

Relationship Satisfaction among South Asian Canadians: The Role of 'Complementary-Equality' and Listening to Understand

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Abstract

This study explored the ways in which adherence to traditional marital expectations in ones marriage was related to styles of interpersonal listening and marital satisfaction among Indo-Pakistanis living in a Western country. Participants (n = 114) were recruited from a large metropolitan city in Canada, were married, and their ages ranged from 19 to 67 years. They completed measures of marital satisfaction, listening styles, and traditional orientation to marriage. Results indicated that greater adherence to traditional marital beliefs were correlated with lower levels of interpersonal listening and marital satisfaction. However, closer examination of the traditional orientation subscales revealed that expectation of traditional husband and wife roles did not result in lower empathic listening in one's marriage or lower marital satisfaction, but the lower degree to which one believed in upholding equality in undertaking such traditional roles did. Furthermore, empathic listening mediated the relationship between belief in equality in one's relationship and marital satisfaction. The implications of these results for enhancing relationship satisfaction for Indo-Pakistanis are discussed.

Key Words: Traditionalism, listening styles; South Asian; marital communication; cross-cultural relationships

Marriage is by far the most important personal relationship for South Asians. The stability and continuity of a marriage is important not just to the members of the marital dyad, but to their family and community as a whole. Traditionally, South Asians expected their marriages to be arranged by their elder extended kin who continued to play a significant role in the couple's lives. Husbands and wives expected each other to follow gender-based division of labour where the husband is responsible for financially supporting the family and the wife is responsible for

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household work and childrearing. More recently, the rapidly changing social and economic trends have led to changes in expectations of marriage for South Asians, particularly those that have migrated and settled in Western countries and are exposed to new value systems.

South Asians have been found to rapidly acculturate to Western values in the area of work and school as they are motivated to be economically and professionally successful, however, they tend to maintain traditional expectations regarding family life (Vaidyanathan & Naidoo, 1991; Wakil, Siddique, & Wakil, 1981). While such traditional expectations may have been functional for relationships in previous generations, very little is known about how they influence the interpersonal dynamics of the South Asian marriage in a North American society. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the degree to which South Asian partners' adherence to the traditional ideology of marriage was associated with their marital satisfaction and to test the hypotheses that the ability to make this association requires a special quality of communication between the married partners. That special quality is the ability of the partners to listen to each other in ways that allowed them to collaborate and accommodate each other's role harmoniously as a unit. The latter is a cultural ideal of the South Asian marriage; to function well together for the good of the family and to be seen to be doing so.

It is feasible that couples who govern their role behaviors according to culturally prescribed rules will assume a common understanding so that negotiating a shared meaning or interpretation of the rules is not necessary. Indeed, it may be that many South Asians traditionally feel that this should be the case, that everyone knows how to behave and ought to conform. However, South Asian couples living within a Western context are accommodating to a myriad of additional social and economic changes that require their modifying their ways of achieving traditional marriage ideals. Thus, an additional supposition in this research was that the association between traditionalism and marital satisfaction could be mediated by the quality of listening where those that were less rigidly traditionalistic would tend to be better listeners to each other which in turn results in higher marital satisfaction. The present study examined these

interested in cultural factors in marriage and changes processes, and combining complex systems constructivist approaches to understanding psychological phenomena.

hypotheses between the two largest South Asian subgroups residing in Canada, Indians and Pakistanis, collectively referred to as Indo-Pakistanis.

Traditional Indo-Pakistani Marriage

The practice and meaning of marriages in India and Pakistan reflects a pattern quite different from that of the Western world. Marriage is the most important life transition for Indo-Pakistanis, who define themselves through their marital relationship. Marriages have traditionally been arranged by parents, considered sacrosanct and permanent, and divorce is socially discouraged (Kurian, 1974). Marriage is more a social affair than an individual affair, as it is seen as the bonding of two families not just two individuals and the marital relationship is not more important than other familial relationships; they were both very important and the attempt is to keep these synchronous (Nath & Craig, 1999; Sonpar, 2005). The purpose of marriage was primarily for procreation and continuity of family and religious heritage. Couples typically live throughout their marriage in either an extended joint family household or live in close proximity. This close contact provides them with emotional, informational and economic support. The extended family and kin help mediate conflicts between couples, as the norm is not to disclose marital problems to outsiders (Natrajan & Thomas, 2002). Members of the extended family household share the burden of domestic duties (e.g., cleaning and cooking) and assist in childrearing (Kurian, 1974; Nath & Craig, 1999). Within such close-knit family organization, spouses develop psychological and emotional bonds not just with their partner but their in-laws (Nath & Craig, 1999).

Research suggests second generation South Asians -- those that were raised in Canada -- are very similar to their parent in terms of their adherence to traditional marital expectations (Dasgupta, 1998). For instance, the second generation Indo-Pakistanis that were raised in Canada are moving away from arranged marriages towards an intermediate compromise with Western marital patterns, where the mate is selected by the individual, yet parental consent and approval is needed before marriage (Vaidyanathan & Naidoo, 1991; Wakil, et al., 1981). Newly married

couples live with their parents, but with the intention to save money and move out when they can afford their own residence. After moving out, the extended family influences the couple through most of their married life and is the first people the couple turns to for mediating marital problems (Goodwin & Cramer, 2000).

Indo-Pakistani Marital Satisfaction within Canadian Context

Changing marital expectations implies changes in what contributes to marital satisfaction among Indo-Pakistani couples. The social support the extended family provided, reduced the need for the husband and wife to depend on each other for companionship needs. However, Siddique (1983) found that Indo-Pakistani Canadian couples that immigrated to Canada and lost their extended family support had to rely more on each other and hence expected more companionship from their partners than those back home did. Research has found that similar to their Western counterparts, Indo-Pakistani couples are placing a greater emphasis on the emotional/intimate aspects in evaluating their marital satisfaction such as expression of affection (e.g., Srivasta & Shukla, 1995), mutual compatibility (Singh & Kanjirathinkal, 1999), companionship and leisure time (Siddique, 1983), and interpersonal trust and self disclosure (Desai, 1991). At the same time Indo-Pakistanis continue to value institutional and pragmatic aspects of marriage that are not typically assessed by Western measures of marital satisfaction, such as religiosity, financial security, educational/occupational status (Desai, 1991), parental acceptance, family reputation, cultural background (Lalonde, Hynie, Pannu, & Tatla, 2004; Vaidyanathan, & Naidoo, 1991), social approval and public image of a happy marriage (Goodwin & Cramer, 2000). Furthermore, in-laws and other kin are also expected to contribute to maintaining the marriage as well as affect marital adjustment and stability (Goodwin & Cramer, 2000; Kurian, 1974).

Listening Styles in Intimate Relationships

A large body of research indicates that the quality of communication is significantly related to marital stability (Haynes, Chavez, & Samuel, 1984; Markman, 1981). A central theory of marital therapy is the “active listening model” which asserts that stable, happy marriages are

characterized by active, empathic listening during conflict and involves such strategies as paraphrasing the content and feelings of the spouse, responding nondefensively, even when a person feels that they are being attacked by their spouse, and suspending personal judgment (Gottman, 1999). Listening is important for mutual understanding and exchange of thoughts and feeling between marital partners.

Doell and Reid (2002) developed a novel conceptualization to understand the ways in which partners in committed relationships listen to each other. Based on their clinical observations they found during interpersonal discourse partners habitually fail to fully understand the meaning of what their partner is communicating and instead think that they understand. Individuals tend to be caught up with what they assume their partner is trying to convey, obstructing their ability to really listen and get at the deeper meaning behind what their partner is conveying. Therefore partners in distressed relationships often only hear enough of what their spouse had said so as to be able to react with their own response. This is not intentional, but a non-conscious habit of failing to listen thoroughly and serves to frustrate each partner's ability to relate effectively to the other.

Doell and Reid (2002) developed an assessment tool to study this concept and found that people differ in the degree to which they characteristically operate within two distinct modes of listening: listening to understand (LTU) and listening to respond (LTR). Listening to understand is characterized as a more proactive and intentional form of listening requiring more focused attention and sensitivity on the part of the listener to the verbal and nonverbal message of their partner. It indicates an underlying motivation to get at the deeper meaning or 'understanding' of what one's partner is trying to say. Such concern for accuracy in their perception of their partner's message better enables them to effectively and appropriately deal with marital issues, because it facilitates a 'shared' sense of inquiry between partners and working together. Listening to understand behaviours are reflected in such behaviours as removing distractions, providing verbal and nonverbal gestures that one is listening, using feedback to seek clarity on what their partner is

saying, delaying immediate reactions to allow partner to finish speaking and to give one a chance to reflect on what their partner has said.

In contrast, listening to respond is commonplace and is characterized as a more automatic form of listening, a kind of jumping to conclusions that reflects listening only enough to react with their own response. Individuals high on this mode of listening are concerned with only 'knowing' what the partner has said, as distinct from facilitating a deeper 'understanding' of what their partner is trying to convey. The listener is unconsciously only trying to get enough information from their spouse to allow them to come back with their own response. Such listening is characterized by effortless and passive listening where the listener aims for only a superficial understanding of what their partner is saying because they feel they already 'get it'. Listening to respond is reflected in behaviours such as interrupting their partner to correct them and defensive responses after their spouse has finished speaking. They tend to be distracted and preoccupied and place more emphasis on expressing their own opinions than those of their partner. There is a tendency to react to details of what their partner is saying and missing the bigger picture. Listening only to respond, and especially when accompanied by a lack of listening to understand, can become problematic especially since people are not typically aware of such listening habits.

Doell and Reid (2002) found that high scores on listening to understand and low scores on listening to respond predicted higher scores on relationship satisfaction. Based on this finding, Reid and colleagues (2006) developed and applied *listening to understand versus respond* as an intervention to couples therapy where partners learn to be more aware of themselves operating in either listening modality and attempt to do more of listening to understand rather than respond in their relationship. They found this enhanced each partner's levels of interpersonal mutuality, we-ness, and relationship satisfaction.

Listening Styles within Indo-Pakistani Marriage

The studies that have been reviewed thus far suggest that while Indo-Pakistani partners expect more emotional intimacy and companionship in their marriage, nevertheless there remains the desire of these couples to function along traditional South Asian marital expectations

(Ahmad, 2006). Such expectations influence partner's ways of negotiating change and relating to each other. Clinical observations of couple therapists in India have found that partners with traditional expectations are less likely to remain in therapy and to change their views and behaviours in ways that benefit the relationship (Nath & Craig, 1999; Natrajan & Thomas, 2002). Isaac and Shah (2004) found that couples categorized as distressed on the widely used Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976) were significantly more likely to adhere to traditional sex role expectations than those that were categorized as non-distressed. Interviews with Indo-Pakistani couples found that they are reluctant to either explicitly challenge status quo in their marriage or attempt to behave along non traditional gender patterns such as the wife asking for more assistance from her husband and the husband helping his wife in domestic duties, and this reluctance happens particularly in the presence of extended family and kin (Goodwin & Cramer, 2000; Siddique, 1983). Yelsma and Althappily's (1988) cross-cultural study comparing couples in India with American couples found that communication was significantly related to marital satisfaction for Americans and the Indian couples that had personal choice marriages but not for Indian couples that had arranged marriages. They concluded that communication was given less emphasis for couples that had arranged marriage as their expectations and purpose of marriage are more traditional.

In summary, traditional marital expectations appear to have adverse consequences for the quality of Indo-Pakistani relationships, yet how traditional expectations impact partner's interpersonal dynamics and result in poorer relationship adjustment is unclear. The present study tested the proposition that although a preference for traditional expectations was the ideal, the more Indo-Pakistani partners rigidly maintain traditional expectations the less they feel the need for interpersonally accommodating and empathic forms of communication such as listening to understand.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the foregoing discussion, we tested the following hypotheses

1. High levels of traditionalism are related to lower levels of marital satisfaction.
2. Higher self-ratings on listening to *understand* are related to higher marital satisfaction.
3. Higher self-ratings on listening to *respond* are related to lower marital satisfaction.
4. Higher traditionalism will be related to lower self-ratings on listening to *understand* and higher self-ratings of listening to *respond*.
5. The association between higher traditionalism and lower marital satisfaction will be mediated by the respondents' listening styles. More specifically, the correlation between traditionalism and marital satisfaction is due to a causal path through which higher traditionalism leads to lower self-ratings on listening to *understand* which in turn leads to lower scores on marital satisfaction.

Method

Participants

Members of the South Asian community living in Canada were the participants in this study. South Asians are not a homogenous group and represent a diversity of regions, languages and customs. This study focused on the two largest South Asian subgroups in Canada, Asian Indians and Pakistanis, collectively referred to as Indo-Pakistanis. Although the diversity between and within the two countries has grown since their post-colonial partition in 1947, they have been found to share familiastic values (Siddique, 1983).

The sample included 114 married respondents of which 53 were Pakistanis, 48 were Indians, and 13 were Indo-Africans (i.e., immigrants of Indian decent from Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, and East Africa). The average age was 36.87 ($SD = 13.04$; ranged 19 to 67 years). There were 51 males and 63 females, 78.9% were Muslim, 21.1% Hindu and 88% were college educated, 12% high school educated. The occupation status was 73% employed, 4% retired, 13% student, 10% household. The average length of marriage was 12.5 years ($SD = 12.03$) and ranged from 6 months to 35 years. There were 77 first generation (respondents raised outside of Canada) and 37-second generation

Canadians (respondents that were born and/or raised in Canada). Among the first generation, length of residency in Canada ranged from 0.3 years to 34 years ($M = 14.38$, $SD = 11.72$).

Measures

Marital Satisfaction was measured using the 13 item Revised Relationship Adjustment Survey (RRAS), a modified version of Fowers and Olson's (1993) ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS). The RRAS provides a reliable and valid measure of satisfaction across a range of relationship domains including: overall relationship satisfaction, personality issues, role responsibilities, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, affection, and family and friends. Items such as "My partner understands and sympathizes with me" are rated on a 5-point Likert Scale. The scale has high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = .83; Nguyen, 1999) and a test-retest reliability of .86 over four weeks (Nguyen, 1999). The RRAS has demonstrated positive correlations with measures of interpersonal mutuality, closeness with one's partner, and couple identity coded as "we-ness" from couple therapy transcripts (Reid, et al. 2006). It also demonstrated significant correlations with the commonly used Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976), $r = 0.76$ (Nguyen, 1999) and $r = .85, 78$ (Dalton, 2005). Item 11 which referred to sexual satisfaction was replaced with 'expression of affection' as Indo-Pakistanis would find the former intrusive. Furthermore, 9 additional questions were added based on a review of the literature presented in this paper earlier and from the first author's personal experience of Indo-Pakistani marital relationships. This included "Our marriage has provided me with the financial and/or social security I want". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the final 22 item RRAS was .93, which was greater than Cronbach's alpha calculated separately for the original 13 item RAS (.89) and for the added 9 items was (.86). The correlation between the 13 item RRAS and the additional summed 9 items was .87. Factor analyses of the RRAS supported the supposition that this measure was one-dimensional. The 22-item RRAS was therefore used for the analysis.

Listening Styles was measured using the Listening Styles in Committed Relationship (LSCR) scale (Doell and Reid, 2002). The LSCR is a two-part questionnaire measuring perceptions of how

well one listens to their partner and how well they perceive their partner as listening to them. For the present study, the self-rating of listening styles was used. It contains two subscales with the first subscale called the self perception of listening to understand (SLTU) that is composed of 17 items measuring the degree to which one listens to understand their intimate other. Sample items include “When my partner is explaining him/herself, I try to get a sense of what things must be like for him/her, so that I may better understand how he/she must be feeling”. The second subscale is called the self-perception of listening to respond (SLTR) that is composed of 9 items. Sample items include “I don’t find it necessary to pay close attention when my partner is talking, because I already know what my partner is going to say before he/she even says it”. Items are assessed on a 7-point Likert scale. Factor analysis of the LSCR has found that the items on the SLTU and SLTR load on two distinct factors (Doell & Reid, 2002). Internal consistency of the SLTU and SLTRU were .75 and .87 respectively and one-month test-retest reliabilities were .76 and .81 respectively (Doell, 2003). In the present study the 2 factor structure was replicated therefore the SLTU and SLTR were analyzed separately and Cronbach’s alpha for each subscale was SLTU = .80, SLTR = .83.

Traditional Marital Ideology was measured using the Traditional Orientation to Marital Relationship Scale (TOMS) developed for the present study because a review of existing tools indicated a lack of a culturally relevant measure of traditionalism (e.g. Pareek & Rao, 1974; Toulaiatos, Perlmutter, & Straus, 2001). Details of scale construction have been presented elsewhere (Ahmad & Reid, 2005, 2008b). The TOMS has 24 face valid items designed to tap Indo-Pakistani traditional beliefs across a range domains that include cultural beliefs about decision making, domestic duties, childrearing, provider role, gender roles, and extended family. Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale, the degree to which they felt the cultural beliefs reflected in the items should apply to their relationship. The internal reliability of the scale for this sample was .88.

Despite common variance among these items, factor analyses found two factors representing a significant amount of the variance among the 24 items. The 9 items loading on the first factor, was referred to as Role Ideals as it included items prescribing differential expectations of the wife and

husband. For instance “We believe that in order to have a healthy family life, the wife should stay at home to look after the children and the housework, and the husband work to support the family”. The 6 items that loaded on the second factor, formed the *Complementary Equality* factor, and included items that juxtaposed the husband and wife roles on various joint marital tasks, and assessed the ‘equality’ in carrying out such roles. For instance “Although time constraints due to our jobs and/or other commitments limit how much housework we actually do, we feel we are both equally responsible for housework such as cleaning washrooms, cooking dinner and laundry”. Finally, the items that had cross-loadings on both factors, for the most part, had aspects of both the expectations of traditional husband and wife role, and the degree of equality/inequality in practicing such roles, therefore blurring this distinction. For the present analysis the full scale and subscales were used in testing the hypothesis.

Demographics. A list requesting various demographics such as age, education, Canadian status, length of marriage, and religion was completed.

Procedure

Participants completed surveys with instructions directing them to answer individually and not share their responses with their spouse. It was difficult to recruit people to complete surveys related to their marriage because of the stigma among Indo-Pakistanis associated with discussing marriage to outsiders. Initially, the majority of people approached by the first author and asked to sign an informed consent and complete a questionnaire that did not require their name or other identifying information, refused even when they were provided with two envelopes to mail the consent form and the questionnaire separately. We then switched to a snowball sampling method whereby several surveys were given to individual Indo-Pakistanis who could complete one themselves and pass copies on to others in their family and friend network. The group of questionnaires were returned by these individuals in sealed unmarked envelopes with no way of identifying whether the person themselves or people in their network completed the survey. This increased our response rate; however, due to the nature of subject recruitment, a refusal rate could not be recorded.

Efforts were made to approach Indo-Pakistanis of diverse socio demographic backgrounds. This included approaching people at religious and community centers, universities, social gatherings, as well as the social network of the first author. Individuals who took the surveys were contacted to remind them to return the surveys. No incentive was provided to complete the survey. The conclusions drawn from this sample clearly have certain limitations as it was could not be a randomly selected sample, and there was a selection bias as only people willing to participate completed the survey.

Results

Examination of the Potential heterogeneity of the Subject Sample

ANOVA and *t* - test analyses found no significant differences among any of the measures by demographic group, (Indian, Pakistani, Indo-African), gender, or education. Thus the data were merged, allowing analyses on the entire sample of 114 respondents. For the TOMS, however, the longer the respondents resided in Canada the lower their scores on the TOMS and Role Ideals, but not on the Complementary Equality. Subsequent analyses found that these correlations held only for males. Furthermore, employed women scored significantly lower than unemployed women on the TOMS and Role Ideals subscale.

Analyses of the Hypotheses

The following summarizes the findings for each of the hypotheses listed and numbered earlier. (1) The prediction that higher scores on traditionalism would be associated with lower scores on marital satisfaction held only for the Complementary Equality form of traditionalism ($r = -.20, p < .05$) and neither for the total TOMS ($r = -.15, ns$) nor the Role Ideals ($r = -.04, ns$). (2) Higher scores on the respondent's listening to understand (SLTU) were correlated with greater marital satisfaction on the extended RRAS ($r = .40, p < .001$). (3) The higher the respondent's rating on listening to respond (SLTR) the lower was their satisfaction ($r = -.29, p < .002$). (4) The prediction that higher traditionalism would be correlated with lower self ratings of listening to

understand (SLTU) held for the TOMS ($r = -.25, p < .01$), but this was due to higher scores on the Complementary Equality measure correlating with SLTU ($r = -.42, p < .001$) and not the Role Ideals ($r = -.10, ns$). Overall, the proposed hypothesis that traditionalism was related to lower relationships satisfaction was supported but only with regard to the Complementary Equality facet of traditionalism. The hypothesis regarding listening to understand and respond and its relationship-to-relationship satisfaction were also supported.

The fifth hypothesis predicted a mediation model whereby a decrease in traditionalism (independent variable) is accompanied by increases in listening to understand (mediator variable) which in turn lead to increases in relationship satisfaction (dependent variable). Only the Complementary Equality form of traditionalism was associated with both listening to understand (unstandardized $B = -1.14, p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction (unstandardized $B = -.74, p < .05$), and the mediator variable was associated with the dependent variable (unstandardized $B = .56, p < .001$) thus meeting the required criteria for mediation analyses (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Mediation analyses found that the initial single predictor variable regression between Complementary Equality and relationship satisfaction (unstandardized $B = -.74, p < .05$) was reduced to nonsignificance (unstandardized $B = -.12, p < .73$) when the SLTU was subsequently entered into a multiple regression on relationship satisfaction. The SLTU remained significant in the multiple regression equation (unstandardized $B = .54, p < .001$), as required to meet the interpretation of a mediation effect described by Barron & Kenny (1986). However, the mediation effect was tested using the Sobel test statistic for mediation and was found significant (Sobell Test statistic = $-3.38, P < .001$) indicating that the indirect effect of Complementary Equality on relationship satisfaction via the SLTU was significantly different from zero (Sobel, 1982). Thus, the mediation hypothesis was supported, but only for the low Complementary Equality form of traditionalism.

Other exploratory analyses were done. Self listening to respond (SLTR) correlated only with Complementary Equality form of traditionalism, but when added to the regression equation of marital satisfaction on self listening to understand (SLTU) did not account for variance over and above that accounted for by SLTU and was also not used in mediation analysis.

Discussion

The results of the present study indicated that it was not the endorsement of traditional role beliefs in marriage, but lower expectations for equality or collaboration in the undertaking such traditional roles that influenced marital satisfaction. Furthermore, a possible mechanism by which such lack of equality in practicing traditional roles impacted marital satisfaction was identified. That mechanism is the lower quality with which the partners communicated with each other and that quality was identified as the respondent rating him/herself as low on listening to one's spouse in ways that attempt to understand more deeply what one's spouse means. Thus the mediation analyses results can be interpreted as the less one expects or strives for equality between the husband and wife role, the less that respondent rated him/herself as listening to understand one's spouse and that, in turn, lead to lower scores on marital satisfaction.

The hypothesis that traditionalism is related to marital satisfaction was supported in this sample of Canadians with an Indo-Pakistani heritage, however, not with regards to the expectation of prescribed roles, but with regards to the couple's cultural requisite expectation that there is no need for equality or sharing in each other's roles. Furthermore, listening was positively related to marital satisfaction and the implications of the mediation analysis was that the association between inequality in the traditional marriage with less satisfaction can be eradicated if the couple can learn to communicate in depth so that each others meaning are attended to in the relationship. Perhaps learning to listen to each others feelings and deeper meanings would help make the partners feel that they are "equal" as a couple and with that have a greater sense of operating as a dual entity as implied by the use of "we" and "us" as a mutually respected shared identity.

The term equality is not to be confused with 'sameness'; rather it reflects complementary undertaking of respective traditional roles such that the burden of responsibility is perceived to be balanced in a reciprocal sense. The roles of husband and wife in the Indo-Pakistani traditional marriage are not expected to be the same: the preference is to keep them different. But that does

not mean they cannot work together in a complementary way, to meet the expectations, at least when residing within the North American context.

Based on detailed interviews with Indian married couples living in the United States, Dasgupta (1992) proposed a similar interpersonal dynamics among Indian couples, which she refers to as 'complementary organization'. She found that husbands and wives endorsed and predominantly functioned along traditional role expectations, but there was a great deal of sharing and mutual assistance. The husband and wife described their roles as fitting together to form a whole, and helping each other by stepping out of their prescribed roles was not construed as being egalitarian or modern per se but as the most effective way of attaining the cultural ideals of the Indian family in North America. The partners in her study said for instance "not doing the same job but equally responsible". They spoke of their traditional roles simultaneously such as "I take care of the child so he does not worry about them" or "while she does the cooking I do something else". Overall, their partners and their own behaviours were experienced as complementary and each partner felt that their role is equally important to preserve the family.

This findings of this study are consistent with the results of previous research on the significance of listening for relationship satisfaction (Doell & Reid, 2002). The more Indo-Pakistani partners rated themselves as listening to understand and the less they rated themselves as listening to respond the more satisfied they were in their marriage. The high correlations between these modes of listening and marital satisfaction lend support to the usefulness of interventions that assist Indo-Pakistani partners in improving their ways of listening in order to enhance the quality of their marriage. Indo-Pakistani partners that tend to listen to respond because they believe s/he already knows what their partner is talking about they are ready to jump in with a response of their own so that their partner often winds up feeling unheard. In contrast, when Indo-Pakistani partners listen to understand they are able to step outside their egocentric view in order to see things from their spouse's point of view, a sort of putting oneself in their partner's shoes so to speak. Individuals that listen to understand are more concerned with the needs of their partner and tend to encourage their partner to continue to communicate. Such

listeners keep an open mind to their partner and the relationship. This mode of listening requires one to adopt a patient and non-judgemental stance thereby creating an atmosphere where partners freely explore and come up with mutually fulfilling solutions to their problems.

The ability to listen to understand, which tends to counteract the tendency of listening to respond, allows Indo-Pakistani partners to appreciate what their spouse is conveying when discussing issues. It also demonstrates empathy for the speaker who feels validated and understood by their spouse. Otherwise, not fully grasping what one's partner is saying leads to forming erroneous conclusions and perceptions of one's partner and leads to increasing misunderstanding, resentment and shutting down (i.e. closing oneself from further hearing their partner). This pattern is reciprocal in that a spouse who feels their partner does not really listen or understands them tends to not listen to their spouse as well, and both partners feel deeply invalidated and frustrated. Indeed, Doell (2003) found that partners ratings of how well they listen to understand their spouse was positively correlated to the degree to which they rated their spouse as listening to understand them.

Notwithstanding the interesting results, this study was not without limitations. As noted earlier, this was a non-random sample of South Asian couples therefore it is likely there were systematic biases in the sample. However, it is difficult to acquire a random sample of a specific ethnic group, particularly a community that is resistant to discussing marital issues to outsiders, and most studies of Indo-Pakistanis reviewed in this paper also used nonrandom selections methods. It remains to be examined whether the results of this study generalize to the community as a whole.

The results of this study addresses recent calls for developing a more indigenous theory of South Asian relationships so that it may inform couple therapy because South Asian couples are increasingly looking for help with their marital problems outside their extended family (Nath & Craig, 1999; Natrajan & Thomas, 2002; Sonpar, 2005). Future research directions, which are currently underway involve clinical interventions to enhance listening skills (Reid, et al., 2006) among South Asian partners experiencing conflicts related to different marital expectations and the enactment of their traditional roles. Preliminary results of an ongoing study applying the

same listening intervention with South Asian couples seeking marital counseling found the teaching of listening to understand to be well received by the South Asian couples (Ahmad & Reid, 2008a).

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