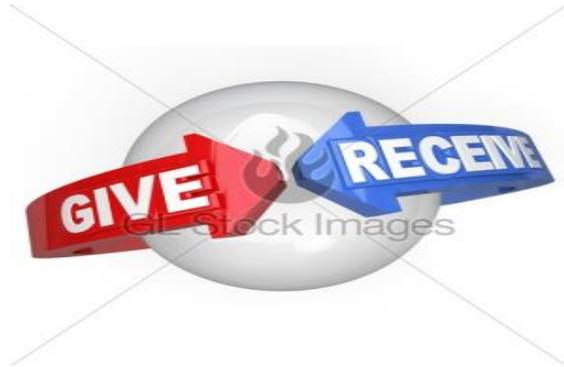
Citation: Giving and Receiving words on arrows around a sphere to symbolize the full circle of sharing and getting back, a form of karma for the good things you do for others [Clip art]. From: http://www.canstockphoto.com/give-and-receive-sharing-support-helping-11606337.html

Couples who tend to share their ideas and support each other help each other "grow", "walk together", "stay together", and are "compatible" in aspects that matter the most to the couple's relationship. Otherwise, there would be a gap in the relationship. The presence of this aspect will help couples be comfortable, complement, respect, be open with and accept each other. According to Hari, shared ideas and support is important in his marriage because:

> When we have a home, children and family, there are a lot of things that we need to work on together and all the time - which school our children will go to or what should our house look like; when we should buy our house and then what if something goes wrong? How do you support? That is something that we need. This is the actual practical aspects of what is happening on a day-to-day basis. This interchange is very important.

This is important in marriage because spouses should be willing to complement each other, be comfortable with the other and treat each other as equals. Lack of understanding, acceptances, and support for each other's ideas may lead to recurrent conflicts and divorce.

Assertion: In the context of marriage, "being present", meant sharing ideas and supporting each other in taking care of responsibilities. This is a way of helping each other grow in relationship.

Positive and Negative Experiences in Shared Ideas and Support

      Positive experiences. When sharing ideas and support happen in a couple's relationship, it results in some constructive emotions and relationship experiences. This is another way of helping and making each other happy. For example, Amar mentioned that when he takes care of the baby at times, his wife would smile or give him a tap and express her happiness on receiving such support from him. Likewise, positive feelings for self may be experienced. For example, one might feel proud, secure, strong, relieved, peaceful, and free. Eva shared a picture of the wall of her home, which displays her professional accomplishments such as certificates for excellence at work (see Figure 10). She attained these accomplishments with her partner's support. Such positive feelings further nurture feelings of motivation, appreciation, acceptance and helpful behaviors among couples. Moreover, negative feelings and thoughts were reduced. For example, one can discuss and share professional burdens, complaints and stress with one's partner and seek the partner's opinion. This gives faith, hope, and support to the spouse enduring the problems.

Figure 10: Picture of support received from partner

Image used with permission of the owner.

Assertion: Positive experiences in sharing ideas and responsibilities increase positive feelings and removes negative emotions and thoughts for self and partner.

Sharing ideas and support also offers couples a form of intellectual connection which helps them understand each other's mental makeup and adapt to each other's mentalities. For couples, it assisted in winning and maintaining trust and building friendship in the marital relationship. For example, Isha referred to her experience of receiving support from Iqbal and its impact on her.

> After my marriage, I wanted to pursue my masters, and it was difficult for me from my in-law's side because they said "You just got married, and you want to attend college full time and then you want to take up a part-time job". But my husband was there, and he really stood for me, and he said: "No, let her study. She has taken psychology, so it matters a lot to her to pursue her master's." Even for the family planning thing, my in-laws were saying: "You ought to have a child. It's been one year now, and you should have a child and why are you not planning a family?" There also my husband supported: "Nowadays people do not plan a child very soon; they take time, and they understand

each other." So he supported me in these important decisions of my life; he is there for

me, he supported me, and that mattered a lot to me.

This aspect of intimacy increased feelings of compatibility and satisfaction in the relationship.

Assertion: Sharing ideas and supporting one's partner helped one understand partner's mental makeup, which increased positive experiences of compatibility and satisfaction in marriage.

Negative experiences. Gina, a participant, selected the picture below (see Figure 11) and

mentioned her experience of lack of support in her marital relationship. She said, "see in my

case, I selected a picture which is entirely opposite of my case. I don't get much help in

household chores from my husband."

Figure: 11 Picture representing lack of support from husband in household chores

Citation: Untitled illustration of a couple cleaning dishes. From

http://www.essentialbaby.com.au/life-style/family-home/the-retro-housewife-20130428-2immn.html

When shared ideas and support do not happen, then one loses morale, feels lonely, dissatisfied,

and distanced. Hari mentioned that his wife Hema became furious when he bought a piece of

land without telling her. Sometimes when people perceive things differently and do not see the

other's point of view then sharing of ideas leads to arguments and stressful experiences for the couple. Kavi shared her thoughts on such a scenario:

> When we generally try and discuss things that we want to do and how we perceive things, we always argue. And sometimes, we think,' oh, God! What the hell is happening why are we arguing so much?' It is stressful.

On those occasions, couples may refrain from sharing with each other or avoid the topic.

> When support is not needed yet offered; sometimes when instead of sharing ideas, one spouse tries to impose their ideas on the other, it may result in conflict, or help is offered which is needed. These experiences evoke a negative feeling such as embarrassment rather than evoking a positive feeling. Amar mentioned an incident where his intention to help went wrong:

> There was this letter that she was trying to write, an application letter, and I went to help her with that letter, I did what I usually do, and instead of writing her name, I wrote mine. And we had to erase it and do it again, and she was a little embarrassed at that. I am giving an example where my desire to help her went wrong.

Assertion: Negative experiences occur when one spouse does not support the other; when sharing of ideas leads to arguments and stress between partners; and when one partner imposes views or extends support to the other that is unwanted. Then such experiences bring negative emotions and distance between partners.

Perceived Barriers and Strategies Used in Shared Ideas and Support

Barriers. Participants reported experiencing certain emotions or situations when they were unable to support each other. One perceived barrier was when one's spouse was unable to go against the wishes of the extended family and support the spouse. For example, Jati reported

that her father-in-law organized a big puja (party) and invited families and other people over and
that she was expected to organize and manage it. She said:

> In fact, recently we were supposed to have a big puja to be held at home and there were
> many people coming home. I was preparing, and it took me almost 15 days to work out
> things, or whether I will be able to manage it properly and 'my god how will I manage
> people?' Jai could understand that I had a difficult time, but he could not really do
> anything against his father's wishes on occasions like these.

When the spouse understands the issues but cannot do much about them, it can be a hindrance.
Situation-based barriers were financial constraints and lack of time. This may stop one partner
from supporting the other in pursuing his or her dreams. One participant mentioned that because
of travel, the conversations are missing.

Other deterrents to the experience of shared ideas and supporting intimacy experiences
are interpersonal differences. These are partners behaving selfishly; making decisions alone or
changing plans without checking with their partner; assumptions (when one assumes that the
spouse will understand without explaining what one is thinking); spouses exhibiting nagging or
being demanding and one partner experiencing negative emotions (hurt, angry, sad, and
frustrated). Sometimes when couples do not talk or argue and blame each other a lot or do not
give space to the other, such behaviors deter the shared ideas and support intimacy experiences
in the couple's relationship. One participant, Firoz mentioned that his behaviors in the early
stages of his marriage were selfish and less supportive towards his spouse:

> I was a bit of a selfish kind of guy because I used to stay alone. We do live in a joint
> family. I, my mom and dad use to live together. So generally all my things my mom used
> to do - pick up my clothes, not pick up my clothes, but all small things like making tea

for me and making my breakfast and all of that. So when my wife came that focus

shifted. So the work which my mom used to do 100%, now my wife does.

When couples have frequent disagreements about ideas and support then, even if they agree at

times, they tend to perceive that there is no agreement between them in the relationship. This is

as a result of their intrapersonal understanding of their situation. See Figure 12 for a

representative picture of a couple disagreeing with each other. In short, this can increase

arguments in a relationship and couples may become reluctant to share and support each other.

Figure 12: Couple disagreeing with each other

Citation: Bryan Creely (Photographer). Couple fight man [Photograph]. From:

http://www.photoxpress.com/photos-couple-fight-man-10910863

Assertion: Barriers were certain situations, intrapersonal, and interpersonal differences

that hindered participant's ability to share ideas and support partner. These were lack of

support from spouse in matters relating to their family-of-origin; when one spouse does not

seek the other's views; and when couples perceive more negativity in their relationship.

Strategies used. Participants referred to using a variety of strategies to maintain the

shared ideas and support intimacy experiences in their relationship. Some strategies that couples

have learned to exhibit in their relationship are sharing and supporting in spite of disagreement

between partners; building consensus or agreeing to disagree; mutual decision-making, and maintaining positivity in the relationship.

Building consensus or expressing disagreements with partner but not resisting partner's plan; supporting each other emotionally and mentally; communicating and mentally preparing each other for discussions; and doing things to keep each other happy. Dolly explained her experience:

> He is a very charitable person. He gives a lot to people, to whoever asks him for help. And there are times he won't have the money but he will ask someone else and take a loan from them and then give it. These are the things I don't support him in, but I don't stop him from doing these. I just share my disagreement.

If disagreements persist, partners could end the discussion; not discuss when angry with each other; give space to each other and recognize that individual decisions are a possibility or they can agree to disagree or pick the best idea possible as a team. Hari mentioned that he and his wife Hema try to build consensus, "I give in a bit and she gives in a bit", using each other's strengths and selecting the best idea as a team. Sharing or splitting responsibilities can help the couple manage their workload. Jai mentioned that he and his wife split responsibilities and they take turns in managing when the other is unavailable.

Another strategy is keeping the positivity going on in the relationship, such as, reminding oneself of those times when one's spouse did support one or share ideas. Other couples keep the positivity going by doing little things to reduce potential negativity in their relationship. For example, Firoz mentioned that although he does not like doing household chores he does so because his spouse becomes happy. He said: "….see generally when I do it, I don't feel good because you are working, but the happiness on my wife's face shows it all. She has to do less

work and she is happy." Positivity is maintained when disagreements are handled by accepting, listening to and respecting each other's point of view; discussing the positive and negative aspects; keeping ongoing communication using various modes such as email, phone and text messages if not present with the partner; not blaming one's partner; recognizing when one is wrong and expecting support from partner when one is right; apologizing for mistakes and not delaying resolution of an argument; and setting time aside as a couple to share. Isha mentioned when she does not receive support from Iqbal she reminds herself that he has been supportive of her on other occasions. This helps her manage her negative feelings when occasionally he does not support her. In a way, she picks her battles and "it is not necessary to fight over everything". According to her, blaming each other does not help their situation. These are several ways couples have helped each other maintain shared ideas and support in their relationship.

Assertion: Participants used more than one way of dealing with intrapersonal, interpersonal and situation based barriers. Some participants found it helpful to share and support their partner in spite of disagreements. Some reported working with partner to reach consensus and learning to agree to disagree with partner as helpful strategies. Some participants referred to keeping the positivity going in the relationship by maintaining positive behaviors and emotions during conflicts.

Change Over Time in Shared Ideas and Support

Couples differed in their understanding of how shared ideas and support have changed over time. For some couples not much has changed, for some couples there has been improvement while, for others, this dimension has deteriorated with time. Three couples reported different degrees of change over time. For instance, Anu's perception was that her support for her partner had not changed much, but her spouse Amar perceived himself as less supportive

after marriage. He also perceived himself as more open and secured after marriage. For Chetan and Charu, while Chetan did not perceive much change in this dimension, Charu, however, reported improvement as a result of Chetan sharing, understanding and supporting her. In both cases, one spouse perceived no change in support and sharing while the other spouse reported improvement in sharing, support and feeling of security.

Another couple differed in their perspective about change over time. While one perceived improvement, the other perceived a reduction in shared ideas and support over time. Kavi felt that acceptance and giving space to share one's ideas had increased over time, but Kunal was of the opinion that it was present earlier in their relationship and had decreased over time.

Assertion: Some couples disagreed on their perception of change in shared ideas and support over time. When one spouse perceives no change, the other may perceive increase or decrease in this dimension over time; and when one partner perceives an improvement the other may perceive a decline in shared ideas and support over time.

Two participants reported growth in self and their partner over time. Balu said that the support has improved with increased understanding of financial conditions and liabilities. Similar to Balu, Firoz also perceived that, over time, this dimension had become better with him sharing household responsibilities with his wife. Four couples also reported progress over time in their shared ideas and support. Both spouses agreed on the areas of improvement and perceived same degree of growth; these were their acceptance of each other; joint decision-making; faster resolution of conflicts; more focus on positivity decrease in conflicts and less blaming over time. Edi and Eva perceived improvement as a result of the decrease in arguments, learning from past experiences and dealing with the ups and downs of life. Another couple, Hema and Hari also reported increased support and positivity in their relationship. Hema said they made joint

decisions and Hari mentioned that his support for Hema had increased the positivity in their relationship over time. Isha and Iqbal agreed that they had learnt to resolve conflicts quickly and that this had improved their shared ideas and support. Finally, more participants reported improvement in shared ideas and support in their relationship over time. Perception of one's role and one's partner's role was a determinant of change over time for couples.

Assertion: Some couples agreed about the positive developments (positive emotions, behaviors and positivity) in their relationship over time.

Perceived Societal Norms

Seven participants shared their perception regarding the existing societal norms for Indian husbands and wives. Five participants reported that, in the Indian society, there exist inequalities in the husband-wife relationship. An Indian husband is expected to bear the burden of creating a secure and stable position for his family in society. For example, Anu shared her thoughts regarding this perception:

> Because, in our society, the husband has to do everything, if you have the security of a husband, and if he is not able to secure his position in society then we will not be able to build our family's position in this society, and I think that's why I have to give him the support.

Firoz's perception is similar to that of Anu's. Firoz mentioned that some Indian husbands think their responsibility is making money for the family. Being the bread winners, they do not go beyond that to help and support their spouse in household responsibilities and child care. Though Firoz himself disagrees with the below mentioned perception:

> Many of my friends generally don't help in the household work. Generally the wife is at home. The guys think because 'I am working at the shop or office, my responsibilities are

over because I am earning for the family.' So it does not end here; we have

responsibilities towards our house also.

Isha believed that husbands who are supportive are rare and difficult to find. She said: "In India

nowadays, I have seen my friends in love marriages and arranged marriages, whatever marriage,

you don't get that support and love from your husband."

Assertion: Unequal gender roles exist in Indian marriages; husbands are primarily

responsible for finances and the wives are responsible for household work.

Another perception is that Indian husbands and wives face dilemmas after marriage. Two

participants, Isha and Fida talked about the husband's dilemma in the Indian society; the husband

is "sandwiched" between his wife and his mother. Mostly when there are conflicts between the

mother-in-law and the wife, the husband usually tends to side with the mother and not the wife

irrespective of whether the mother is right or wrong. Similar to the husband's dilemma, Charu,

reported that an Indian wife also faces a dilemma. That is, before marriage as a girl she is

"committed and accountable to her own family but after marriage, it is for two families - one in-

laws and one of her family of origin." In short, both Indian husbands and wives face challenges

in meeting parental and in-law expectations after marriage.

Assertion: After marriage both husbands and wives face dilemmas. A husband's dilemma

is choosing a side, between wife and family-of-origin. A wife's dilemma is being responsible

for one (family-of-origin) versus both sides of the families (family-of-origin and in-laws)

after marriage.

Sexual Intimacy

Here I will describe the third dimension which is sexual intimacy and participants'

experiences of this dimension. The themes focus on (a) description of sexual intimacy with the

sub-theme of sexual intimacy perceived as the "body of the relationship" in the context of marriage; (b) positive and negative experiences; (c) perceived barriers and strategies used to maintain sexual intimacy; (d) change over time and (e) perceived societal norms.

Description of Sexual Intimacy

Sexual intimacy was described by participants (n= 16) as a physical connection that involves more than just sex. It includes physical affection and communication. Sexual intimacy behaviors referred to the following: sexual intercourse; foreplay; orgasm; hugging; cuddling; caressing; touching; holding hands or holding each other in bed; kissing and sitting or smiling together with spouse. Participants derived different degrees of satisfaction from these acts. For example, Amar said: "I believe the cuddling part occurs after the intercourse, and it gives more satisfaction than the real thing." Similarly, Edi shared that "physical intimacy does not only mean sex, but also means kissing each other, touching each other, even like holding hands, and you can feel it." Two representative pictures of sexual intimacy behaviors (holding partner and smiling together; sex with partner,) are presented by two different participants below (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Sexual intimacy behaviors
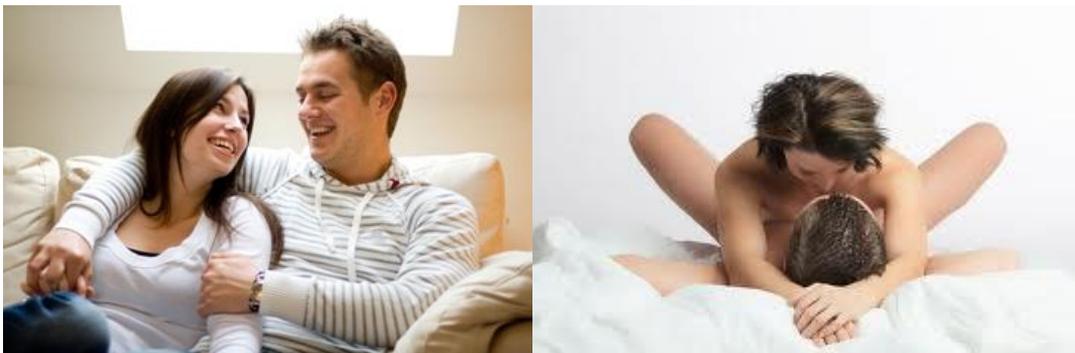
Citation:13a (image on the left): Untitled photograph of a couple laughing together on the couch.

From: http://blog.the-intimate-couple.com/2012/02/04/settling-for-a-%E2%80%9Cgood-enough-

marriage/, and 13b (image on the right): Christoph Rosenberger. Young nude couple

[Photograph]. From: http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/young-nude-couple-royalty-free-

image/109863082

In addition, this form of bonding also includes talking openly about sexual desires, giving

and receiving feedback and meeting each other's needs. For example, Anu stated that sexual

communication is important in her relationship: "I think in our relationship just having sex is not

enough, and we go our separate ways that will not work. We have to talk about it and be sexually

intimate." Therefore, participants in this study described sexual intimacy as much more than the

act of having sex, it involves physical display of affection which may be nonsexual in nature, as

well as communicating about sex.

Assertion: Participants described sexual intimacy as engaging in sex and sex-related

behaviors with partner (foreplay, kissing); behaviors that reflected physical affection

(hugging or holding partner) and engaging in sexual communication with partner.

Sexual intimacy perceived as the "body of the relationship" in the context of

marriage. In this cluster, participants (N=17) shared their perception related to sexual intimacy

and its role in the context of marriage. Sexual intimacy was considered as the "body of the

relationship" because it offered couples a way of expressing their emotions in a physical,

concrete and real manner. Sexual intimacy offers verbal and non-verbal means of

communicating love, affection, and desires in the couple relationship. It served as a way to enjoy

each other, to know each other's bodies and to give and receive pleasure in the relationship.

Sexual intimacy is a way of sharing and submitting one's self to one's partner willingly and

wholeheartedly in a way which is not done in any other relationship. One participant shared a

picture representing the idea of connecting with one's partner in a physical manner (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Connecting with partner in a physical manner

Citation: Untitled photograph from the movie Parineeta. From:

http://ibnlive.in.com/photogallery/5121-1.html

Although sex offers an intimate connection with one's partner, it was perceived as only one of the several ways of expressing love and making partner happy. Sexual needs cannot overpower all the other needs of the relationship. Dhruv states:

Sex is important, but it is not the thing that will overpower all your relations, your emotions, so take it lightly. If it happens, it's fine, if it doesn't happen, it's not a big deal. God has given us a wonderful thing; we should enjoy it rather than make it an issue.

Assertion: In the context of marriage, sexual intimacy offered couples a way of relating to each other in a physical and concrete manner. It's one of the ways to form intimate connection with partner, but this need should not overpower all the other needs of the relationship.

Positive and Negative Experiences in Sexual Intimacy

Participants stated positive and negative experiences in this aspect of intimacy. These relate to emotional and relationship experiences in a couple's relationship. One's perception

influenced the way the intimacy experience was viewed positively or negatively. For instance,

Anu mentioned that, during her pregnancy for a few months, she was living with her parents. At

that time, she was not with her husband and they did not have sexual relationship. Yet she said:

"We use to talk to each other a lot on the phone; it was as strong as the way we were when we

lived together." Unlike his wife's experience as mentioned above, Amar experienced sexual

intimacy differently during Anu's pregnancy. According to him, there was a decrease in their

degree of sexual intimacy. He said:

> When she was pregnant, and we could not become intimate with each other, we just
>
> touched and felt each other ... It was not complete; we couldn't cuddle up because of her
>
> belly, the baby could have been affected. I felt outside; a little estranged from her during
>
> that time.

Below are two similar pictures of couples beneath the sheets selected by Anu and Amar (See

Figure 15).

Figure 15: Anu's and Amar's perception of sexual intimacy

Citation:15a (image on the left): Untitled photograph of two sets of feet on the bed under the

white sheet. From: http://kisapuckett.hubpages.com/hub/3-Juicy-Secrets-to-Sexual-Satisfaction-

in-a-Healthy-Marriage, and 15b (image on the right): Untitled black and white photograph of a

couple on the bed cuddling each other. From: http://www.inquisitr.com/113562/wives-sleep-issues-can-cause-marital-discord/

Assertion: Partner's may view the same experience differently, one partner may report the experience positively and the other negatively depending on their perceptions.

Positive experiences. When participants (N=17) experienced sexual intimacy positively, they reported feeling fulfilled. Mutual pleasure brought excitement, comfort, provided encouragement and removed insecurities between partners. Sex, physical affection and communication with one's spouse reinforced the feeling of being important and a sense that partners are there for each other. Charu shared her perception of the physical display of affection shown by her husband in a couple's gathering:

> I was putting my head on his lap, and he was caressing my hair, and it was so nice, child like feeling, such a gentle feeling. I felt really good about it. I felt in front of a crowd. I am so important to him, and he gives me so much importance. So that was something I really loved, small gestures like that.

When partners feel close as a result of sexual intimacy it also decreased tension in the relationship and resolved disagreements and discords between partners to a certain degree. This also removed the feeling of being under pressure to engage in intercourse and relieved stress. In addition, the positive moments strengthened the physical and emotional closeness and trust between spouses.

Assertion: When positive experiences in sexual intimacy occur, participants report positive emotions (excitement) and behaviors (resolution of disagreements). It also removes negative emotions (such as insecurities and stress) and affects other dimensions of intimacy (emotional closeness).

Negative experiences. Participants (N=12) reported negatively when they experienced less than their desired level of sexual intimacy or different degrees of sexual intimacy as compared to their spouse or when they did not experience sexual intimacy. For example, Kunal reported that when his wife has an orgasm, and he doesn't then it creates "disharmony". Negative experiences such as lack of satisfaction and fulfillment increased arguments and stress in a couple's relationship. Isha reported that during her honeymoon it was difficult for her to adjust to their sexual life as her husband would sleep, and she would get angry with him. Such conflicts may result in a spouse questioning the relationship and not talking to or helping their partner.

Assertion: When one partner's level of desire does not match the other's level and when one partner is dissatisfied; such experiences were termed as negative by participants. Such differences lead to conflicts between spouses.

When there is recurrent or long-term disinterest in sex by one spouse, the other may feel depressed and unfulfilled. Hari shared his negative experiences with his partner's continued disinterest in sex for fourteen years. He said:

> It goes on, and I actually get depressed and angry. I think more angry than depressed. I will be angry for one or two days. I don't talk to her much about it. I don't talk to her at all for a few days, and it can be longer, as well. And it can go on for a week as much when we don't talk.

When sexual intimacy needs are not met according to one's expectations, it can create problems and stress in a couple's relationship and affect other areas of intimacy.

Assertion: Some participants reported their spouse's recurrent disinterest or long-term disinterest in sex, which is a source of conflict in their marital relationship.

Perceived Barriers and Strategies Used to Maintain Sexual Intimacy

      Barriers. Participants reported several factors that interfered with the achievement of their desired level of sexual intimacy. (a) Factors those were situation-based, such as not having enough time, and their spouse being unavailable. (b) Some factors were intrapersonal such as self or partner having health issues; and being tired; not being in the mood or stressed out due to work or any other reason; when one is unaware of one's desires or the focus is self-performance; lack of knowledge about sex; negative attitude about sex and disinterest in sex. (c) Some factors were interpersonal such as one's partner forces one to have sex; one find it difficult to express their desires to partner; when partners are physically and emotionally uncomfortable with each other; when one partner gives a recurrent negative response to the other's initiation of sex and physical affection; when partners have different libido; when sex is only for procreation or when sex is no longer fun, and monotonous between partners. These factors affect the achievement of sexual intimacy between married couples in India. Few examples relating to the interpersonal factors from participant's experiences are: Hema said she was from a conservative family and had difficulty expressing her desires to her husband whereas another participant, Dhruv said that when he focused on performance he was putting undue pressure on himself and was unable to be sexually intimate with his spouse. Another participant, Charu reflected that conflicts with her spouse created, and the physical and emotional distance between them and interfered with their sexual intimacy:

      I shout and then just to teach him a lesson or to teach him next time he cannot repeat it; I will not talk to him for a day or two. And when I am in the bed, I will be on one side and not look at him. When I am angry with him, I feel he needs to understand where I am coming from and my body becomes very unapproachable.

Two other female participants, Gina and Hema reported that they have different degrees of libido from their spouse and the same sexual acts have become monotonous over time, creating a barrier in their sexual intimacy.

Assertion: Couples reported barriers that were situation-based, internal and interpersonal factors that interfered with the achievement of desired level of intimacy.

Strategies used. The above mentioned barriers were overcome by several strategies that participants mentioned in their relationship. Many used more than one strategy to maintain their and their partner's desired level of intimacy. Situation based barriers was resolved by taking time out to be sexually intimate with one's partner. Interpersonal barriers to achieving desired level of intimacy were resolved through sexual communication. For example, discussing with each other their likes and dislikes, preferences; accepting, appreciating and acknowledging one's self and one's partner's needs; focusing on mutual pleasure and exploring new ways of pleasuring each other when both partners are comfortable; demonstrating physical affection (hugging, kissing and giving gifts and cards) towards partner. Hari mentioned that if he made sure that not only he but his wife also has an orgasm during sex, then it puts her in a good mood for two days. Moreover, holding and cuddling can put one's spouse in a good frame of mind. Similarly, husband and wife, Dhruv and Dolly stated that they focused on mutual pleasure.

Furthermore, internal barriers to sexual intimacy were resolved using humor or laughter. These mitigated stressful sexual communication under unfavorable conditions (such as being unable to perform sex when tired, stressed, or not in the mood) and dissipate the negative effects of such situations on a couple's relationship.

Assertion: Couples used more than one means of resolving issues with spouse. Sexual communication resolved interpersonal difficulties; humor addressed internal barriers; and making time for partner addressed situation-based barriers.

Change Over Time in Sexual Intimacy

Participants reported changes in their sexual intimacy over time. Some of the changes related to improvements in their sexual intimacy; some changes were related to a decrease in sexual intimacy over time; and some reported no changes. In many instances, husbands and wives differed in their perceptions and understandings of these changes.

Some changes were for the better, such as more access to one's partner; accepting each other's "no to sex" at different points in time; increased understanding, openness, accommodation and satisfaction of each other's sexual needs, and desires; over time. Spouses reported different degrees of changes over time. Amar stated that passion has abated over time but understanding, adjustment to each other's needs, accessibility to one's partner, and sexual satisfaction for both has increased comparatively. Anu, his wife, reported no changes over time. In contrast, two couples, Dolly and Dhruv and Jati and Jai reported similar changes over time in their relationship in terms of being "open", "expressive", and "knowledgeable" about each other's needs, and being more at ease in asking for a hug or a kiss or sex.

On the other hand, some spouses reported inconsistent perceptions about changes in their sexual intimacy over time. One reported positive changes and the other reported decrease in sexual intimacy over time. Husband and wife Kunal and Kavi, reported different perception of their sexual intimacy, Kavi reported a great sex life, usually initiated by her, whereas Kunal mentioned that initially they had a good sexual intimacy and cared for each other's needs like

reaching orgasm, but over time it had declined. He said: "I do not want to talk or have sex and sometimes she may raise this as an issue."

Assertion: Some couples reported different degrees of change time (no change, positive changes, and negative changes) over.

For some couples, closeness may have grown over time or differences were not reported in spite of facing a few challenges along the way, such as coping with health issues, child birth, discrepancy between spouses in terms of interest in engagement in sex, physical affection and sexual communication. Edi mentioned that Eva had more interest in exploring sexually while he was a "slow pacer" in the early years of their marriage but that over time, her interest had declined compared to his. This was due to health issues, work stress and child birth. However, affection had increased. Eva reported that "this closeness continues to grow strong. Sometimes it does hit rock bottom". Two other couples Charu and Chetan and Fida and Firoz, reported that their interest in sex was higher initially but over time had been replaced with more interest in physical affection (hugging, kissing, holding each other, lying down together, cuddling and talking to each other openly).

Assertion: Some couples report positive changes inspite of challenges faced.

Three couples referred to difference in libido as a consistent problem in their relationship with different outcomes over time; one spouse reported more problems in sexual intimacy compared to the other. Isha reported that Iqbal was shy and was less interested in sex as compared to her but over time he understood her needs and their closeness has improved. However, Iqbal did not report any changes over time. Similarly, Geet did not mention any change over time but Gina reported that interest in sexual intimacy had declined over time from his end and reported it as a problem in their relationship. Hari and Hema struggled with the same

issue. Hema was less interested in sex as compared to Hari, but over time Hema reported that they have been exploring and trying new things. Hari reported that the closeness had improved for the better much more slowly than his expectation in the past 14 years. In the pictures (See Figure 16) below, Hari attempted to depict his sexual intimacy experiences with his spouse. The first and second picture depicted his wife's recurrent disinterest in sex and her refusal to have sex with him whenever he initiated. These pictures depict his struggles while the third picture depicts improvements in his sexual relationship with his spouse. This particular picture depicts the times when his wife demonstrated interest and enjoyed sex and had orgasms.

Figure 16: Sexual intimacy picture selected by Hari
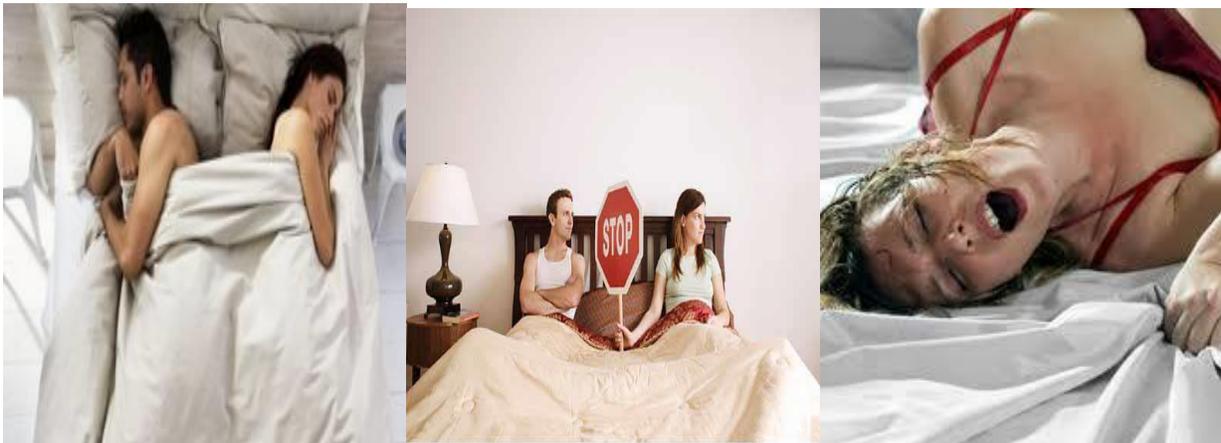
Citation: 16a (image on the left): Fuse (Photographer). Couple sleeping on opposite sides of bed [Photograph]. From: http://www.thinkstockphotos.com/image/78778693/popup; 16b (image in the middle): Jupiterimages. Couple holding stop sign in bed. [Photograph]. From: http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/couple-holding-stop-sign-in-bed-royalty-free-image/78375459; 16c (image on the right): Denis Aglichev (Photographer). Orgasm [Photograph]. From: http://www.shutterstock.com/pic-4540423/stock-photo-orgasm.html

Assertion: Sometimes one partner reported ongoing problems in sexual intimacy, which may or may not be addressed by the other partner.

Finally, there was one exception - Balu and Bani. This couple had reportedly been legally married for one year and sharing physical affection but they did not voice their desires for sex nor did they have sex until they could reside together after their social marriage, where one gets married following the social and religious customs. Balu provided a picture that depicted their situation as visible in Figure 17. This case was an exception.

Figure 17: Sexual intimacy picture selected by Balu
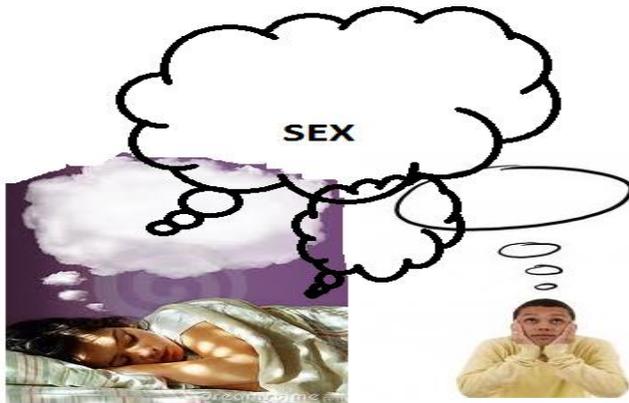
Citation: 17a (image on the left): Young girl sleeping in her bed, with a dreaming fluffy balloon above her head [Photograph]. From: http://www.dreamstime.com/stock-photos-dreaming-girl-image14856243, and 17b (image on the right): Young man dreaming looking up to the copy space [Photograph]. From: http://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-images-young-man-dreaming-image7903989

Assertion: There was an exception, a couple married for a year did not engage in sexual relationship with each other.

Over all, couples reported a mixed variety of changes, no improvement, some improvement whereas others reported decline over time. Some couples were in agreement about the changes, whereas others provided contradictory perception of their sexual intimacy.

Perceived Societal Norms

Participants (N= 9) shared their perception of societal norms related to sexual intimacy. In Indian society, sex before marriage is unacceptable but sex after marriage is essential to build a relationship and makes the marriage real. Amar said:

> Once you make the physical contact with a woman, and a woman makes a physical contact with a man, I believe it becomes more important than even the social contract of marriage. It's a real marriage.

Mostly sex happens after marriage. Both husbands and wives are expected to engage in mental and physical connection after marriage. Iqbal mentioned that he had sex for the first time on his honeymoon. The predominant notion is that the purpose of sexual intimacy is procreation and the more traditional Indian couples may not exhibit physical affection with each other. For example, Isha mentioned that her parents have never held each other's hands, but unlike them she and her husband hug and kiss each other.

Assertion: Sex is for procreation and couples should engage in sexual relationships after marriage.

Gender differences also impact attitudes towards sex. Indian women consider sex as a stigma. Such an attitude towards sex may be a result of upbringing and can influence the presence of minimal or lack of sex education. Hema said:

> Actually it was sort of an inhibited feeling. I come from a conservative family, and the idea of this intimacy was itself a new thing. I was not able to express anything whether I like it or not. So that was a part my husband wanted, and so we have to do it. But over a period of time we started going through different materials and I felt that I could ask how I wanted it, what gives me more pleasure.

Similar views were expressed by Fida, who said that, unlike her, a lot of women in Indian society go through stress in the sexual relationship with their spouse because their wishes and desires are not understood or considered important. Mutual understanding and pleasure may not be common among for a lot of Indian couples. Indian men may be more focused on performance than having fun or pleasing partner.

Assertion: Gender differences exist in attitudes towards sex.

Relationship Skills

The fourth dimension of intimacy, relationship skills, is the next to be described. There are five themes explored below. They are (a) the description of relationship skills, which has a sub-theme of relationship skills as means 'to hold the relationship together' in the context of marriage; (b) positive and negative experiences; (c) perceived barriers and strategies used in maintaining relationship skills; (d) change over time and (e) perceived societal norms.

Description of Relationship Skills

Participants' understanding of relationship skills can be seen in a number of comments. They referred to the relationship skills dimension of intimacy as "complementary and interdependent", "having agreements and disagreements" and "tolerance and intolerance towards unpleasant aspects of partner's personality". For example, Dolly said:

> Our qualities complement each other. For example, he cannot say no to people. I can say no very easily. So there are times I tell him when to say no and how to say it. So I complement his limitation.

Eva depicted her understanding of relationships skills by selecting the picture below (See Figure 18) as an illustration of managing disagreements and agreements between spouses.

Figure 18: Relationship skills picture (U v/s Me = Us)
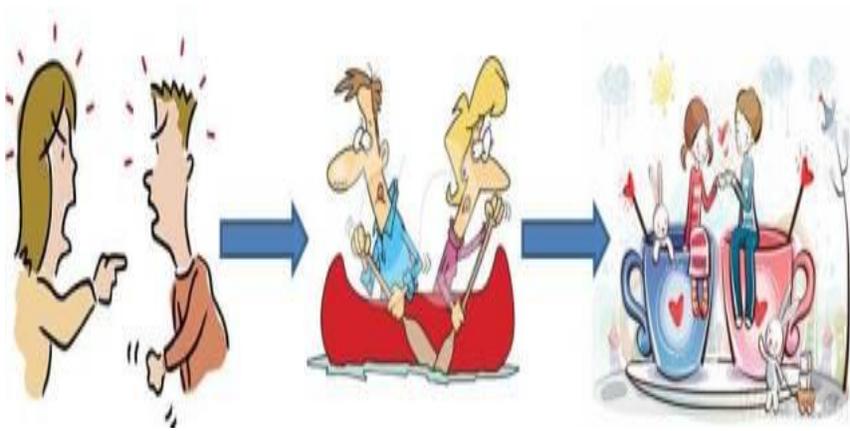
Citation: 18a (image on the left): Untitled illustration of a couple arguing. From:

http://www.thecollegianur.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/arguing_cartoon.jpg; 18b (image in

the middle): Ron Leishman. Untitled illustration of a couple in a canoe. From:

http://images.clipartof.com/small/1047139-Royalty-Free-RF-Clip-Art-Illustration-Of-A-Cartoon-

Couple-Rowing-A-Canoe-In-Opposite-Directions.jpg; 18c (image on the right): Couple lovers

valentine cartoon ktqrj vector holiday [Illustration]. From:

http://www.desktopwallpaperhd.net/couple-lovers-valentine-cartoon-ktqrj-vector-holiday-

180994.html

Couples tend to become dependent on each other to meet their needs. Anu referred to her

relationship with Amar as an interdependent relationship. Amar depended on Anu in terms of

"taking care of his clothes, shoes and socks when he leaves for school in the morning" while she

consulted him on "major decisions". Husbands and wives may tolerate and accept the least

pleasant aspects of each other's personality. Dhruv described how he exhibits tolerance in

dealing with unpleasant aspects of his spouse Dolly:

> For example, my wife takes a lot of time in dressing up. She will take at least half an hour
>
> to one hour if she has to go out. I take 3-4 minutes, and my wife takes half an hour to get

ready. So these 25 minutes, one is you tolerate, second is you enjoy. Rather than

tolerating, I enjoy it. I crack jokes on her style of getting ready, the way she wears the

saree, and the way she picks her earring. These are her style, which I don't want her to

change, but these are totally different from my personality, my style. So I try to take the

less tolerant aspects in a lighter way, and that's the best way of keeping your relationship

intact.

In this particular dimension of intimacy husbands and wives needed skills set that helped them

experience a complementary and interdependent relationship, deal with disagreements and learn

to build consensus or agreements and manage individual differences by accepting the least

tolerable aspects of their spouses.

Assertion: Relationship skills help couple maintain a complementary and interdependent

relationship, manage disagreements, and tolerate the least pleasant aspects of the partner.

Relationship skills as means to "hold the relationship together" in the context of

marriage. Participants perceived relationship skills as very important to holding their marital

relationship together, without these skills the gaps in their relationship would become greater. A

marital relationship needs work and rests on the ability of the spouses to manage differences,

engage in communication and maintain friendship to build a better relationship for both. See

Figure 19 for a representative picture of a couple trying to hold on to each other despite their

differences.

Figure 19: Relationship skills picture

Citation: Conflict in a family [Photograph]. From: http://www.istockphoto.com/stock-photo-11553872-conflict-in-a-family.php

Relationship skills are necessary as no one is perfect in a marriage. Some aspects of each other's behavior, personality, thinking and emotions may be disagreeable to the other. Firoz expressed that "agreements and disagreements are a part of life so once we have accepted that it's okay. No one is perfect, and disagreements do happen." Hema viewed agreements and disagreements as an acceptable part of marriage, arguing that they are bound to happen between two individuals who are married to each other. She feels that life would be too "dull" or "bland" should spouses agree on everything. She said: "If we are disagreeing, then disagreement is part of the agreement." Relationship skills help couples work out their disagreements, both small and large. Amar shared that small fights tend to teach couples to manage big fights:

> If we don't fight or quarrel then, it would be quite a salt-less kind of a relationship. If some crisis does come later, we might be prepared for it like in a quarrel 'what should be said and what should not be said'. So maybe rehearsal for big fights so that it does not ever occur because small fights lets off the steam.

This approach helps the spouses tolerate and accommodate the unpleasant aspects of each other. These skills help increase trust, emotional and sexual closeness and understanding between couples, thereby affecting the other dimensions of intimacy.

Assertion: Relationship skill "holds the relationship together" because no marriage is perfect and disagreements are inevitable. Married couples need skills to manage their individual differences.

Positive and Negative Experiences in Relationship Skills

Participants talked about their positive and negative experiences with respect to relationship skills. Two pictures representing both these aspects have been presented below by a participant (See Figure 20 below).

Figure 20: Positive and negative experiences in relationship skills

Citation: 20a (image on the left): Jacob Wackerhausen. Beautiful day at the beach [Photograph]. From: http://www.thinkstockphotos.com/image/stock-photo-beautiful-day-at-the-beach/145120377, and 20b (image on the right): Untitled photograph of a couple fighting. From: http://www.goodtoknow.co.uk/relationships/261030/8-rules-of-arguing-in-a-relationship

Positive Experiences. Positive experiences were described as occasions when one's self or one's spouse or both managed individual differences in a manner that had a positive impact on

their marriage. Amar mentioned that, despite his wife's possessiveness, she managed the following situation well. He indicated that there was trust in the relationship and no teasing from her side later.

> We went to this marriage party, wedding party, and we were sitting together and she went out to wash her hands or something. Some other lady came and sat in front of me, and we had a little conversation about the wedding. By the time, she came back and sat by me and looked at me and her. She actually participated in the conversation. I thought that she might tell me about it later, or she might tease me about the conversation later but she didn't.

Accepting disagreements helped couples release pent up emotions, learn acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, handle crisis and develop consensual decisions. Positioning small disagreements as bringing fun and revealing the depth of love in the marital relationship helped spouses not feel threatened by arguments or become too annoyed to express their views. Dolly shared a narrative of her disagreement with Dhruv over an issue:

> Our home is being constructed right now and there are some aspects like parts of the balcony that we disagree about. I didn't want it to be made because it was an extension that didn't look good from outside, but he wanted it. I expressed my disagreement completely. But we went ahead with it. Even after the disagreement, we didn't fight or not talk to each other, we respected that.

Learning to make mutual decisions can generate positive emotional and relationship experiences. Even if agreement is not reached between spouses, couples can be at ease with each other despite their differences. See below a picture of a couple engaged in expressing their disagreements with ease (See Figure 21).

Figure 21: A couple engaged in discussion

Citation: AAGAMIA (Photographer). Couple talking in bedroom [Photograph]. From:

http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/couple-talking-in-bedroom-high-res-stock-photography/sb10068015h-002

Assertion: Couples had positive experiences when there is a shift in emotion, behavior or thoughts by one or both partners that improved the relationship.

Negative experiences. These occurred when participants were unable to depend on each other, resolve disagreements or tolerate the unpleasant aspect of their partner's personality. Negative experiences were characterized by one spouse or both experiencing negative emotions such as hurt, anger, loneliness and dissatisfaction or negatively affecting their partner's mood. Referring to her discussion with her spouse, Gina said "to be very honest, I avoid that because at the end of the day after three hours of discussion, we do not reach a conclusion. We have wasted time and mood." Gina was referring to the recurring discussions with her spouse relating to his family-of-origin and its unhelpful effects on their relationship.

In addition, negative experiences were seen as occasions when partners stopped talking to each other, did not accept recommendations from each other and did not work together towards resolving issues. See below a picture of a couple not talking to each other (Figure 22). In

negative experiences, thoughts such as separating or divorcing their partner had crossed their

mind. For some couples, this feeling may be temporary but for others such feelings over time

resulted in distance and spoilt relationship between spouses.

Figure 22: Picture of a couple not talking to each other.

Citation: Digital Vision (Photographer). Portrait of a woman sitting on a sofa with a man in the

background [Photograph]. From: http://www.thinkstockphotos.ca/image/stock-photo-portrait-of-

a-woman-sitting-on-a-sofa-with-a/dv702059

Assertion: Couples had negative experiences when emotions, behaviors and thoughts of one

or both partners that declines the ability of the spouses to work together to resolve issues.

Perceived Barriers and Strategies Used in Maintaining Relationship Skills

Barriers. Participants reported certain barriers that prevented the use of relationship

skills to resolve differences with their spouses. These barriers were interpersonal differences

such as lack of compromises and mistrusts between spouses; delaying resolution of conflict;

waiting for the other to take the first step; repeated discussion of the same issue without any

conclusion or resolution; bringing up the past in any arguments and blaming each other;

misunderstanding; imposing views on spouse; talking harshly to each other during conflicts; one

or spouse being busy and/or unavailable or unwilling to resolve issues or to listen to the other.

For example, when there is a disagreement Kunal mentioned that his spouse is unwilling to listen and shuts him down. Kunal selected a picture that represented his partner's unwillingness to listen (See Figure 23 below). This repeated lack of resolution of their conflicts has impacted their relationship and now both keep grudges. These issues create a disconnection between partners.

Figure 23: Relationship skills picture shared by Kunal "This is what happens and I hate it"

Citation: Sharon Dominick (Photographer). No! [Photograph]. From:

http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/no-royalty-free-image/172176699

Assertion. Couples perceived interpersonal differences as barriers and they interfered with the couple's ability to use relationship skills to manage individual differences.

Strategies used. Participants mentioned that they used some relationship skills to manage disagreements and build consensus, their dependence on their spouse and how they reacted to what they perceived as intolerable characteristics of their spouse. These strategies included tailoring expectations, for example, not expecting their spouse to agree all the time and to look for a workable solution; respecting each other's decisions on issues such as tolerating each other's parents and involvements with friends; 'agreeing to disagree' on issues where there were considerable differences and to continue to talk to their partner in spite of these differences; choosing one's battles and letting go of things beyond one's control; apologizing and

appreciating each other; and using humor and enjoying the least pleasant aspects of spouse.

Dhruv referred to using the principle of acceptance:

> We have to accept the way a person is. Although it is common tendency to expect I am
> perfect and the other person should behave the way I am behaving but that is not the
> reality. There are ten strengths in my wife and two weaknesses in my wife; there are ten
> strengths and few weaknesses in me and that's the way we are. So if we don't accept each
> other, we are unnecessarily inviting trouble in our life. And another thing is all these
> small things in our life are negotiable.

As another example, Hari stated that his apologizing and appreciation diffused a conflict between

him and his wife. He shared an occasion where a sorry and a kiss resolved their differences. See

Figure 24 for a representative picture of one spouse apologizing to the other.

> I know she was very upset and I did not talk about it at all. When she was just sitting, I
> just went to her and kissed her and said I am sorry. And then she said that's okay. I didn't
> talk to her after that and three or four days later she tells me when I said sorry to her, all
> her pains went away suddenly. She was so much more at ease. She was still a bit unhappy
> but 90% of it was resolved.

Figure 24: Apologizing to partner

Citation: The New York Times. "Do the Right Thing" with Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis [Photograph]. From: http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2006/03/22/arts/26jame3_ready.html

Finally, there were multiple ways of resolving disagreements, tolerating difficult aspects of spouse and handling dependence on the partner. Some participants used more than one strategy to resolve different conflicts in their relationship.

Assertion: Couples used more than one strategy. Some used intrapersonal (tailoring one's expectations; picking battles) and interpersonal (respecting) skills to manage conflicts in the relationship.

Change Over Time in Relationship Skills

Different perspectives were shared by participants regarding changes in relationship skills over time. Some couples were consistent with each other regarding their reported changes over time. At times, one partner reported more changes in self or partner over time. Six couples reported improvements in their relationship skills with time in dealing with their disagreements and unpleasant aspects of partner. These couples reported the following improvements in their relationship: learning to be together through conflicts and talking through issues with a spouse, fighting over major issues instead of fighting on petty issues and increased openness in communication, acceptance, and understanding in the relationship. For example, both Fida and Firoz agreed that they have become more understanding of each other with time; Edi and Eva have become tolerant and direct in handling each other's unpleasant aspects.

Two female participants and one male participant reported improvements in self, partner and the relationship. For example, Anu explained that she was not dependent on her spouse before their marriage but her dependence on him had progressed over time, and she depends on him for major decisions such as which doctor they should consult for their daughter. Kavi is

more open about sharing her thoughts and Iqbal reported that earlier he would take the initiative to resolve conflicts and now it is both sided. In the end, with time most couples' experienced changes in relationship skills; some reported similar changes, others different degrees of changes relating to self, spouse or both.

Assertion: More couples reported changes in their relationship skills and their ability to handle differences over time.

Perceived Societal Norms

In the Indian society, relationship difficulties between a daughter-in-law and a husband's family are not uncommon and are an important source of conflict in couples' relationships. Conflicts related to in-laws were a core issue in many couples' relationships. Moreover, female participants reported that they were expected to accommodate and compromise more in their spousal relationship by their in-laws. Four female participants reported restrictions or conflicts in the spousal relationship arising from the attitudes and behavior of their in-laws, even when the in-laws lived separately from the couple. Bani referred to the lack of freedom to visit Balu's parents' place because although they were legally married, they had not had their social marriage. Gina referred to restrictions imposed on her by Geet's family, such as their disapproval of her clothes and manner of dressing and her decision to pursue a career. Hema also referred to conflicts with her spouse about their family-of-origin, even though she did not live with them. Charu had to make compromises in her marital relationship. She said: "….in Indian culture you have to compromise about lot of things" such as family matters and parents. She also said that her husband gets "sandwiched" between his parents and her. Therefore, expectations from the husband have resulted in conflicts in the husband-wife relationship, irrespective of whether the daughter-in-law lived with the extended family or not.

Assertion: Wives reported in-laws as an important source of conflict in their relationship with their husband. In-laws imposed restrictions or expectations on the daughter-in-law even when they were not living with the couple.

Commitment

The fifth dimension of intimacy focused on participants' description of their experiences with respect to commitment. Five themes are listed below. These are (a) the description of commitment, which has a sub-theme of commitment perceived as the 'foundation' of the marital relationship; (b) positive and negative experiences of commitment; (c) strategies used in maintaining commitment in a relationship; (d) change over time in commitment and (e) perceived societal norms.

Description of Commitment

Participants used the following terms to describe commitment in a relationship: "trust", "loyalty", "fidelity", "faithfulness", "being there" and "together forever". Two representative pictures of commitment have been presented below by two participants (See Figure 25).

Figure 25: Commitment - "Together forever" and "raising kids, growing old together with each other"

Citation: 25a (image on the left): John Kounadeas (Photographer). You can see my heart [Illustration]. From: http://www.thinkstockphotos.com/image/stock-photo-you-can-see-my-heart/140393817, and 25b (image on the right): The story of Lois Rapp's commitment to her former POW husband Albert Rapp [Photograph]. From: http://www.kansascity.va.gov/features/POW_s_wife_s_Commitment_and_Dedication.asp#sthash.P20PNe58.dpuf

For husbands and wives commitment represented a "serious promise" and a "conscious decision" to be with partner for life. Anu indicated her perception of commitment:

I will be there, with you in your troubles, your likes and dislikes. Just as I am with you in your happiness, I will be there with you in your sorrow. You can trust me and I will be there with you all my life.

Commitment was perceived as not only as 'being there' for one's partner but also expecting one's partner to do the same for eternity. Mutual trust, loyalty and being there were all valued in the couples' relationships. Commitment can be manifested in multiple ways such as husbands and wives (a) maintaining loyalty to each other; (b) making plans for the future, spending time together, raising kids, growing old together and (c) maintaining growth in the relationship by sharing responsibilities, mutual acceptance, respect and understanding. For Amar, marriage was the greatest commitment. Having a baby with Anu and planning and saving for the family's future were ways of expressing his continued commitment to their relationship. Bani shared the example of a woman continuing to express interest in her husband despite his not paying any attention to her. For Bani, such behavior exemplified his loyalty to their relationship. Spouses' understanding of each other's need and willingness to meet those needs were also seen as ways of showing commitment to their relationship. Fida said her husband shares household

responsibilities and makes sure that she is not overburdened. For her this is how he expresses commitment in their relationship.

Assertion: Participants described commitment as maintaining trust and fidelity; growing as a family (raising children, growing old together); and maintaining growth in the relationship (sharing responsibilities, mutual acceptance and respect).

Commitment perceived as the "foundation" of the marital relationship.

Commitment was perceived as a necessary condition for the relationship to survive, be meaningful, to grow and be secure. Participants viewed commitment as a core aspect or "foundation" of their marital life. Commitment makes the relationship meaningful and secure and is present in every aspect of the couple relationship. Geet's statement that "commitment makes a relationship stronger and if a relationship does not have commitment, then it has no meaning" is consistent with these views. This aspect helps couples trust, support, respect, understand and share responsibilities.

Commitment is earned and it is a choice. Kunal stated that "…when you commit, it's not by force, it's by choice". A person's level of commitment will determine whether or not they will succumb to the prevailing distractions in their environment, like attractions to other men or women, loyalty towards family-of-origin over spouse and lack of desire or willingness to support or share responsibilities with a spouse. With respect to succumbing to distractions, Hari described his faithfulness and trust in these terms: "I am a one-woman man, and I am not interested in anybody else." Figure 26 is a representation of his commitment in his relationship.

Figure 26: Pictures of commitment selected by Hari –"Committed partners for life through thick and thin"
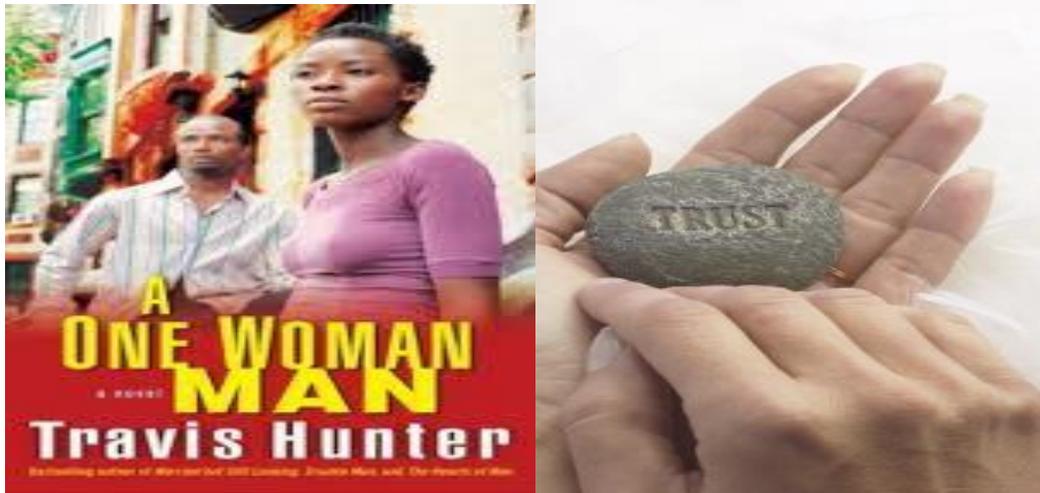
Citation: 26a (image on the left): Travis Hunter (Author). A one woman man [Photograph]. From: http://www.target.com/p/a-one-woman-man-paperback/-/A-11808323, and 26b (image on the right): Hemera Technologies (Photographer). Woman holding inspirational stone [Photograph]. From: http://www.photos.com/royalty-free-images/woman-holding-inspirational-stone/87686987

Assertion: Commitment is the foundation of a relationship. It gives meaning and security in marriage. Commitment is a choice.

Positive and Negative Experiences of Commitment

Positive experiences. Participants reported that commitment in their marriage evoked a certain degree of positive experiences of one's self, one's spouse, and their relationship. Positive emotional experiences were feelings of happiness, confidence and satisfaction in the relationship. Positive relationship experiences were spouses openly talking to each other about their views, emotions, vulnerabilities; supporting and motivating each other to do well and grow in life and career; sharing responsibilities and improved trust, acceptance and understanding between

partners. A few examples of positive experiences shared by participants have been outlined below. Dhruv said that the commitment means supporting and motivating his wife to grow in her career and to support her to pursue higher education overseas and away from him for one and half years. Similarly, Amar expressed his commitment to his wife by sharing the responsibilities of child care, such as getting up in the night to take care of their baby. In their committed couple relationship, Hari and Hema perceived support and trust as positive experiences of their commitment to each other. When Hari shared his irritation with Hema's father, she supported him and when Hema mentioned about her attraction towards her colleague, he accepted her and trusted her. Figure 27 depicts Hema's representation of support from partner.

Figure 27: Positive experience in commitment

Citation: Michael Speller (Sculptor). Commitment (Abstract figurative Garden /Yard statues) [Sculpture]. From:

http://www.artparks.co.uk/artpark_sculpture.php?sculpture=764&sculptor=michael_speller

Assertion: Positive experiences in commitment were related to both positive emotional and relationship experiences.

Negative experiences. Participants revealed circumstances or described moments in their marital relationship when they either questioned or felt that commitment was weak in their relationship.

These negative relationship moments included when one partner was unable or unwilling to understand or support the other; when one partner listened more to their family-of-origin than their spouse and when one partner was over burdened with responsibilities. Negative emotional experiences include feeling hurt, disappointed and a lack of confidence in one's self or one's partner. For example, Gina shared her negative experiences in her relationship with her spouse. She said:

> Because of my relationship with his family or personal fight or other reason when he is not very keen on having kids and I want kids. Sometimes I think if he doesn't want and I want and at that time I sometimes feel that I should go out of this marriage. Another thing, when he is unable to understand me.

Although participants reported negative thoughts, emotional and relationship experiences, none reported leaving or separating from their partner because of those moments. None of the participants provided a pictorial representation of their negative experience with commitment in their relationship.

Assertion: Negative experiences in commitment were related to both negative emotional and relationship experiences.

Strategies Used in Maintaining Commitment in the Relationship

Commitment, like other aspects of intimacy in the relationship, needs work. Participants stated more than one means by which commitment can be nurtured and strengthened in the relationship. These were intrapersonal and interpersonal changes that helped their relationship. They mentioned developing friendship; having confidence in one's self and one's partner's capabilities and decision-making; openly sharing information and being transparent with one's partner; accepting and understanding one's partner's positive and negative traits; respecting

boundaries and giving each other space in the relationship; standing up for each other and showing affection to each other and believing that the existing differences can be worked out and that the relationship will work. For example, Eva talked about her vow to accept Edi's innate qualities without changing them:

> A vow, that one has consciously taken to be with the other, accepting him without changing him at all. When I mean changing here, it doesn't mean small habits, but not changing the innate qualities and nature of the person.

On a similar note Jai and Jati talked about accepting each other's traits. Both Kunal and Kavi were consistent in their belief that their relationship will work out despite the increased conflicts and differences between the two.

Assertion: No barriers were discussed as participants did not report instances where they were separated from spouse. Couples used more than one strategy, and these were intrapersonal (having confidence in self) and interpersonal means of maintaining commitment in their relationship.

Change Over Time in Commitment

Over time, some participants reported that their commitment strengthened because of marriage, parenthood, and improvement in other aspects of their relationship. For some, getting married to each other deepened commitment which was further enhanced by parenthood. See Figure 28 for two pictorial representations of marriage ceremonies that increased commitment between spouses.

Figure 28: Marriage ceremonies

Images used with permission of the owners (left and right side images).

For others, each additional change increased commitment in their relationship. Being married to each other and having children also increased their commitment to the relationship. One participant, Amar, and a couple, Eva and Edi, mentioned that their commitment deepened through different stages from friendship to marriage to raising a child together. For four participants, commitment became greater gradually with improvement in different aspects such as increased support and trust. Figure 29 presents two pictures that represent supporting each other. One female participant, Charu and a couple, Dolly and Dhruv, perceived that their commitment to their relationship had remained the same over time. Therefore, for some couples commitment had not changed over time; for some commitment deepened with different stages of growth in the couple relationship, such as marriage and parenthood and for some, commitment became greater gradually with improvement in aspects such as trust, support and acceptance. None of the participants reported lessening of commitment in their marriage.

Figure 29: Represents supporting each other

Citation: 29a (image on the left): Strong foundation [Illustration]. From:

http://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-photography-strong-foundation-image26813667,

and 29b (image on the right): Untitled illustration of two dried bloom. From:

http://witnessla.org/post/17272227075/you-shall-not-be-broken

Assertion: For some couples commitment has remained same over time whereas for others commitment increased over time with changes in their relationship and family. No couple reported decrease in commitment over time.

Perceived Societal Norms

In India, commitment is highly valued and emphasized in marriage. Therefore, Indian husbands and wives are expected to behave in a certain manner after marriage. For example, for an Indian wife placing her career before her husband's interest is unacceptable behavior. Dhruv explained that he came from a conservative family and his family objected to his desire to support his wife to pursue higher studies in London. There was an expectation that if he did choose to support his wife to continue her studies, he should move to London with her rather than allowing her to live alone for eighteen months. A wife is not expected to reside without her husband. Another example of inappropriate behavior for husbands and wives is talking to, being

friendly with and sharing jokes with the opposite sex. Firoz and Dhruv explained certain prevalent prejudices they encountered in the Indian society - a husband laughing, talking or sharing jokes with female colleagues is viewed as inappropriate. They reported that people make a big deal out of such behaviors, viewing them with suspicion or questioning their commitment to marriage if they exhibited such behaviors.

Assertion: Commitment is highly valued in the Indian culture. A wife is expected to put her husband before her career. Both husband and wives are expected to behave in a certain way when interacting with the opposite sex after marriage.

Social Intimacy

The sixth dimension relates to the social intimacy experiences of participants. Five themes are listed below. These are (a) description of social intimacy, which has a sub-theme of social intimacy perceived as connecting with others in the context of marriage; (b) positive and negative experiences; (c) perceived barriers and strategies used in maintaining social intimacy; (d) change over time and (e) perceived societal norms.

Description of Social Intimacy

The social intimacy dimension was described by participants as spending time in one's individual and mutual network of friends, family, colleagues and other members and engaging in shared activities as an individual in a group or together as a couple. This form of socialization offered couples the scope to interact as an individual as well as a team. Couple shared their social space individually with their exclusive set of family or friends or colleagues and together when they met with shared sets of friends, family or colleagues. Couples' spending time in shared interests or activities. These include celebrating festivals, going on vacation, attending parties, having fun together and sharing jokes. For example, Bani talked about attending birthday parties

or thesis parties with her spouse and friends. Her spouse Balu also referred to spending time with

friends attending festivals such as Durga Puja or Saraswati Puja with his spouse and common

friends on campus. In short, social intimacy meant spending time sharing one's own or one's

partner's interests; having fun with one's partner's colleagues and/or mutual friends; maintaining

a connection with one's spouse's friends; getting together with one's own friends and socializing

with extended family members on both sides. Figure 30 below is a pictorial representation of

social intimacy shared by a couple, Fida and Firoz respectively. Fida explains that their social

network and commitments involved "spending time with friends and family".

Figure 30: Picture with family and friends selected by Fida and Firoz respectively

Images used with permission of the owners (left and right side images).

Assertion: Participants described social intimacy as spending time with one's friends or family, mutual network of friends or family or a couple spending time in shared activities.

Social intimacy perceived as 'connecting with others' in the context of marriage.

Social intimacy provides couples with the scope to interact and connect with others in the

community as a team. It prevents them from leading an isolated life and allows them to gain

acceptance of their partnership by family, friends, colleagues and others in their social network.

Social interactions helped each partner to grow as an individual, be open and flexible, learn from

the experiences of other people in the society and provided insight about partner's other interactions in the society. Therefore, Eva stated that their social intimacy has added "colors" to her relationship with her spouse.

Assertion: In the context of marriage, social intimacy offers opportunities for the couple as a team to connect with others in the community.

Positive and Negative Experiences of Social Intimacy

     Positive experiences. Participants reported both positive emotional and relationship experiences as a result of their social interactions. Social intimacy brought fun, freshness and a positive environment for their relationship with their partner. For example, Gina stated that she and her husband feel refreshed as a result of their interactions with friends because when "you meet new people; you have a discussion; you discuss ideas and your mood is fresh and better".

     This aspect of intimacy also brought a sense of togetherness and acceptance and respect for the couple's relationship by others in the society. Dolly referred to the sense of togetherness and acceptance in each other's social circles, "…..though we have different friends because I had a different group and he had a different group, but we have been accepted and we have accepted each other's friends equally." A picture representing positive experience of having fun with friends is presented below (See Figure 31).

Figure 31: Positive experience in social intimacy

Image used with permission of the owner.

Social networks formed the couple's support system and helped each partner learn about different aspects of the other when interacting in their social circles. Eva mentioned that when her husband was out of town, friends and family dropped in to check on her well-being, cheer her up and assisted her in getting supplies. Social interactions helped couples exchange and learn different perspectives and solutions to relationship problems in their social networks.

Assertion. Positive experiences in social intimacy relates to positive emotional (fun and refreshing) and relationship experiences (such as giving respect, acceptance, and acting as support system) with others in the society.

Negative experiences. Negative experiences with regard to the social intimacy dimension were expressed by participants. Unsatisfactory social interactions generated negative emotional and relationship experiences. Negative emotional experiences were feeling isolated, embarrassed and uncomfortable. Negative relationship experiences were faced when one spouse shared confidential information about the other without their consent; when one or spouse disapproved or refused to socialize with one's or the other's friends, family or others in the social network and when a couple disagreed on how to spend their time. Balu referred to such a difficult experience:

"I don't join her lab mates, and I accept it because they are different. Our views are not the same, and I don't have time for them. Another example is I have some personal friends whose behaviors are not good as per Bani, but I can't say no to friends and so it has been difficult, spending time with those friends without her. I feel bad doing that."

Such experiences result in confrontations between spouses and diminish social intimacy experiences of couples.

Assertion: Negative experiences related to negative emotional and relationship experiences.

Perceived Barriers and Strategies Used in Maintaining Social Intimacy in the Relationship

        Barriers. Participants stated that there were certain barriers to maintaining social intimacy. These barriers were situation-based and interpersonal in nature. The most cited barrier to social intimacy was situation-based where one or both spouses or others in their social network being unavailable or busy as a result of professional or other responsibilities and travel, hence restricted their socialization. The other was interpersonal, where couples disagreed on ideas and preferences for social networks.

        When couples disagreed or had a conflict in a group setting, the group atmosphere and group interaction was negatively impacted. For example Amar cited this incident:

> When we were going in a group and we had a disagreement, me and my wife. My wife turned home and she didn't come with us and I felt very bad about it and we had a quarrel later also. So one element went out of the group; the group which was very happy and chatting with each other felt very silent. So that's an example where social intimacy broke down because of our disagreement.

Participants stated that problems were experienced in social intimacy when one spouse felt uncomfortable with their partner's social circle or was uninterested in social gatherings or preferred one social network over the other. In each of these cases, expectations regarding social intimacy differed between spouses and led to disagreements. One participant, Kunal. reported that social intimacy is a problem in their relationship because his spouse's idea of social intimacy differed from his idea of social intimacy. His wife has many friends and shares openly with them information about their life whereas he has few friends and values his privacy. Having different

perceptions and approaches to social intimacy interfered with the experience of the couple and created problems in this dimension of intimacy.

Assertion: Barriers in social intimacy were of two types. The more common was situation-based. Interpersonal factor was another barrier that hindered social intimacy experiences in couples.

      Strategies used. Participants used several strategies to manage problems related to social intimacy. Strategies used addressed intrapersonal and interpersonal barriers to social intimacy. To address the intrapersonal barriers couples relied on acceptance that one's partner was not a part of one's friends' circle and not comfortable with their friends. Hari accepted that Hema was not comfortable with his friends but comfortable and popular among his relatives. To address interpersonal barriers, couples used several means (a) when one's spouse disapproved of certain friends or family members, then partner maintained the relationship with these individuals separately; (b) being supportive of each other's social interactions, helping each other adjust and feel respected in a group and (c) couples mutually deciding on how, with whom and how often helps maintain balance between spending time with both sets of friends and families. Fida said: "I always make sure that I am going out with my family then we have to be with my husband's family as well."

Assertion: Couples used strategies that addressed the intrapersonal (accept partner not part of friend circle) and interpersonal barriers (letting partner maintain friendship separately, being supportive, mutually deciding on social events).

Change Over Time in Social Intimacy

      Some participants mentioned that with the passing of time their social intimacy experiences became better with joining of networks; one becoming comfortable with the other's

network and increased mutual decision-making in planning social events. For example, Anu reported that before her marriage with Amar, they spent time together as a couple only. However, after their marriage, they were socially accepted as a couple and were able to spend time with family members such as cousins, brothers and sisters and so social intimacy has become better with time with the joining of networks. Likewise, five participants shared this perception that social intimacy increased with merging of networks.

Some participants experienced a decrease in social intimacy with a decrease in social interactions as a result of professional responsibilities and travel. With time, some social networks became smaller. Dhruv perceived that social intimacy had decreased in his relationship due to increased professional and other responsibilities. Though the frequency of social interactions decreased with time, quality of interactions remained unaffected. The absence of one's spouse from social gatherings because of work or travel was another contributor to the decrease in social intimacy over time for some couples. Iqbal too cited similar reasons for a decrease in social intimacy, although he perceived that his comfort had increased over time.

Social intimacy decreased with social circles becoming smaller with time. Edi reported that over time he has become pickier about his social circles and chooses those with whom he can interact as a family with his wife and child. On a similar note, Gina, who does not have children, reported that over time she had declined invitations from couples with children. Therefore, overt time couples become selective about their social circles.

Assertion: For some couples, social intimacy improved with time; for others it decreased with less time for social interactions and with social circles becoming smaller over time.

Perceived Societal Norms

Social interactions play a crucial role in the Indian society. They recognize, validate, accept and provide security for married couples. Amar referred to this public recognition and acknowledgement of the husband-wife relationship:

In the India setup you are accepted by a number of people, you feel like you are together in a team. You belong to a particular place and your position becomes secured. When people come to you and realize you are husband and wife, our relationship becomes from personal to public and more people realize that we are together. I believe this is the reason it is important in the Indian context because without this marriages are not really accepted in the Indian society, without a big fat Indian wedding we are not really accepted as a husband and wife.

Families form an important support system in the Indian context hence their happiness is important for the couple, much more than being happy with each other. When there are frequent interactions or shared living arrangement with other family members, then maintaining a balanced and amicable relationship is important for the spouse who spends most time with them. Thus Fida stated:

They are the support system actually. In the Indian context family is more important than your partner. Keeping the family happy is more important than being happy with each other. Because it's just during the night time that you are spending time with your partner, the rest of the time you are with the family. So it is very important to keep a balance and to be happy with what you are having and whom you are living with.

Lastly, couples in a social situation cannot show public display of affection to each other and therefore may feel restricted and distanced. Firoz voiced his perceptions about respectful and acceptable behaviors of couples in a social situation:

> Generally in public you have to maintain your distance. You can show your closeness but you have to maintain your distance and all. Other people are looking and you have to respect your wife.

Assertion: Social interactions validate the couple relationship. Family is a big support system. Social interactions with family offer support system. Social interactions restrict couple's behaviors such as physical display of affection is not acceptable in social situations.

Other Findings

Participants were asked to rate themselves on a scale of one to seven, with one being traditional and seven being modern, and cite reasons for their perceptions. Similarities and differences were noticed in couples' perception and reasons for their rating of self. Participants were also asked to rank the six dimension of intimacy in order of their importance. Below is a description of the importance couples gave to each aspect of intimacy.

Am I Modern or Traditional?

Most couples placed themselves between 3 and 7 and reported preferences for certain modern and traditional outlooks, cultural values and traditions, religious beliefs; perception about gender roles, equality and freedom; openness to change in the society and other viewpoints and exposure to other cultures. Six couples had similar ratings or approximately similar ratings but there were some differences with respect to the reason cited for these ratings. Only one participant did not provide a numeric value but viewed herself as modern. Another participant, a

male, placed himself at one on the scale and commented that he considered himself traditional. Since love marriages were a tradition in his family and each individual has the freedom to make decisions relating to their marriage, this participant viewed himself as traditional instead of modern.

Comparisons of husbands' and wives' responses. Below is a close comparison of the responses from husbands and wives which were approximately closer to each other in ratings, slightly different to each other in ratings and very different ratings from each other.

Couples who had approximately similar ratings. Although the ratings were similar, in some couples the reasons for those ratings varied between spouses, though in some cases, there was a degree of similarity. Kunal and Kavi both viewed themselves as modern (self rating 6, 6), citing that they did not conform to traditional beliefs. Kavi considered herself modern as she challenged traditional belief systems, did not judge people, respected all religions and celebrated different religions, with one exception, her love for traditional Indian sarees. Kunal, on the other hand, reported that he is modern because he did not conform to social stereotypes such as having a court marriage instead of social marriage, having a girlfriend before marriage, cohabiting and having premarital sex with girlfriend, disclosing the same information to his spouse and getting married late, even though he is the eldest of his siblings.

Gina and Geet both gave themselves a rating of four but cited different reasons. Geet perceived himself as both traditional and modern because he followed traditions yet he was open to change and gave his wife freedom. Gina reported herself as four because she believed in equality, preferred a nuclear family, did not believe in patriarchy and shared financial responsibility with her husband. Despite the differences, both expressed and experienced freedom in their relationship.

Charu and Chetan (self rating 6, 6) reported more similarities such as a preference for equality and the freedom to make independent decisions about personal choices and interests and career. While Chetan referred to his independent decision to be in a love marriage, Charu talked about the choice of cooking food for husband and having children when she is ready.

Dhruv and Dolly both rated themselves as a five but Dhruv viewed himself as modern while Dolly considered herself both traditional and modern. Both viewed themselves as open minded, valued equality, respected other people's choices and changes in the society. Dolly reported: "I believe in balance and that is why this rating". Her respect for the elderly and being committed to her loved ones made her traditional.

Couples who had slightly different ratings. With some couples, either the husband or the wife gave themselves a slightly higher rating than their spouse. Eva and Edi had an approximately similar rating, (6.5 and 6). They perceived themselves as modern because they practiced gender equality but were somewhat traditional as they practiced religion and celebrated religious practices as a family. Edi stated: "I consider myself modern as I am using newest technology that helps us fulfill the basic to advance needs of the family."

Jati and Jai (rated self as 5-6 and 5) cited different reasons for their ratings. While Jati believed in equality, openness to changes in society and respect for all religions, Jai mentioned that he did not believe in superstitions or certain traditions but may follow them if suggested by a family member. Hari and Hema (self rating, 5, 4) reported following some traditions. Hari followed traditional cooking and festivals. He also believed in giving freedom to his spouse and considered himself as open to other views about religion and cultural practices. Hema, because of her upbringing and exposure to different cultures, perceived herself as both modern and

traditional. Isha and Iqbal (self-rating, 4, 3) had similar perceptions. They both reported following religious traditions and practicing respect and freedom in their relationship.

Fida and Firoz (self-rating none, 5) both expressed that they followed some traditional and some modern rules of living. Firoz reported maintaining a balance between being open towards world and religion. Fida expressed similar views. She followed the rules of dressing as prescribed by her religion but had the freedom to dress according to the context or place she visited.

Very different ratings from each other. Two husbands and wives had very different self-ratings. In the case of Amar and Anu (self-rating 7 and 3), Amar perceived himself as liberal in his views about sexuality, open to new ideas, and rejected orthodox ideas and practices whereas Anu considered herself a mix of both modern and traditional. She valued education and certain cultural traditions from her upbringing and social surrounding.

Balu and Bani (self-rating 1 and 5) cited reasons for being in a love marriage. Balu said that love marriage and making independent decisions is a tradition in his family and therefore he considered himself traditional. Bani, on the other hand, gave herself, a five, as she was in a love marriage, made the decision to have a court marriage before social marriage and cohabitated with spouse before social marriage.

Summary of findings. A review of the reasons cited by all participants revealed certain commonalities such as (a) believing in equality and freedom in the couple relationship, (b) openness and exposure to other world views, (c) acceptance of changes in these areas: economic, technological, societal, educational, and religious differences, (d) liberal views about sexuality, (e) non-conformity to some cultural traditions such as love marriages and engaging in late marriages. These experiences influenced participants' perception of oneself as modern.

Preference for cultural traditions such as Indian cooking, respecting the boundaries of one's religion, spending time with extended family and elderly members, being aware of one's upbringing and social setting and the desire to impart the same to the children were reasons cited for viewing oneself as traditional by some participants in this study.

Ranking Each Dimension of Intimacy

Participants were asked to rank each dimension (emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment and social intimacy) of intimacy in their order of importance. Only one participant assigned the same value to two different dimension whereas the other 21 participants assigned differently ranked each dimension.

Emotional closeness and self-disclosure. Eight participants, of which three were men and five were women, ranked emotional closeness and self-disclosure first. Only one couple, Edi and Eva, ranked emotional closeness and self-disclosure as the most important aspect in their relationship. Another eight participants, of which seven were men and one was a woman, ranked this aspect second. Another couple, Jai and Jati, were consistent in ranking this as the second most important aspect of their relationship. Only one female gave this aspect a third ranking, while four individuals including one male and three females, ranked it fourth. Charu and Chetan were consistent in ranking this aspect as the fourth important aspect of their relationship. Only one female ranked it fifth and none gave ranked it sixth. Therefore this aspect was one of the most important aspects of couple relationships.

Shared ideas and support. Only one female participant ranked this aspect as the foremost in her relationship. Five rated it as the second most important aspect of their relationship (one male and four females). Six participants (four males and two females) ranked it

third. One couple, Jai and Jati, ranked this aspect as the third most important dimension of their relationship. Fourth ranking was given by five participants, of which four were males and one was a female; fifth ranking by three participants, and of those two were males and one was a female; and lastly sixth ranking was assigned by two female participants.

Sexual intimacy. Two couples were consistent in placing similar importance to this aspect of intimacy. Gina and Geet ranked it as the third most important aspect and Dolly and Dhruv ranked it as the fifth most important aspect. This aspect was assigned a first ranking by only one male and one female participant; second by one male participant; third ranking by seven participants (four males and three females); fourth by five female participants; fifth by six participants (five males and one female) and sixth ranking by only one female participant.

Relationship skills. One couple, Iqbal and Isha, were consistent in ranking this aspect as fourth most important aspect of their relationship. Only one female participant assigned it as first and four (one male and three females) participants made this aspect the second most important. Third ranking was assigned by four participants in total, of which two were males and two were females; fourth ranking was given by five participants, of which four were males and one was a female; fifth ranking was given by five participants, two of which were males and three were females; and lastly sixth ranking was given by three participants and three of which were males and one was a female.

Commitment. Two couples assigned similar importance to this aspect of intimacy in their couple relationship. Iqbal and Isha considered this aspect as the most important aspect of their relationship whereas Anu and Amar considered it the second most important aspect in their relationship. Eight (seven males and one female) participants ranked this aspect as their first. Second ranking was given by five participants, one among them was a male whereas the rest

were female; third ranking was assigned by three participants, of which one was male and two were female; fourth ranking was assigned by three participants, of which two were male and one was a female; fifth ranking was give by two female participants; and no participant assigned commitment a sixth ranking.

Social intimacy. Five couples were in agreement that this was the least important aspect of their relationship**.** Eva and Edi, Gina and Geet, Hema and Hari, Isha and Iqbal, and Jati and Jai similarly ranked this aspect as the least important. Only female participant, Kavi, ranked this aspect as the most important in her relationship. Another female considered it as the third most important aspect whereas none assigned it a second or fourth ranking. Five (two males and three females) participants considered it as the fifth most important aspect whereas fifteen (nine males and six females) assigned it the sixth ranking.

Summary of ranking. Most couples were in agreement that social intimacy formed the least important aspect of their relationship, more specifically husbands compared to wives. A comparison across rankings in the six dimensions revealed that more wives placed higher importance on emotional closeness and self-disclosure, closely followed by most husbands who ranked it as the second most important aspect. Commitment was an important aspect for husbands as compared to wives as they ranked it foremost in their relationship. For wives commitment and shared ideas and support were of equal importance. Sexual intimacy and relationship skills rankings had no clear majority and were of were of medium importance to most couples.

Comparisons of Couples Who Lived With In-Laws versus Couples Who Did Not Live With Their In-Laws

Seven couples lived with their in-laws whereas four were living separately. Mostly wives talked about in-laws related difficulties, such as in-laws disapproved of their dress, desire to continue career, education, and expected the daughter-in-law to start a family after a year of marriage. Whether the couple lived with the in-laws or did not live the in-laws, wives reported if the husbands were supportive or not supportive of them when they experienced difficulties with the in-laws. For example, Isha who lived with her in-laws was expected to have a child after a year of marriage and they disapproved of her desire to continue education and career after marriage. But her husband Iqbal against his family's wishes was supportive of her decision to continue her education and they both decided to wait to start a family. In contrast, Gina who lived alone with her husband reported that when she experienced problems with his family, she received no support from him. Husbands' response to wives' experience with the in-laws played a crucial role irrespective of whether the couple lived with the in-laws or not. On the other hand, Dhruv reported his family's objection to his wife's desire to pursue higher education abroad and he supported her in her decision. Dolly talked about her husband's support of her decision to study but did not mention about the objection from the in-laws. Therefore husband's support was an important determinant of the experience the wives had with their in-laws.

This chapter presented the findings from the collective lived experiences of married Indian couples in six dimensions of intimacy. Each dimension was separately presented above with its main theme and sub-themes. The next chapter will focus on a discussion of the findings in the context of theory and existing literature on this topic, strengths and limitations, research and clinical implications of the dissertation study.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSIONS

In this study, I have investigated the intimacy experiences of married couples in India in six dimensions: emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment and social intimacy. I had four research questions: (a) how do couples relate to emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationships skills, commitment, and social intimacy? (b) What happens when couples experience or do not experience emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment, and social intimacy in their relationships? (c) How do couples make sense of their experience and the changes over time in these aspects of intimacy such as emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationships skills, commitment, and social intimacy? and (d) what are the similarities and differences in the experiences of husbands and wives? Many important findings were uncovered which relate to the intimacy experiences of married couples. Many of these findings can be connected back to the existent literature and explained using the integrated theoretical approach; multicultural feminist perspective and family systems theory. Finally, I will discuss the strengths and limitations of this project, clinical implications and directions for future research.

In the beginning of this research study, I not only reviewed western literature on intimacy, but also carefully looked at intimacy measurement instruments such as PAIR, WIQ, Swenson's Love Scale, a self-report Marital Intimacy Questionnaire, and FIS for discrepancies and commonalities among different dimensions of intimacy. I narrowed down six intimacy concepts which were then explored in the intimacy experiences of married Indian couples. They were emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment and social intimacy. These concepts look at whether participants

experienced emotional connectedness or affection or emotional intimacy; sharing of ideas or

intellectual intimacy or expressiveness; sexual intimacy or passion; ability to resolve conflicts;

commitment or cohesion; and social intimacy (Merves-Okin et al., 1991; Schaefer and Olson,

1981; Sternberg, 1997; Swensen, 1972, Swensen et al., 1984; Van den Brouche et al., 1995;

Waring & Reddon, 1983). Participants were asked to select pictures that represented each of

these concepts in their marriage. They were then interviewed about their perception about these

pictures and their experiences or lack of experiences in each of these dimensions of intimacy. A

number of themes emerged from this study that provided insight into the intimacy experiences of

married Indian couples and addressed the research questions mentioned below.

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Research Questions

</div>

How Do Couples Relate to Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure, Shared Ideas and

Support, Sexual Intimacy, Relationships Skills, Commitment and Social Intimacy?

      Description. According to the findings married Indian couples were able to relate to the

concept of intimacy. The theme "description" ("description of emotional closeness",

"description of shared ideas and support", "description of sexual intimacy", "description of

relationship skills", "description of commitment" and "description of social intimacy") captured

how participants defined and perceived the dimensions of intimacy in their daily lives as couples.

In the prior intimacy literature on Indian couples, one other study Sandhya (2009) primarily

focused on exploring intimacy in married Indian couples. But no other study conceptualized and

assessed different dimensions of intimacy influenced by the Western intimacy literature on

Indian couples. This study consistent with that of Sandhya's found that married Indian couples

experienced intimacy. Couple's supported their description of each dimension of intimacy with

pictures and examples from their daily lives. Couples' experiences in each of the intimacy

dimensions (emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment and social intimacy) can be related back to the multiple components of intimacy measured by different intimacy instruments.

Emotional closeness and self-disclosure. The emotional closeness and self-disclosure dimension from the present study had some degree of similarity with the emotional intimacy dimension of PAIR (Schaefer & Olson, 1991); WIQ's affection scale (Waring & Reddon, 1983); three dimensions of Swensen's Love Scale that measure feelings and affection verbally, nonverbally, and self-disclosure (Merves-Okin et al., 1991; Swensen, 1972); intimacy problems, affective and openness scale from the Van den Brouche's (1995) self-report marital intimacy questionnaire; three subscales of FIQ: content, valence and vulnerability (Descutner & Thelen, 1991); and disclosures of personal information and vulnerabilities (Lippert & Prager, 2001; Reis & Shaver, 1991). Prior Indian marital literature based on studies that explored marital satisfaction and communication, expectations and adjustments provided support for existence of some degree of intimacy in Indian couples. Two Indian researchers, Yelsma and Athappilly (1988) found that married couples in India engaged in verbal and non-verbal communication, and self-disclosure with their spouse. Badiger and Krishnaswamy (1999), Bhuta (1987), Pothen (1989), and Netting (2010) loosely referred to the existence of emotional connectedness or emotional intimacy in married couples in India, but none provided explanation of what was experienced in emotional intimacy. This study presents Indian couples' description of intimacy in this dimension. From the participants' perspective, emotional closeness and self-disclosure were verbal and nonverbal sharing with spouse about one's emotions, behaviors, thoughts, personal information, vulnerabilities and secrets and the ease with which it is experienced in their relationships.

Another important finding, participants' use of phone calls, text messages and emails to share emotions, thoughts, personal information and vulnerabilities with one's spouse. Researchers, Allendorf (2013) and Pal (2010) mentioned that access to technology such as mobile phones and Internet have changed the ability of the young adult Indian men and women to communicate and interact with potential romantic partners before marriage or revolutionized the process of seeking potential partners from matrimonial sites. But this study finding revealed that Internet and mobile phones (through phone calls and text messages) have increased flexibility, accessibility, and privacy among married couples as well.

Another finding related to emotional closeness and self-disclosure in couples is that partner's response determines further emotional connection. This is consistent with the work of intimacy researchers Reis and Shaver (1988), and Lippert and Prager (2001), who stated that one's disclosures were dependent on partner reaction and the ease with which one can share one's emotions, behaviors, and secrets with partner.

Shared ideas and support. In this study participants' descriptions of shared ideas and support dimension were similar to the following intimacy subscales: PAIR's intellectual intimacy subscale; WIQ's expressiveness and identity subscale; Love Scale's moral support and material support dimension (Merves-Okin, Amidon & Bernt, 1991; Schaefer & Olson, 1991; Swensen, 1972; Swensen et al., 1984; Waring & Reddon, 1983). Present study couples reported sharing of ideas and responsibilities; complementing each other; sharing intellectual connection and responsibilities with partner; and maintaining equality. Similar to this finding, previous Indian marital researchers reported that Indian couples expressed desires for equality, respect and support after marriage. For example, Netting (2010) reported that educated single men and women aspired for marriages, where partners treat each other equally and support each other in

their careers and household division of labor. Sandhya (2009) found that support, validation and empathy from spouse were important for marital happiness of married Hindu couples. Kulkarni (2004) reviewed of marital expectations in educated married couples from different religions. She revealed that couples had work-related expectations from their spouse, that is, they expected spouse to support in managing household duties, and managing time between professional demands and household demands of their time. In this study, participants were from different religions, and some were in mixed marriages where both spouse had different religion. Therefore equality, support and validation is important for some educated married couples from different religions residing in urban areas.

Sexual intimacy. Likewise participants' descriptions of the sexual intimacy dimension for the present study were consistent with the PAIR's sexual intimacy subscale and WIQ's sexuality subscale (Schaefer & Olson, 1991; Waring & Reddon, 1983). Participants engaged in sex-related behaviors, physical affection, and sexual communication. Consistent with early Indian marital literature, sex and sexual communication existed in marriages in India (Badiger & Krishnaswamy, 1999; Kulkarni, 2004; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). While Kulkarni (2004) explored frequency, duration, initiation, method and time spent on intercourse, this study confirms that sexual intimacy relates to couples involvement in sex-related behaviors; nonsexual behaviors (hugging), which refers to display of physical affection towards spouse; and sexual communication with spouse. Sexual intimacy is more than just having sex with spouse.

Relationship skills. Participants' descriptions of relationship skills dimension were comparable to the subscale 'tolerating the less pleasant aspects of one's partner' from Swensen's Love scale and WIQ's conflict resolution subscale (Swensen, 1972; Swensen, Eskew & Kohlhepp, 1984; Waring & Reddon, 1983). In addition to tolerating the least pleasant aspects of

one's partner, couples in this study valued skills that helped them manage disagreements, maintain complementarity and mutual dependence in the relationship.

Commitment. Similarly, participants' descriptions of commitment in this study were comparable to the aspects of WIQ's cohesion scale (Waring & Reddon, 1983) and Van den Brouche and authors' (1995) commitment scale. Prior studies, such as those of Kulkarni (2004), and Myers et al., (2005) reported that loyalty and fidelity is valued among Indian couples. The present study findings extend the understanding that married Indian couples' associate commitment to trust, fidelity, growing as a family and growing in the relationship.

Social intimacy. Likewise, PAIR's social and recreational intimacy subscales, and WIQ's compatibility subscale (Schaefer & Olson, 1991; Waring & Reddon, 1983) are comparable to the social intimacy dimension in this study. Previously, only two Indian studies referred to expectations and conflicts related to friends and recreations. These were expectations related to spending time and money in shared activities with partner, and spending time and money with partner (Hegde, 1998; Kulkarni, 2004). But the findings from the present study, extends the idea of social intimacy. Couples in this study described spending time with not only friends but family, mutual network, in addition to the couple spending time together in shared activities.

Overall, some marital researchers in India referred vaguely to the existence of emotional, mental and physical connection; equality and support; loyalty (Badiger & Krishnaswamy, 1999; Hegde, 1998; Kulkarni, 2004; Myers et al., 2005; Pothen, 1989; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). Only one Indian intimacy researcher, Sandhya (2009) focused on the interplay of behavioral and cognitive aspects of intimacy in married Hindu couples in India. But the present study findings extend the understanding of intimacy experiences in different dimensions in educated, urban, married Indian couples from different religion.

Perception of different dimensions of intimacy in the context of marriage. An important highlight of this study is the sub-themes regarding participants' perception of the different dimensions of intimacy and their importance in the context of marriage (emotional closeness and self-disclosure perceived as the "soul of the relationship"; shared ideas and support perceived as "being present in a give and take relationship"; sexual intimacy perceived as the "body of the relationship"; relationship skills as means to "hold the relationship together"; commitment perceived as the "foundation" of the marital relationship; and social intimacy perceived as 'connecting with others'). Existing Indian literature on marital intimacy does not include why couples' value each dimension of intimacy in the context of marriage. In the present Indian cultural context, different dimensions of intimacy added value and purpose to the marriage. Indian couples' who valued emotional connection, compatibility, and transparency believe that these aspects keep their marital relationship alive; sharing equal responsibilities and being supportive helps couples keep a growth-oriented give and take relationship; though sexual intimacy is one among several ways of connecting with partner, it is important because it offers a physical and concrete connection with one's partner; individual differences and conflicts are inevitable in marriage and relationship skills serve as a means to sort out issues of relating with one's partner; commitment in marriage is a choice, which provides a meaningful and secured marital relationship; and social intimacy helps couples work as a team and connect with other members of the community. When working with couples it is important to understand the value and meaning they assign to the various dimensions of intimacy in their cultural context. The above findings conflict with the traditional views of marriage.

Perceived societal norms. In spite of the gradual changes in the marital relationships in the Indian culture, traditional societal norms still pose a challenge for couples. Another main

feature of this study is the participants' "perception about societal norms". This information is useful for therapists working with Indian couples. Some perceived societal norms: Husbands' provide less support to their wives when wives experience problems with in-laws. This is in agreement with Allerdorf (2013) and Arora and Chadha (2012) findings that in-laws are a source of conflict for the couple. Consistent with Chawla's findings, wives are resisting and voicing their opinions against their in-laws as was evident in the current study. Some wives expected their husbands to mediate the conflicts with the in-laws. Unlike Chawla's findings where in-laws imposed restrictions and rules on daughter-in-law when living with them, female participants reported experiencing restrictions even when the in-laws did not reside with them. The present findings can be compared to that of Allendorf's (2012) findings, that relationship with husband and in-laws is important. It cannot be confirmed if a good relationship with in-laws empowered these educated women, but it is clear that the husband played an important role in mediating a good or a bad relationship with in-laws.

Consistent with traditional views, sex was perceived as a means for procreation and to be had after marriage (Bloom & Reddy, 1986) and gender differences were encouraged with wives expected to cater to the sexual needs of the husband (Avasthi. 2010). Physical displays of affection in social situations were discouraged. Commitment was highly valued in the Indian society and husbands and wives were expected to maintain a certain standard of behavior when interacting with the opposite sex. Social interactions with the community provided validation, acknowledgement and security to the couple relationship, and family interactions provided support system to the couples.

The perceived societal norms represent the traditional views on marriage. The couple formed a small part of the existing family system (Avasthi, 2010; Shah et al., 2000). A husband's

parents were a part of the couple's nuclear family. In a traditional marriage, a husband's loyalty was with his family even after marriage (Pothen, 1989). Unequal gender roles existed and wives were expected to be submissive and dependent on the husband for decisions. A wife was accountable for both families (her family-of-origin and in-laws family). Kakar (1978) said that in a traditional Indian marriage closeness in a husband-wife relationship was considered a disgrace and rejected by the family. The couple relationship was not allowed to emerge as a separate entity in the larger family system (Avasthi, 2010; Shah et al., 2000; Sonpar, 2005). Physical demonstration of affection between couples was discouraged (Kakar, 1978; 1988) and women were not expected to express their sexual desires (Avasthi, 2010) and were encouraged to be submissive and powerless in the spousal system (Avasthi, 2010; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988).

What Happens When Couples Experience or Do Not Experience These Specific Aspects of Intimacy, Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure, Shared Ideas and Support, Sexual Intimacy, Relationship Skills, Commitment and Social Intimacy in Their Relationship?

The theme "positive and negative experiences" provided valuable information about how each component of intimacy impacted the couple relationships in India. Overall when couples experienced intimacy with their spouses, they had positive experiences. Some of these positive experiences were positive emotions and relationship with partner. Moreover, such positive emotions and relationship behaviors reduced negative emotions and behaviors in the relationship. Couples experienced happiness and satisfaction in each dimension when they were emotionally connected with each other; when couples equally shared responsibilities and supported each other; when couples attained their desired level of sexual intimacy; when couples used skills to manage differences; when couples experienced trust and faithfulness; and when couples were socially engaged in their network of family and friends.

When couples do not experience intimacy in the various dimensions, they have negative experiences. Negative experiences were negative emotional and relationship experiences. For example, couples are unhappy and dissatisfied when they feel emotionally distant from each other; do not support each other and sharing of ideas is stressful; when one partner feels unfulfilled in sexual relationship with spouse; when couples are unable to resolve differences; when couples are unable to trust and depend on each other; and when couples are not happy with their social interactions. Such negative experiences influence the couple relationship and each other's behavior.

Previously Gottman and Levensen (1992) mentioned that positive interactions determine satisfaction and stability in marriage, although negative interactions do occur in all marriages. Those couples who have stable marriages have five times more positive to negative interactions in their marriages. Gottman and authors (1998) further elaborated that positive interactions were important for marital happiness and stability along with the couple's ability to de-escalate negative reciprocal relationships. Therefore couple's ability to manage positive and negative interactions was important for marital success. An Indian researcher, Sandhya (2009) mentioned that 'good times' or positive experiences are essential for marital happiness and success of the marital relationship. She further stated conflicts are common in marriages and negatively impact the marital happiness of couples. The present study findings elaborate on the good times or the positive experiences and bad times or negative experiences with relation to each dimension of intimacy assessed in the study. This information is helpful for therapists working with Indian couples.

How Do Couples Make Sense of Their Experience and the Changes Over Time in These Aspects of Intimacy Such as Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure, Shared Ideas and Support, Sexual Intimacy, Relationships Skills, Commitment and Social Intimacy?

The two themes "barriers and strategies used to maintain intimacy" and "changes over time" addressed how couples made sense of their experience over time. First I will review the findings related to barriers and strategies used, and then review the 'change over time' findings.

Barriers and strategies used to maintain intimacy. In each dimension of intimacy, barriers were situation-based, intrapersonal and interpersonal, which hindered achievement of the desired level of intimacy in the couple relationships. Couples used strategies that helped them overcome situation-based, intrapersonal and interpersonal barriers in the couple relationship. For example, personality characteristics and one's negative emotion were intrapersonal barriers; one spouse reminding self that the relationship is important was using an intrapersonal strategy to maintain the relationship and overcome the barriers to the relationship. This important finding, highlights the problems couples encounter and the solutions they use to maintain intimacy in their marital relationship over time. Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (1999) mentioned that couples' engagement in positive or maintenance behaviors are useful for maintaining the relationship. Gottman and Silver (1999) stated that couples experience both positive and negative experiences in their relationship. Couples in happy marriages make attempts to repair their relationship. Therefore, the present findings not only highlight the barriers but the maintenance behaviors in Indian couples in different dimensions of intimacy. Such information are useful for marriage educators and therapists working with the Indian population.

The theme "change over time" revealed couples' perception of changes over time in different dimensions of intimacy. Over duration of time, some couples reported no changes;

some reported positive changes; and some negative changes. Sometimes spouses perceived the similar or dissimilar changes over time in their relationship in different dimensions. Each spouse's perception of change was important. Particularly in the dimensions, relationship skills and commitment, couples did not report negative changes. On the whole, more couples reported that relationships skills and commitment improved over time in their relationship. This finding highlights the importance of exploring each spouses' perception of the development of the relationship over time in each dimension of intimacy.

Overall, the themes, 'positive and negative experiences', 'barriers and strategies used to maintain intimacy' and 'changes over time' can be understood in the context of self-reflexivity, a family systems concept. This means that humans have the ability to reflect on their own behaviors and experiences, and make behavioral changes to improve their relationship. Western researchers Gottman and Levenson (1992) found that positive and negative interactions are part of intimacy experiences of couples. But, stability of the relationship and happiness of the couple dependent on their ability to maintain five times more positive interactions as compared to negative interactions. Similarly, Indian researcher, Sandhya (2009) reported that the marital bonds in Indian couples are characterized by intimacy and conflict. According to Gottman et al., (1998) couples have the ability to repair their relationship and de-escalate negative reciprocal relationship between spouses. Another family systems' concept "reciprocity" explains that couple relationship is reciprocal and has a circular feedback; therefore behavior of one spouse affects the behavior of the other. Just as positive or maintenance behaviors by one spouse can influence the other, similarly, negative behavior of one spouse can affect the other.

What Are The Similarities and Differences in The Experiences of Husbands and Wives?

An important finding from this study was the similarities and differences in the rankings of husbands and wives in each dimension of intimacy (emotional closeness and self-disclosure, shared ideas and support, sexual intimacy, relationship skills, commitment and social intimacy). Both husbands and wives were asked to rank the pictures of different dimensions of intimacy in the order of their importance. Based on the findings, comparatively more wives than husbands ranked emotional closeness and self-disclosure as important. For husbands, commitment was of foremost importance as compared to wives, followed by emotional closeness and self-disclosure. For wives, commitment and shared ideas and support were equally important but the foremost was emotional closeness and self-disclosure.

Next, social intimacy was the least important of all the intimacy dimensions for both; more for husbands than wives. A comparison of the sexual intimacy and relationship skills rankings of both husbands and wives revealed that there was no clear majority in the importance placed in these dimensions. For both husbands and wives, both of these dimensions were of intermediate importance. In step, the present findings are consistent with those of Netting's (2010) that emotional connectedness is important for Indian men and women. But the present findings extend existing knowledge about gender differences in intimacy experiences of Indian husbands and wives in each dimension of intimacy. Kulkarni (2004) did not use the term emotional closeness and self-disclosure and assessed the marital expectations of couples in 11 areas. She reported that wives preferred frequent communication with their husband about thoughts and feelings, which is similar to the present findings. Bhuta (1987) used the term emotional closeness when assessing marital adjustments in longer duration marriages and found that emotional closeness was more important for wives than husbands. The present study

confirms this finding. Husbands, more than wives valued commitment in the marital relationship in the present study; which is in contrast to the Kulkarni study findings. Kulkarni (2004) found that husbands and wives equally expected fidelity or faithfulness in their marriage. This study finding cannot confirm Merves-Okin and authors' (1991) findings that gender differences exist in the engagement of maintenance behaviors in couples. Finally, husbands and wives were more in agreement about improvements in relationship skills over time than other dimensions of intimacy whereas husbands and wives were in agreement that commitment did not decrease in their relationship over time. On the contrary, husbands and wives were more dissimilar in their perceived changes over time in the sexual intimacy dimension.

Comparatively wives referred to relationship difficulties with their in-laws and whether or not their husbands supported them during these times. Irrespective of whether the couple lived or did not live with the extended family, the husband played an important role in the wife's experience with the husband's extended family. Some wives referred to the husband's dilemma of having to choose sides between the wife and the extended family whereas some husbands reported mediating relationship between their wife and the extended family. Therefore, relationship with the extended family was important for the Indian couples and impacted the couples' intimacy experiences irrespective of whether the couple lived or did not live with extended families. In this study, wives were unhappy with the lack of support from the husband and husband's family even when they were not living with the extended family. Wives were happy when their husband supported them and mediated the in-laws expectations even when they lived with their in-laws. Not all wives referred to problems with in-laws when they lived with them. This finding is consistent with the works of Allendorf (2012) that wives' marital experiences were influenced by their relationship with the husband and their in-laws. But, the

present findings contradict that of Sandhya's, which states that couples in nuclear families were happier than couples living in extended families.

Summary of the findings. In sum, we can conclude that intimacy is experienced by some married middle-income Indian couples living in urban areas, who are educated, who value respect, openness, and accept changes in the society. These Indian husbands and wives reported emotional connectedness, intellectual connection, support, sexual intimacy, commitment, social intimacy, and skills needed to manage disagreements in the relationship. They perceived the intimacy as important in the husband-wife relationship. When couples experienced intimacy it had positive emotional and relational influence on their relationship, on the other hand, lack of intimacy lead to negative experiences. Couples referred to the following as connected with their intimacy experiences, such as, sharing household work, sharing with each other regarding difficulties at work place, sexual communication, and adjustment to each other skills in managing relationship, commitment to each other's growth, and managing support systems such as network of friends and family. One's expectations from spouse, interference of in-laws, intrapersonal (personality, one's emotion) and interpersonal factors (arguing with each other, not trusting each other) at times were challenges that resulted in negative intimacy experiences. Couples' experience of intimacy were influenced by societal expectations and perceived notions of behavior, and technological advancements (such as use of text messages and email to connect with spouse). There were gender differences in the intimacy experiences of Indian couples. Wives expected that their husbands will support them in household chores, career, and when they experienced difficulties with the husband's family. Husband's expected wives to respect individuality, space, respect and accept their family. Most husbands ranked commitment as the most important in their relationship, comparatively wives perceived emotional closeness and

self-disclosure as the most important aspect of their intimacy experience. In short, intimacy experiences of Indian couples were influenced by not only the spousal relationship but also by the experiences with extended family and the community.

Findings in the Context of Integrated Theoretical Framework

According to the multicultural feminist perspective, social identities (such as education, urban location, nationality, globalization, access to technological advancements, and class) influence people's experiences within their culture (Hurtado, 2003). These identities influence experiences in different dimensions, in the context of marriage, and the way couples handle the perceived societal norms about marital relationships. Bringing in the idea of intersectionality from the multicultural feminist perspective, the intersection of social identities, such as socioeconomic status, location, and education influenced the intimacy experiences of married men and women in India. The couples in this study were from middle-class and upper class families, had higher education and resided in metropolitan cities. Globalization and technological advancements have not only influenced interactions on an international, national and community levels but also on interpersonal levels in a family and couple system. This development can also be understood from the family systems theoretical perspective. Intersectionality and wholeness explain the interconnectedness between multiple systems, such as the family system, and the outside world or the suprasystem (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Change in one system influences change in others. Therefore globalization and education (macro level changes of the nation and society) have has not only changed Indian society but also changed interactions in couple relationships. Internet and mobile phones are highly used in India. Based on a survey that revealed that urban India internet users comprise of 84% of the 46.5 million people who use the internet and 57% of all internet users in India have a graduate degree or higher. The couples in

this study match the above demographics; they had a graduate or a higher degree and used Internet to select pictures and it is not unlikely for them to use the same technology to maintain emotional intimacy in their couple relationships. Therefore, the couples' experience of emotional closeness and self-disclosure is influenced by intersections of their several social identities, such as their education, age, socioeconomic status, access and usage of technological advancements such as mobile phones, text messages and the Internet. Changes in the Indian society, as a result of increased female education, women in the work force, exposure of women to their rights, and globalization have influenced couple relationships. Therefore, community level changes have created new expectations and negotiations in the husband-wife intimate relationships.

Changes in the Indian society have influenced changes in the perception of Indian marriages and intimacy experiences in couple relationship. For example, wives expected husbands to share household work, and husbands expected wives to have a career and supported their wives to continue education and career. Indian couples share a reciprocal relationship and the behaviors of one partner influences the behavior of the other in a circular feedback loop. Therefore a positive and negative experience of one partner influences the other. For example, one's partner's positive reaction to one's sharing influences the interactive process of intimacy experiences in the couple relationship. Similarly, one partner experiences lack of support or when one partner imposes his or her views on the other also leads to negative experiences in the couple relationship. Because of the interconnections between multiple systems- the couple system, extended family and the community, work-related or in-law related difficulties or positive experiences influences the couple system. The family system concepts, such as boundary and self-reflexivity explain the family's degree of readiness and openness to change. Self-reflexivity explains that each individual of the family is capable of reflecting on his/her

behavior, and that of others. Therefore, husbands and wives are capable of deciding how they influence each other and how they allow their families and the community to influence their behaviors. Flexibility, an important concept from the family systems perspective (Doherty & Baptise, 1993) provides an explanation of the changing dynamics in the relational patterns of couples in India.

Couples in this study were educated and from middle and higher socio-economic class. Furthermore, most couples in this study were in love marriages or self-choice marriages, and perceived themselves as "modern". Participants who perceived themselves as modern valued equality, freedom, openness to exchange of world views; more inclined to accept changes in the society (economic, religious, technological, educational and societal changes); and had liberal views about sexuality. Therefore, steady changes in the Indian society as a result of globalization, education, technological advancements (mobile phones, computers and television) have transformed perception of marital relationship in the Indian context (Allendorf; 2013; Netting, 2010; Ranga Roa & Sekhar, 2002; Sandhya, 2009; Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003). Therefore the integrated theoretical framework (the multicultural feminist perspective and family systems theory) provide an understanding of the changed perceptions, intimacy experiences and influence of social identities (such as, education, socio-economic class, and access to technological advancements) and how they intersect and influence intimacy experiences in married Indian couples.

Strengths and Limitations

There were several strengths and limitations of the present study. Very few qualitative studies have explored intimacy in married Indian couples. Using a new, innovative method, to explore different dimensions of intimacy derived from Western literature on intimacy

measurements was challenging. In a way, this was a pilot study and had its fair share of strengths and limitations. First I will review the strengths and then limitations of the study.

Strengths of the study

There were a number of strengths that enhanced this study. Those include the contribution of this study to the existing literature on intimacy in married Indian couples and, the many aspects of the ZMET method with the in-depth phone interview.

Contribution to the existing literature. This study is unique. It has used pictures as metaphors to explore and understand the intimacy experiences in married couples in India. The existing literature on intimacy is outdated and provides very little information on the most recent intimacy experiences of married Indian couples. A few studies have explored Indian marriages (Netting, 2010; Sandhya, 2009), but none that focused on exploring how married Indian men and women experienced the different dimensions of intimacy.

ZMET. This study is one of a kind. The ZMET method of using pictures as metaphors to elicit responses from participants helped tap into the inherent emotions, thoughts, behaviors, positive and negative experiences of the participants on the sensitive topic of intimacy. For this study, the ZMET process was helpful in delving deeper into the participant's experiences or lack of experiences in each dimension of intimacy. In addition, participants provided everyday examples to illustrate their experiences or lack of experiences during the in-depth interview. There is no known study in the Western or the Indian literature that has used pictures to explore intimacy in couples.

Another strength is the process of using pictures and in-depth interview to elicit participants' stories. Some participants provided feedback on the interview process. They perceived it as a thought provoking and insightful experience. Zaltman (1996, 1997) mentioned

that special methods are needed to access deep and relevant thoughts which are not readily available. In a way, the present study was able to access participants' deep thoughts through the use of pictures and in-depth interview. Some participants reported that during and after the interview they had many insights and reflections. Further, one participant reported at the end of the interview that the pictures and the interview evoked memories of experiences that he thought he had forgotten.

Interviews. Each spouse was interviewed separately. This method of conducting individual in-depth interviews with each spouse provided the space and scope for participants to share freely their perspective, experiences and lack of experiences providing rich data about each aspect of intimacy. In a way, issues of social desirability (where in participants may want to present their marriage in a better light) were minimized.

Consistent with Sturges and Hanrahan's (2004) views on the benefits of the phone interview, this method provided a cost-effective approach for the researcher to interview participants, keeping in mind the participant's convenience and availability. Otherwise, time, cost and location would have served as a restriction for data collection from different parts of India. Challenges faced in recruiting participants for a sensitive research topic such as intimacy (Sharangpani, 2010) can be overcome by using a method of data collection that offers anonymity to participants (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Most recent studies that explored marital relationships in India, such as Allendorf (2013), Arora and Chadha (2012), Chawla (2009), Kulkarni (2004), Netting (2010), and Sharangpani (2010), recruited participants from only one location. Unlike these research studies, the present study was able to recruit a diverse group of couples from different metropolitan cities of India, belonging to different religions. All the couples who were recruited for this study continued their participation till the end of the study.

Summary. Though the findings expand knowledge about intimacy experiences in married couples in India, they cannot be loosely applied to all married Indian couples. It should be viewed in the context that most married men and women in this study perceived themselves as 'modern' and had a love marriage, or both. The findings offer information on the intimacy experiences and expectations of educated, middle-income couples, living in urban areas, who perceive themselves as modern, and aspire to have equality, respect, and intimacy in the marital relationship with their spouse. Therefore, the diffusion of information based on the present study through marriage education and relationship course should target couples, who view themselves as modern and perceive intimacy as an important component of their relationship. ZMET as a method could be used for counseling with couples where both partners are willing to engage and open to using pictures as a means of discussing about their relationship in session. Therapist should refrain from using ZMET method with couples who are uncomfortable, and unwilling to search or use pictures to discuss their relationship.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations of this pilot study and they are mentioned below. These issues relate to recruitment and the data collection process.

Recruitment Issues. First, recruitment for this study was difficult. Some men and women who made initial contact and expressed interest in participation did not respond to the researcher's email upon contact. Therefore, the initial recruitment for this study was slow. Secondly, one recruitment issue was that some respondents either completed the contact information or the consent form. Those respondents who only completed the consent form did not provide any contact information and these respondents were dropped from the study. Moreover, some Indian respondents who resided in other countries also expressed interest but

were not included in this study as they did not meet the study criteria. The third issue was that

during recruitment, participants perhaps had to complete too many forms: participant information

form, consent form and a participant questionnaire form before the first short phone call was

scheduled. Though, all participants who completed the three forms and scheduled a time for the

short phone call completed their participation in this study. The fourth issue with recruitment is

that there were few couples with longer duration marriages and traditional arranged marriages

(where parents choose the spouse without the consent of the bride or groom) and hence this study

may provide restricted information about the intimacy experiences on those couple relationships.

The fifth issue is self-selection bias. Participants who were willing, available and valued

intimacy may have consented to participate in this study. This excluded others who were

unavailable or unwilling to participate in an intimacy study. The sixth issue is that only those

respondents who were familiar and had access to Internet were included in this study. This

excluded the educated non-Internet users, people who were from lower socio-economic status

and people who were less educated or illiterate. If recruitment had not been limited to only

couples, then a higher number of people would have been available. Also if one spouse was

interested, then they could have participated in this study alone.

Data collection process. The data collection process had a few shortcomings. Some

participants had difficulty accessing or navigating the Scholar site to submit their word document

with pictures. Long distance calls had their own challenges. Sometimes phone calls dropped or

had disturbances. Another limitation could be that that the interview was lengthy and ranged

between forty-five and ninety minutes exploring the six dimensions of intimacy. Social

desirability is another limitation wherein participants may want to present their marriage in the

best light. This is consistent with Mehta's (1998) report that couples were likely to present their

marriage in a more favorable way than in reality. However, the ZMET method of data collection and interviewing couples separately gave each spouse the opportunity to share their experiences freely. The pre-interview instructions (Appendix F) which had the researcher's selection of pictures as examples may have influenced participants' choice of pictures. Nonetheless biases cannot be completely eliminated. Although phone interviews provided some anonymity for a sensitive topic like intimacy, maybe a more anonymous online survey could have minimized the challenges faced during recruitment (slow recruitment in the beginning and participants providing information but not responding to contact email).

Clinical Implications and Future Directions in Research

Based on the findings, this study has both clinical and research implications. First I will explore the clinical implications and then focus on the future directions for research.

Clinical Implications

This study provides insight into the way some couples are incorporating changes into their marital behaviors and their intimacy experiences in the couple relationship. The present study's findings elaborate on the components of intimacy that have been barely addressed by research on Indian marriages, such as, emotional closeness and self-disclosure; sharing ideas and supporting partner; sexual intimacy; relationship skills; commitment; and social intimacy. The findings are helpful for marriage educators as they provide information about the challenges and strengths of present day educated couples. With slow and gradual changes in the Indian society, the nature of marital relationships has been changing, and couples are negotiating new roles and new ways of relating to each other. The themes 'positive and negative experiences' and 'barriers and strategies used' highlight the way couples are negotiating ways of being intimate with each other. This information could be helpful in premarital workshops for Indian couples, preparing

them for talking to each other about ways and means in which they can express their expectations and limitations to their spouse. Furthermore, it prepares couples to work as a team to have the pleasant and the unpleasant conversations relating to intimacy and conflicts in marital relationship. Intimacy and conflict occur concurrently in Indian marriages as in Western marriages (Sandhya, 2009) and Indian couples would benefit from pre-marital programs that address these concerns (negotiating relationship with in-laws, managing work and family, sharing responsibilities, sharing desires and thoughts, need for space and respect etc) in couple relationships in the Indian culture. Furthermore, the findings may be potentially beneficial for therapists and counselors working with couples and families in India or Indian families overseas. Therapists are informed about some of the struggles that Indian couples experience. The information from the findings can help therapists encourage discussion among couples and families that struggle with adapting to the new demands (cultural expectations in a changing society, and new roles and rules for husbands and wives, mother-in-law, and father-in-law).

Family therapists working with couples can use the method of data collection (interviewing participants regarding their selected pictures of different dimensions of intimacy and their experiences as it relates to these pictures) as a technique to facilitate couple's communication of expectations, experiences and concerns in couples counseling. Many participants in this study found the in-depth interview an insightful process. With the therapist facilitating this process in couple counseling, this may benefit couples struggling to maintain intimacy and manage conflicts in their relationship. Although no participants in this study reported sharing their pictures with their spouse before their interview, the participants were curious and excited to share their pictures with their spouse or learn about their spouse's selection of pictures. To a certain extent, this approach of using pictures is a different way to

facilitate communication in therapy session between spouses or to allow couples to be curious about each other's intimacy experiences. This may help couples struggling to openly converse about sensitive issues such as their relationship with spouse's parents and sexual difficulties. From one point of view, listening and reflecting on one's and each other's experiences (with the help of the pictures) can help couples discuss their issues in a non-threatening manner. Besides, therapists can help couples talk about positive and negative experiences, difficulties and strategies used, societal expectations, family expectations and how they influence the couple's behavior towards each other to have a holistic picture. This process of exploration in therapy can empower couples to be insightful about their behavior towards each other and work towards resolution of their concerns. The findings and technique mentioned above should be used with caution by family therapists handling couples with domestic violence and dowry-related issues. The findings may not be beneficial for couples where one spouse does not feel safe with the other.

Future Directions in Research

Based on the findings, future research can explore more extensively each dimension of intimacy. In addition, a study that recruits couples and married individuals may provide diverse and more information about the intimacy experiences of married Indian men and women. In the future, scaling questions that assessed participants' experiences in each dimension and assessed participants' assessment of one spouse's experience in each dimension could be included to measure the accuracy and similarity between couples' scores. Heller and Wood (1998) assessed accuracy and similarity in couple's scores in Western couples. Therefore, future study can further the present findings. Future research should consider comparing couples in short-term and long-term marriages in terms of their intimacy experiences in each dimension. Further study

in this area should include couples from different socio-economic status and lower educational

levels and assess the intimacy experiences of couples from these backgrounds.

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Appendix A: Email Template with Recruitment Flyer

Dear Member,

We are conducting a research project related to how Indian Couples capture various forms of intimacy through metaphors and pictures. We want to interview couples who a) have been married between 1 to 15 years, b) both should have access to computer and internet at home or workplace, and c) both have the basic ability to use the computer and internet to find pictures. Both spouses should be willing to participate in this research study.

If you and your spouse are living in India and are interested to participate in this study or if you know of married Indian couples living in India who might be interested in taking part, please consider forwarding the attached flyer to them. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential.

For information about the study please see the attached flyer. If you have any questions at all, please contact me at mpalit@vt.edu. This research project is approved by the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, USA.

Thanks for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Manjushree Palit, Doctoral Candidate
Human Development Department
Virginia Tech
mpalit@vt.edu

Appendix B: Recruitment Materials

[Text on fliers]

Project on Understanding Intimacy in Indian Couples

Research Participants Needed

Would you and your spouse like to take part in a study focused on understanding intimacy among Indian couples? I'd like to invite you, a) if you are a married couple living in India, b) have been married for 1 to 15 years, c) if you have access to a computer and internet access at home or workplace, and d) have the basic ability to use the computer and internet to find pictures. As a token of appreciation, for each couple who agrees to be interviewed for this study will receive a Shopper's Stop gift card of INR 1000 = $ 18.85.

Please consider taking part. Participation is confidential. If you and your spouse are interested in participating please complete the participant information form at the link below so that the researcher can contact you and your spouse.

https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1335973779285

If your unable to go to the site directly by clicking the below mentioned link, then try copying and pasting the link on your web browser. Please read about the research study and complete the consent form at the below mentioned link.

https://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1337655416320

If you need more information about the study and your eligibility, please contact **Manjushree Palit at mpalit@vt.edu**. This research project is approved by the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, USA**.**

Appendix C: Informed Consent

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Participants
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Uncovering messages of intimacy in Indian couples using pictures as metaphors

Investigator(s): Dr. Fred P. Piercy and Manjushree Palit

Purpose of this Research/Project: The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of intimacy experiences of married couples in India.

Procedures: You will receive an email with the consent form, pre-interview instructions and questionnaire. Once you return these, you will receive a phone call of approximately 15-20 minutes. This pre-interview phone call will be used to explain the procedures and to address any questions you have about the instructions. We will also schedule a telephone or skype interview at the end of one week. You will have a week's time to select at least 6 pictures that you believe reflect the six concepts of intimacy as outlined in the pre-interview questionnaire. You will copy and paste the 6 pictures in a Microsoft Word Document and upload them in the link provided before the interview. The telephone or skype interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. In it we will discuss the 6 pictures you have selected. You will need access to the internet at the time of the interview to perform small tasks of arranging the pictures during the interview and to upload these pictures on the link provided. The interview will be audio-taped.

Risks: You will be asked to discuss your close relationship with your spouse. Sometimes talking about close relationships can make people feel comfortable when they remember happy experiences or uncomfortable when they remember negative experiences. Please know that your information is confidential and your participation is voluntary. You are free to end the interview at any time, if you feel uncomfortable.

Benefits: Taking part in this study means that you will contribute to the knowledge about the concept of intimacy in Indian couples

Compensation: As a token of appreciation you will receive a gift voucher from Shopper's Stop Store for INR 1000 (US $ 18.85) at the end of the interview.

Confidentiality: Your consent form will be kept in a locked cabinet in an office. Only those directly involved in the study will have access to your information. If you agree to participate, and if you select pictures from the web, or take pictures of your family members or if you share pictures from your family album, they will be transferred using a secure server (Scholar) and will be kept in a password protected computer. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. The recording and transcription text (the written version) will be kept on a password protected computer. When writing reports we will never use your real name, any name of others you may talk about, or any other identifying information. Instead, each participant will be assigned a code.

This project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
Likewise we will never attach your name to any pictures you share with us. We do plan to use some pictures in professional articles based on this study. However, if you do not wish us to use one or more of the pictures you select we will honor your wishes.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact:

Manjushree Palit	Dr. Fred P. Piercy	David M. Moore, IRB Chair
540-808-8060	540- 231-9816	540-231-4991
mpalit@vt.edu	piercy@vt.edu	moored@vt.edu

Participant's Permission
I have read and understand this document. By signing my name I am consenting to participate in this study:

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Participant Information

1. Your name: _____

2. Spouse's name: _____

3. Your phone number: _____

4. Spouse's phone number

5. Your email address: _____

6. Spouse's email address

7. Your current city: _____

8. Your age: _____

9. Your spouse's age

10. Your gender:

     a. Male

     b. Female

11. Your spouse's gender:

     a. Male

     b. Female

Appendix E: Participant Questionnaire

12. Your highest level of educational degree achieved

    a. Doctorate degree

    b. Masters Degree

    c. Post Graduate Diploma

    d. Bachelor's degree

    e. 12th Standard

    f. 10th Grade

    g. Others. (Please specify)_____

13. Your profession: _____

14. Approximate household income (before taxes): _____

15. Your religion

    a. Hindu

    b. Muslim

    c. Christian

    d. Sikh

    e. Jain

    f. Buddhist

    g. Others: Please specify_____ .

16. Your caste: _____

17. Your social class

    a. Upper Class

    b. Middle Class

    c. Lower Class:

18. Number of years in present marriage? _____

19. Is this your first marriage?

    a. Yes

    b. No

20. If no, how many times have you been married before?

    _____

21. Have you ever been divorced/ separated? If so, how many times and how long ago?

    _____

22. Number of children: _____

23. How many family members live in your house? Please specify your relationship with them?

    _____

24. Type of marriage you are in

    a. arranged marriage

    b. love marriage

    c. Both

25. On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being "traditional" and 7 being "modern", where would you place yourself in this scale? Please specify at least 3 reasons for your choice.

Traditional   Modern

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Reasons:

Appendix F: Pre -Interview Instructions

 I would like you to think about intimacy in your relationship with your spouse. Please take a

week's time to think about and select six pictures that you believe reflects the **<u>six</u>** aspects of

intimacy in your marital relationship with your spouse. These six aspects of intimacy are (1)

<u>emotional closeness and self disclosure</u> such as, feeling close to your partner through verbal

and nonverbal expression of feelings, sharing something very personal about yourself; feeling

vulnerable by sharing your feelings, worries and fears with your partner, (2) **<u>shared ideas and</u>**

<u>support</u> such as, sharing ideas and opinions with partner; feeling supported and encouraged by

partner; giving words of encouragement and support to your partner, (3) **<u>sexual intimacy</u>** such

as, being physically affectionate with your partner; communicating sexual needs to your partner;

initiating and engaging in sexual activities with your partner, (4) **<u>relationship skills</u>** such as,

resolving differences of opinion with partner; building consensus or agreement with partner;

tolerating the less pleasant aspects of your partner, (5) **<u>commitment</u>** such as, commitment to

improving the relationship; experiencing trust with your partner; experiencing loyalty or

faithfulness or fidelity in the relationship, (6) **<u>social intimacy</u>** such as, having mutual friends, or

similar networks with your partner; shared interests in hobbies or joint participation in activities

or sports with your partner. You can find these pictures from magazines, the Internet (to name a

few free Internet sites that will provide pictures related to any word you enter are **<u>Flikr.com,</u>**

<u>images.google.com</u>, <u>http://www.bing.com/images</u>, **<u>images.search.yahoo.com</u>**,

<u>gettyimages.com</u>, and **<u>dinodia.com</u>**, family albums or you can take pictures using your camera.

Find pictures that symbolize what and how you experience intimacy in your relationship with

your spouse. For example, see the attached six concepts of intimacy and the researcher's

selection of pictures that represents her concept of intimacy with quotes. <u>Please upload at least</u>

six pictures representing each of the six constructs of intimacy to the Scholar link provided to

you with quotes as shown in the example. Please create two columns, in the first column copy

the intimacy constructs as shown in the example. In the second column place the picture that

represents the particular intimacy construct with your own quotes. We will be discussing the

pictures you selected in the interview. Please ensure that you have computer and internet access

during the interview as you will be required to do simple tasks such as rank order the pictures

and upload them to the scholar site during the interview.

Intimacy Constructs & Illustrative Examples of Pictures Reflecting Those Concepts with Quotes

Intimacy Construct	Researcher's Selection of Illustrative Pictures
1. **Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure** (feeling close to your partner through verbal and nonverbal expression of feelings, sharing something very personal about yourself; feeling vulnerable by sharing your feelings, worries and fears with partner).	**Emotionally close and unburdening self with partner**
2. **Shared ideas and support** (such as, sharing your ideas and opinions with partner; feeling supported and encouraged by partner; giving encouragement and support to your partner).	**Supporting and challenging each other's beliefs**
3. **Sexual intimacy** (such as, being physically affectionate with partner; communicating sexual needs to partner; initiating and engaging in sexual activities with partner)	**Easily communicating physical desires and affection with partner**

4. **Relationship Skills** (such as, such as, ease with which differences of opinion with partner are resolved; building consensus or agreement with partner; tolerating the less pleasant aspects of your partner,)	**Moments of agreement and disagreement**
5. **Commitment** (such as, commitment to improving the relationship; experiencing trust with partner; experiencing loyalty or faithfulness or fidelity in the relationship).	**Working together, being committed to a joint task and trusting each other**
6. **Social Intimacy** (such as, having mutual friends, or similar networks with partner; shared interests in hobbies or joint participation in activities or sports with your partner)	**Spending time in a gathering with close knit friends or extended family (in–laws, siblings and other relatives) in parties, movies, picnics, wine socials, festivals, potlucks**

Appendix G: Instructions on How to Upload Documents on Scholar

Once you have your guest account, you can log in to Scholar:

1. Open   Scholar : https://scholar.vt.edu
2. Click the Login button.
3. Type your guest account login and password, and click Login.
4. Go to the site, click on the site tab. (You will see two or more tabs in a row across the upper part on the left hand side of the screen.)

Use the Assignment tool which is visible on the left hand side tab. This will allow you to share files with the researchers using a private folder that only you and the researcher can see. For uploading a file from your computer, under each assignment you will see a text box and attachment. Go to the attachment, select the file from your computer and attach it here. Do not forget to hit the submit button.

Under assignments you will see several steps.

Step 1: Informed Consent Form

Please download the consent form sign the consent form and attached the completed form as an attachment under Step 1.

Step 2: Participant Questionnaire Survey

Once you submitted your signed consent form then proceed to Step 2. Under instructions there is a link to a short 10 minutes survey. Please complete this survey.

Step 3: Pre-interview Instructions

We have spoken on the phone and had a short conversation on the pre-interview instructions and we have decided on a date for the interview. Please use the pre-interview instructions as a guide for selecting the 6 pictures that represent your understanding of intimacy. You can follow the example that is given in the pre-interview instructions. Do not use the same pictures or quotes used in the example. Please select your own pictures and quotes and paste it in a word document. Make a table with two columns and 6 rows. On one column copy and paste the 6 concepts and on the other column copy paste your selected pictures. Two days before our scheduled interview upload the word document as an attachment under step 3.

Step 4: During Interview Upload Documents

During the interview you will need access to a computer and internet. During the interview, you will complete small tasks and you will upload the document with the pictures again in this site.

You will need access to this account during your interview. Please remember to sign out of your guest account.

Appendix H: Interview Protocol

You selected six pictures before this interview that represents what you think and feel about intimacy in your marital relationship with your spouse. I would like to ask you some questions about these six pictures and how they relate to your everyday life experiences of intimacy with your spouse.

I. Start with the first category of intimacy.

Possible ZMET laddering questions:

1) *Picture of Emotional Closeness and Self Disclosure*

How does this picture relate to your experience of "emotional closeness and self disclosure" in your marital relationship?

- Can you describe what you see in this picture?

- What does this picture about "emotional closeness and self disclosure" mean to you?

- What do you feel when "emotional closeness and self disclosure" occurs? Can you give an example from your life when that happened?

- What happened after "emotional closeness and self disclosure" happened in the example you just provided?

- What do you feel when "emotional closeness and self disclosure" does not happen? Can you give an example from your life when that did not happen?

- What causes "emotional closeness and self disclosure" to exist in your marital relationship? / How do you maintain it or how do you keep it going?

- How has "emotional closeness and self disclosure" changed in your relationship over the years? Can you explain with an example from your relationship?

- Why is "emotional closeness and self disclosure" important?

2) *Picture of Shared Ideas and Support*

How does this picture relate to your experience of "shared ideas and support" in your marital relationship?

- Can you describe what you see in this picture?

- What does this picture about "shared ideas and support" mean to you?

- What do you feel when "shared ideas and support" occurs? Can you give an example from your life when that happened?

- What happened after "shared ideas and support" happened in the example you just provided?

- What do you feel when "shared ideas and support" does not happen? Can you give an example from your life when that did not happen?

- What causes "shared ideas and support" to exist in your marital relationship? / How do you maintain it or how do you keep it going?

- How has "shared ideas and support" changed in your relationship over the years? Can you explain with an example from your relationship?

- Why is "shared ideas and support" important?

3) *Picture of Sexual Intimacy*

How does this picture relate to your experience of "sexual intimacy" in your marital relationship?

- Can you describe what you see in this picture?

- What does this picture about "sexual intimacy" mean to you?

- What do you feel when "sexual intimacy" occurs? Can you give an example from your life when that happened?

- What happened after "sexual intimacy" happened in the example you just provided?

- What do you feel when "sexual intimacy" does not happen? Can you give an example from your life when that did not happen?

- What causes "sexual intimacy" to exist in your marital relationship? / How do you maintain it or how do you keep it going?

- How has "sexual intimacy" changed in your relationship over the years? Can you explain with an example from your relationship?

- Why is "sexual intimacy" important?

4) *Picture of Relationship Skills*

How does this picture relate to your experience of "relationship skills" in your marital relationship?

- Can you describe what you see in this picture?

- What does this picture about "relationship skills" mean to you?

- What do you feel when "relationship skills" occurs? Can you give an example from your life when that happened?

- What happened after "relationship skills" happened in the example you just provided?

- What do you feel when "relationship skills" does not happen? Can you give an example from your life when that did not happen?

- What causes "relationship skills" to exist in your marital relationship? / How do you maintain it or how do you keep it going?

- How has "relationship skills" changed in your relationship over the years? Can you explain with an example from your relationship?

- Why is "relationship skills" important?

5) *Picture of Commitment*

How does this picture relate to your experience of "commitment" in your marital relationship?

- Can you describe what you see in this picture?

- What does this picture about "commitment" mean to you?

- What do you feel when "commitment" occurs? Can you give an example from your life when that happened?

- What happened after "commitment" happened in the example you just provided?

- What do you feel when "commitment" does not happen? Can you give an example from your life when that did not happen?

- What causes "commitment" to exist in your marital relationship? / How do you maintain it or how do you keep it going?

- How has "commitment" changed in your relationship over the years? Can you explain with an example from your relationship?

- Why is "commitment" important?

6) *Picture of Social Intimacy*

How does this picture relate to your experience of "social intimacy" in your marital relationship?

- Can you describe what you see in this picture?

- What does this picture about "social intimacy" mean to you?

- What do you feel when "social intimacy" occurs? Can you give an example from your life when that happened?

- What happened after "social intimacy" happened in the example you just provided? / What does it do?

- What do you feel when "social intimacy" does not happen? Can you give an example from your life when that did not happen?

- What causes "social intimacy" to exist in your marital relationship? / How do you maintain it or how do you keep it going?

- How has "social intimacy" changed in your relationship over the years? Can you explain with an example from your relationship?

- Why is "social intimacy" important?

II. Can you describe images that you would have liked to add to these six pictures of intimacy but you could not locate them?

Possible Laddering Questions:

- *What images you would have wanted to include in these pictures?*

- *What does this image represent?*

- *What happens when the above mentioned thing happens?*

- *How does it make you feel?*

- *What happens when the above mentioned thing does not occur?*

- *When the above mentioned thing occurs how does it help or hurt your relationship over time?*

III. Can you rank the six pictures in the order of importance?

Possible Laddering Questions:

- *Why is this order important?*

- *What happens if this order is followed over time?*

- *What happens if this order is not followed over time?*

IV. Kelly Repertory Grid:

1. Can you pick any three pictures from the six pictures?

2. Can you tell me how two of these pictures are similar to each other and different from the third?

Possible Laddering Questions:

- *Which two pictures do you think are similar?*

- *How are these two similar pictures different from the third?*

- *Why is "the above mentioned thing" important?*

- *What happens when "the above mentioned thing" occurs or does not occur?*

- *What do you think and feel about the third picture?*

- *Can you provide an example when you have experienced "the above mentioned thing" and the third picture?*

Note: Adapted from "Using metaphors to explore the experiences of powerlessness among women in Twelve-Step substance abuse recovery", J. L. Matheson, 2005, *Doctoral dissertation*, pp. 132-135; "Metaphorically speaking: New technique uses multidisciplinary ideas to improve qualitative research", G. Zaltman, 1996, *8,* p. 15.

Appendix I: Template for Intimacy Constructs & Pictures Reflecting Those Concepts with Captions

Intimacy Construct	Your Pictures + Your Quotes
1. **Emotional Closeness and Self-Disclosure** (feeling close to your partner through verbal and nonverbal expression of feelings, sharing something very personal about yourself; feeling vulnerable by sharing your feelings, worries and fears with partner).	**Copy paste your picture here** **Write your quote/caption here**
2. **Shared ideas and support** (such as, sharing your ideas and opinions with partner; feeling supported and encouraged by partner; giving encouragement and support to your partner).	**Copy paste your picture here** **Write your quote/caption here**
3. **Sexual intimacy** (such as, being physically affectionate with partner; communicating sexual needs to partner; initiating and engaging in sexual activities with partner)	**Copy paste your picture here** **Write your quote/caption here**
4. **Relationship Skills** (such as, such as, ease with which differences of opinion with	**Copy paste your picture here**

partner are resolved; building consensus or agreement with partner; tolerating the less pleasant aspects of your partner,)	**Write your quote/caption here**
5. **Commitment** (such as, commitment to improving the relationship; experiencing trust with partner; experiencing loyalty or faithfulness or fidelity in the relationship).	**Copy paste your picture here** **Write your quote/caption here**
6. **Social Intimacy** (such as, having mutual friends, or similar networks with partner; shared interests in hobbies or joint participation in activities or sports with your partner)	**Copy paste your picture here** **Write your quote/caption here**

Appendix J: Electronic Receipt of Gift Card

I hereby acknowledge that I have received the Shopper's Stop Gift Card of 1000 Rupees as a token of appreciation for my participation in the research project "Uncovering Message of Intimacy in Married Couples From India: A Phenomenological Study Using Metaphors"

Signature (Full name): _____

Date: _____

Checking the box signifies my signature and confirmation of the receipt of the gift card

☐   **Received Shopper's Stop Gift Card of 1000 Rupees**

Appendix K: Six Concepts of Intimacy (English to Bangla Translation)

Emotional Closeness (manosik on-tarangota) and Self-Disclosure (Ato-prokash)

Shared Ideas (Yugmo dharona) and support (Samarthan)

Sexual Intimacy (Jauno naikatta)

Relationship Skills (Paros-porik samparker unnati)

Commitment (*Angeekar*)

Social intimacy (Samajik naikattya)

Appendix L: W-8BEN Form

Form W-8BEN
(Rev. February 2006)
Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service

Certificate of Foreign Status of Beneficial Owner for United States Tax Withholding
▶ Section references are to the Internal Revenue Code. ▶ See separate instructions.
▶ Give this form to the withholding agent or payer. Do not send to the IRS.

OMB No. 1545-1621

Do not use this form for: | **Instead, use Form:**
- A U.S. citizen or other U.S. person, including a resident alien individual W-9
- A person claiming that income is effectively connected with the conduct
  of a trade or business in the United States W-8ECI
- A foreign partnership, a foreign simple trust, or a foreign grantor trust (see instructions for exceptions) . . . . . . W-8ECI or W-8IMY
- A foreign government, international organization, foreign central bank of issue, foreign tax-exempt organization,
  foreign private foundation, or government of a U.S. possession that received effectively connected income or that is
  claiming the applicability of section(s) 115(2), 501(c), 892, 895, or 1443(b) (see instructions) . . . . W-8ECI or W-8EXP

Note: *These entities should use Form W-8BEN if they are claiming treaty benefits or are providing the form only to claim they are a foreign person exempt from backup withholding.*
- A person acting as an intermediary W-8IMY

Note: *See instructions for additional exceptions.*

Part I — Identification of Beneficial Owner (See instructions.)

1 Name of individual or organization that is the beneficial owner | **2** Country of incorporation or organization

3 Type of beneficial owner: ☐ Individual ☐ Corporation ☐ Disregarded entity ☐ Partnership ☐ Simple trust
☐ Grantor trust ☐ Complex trust ☐ Estate ☐ Government ☐ International organization
☐ Central bank of issue ☐ Tax-exempt organization ☐ Private foundation

4 Permanent residence address (street, apt. or suite no., or rural route). **Do not use a P.O. box or in-care-of address.**

City or town, state or province. Include postal code where appropriate. | Country (do not abbreviate)

5 Mailing address (if different from above)

City or town, state or province. Include postal code where appropriate. | Country (do not abbreviate)

6 U.S. taxpayer identification number, if required (see instructions) ☐ SSN or ITIN ☐ EIN | **7** Foreign tax identifying number, if any (optional)

8 Reference number(s) (see instructions)

Part II — Claim of Tax Treaty Benefits (if applicable)

9 I certify that (check all that apply):
a ☐ The beneficial owner is a resident of _____ within the meaning of the income tax treaty between the United States and that country.
b ☐ If required, the U.S. taxpayer identification number is stated on line 6 (see instructions).
c ☐ The beneficial owner is not an individual, derives the item (or items) of income for which the treaty benefits are claimed, and, if applicable, meets the requirements of the treaty provision dealing with limitation on benefits (see instructions).
d ☐ The beneficial owner is not an individual, is claiming treaty benefits for dividends received from a foreign corporation or interest from a U.S. trade or business of a foreign corporation, and meets qualified resident status (see instructions).
e ☐ The beneficial owner is related to the person obligated to pay the income within the meaning of section 267(b) or 707(b), and will file Form 8833 if the amount subject to withholding received during a calendar year exceeds, in the aggregate, $500,000.

10 **Special rates and conditions** (if applicable—see instructions): The beneficial owner is claiming the provisions of Article _____ of the treaty identified on line 9a above to claim a _____ % rate of withholding on (specify type of income): _____ .
Explain the reasons the beneficial owner meets the terms of the treaty article: _____
_____

Part III — Notional Principal Contracts

11 ☐ I have provided or will provide a statement that identifies those notional principal contracts from which the income is **not** effectively connected with the conduct of a trade or business in the United States. I agree to update this statement as required.

Part IV — Certification

Under penalties of perjury, I declare that I have examined the information on this form and to the best of my knowledge and belief it is true, correct, and complete. I further certify under penalties of perjury that:
1 I am the beneficial owner (or am authorized to sign for the beneficial owner) of all the income to which this form relates,
2 The beneficial owner is not a U.S. person,
3 The income to which this form relates is (a) not effectively connected with the conduct of a trade or business in the United States, (b) effectively connected but is not subject to tax under an income tax treaty, or (c) the partner's share of a partnership's effectively connected income, **and**
4 For broker transactions or barter exchanges, the beneficial owner is an exempt foreign person as defined in the instructions.
Furthermore, I authorize this form to be provided to any withholding agent that has control, receipt, or custody of the income of which I am the beneficial owner or any withholding agent that can disburse or make payments of the income of which I am the beneficial owner.

Sign Here ▶ _____ _____ _____
Signature of beneficial owner (or individual authorized to sign for beneficial owner) | Date (MM-DD-YYYY) | Capacity in which acting

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