TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES OF IZZAT: VOICES OF SECOND-GENERATION PUNJABI WOMEN SURVIVING AND TRANSGRESSING “HONOUR” RELATED VIOLENCE IN CANADA

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This study is an act of witnessing second-generation Punjabi women who have survived displacement/excomunication/exile from their family and/or community after transgressing boundaries of izzat. Izzat is a cultural construct that holds particular importance in the Punjabi community of Northern India and is translated into English as meaning “honour”. The life histories collected in this study are a result of in-depth interviews through narrative inquiry with 5 second-generation Punjabi women living across Canada. The women’s stories speak to the complexities of “honour” related violence in the West, they challenge the dominant discourses that frame family violence in South Asian communities, and they allow the reader to hear how they resisted/reclaimed izzat while challenging/surviving layers of heteropatriarchy, violence and racism throughout their lives. This study aims at shifting dominant discourses that use “honour” related violence as a tool to justify Orientalism/war and cultural racism towards South Asian bodies and it does so through the use of stories. Critical race theory, post-structural feminist theory and narrative inquiry are the lens through which the central question is asked, how can second-generation Punjabi women’s voices be heard and contribute to change inside their families and community, while challenging dominant discourses surrounding “honour” related violence? As the researcher, my story and autoethnographic voice is layered throughout the writing and I share my own story of displacement/exile/excommunication throughout this
study. In order to understand the history of izzat and violence in the Punjabi community I conduct a genealogy of izzat and trace its development from Northern India to Canada, from a system of morality to a tool of violence against women. Finally, action research informs the final aim of this study. The women gathered and created a piece of collective writing to raise critical consciousness in the Punjabi community, as well as in dominant Canadian society, about the impact of izzat on their lives. Their words and action push us to question how we engage with violence in our communities and instill the importance of listening to young second-generation women’s voices and stories of everyday survival against racism, colonialism and heteropatriarchy.
Acknowledgments

This has been a long journey. It has been 10 years since I “left” a place I called home. From the moment, I left I have been anxious for a connection to others who share my sorrow. To connect the chain of stories that circle this “cage” that I find myself in every now and then. This research and writing could not have been possible if I did not meet all the incredible women who shared their stories and spent numerour hours with me. There is a kindred connection that I will carry with me for the rest of my life and I open these acknowledgements with my gratitude to the sister’s that joined this journey with me. Your generosity in sharing will be witnessed by many and I know these stories will impact many young girls and women who find they are struggling with izzat, family and community.

I am the first of the Bhalru and Dual clan to get this far in post-secondary education. I sit on the shoulders of my ancestors whose wisdom filters through my blood and bones, they may not have had the years of education that I have now, but their knowledge of the world has taught me how to survive. My achievements in the academic world are laregely shaped by my mentors, teachers, and educators. My diligent, patient and brilliant supervisor, Dr. Bonnie Burstow, has witnessed this journey and I have such incredible respect for her dedication to her students. Every one of us feel so lucky to have Bonnie as our supervisor because she plays so many roles, including confidant and guide, and she inspires us to to act in the face of inequity and injustice. Thank you Bonnie.

My time at OISE has been filled with wonderful conversations and incredible women who have taught me how to write, research, and how to keep the spirit in my work. Thank you Dr. Njoki Wane, Dr. Ruapleem Bhuyan, and Dr. Angela Miles for your guidance, and for your commitment to my scholarly work. Your thoughts and feedback has followed me through this writing journey and I am so grateful for your scholarship. Dr. Mythili Rajiva, thank you for your guidance in editing my dissertation and your very important revisions that have made my work stronger.

There are so many friends and family members that have shared hugs, warm words, and encouragement and were there when I dreaded waking up at 4:30am every morning to write this
dissertation. Suzanne Vonderporten, Lucy McCullough and Severn Cullis-Suzuki you are my soul sisters and I thank you for always being on the other end of the phone when I needed to, either take a break, or to vent. Cindy Knapton and Sandra Schnare your edits saved me, as did your laughter and spirit. Sheila Batacharya, your guidance in this process has been my light at the end of the tunnel and you will probably never know how much your dissertation saved me when I lost sight of things. And finally, to the wonderful thesis support group, I always looked forward to the monthly meetings, even through skype; I could feel your support and encouragement and I hope I can pass on that same energy to you all as you go forward in your dissertation journeys.

My family has always played an integral role in my life and no less of a role in this dissertation. They do not always know or understand what I am doing, writing, or why I ask the questions that I do, but I am grateful for the wisdom that I gain from them. My mother, grandmother, aunties, and cousins are the women who taught me about feminism resistance, and womens Shakti and I am proud to demonstrate that power and strength here. My brother, father and, uncles demonstrate their love and care in silent ways, yet I have felt their presence and faith in me as I write, research and, teach. I know they have my back.

I need to thank my sister individually because without her I may not have survived many traumas in my life. She is my “jaan” which is a Punjabi word for heart, but this translation does not capture the meaning that I am trying to convey. Sanjit Kaur Bhalru, you have been my sidekick even before you were born, because we have been connected before this life and I feel like the luckiest person to have your friendship, love and, prescence in this life as I have in many before this one.

I am so grateful to my best friend/partner/soulmate Devi Dee Mucina for his encouragement and support over these years. From the day we met he has been whispering beautiful words in my ear convincing me that I am capable of this work, for that I am forever grateful. It was your faith in me that I turned to in those many hours that I was unsure I could carry on writing and working. I love you.

Lastly, I have to acknowledge my two wonderful children who have been the grounding force every single day they have been in my life. Khumalo you were born after I submitted my
proposal and you were there on my lap as I read articles, and waiting for me when I came home from conducting interviews, each and every time you embraced me with your lovely smiling eyes. Nandi, you were born as I started writing this dissertation and I have thought of what this will mean for you when you pick this up one day in the far future. You have wisdom in you that is years beyond you and your determination makes me proud. Thank you both for coming in my world while I was completing this degree, it could not have been the worst timing, yet also the best timing. You teach me so much about my capacities and about the world everyday. I love you.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the women across the world that have passed before us as a result of “honour”, izzat and, gender based violence. Your stories live in us and we will remember what you have taught us after your passing. Thank you.
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Glossary of Terms

Izzat………………………………….(Honour and/or reputation of the family, community, and nation; Responsibility of an individual to other members of their life; respect for self and others.)

Ghar dhi izzat khuri dha nhar raandhi hai…….(The “honour” of the household sits with the daughter of that household.)

Rakhi………………………………………………….(Festival that celebrates the bond between and brother and a sister)

Dupatta/Chuuni……………………………………….(Head scarf, shawl)
Sharam………………………………………………..(Shame)
Chuund…………………………………………………..(Veiling of the face with a head scarf or shawl)

Jauhar…………………………………………………. (Taking one’s own life, committing suicide; - fighting desperately to the death: - juhar (or jauhar) karna, to kill oneself together with wife and children)

Ardaas……………………………………………………………(Sikh prayer)
Sachche padshah……………………………………..(God)
Sikhi…………………………………………………………..(Faith in Sikhism)
Kurta………………………………………………………………..(Pants)
Devi …………………………………………………………………..(Goddess)
Shakti………………………………………………………………..(Power)
Boag…………………………………………………………………..(Burden)
Kirtan…………………………………………………………………. (Prayer)
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Chapter 1

Ghar Dhi Izzat: The “Honour” Of The House

There is a Punjabi phrase that I grew up hearing often throughout my life. Ghar dhi izzat khuridha nhar raandhi hai; translated into English this phrase means: the “honour” of the household sits with the daughter of that household. Each time I heard this phrase, I would think hard and fast about what I was doing, who was watching, where I was going, and how my actions would impact on all my relations. Each time I have shared this phrase with other women of my community and generation (Punjabi women, Sikh women, or South Asian women of the Canadian Diaspora¹), we share a common understanding of what is being said and implied. The word izzat² or “honour” carries many meanings for my family and for many people in South Asian communities. As the eldest daughter of my household, I recall moments when I took pride in my actions knowing that they reflected on my family and, more importantly on my father. Other times I struggled with my choices, haunted by these words every time I transgressed a boundary laid out for me by my family, my community, and even by wider society. The word izzat or “honour” came to be tattooed on my body and I wore the burden of izzat and carried it with me every day. My body and the spaces I occupied with this body became an incubator for my family’s izzat. My body was a walking representation of my family, my community, and my religion and culture.

At a pivotal time in my life when I was searching for an explanation for how my choices became a site of emotional violence for my family and my community, I came across the

¹ Throughout this dissertation I will be referring to the women I have interviewed as Punjabi, as a signifier for where in India their parents come from. I will also be referring to them as second-generation, which means they were the first generation in their family to be born in the Diaspora.

² The word izzat is not an English word but a Punjabi word, which in most accounts is expected to be italicized or quoted in order to differentiate it as separate from English. However I am going to refrain from doing this because as the Decolonization: Indigeneity Education and Society Journal states in their website, this “only serves to set them (us) apart as exotic, deviant or as part of a particular colonizing anthropological project.” As an act of resistance to the exoticization of my language, people and culture, I will not italicize the word izzat in order to separate it from the English language. Hence, all words that are in Punjabi will not be italicized but can be found in the glossary at the beginning of this dissertation.
haunting words of a woman who survived the brutal trauma and violence during the 1947 partition of India.

Puttar, aurat da ki ai, au tan varti jaandi ai hamesha, bhanve apne hon, bhanve paraye. (My child, what of a woman? It’s her lot to be used, either by her own men or by others) (Menon & Bhasin, 1997, p. 45).

This quote was taken from the work of Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin (1997) in their book *Borders and Boundaries* and triggered my core encounters with izzat. Her words reminded me so much of the above phrase that I had heard so many times from my mother, grandmother and even father. However, it did not conjure the pride that I had of my izzat, but of the many ways in which my izzat becomes more about my family’s reputation and less about my own “honour”.

In Menon and Bhasin’s groundbreaking research, they interview women whose bodies became the battleground for the war that transpired after Indian independence from the British raj. At that time the izzat or “honour” of the women of each religious community (Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim) that resided in Northern India, became the primary target or site of violence during the communal war that transpired. Thousands of women were brutally raped, displaced, sold to brothels, forcibly married, and martyred during this time (Menon and Bhasin, 1997; Butalia, 1998). Upon interviewing the survivors, Menon and Bhasin, as well as Urvashi Butalia (1998) in her book *The other side of silence*, spoke to many men and women in the Sikh Punjabi community who shared stories of “martyring” or murdering their daughters, wives, and even elderly women in order to save the “honour” of the family. These pre-emptive murders charged by the fear of “their” women being raped and violated, stirred an anger and pain inside me as I was going through my own experiences of being forsaken to preserve my family’s “honour”, and I began asking questions to which I realized I would never have the answer. How could killing sisters, mothers and grandmothers be considered martyrdom? Why did my community have so much invested in preserving the family’s izzat? Why are the women seen as martyrs not victims of this tragedy? Is this happening to women in my community today?

In my current context and life, I began to realize that my father was also very much invested in preserving his “honour” in the face of our community and in order to do that he was willing to estrange and symbolically wipe my existence from his life. I recalled the lessons that I was taught from a very early age in my life that my body had the capacity to tarnish or uplift the reputation of my family and, more specifically my father, because the responsibility of
maintaining izzat that had been placed on my body. The lessons imparted by the women who survived the partition of India are similar. It is for this very “honour” or izzat, situated in women’s bodies in Northern India that wars of various kinds were played out; wars that use the body of the woman as a site to tarnish the “honour” and reputation of a family, community, religion, and nation (Banerjee, S., Chatterji, A. C., Desai, M., Toor, S., & Visweswaran, K. 2004, Butalia, 1997, Menon & Bhasin, 1997). Thus, the izzat of a woman is embedded in her body and the actions taken upon her body, or the choices she makes with her body (Bhalru, 2007).

As a second-generation Punjabi woman from the South Asian Diaspora, when I think of izzat for myself and I hold it in my mind, it is like a safety blanket that I have carried with me since birth. It is something that I cherish and hold dear because it reminds me of key values and ways of looking at the world that are connected to people, places, and elements beyond my individual self. Yet as easily as it is a concept I respect and uphold, it is also a dangerous concept that can be taken away from me at any moment, for I am told that I am not the ultimate possessor of izzat, only the bearer. Herein lies the dilemma for many second-generation Punjabi, South Asian women like myself who struggle with the imposition of izzat on their lives, as well as the desire for power over their body and the choices they make with their bodies: a desire to reclaim their izzat.

How can we second-generation Punjabi, South Asian women confront the violence and patriarchal aspects of izzat in our lives, while recognizing the parts of izzat that we cherish? How can we speak about the violence of izzat without falling into the well laid out trap of “cultural deficit explanations” (Razack, 2004) of our family, community and religion and without inviting cultural racism to overshadow our stories? Can izzat be something that we can reclaim, redefine, or recreate for ourselves? How do I engage the morality of izzat that I learned from my mother, grandmother, aunties, and elders throughout my life in the context of patriarchy, colonialism and a culturally racist society? How do I challenge this morality within this context?

These questions have haunted me from the moment I was excommunicated by my father from my home, my family and from my community because I chose to marry a Black African man, because I transgressed a boundary in my family and community with the actions of my gendered body. Through my act of marriage, in my father’s eyes I had tarnished our family
izzat. It is because of izzat that I am stringing together my story and the story of many sisters who have come on a journey with me in this research. So I must begin by sharing a slice of my story of how my izzat and my body became a battleground for patriarchy, racism and sexism.

**Mapping Izzat On My Body**

My story, like the story of many women of the Punjabi community, begins with my departure from my family home, into the school system, where mainstream eyes regularly gazed upon my body, my language, my worldview, and my spirituality. I was deemed exotic and uncivilized, requiring attention and assimilation. These racist eyes that viewed my body and everything that it represented as the “other”, changed me as a child. I began to see the world through fear and anxiety, which left many scars full of pain and emptiness. Leading a life of quiet solitude, I tried hard to make sure I was not seen or heard by my peers, by my teachers, and by the white men and women who were the vast majority in the little town that I grew up in. By remaining silent, I would not bring any notice to my brown body and its “other” ways.

This control and regulation over my body, my voice and what I represented did not appear solely from the white gaze of the outside world; the manifestation of my gendered body in this world was as much a preoccupation for my family and community, as it was for the wider world. I became a representation of the izzat or “honour” of my family, and the Punjabi community that lived in my circle of care at that time. Navigating patriarchy within this circle and struggling with racism and patriarchy outside this circle became a part of my daily survival.

In my youth I began to make bold statements about the choices I made with my body, which challenged notions of izzat that were imposed on my family by outside community members. I started wearing my hair differently, wearing clothes and makeup that transgressed boundaries of respectability just a little. Each boundary resulted in my community gossiping and my mother being ashamed and slightly fearful. I also pushed the ultimate boundary - talking to boys who were not related to me, yet I made sure this transgression was never witnessed by anyone, especially my father. My family reacted to my transgressions with the usual hostility that is expected of a parent of an adolescent, yet I made sure I never pushed too far - not really sure what would happen but knowing that I didn’t want to find out.
Eventually after high school, I left home for post-secondary education and things shifted for me. I had a different sense of personal agency and I used education to exit from the small, white, predominantly racist blue-collar town I had spent the last 18 years in, and to exit from the strong grip that my family had over me. Eventually I was able to survive on my own, financially and emotionally and I started to make choices about my body and my izzat without my father’s consent. Many worlds were created during this time and in order to keep these worlds separate many lies were told. I was the good brown girl to my family and community, and an entirely different person in my life away from home. These lies still haunt me and I wish I had the courage to speak the truth to my parents, yet I was afraid that my moral decision making was not embedded in theirs. I was afraid they would tell me I had become “white”, something that would hurt to hear because in the eyes of the white world, my actions and my body were always read as brown, different and the “other” so I never truly belonged to that space. Did I belong to any space?

These worlds collided the day that I told my family that I had decided to marry a person who was racially, and religiously outside my family and community. This choice challenged my family and community in ways that did not make sense to them at the time. Very suddenly, I found myself facing emotional violence, trauma and displacement from my family and community. As a result, I was excommunicated from my family and community and I moved to another province to get away from the pain and trauma. From there, I actively engaged in a process of mourning and reclaiming my body. Years later, I began reviewing the meaning I had attached to my story and the impact it had on my engagement with the world, emerging into the present research with a hunger for consciousness about izzat and a desire to engage others who were suffering from the confines of izzat.

When I share my story with peers or even strangers who represent the mainstream I am at times frustrated by the responses I receive. From the perspective of white mainstream society, going against the wishes of my family is viewed as a natural process of assimilation to liberal Canadian values that the second-generation should and do go through, (See the work of Bhardwaj, 2001, Ghuman, 1994, 1999 & 2005, Valiente, 1992, Weinreich, 1979). Furthermore, this lens saw my family and community holding onto cultural beliefs that are based on old traditions from back home, traditions that they should have let go a long time ago in order to embrace so called egalitarian traditions of Canadian society. Yet, this is not how I felt about the
choices I made. I did not feel that Canadian society was opening its arms to me after my departure from my family. I did not walk into the arms of Canadian society without heteropatriarchy or racism existing in all its layers. In fact, because I was now married to a Black man, my experiences with racism and discrimination took on deeper layers, since our union challenged homogeneity and normalized expectations of racialized immigrants. As an interracial couple walking down the streets of major cities in Canada hand in hand, my partner and I were exoticized, racialized and, ultimately, seen as rebels challenging too many norms. We no longer knew our place.

This choice set my life on a lonely path of resistance. I resisted the heteropatriarchy that lives in my family and community. I resisted white Canadian neo-liberal society, who viewed my actions as going against a “barbaric culture”, rather than seeing my actions as going against patriarchal norms. I resisted the systems of racism and segregation that my family and community faced upon arriving on the West coast shores of Canada that contribute to our divisions from other diverse communities, including Indigenous communities, and our sense of protection for what is threatened and demoralized – our identity, sense of self, and dignity as people.

This condensed version of my story and experiences of izzat throughout my life is layered with experiences of racism and discrimination by wider society. It is a story that touches on family violence, heteropatriarchy, trauma and pain, and ultimately institutional forms of cultural racism. There are many painful reasons for why my story unfolded the way that it did and ended with a broken family and broken relationships. The women of my family were entrapped by the responsibility of upholding the izzat of generations of men in my family and community, and the men of my family were beholden to regulate the actions of women in my family and community. My family can be understood as a micro example of a larger discourse that has been functioning in this very manner for many generations in most of Northern India (Bose, 2000), and quite easily can be understood as an example of heteropatriarchy that has been functioning on a global scale for generations (Bannerji, H. 2001). Yet it is essential to

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3 Himani Bannerji’s scholarly work utilizes Marxist, feminist, anti-racist theories to reflect on gender, race, and class. My use of her work focuses, more specifically, on her engagement with marginalized immigrant women and the othering and silencing they encounter in Western spaces.
unpack discourses of heteropatriarchy, colonialism and, most importantly, racism embedded in a story like mine, which is a story about “honour” related violence (HRV)⁴. To ignore the racism that my family and I experienced, the colonial gaze from which my family emerges from, and wider notions of heteropatriarchy, is to ignore every layer of my story and every layer of each and every “honour killing” story that we have heard up until today. As Sherene Razack⁵ (2004) speaks to, in her work, “you can’t fight violence against women with racism because racism is likely to strengthen patriarchal currents in communities under siege.” (p. 132).

This story is the story of many women from the South Asian community. This is a community that is exceptionally diverse, yet the brown bodies of South Asians in the Western context become homogenized into one religion, culture, language, and one body⁶, a Muslim body. So when we attune our ears to public discourses we are not hearing young women speak to their survival and everyday struggles with heteropatriarchy, violence, and racism from both the private and public spheres. Rather, what we hear are media banners of women being trapped by the confines of their family and its culturally “barbaric” traditions, and an Islamaphobic response from mainstream media that encourages further stigmatization, surveillance and control of South Asian bodies in the Canadian landscape (Razack, 2004, Abu-Lughod, 2011, 2013). We hear members of South Asian and Muslim communities defending their religions with statements like “honour killings do not exist in our culture/religion”, yet these very community members choose to call similar deaths during the 1947 Partition of India, “martyr” killings and turn their eyes away when family violence continues in their communities. This defensive stance only confirms the mainstream narrative and pushes South Asian women who

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⁴ The words “honour-based violence”, “honour crimes”, “honour killings”, and “honour violence” are all terms that have been questioned by many in South Asian communities as potentially problematic, particularly because the word “honour” has many meanings and may, in turn, place reverence or prestige on the violence that emerges from this concept. I will go into further discussion about the terminology throughout this dissertation, however from this point on I will be using the term “honour related violence” to encompass all the above terms and will hyphenate it as “HRV” (in quotations) in order to try and encompass the complexity of the term, as well to shorten it for the reader.

⁵ A prolific writer, Sherene Razack is a professor of Sociology and Equity Studies at the University of Toronto. Her work engages anti-racism theory, feminist theory, and the law and focuses on how racialized bodies are constructed in the West. She has written various influential books, including Looking White People In The Eye: Gender, Race And Culture In Courtrooms And Classrooms (1998).

⁶ The bodies of South Asians are generally read as Muslim, particularly when speaking about honour killings in the media. After 9/11 attacks, this generalization is even more apparent and violence towards all brown bodies, particularly those who wore turbans and dressed in traditional wear that is in any way different from Western clothing, were subject to this violence (See the work of Rita Verma, 2006).
are survivors of this violence into further silence. There is a clear choice being made by repetitively circulating these discourses of cultural racism, denial and shame; that choice is to perpetuate particular discourses about “honour” and women at the expense of the South Asian women’s bodies.

This research and writing is an attempt to move away from self-serving discourses and go beyond the denial and defensiveness, as well as the cultural racism that permeates these discourses. It is about making second-generation Punjabi women and their stories of survival central to the conversation. I began this dissertation by sharing my story with you because it is the impetus for this research. I have also shared my story first to demonstrate the complexity that is embedded in the stories of izzat or “HRV”. Yet, there are many stories of women surviving and resisting the violence from their families as well as the violence and trauma that emerges from mainstream media and its culturally racist discourses.

Many times when I talk about my research within my community, specifically within the Punjabi community and in larger South Asian communities, I get common responses: “this does not happen in Canada”, “this happens among the lower classes in India” “those that participate in this are uneducated immigrants”. This classist response is just as problematic as the racist discourses that attempt to silence and oppress South Asian bodies in Canada. Essentially, izzat and the violence that is perpetuated on Punjabi women in the name of saving “honour” and preventing shame, is a part of the heteropatriarchy that is embedded in gender-based violence and is a concerning issue for South Asian women in the Canadian context. If we continue to deny this violence in our community we are contributing to the ill health and trauma of many young women. Furthermore, if Western media and Canadian policies continue to use South Asian women’s bodies as a way to uplift Western feminism, and the superiority of the West as opposed to the East (Razack, 1998, 2004, 2008), by further stigmatizing South Asian men, we (South Asian communities) will find ourselves falling into the very well laid out trap of assimilation that Canada is so well versed in perpetuating and is invested in maintaining.

Throughout my life I have witnessed how the need to control and regulate the bodies of women has led to trauma and pain of women in various contexts: from working as a child protection social worker in the Vancouver East Side of British Columbia, to working as a violence against women counsellor with Muslim women in the Thorncliffe neighbourhood of Toronto, Ontario. Each of these contexts confirmed that heteropatriarchy and violence is
embedded in Canadian society and is very much a part of all women’s lives, regardless of race, class, religion, and ethnicity. In the words of Shanaz Khan (2005) “local patriarchies are interconnected to global ones” (p. 2030).

I also witnessed abuse and violence in my own home growing up. My father’s behaviour instilled fear in my body about what boundaries I can and cannot cross and I witnessed his violence towards my brother and mother, which continues to haunt me. I witnessed aunties in my community whose bodies were policed and regulated. I observed young women of my generation who navigated the same boundaries set around their bodies as I did, but we did so in a very different context and space from our mothers. When these young second-generation women of my community chose to transgress bigger unspoken boundaries that instigated agency around their sexuality, this regulation turned ugly and many times izzat became the tool to excuse violence and emotional pain on their bodies. All of sudden, the izzat that we cherished within ourselves was used to cause pain.

Second-Generation Punjabi Women In The South Asian Diaspora

If it is not yet evident, I have come to this research and writing from a personal place that has been made political through my navigation in the world. Surviving, reclaiming, and redefining izzat is a part of my lived experience and I come to my current understanding of izzat as a Punjabi second-generation woman. This distinction of being Punjabi and a second-generation woman is important to identify upfront because it situates the context, place, and space from which I am defining, exploring, and redefining izzat and “HRV” in this research. “HRV” has come to be identified as a phenomenon impacting all Diasporic South Asian bodies in the West, and, more specifically, has been associated with Islam and any marked bodies that reflect Islam. Yet, the manner in which “HRV” is situated in each South Asian community can be quite different and it would be irresponsible to suggest that all South Asians understand the word izzat in the same way.

In the Western context, the term South Asian encompasses people from a great diversity of ethnic backgrounds, including those with Bangladeshi, Bengali, East Indian, Goan, Gujarati, Hindu, Ismaili, Kashmiri, Nepali, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sikh, Sinhalese, South Asian, Sri Lankan,
and Tamil ancestry, just to name a few. The term South Asian is used to define all people from 7 distinctly different countries with a diversity of languages, histories, and religions. In this dissertation, I am not suggesting that izzat carries meaning for all South Asians, my engagement with izzat comes from a very specific and place: Northern India in the Punjabi community. However, having said this, as much as I will be speaking specifically to Punjabi women’s experiences, I also refer to South Asian communities quite generally throughout this dissertation. I purposely use the term Punjabi when speaking to izzat and the specific engagement Punjabi communities have to izzat. I also use the term South Asian throughout this dissertation as a reference to larger dominant discourses operating in Canada, which depicts all brown bodies as one unified culture and identity. As much as I am attempting to challenge this generalization by looking specifically at izzat and its relationship to the Punjabi community, I cannot escape the fact that in the Canadian context izzat, and the cultural racism that emerges from the “HRV” discourses, impacts all South Asian brown bodies, regardless of whether or not they identify with the concept. This imposition from wider Western society, generalizes “HRV” on all South Asian bodies, yet my specific engagement with Punjabi women is a way to challenge and expose how complex “honour” or izzat is for South Asians, and to recognize that imposing this concept on such a diverse population is another form of racism. Hence, I will be using the terms South Asian as a way to speak about this imposed generalization by Western society on brown bodies in Canada. Yet, when I am speaking specifically about izzat I am talking directly to and about Punjabi women and their community.

Unpacking the meaning of izzat and how it has come to be associated with violence against women will be discussed thoroughly in chapter 2, however it is important to identify what is specific about the Punjabi Diaspora and second-generation women that has led to writing a dissertation of this size. I will break down both positionalities in order to recognize the specific direction that this research and writing will take, and speak to why I have focused on the Punjabi Diaspora to deconstruct “honour” related violence.

Being Punjabi In The Diaspora

The Punjabi community has been migrating to Canada since the 1900s and this is very evident when one travels to British Columbia and explores pictures or stories of migrant workers. My own family first travelled to BC in 1920 when my father’s maternal aunt arrived on the shores
of Vancouver at the ripe age of 16 years. Two generations of our family came to Canada from my great-aunt. My father was invited to try his hand at immigrating in the early 70s, which he did with optimism for a future in a new country. After many labour jobs across BC and Alberta, my father eventually settled in a mill town on Vancouver Island where I grew up as a child. This was the story of most of the South Asian families I met growing up and it is a recognizable story for many Punjabis that live in BC. This migration story is an important identifier for many Punjabis in the Diaspora, as the racism, segregation, and exclusion that Punjabis encountered from the early 1900s is a part of the stories that carry on intergenerationally.

As Enakshi Dua⁷ (1999) highlights in her writing, the history of racialization in Canada is important to contextualize when speaking about a community that has been migrating in various contexts since the early 1900s. Dua’s writing speaks to how Canada became a white settler society and the impact of marginalization on, not only Indigenous communities, but also migrant communities entering Canada. This marginalization shapes how women of colour encounter various systems in Canada not only within their family and community, but also in wider systems of Canadian society. Canada’s history since the settlers first began colonizing Turtle Island is filled with violence, racism, and a persistent narrative of constructing a white nation.

Being Punjabi usually connotes being Sikh and from Northern India. The largest populations of Punjabis are situated in the province of Punjab in Northern India and are largely born into the Sikh religion. However, as much as this is the dominant perspective of Punjabis, it is important to recognize that many South Asians are also Hindu, Muslim and Christian. Punjabis define themselves based on their ancestry, regardless of where in India, Pakistan, or in the Diaspora they are currently living or what religion they are. Being Punjabi is connected to a particular history, a specific language base and to some degree a particular cultural engagement that has been defined as Punjabi. The Punjabi language base is important to recognize and is unpacked directly in Chapter two, however the word izzat is a Punjabi word that carries currency for all Punjabis.

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⁷ Enakshi Dua writes extensively on historical racism and immigration policies and practices in Canada. Her work focuses on feminist theory, anti-racist feminist theory, postcolonial studies, and globalization. She engages categories of nation, race and, gender in her research, particularly exploring the impact of immigration on women and the racialization of masculinity and femininity.
Izzat carries incredible historical meaning for Punjabis and each and every family takes up their understanding of izzat in unique ways. In the context of India, izzat intersects with our socially constructed world and patriarchal systems of power and control. The interlocking of izzat with heteropatriarchy, racism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia becomes, in the Diaspora, a tool of power and control over women’s bodies in contexts and societies that already sees South Asian bodies in racialized ways. As you will read throughout this dissertation, the particular way this transpires for second-generation Punjabi women is unique and speaks to their specific location as a part of the Diasporic generation that is constantly racialized in the West.

Aside from the racialization of migrants to the West, the Punjabi community itself exercises heteropatriarchy through izzat to maintain gender roles that each member of the community is expected to play in their family and community. Women are defined through boundaries of respectability, which generally involves regulating their sexual behaviour and sexuality (this will be expanded on in Chapter 6 and 7). The “good brown girl” trope is created amongst the second-generation to encourage women to self-regulate around particular boundaries and gender roles. Izzat is used as a moral code that allows for this self-regulation to be maintained and also allows for the regulation of women’s bodies to be policed, persecuted, and punished if they stray from the boundaries of respectability. Men pay a particular role in regulating the boundaries of izzat and their own izzat is largely connected to not only how they regulate women in their lives, but also whether or not the women in their lives cross the boundaries of izzat that each family and community has drawn. Hence the saying “Ghar dhi izzat khuri nar rhandi hai”, the izzat of the family sits in the daughters. What I am defining here is the interlocking nature of women’s izzat in relation to patriarchal boundaries.

As complex as this may sound, and as I will discuss extensively in chapter 2, the regulation of women’s bodies and gender role expectations is the basis of heteropatriarchy. For Punjabi communities, however, izzat becomes the most available and recognizable historical tool for maintaining heteropatriarchy in the home and community. Furthermore, as I unpack

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8 I am speaking specifically to the impact of izzat on second-generation Punjabi women in the Diaspora. I recognize that patriarchy shapes izzat in all parts of South Asia, which I will speak to more specifically in Chapter two by looking at the history of izzat in Northern India. However, I cannot speak to how it impacts women in other parts of South Asia due to the vast diversity of this region and recognizing that not all ethnic communities in South Asia identity with this cultural construct.
further in Chapter 6, immigrant communities in the West find themselves holding onto the regulating tools of heteropatriarchy, such as izzat, even more strongly as a form of resistance to the forced segregation, assimilation, and racialization they encounter in white settler nations. For Punjabis, there is a memory of izzat that connects them to a collectivism that has been essential for their survival throughout the history of Northern India, which is plagued with various invasions and colonizations. The memory of izzat is ever present in the Diaspora and generally emerges when there is a perceivable threat to the community. In the West, the greatest threat to Punjabis has always been an erasure and assimilation of their identity, which is almost always in the second-generation. The second-generation, which are conceived of as the “home grown generation” (Haque, 2010) is a generation that is perceived as Canada’s last hope for true assimilation into “Canadian values”.

Many of the notable cases of “honour” killings in Canada have been located in the Punjabi community, yet this is not to suggest that Punjabi women are at higher risk of encountering “HRV” than other women. In this dissertation, I argue that focusing on policing, persecuting, and punishing women based on “honour” is an element of heteropatriarchy that we see in all communities. There are arguments circulating around “HRV” discourses that suggest that the framing of “honour” in this violence is leading to cultural relativism and contributes to the racialization of brown bodies in the West. I agree that this is definitely occurring in discourses surrounding “HRV” and I expand on these discourses and this argument further in Chapter 6. However, as will be evident throughout this dissertation, we need to start talking about “HRV” in our communities and how the concept of “honour” is taking form through systems of heteropatriarchy and racism. This conversation looks very different for the Punjabi community, as it would look for the Bedouin community in Egypt (See Lila Abu-Lughod’s work), or even the Somali community in Canada. Heteropatriarchy is a global phenomenon, as is gender-based violence, and as much as the global fight to end heteropatriarchy and gender-based violence is essential, the conversation within specific communities where violence against women plays out in particular ways is just as important. I am having that conversation with the

9 Lila Abu-Lughod’s scholarly work explores the image of Muslim women in Western society post 9/11, women’s rights, and the impact of media on Muslim communities. Her earlier work explores the Bedouin community and women’s agency and resistance, exploring specifically the stories, poems and songs Bedouin women use in their everyday lives.
Punjabi community in this research. As you will hear in my personal story, as well as the stories of the women I worked alongside, izzat has been a tool of heteropatriarchy to regulate our bodies, yet the process of reclaiming, redefining, and recreating izzat is a part of our survival and navigation through heteropatriarchy and racism in the West.

**Second-Generation South Asian Women**

Research on South Asian women spans many decades and has shifted through time to reflect migrations of South Asians to the West. Within this research and writing, there is a strong emphasis on first-generation immigrant women and their encounters of racism, sexism, and acculturation after migration (Abourguendia, & Noels, 2001; Ahmad, et al. 2004; Das Gupta, 1994; Dua, 1993, George, & Ramkissoon, 1998; Khan & Watson, 2005, Ralston, 1991, Srivastava, 1993). Scholars such as Mythili Rajiva (2006) have challenged this literature as having “overlooked the experiences of second-generation women born and/or raised in Canada who have experienced immigration only indirectly, through their parents’ struggles” (p. 166). Subsequently, research focusing on second-generation South Asian women within the diaspora has grown quite a bit since the early nineties (Rajiva, 2006). This research seeks to theorize the experiences of second-generation South Asian women’s encounters with racism in Canada, the U.S., and Britain (See Aujla, 2000, Das Gupta, 1997, Handa, 2003, Maira, 2002, Puar, 1995, Rajiva, 2006, 2009) as well as their identity, development, and acculturation to the West (Hennick, Diamond, Cooper, 1999, Ghosh, 1994, Portes & Zhou, 1993, Purkayastha, 2005). Within this research, there are key findings that shape how we currently understand second-generation women’s encounters with racism from dominant society, their peers, and from the institutions they engage with. This research has focused on first voice experiences of second-generation women and girl and how they are constructed as “others” within the land in which they were born and/or raised (Aujla, 2000).

Of most significant interest to this research is the theorization offered in the writing of Mythili Rajiva (2006, 2009) and Amita Handa (2003). In Rajiva’s research, she interviews 10 second-generation South Asian women in order to explore how they negotiate their sense of racialization or difference amongst dominant white society. Rajiva’s (2006) research focuses specifically on adolescence and the importance of identity formation, which rests largely in a desire to “becoming somebody” and belonging “somewhere” (p. 166). Rajiva’s work offers a
necessary investigation into how adolescence is experienced by second-generation South Asian women, considering the ways in which they are racialized and not necessarily considered “Canadian” by whiteness and dominant discourses that frame them as outsiders belonging to a foreign land. Furthermore, Handa’s (2003) research further contextualizes the process of belonging that second-generation South Asian women are constantly negotiating in the Western context. This negotiation demonstrates itself through peer culture, popular culture, and through women’s interactions with whiteness. Yet, what is significant about Handa’s research is that belonging is fraught with tension from both the private (family) and the public (community and dominant society). The young second-generation South Asian women in her research describe struggles with fitting into competing roles (i.e.: being a good daughter, good example for others, good student). Both researchers, as well as Aujla (2005) and Puar (1995), engage with the complex notion that second-generation struggles with belonging are connected to the fact that they are considered others in the space where they consider home (Canada, U.S., Britain); however, their relationship to their ancestral land (South Asia) is understood through the stories and the relationship their family has to their birthplace. The following quote by Puar (1995) eloquently captures this sentiment of belonging that is evident in the dominant research on second-generation South Asian women and girls in the West:

Immigration is not a onetime movement; it is a complex shifting of physical, mental and emotional states, which begins much before and extends far beyond the actual event. As children of immigrants we are denied these realities by Western society, yet constantly reminded of them. The actuality and validity of our displaced outsider’ identities are hence negated.

Puar’s work examines and deconstructs how second-generation South Asian women and girls are defined as struggling between a “clash of two cultures”, a notion that Puar contextualizes as being perpetuated in the context of perceived transgressions that women demonstrate that are defined as Western, such as dating and relationships. This clash suggests that South Asian girls are victims of their culture, and in order to “survive” as the child of an immigrant, a second-generation girl has to choose one culture over the other. Both cultures and values are pitted against each other, and often, the dominant Western society is understood, and many times termed as the choice of “freedom”, whereas the culture of our families and communities lacks that same freedom, and is seen as barbaric and constraining on the lives of South Asian women. Therefore, the “choice”, or lack thereof, is ultimately to admire the Western values over those of the familial culture and religion. Puar’s theorizing of the “rebellious” second-generation South
Asian girl who pushes the boundaries of her family in order to become more Western, is very applicable to this research. It demonstrates the complex conundrum that second-generation South Asian women experience in moments where they are encountering the patriarchy and restrictions on their body due to patriarchy inside their home, and encountering racism, patriarchy, and oppression outside of the home by dominant society. If women are rebelling against their family boundaries, they are defined as seeking Western ideals, as opposed to the barbaric traditions in which their family comes from. Yet, the West does not offer the same connections and support, and consistently defines second-generation South Asian women’s identities through a Eurocentric, colonial lens (Puar, 1995).

As is evident, there is much that we can glean from this research and the voices of the women and girls who have shared their stories. The dominant themes that emerges from their stories, involves everyday encounters of racism from peers, resistance to whiteness, acculturation as a coping mechanism, and a desire for belonging to a space (such as Canada) that continues to “other” their existence. Throughout this research, we begin to see that second-generation women and girls struggles need to be recognized as unique, and their daily encounters with racism shadow their self-concept, their relationship with their families and their community.

The work of the scholars named above lays the foundation for my own research, and a large part of my focus in my Master’s thesis engages with the racism second-generation South Asian women encountered in their everyday lives in Canada, as well as how their encounters of intergenerational trauma from their family and community impacted their identity and sense of self (Bhalru, 2007). I see this dissertation contributing to the developing research on second-generation South Asian women; however, in this dissertation, I depart from explicitly engaging with identity, acculturation, and racialization of second-generation South Asian women. I want to pursue a nuanced discussion on how second-generation South Asian women encounter family violence within their family and/or community, and intersect that with how discourses of white supremacy situates their encounters and stories of trauma through an orientalist and capitalist lens, which as a result, impacts their engagement with institutions of power, and limits their capacity for support and healing. In this research, I emerge from the above research to delve further into how second-generation women encounter patriarchy inside their family and/or community and in dominant society. This research is about engaging in a conversation from
inside the Punjabi community to better understand how izzat becomes a tool of patriarchy, and how women are resisting constructions of izzat and “honor” inside and outside their family to reclaim a moral compass that is connected to belonging, a connection to their family, their culture, and their identity as a second-generation South Asian woman.

Essentially, the second-generation have a unique story to share, and young women and girls have a particular engagement with society. The systems in Canada speak to not only their encounters, but also to their families’ stories of migration. It is necessary that we continue research and work with second-generation South Asian women. As we move forward in this dissertation, the stories of second-generation Punjabi women navigating through izzat in their everyday lives will reflect on some of the many elements of migration, heteropatriarchy, and resistance highlighted here.

Research Endeavor: Subject Position and Research Questions

In this dissertation, I will be narrating the life stories of five women who disclosed their tales of transgressing boundaries in their families and community and their stories of displacement and violence from their family and community. This displacement and violence occurred for the five women after “coming out” to their families about secrets they held about their sexuality. Intrinsically, this is about the women demonstrating power over the choices they made with their sexuality and their bodies. Whether they were in a same-sex relationship or were in a heteronormative relationship with a man who was racially/ethnically/religiously outside their family norms, or if they chose to challenge their families decisions about who they were to marry, all the women resisted the control and power over their sexuality and, as a result their families threatened their familial bonds as a form of power and control over the women.

Each of the women’s stories is layered with emotional trauma and pain. The common factor that holds all the women’s stories together is that izzat was the tool with which this trauma was enacted and each of them utilized resistance and reclamation of their sense of izzat to move beyond the trauma and violence. Hence, the women in this research will be sharing how they navigated various systems and barriers to come to a place of mourning and healing after the incredible loss of their family and the trauma associated with this event. It is in this act of
transgressing that the whirlwind of displacement and violence from their families and community began, but it was also in the continuous act of transgressing and reclaiming izzat for themselves that the women were able to survive and maintain their sense of self.

The transgressing of boundaries that second-generation Punjabi women demonstrate in their everyday lives from both inside and outside the family, is the element of this research that goes beyond offering a critique of the discourses that currently exist about “honour” related violence, or to deconstruct the very notion of izzat from inside the community. When we look at how women’s bodies have become a space of control and regulation, and more specifically when we look at the violence and trauma that this creates in second-generation Punjabi women, we also see how women are resisting and transgressing these boundaries that have been placed around their bodies. How these transgressions unfold and how women navigate them are the foundation to women’s survival of “HRV”. Furthermore, these transgressions can also be defined as shifting moral systems throughout history and time. As I discuss further in the following two chapters, we as the first generation born in the Diaspora, are shifting these moral systems in an entirely different political, social, economic context than our foremothers, which is a significant phenomenon to recognize, record and share, especially in a time where “honour” crimes have become “seductions” for discourses of liberal feminism and cultural racism (Abu-Lughod, 2011, 2013).


10 Yasmin Jiwani is well known for her book *Discourses of Denial: Mediations of Race, Gender, and Violence* which explores how media representations are raced and gendered particularly when engaging with violence against racialized women.

11 Uma Narayan is a feminist, scholar and professor of philosophy. Her most influential work is the book *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism* which challenges dominant assumptions of South Asian women and their communities. Her work largely informs my theoretical basis for understanding the impact of Western feminism on women of colour, particularly for South Asian women living in the West.
2013), Inderpal Grewal\textsuperscript{12}, (2013) and Rupaleem Bhuyan (2008), to name a few, have been pivotal in giving me, a South Asian woman of color/social worker/scholar, the language to challenge neo-liberal, racist, and sexist discourses that are part of the everyday narratives of Western society. The critiques, analysis and arguments that these scholars provide are embedded in anti-racist, post-structural feminist, anti-colonial, cultural theories that are pivotal to not only this research, but to the conversations I have in my Punjabi community. I recognize and pay homage to their work, because without it I would not be able to take this conversation to the next level.

The next level or stage in the conversation involves going beyond a critique/analysis/dismantling of racist discourses that fog second-generation South Asian women’s stories of violence. This research is about creating and implementing an action-based project that aims at consciousness-raising for both individuals and communities. This involves acknowledging and confronting the patriarchal family violence that is distressing South Asian communities in Canada. It also involves maintaining a strong hold on how culturally racist discourses are waiting to take up our stories and use them to diametrically oppose the values of the West to the East in order to portray a fabricated picture that the West is a nation beyond patriarchy and violence against women.

This precarious balance that I am attempting to strike may leave most readers with a sense of unease, particularly because I am confronting the patriarchy and violence in my community and am taking a tremendous risk in having my words taken up as fuel for the fire of cultural deficit/racist explanations for “honour”-related family violence. My hope is that I do not contribute to creating further binaries between Western mainstream discourses and South Asian communities. Binaries are created to further marginalize voices that are not at the centre of a discourse and do so by creating an either/or model of understanding an ideology or phenomena (Sawicki, 1991, St. Pierre, 2000). In fact, current discourses of “HRV” enact this very binary in a repetitive manner. “Honour” violence is either a religious act embedded in the culture of all South Asian communities, or the individuals who participate in this type of violence are outside

\textsuperscript{12} Inderpal Grewal is a professor at Yale University and a key figure in feminist scholarship. Her research and writing focus on transnational and post-colonial feminist theory. She engages with how South Asian culture is connected to citizenship and subjectivity, as well as the role of NGO’s and human rights in conversations about women of colour in the West.
the South Asian culture. According to dominant Canadian media, all South Asian communities are both barbaric and backward thinking which is why they kill their daughters in the name of “honour”. Or most South Asians are progressive and educated, but those that do this crime are uneducated and, therefore, not progressive, according to counter arguments from South Asian communities.

This work and the stories that I am narrating are a precarious act of identifying who is excluded from this current binary in dominant discourses, which I suggest is second-generation South Asian women and their experiences of violence from both sides of the binary. Hence, the precariousness and unease is in the act of disrupting this binary and the structures that support it, by highlighting voices that are objectified by both sides. The risk lies in further stigmatizing my community and becoming the native informant, one who defines/represents/translate the culture of the “other” for the researcher/outsider/dominant society (Khan, 2005, Spivak, 1999, Trinh, 1989, Visweswaran, 1994). Shanaz Khan (2005) so eloquently describes the trap of being understood as both a native informant to the West, yet being considered not authentic enough to her own community:

Feminist discourse both here and there is marginal to mainstream debates. I am an outsider to marginalized feminist debates in Canada because I am not white, and in Pakistan because I do not live there. Situated as other of the other, I am reminded that the position of the native informant is precarious. The native informant is an authority on third-world women. The authority of my claims, however, is continuously deferred to the western academy for legitimization, identifying once again my complicity in reproducing the master narrative about third world peoples. Such a process suggests that my research is not relevant to Pakistani struggles (p. 2025).

I find myself struggling with a similar process. Will my community see me as a traitor for speaking about violence against women in our community? Should I be focused entirely on the racism we South Asians experience in Canada in order to discuss “HRV”? Will my community and second-generation women find my work useful or will it be seen as unworthy and feeding into Western perspectives of South Asians?

As much as I am inundated with these doubts and questions, I am also inspired and held accountable by the women I interviewed and the stories they have shared. I ground myself in their stories and in the responsibility of telling stories (my own and the participants) in order to challenge the imposition of the native informant title, and claims of my authenticity as a Punjabi, South Asian women speaking about violence in my community. Stories are the
grounding force that I cling to, because, in the words of Thomas King\textsuperscript{13} (2005), “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). We are the stories we tell ourselves and the stories we have been told about ourselves, it is through stories that we can transform how we understand ourselves and reflect to others what they see in their selves when they hear our stories (Kumsa, 2007, Okri, 1997). Yet, Sherene Razack (2001) in her transforming book \textit{Looking white people in the eye} reminds us of how dangerous, yet powerful, stories can be:

There are land mines strewn across the path wherever storytelling is used, that it should never be used uncritically, and that its potential as a tool for social change is remarkable, provided we pay attention to the interpretive structures that underpin how we hear and how we take up stories of oppressed groups (p. 37).

Razack urges us to pay attention to how we understand our subject positions, which will ultimately inform, “how we know, tell, and hear stories” (Razack, 2001, p. 51) and to do this by critically reflecting on what informs our subject positions. My subject position is wholeheartedly embedded in the act of listening, sharing and writing the stories of the women I interviewed, as well as my own story. I come to this research as an able-bodied, heteronormative, Punjabi, brown cis woman who has had the privilege of accessing post-secondary education in Canada. I come to this research with many subject positions that influence how I tell this story of izzat. I am a South Asian woman who was born in Canada, yet am forever read as an immigrant first in this country, and seen as an outsider in the land of my ancestors. I am a visitor to this land and pay my respects to the First Nations people whose sovereignty is at risk with my imposition on their lands. I identify as a survivor of izzat violence or “HRV”, in very similar ways to the women I chose to interview for this research.

The relationships I created through the process of this research with the women is that of sisterhood. We shared hours together that involved tears, hugs, tea, food, stories and questions. Sharing was the integral part of this interaction and I see each of the women as my sister in this journey, rather than as participants who are a distant memory. Hence, from this point forward I will be speaking about the women as my sisters, rather than as participants of the study. I share these subject positions now, not to absolve any responsibility for them, but to recognize that I

\textsuperscript{13} Thomas King is a First Nations American-Canadian novelist and broadcaster on CBC Radio. He is well known for his Massey Lecture entitled \textit{The Truth About Stories}. An eloquent writer, King engages with stories, their influence on individuals and communities, and their capacity for change.
come with a lens and it is with these experiences of privilege and marginality that I embody the role of storytelling.

This dissertation will attempt to explore the layers of meaning that izzat has for Punjabi, second-generation women living in the Diaspora. Its goal is to hear the stories of women whose bodies have become the battlegrounds for patriarchal violence through the misuse of izzat as a tool of control over Punjabi women. It is also to theorize the impact of izzat as well as the violence that emerges from culturally racist discourses in the media, and to discuss how we can start creating change inside South Asian communities so that family violence can not only be prevented, but also families can begin the healing process from violence that has already occurred. And finally it is to theorize family violence and gender-based violence in the context of racialized migrant families and communities so that young women accessing services and social supports in wider mainstream society do not encounter culturally racist responses that perpetuate further violence in their lives. This research will start the process of talking about violence within our communities in a radically new way by starting with women who have survived the violent and dangerous elements of izzat.

The overarching research questions that guide this dissertation are:

• How does izzat become a tool of heteropatriarchy and violence in the lives of second-generation Punjabi women?

• What are second-generation Punjabi women’s stories of transgressing boundaries of izzat?

• How do second-generation Punjabi women negotiate and/or resist heteropatriarchy inside and outside their family?

Embedded in this question is the complex multidimensional nature of izzat that consists of patriarchal interpretations that have led to violence in the name of “honour”. Yet there is also a collective element of izzat that connects Punjabi women to their families and community in a manner that may be empowering and renewing, particularly in the Canadian context which can be racist and oppressive. To capture these many layers of izzat and how second-generation Punjabi women are negotiating/resisting/interpreting izzat in their lives, the following supporting question will be explored in this research:
• Are second-generation Punjabi South Asian women regenerating a new definition of izzat and, if so, what does it look like? How do they reclaim izzat for themselves?

This research is about exploring izzat from inside and outside the private and public domains. This requires a look at how discourses of izzat are functioning, from the personal lives of second-generation Punjabi women, to the wider discourses of izzat in white mainstream society. Finally, this research is about voicing the stories of women who struggle with the multidimensional elements of izzat at the intersection of patriarchies, cultures, and the discourses that are embedded in each.

**Telling A Story Of Izzat: Research Methodology**

I came to theory because I was hurting – the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory a location for healing (hooks, bell, 1994, p. 59)

I remember very clearly when I turned to theory to understand and make meaning of my story. It began with challenging the structures in my home and upbringing, which meant challenging my father. He was a difficult man to engage with on the best of days, and even worse in the evenings. My mother was a determined woman who refused to be bullied, but without a great deal of external supports to carry through with her convictions. As one can imagine the daily engagements in my home involved fighting words. Words that, many times, I did not understand. Words that I came to despise and reject. The words that circulated in my family home were difficult to comprehend and I wanted so badly to have a life that was without a war of words. As I child, I concluded that the only way this could happen was if my father died. I remember feeling guilty for that and crying myself to sleep hoping that my words would not come to transpire. When I could not live with that conclusion, I challenged my father’s behaviour through my own words. Yet, this never transpired into anything fruitful.

As bell hooks\(^{14}\) shares in her work, I too turned to education to heal the wounds of my

\(^{14}\) An American author, social activist and, feminist, bell hooks’s writing focuses on intersectionality of race, capitalism, and gender and how these systems reinforce and perpetuate oppression and class domination. Her work is influential in my articulation of feminist theory and the action based work that I pursue in this research.
upbringing. Initially I wanted to know why the words I chose to change my father, my family and my childhood, did not work, as if they had the magic to transform my family. For many years, I thought I could go back and use a different technique that could “help”. Were there words that would heal my father from his own childhood trauma and stop him from being an alcoholic? However, words did not become my tool for changing my family, they became my source for comprehending and healing from the many experiences that had shaped my life and continue to shape my world. Words and, subsequently, theory allowed me to deal with the contradictions and manage the uncertainties of being a racialized minority in the wider world, and a child in a home that had a story of pain and trauma.

As bell hooks goes on to elaborate in her book *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom* (1994) “Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask it to do so and direct our theorizing towards this end” (p. 61). My intention in this dissertation is to ask theory to direct my story and the story of my sisters, as well as the wider story of “honour” to a healing, liberatory or revolutionary place. The theories and methods that I choose to engage for not only my own story of pain and healing but the stories of the women in this research, are wielded with the intention of healing and understanding the process of pain and trauma of being a woman in a culturally racist patriarchal world.

In order to confront the complex issues surrounding discourses of “honour” I have utilized a discursive framework for this research process. As reflected in George Dei’s ongoing writing, by placing emphasis on a discursive framework rather than a theoretical framework one can engage in the post-modern critique through the use of meta-theories intended to engage all the complexities embedded in a topic, such as “HRV”. Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) emphasize the importance of having a guiding framework “that takes into full account the fact that academic and political questions are continually changing to reflect social realities. By placing emphasis on the discursive rather than the theoretical, we also hope to avoid the rigidity and inflexibility that theory has come to be identified with” (p. 299). Along

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15 George Sefa Dei research and scholarly work range from anti-racism studies and Indigenous knowledge production through the development of education, locally and internationally. Dei’s extensive research has focused on Black/African Canadian students in the Ontario public school system.
similar motives, I place emphasis on the discursive nature of the following theories that are strung together to engage in the ongoing questions and complexities of “honour”, izzat, and gender-based violence.

Theories of critical anti-racism and post-structural feminism are the blueprint for this framework. Embedded within these theories are theoretical tools of inquiry including: discourse analysis and a feminist-autoethnography both of which stem from a post-structural feminist framework. Furthermore, narrative inquiry and action research are the methodologies from which I have conceptualized this research process. As is apparent thus far the focus on the stories of the participants is central to this research, while engaging in action-oriented outcomes. In this research narrative inquiry is the analytical framework from which I conceptualize, interrogate and analyze the stories of the women in this research.

The interconnection between race and gender along with other social hierarchies such as sexuality, class and ability are theorized in terms of relations of power. Dorothy Smith’s work (Smith, D.E. 1987, 1990a, 1990b) unpacks the everyday workings of power and demonstrates how categories of inferiority and Otherness are defined as the opposite of a white, male, bourgeois, heterosexual, able-bodied norm. The social relations of everyday life that Dorothy Smith speaks to in her work coordinate how our conscious and subconscious lives operate. Amongst this social organization are the everyday workings of whiteness and racism, as well as heteropatriarchy. I reference Smith’s use of the terms “everyday life” throughout this dissertation in order encapsulate the social relations of power that she so effectively theorizes in her vast work.

This counter hegemonic theoretical positioning has allowed me (a second-generation Punjabi South Asian woman) to be embedded in an Eurocentric context (a university institution in the West), and to engage in the process of deconstructing notions of power and whiteness that are central to the dominant debates and discourses surrounding “honour” related violence in the West. A post-structural feminist theory and lens underscores the entire theoretical base of this dissertation and allows me to connect the interlocking identities and lived realities of the

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16 Dorothy Smith is a Canadian sociologist who founded Institutional Ethnography, a sociological method of inquiry used to explore the social relations that structure people’s everyday lives.
participants, while focusing on their voices as central to this research. In the remainder of this section, I will elucidate how I will be engaging in each of the theories mentioned above, to give a clear outline to the reader of my theoretical positioning is as a researcher. This section is a brief introduction to my theoretical framework, and these theories will be unpacked further in the remaining arguments that I put forth in the dissertation.

**Critical Anti-Racism**

By engaging in a discourse that is focused on racist interpretations of South Asian women’s bodies and cultures, I am entering very difficult terrain. I am striking a balance between naming the racism and the maintenance of whiteness in the dominant discourses surrounding “honour” violence, and still identifying and speaking to the patriarchal violence that South Asian women are experiencing in their families and communities; and in doing so I am implicating everyone through the process. Engaging in theory and working through a critical anti-racist lens, I find I am able to support my balance in this endeavor and still maintain a strong voice that speaks against violence against all women.

As June Ying Yee (2005) defines in her article *Critical Anti-racism praxis in social work: The concept of Whiteness implicated*, anti-racism has roots in Marxist traditions and has gone beyond looking at racial minority groups from an “overly economic deterministic viewpoint” (p. 87). Yee (2005) demonstrates how scholars such as Louis Althusser, and Antonio Gramsci engage in the move from simple class analyses on the domination and exploitation of minority groups to an analysis that examines the ways in which the “dominant group in power produces and reproduces its relations of power through ideology in the form of hegemony” (Yee, 2005). These nuanced interpretations speak to the instances of non-class sites of domination for Marxism did not account. Yee (2005) goes on, in her article, to demonstrate how in the everyday workings of uncovering and confronting racism, practitioners particularly the community of social work practitioners which she is speaking to in her article, collude with dominant power structures by not addressing whiteness (p. 88). Yee (2005) concludes that critical anti-racism work requires a theoretical understanding of the both concepts of whiteness and racism and one cannot speak about racism until whiteness is named (p. 88).

My own experiences with race analysis have been significantly enhanced by the examination of whiteness in discourses of “honour” violence in the West. As I contend with the
various research and discourses that perpetuate racist sentiments about Muslim, South Asian, and racialized bodies in relation to culture, religion and “honour”, the investment in maintaining whiteness is evident throughout these discourses. Whiteness is defined by Yee (2005) as “a complex social process that perpetuates and maintains the dominant and/or majority group’s power” (p. 89). Connecting back to Dorothy Smith’s (1987) work, dominant power is maintained by creating the other in opposition to the white, male, heteronormative. In John Gabriel’s (1998) work, whiteness is argued to be operating through three discursive techniques, including exnomination, naturalization, and universalization. As I unpack in this dissertation Whiteness exonerates white people from being connected to an ethnicity, and all “other” ethnорacial bodies are racialized through a discourse of culture and religion. The naturalization of whiteness is normalized through the construction of the norm, which is always a white, male, heteronormative body. This norm is then universalized and an understanding of the world is seen from this “socio-political and historical vantage point without being questioned” (Yee, 2005, p. 89).

Finally, Andrea Smith17 (2006) speaks to the complicit ways communities of color engage with whiteness and racism that contribute to an oppression Olympics, where people of colour are not only competing with each other on how they are racialized and oppressed in dominant society, but also become complicit in the oppression of other Indigenous communities and communities of color. Smith (2006) has constructed a framework for activists, feminists, and political organizers to challenge the assumption that “racism and white supremacy is enacted in a singular fashion; rather white supremacy is constituted by separate and distinct, but still interrelated logics” (p. 67). This framework is called “Three Pillars of White Supremacy” (p. 67) and is broken down into three forms of logic that form the basis of white supremacy.

First is the logic of Slavery/Capitalism that renders Black people as slaveable, which is the anchor of capitalism. Smith (2006) articulates how capitalism ultimately commodifies all people as workers through the very construction of creating economic growth from one’s personal labour. However, with slavery, the commodification relies on the slaveability of black

17 Andrea Smith is a First Nations activist, feminist, focusing on violence against women of color and Indigenous women. Her critical work engages colonialism, patriarchy and, discusses the work that communities of color and Indigenous communities need to do in order to dismantle colonialism and racism in settler societies. Her work is very influential in this regard to my research and writing.
people, who are defined as nothing more than property. This system relies on a racial hierarchy to work and it is through this racial hierarchy that the masses are told, “that as long as you are not Black, you have the opportunity to escape the commodification of capitalism” (p. 67). The second pillar is the logic of Genocide/Capitalism, which relies on the disappearance of Indigenous people in order for non-Indigenous settlers to take claim of their land. This becomes the anchor for colonialism and, as we witness throughout history the genocide of Indigenous people is an ongoing mission of colonialism; as Smith effectively articulates “Native peoples are a permanent ‘present absence’ in the US colonial imagination, an absence that reinforces, at every turn, the conviction that native peoples are indeed vanishing and that the conquest of Native lands is justified (p. 68). Finally, the third pillar is Orientalism/War, which focuses on Edward Said’s definition of Orientalism where the west defines itself in relation to the Orient, constructing a narrative of superiority over nations and people defined as “barbaric” and inferior. This logic relies on defining the Orient as a constant threat to the West, where bodies that originate from the Orient will always be read as “permanent foreign threats to empire” (p. 68).

Smith’s (2006) framework is an effective theorization of whiteness that highlights how white supremacy works not only to oppress Indigenous communities and communities of colour, but also works to trap us in the complicit oppression of other communities of colour through what Smith defines as “the prospect of being able to participate in the other pillars.” The power that is embedded in the prospect of contributing to power over another community impacted by whiteness is subconsciously enticing and is how white supremacy maintains itself. This structure of white supremacy allows for people of color and Indigenous communities to police themselves and regulate each other in our struggles against racism and whiteness. We are divided and then conquered through white supremacy. I will continue to return to Andrea Smith’s “Pillars of White Supremacy” throughout this dissertation, as I hope that by speaking to how whiteness works to situate Indigenous communities and communities of colour as bodies that can be slaved, are already invisible, and constructed as inferior, I am able to meet Smith’s call for developing resistance strategies that do not keep this system in place but keep us accountable to our complicity in the oppression of others.

As may be apparent thus far, I am using critical anti-racism as a theoretical foundation for engaging in critical practice in community development and education, as well as in social
work practice. George Dei (1996) articulates how anti-racism engages both education and community engagement, and his work has been essential in my own engagement with anti-racism as a theory and practice. Dei & Caliste (2000) define anti-racism work as “an action oriented, educational and political strategy aimed at institutional and systemic change that addresses the issue of racism and the interlocking system of social oppression (sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism)” (p. 13). These interlocking systems are an essential element to the theorization of patriarchy and violence against women, and by examining the ways that race, gender, and whiteness are used to perpetuate the oppression and “othering” process of racialized bodies, I am able to engage in the necessary action oriented change and education process that I am seeking to achieve in this research and dissertation.

However, as critical as anti-racism work is to this dissertation, I am speaking specifically to issues that impact on South Asian women in their everyday lives. Anti-racism theory allows the discussion to focus on how whiteness is present on a systemic, institutional, and societal level, however it is also necessary to have a feminist lens on the impact of “honour” violence on the lives of second-generation Punjabi women.

Post-Structural Feminism

My first encounters as a feminist began at an early stage in my life. I cannot remember what age I was, however I remember the first time I challenged my mother, grandmother and father on their rationality and truth around a festival called Rakhi. On this day all brothers and sisters are expected to come together and the sister ties a colorful and, usually handmade, string around her brother’s wrist as a metaphor for their relationship. This relationship requires the brother to protect his sister(s) till their death, and the sister will pray for her brother’s long and enriching life. In return for the string, the brother is expected to give his sister a gift, (usually money) and the bond is sealed with an exchange of sweets. My family took a lot of pride in the Rakhi ceremony, which literally translates into the “bond of protection”, and we came to call it “brother’s day” in our community. I questioned my parent on why the focus was on the long life of brothers. When was “sisters’ day”? And exactly whom is my brother protecting me from? My father in particular was sort of dumfounded. His “truth” about a relationship he had never questioned himself was being examined his daughter, in a land that did not recognize this ceremony, within a context that could never truly support his belief system. In fact, I was not
only questioning it but also asking for an equal ceremony to occur for girls, and he was not exactly sure how to answer.

In retrospect, I see this ceremony from a very different lens now and recognize the underlying history and reasoning for the Rakhi ceremony, which is very much connected to izzat and “honour” and the role that brothers play in protecting the izzat of their family. Now, having language to engage with the theoretical impulse I was demonstrating as a child, I would suggest that I am a feminist who is fond of questioning knowledge, truth, rationality, and power as it is embedded in humanism, a feminist act that is embedded in postmodern and poststructural impulses, and is always questioning how racism intersects with heteropatriarchy.

In this dissertation I come first to the process of research from a feminist theoretical foundation. As a feminist I am cognizant of the “interlocking” effect that Patricia Hill Collins\(^\text{18}\) (1990) coins in her work where “seeing race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppressions…fosters a paradigmatic shift of thinking inclusively about other oppressions, such as age, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity…” (p. 225). Fellows and Razack (1997) define the interlocking effect as “the systems of oppression [that] come into existence in and through one another so that class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies; imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism and so on” (p. 335).

Collins (1990) continues to challenge feminist circles to consider the connection between these systems of oppression and how one form of oppression cannot function without the other. By understanding the interlocking nature of oppression Collins moves feminist engagement away from dichotomous, Eurocentric, patriarchal thought to one that engages multiple paradigms. Fellows and Razack (1997) use Collins work to unpack how feminist political solidarity presents a problem of “competing marginalities” which is centered on the false belief that “each of us, as women, is not implicated in the subordination of other women.

\(^\text{18}\) Patricia Hill Collins is a well-known Black feminist whose scholarly work involves feminism and gender within the African American community. Her influential book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* is one of the leading sources that engages Black women’s everyday oppressions and highlights their voices of resistance. Collins utilizes the term intersectionality to refer to the overlapping multiple forms of oppression that racialized women experience in their everyday lives.
When we view ourselves as innocent, we cannot confront the hierarchies that operate among us” (p. 335). Hence, Fellows and Razack define this reoccurring move as a “race to innocence”, where a woman claims that her own marginality is the worst one, without considering how we are all complicit in all women’s marginality (p. 335).

By engaging in the interlocking systems of oppression within feminist theory, I hope to move away from a “race to innocence” in my writing. I ask the reader to join me in this move, so that we can consider “honour” related violence as embedded in the marginality of all women by disrupting the systems that create this marginality. As we will see throughout this dissertation, the interlocking systems are fundamental to unpacking “honour” related violence and its impact on the lives of second-generation Punjabi women.

Furthermore, I come back to Andrea Smith’s (2006) work on the role of whiteness or white supremacy in the construction of gender binaries as an essential insertion to this conversation, as her work demonstrates how racism, colonialism, and sexism intersect with feminism. Smith reminds her readers of how patriarchy in order to work relies on the gender binary system, where one gender is dominating the other. She states, “any liberation struggle that does not challenge heteronormativity cannot substantially challenge colonialism or white supremacy” (p. 72). We exist in, and contribute to, a settler society that is built on colonization of its entire people. Every community here has played an active role in sustaining, maintaining, and complicitly contributing to whiteness, which forces hierarchies in and amongst communities in order for the three pillars of white supremacy to work. Patriarchy itself is sustained through this hierarchy of gender and the binary of male and female; hence, as Smith articulates, white supremacy relies on heteropatriarchy. As may be evident, thus far I have been using the term heteropatriarchy throughout my writing, which come directly from Smith’s (2006) theorization of patriarchy and gender binaries. In order to support her argument and continually reference Smith’s (2006) theorization and intersection of racism and heterosexism, I will be using the term heteropatriarchy instead of patriarchy, to remind readers of the connection between heteropatriarchy, colonialism and whiteness or white supremacy.

This research is a feminist project and the work of feminists, such as Patricia Hill Collins, Sherene Razack, Mary Louise Fellows and Andrea Smith engage the intersection of antiracism with feminism. However, for this dissertation I am also critiquing the language and discourses that are a part of the structures and hierarchies that enact heteropatriarchy and racism.
This is where post-modern theory comes into the story of feminism. Post-structural thinking is embedded in postmodernism and can be defined as challenging the language and discourse elements of postmodernism (Fook, 2002). It is important to note that the body of literature that informs postmodern feminist thought is extensive. As a result, I have chosen to outline and engage in scholars who are embedded in disciplines of education and social work for this research and writing. This move has allowed me to focus on how post-structural feminist thought can be applied to practice within educational settings, as well as social care systems of Western societies.

Poststructuralism is effectively defined by Sands and Nuccio (1992) in their article *Postmodern Feminist theory in Social Work* as follows:

Poststructuralism looks at meaning in relation to the particular social, political, and historical contexts in which language is spoken and written. They view discourses (bodies of language and texts) and “readers” as situated rather than neutral. Accordingly, poststructuralists move away from “grand theory”, which purports to assert universal truth” (p. 491).

As is evident so far, discourses of “honour” carry tremendous currency in Western societies today and the dominant manner in which these discourses circulate and function requires a thorough deconstruction. As a result, I utilize many of the six themes that Sands and Nuccio (1992) outline in their article of poststructuralist thought including: (1) *A critique of logocentrism*: challenging universal truths about women, through the history of heteropatriarchy; (2) *dichotomous thinking*: challenging the binary opposites that have been created between racialized, cultured bodies as being barbaric, in relation to the white egalitarian civilized bodies of the west; (3) *the idea of difference*: the other is always defined in relation to the dominant, which leads to silencing or ignoring marginalized “othered” voices which, in this research, is South Asian women; (4) *deconstruction*: uncovering hidden multiple meanings by decentering dominant thinking about “honour” related violence in South Asian communities; (5) *multiple discourses*: recognizing that any one interpretation of a text is only a partial narrative and recognizing the multiple discourses embedded in the same text and (6) *situated subjectivity*: the idea that a person’s perception of a person is socially constructed and is changing constantly depending on the context in which they are situated.

Using a post-structural feminist lens, I have taken two turns in this dissertation. First, I engage in historical understandings of heteropatriarchy, the making of the “ideal woman”
throughout history, and unpack themes of “honour” as they are spoken about in multiple discourses. Second, I have engaged current literature and research that engage in the dominant discourses of “honour” related violence and speak to the multiple silenced discourses and voices that are missing in the process. Embedded within this is a theoretical discussion of power and resistance. Power and resistance is most commonly associated with the writing of French philosopher Michel Foucault\(^\text{19}\), who enters into the theoretical elements of this dissertation at various sections. I see his work informing much of the poststructural lens that I use in my arguments.

Jana Sawicki (1991) in her book *Disciplining Foucault* outlines Foucault’s model of power, which stems from a rejection of traditional revolutionary theory. Marxism and radical feminism both utilize a revolutionary approach to human liberation, which searches through history for the origins of oppression to identify a revolutionary subject in history. Each takes a radically different turn when they define the origins of oppression. Marxism defines capitalism as the origin of oppressions, whereas radical feminists “identify patriarchy as the origin of all forms of oppression” (Sawicki, 1991, p. 19). As we see throughout the waves of feminism, creating universal categories for understanding women’s experiences on the basis of radical feminist thought, does not recognize what Audre Lorde\(^\text{20}\) (1998) defines as difference amongst women. Sawicki (1991) suggests that Michel Foucault’s work provides an alternative approach to engaging the question of difference through his theory of power, as she defines in the following quote. “Foucault proposes that we think of power outside the confines of state, law, or class. This enables him to locate forms of power that are obscured in traditional theories” (p. 20).

Foucault’s work on power and resistance provides researchers, like myself, with a way of engaging historical processes and ideologies, such as heteropatriarchy, through a lens of possibility. In this writing, I focus on how power is exercised, rather than possessed, how power

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\(^{19}\) Micheal Foucault is most recognized for his work on the relationship between power and knowledge, and how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions which has been highly influential for both academics, social workers, and activists.

\(^{20}\) Audre Lorde’s work has long served as influential to women worldwide and to feminist theory. Her identity as a Black lesbian gave her work and engagement with feminism a unique and necessary voice and she is well known for her poetic writing and activism. Her most well known article *The Master’s Tools will not dismantle the Master’s House* explore the underlying racism in feminist movements.
can be repressive, yet productive, and how power can be analyzed as coming from the bottom up (Sawicki, p. 21). Furthermore, Foucault (1978) in *The history of sexuality: An interview* states, “where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95), which is embedded in the claim that wherever there is power, one can find a way to resist and shift its hold (Sawicki, 1991). In this dissertation, the resistance that South Asian women exemplify in the face of tremendous social pressure, institutional racism, familial power over, and dual patriarchies, is one of the cornerstones of the research findings. Foucault’s analysis offers this research a space to engage with not only with the power that is exercised over women’s bodies but with the resistance that almost always comes with the oppression of power.

**Feminist-Autoethnography**

A significant element of this research is autoethnographic, where I begin with my personal story as the starting point for further exploration of the sociocultural context in which izzat is located (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Yet as much as my story is central to the beginning of this inquiry, it is not the entirety. Not all of the thesis will be written in autoethnographic form, yet my voice will be central to the writing process; as well, my personal stories and relationship to “izzat” will open up the dissertation and the inquiry, connecting the personal to the cultural and political. I have used the terminology feminist-autoethnography to define this process of writing and research, in order to iterate how the process of writing my own story into this research is a political and personal endeavour. By engaging autoethnography through a feminist lens I am able to connect the personal to the political and go beyond my individual story to a story that is connected to a wider social context in order to promote social justice and action.

By gathering Punjabi women’s specific stories of izzat and survival in Canadian society and using them to convey a wider story of izzat and cultural racism, I am holding stories central to the research focus. My central motivation for research is to shift the “single story” (Adichie, 2009) of second-generation South Asian women and to use the multiple stories of izzat to raise consciousness and create dialogue about “honour”-related violence in the Punjabi community. The overarching theme I will be looking for in each of the women’s stories will be their stories of izzat and moments in the women’s lives when their izzat was used as a patriarchal tool of violence. Furthermore, stories of racism, oppression, and heteropatriarchy that Punjabi women have encountered outside of their community will also be explored and, the role this has played
in their lived. A narrative inquiry is based on the belief that “life might be understood through a recounting and reconstruction of the life story” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 19). Hence, I turn to narrative inquiry to examine Punjabi women’s stories of izzat, heteropatriarchy and racism and will work with these stories to recount and reconstruct the layers of meaning that we place on izzat as a cultural knowledge.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Stories, storytelling and listening to the stories of others have been a significant part of my life. As a child I grew up hearing stories from the mother(s) in my life. As a student I was always drawn to the circle when stories were read in school. As an adult I chose to be a part of the social work profession where listening to the stories of others is a vital part of the job description. As a researcher I recognize that the process of telling one’s story is a way of making meaning of everyday life and the way we tell our stories is a significant element of this meaning-making process. As a researcher I see myself as a “narrative inquirer”, someone who studies experience as story (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). Therefore, narrative inquiry was a natural fit for me to conceptualize and understand how people make sense of the world and their experiences through stories.

Connelly & Clandinin (2006), define the philosophical underpinnings of being situated in a phenomena under study (2006). Experience itself is defined as being in relationship to others and Clandinin & Connelly (2000) draw on the work of John Dewey’s (1938) pragmatic philosophy and other that of philosophers to illustrate narrative inquiry

A way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Narrative inquiry as a methodology allows for the engagement between the researcher and the

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21 Patricia Hill Collins (1990) writing on the role of mothers and other mothers influences my choice to identify all the women who have shaped my upbringing. I use the term mother(s) to capture the essence of other mothers, which Collins defines as all the women in our family, and communities that support and contribute to the parenting of children beyond the biological mother.
participants to be embedded in a landscape and a metaphorical context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 47). Using this analogy of space and place, Clandinin & Connelly (2000) have created three metaphoric dimensions of narrative inquiry space that researchers enter with participants: “the personal and social (interaction) along one dimension; past, present and future (continuity) along a second dimension; place (situation) along a third dimension.” (p. 54). This description of narrative inquiry in the research process is an effective way of speaking to the relational dimensions of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry asks a researcher to “find ways to inquire into participant’s experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experience developed through the relational inquiry process” (p. 47).

My engagement with narrative inquiry as a methodology is situated in the way experience is unpacked and allowed to be the central piece to an individual’s story as well as the relational dimension of narrative inquiry. Using narrative inquiry with my sisters who shared their story from early moments in their life, to the current stage they were living in, allowed me to be in the three dimensional spaces that Clandinin and Connelly describe. Their stories and the meaning they attached to their stories are understood through this relational dimension.

Connecting narrative inquiry to anti-racism theory, and post-structural feminism has allowed this research to go from the political to the very individual and personal, while remaining connected to the wider and dominant story of izzat and “honour” violence. Narrative inquiry as a research method makes central people’s desire to story their lives and the events and experiences that have impacted on their lives. As effectively stated by Thomas Schram in Conceptualizing and Proposing Qualitative Research (2006) the aim of narrative inquiry is:

To understand how people structure the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives…narrative researchers take as the object of investigation the story itself, rather than treating interviews or documentation of naturally occurring conversations solely as a means to obtain information (p. 104).

For this research, my interest is to gather stories of women who have been affected by “izzat” or “honour”-related violence and to focus on their stories of resistance, and the everyday struggles that come from interlocking patriarchies. The aim is to engage with the women and their stories and use those stories to challenge existing discourses of “izzat” or “honour”-related violence, as well as engaging the Punjabi community in current practices or beliefs about “izzat”. Narrative
inquiry allows the research to focus on Punjabi women’s stories, how they make meaning of these stories, and then to use these stories to create consciousness or action towards shifting current discourses in mainstream society, and the Punjabi community.

Great power and strength can be discovered when we begin unpacking the many layers of meaning and significance represented in our stories. The late Michael White, (2004) a well-known social worker and family therapist, spoke to how stories can change how we live our lives when we explore the meanings we place on stories. Narrative approaches in therapy focus similarly on understanding people’s life stories and ways of re-authoring these stories with the help of a therapist. The focus of narrative therapy is on the history and the broader context in which the story is taking place and how that is affecting people’s lives.

Exploring “honour” related violence in the Punjabi community is about unpacking trauma and pain that has been enacted on the mind and body of women by their families and members of their community. In the process of resurrecting these stories, the women will likely experience lingering pain in the process of sharing. Therefore the process of gathering these stories is itself just as important as the stories themselves, since I did not want to participate in re-traumatizing the women. By using narrative inquiry from a research perspective, as well as a social work therapeutic perspective, I aspire to use the moment of sharing stories as a space for the women to reflect on re-authoring their stories. Re-authoring is a therapeutic practice coined by Michael White (2005) and the following excerpts from his notes speak to the process of re-authoring:

Re-authoring conversations re-invigorate peoples efforts to understand what it is that is happening in their lives, what it is that has happened, how it has happened, and what it all means. In this way, these conversations encourage a dramatic re-engagement with life and with history, and provide options for people to more fully inhabit their lives and their relationships (p. 10).

Narrative inquiry combined with narrative therapy allowed the research process to focus on unpacking the many layers of meaning Punjabi women have placed on izzat and their experiences of “honour” related violence, as well as to give space for the women to engage with their story and re-author it to shift them from a place of trauma to a place of regeneration.
Action Oriented Approach to Research

As may be apparent so far, action emerging from research is an essential part of this research. The importance of action being embedded in the methodology comes from my many years of working on the front line with women, children, youth and families as a social worker. As a result, I recognize the need to engage in social justice work in order to incorporate critical awareness and consciousness of marginalized voices in society. However, I must admit that this research is not participatory action research (PAR). Furthermore, it is not entirely action research (AR) in the traditional sense. Karen Healy (2001) in her article *Participatory Action Research and Social Work: A Critical Appraisal*, defines PAR by speaking to the four core assumptions that guide it: (1) to situate oppression in the micro-social structures of society, such as capitalism and heteropatriarchy; (2) to draw on conflict theory, which seeks to expose the powerful in society; (3) to view the relationships between the researcher and participants is seen as egalitarian, which requires a sharing of tasks and roles in the research process; (4) for participants to take control of the economic and social structures that govern their lives and to do so through consciousness raising, and collective action. In order to effectively do PAR, the participants must be engaged with the research process from its conception and are active partners in the research process.

True action research intends for the process to occur in similar ways as PAR. In an AR research study; the participants or community involved in the study are involved in the design and research process from the beginning, they are included in the analysis and the results, as well as in releasing the data and results, and finally in the action-based solutions that come forth from the research (Brydon-Miller, 2003, Pain, 2004, van der Muelen, 2010, 2011, Whyte, 1991).

These fundamental principles of both PAR and AR inform my research process and the ontology of this research; however, as a research project I did not have the capacity to allow for the process to be truly PAR or AR. The research questions and the incentive for conducting this research started from personal experience, from what I witnessed on the front line as a social worker, what I was witnessed in my community, and what I encountered in my own life as an insider to the community I am researching. However, I am not embedding the participants in this study from the beginning of the research process, nor are they contributing to the implementation and dissemination of the results.
Yet, AR and PAR greatly influence my drive for research and social work practice, by embedding some form of AR that contributes to critical consciousness raising in our wider society and community is an important outcome for this research. Hence, at the outset I asked my sister if they would like to gather as a group to create a project that emerges purely from their power and control. This project will engage the South Asian community, as well as wider mainstream society, about their experiences with “HRV”. This invitation was accepted by 3 of the participants and the major thrust of this ongoing group was to create social action through raising critical consciousness inside the Punjabi community in Canada. The process of this project will be discussed in detail in the final chapters.

As a result, I am naming this research action oriented. What I have focused on is the critical consciousness-raising element of AR that is informed largely by Paulo Freire’s work in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Freire (1973, 1990) is well known for popular education methods in working with marginalized communities in Brazil. Ultimately, Freire’s social-change strategy has influenced the theoretical underpinning of this research and I have attempted to focus on action-oriented research to engage in social change. Finn and Jacobsen (2008) succinctly describe Freire’s social-change strategy in the following way: “wherein people affected by oppressive social conditions come together to reflect on their current circumstances, become critically conscious of the root causes of their suffering and take liberating action” (p. 22). Furthermore, embedded within a social-change strategy is the assertion that in order to create change, research must be political and promote critical consciousness to engage in community-based education.

Concientización as Freire theorizes in his work, is the process of developing a critical awareness of how personal dynamics unfold within social and political contexts (Freire, 1970). Critical consciousness on a community engagement level is about bringing awareness to how heteropatriarchy and racism function to marginalize South Asian women in the Canadian context. Paulo Freire (1970) describes education as a practice of freedom. I believe that in order to engage adults in my community about the effects of violence against women, as well as heteropatriarchy, we must find ways of engaging them that allow for this consciousness about women’s reality to be reached.

The most important part of this group engagement was starting it after the individual interviews were complete. During the process of gathering, listening, and engaging in the each
of the women’s stories, there were moments of critical awareness occurring during the interviews. This awareness was then further solidified and raised as a group, which then went into the final piece that we created together, a spoken word poem.

Morris & Muzychka (2002) suggest that the process of action research involves collaboration and reflection on the part of the researcher:

Action research is a process that allows someone or a group to create or add to knowledge about an issue or situation through a collaborative and reflective process. Furthermore, we can use that information to cause change, both at a personal level and at a community level (p. 52)

In effect, my sisters and I are using the knowledge that we have gained through our experiences in a collaborative and reflective manner in order to contribute to change in the Punjabi community. The actual process of doing this will be unraveled later in this dissertation. However the actual moments where we gathered as a group to talk about our experiences and our relationship to the issue of “HRV” and violence against women, were the most powerful moments of this research process, because we were contributing to creating critical awareness within ourselves on an individual level, and to support each other on the road of pain that each of us had been on to that point.

The work of Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) also informs the action approach that I have taken in this research, as she writes about the negotiation that is required of an insider/outsider voice in research. Using my insider voice throughout the process is critical to making this research feminist and action-based. By using Smith’s (1999) work, I cultivated my voice in this research and utilized an insider perspective to examine izzat. Furthermore, Smith’s work also critically examines how to avoid producing work that perpetuates the colonization and oppression of marginalized communities. Other scholars that contribute to this aspect of the research include Patricia Hill Collins (2000) who speaks to the marginalized voices in feminist research and theory, as well as South Asian scholars Himani Bannerji (2001), Inderpal Grewal (2013), Yasmin Jiwani (2006), and Sherene Razack (2010) who critically examine the way South Asian women are spoken about in research and the role future research needs to play in challenging these discourses.
There is a feeling of urgency inside me to tell the many stories of izzat and to dismantle the ideologies of “HRV” and heteropatriarchy so that stories and perspectives that are rarely heard in dominant discourses can become central. This urgency is what has led me to pursue this research, which essentially places me outside both mainstream discourses and in many spaces outside my community. Yet, these feelings also come from a need or desire to bear witness to women’s lives that have been lost because of the violence of izzat or “honour”. The complicated process of telling the stories of women who are not here to share their own stories leaves me with a sense of discomfort and dread. There is a necessary act of witnessing women’s stories of pain and survival. As “HRV” and the term “honour” or izzat have gained currency in mainstream and academic discourses, the act of witnessing and listening to the stories of women who have experienced “HRV” are few and far between. In fact there is great deal of exoticizing or gazing that occurs about women who have been killed due to “honour” or izzat. The telling of these women’s stories is always from voices that are outside that woman, a story that is asserted on the body of a woman from her grave. This clear avoidance or assumption of a woman’s story is a final act of violence on that woman’s body. Many times, it is after a death that we hear the daily struggle and violence that a woman experienced from her family and community, as well as the barriers to accessing support from institutions and structures of wider society in Canada. As with any form of oppression, there is always a resistance and struggle by the oppressed, yet these discourses portray South Asian women without any agency and as “a body fixed in the Western imagination as confined, mutilated, and sometimes murdered in the name of culture” (Razack, 2004, p. 130.)

I also recognize that the manner in which the women’s lives have been storied in dominant media is another kind of violence on their lives and leaves a stain on the South Asian community. Women who have died as a result of “honour” killings have served the purposes of maintaining a narrative that these women are victims of their barbaric cultures, all to support racist discourses about the “Other” in the Canadian context. This violence emanating from the media has only led to defensiveness on the part of our community, rather than collective action against “honour” based violence, which is necessary for any restoration to occur within the community (Herman, 1992). What if we were to bear witness to the pain and violence that has
happened in the Punjabi South Asian community in order to instigate change and shift the ideologies of izzat and family violence?

The act of witnessing, as articulated by Dori Laub (1995) is about a “narrative that could not be articulated to be told, to be transmitted, to be heard” (p. 69) and to do so in a manner that involves the survivor witnessing their own story as well as others hearing and witnessing the telling of the traumatic event. The manner in which witnessing occurs in the words of Bonnie Burstow (2003) and should be embedded in:

Actions that counter alienation…Possible examples include telling one’s story; naming one’s own experiences; debunking myths about one’s community; creating public rituals and ceremonies for expressing grief and outrage; rebuilding community ties, traditions, and models; reclaiming personal community, or national space; reclaiming the product of one’s labor; reconnecting with nature; and indeed all environmentally responsible libratory initiatives (p. 1313).

The effectiveness of witnessing cannot be undermined. In trauma and violence work, it is an essential piece that can shift the recovery not only of individuals who are surviving the traumatic experience, but also a community that is connected to the story.

This dissertation is my effort to create a written and active forum for witnessing the lives of women that have been killed in the name of izzat or “honour”, and to bear witness to those women who are surviving everyday within the confines of izzat. The action-based project that is a part of the research process is one part of bearing witness to our own stories, while at the same time contributing to consciousness raising in the South Asian community about “HRV” and izzat in our everyday lives.

Before ending this introduction, I believe it is important to bear witness to the lives of women who have become symbols of “honour” killing discourses in the West and to weep for their lives through words. The words I hope to share here are my way of bearing witness to the violence that led up to their deaths and to recognize the resistance that has been lost in the telling of their stories.
“There Is No “Honour” In Killing”: Witnessing Lost Sisters And Unpacking The Language Of This Dissertation

When I was 7 years old, my family decided to travel to India for the first time since they had immigrated to Canada 10 years prior. This trip was very exciting for me, as a child I knew in my very bones that I was going somewhere special. I did not have the language for or understanding of how this trip would impact on the rest of my life, but it did in so many ways.

One of the many stories that occurred which has stayed with me forever was the witnessing of a mourning ceremony in one of the villages we visited. We had been travelling all day to get to the village and this journey involved a bus ride and a long hike to a remote village in the mountains of Himachal Pradesh. Once we arrived, the first noises I heard were the wailing of women coming from a distant room on the compound where my father’s family lived. As we came closer, the wailing grew louder and I remember being afraid. I remember feeling this deep sense of sorrow and pain conjured by hearing those voices. I also knew not to ask questions and to continue walking in silence. My mother, Bebe (grandmother), Phua-ji (paternal aunts) and Maasi-ji (maternal aunt) all joined the women in the room. As they opened the door to enter, I peeked in to see what was happening and I saw a circle of women with their Dupattas covering their eyes, swaying back and forth. I waited outside with my father and uncles. No men or children were allowed in. This carried on for an hour and then, just like that, it all stopped. They were finished. Tears were wiped away, tea was served and there was no sign of what had just happened on any of the women’s faces.

This mourning ceremony was for the death of a relative that had happened many months prior, but because my family had come to their home for the first time since then, it was necessary to do this public and very physical ritual. The women wailing was so visceral, even at such a young age I felt the emotions that accompany a death, yet I don’t even remember who had died and how I was connected to him. This ritual is one of the many ways we remember and mourn those we have lost, a ritual that involves the physical and emotional connection to a community and to your own self. Even if you don’t participate in the wailing, hearing it is enough to make you think about what has happened and to feel something for the dead person. I see this ritual as a kind of witnessing of a person’s life, how they died, and those who have been left behind having a chance to recognize what they have lost and to send the body to the ground.
with tears showered over them so they know that we loved them. Many deaths have happened since I witnessed that first wailing ceremony and each time there is a comfort accompanying these emotions. I felt proud knowing that the women in my family and community were also the ones in control of this ceremony; its sacredness was held in the hands of a circle of women.

As I conjure these memories of personal family and friends that have died around me, I wonder about the women who have died from “honour” related violence. I feel this overwhelming sense of sorrow thinking about how there may not have been a wailing ceremony for them…or maybe there was but, in the collective consciousness, we only remember feelings of shame/regret/anger/resentment. The public mourning seemed to have been controlled by media and the criminal acts of those who were connected to them by blood, their father, brothers, uncles and mothers.

Jassi Sidhu, I remember hearing about your body being found in a ditch in India by the local authorities, but I don’t recall my community, your community, our community wailing for your life lost so young. Amandeep Atwal, I was in my car when I heard about your father stabbing you over and over again in your car. But I don’t remember anyone expressing grief for what happened to you, only shame. Aqsa Parvez, did you hear the wails of your sisters and brothers when we heard that you had succumbed to your injuries in the hospital room? These wails were subdued by the loudness of the media who wanted so desperately to put you up as the poster child for “honour” killings. Aqsa, there is a picture of your mother in our local papers wailing alone – without the accompaniment of her sisters. I know that must have hurt you as much as it pained me to witness. Zainab, Sahar, Geeti, and Rona, I want to imagine you all holding hands together as you are plunged into the canals of Kingston. I heard your names repeated in every corner of Toronto, yet your names mean so much more than girls on a “pursuit of freedom” dying for “honour”.

I say all your names here to conjure a memory: Jassi Sidhu, Amandeep Atwal, Aqsa Parvez, Zainab Shafia, Sahar Shafia, Geeti Shafia, Rona Shafia. I recognize that your stories that come before the story of your death may never be heard. I imagine and hear that you struggled with many internal and external wars, many of which involved your responsibility to your family’s izzat, and your struggle through the heteropatriarchy of our world. I am sorry that your body has become a site for many discourses/words that burden you even in death. I wail internally, through my words here, and with my sisters who have shared their stories of
surviving izzat violence. I hope this wailing can release some of the Oriental gaze that continues to penetrate your body, even in the graves or ashes that remain of you. I wail for the short life that you lived and will remember each of you as resisters, choosing to express agency, not as women who were victims of a tragic death. No you are not victims, martyrs, or even statistics, you are our sisters and we see your deaths as a reminder to each of us of what we have to change in our community and the world.

The Currency Embedded In The Word “Honour”

The stories of the above women live in the collective memory of the South Asian community, as well as in wider mainstream society, in discursive ways. There is a memory of pain, sorrow and deep regret for their deaths, however there is also a sensationalized story that accompanies each of these memories and in that story there is a defining word that is attached to their deaths – an “honour” killing. The word “honour” is repetitively associated with the violence that was enacted on their bodies, however, as South Asian women who lived in families and communities that followed the values of izzat, they may have had a relationship to izzat before their deaths that may or may not have involved violence. They may have had a relationship to izzat that embodied collectivity and respect for their families and community. It is true that we will never come to understand this aspect of their lives; however, this element of izzat is alive in the lives of second-generation South Asian women today, who are witnesses and survivors of violence, and the multidimensional relationship they may have to izzat is a missing element to our definition and understanding of the word “honour” as it is associated with South Asian communities.

The dominant discourses surrounding izzat further contribute to the construction of binaries and hierarchies and homogenize the complexities embedded in izzat. Elizabeth St. Pierre (2000) identifies the limitations of language in her writing as “Feminists and others representing disadvantaged groups use post-structural critiques of language, particularly deconstruction, to make visible how language operates to produce very real, material, and damaging structures in the world” (p. 481). For example, these “real, material, and damaging structures of the world” can be seen in the patriarchal construction of women as inferior to men, and in the binaries between white people and people of colour that inform racist ideologies. In the case of izzat, the dominant language surrounding “honour” produces a binary that considers
those who believe in izzat, such as Muslim and South Asian communities, as a barbaric, backward, and traditionally violent people that refuse to embrace Western society’s so-called “liberal” values. A binary is created between South Asian communities, and white “liberal” society, in the very construction of the word “honour” when speaking to violence against South Asian women, since the word itself has become attached to a cultural identity and community that is juxtaposed with values of the white, able-bodied, heteronormative person, essentially the “imagined” identity of white, liberal society (Anderson, B22, 1983).

As we can see in the academic, policy and media representation of “honour”, the word has been used as a tool to create binaries between the racialized bodies of South Asian women and their community and culture, and the dominant values of Western society. In this construction the reader is led to believe that this cultural belief that is supported by the community, leads South Asian communities to enact violence on their daughters, who are exercising their Western independence and identity. It is with “honour” that the discussion begins and ends and we fail to examine the role that racism, sexism, oppression and heteropatriarchy, which are global phenomenas, manifest in these acts of violence.

Naming the violence that was enacted on the bodies of the above women as “honour” killings creates two very difficult positions for the South Asian community. First, by naming it an “honour” killing and specifying that it is a particular form of violence against women that is nuanced by this understanding of a woman’s body and enacting power and control of her body and sexuality through violence, we are placing the spotlight on the construction of a discourse that is specific to our community and has been altered and distorted by heteropatriarchy to be used as a tool of violence against women. However, by naming it as a form of violence that stemmed from a cultural knowledge, culturalizes the act, the people, their beliefs, and values and further contributes to the construction of binaries that are apparent in these media articles.

In the Diaspora we, as South Asian communities, face a conundrum of naming an experience that is specific to our community, yet has the potential to be judged and taken up by a colonial, Orientalist, gaze in the West. Joan W. Scott (1992) asks the following questions in

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22 Benedict Anderson coined the concept “imagined communities” which explores how nations are socially constructed communities, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as a part of a group. This concept engages with notions of nationalism and the construction of state societies.
her article Experience, “How can we historicize “experience”? How can we write about identity without essentializing it?” (p. 33). These questions haunt me when I consider writing about the violence that is occurring in my community, to my sisters, and even when I consider writing about my own personal experiences of izzat and violence. Later on in the same article Scott follows up by stating that, “it is finally by tracking the ‘appropriation of language…in both directions, over the gap,’ and by situating and contextualizing that language that one historicizes the terms by which experience is represented and so historicizes ‘experience’ itself” (p. 36).

Hence, it is “over the gap” that I believe historicizing the language of izzat or “honour” needs to happen, and it is in this gap that I believe voices of second-generation South Asian women need to be included when speaking to the discourses of “honour”.

A way of resisting the current discourses that surround “honour” and second-generation South Asian women is to have the marginalized voices of our community come to the forefront to speak about violence and “honour” in our communities, as well as in mainstream society. With our voices at the forefront we can begin challenging how we are constantly portrayed in the media, and focus our attention on voicing how the intersections of heteropatriarchy, violence and izzat impact on our everyday lives. Hearing Punjabi women’s stories and their voices in these stories is one tool for creating awareness and working towards creating change. The following words by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, exemplify the power of story and its impact on a people:

To create a single story, is to show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become... The single story creates stereotypes and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story... The consequence of the single story is this: it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, October 2009).

There is a single repetitive story that is constantly portrayed in the media about second-generation South Asian women who are victims of “honour”-related violence. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls this discourse a single story of a people that is used to create stereotypes and portray people in one way. In the above quote, Adichie eloquently highlights the danger of this single story and the impact this single story has on marginalized people who are repetitively portrayed through a single lens. The single story of a people has been used in history as a tool to
colonize and “Other” racialized bodies; we see it in the actions of the colonial powers of yesterday, as well as in the everyday portrayals of the “Other” in dominant discourses today.

Taking Adichie’s analogy of the single story and applying it to the discourses of “honour” and second-generation South Asian women, we see that such an act creates a strong binary between the racialized body and culture of the South Asian women to that of the white, middle class, Canadian citizen. Essentially there is a binary produced of those who are considered valuable members that contribute to building this nation as opposed to racialized communities, who are considered barbaric and backwards, and therefore not valuable (Bannerji, 2000). This single story of South Asian women as victims of their barbaric culture, yet pawns of a Canadian multiculturalism dream, dominates and forces all other stories to be silenced or unheard.

In order to break this binary or single story, Adichie suggests that we need to include many stories of a people and by doing so we are resisting the single story, as well as empowering each other to think about the humanity embedded in each of our stories:

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to disposes and malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, October 2009).

I believe in the power of stories, as Adichie conveys. I believe that through stories we can voice change and create awareness inside and outside our specific ethnic, cultural, racial communities. For the Punjabi community, stories are one way of opening up conversations about “HRV” against Punjabi women. It is through my personal voice, as well as the collective voices of women in my community that I hope to move this research to a place of resistance and movement.

My name is Mandeep and I am from the Punjabi, South Asian Diaspora. I am a researcher, a woman, a social worker, and a survivor of izzat violence. I am a reclaimer of my own izzat and a fighter for the development of education in my community around violence against South Asian women. My voice is central to this work and to this research and I am not apologetic about it. It is necessary for me to be the backbone of this dissertation and for you, as the reader, to follow my journey as I have experienced it. My journey begins with my personal story and it is because of the pain I have experienced from izzat that I searched for other sisters
who had gone through similar pain and trauma. This dissertation is written and told in a story format and in an active voice, a voice that struggles with every single word that is put down on paper, because of how painful it is to share the stories of my sisters who have been hurt by izzat. I gain strength from elders and sisters to tell these stories and I hope that I can do justice to the lives that have been lost by “honour” and those who have come to a place of healing from the wounds of izzat.

**Contributions To Political Engagement And Scholarship**

It is safe to say that “HRV” has become a sexy topic that has become oversimplified and associated with marked bodies in the West. A significant amount of funds have been filtered into liberal feminist discourses that frame “HRV” as a problem in migrant communities that can be resolved by civilizing brown bodies. The currency embedded in the construction and maintenance of “honour” discourses allows for not only institutions like immigration Canada to maintain a strong hold on who gets in to Canada and how migrants are assimilated into Canada, but also gives power to the ongoing surveillance of marked bodies, particularly Muslim bodies that are seen as a threat to Western imperialism (Razack, 2008).

The counter discourses that speak to the impact of these larger discourses on the lives of migrant communities are necessary and contribute to the political context. The alternative stories of “HRV” resist these constructions and attempt to shift how we are complicit in the kind of support available to women leaving situations of violence. My writing is focused on unpacking the dominant discourses about “HRV”, while recognizing how we can shift the conversation on various levels. This involves challenging how frontline services are engaging with survivors and their families, such as shelters, and confronting the modern infrastructures within society that perpetuate racist ideologies of migrant communities, including child protection services, police, immigration policies, and health care systems. Finally, this is also about starting a conversation from inside the Punjabi community about “HRV” how it impacts young women and the struggles young women have living in the context of multiple patriarchies, while surviving the daily encounters of a racist society. The conversation with my own community happens at the periphery of this dissertation and my hope is that the action-based work that emerges from this research will contribute to a larger discussion that is long overdue in our community.
Hence this research is not only unraveling the current political context in which dominant discourses of “HRV” is being supplied and given legitimacy, but also contributing to scholarship and research that focuses on gender-based violence and how racism plays into the construction of marginalized communities. From an education perspective, this research engages in how critical consciousness raising is essential for conversations about “honour” and heteropatriarchy on a global scale to fight gender-based violence. From a social work perspective, this research focuses on how we need to counter and shift the practice of various institutions that are still embedded in racist, patriarchal and sexist ideologies supported by a heteronormative white supremacy. Finally, from a feminist perspective, this research centers the voices of women in this conversation and attempts to bring personal stories to inform critical political work. My hope is that this dissertation shifts current discourses, contributes to important work that is currently happening in counter discourse of “HRV”, and provides a voice that is informed by the voices of my sisters who are the life of this research and writing.

**Follow Me On This Narrative: Dissertation Overview**

This dissertation is about telling stories of survival. The first part of the dissertation sets the stage and provides a historical and theoretical background to izzat, and discourses of “honour” related violence. In the second half of the dissertation, the reader is able to engage in the research and the stories of my sisters with the history and theory in mind. This dissertation needs to be read with a strong understanding of feminist theory deconstructing the history of heteropatriarchy and its pervasiveness in our society, as well as following a genealogy of izzat and its migration to Canada. Hence the first three chapters, including this introduction, are about setting the groundwork for locating the research and stories of my sisters in a context and political understanding of how izzat is a tool of heteropatriarchy. Chapter two focuses on a review of literature that surrounds discourses of izzat, as well as a genealogy of the concept and social construction of izzat from India to the Canadian Diaspora. In chapter three, I situate “HRV” discourses in the West and then move into the research methods and design in the latter half of the chapter.

In chapter four, I begin by introducing the process of story telling by speaking to the story of Sita, a goddess in Hindu mythology, which introduces the thematic process that I will be using to share my sisters’ stories. I end this chapter with the story of one my sisters who
speaks to the complexities of disclosure and the process of deciding how to reveal multiple worlds that have been secret to her family and community. Chapter five focuses entirely on the life stories of my sisters.

In chapter six I discuss the meaning-making process of my sisters’ stories, by going specifically through each theme used to tell their stories in chapter five. The stories are used as a way to shift ideologies of heteropatriarchy inside the homes of South Asian communities, as well as in the public. Furthermore, policies and discourses that are using “honour” related violence to further racialize and subsequently marginalize South Asian women from speaking out about their stories of violence are examined. These policies are then challenged and I deconstruct the role they play in further marginalizing South Asian communities from engaging with support systems that can potentially help them navigate the systems of oppression and the marginality they may be experiencing as new immigrants to Canada. I speak to the impact that the current discourse of “honour” has on South Asian women and propose a radically different way of speaking about “honour” that involves situating “HRV” on a continuum, proposing a tool of practice that can be used by practitioners to engage with women on their stories of everyday survival with “honour” and heteropatriarchy. As with theories of violence against women, there is a continuum which second-generation South Asian women find themselves situating their experience. On the extreme end of the continuum is death at the hands of our family and/or community, and on the other end (as well as in the middle) is a great deal of emotional, psychological, and insidious forms of violence.

In the final two chapters, I talk in-depth about the action element of the research that my sisters and I undertook over the past two years, as well as concluding the dissertation with two arts-based pieces that speak back to our family, community and future generations.

Overall, the message that I am articulating in this dissertation is about wider theories of heteropatriarchy, feminism, and gender-based violence, as well as theories of morality and their place in Diasporic communities. I am situating the act of “honour” related violence within these wider theories because I believe, at the end of the day, that izzat is a complex concept that needs to be recognized and spoken about in multidimensional ways. The women I interviewed and the story I am going to share here is about widening our understanding of the whole continuum of “honour” based violence and to hear from second-generation Punjabi women about the impact
of this trauma on their everyday lives. This is about sharing our stories of everyday survival, resistance and, ultimately, reclamation of our izzat.
Chapter 2

Mapping Izzat And Heteropatriarchy Throughout History

In this chapter, I continue a thread of storytelling by historically examining literature and the social construction of heteropatriarchy, women’s bodies, and “honour” violence. I attempt to weave a framework of heteropatriarchy, as it is historically situated in the West, and then travel to northern India to trace how women’s bodies became a site of violence and how izzat is the tool to enact this violence. In the end, I will return to the specific everyday encounters of izzat and “HRV” in the lives of Punjabi South Asian women in the West, finally ending with a review of current literature that investigates “honour” based violence. However, before I delve into this journey I must transgress and set the stage by giving a current and lively example of the very important positions I am taking in this chapter. These positions are (1) the claims that heteropatriarchy makes on women’s bodies are not specific to any culture/race/caste/class/religion; (2) The act of bringing awareness to the ideological impact of heteropatriarchy on women must be taken up with the interlocking notions of race/class/sex/ability/culture in mind; to do so without this prudence continues colonial, racist, Orientalist oppression in the lives of diverse women around the world while maintaining the pillars of white supremacy (Smith, 2006); and (3) the concept of izzat for Punjabi women is complex and layered within systems of morality. It is a cultural construction that has shifted through social engagement and the complex relationship women have to their izzat is a part of the conversation we are not having and is essential to the identity and survival of Punjabi women. So please follow me for a moment to talk about current events and their impact on my research question.

As I write this chapter, a predominately white group of Ukrainian women called Femen have staged protests across Europe, calling for a “topless jihad day”. A demonstration was staged in support of Amina Tyler, a young Tunisian women who posted pictures of herself topless to the Femen Tunisia Facebook page, with the words “I own my body; it’s not the source of anyone’s “honour” and “Fuck your morals”. In reaction to Amina’s public display of action, Muslim clerics in Tunisia called for her death by stoning, which led to worldwide attention to
the Femen group and to Amina’s story. Yet, as I watch these European women with fierce violent energy and angry faces fight against authorities that are trying to quash their protests, I am left with a sense of discomfort and mixed feelings of disappointment.

The pictures of these protests can be found quite readily online, in fact the first post that comes up for Femen are the images of this demonstration. For this very reason, Femen chose to use media and social media sites to gain attention and voice for their cause. Yet, I am still left wondering what this cause is about. Who is this cause representing? Each of the women have words in black ink written all over their upper bodies and bare legs, “Bare breasts against Islam”, “Free Amina”, and “Freedom for all women”. Along with the striking words and the bare breasts, many of these women have placed towels on their heads as turbans and created fake beards to emulate Muslim men. There are crescent moon drawings over their bare breasts and painted flags of Islamic Middle-Eastern countries drawn on their bodies. These images not only contribute to anti-Muslim stereotyping of brown bodies, but also give fuel to Islamophobic sentiments. Many neo-liberal “feminists” who support anti-Muslim rhetoric in the name of “saving Muslim women” chose to demonstrate their “solidarity” by marching topless in immigrant Muslim neighbourhoods across the West demanding their Muslim sisters join them and “get naked” in solidarity. Again, what is the message that these women are trying to voice? What does this bring attention to? How does this action impact on women sitting on the fringe of these demonstrations? How are these demonstrations enacting Smith’s (2006) theorization of the pillars of white supremacy?

My discomfort with Femen’s actions brings me back to the question that I pose earlier—what is their cause and how are they voicing it? Is it to call attention to the sexualized manner in which women’s bodies continue to be represented in the media? Is to challenge notions that women’s bodies are owned by men, as is so effectively asserted in every fabric of society? If so how did culturally racist actions become embedded in their messages and how does this message actually contribute to the everyday realities of racialized women? As bell hooks reminds us “naming oppressive realities, in and of itself, has not brought about the kinds of changes for oppressed groups that it can for more privileged groups, who command a different quality of attention” (hooks, 2000, p. 76). The Femen movement is bringing attention to heteropatriarchy, and violence against women, cloaked in culturally racist liberal feminist ideals.
that define heteropatriarchy and sexist ideologies from a very white, middle class reality, yet claim to speak for all women on a global scale.

Femen’s actions of bringing awareness to patriarchal ownership of women’s bodies are mixed with racist actions and colonial sentiments, sentiments that suggest there is one kind of feminism that all women should be aiming for, and that involves removing clothing, including hijabs, burqas, and headscarves. The implications of this, for many women around the world are not only dangerous, but also embedded in privileged notions of choice, particularly in the context of renewed energy post 9/11, to demonize Islam and anyone connected to the image of Islam. Furthermore, it is contributing to what Angela Smith and other critical race theorists suggest as maintaining whiteness and hierarchies of how feminism should be practiced through a white lens.

To counter Femen’s demonstrations a collective of Muslim women created a Facebook page called “Muslimah Pride Day” and many Muslim women sent pictures of themselves holding index cards with words like “Femen does not represent me, I do not need liberating”. These counter narratives challenge Western liberal feminism that is cloaked in pillars of Orientalism that “those” brown women of “those” backward nations, cultures, and religions need to be saved by white liberated women of the West.

Nevertheless, how can hegemonic notions of women’s bodies be challenged and how can groups bring voice to the ways in which women’s bodies have been claimed by patriarchal notions of ownership? I can only imagine what Amina Tyler may have seen/read/felt/experienced or the moments of pain that led to her challenging the state and institutions she was living in with the words “I own my body” written across her bare breasts. Her story is essential to the fight against heteropatriarchy, but what are we missing in this conversation?

23 In most recent news (September 2013) Femen was exposed for being created and supported by a man by the name of Victor Svyatski, who admitted to this in a documentary called Ukraine is not a brothel. According to the documentary and to news sources, Victor Svyatski handpicked each of the women and staged the protests to sell papers and gain currency through exposure of women’s bodies. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/the-man-who-made-femen-new-film-outs-victor-svyatski-as-the-mastermind-behind-the-protest-group-and-its-breastbaring-stunts-8797042.html.
On the heels of this story, I recently read a blog post by Janelle Hobson (June 10, 2013) in Ms. Magazine. She eloquently writes about “Policing Feminism: Regulating the bodies of women of color”. In her piece she connects the Femen demonstrations to the Hollywood spotlight on the body and clothing choices of Beyoncé Knowles, a well-known R&B singer in the US. Recently, Beyoncé was condemned for showing too much skin at an event she was performing at, which Hobson suggests is another form of regulation where women of color are continually policed by liberal feminist notions of what is an acceptable amount of skin for black women to display. Yet, she highlights the contradictions of this argument by bringing focus to the Femen demonstrations and the insistence that brown women need to be liberated by showing more skin:

So, what’s going on in the sphere of Western feminism? In one area of the world they’re condemning women of color such as Beyoncé for “not covering up,” while in another part of the world they want Muslim women to “get naked.”

Indeed what a pertinent question. Yet, I would probably challenge Hobson by suggesting that this is less about feminism speaking to the masses and more about heteropatriarchy finding its way into the subconscious of feminism. As many black feminists throughout history have highlighted, liberal feminism lacks an intersection of race, sexuality and class, which only serves to oppress women of color further. I would add to Hobson’s questions by asking: what does this discourse tell us about our understanding of heteropatriarchy and racism and the deeply entrenched manner in which both ideologies live not only our society, but in our consciousness, to emerge most of the time in subtle and overt ways? Women’s’ bodies have historically been sites of control, and regulation but, as is demonstrated in these examples, have also become sites of difference, which is effectively articulated by Hobson (June 10, 2013):

If feminism becomes yet another space for the regulation of our differences, rather than an embrace of our differences, then we have impeded our progressive move forward in our collective political consciousness.

I recognize that there are dominant narratives and stories about feminism, heteropatriarchy, “honour”, and women’s bodies that have excluded essential theoretical groundings. In this chapter, my hope is to ground this dissertation in wider epistemologies that will challenge dominant narratives that situate heteropatriarchy and “honour” based violence on a global context, rather than as an issue of South Asian cultures. These arguments will locate this research in current debates and discourses that surround the timely and very current topic of
izzat or “honour” violence. This chapter also functions as a historical literature review on “HRV” and izzat. Each of the following sections are intended to provide the reader with a grounding in literature, research, and a historical understandings of “HRV” and its impact on second-generation South Asian women in Canada.

In order to effectively capture theoretical arguments that inform this research, as well as literature that currently contributes to discourses surrounding “honour” related violence, this chapter will be broken down into four parts. In the first part, I will be contextualizing the concept of “honour” and how it is connected to the bodies of women through the ideologies of heteropatriarchy and in the regulation of women’s bodies. The literature that I review in this historical mapping is embedded in Western feminist theory, which locates “honour” in women’s bodies and historicizes heteropatriarchy. Izzat is situated in the body of second-generation South Asian women and the regulation of women’s bodies is a central theme throughout this dissertation, thus I will be exploring literature that helps us understand how this regulation occurs, how this is embedded in global heteropatriarchy and what is at stake for heteropatriarchy and society to maintain this regulation.

In the second part, I will be providing a brief history of izzat as it is discussed in literature from Northern India, particularly as it pertains to the Punjabi community in India. This part is about mapping how izzat has become a tool of heteropatriarchy and violence by following the concept through language, historical and religious texts, and to its most recent transpiring during the 1947 partition of India.

Finally, in the third part, I will be discussing the migration of izzat to the Canadian context, unpacking what happens when a theme or ideology like izzat is understood and theorized in the West. In this part I will be outlining some of the main discourses that currently surround the cultural and social construction of izzat and how discourses impact second-generation Punjabi women, providing a literature review of “HRV” in North America and some of the work that is happening in the United Kingdom.

**Heteropatriarchy And The Regulation Of Women’s Bodies**

As Wanda Pillow speaks to in her work with teenage pregnant girls, the female body can be a place from which to “theorize, analyze, practice and critically reconsider the construction of
knowledge and reproduction of knowledge, power, class and culture” (Pillow 2000, p. 199). Pillow suggests that by paying attention to the body, one can disrupt methodological practices and expose what is oftentimes overlooked (Pillow, 2000, p. 200).

It may seem strange to state the obvious and “pay attention” to the bodies of South Asian women when discussing “honour”, izzat and gender-based violence, since the bodies of South Asian women have been the primary focus of these discourses. Yet this focus has been fairly subtle and words like “culture” and “religion” have overshadowed what is, at the end of the day, about power and regulating the behavior of South Asian women. The woman’s body is the particular site where control and power is enacted, primarily to protect ideologies of heteropatriarchy and the regulation of bodies in societies that perpetuate heteropatriarchy.

In this section I will be presenting arguments by various feminist and post-modern scholars that theorize how and why a woman’s body has come to represent the “honour” of a family, community and nation and how izzat or “honour” based violence has become a tool of heteropatriarchy.

You may be questioning right off the start why I am choosing to speak about women in one swooping generalizable manner. Using the word “women” as an all-encompassing term is not only problematic but has, throughout feminist history, been harmful towards marginalized and oppressed women, in particular women of colour and Indigenous women. Generalizing about the experiences of all women has served to maintain racism and seclusion of women of colour and Indigenous women who, throughout history, have not had the same privileges that white women have had in society. Historically, feminism has had a tendency to homogenize women in one category where race, ethnicity, class and sexuality are either ignored or overshadowed. There have been active feminists who have challenged this generalization and pushed for an interlocking or intersecting of women’s identities and a recognition of the contexts in which women are living (see bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Audre Lorde, Uma Narayan, Himani Bannerji). The homogenizing of all women’s experiences not only silences the voices and experiences of women of colour, but also further contributes to racist ideologies and practices.

Yet, as much as I am wary of the trap of generalizing about and homogenizing women’s experiences, one of the central points that I make in this research is that all women who live in
societies that perpetuate and practice patriarchal ideologies are susceptible to violence, whether it is emotional, psychological, physical or spiritual. This is not a new revelation and I recognize that many feminists and theorists have argued that being read as a woman comes with the threat of violence, many times sexualized violence. Bonnie Burstow (1992) eloquently sums up this notion of violence and women’s position in society:

Civilization as we know it is based on the violation and domination of subordinates by elites. All women are subordinate. Working class women, women of color, lesbians, and women with disabilities are doubly or triply oppressed. Civilization is based as well on male hegemony, that is, on viewing, understanding, and naming the world from a rigidly male elite point of view and seeing this view itself as something that is neutral and given in the nature of things (p. viii).

Hence, it is imperative that from this moment on I speak on behalf of the collective and try to grapple with how women’s bodies have come to represent a family, community and nation. Women’s bodies are the spaces where a nation’s identity is stamped, and any transgressions that women take to challenge the boundaries and codes of conduct set around their body, is confronted with control and a need to regulate that behavior, many times through violent means. If we generalize heteropatriarchy as an issue for all women, perhaps we can move away from culturally racist definitions of “honour” killings” and “honour” related violence. Perhaps the research I will be sharing in the remainder of this dissertation, which is focused on violence perpetrated on the bodies of racialized women, will be recognized in the broader field of gender-based violence against all women.

My hope is that I do not fall into the trap of marginalizing and contributing to the oppression of women of colour, and specifically South Asian women, by speaking about “women” as a whole. My hope is that the theories that I weave together will continue on with you as you read the remaining dissertation to thread together a picture of how izzat is located in heteropatriarchy as a tool to enact control over women’s bodies. The story of izzat and the stories of the women who have survived izzat violence are complex and need to be read and listened to with the contexts in which they exist. This section will give you the background to our current context in which izzat discourses are functioning and how current politics and economics of society have shifted the ideologies of heteropatriarchy and violence against women to impact izzat discourses in the Western world.
Patriarchal Violence And The Creation Of The “Ideal” Woman

When I begin to break down the many practices that feed into regulating women’s bodies, the basic elements of patriarchal rule are a useful lens from which to begin understanding these dynamics. Susan Kent (2004) states that “patriarchy in state and society as well as in the family rested on the ancient presumption that a male head of household held property not just in his land and animals but in his wife and children” (p. 278). Kent (2004) goes on to describe how patriarchy emerges from an ordering of society where women held positions in the hierarchical chain in relation to the men in their lives, whether they were daughters or wives. This definition is commonly used to define patriarchy, however there are necessary challenges to this definition. Gerda Lerner in her thought-provoking book *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), suggests that if we limit our understanding of patriarchy to this definition, which began in classical antiquity and ended in the nineteenth century with the granting of civil rights to women and married women, we risk limiting our understanding of the current system women live under “since the dawn of civilization” (p. 238). Lerner’s wider definition of patriarchy speaks to a construction of patriarchy that is evident in every layer of society today and challenges the notion that patriarchy is only about male ownership of women, patriarchy is:

The manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all-important institutions in society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources (p. 239).

As Lerner highlights, the above definition of patriarchy provided by Kent is limited in its historicity. Hence, Lerner’s definition recognizes changes in the role of economics and politics of a state society that has shifted patriarchy to its current functioning. However, it is important to recognize the evolution of heteropatriarchy. I believe both definitions allow us to see how history of the economics and politics of society have impacted on women’s roles and how heteropatriarchy is functioning throughout time. What is overwhelmingly evident throughout the evolution of heteropatriarchy is the sense that women’s bodies have been the central element that is being regulated and disciplined. These definitions of patriarchy offered by Kent (2004) and Lerner (1986) can quite easily be generalized as the way in which the heteropatriarchy ideologically functions at its core – transnationally.
Feminist scholars have also argued that the societal need to control women’s bodies emerges from the belief that women play a critical role in creating and maintaining ethnic and racial differences of a nation (Ortner, S. 1978, Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). As the biological reproducers of a nation, women’s bodies bear the burden of being constructed in society as the transmitters of culture and the socializers of children. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989), in their collection of essays *Women-Nation-State*, reveal the similarities across geographical boundaries (including Europe, South Asia, and South America) of this construction and possession of women’s bodies. In this important volume, Yuval-Davis and Anthias unpack how women’s roles in society is a symbolic representation of a nation’s ethnic and racial identity, as they describe in the following quote:

> Women are controlled not only by being encouraged or discouraged from having children who will become members of the various ethnic groups within the state. They are also controlled in terms of the ‘proper’ way in which they should have them – i.e. in ways which they will reproduce the boundaries of the symbolic identity of their group or that of their husbands (p. 9)

This theoretical understanding of how women’s bodies are read in a nation’s subconscious greed for building a fixed racialized and ethnic society helps us to understand how women’s bodies are constantly regulated through violence and force in the name of building a state society. This ideology is repetitively maintained in subtle and overt ways through various institutions and practiced in the public sphere and in the everyday actions of individuals in the private sphere of home and family. Andrea Smith’s (2006) work on white supremacy as well as her discussion on how communities have been imagined in the colonial construction of the West, remind us of how purposeful the regulation of women’s bodies is. Indigenous women are disappeared, black bodies are erased through slavery, and brown bodies are saved and then conquered. The colonial imposition in this process is important to remember and hold close as we carry on.

Sherry Ortner (1978) in her article *The Virgin and the State* connects theories of patriarchy and nation-building to the regulation and control of women’s bodies, but then goes on to question how and why women’s bodies have come to represent the “honour” of a family and nation, particularly the virgin body. By researching the practices of various communities that maintain notions of “honour” in the bodies of women, Ortner suggests that there is one common factor that binds all cultural communities who practice and believe that the purity of women represents the “honour” of a family. Ortner (1978) states that the purity of women’s bodies and
their representation of a family and a nation’s “honour” are “symbolically bound up with the historical emergence of systemically stratified state type structures, in the evolution of human society” (p. 23). Ortner briefly sketches out an argument that demonstrates how the ideal women in state society came to be represented by the image of a mother and a virgin and in order to reach this image men took many measures to regulate the women in their family for the sake of status.

Ortner suggests that changes in the structure of the family throughout state societies, which involved what she defines as the “domestication of men” as husbands/fathers/ and sons and their responsibility for the family unit, was a strong factor that led to the patriarchal belief that men were at the pinnacle of the hierarchy and control of the household and ultimately the representatives of the family. So, as the representative of the household, the husband or son of a household was responsible for his family and any transgressions the family members might make, in the larger system. From Ortner’s perspective, this “domestication” was entirely forced onto family units and particularly men by the wider state, which I would suggest is a simplistic explanation of how notions of power and control function and play out. In fact, suggesting that men were “domesticated” into the role of regulating the transgressions of their household members lacks an analysis that includes the role of nation building.

Through a Foucauldian analysis coupled with an anti-colonial lens, I would suggest that the wider nation or empire is not necessarily imposing this responsibility of controlling their household onto men, particularly the women of their household, but is, in fact, instructing men on how to manage their mini private empires, which are their family and all members in it. Ultimately, this is about control and power over those who are hierarchically lower to the masters of the home and I speculate was not a task that each man of each household took up with hesitation. Ortner’s lack of recognition for the consciousness of both men and women in taking up these roles in the private household is one of the many limitations that I see of her work. However, the historical recording and analysis that Ortner offers how honour is embedded in the bodies of women is worth exploring and I will come back to deconstructing her argument subsequently.

Ortner (1978) describes this as a domestication process; yet I would go further to suggest it is less a process of domestication of men, and rather a managing of patriarchy inside the
home. However, Ortner goes on to describe the impact of this process on the larger system of state societies:

The notion that males are not only economically but also legally and politically responsible for the proper functioning of the family unit seems to be part of the systematic extension of principles of hierarchy, domination, and order in the evolution of states as a whole… Responsible husbands/fathers, which is to say in this context patriarchal husbands/fathers, in turn keep everyone else in line – the women of course but also the sons (p. 29).

Ortner goes on to connect this shift in family structure to changes in marriage systems of state societies and describes how hypergamy plays a significant role in how women have come to represent an “ideal” of society and of a family unit. Hypergamy is defined by Webster’s dictionary as “the marriage into an equal or higher caste or social group”, generally between upper status men and lower status women. Ortner argues that if women’s bodies are representing the family unit, then their upward status can be the movement of the entire family unit. Furthermore, if a family maintains the virginity of the daughters in the household, they represent a symbol of “exclusiveness and inaccessibility, nonavailability to the general masses” (Ortner 1978, p. 32) and is worthy of being considered by the elite. This notion of the virgin woman who represents her family unit and the one who can drastically shift her family’s position in state society through the marriage of her body with that of an elite man, contributes to what Ortner describes as a family and a woman being oriented towards an “ideal and generally unattainable status” (p. 32). Hence, Ortner suggests, “women are not…representing and maintaining the group’s actual status, but are oriented upwards and represent the ideal higher status of the group” (p. 32).

Ortner (1981) is widely known for her influential work on the universality of female subordination, particularly in relation to her book Sexual Meanings: The cultural construction of gender and sexuality, where she argues that universally women are closer to nature than men. Correspondingly, man’s desire to conquer nature is the primary instigator for the subordination of women in society. These are very modernist problematic arguments to engage with. Reading this article, I am very aware of the limitations present in Ortner’s arguments. As Gerda Lerner (1986) points out, Ortner’s arguments present women as passive victims of the conditions that led to their subordination and create a false dichotomy between males and females. Both limitations are very present in this article. Furthermore, Ortner’s arguments have implicitly suggested that men were victims of their own domestification and held a “burden” of
expectations from the nation to keep their house in order. Finally, Ortner creates a dichotomy between men and women and a postmodern lens on her discussion dismantles the very binary in which she has situated her argument. These limitations are problematic and have implications for how the history of heteropatriarchy has been shaped. However, I see Ortner’s construction of women’s bodies as situated in a particular history and context and use her as a source for gathering theories and making an argument about how the regulation of bodies is embedded in heteropatriarchy. Hence, if we apply a post-structural feminist lens to Ortner’s work, particularly her description of women’s role in society, there are elements of her argument that speak to how women’s bodies are read today.

Let us first look at the notion of the family unit, which is the “base unit in the political-economic structure of the state” (Ortner, 1978, p. 29), reaching for a status/position/image. This ideal of a family and a woman is socially constructed and designed in such a way that any member of society can never truly achieve this image. Whether we are talking about the upward mobility of a family in their socio-economic status, or how beauty and the image of a woman is defined in society as white, thin, able-bodied, there is a very defined narrative of how women’s bodies are expected to perform in family and society. The expectations of a woman’s body is defined through heteropatriarchy and male hegemony and are essentially constructed in such a way that nobody can ever truly achieve the status or image that white hegemonic heteropatriarchal society would like to suggest. If we take Ortner’s argument of how heteropatriarchy has contributed to women’s bodies as being held as the property of the household, and, in turn, the actions taken on the women’s body as representing the “honour” of the household, we start to see similarities of how women’s bodies continue to represent these ideals not only in societies that have been deemed practitioners of “honour” killings, but also in Western societies. In the Western context, the body of a woman is still very much regulating towards an “ideal”, one that is, largely, policed, persecuted and punished if it transgresses boundaries of acceptability.

The work of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2002) is useful for deconstructing how society creates a “culturally fabricated narrative of the body” (p. 5), particularly women’s bodies. Thomson’s work is about integrating feminism with disability theory to introduce an approach that “fosters complex understandings of the cultural history of the body” (p. 6). Garland-Thomson suggests that by integrating disability theory with feminism we begin to
understand how there is a socially constructed narrative of bodies. This social construction supports an “imaginary norm” that is perpetuated and supported by being granted power, privilege, and status based on who fits into the image of a “compulsory ablebodied norm” (McRuer, 1999). Thomson states that disability theory allows us to challenge the construction of ablebodieness, while feminism allows the construction of ablebodieness to intersect with gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality in our oppressive social systems (Garland-Thompson, 2006). By bringing these two theories together, we can challenge the limits of how we currently understand the body and challenge the meanings that have been attached to bodies.

Applying a feminist disability lens that Garland-Thomson offers in her work both to arguments presented by Anthias and Yuval-Davis on the role of women as biological reproducers of an imaginary society, as well as Ortner’s anthropological arguments on how women’s virgin bodies are expected to raise the status of a family—move us to a place where we can theorize how women’s regulated bodies become sites of violence. Both arguments I have presented above demonstrate how heteropatriarchy is invested in maintaining an ideal image of a woman and the performance that is expected from a woman’s body, both of which can never truly be achieved or attained.

This notion of an “ideal” woman, and the performance expected of women is about taming, regulating and disciplining marked bodies (Foucault, 1984). Garland-Thomson (2002) suggests that “female, disabled and dark bodies are supposed to be dependent, incomplete, vulnerable, and incompetent bodies” (p. 8). Such constructions of gendered, raced, and disabled bodies have led to the subjugation of women, people of color, and (dis)Abled people. Systems in society that perpetuate a normalized body that all people should be attaining create representations of who is worthy and who is expendable, which Garland-Thomson effectively argues can lead to violence against marginalized bodies:

Such representations ultimately portray subjugated bodies not only as inadequate or unrestrained but at the same time as redundant and expendable. Bodies marked and selected by such systems are targeted for elimination by varying historical and cross-cultural practices. Women, people with disabilities or appearance impairments, ethnic Others, gays and lesbians, and people of color are variously the objects of infanticide, selective abortion, eugenic programs, hate crimes, mercy killing, assisted suicide, lynching, bride burning, honor killings, forced conversion, coercive rehabilitation, domestic violence, genocide, normalizing surgical procedures, racial profiling, and neglect. All these discriminatory practices are legitimated by systems of representation, by collective cultural stories that shape the material world, underwrite exclusionary
attitudes, inform human relations, and mold our senses of who we are (p. 9).

Feminist disability theory would suggest that this image of what a woman’s body represents in our society is very much invested in “normalizing phallic fantasies of wholeness, unity, coherence, and completeness” (Garland-Thomson, p. 28), which disability theory teaches is flawed and contradictory because disability is everywhere and is an inevitable end for all humans who live long enough to see old age (Garland-Thomson, 2002). The violence emerges when the body is not performing in a manner that society expects. So if a woman is expected to take her family to a higher status, or if a woman is representing the ideal of a family and she performs beyond the boundaries that are placed on her body, violence is utilized to eliminate either the behaviour or the threat to achieving this ideal image. We see this playing out not only in women’s bodies but also in all bodies that are marked as different. The marked body is one that can be read as challenging how society has constructed normality through a lens that gives legitimacy to an image that can never, ever be achieved: an image of white ablebodied heteronormativity.

So what does this tell us about the notion of “honour” and how it is situated in the bodies of women? The arguments presented here teach us that heteropatriarchy emerges from the belief that women’s bodies are the property of men. We know that the nation or state society has an investment in women’s bodies because they rely on women to reproduce a nation based on racial and ethnic lines; in a colonial context this investment is in maintaining whiteness. We also take into account that women becoming representatives of the “honour” of a family and nation is also embedded in this “ideal” unattainable status of mother and perceived virgin and that men are invested in this status because it represents their own movement in the hierarchy of society. Furthermore, the perceived virgin woman also represents an assurance of maintaining a particular racial and ethnic identity of a community, simply by the fact that the marked “other” has not tainted a virgin woman. Finally, a feminist disability lens allows us to theorize the forces that regulate marked subjugated bodies that challenge the “imagined” ideal image of what a patriarchal state society should look like. A feminist disability lens helps us understand how a woman’s body is expected to perform in society which is about defining a normativity. This normativity is imagined so that it can never be achieved because society will always create new constructions of what normativity will look like and what is required to achieve it. Capitalism relies on this construction since the notion of attainability is embedded in consumerism and the
basis of capitalist ideologies. This imagined notion of normativity and idealness is constantly changing and is truly about regulating bodies in a hierarchical form.

If we place these arguments further into a context of how violence against women and heteropatriarchy function today, we can see that patriarchal violence which has taken the form of controlling women’s reproduction, and the creation of an “ideal”, unattainable image, are all issues women have been struggling with globally. There are many tools used to maintain heteropatriarchy and regulate marginalized bodies, women’s bodies.

The regulating of women’s bodies is essentially patriarchal violence that takes various shapes and forms. The manner that patriarchal violence takes is impacted on by the context in which it is set. In the context of the West, we currently see domestic violence, sexualized violence and crimes of passion as the prevailing types of patriarchal violence, all of which are very much impacted by Western ideals and values about a particular form of heteronormativity and a power over women’s sexuality. In the context of societies like India or Pakistan, where dominant narratives suggest “honour” killings are on the rise, patriarchal violence takes a particular form based on how women’s bodies are read and controlled. As Nicole Pope (2004) unpacks in her written work:

“honour” killings, in my view, are an extreme- the most extreme- form of patriarchal control. But patriarchy takes many shapes and forms, and it certainly exists in Western liberal societies even if we sometimes too confidently believe women have equality (p. 102).

“Honour” killings are an example of a tool of violence that is used to regulate the bodies of women, as are forced marriages and any form of femicide, sexualized violence and domestic violence. The ultimate umbrella keeping all these forms of gender-based violence together is heteropatriarchy and the systems that are reinforcing heteropatriarchy in our society.

It may seem that we have strayed off the path of talking about izzat or “HBV”, however as I maintained throughout this chapter, these philosophical/theoretical arguments are merely a mirror of how Western state society evolved into the patriarchal system that it is today. These theories are the foundation for “HRV”, which is a global issue based on a global understanding of heteropatriarchy and gender-based violence.
The creation of heteropatriarchy and the history of heteropatriarchy is an important part of this discussion and, as such, Gerda Lerner’s (1986) work gives an in-depth look at the historical process of how patriarchy has become established and institutionalized in our collective consciousness. At the risk of simplifying Gerda Lerner’s layered and quite extensive history of patriarchy, I want to end this section by focusing on what Lerner defines as the two forces that organize patriarchy: “the patriarchal family and the sexuality of women” (p. 212).

As Lerner’s research demonstrates, throughout history women’s reproductive capacities have been used, understood, and acquired as a resource or commodity (Lerner, 1986). Much of this has been controlled by the state through the regulation of the private family home and as Lerner states, “The family not only merely mirrors the order in the state and educates its children to follow it, it also creates and constantly reinforces that order” (p. 217). The patriarchal family is expected to perform and manage its image so that these wider notions of heteropatriarchy can be sustained, and the regulation of women’s sexuality is the most powerful way in which to maintain this control, which Lerner effectively articulates:

Economic oppression and exploitation are based as much on the commodification of female sexuality and the appropriation by men on women’s labor power and her reproductive power as on the direct economic acquisition of resources and persons (p. 216).

Our collective consciousness has embraced heteropatriarchy. Therefore it is not surprising that demonstrators fighting against heteropatriarchy believe that violence against women is “cultural” and that the privilege of being white, ablebodied, and heteronormative protects against the impact of heteropatriarchy. The arguments presented here remind me of how much work is required to deconstruct our everyday notions of the “normal”, “ideal” body and to what extent people will go to attain this image. I am reminded of how violence against women happens because of power and the need to regulate and discipline bodies that challenge an unattainable ideal or norm. I am reminded of how much work needs to be done to make conscious these notions of heteropatriarchy, which have been so effectively made unconscious.

To conclude this discussion, what I am hoping we can collectively take from these scholars is that the notion of women’s bodies as sites of violence because of “honour” is not a new concept or one that is specific to South Asian communities and cultures. It is a concept that is very much rooted in heteropatriarchy and societies and communities that are invested in
creating a norm or ideal, all of which contribute to control, power and the regulation of the masses for colonial and capitalism means. Izzat violence, or HRV is one of the many tools that fill the cupboards of heteropatriarchy and can become a tool to condone or justify violence in order to maintain control over women who transgress norms/boundaries set around their bodies.

The word izzat or “honour” has become ubiquitously attached to violence against racialized women in the global south, yet the concept of izzat has its own history and has been taken up by men as a tool for regulating the bodies of women in the household and in the nation. In the following sections I will spend some time looking at the history of izzat and will attempt to conduct a mini-genealogy of izzat and its beginnings in Northern India. Finally, I will try to map the migration of izzat as a tool of violence against women, from Punjab to the Canadian context.

Genealogy Of Izzat

This is the world in which I move uninvited, profane on a sacred land, neither me nor mine, but me nonetheless. The story began long ago…it is old (Trinh T. Minh-na, 1989, p. 1).

The story of izzat has been passed down through unspoken gestures and lessons, through the eyes of women from one generation to the next; it is a story that is deemed necessary by generations of men, and a story that is embedded in the identity of so many women. It is a story that lives in my family as it has in generations before us. The story of izzat is as old as the story of heteropatriarchy and in recent years has become new again. It is revitalized as a site of fascination by those in the West who deem themselves existing outside this “backward” tradition, and a tool of power and control by those insiders to izzat. This fascination with izzat in mainstream discourses is largely about portraying izzat as a tradition, cultural knowledge, or custom that exists primarily in the Orient or in “backward” religions, such as Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. Yet, as I discuss in the first part of this chapter, “HRV” is embedded in heteropatriarchy and the enactment of power over the bodies of women.

Understanding what contributes to izzat being used as a tool of violence is an important part of this dissertation. There are many versions of this history. As in all histories the storyteller and the listener each speak and hear the story in their own way, some parts of the story are heightened while others are subdued, almost hidden or omitted. Who tells the story of izzat and
how are some voices forgotten through time? Is there a purpose and order to this exclusion? In this section I will attempt to conduct a short genealogy of izzat, from a post-structural feminist perspective and will follow izzat through the history of Northern India.

The exercise of unpacking the roots of izzat is about understanding how the values and events of our present experiences have been established historically and practically (Pillow, 2003). Coming to terms with what a historical genealogy looks like and connecting it to a feminist lens, I turn to the work of Wanda Pillow (2003), who conducts a feminist genealogy on the bodies of teen mothers. Pillow begins with a Foucauldian analysis for “decentering what we think we know and for tracing how we come to know it” (p. 149). A decentering of knowledge production that Pillow suggests, allows for one to have a beginning into a venture that has an endless beginning.

In this section I will be deconstructing izzat by focusing on three distinct elements of izzat that can be found throughout history of Northern India. First I will be conducting a short literature review of how izzat is defined in contemporary literature, arguing that current understandings of izzat and its role in the Punjabi community, particularly for second-generation South Asian women, is limited. Second, I will explore how izzat is defined in Punjabi and discuss some of its origins. Third theme will connect notions of izzat as they begin to be demonstrated in dominant Hindu mythology, looking particularly at the story of Sita from the Ramayan scriptures. Finally, I will end with a discussion of martyr suicides, or Jauhar and connect this historical practice to the partition of India and to contemporary “honour” violence in the diaspora.

Definitions Of Izzat In Research And Literature

Currently, there is no dearth of research, literature, and references on the subject of “honour” based violence. There are numerous non-governmental organizations that have quantifiable data on the where “HRV” occurs, as well as providing online educational webinars.

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24 For this dissertation and this historical genealogy I am focusing only on Northern India geographically, as well the Punjabi community of India. This is due to the fact that India, the culture, its people, and its knowledges are quite diverse and historically each region has its own history and knowledges specific to the people of that area. It would be impossible to gather and portray the history of izzat and it’s meaning for all the diverse ethnic communities in India, not to mention to translate the meaning of izzat in all languages of India.
(see the following to name a few: http://hbv-awareness.com/about/, http://www.sikhpolice.org, http://ikwro.org.uk/, http://www.stopvaw.org/drafting_laws_3). There are a number of widely researched publications that have provided various theories on the extent of “HRV” in Western immigrant-receiving countries, such as the United Kingdom and North America (An-Na’im, 2000, Baker, Gregware, & Cassidy, 1999, Gill, 2005, Kortweg, 2012). However, as much as there is extensive activism towards preventing and eliminating “HRV” against women, and more recently analysis and research unpacking the complex layers of “HRV” and shifting the conservative discourses, any historical analysis or even a genealogy of “honour” or izzat in the Punjabi community is limited.

Key scholars such as Tahira S. Khan (2006) and Amir H. Jafri (2008) have attempted to provide a theoretical and historical grounding to the emergence of “HRV” in South Asian communities, which has been helpful to my own historical analysis of “HRV” and izzat. The historical and socio-political factors operating behind the subjugation of women in society in general, and how izzat and “HRV” emerge from wider notions of heteropatriarchy are elements that are rarely discussed in literature and research about “HRV”.

The concept of izzat itself is thrown around in literature quite loosely and frequently and is mostly associated with Muslim and Sikh Punjabi communities in the Canadian context. The actual concept of izzat and its definitions can be found in ethnographic research of Sikh and/or Punjabi immigrant communities that live in the Western Diaspora and their integration stories in mainstream Western societies. Current research that has focused on the Sikh Punjabi community and their migration to the West, have spoken about the practices of izzat as a cultural tradition that has remained strong in the immigrant Punjabi community despite the communities integration into Western societies (See Nayer, 2004; 2012). Izzat is generally defined as a moral affect that all Sikhs are attached to, whether in India or in Canada (Dusenbery, V. 1990, Nayar, K. 2004). Izzat as a cultural construct is quite frequently associated with the word Sharam, meaning shame and is essentially described as the driving force for Sikhs engagement with their family, community and society.

Literature that explores second-generation ethnic identity and acculturation generally finds space to talk about how izzat and sharam (shame) are two cultural constructions that are intimately connected and remain a cultural problem which with young people struggle with (Ghuman, 2005, Gilbert, Gilbert, Sanghera, 2004, Sekhon & Szmigin, 2005). Literature that
speaks about the concept izzat and even sharam is trying to encapsulate a cultural knowledge that is quite layered and a part of the historic fabric of Punjabi communities through one simplistic definition, “honour” and shame. The word “honour” in itself is associated with various meanings in the Western definitions and as we will see in this section, the concept of izzat is not as simply defined in the Punjabi community. Coming back to Amita Handa (2003) and Jasbir Puar (1996), both scholars challenge the notion of culture clash and as we spoke about early expose the racist construction of South Asian communities in order to uplift the West and whiteness. However, neither of these authors explores the concept of izzat or sharm and its role in the lives of second-generations South Asian women or their families.

There are limits to mapping izzat and the complex moral understanding that Sikh Punjabi communities have of izzat, through the use of simplistic definitions. Izzat as a cultural construct has shifted and changed throughout history based on the political and cultural movements that emerge in the history of northern India. The shifts and turns that izzat has taken to become associated with the bodies of women is a part of the story and definition of izzat that is at times entirely missing from ethnographic literature, or is spoken to very briefly. Research that does speak about izzat and its association with women’s bodies and behavior is prevalent in domestic violence literature, particularly amongst immigrant couples (Abraham, 1999, Agnew, 1998, Gilligan & Akhtar, 2006). The definition of izzat is generally limited to the words “honour” and “respect” and is associated with Sharam. Izzat is defined as one of the leading factors in violence erupting in heterosexual Punjabi marriages, and the reasons for women not disclosing the abuse or violence they may be experiencing in the family.

As mentioned in the introduction, dominant media perspectives (See Tripp, 2012) as well as various types of research and literature about “honour” related violence, written from first person narratives (Manahaim, 2009, Sanghera, 2007, 2009, Papp, 2012) have become popular in dominant Western societies. These first person survivor narratives have focused on the concept of izzat, however they have chosen to define it as a burden that led to violence amongst their family and upbringing. The authors tend to limit their analysis to defining “HRV” as a cultural concept embedded in tradition. In contextualizing “HRV” as simply “cultural”, there is a lack of recognition of the role heteropatriarchy plays in the violence that these women experience.
Indeed, there is a tendency to define “HRV” as a problem that impacts on all South Asian women, and is rampant because the South Asian community is not willing to assimilate into Western values and thus continues old traditions from back home (Gilbert et al, 2004, Papp, 2010; Sanghera, 2009). There is little to no reference to how this practice has shifted throughout history. In other words, dominant “HRV” and izzat narratives are framed in ahistorical ways as if izzat were a custom without history or a tradition that does not need to be historicized because it has always been there. Uma Narayan (1997) defines ahistorical discourses as an “erasing of history” in order to perpetuate a “colonialist representation” (p. 45) of third world nations and communities. Many anthropological research and feminists fall into this error. This “erasure of history” (Narayan, 1997, p. 46) contributes to culturally racist and colonial representations of third world cultures as unchanging or “places without history” (Narayan, 1997, p. 48) and helps construct these nations and their people and practices as one that always has been and will be “barbaric” and “backward”.

The point is, history matters, not only as a tool of inquiry into how the past is influencing the present, but also history inspires us to act “to draw on history is to shine a light on possibilities for the future” (Finn & Jacobson, 2008 p. 87). When we look at gender-based violence and how rapid and pervasive it is in the lives of women around the world, there is very little space to talk about optimism for the future. Yet, in the words of Howard Zinn²⁵ (1997), “…for hope we don’t need certainty, only possibility. Which (despite all those confident statements that “history shows…” and “history proves…”) is all history can offer us” (p. 656). As we will see through deconstructing the history of women in Northern India, izzat demonstrates itself in women’s bodies as a way of upholding patriarchy and power and control over women’s bodies.

Tracing Izzat Through Language

Language has many functions, including relaying messages and expressions; it is a form of communication that we begin using at birth. Our everyday use of language perpetuates power in particular ideologies and discourses, hence the function of language is a lot more complex,

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²⁵ The late Howard Zinn was a historian and activist, who wrote extensively on civil rights and anti-war movements. His work is considered influential in peace movements and in activist circles.
particularly when we are talking about power that is embedded in particular bodies. James Gee (2005) states that the function of language is “to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions” (p. 14). As we see in the colonial imposition and assimilation of languages in India, by exploring how languages shifted through time, we begin to see the ideologies of the people changing too, as well as institutional power shifting from one power group to another. By following the word izzat and how it entered the vocabulary of the people of northern India, we begin to see how language functions to support particular discourses.

The word izzat can be found in Persian, Urdu and Punjabi vocabulary and in each turn of language the definition remains constant – it is connected to “honour” and the attainment of “honour” through human actions. Urdu is a language that has been created through the assimilation of Arabic, Persian, and how we understand Hindi today. Similarly, Punjabi is a combination of Urdu and Hindi and is spoken primarily in the northwest region of India and predominantly, but not entirely, by those of Sikh religious origins. When we break down the meaning of the word izzat in Arabic, Urdu and Punjabi we see slight variations in the definition and application of the word. In Arabic, the word izzat means glory (Quitregard, 1994). The word “glory” in English means to “rejoice, exalt, pride oneself, make glorious, a special distinction, something which brings renown” (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002). Each of these translations communicates an action that is connected to distinction and entitlement, such as war and the winning of a battle. In Urdu, we begin to see a shift where izzat becomes attached to the words “grandeur, power, “honour”, respect, glory; to acquire rank; to preserve “honour”, to be held in public esteem” (Badley, 1993). This Urdu translation of izzat into English, suggests a slight shift to more local power and a connection of the individual self to the public, essentially a more localized acquisition of “honour” and power. Finally, the primary definition of izzat in Punjabi is solely “honour; honour to; and honourable” (Hares, 1998). The word “honour” in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1974) is defined as:

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26 I am conscious that I am exploring this through an English interpretation of the words. Each time I am translating the word izzat from Persian to English, from Urdu to English, and from Punjabi to English, I am providing the definition through the use of the English language, thus the connotations, application of the words, and meaning has been understood primarily from a Euro-American lens. The limits of this are apparent and vast, however for the sake of space, I am making note of this limitation in my analysis and consciously continuing with unpacking the word izzat from this lens, as I believe there is still considerable merit to analyzing the origins of the word, even if it is tarnished with English definitions.
High respect, esteem, deferential admiration; an expression of this; glory, credit, reputation, good name. b. The chastity or purity of a woman; a woman’s reputation for this (p. 1264).

If we look at current discourses in the West that speak about “honour” related violence and concepts of izzat, the primary definitions that are provided are connected to a community or family “honour” embedded in the actions of women. Yet, as we follow the word through the different language shifts in the northern parts of India we can see that this was not always the primary definition of the word. During a conference preceding, a colleague of mine commented on a very tangible definition of izzat that she had grown up hearing in Karachi, Pakistan where she was born and raised. She stated that a woman’s dupatta or chunni was normally called her izzat. This was a significant moment for me as I began to see the symbolism that a chunni represents for Punjabi women. The dupatta is worn by most women to cover their breasts, neck, and hair if necessary and during my grandmother’s and for a short time during my mother’s generation, was used to cover one’s face if a woman was expecting to be in the presence of older men of her family or community, or men that were strangers to her. This practice was called chuund and has also been referred to as purdah by Western anthropologist and historians researching this practice (which has its own implications). One of my earliest memories is of seeing my mother covering her face with her dupatta in the presence of the elders in our community and family in India. I was about 7 years old and it is one of my strongest memories because there was something so familiar to what my mother was doing, yet also so strange. The familiarity was connected to a collective understanding, just like the word and practice of izzat; there were no words to describe how I knew that this practice was important for everyone who was in my mother’s presence that day. The only other time I had witnessed this was in pictures of my mother’s wedding day. In each and every picture taken of

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27 Shawl (Hares, 1998, p. 378)
28 In the work of anthropologist David Mandelbaum, Women’s seclusion and men’s honour: Sex roles in North India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (1988), the author refers to this practice as “purdah” or “veiling”, in which he describes, “A woman quickly covers her head at the approach of an older man of her husband’s family, using either the end of her sari or the separate head scarf, dupatta in Hindi, to do so. She draws the edge of the cloth across her face so that only her eyes are uncovered, or pulls the headcloth forward in a cowl from which she can peer out” (p.4). The author suggests that this conduct is a reflection of a Hindu or Muslim women’s modesty and subservience to the men of her family. Yet, not once does the author speak about the origins of these codes and how they are embedded in patriarchal practices of the family and community. Furthermore, there is an anthropological authority from the author suggesting that this is almost an innate characteristic of the women, rather than a code of conduct that is expected of her through societal arrangements.
her you cannot see her face, just a chunni covering any recognition of the woman she was that day.

The dupatta as a symbol and actual translation of the word izzat is an effective demonstration of “language-in-action” (Gee, 2005), the translation of language into everyday workings of discourses and ideologies. As Gee (2005) articulates in his discussion on language:

We continually and actively build and rebuild our world not just through language but through language used in tandem with actions, interactions, non-linguistic symbol systems, objects, tools, technologies, and distinctive ways of thinking, valuing, feeling, and believing. Sometimes what we build is quite similar to what we have built before; sometimes it is not. But language-in-action is always and everywhere an active building process (p. 11).

Each time izzat has shifted in its definition to encompass a symbol or meaning of what the community values and believed at that time, we are seeing the workings of language-in-action. Nevertheless, there are actions that stimulated this turn of izzat shifting from representing battle and war, to a meaning connected to the bodies of women and “honour”.

Unfortunately in our contemporary context the dupatta as a head scarf or “cover” in a post 9/11 world has come to symbolize oppression and is most commonly associated with religious practices. Anything that resembles a headscarf has come to symbolize oppression and Islam regardless of what origins. Young women like Aqsa Parvez become symbols of what happens when a woman does not wear a hijab, according to media headlines that suggest that she was killed because she refused to wear the headscarf to school. Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) talks about the colonial discourse that symbolizes the head covering as an imposition on brown women. The very imposition of this dominant dualistic discourse on the lives of young South Asian women reminds us of how binaries like these create oppressed silenced bodies, especially since the practice of covering the head has such diverse meanings for each community and individual that partakes in it. As Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) demonstrates so effectively in her work on cultural relativism, historically the burqa, and many of its variations symbolized women’s modesty or respectability and the symbolic separation of men’s and women’s spheres (Abu-Lugod, 2002) As Abu-Lughod quotes the work of Hanna Papanek, the burqa can be reframed as a form of “portable seclusion” and understood as a “liberating invention because it enabled women to move out of segregated living spaces while still observing the basic moral requirements of seperating and protecting women from unrelated men.” (p. 785). Abu-Lughod’s
reframing and challenge to the dominant discourses that suggests any head covering is a symbol of violence and oppression, allow for voices of young women who have diverse relationships to the head scarf to speak and highlight the complex relationships we have to this practice.

I asked my mother about practicing chuund, when she did it and why. I recall her saying that she normally practiced it in front of elders in the community as a form of respect and in front of strangers whom she was not sure about. Abu-Lughod (2002) recalls a similar meaning for Bedouin women of Egypt and recognizes that there is a sense of agency in not only the act of covering the face with the head cloth, but also the moral decision to perform this act in contexts determined by the women themselves.

There are many ways in which I interpret the implications for this alternative narrative of the dupatta or head scarf. One of the first questions that comes to mind is how did protection and seclusion come to be a moral requirement for women? Is this due to the danger that women continued to face from men outside their family and community? Or is it something that has been imposed on them throughout history? And does this contribute to men seeing the women in their lives as property? Are these not the basic elements of heteropatriarchy that we see in the global understanding and definitions? I sit in these complex questions and recognize that to ask them in a public context continues to fuel the fires of dominant, culturally racist, colonial discourses that situate the “to cover or not to cover” discourse in a polarization of what type of feminist you are. The doubts created in my mind about the practice of covering may actually have humble beginnings that were first created by women for themselves and later possessed by heteropatriarchy to become tools of violence. I also challenge myself not to glorify history, which is why it is essential that the focus turn to how practices such as chuund and izzat came to be used as tools to control and demonstrate power over women, rather than strong bases of agency that women possessed within themselves.

I have a collective memory and identification with izzat that is embedded in agency and power, yet those moments are overshadowed by patriarchal power over my body, as well as racist discourses that attempt to regulate my engagement with my culture and identity as a South Asian Punjabi woman. Similar to my discussion in the first part of this chapter it is through the structuring of society that we begin to see the workings of izzat translating into a tool of heteropatriarchy and power over women. It is in this discourse that we see how izzat turns into action. Essentially violence is attached to notions of “honour”, as izzat becomes attached to the
bodies of women. In the next section I will explore how izzat demonstrates itself in dominant narratives of what signifies a good woman, by exploring the story of Sita.

Sita’s Body As A Site Of “Honour” And Resistance And “Colonial Representations”

When I was about 10 years old, there were VHS tapes circulating in our small town, amongst all the Punjabi families living there. They were part of a series called Ramayana, which is an epic Hindu text that has been translated into many forms, including film, television series and theatre. Essentially it is embedded in sacred Hindu texts that tells the story of Ram, a Hindu God who is born amongst the people of Ayodhya. The story is of his life and the adventurous turns it takes, “it is a tale of love and war, abduction and pursuit and heroic battles” (Oldenburg, 2007). The other major characters in the story are his wife Sita and his brother Lakshaman. The details of the story are vast and there are many interpretations of its significance, however the key figure of this story that always stayed with me is that of Sita and the image of a woman that is created through her story.

As a child, I was drawn to Sita’s part of the story and character. In many ways she is the heroine of the epic, yet as much as she displayed strength and perseverance throughout the story, she has also been held up in history as the ultimate example of a woman who obeys her husband, maintains virtue, and is the ultimate “good” woman. To this day she is an icon of virtue and idealism. The following telling of the story lays the groundwork for how Sita has come to be this iconic woman:

Even today, Sita is held up to every girl in India as the supreme model for her to emulate. The tale, briefly told, is this. The old king Dasaratha is tricked into promising to Kaikeyi, a younger wife, that her own son Bharata shall inherit the throne instead of the legitimate heir Rama, son by the first wife Kausayla. In addition Rama is to be banished to the forest for fourteen years…the oath must be kept; a king’s word is sacred. To the overwhelming sorrow of the entire kingdom, accompanied by his wife Sita and his brother Lakshaman, both of whom refuse to leave him, Rama prepares to go into exile. During their sojourn in the jungle, the demon Ravana, king of Ceylon, parts them by a trick and carries off Sita to Lanka in Ceylon. Despite Ravana’s endless and enticing temptations, Sita does not falter for one single moment in her loyalty to Rama. [Rama], inconsolable for the loss of his cherished wife, moves heaven and earth to regain her and
after many years succeeds\textsuperscript{29}. But at the last moment doubts assail him as to Sita’s having remained faithful during the long period of imprisonment. He humiliates her publicly at the moment of the reunion; but though insulted, she retains her devotion and dignity, undergoes the fire-test of chastity, and comes out victorious (Sharma & Sharma, 2005, p. 48)

The definition of a good woman becomes quite intricately tied to sacrifice and preservation of “honour”. Sita’s story and her body are upheld as an example of what can happen when a woman is not protected by the men in her life. Abduction and possible rape become the most feared fates for a woman and her family and community. Sita’s body is held up as a sanctuary of “honour” and Rama is justified in doubting her strength and chastity in the face of her imprisonment. Sita has to prove that no other man touched her body by undergoing a fire-test and the fire becomes symbolic of sacrifice and “honour”. Sita does pass this test, however, the story does not end there.

The wider community enters the story at this stage, and after fourteen years in exile, Rama, Sita, and Lachman return to their family and community, yet Sita emerges with a protruding belly displaying her pregnancy. Once seeing and hearing about her capture and her pregnancy, Rama is enticed by his family and community to question whether Sita’s body has dishonoured him. However, this time Sita will not have any of it and leaves her husband and community, and goes into exile for the remainder of her life, bearing twin boys during this time and rearing them on her own. Towards the end of the story, Rama finds his wife and children and begs for their forgiveness, asking Sita to go through yet another fire-test upon her return to him. However Sita “defiant of cultural expectations, refuses to forgive his behaviour. Instead she wills the Earth, her mother, to crack open a fissure and disappears into it. Ram, now rejected and miserable, sheds his mortal coil and returns to the world of gods” (Oldenburg, 2007, p. 159).

When I first saw Ramayana and watched Sita’s story unfold on television, I remember feeling a mixed bag of emotions. The elements of the story that I remember my grandmother and father upholding were Sita’s devotion to her husband and her willingness to prove that she maintained his “honour”. Rama’s “honour” was the piece that was most at stake, not the fact that Sita had been imprisoned and experienced tremendous trauma for a number of years. I

\textsuperscript{29} In Chapter 4 we will come back to a retelling of Rama and Sita’s story as told by Arni & Chitrakar, (2011)
remember feeling such hidden excitement when Sita ran away and defied her husband, yet my grandmother’s reaction to this part was feelings of great sorrow for Rama and his loss of wife and children, which further confused me as to what I “should” be feeling.

The raw emotions I felt after watching this epic lingered for me, and when I began this research, it was fascinating to me how Sita’s body continues to be a metaphor and example of how women in our community are expected to be “good”. How did this notion of “honour” become so deeply associated to her body and the actions taken on her body? Sita is also an ultimate example of how women resist these notions of “good woman” and struggle through to find voice to solidify their resistance to violence perpetuated from men inside their lives. Veena Oldenburg (2007) eloquently articulates a re-writing or re-working of Sita’s story to one that is less about the “good woman” and more about a fight against heteropatriarchy and the violence embedded in notions of “honour” and their connections to our body:

Sita remains very relevant to Hindu women: of course she is the good wife, but she is not just the silent, submissive wife – women see her as strong willed, outspoken in her views against violence, ready to speak out against perceived sexual harassment (even from Lakshman), unflinching in her resistance against a demon-king even as he threatens to ravish or to kill her, and a hurt but dignified survivor even after her beloved husband abandons her…as a survivor of the inequality and violence built into a woman’s condition rather than a meek and contended wife of the ideal man (p. 171).

It is in Sita’s story that we begin to see notions of izzat or “honour” being connected to the body and the sexualized violence that threatens the izzat of a family and community. The fire test connects us back to the practices of Sati; and British colonials used scriptures such as Ramayana to sanction and legitimize acts of Sati as based in religious traditions (Narayan, 1997). Many historians and scholars, such as Uma Narayan (1997), Lata Mani (1987) and Sakuntala Narsimhan (1990) address the Western preoccupation with the Hindu practice of Sati and the colonial lens that used acts of Sati to “hide its modernity” (Narayan, 1997, p. 63)

This colonial preoccupation with Sati and Sita’s story is embedded in Western beliefs about saving Indian women from “barbaric” practices at the hands of Indian men by situating both as a practice that is central to Indian traditions. Uma Narayan’s work is probably the most extensive in revealing how this preoccupation is situated in colonial construction of Sati as a “tradition” that is practiced widely in India, and as a result the British colonialists also have been widely considered the ones to advocate for changing this tradition in the name of progress
and to save Indian women from their plight (Narayan, 1997). This very well situated discourse that British colonials created and then re-created, is one way to create divisions amongst its subjects, as well to legitimize the existence of colonization and its desire to the modernize the “barbaric native”, while also defining the practices of the West in contrast to the “other” (Narayan, 1997, p 66). As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak�⁰ (1988) so cynically articulates the colonial politics of British rule, the continuous spotlight on practices such as Sati, child marriage and women’s plight in India, and the preoccupation with Sati are all used to justify colonial rule:

The Hindu widow ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it. This is widow sacrifice (the conventional transcription of the Sanskrit word for the widow would be sati. The early colonial British transcribed it suttee). The rite was not practiced universally and was not caste or class fixed. The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men”. White women – from the nineteenth-century British Missionary Registers to Mary Daly – have not produced an alternative understanding. Against this is the Indian nativist argument, a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: “The women actually wanted to die”. (Spivak, 1988, p. 297)

These debates on Sati are important and connect us to how the body of racialized brown women quite easily becomes the site for many forms of violence, whether it is the physical violence of widow immolation or colonial violence of constructing discourses that highlight a practice that is questionable, particularly to the common folk of India�¹. The discourses surrounding Sati are profound and are many times conducted by British colonials, or Hindu nationalist voices of India who want to sanction the practice and/or vilify it in defense of religion and culture. In the context of izzat and Sita’s story, the colonial preoccupation with Sati and contemporary nationalist discourses surrounding Sati, Sita, the izzat or “honour” of a woman, each situate us back to narratives of heteropatriarchy and its intersection with modernity. Uma Narayan (1997) highlights how British colonial encounters in India have left lasting effects, particularly when examining how right thinking Hindus have engaged and discuss contemporary violence against women that signify the practice of Sati,

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�⁰Gayatri Chakroarty Spivak is an Indian literary theorist best known for her essay Can the Subaltern Speak? Her work is considered influential in post-colonial studies. She challenges colonialism by focusing on who is marginalized by dominant Western culture, specifically focusing on immigrants, working class, women, and all other positons of the subaltern.

�¹Narayan (1997), Narsimhan (1990), and Mani (1987) each speak to how Sati was a practice that was mainly used by upper class Brahmins and very rarely was it a practice of the masses, which is an important distinction, as today there are many dominant narratives that would like to suggest otherwise.
Colonial representations do not necessarily issue only from “Western” subjects. Their status as “colonial representations” is determined, rather, by their replicating problematic aspects of the representation of the “Third-World traditions” that have their historical roots in the colonial encounter (p. 69).

Sita’s body and the re-telling of her story for centuries is an example of a patriarchal discourse that is meant to keep women engaged in self-discipline and not transgressing boundaries which would be considered dishonourable to their family and community. However, as we learn from the anti-colonial work of Uma Narayan, the workings of colonization are entrenched in how we, as colonized natives, engage/disengage/re-engage with these representations throughout contemporary moments. Much as it is essential to trace izzat throughout the history of Northern India, it is essential to remain cognizant of the persistent, subtle, and invasive role colonization plays in our current understanding of religious or traditional practices that impact on women in India.

The way history is depicted in these Vedas places great importance on the body of a woman, and the representation of it as the site of “honour”. The sacrifice of a woman is exemplified as an act of spiritual power for the family and community, and in many ways we continue to see those themes playing themselves out in “honour” related violence throughout history, to the present day. As we continue on the journey of izzat, when we speak to the practice of Jauhar (to take away life, i.e. suicide) and how women were martyred during Partition of India in the name of “honour”, we see themes of izzat being spelled out more concretely and the threat of dis-”honour” leading to “honour” related violence against women.

**Historical Practice Of Jauhar And Its Connection To Izzat**

My intention in this chapter is to trace themes of izzat throughout Indain history, with a specific focus on how women have been impacted on by heteropatriarchy’s tool of izzat, as well as specifically focusing on the ways in which the izzat of a man, his family and community, becomes situated in the bodies of women. So far I have focused on tracing izzat through language and the shifts that occur in the history of the northern parts of India, changing the language of the people and their customs. Finally, we arrive at the story of Sita, who becomes the icon for what a “good woman” is supposed to be and how she is expected to hold the “honour” of her husband in her body. We also see the forms of resistance in Sita’s story,
demonstrating how women enacted a sense of agency and rebellion to these laws and expectations.

In most of the previous section the word izzat itself has not made itself known in a direct way. Mostly, I am following themes in texts that connect to how women are expected to behave, as well as how a woman’s body becomes a site for a man’s “honour” to be enacted. In this next section, we begin to see the themes of izzat becoming more solidified and defined through the actions taken upon the body of a woman, particularly in the form of violence. We will see how the woman’s sexual body is the primary focus and how others view her body, as well as what potential actions others may take on the bodies of women is the focus of “honour” or izzat. I will be focusing on the practice of Jauhar and its connection to a very recent time in Indian history, the 1947 partition of India.

**Jauhar And The Martyrs Of Partition**

In 1947, India gained independence from Britain, ending 100 years of colonial rule. This was the beginning of one of the worst communal period of violence of Indian history (Singh, 1972). It was at this time that Pakistan was created, and the people of Western and Eastern Punjab were divided by religion and caste. As a result, extensive communal bloodshed occurred, particularly on the Northern boundaries, and the people of Punjab (who were predominantly Sikh, Hindu and Muslim) lost their land, their identity to the land, their community, and their livelihood. Yet, as one reads deeper into these texts, the history of many women who were brutally raped by rival groups is missing: the history of young girls and their mothers forced to commit “martyr” suicide for the sake of family “honour” is left out; the history of the numerous women who were abandoned by their own families after being brutally raped and forced to marry the perpetrators of their assaults is silenced; and stories of the many of the children who were displaced, kidnapped or sold to brothels and landowners is absent (Butalia 1998, Menon & Bhasin, 1998).

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32 Due to the specificity and limitations of this dissertation I am unable to do justice to the role the government has played in the creation of the Partition, therefore this angle will not be explored extensively. For further information on the politics of separation, the following is a list of a few sources that speak from the dominant patriarchal perspective and the role of the government in the partitioning of India and Pakistan: (Kamra, S. 2002, Kaul, S. 2002, Sadullah, 1993, Salim, A. 2001, Singh, A. 2000).
It is important to review this marginalized history of the women and children of the partition, and the relationship this time has to the memory of izzat. This will be our entry point for this section. There are links to the “honour” violence of the partition, to a practice called Jauhar, which is defined in Platt’s *Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* as:

Taking one’s own life, committing suicide; - fighting desperately to the death: - juhar (or jauhar) karna, to kill oneself together with wife and children. (When Rajputs are attacked by an overwhelming force, they sometimes slaughter or burn their wives and children, and then sell their lives dearly on the field of battle.) (p. 399).

We will come back to unpacking the history and discourse surrounding *Jauhar* and its relationship to “honour”. Before we do that let me first speak to the “HRV” that occurred in the Sikh Punjabi communities of northern India and the nuances of izzat that are reminiscent of concepts of the practice of Jauhar.

As mentioned earlier, Partition affected everyone in one way or another. However, the manner in which women were affected was indicative of the national decisions made by colonial and dominant powers. As soon as decisions were made to separate, violence all around Punjab erupted. Within three months, a million people were left dead and at least seventy-five thousand women were raped and abandoned (Kabir, 2005, Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Often during times of war, a woman’s body becomes the battlefield and site of violence, for various reasons. A common belief held by colonizing or conquering males is that by raping and possessing a community’s women, the man is extinguishing the existence of that culture and the regeneration of that people, and the ability of a woman to regenerate her people.\(^{33}\)

Equally, during the Partition a woman’s body became the place where “Hindu, Sikh and Muslim men sought to humiliate and annihilate the “other” while imprinting their own identity on the bearer of future generations” (Kabir, 2005, p. 207). The decisions to separate created such strong divisions amongst Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs that the most effective way to hurt the “other” on a personal and communal level was through the women of each community. With the nation-building politics of partitioning the land and even the nation exemplified its “honour” through the bodies of women. As a result, women’s bodies were being mutilated, raped and

\(^{33}\) The concepts of assimilation and annihilation has been adequately expressed by the following scholars: Andrea Smith, Frantz Fanon, Toni Morrison, Albert Memi, Edward Said, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin.
converted to the other religion, by men who days before were their neighbours, community members, and peers. By doing so the “honour” of the men in each subsequent community was being attacked.

Consequently, families and communities began to resist and find ways to counter this attack on “their” women by the “other”. One way in which the men of the Sikh, Punjabi community resisted was to kill, or as it is termed in our community, “martyr” the daughters and young women of their family or community. The following narrative from Urvashi Butalia (2002), describes the decisions that led up to the martyring of hundreds of young women. This account is given by Bir Bahadur Singh who, at the time, witnessed the martyring of his sister (Maan Kaur) in the name of the family “honour” and describes the horrors of that moment:

In Gulab Singh’s haveli, twenty-six girls had been put aside. First of all my father, Sant Raja Singh, when he brought his daughter, he brought her into the courtyard to kill her; first of all he prayed, he did ardaas, saying sachche padshah, we have not allowed your sikhī to get stained, and in order to save it we are going to sacrifice our daughters, make them martyrs. Please forgive us…my sister came and sat in front of my father and I stood there, right next to him, clinging on to his kurta as children do. I was clinging to him…but when my father swung the kirpan, perhaps some doubt or fear came into his mind, or perhaps the kirpan got stuck in her duputta…no one can say. It was such a frightening, such a terrible scene. Then my sister, with her own hand, she removed her plait and pulled it forward…and my father with his own hands moved her dupatta aside and then he swung the kirpan and her head rolled off and fell…there…far away. I crept downstairs, weeping, sobbing, and all the while I could hear the regular swing and hit of kirpans. (p. 148)

In her article, Butalia explores with Bir Bahadur Singh what the decision to kill his sister meant for him and his family and discovers the women, including Maan Kaur, are remembered as martyrs rather than victims of a tragic fate. Because the women were seen to have “offered” their lives to save the “honour” of their family, community, and religion, they were crystallized into a hero status (Butalia, 2005). As Butalia questions in her article, we do not have the opportunity to hear the voices of those women who were seen as “offering” their lives in the name of “honour” openly and knowingly. Even though these women, who may have been as young as 16 years of age (as was Maan Kaur), lined up to have their heads severed, or to jump in a well, “could she [or they] really have believed that the cause of making a new nation would be better served by her death?” (Butalia, 2005, p. 160) Was this really a choice, did they really have much of a voice in this decision? Yet there is a very strong collective memory of these
women as martyrs who understood the importance of their family and community’s “honour” and “offered” themselves for the killing.

The women of the Sikh community, who were grieved as “martyrs”, have been silenced even in their death. As Judith Butler\textsuperscript{34} (2004) describes, “…if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life; it does not qualify as a life and is not worth a note. It is already the unburied, if not the unburiable.” (p.34). In the case of the women during the partition, even the grieving process has been controlled and silenced and, only in the last decade, have scholars such as Butalia, Menon and Bhasin, begun the process of uncovering the silence and presenting the layers of truth. The memory we have as a collective community is strongly embedded in a grief that is not spoken of, or one that is valorized in heroic status. A heroic death memorialized in a way that suggests that their deaths were justified and necessary for the sake of family, community and national “honour”.

Now, going back to the concept of Jauhar, we see similar discourses of “honour” and death apparent in the definition of Jauhar. However, many scholars have historically connected Jauhar and Sati, particularly because there is an emphasis on the wives dying for their husbands “honour”. However, Veena Oldenburg effectively creates a distinction between Jauhar and Sati in her article, \textit{The Continuing Invention of the Sati Tradition} (1994):

Jauhar was committed for the sake of the defense of territory (and therefore economic interests) and for the purity of royal lineage, not for the chastity and wifely devotion implied in sati. Like polygyny, jauhar was a royal or noble prerogative: queens whose husbands were slain in battle had the prerogative to opt for collective suicide…Jauhar was committed by the queens of defeated Rajput kings on a chita or pyre with the husband’s corpse nowhere in sight. Sometimes the fate of the husband was unknown to these wives; only their own capture was certain. Women’s resistance to rape, torture, and other ignominies inspired these very rare self-immolations (p.165).

Oldenburg goes on to suggest that during the Brahminical period, the practice of Jauhar and Sati reinforced each other and when British colonists began to study or exoticize the practice, these two concepts merged. Confusion and melding of the two concepts contributed to the colonial gaze on Sati, as a glorified act that takes place in great numbers by the masses of India, whereas

\textsuperscript{34} Judith Butler is a well-known gender theorist whose work has influenced how we conceptualize and theorize gender, feminism, and queer identity. She is well known for her book \textit{“Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion Identity”} (1990) which challenge normative notions of gender and gender performativity.
both practices were rarely part of the daily life of most everyday people\textsuperscript{35}. In fact, both practices mainly occurred in noble homes, generally amongst the upper class elites. Oldenburg’s arguments are compelling and give us an alternative perspective on both practices of Jauhar and Sati, yet where I disagree with Oldenburg is in her assertion that Jauhar is no longer practiced, nor has been practiced in India since the 16th century.

When I began uncovering some of the discourses in history that are connected to the concept of izzat and came across the practice of Jauhar, I immediately thought of the partition and the mass “suicide”/“murder/“martyrdom” that occurred in response to the potential rape and violence that women may experience at the hands of the “other” men. As I continued on my search for this connection, which seemed obvious to me, I was surprised to find that there was no research or papers written about the mass suicide during the partition being linked to the practice and concept of Jauhar. Yet if we look at the ideology that spawned both historical instances of Jauhar and the deaths of Sikh women during the partition, there is a relationship between both instances. The need to preserve the izzat that is located in the bodies of women, and the potential rape they may experience at the hands of the “other”, is embedded in the fear of subsequent procreation that results from rape and violence. Thakur (1962) speaks to how this mass suicide was committed to avoid the dishonour that comes from rape and sexual assaults, as well as to preserve royal blood. Furthermore, the manner in which acts of Jauhar are memorialized, is very similar to how the deaths of Sikh women have become symbols of martyrdom, which Bhugra (2004) eloquently articulates in the following statement:

A funeral pyre was lit within the great subterranean retreat in chambers impervious to the light of the day and several thousands of women committed Jauhar….the sites of these acts are worshipped even today….Suffice to say that the religious orthodoxy still pays lip service to these acts and people flock to such sites to worship and seek blessings” (p. 91-92).

Hence, the memory of these acts continues to uphold the discourse of “good women” who escaped dishonouring their family and husbands name, by preemptively killing themselves. Both Jauhar memorials and partition memorials continue the same discourse and memory of the victims of these deaths.

\textsuperscript{35} This argument has been reinforced by various feminist anti-colonial scholars such as Uma Narayan, Lata Mani and Sakuntala.
In both instances we see izzat functioning in the bodies of women for the sake of men’s power and “honour”. In both situations, we see society suggesting that women were active participants in the decisions surrounding these deaths, not once questioning whether there really was a choice in these very public and communal acts. Bhugra (2005) asks a very pertinent question in his analysis of Jauhar, “the argument here is that the family honour or impending dishonour plays a more important role than individual survival…why should a woman have to sacrifice themselves because their males’ honour depends on it?” (p. 92). Embedded in Bhugra’s inquiry is the questioning of choice and coercion. When overwhelming response from society suggests that a “good woman” is one that sacrifices her self in the name of “honour”, one begins to think of choice in a very different way. I cannot imagine how much fear, collective guilt and shame these women felt, not to mention the collective thinking that allowed for these deaths to transpire the way they did.

Yet, there are always moments of resistance, which we tend to hear less of and the ideologies that serve the purpose of perpetuating heteropatriarchy exclude the voices of women who chose to not take part in these collective “suicides” or “murders”. The most recent evidence of this resistance has been recorded post-partition. Butalia (1998) and Menon and Bhasin (1998) describe stories of women who chose not to jump into the wells, or chose to run away from their families when these killings were going on, or chose to defend themselves in the migration to the new and “independent” India, regardless of what came in their paths. The stigma they lived with or received from the community was just as difficult as the decision to walk away from the coercion placed on them from their families and community. An example of this story can be found in the movie Khamosh Pani: Silent Waters (2003) by Sabiha Sumar and Paromita Vohra. This film speaks to the martyred women during the Partition from the perspective of one Sikh Punjabi woman who resisted against the idea and ran away, rather than being killed by the men in her community. However, as a result she was abducted by a Muslim man and ended up marrying him and bearing his son, all the time keeping her true identity of being Sikh a secret from her son for fear of losing the new life she had been forced to carve for herself.

These stories began to ring a similar tone for me in the Diasporic context. Stories of women of my generation, who had the potential for dishonouring their family through the choices they were making with their own bodies, have been excommunicated from their family’s lives, almost severing them as if they did not exist. We see parallel ideas in our
community of women sacrificing their choices for the sake of their family “honour”. How is it possible that even today we are asking our daughters to martyr themselves, whether in literal or symbolic ways, for the “honour” of their family? “Leave him or else we will disown you”. “You cannot leave the home from this day forward”. “You are dishonouring our family if you pursue this decision”. These words and phrases ring true even in my own life story. Is it possible that others are hearing the same statements and if so, is this a memory of our history from the days of Jauhar to the partition of India?

When we speak about Jauhar historically, many scholars have emphasized that this practice was only apparent during times of war and the threat of pillage by the “other”. When we look at the time of partition, the same mentality was intact. Communities saw themselves at war with their neighbours, a war against religion and identity based in religion. A war brought on after decades of colonial imposition on the minds and lives of native Indians, who are told their worth are determined by what the white body had given them. Colonizers who defined and carved out divisions within villages and communities that lived amongst each other for generations. What goes through the mind of people when they are going to be potentially attacked by defined “enemies”? When I look at narratives of women and men after the Partition that speak to the martyr killings that occurred, it is evident that there was a sense of urgency and vulnerability that led to these horrific killings/suicides. When I think of how “honour” related violence is going on now, I wonder if families feel like they are at war in the Canadian context, that violence is their only option. Is there a collective memory that emerges in our community that speaks to the urgency to think of “honour” first and an individual life last, if at all?

These questions leave me with a sense of unease, and at a loss for words. This unease is very much connected to the blatant examples of women who continue to be hurt by their family and community in the name of “honour” in a similar manner to what has happened historically. This leads me to the final question of this chapter, what do we do with this knowledge? How do we make sure we do not continue to repeat history? And how is history repeating itself in contemporary violence against South Asian women in the Diaspora? These questions become the central guides to the final parts of this dissertation and the stories of my sisters allow for the unfolding of this history to be contextualized in current discourses of “HRV”. However, before we move forward to the research and stories that guide this dissertation, it is important to come
back to Canada and lay the groundwork for how the Punjabi Diaspora engages izzat, heteropatriarchy and the role racism plays in their encounters with “HRV”.

Intersecting Heteropatriarchy And Racism In The Punjabi Community

According to 2006 Canadian Census data, 1.3 million South Asians live in Canada, and it is estimated that by 2031 that number should grow to between 3.2 to 4.1 million. Historically, Punjabis have been migrating to the Canada since the 1900s and have a deep history of encountering racism, discrimination, and violence on a systemic level (Dua, 2007, Ferguson, 1975, Ralston, 1999). British Columbia, in particular, has had a coloured history of direct racism and violence against South Asian communities, from the Asian riots in 1907 to the Komagata Maru tragedy in 1914. These incidents highlight the desire for a particular immigrant body to enter into the landscape of Canada and as a result a deep seeded subconscious attitude of racism in Canada. There has been very important literature that reflects on the racism that immigrants encounter when they move to Canada with their families, which speak to encounters of racism and immigration as one of the social determinants of health (Dunn & Dyck, 2000, Harding, 2005, Nayar, 2004)

Furthermore, there has also been a significant amount of research and literature that speaks to domestic violence in immigrant households, speaking to the complexities of migrating to a new country and the psychological impact this has on the family that leads to family violence (Abouguendia & Noels, 2001, Ahmed, Riaz et al., 2004, Alaggia & Maiter, 2006, Bannerji, 2006, Maiter, 2003, McKenna & Larkin, 2002, Sharma, 2001). Much of what this research reiterates is that when racialized migrant communities immigrate to Canada they not only encounter the expected challenges of becoming accustomed to environmental changes, but they also encounter a tremendous amount of institutional racism and discrimination based on being marked bodies different from the norm or dominant white settler society. All of this contributes to what much of the literature on violence in immigrant communities suggests as anger, violence and depressive symptoms that lead individuals and families into emotional and physical distress. Family violence becomes the norm and, in many ways, heteropatriarchy becomes hyper present in the household as a way to have power and control in the private realm, which many individuals do not have in the public realm they are navigating daily.
As Himani Bannerji (2001) speaks to, in her discussion about violence against migrant women, we must take into consideration the isolation, lack of economic and social support and a sexist and racism of the host society when looking at cases of domestic violence. By intersecting racism, sexism, classism, and heteropatriarchy we begin to see the complexities of growing up in an immigrant household, particularly for second-generation women.

Heteropatriarchy operates in sustainable ways, as I have discussed throughout this chapter. Izzat has been contextualized and used as a tool of power and control through heteropatriarchy throughout the history of northern India. For the Punjabi community in Canada, izzat is remembered and sustained in their families as a way to solidify the collectivism that is threatened in the Western context. The valorizing of izzat sustains itself in a time capsule of memories and understandings as each generation of South Asians migrate to Canada and with each turn izzat takes on a particular shape in the family. Das Gupta (1997) terms this move of the immigrant generation as a “museumizing” of culture to a place and time that sustains an ideal sense of culture and values. What sustains the violence of izzat is heteropatriarchy, however what allows it to be so present in the household as a tool of power and control is the daily break down of immigrant identity, self esteem, and self concept that men and women encounter as racialized minorities in Canada (Bhuyan, 2012, Jiwani, 2006, Haque, 2012, Razack, 2008).

Looking specifically at the Punjabi community in Canada, notions of izzat are closely connected to notions of sharam when it comes to heteropatriarchy taking form in the family. Sharam essentially means shame and is closely associated with izzat to contribute to the moral and emotional self-regulation of individuals in a collective. Guilt, “honour” and shame are intimately connected. In the process of community regulation and self-regulation this marriage of guilt and shame conjure the same outcome: rendering a person powerless through the belief that their behaviour is wrong by all moral standards. I speak more specifically to how shame and guilt play a role in family encounters with izzat in chapter 6, however at this stage I want to recognize the presence of izzat and sharam in Punjabi communities and the role that racism plays in the Canadian context to force families to their most vulnerable and violent places, by breaking down an individual’s sense of their self and the level of power and control they do not have in their everyday encounters in a nation built on colonization, racism, and the logic of whiteness or white supremacy (Smith, 2006).
Having engaged in the complex way that heteropatriarchy functions as a Eurocentric ideology transnationally, and then worked my way specifically to how izzat and heteropatriarchy appear in Northern India, it is important to end on how heteropatriarchy operates specifically in the Punjabi Diaspora within Canada. Recent research has emerged in Canada that explores the Punjabi community, particularly from an anthropological level (Dusenbery, 1990, Nayar, 2004, 2012). Of particular interest is a recent report released by the Justice Institute of British Columbia, entitled *This is a man’s problem*: Strategies for Working with South Asian Male perpetrators of intimate partner violence (2011). The report interviews not only Punjabi men who have been charged with domestic violence, but also the 17 frontline practitioners that work with male perpetrators of domestic violence, including psychologists, probation officers, social workers, and police officers. The report does an excellent job of reflecting on the various complexities of domestic violence and suggests that violence is not something that is engrained in Punjabi men as dominant media frames the issue.

By interviewing men after they have received support and education regarding domestic violence, the report outlines that men recognize how patriarchy has shaped their perception of the family. My challenge to the report is that it still maintains a particular distinction between India and Canada and inadvertently perpetuates cultural racism by not exploring how heteropatriarchy and its intersection with racism manifest in the Punjabi community in British Columbia. However, for the sake of my own research particular parts of the report are important to highlight as they identify how heteropatriarchy gives power to men in the Punjabi community and the particular way it plays out for women.

For example the reports speaks about the role that extended family members play in perpetuating gender roles in the home by teaching young men at a very young age how to embed power and control in their family and then later on in their own households. Men are told to maintain control over their family by instilling fear in women and children. Many of the men in the study spoke to messages they receive early on about the importance of the household always being in control of the male members. The primary way to maintain this control is to be the dominant provider in the home and instilling fear in women and children. This is not necessarily unique to Punjabi households as we spoke about earlier, however what becomes unique for the Punjabi households is the segregation of the two-gender groups that happens at
birth. This also becomes apparent when girl children are regarded as unwanted children in the Punjabi community and male children are favoured.

There is an ever growing concern in Canada of sex selection abortion which is dominant in South Asian communities, which became headline news due to a study released by the Canadian Medical Association Journal (Ray, Henry, & Urquaia, 2012). This study found that “third child births of Indian born women were at a ratio of 136 boys to 100 girls” (Burns-Pieper, Apr. 16, 2012). There are a few ways we can deconstruct the subsequent media attention this study drew. This report speaks not only to marked racialized, immigrant bodies in Canada, but more specifically their acts of inhumanity that is evident in the act of selecting which gender is favoured in the community. The racist undertones that follow this line of thinking are problematic, important to recognize, yet we can use this same research to have a different type of conversation within South Asian communities of Canada. I may not have the time to do this work here, however what I want to highlight in this section, that there is an overwhelming problem within my community, the Punjabi community, that socializes men and women in a particular, which perpetuates segregation, isolation, and gender preferences within the family and community.

As a result, we have generations of young Punjabi men who believe they are entitled to do whatever they want in their households, while being policed, persecuted, and regulated outside their homes in dominant society by police, school officials and the legal system. We have young Punjabi women who encounter heteropatriarchy in their homes and outside their homes, and are in constant fear of encountering violence in all these spaces. This is how heteropatriarchy rears its dominant head in the Punjabi community. By recognizing the early messaging that young men and women encounter from their family, community and then in the public realm within society, we begin to see a particular picture of the struggles that both encounter in the Canadian context. However, how we can move to create change in the Punjabi community to begin the process of challenging heteropatriarchy, while witnessing and recording the encounters of racism that young second-generation Punjabi men experience, may contribute towards change and essential conversations inside our community.
Lessons Learned From Looking Back

When I was a child, I recall moments in my life where I was asked invasive questions about my body and the decisions made about my body, questions that came from other children in school who were outsiders to my family and community – particularly white children. These questions always came in the same form: “will you be getting an arranged marriage when you graduate from high school?” “Why are you not allowed to cut your hair?” “Why are you not allowed to talk to boys in public?”

The curiosity in the eyes of these children felt intrusive. Yet, I was always compelled to provide them with the “right” answers so that they did not walk away with a further distorted picture of my family, my community and our “culture”. The word culture seemed the most appropriate way of addressing these moments, however that sense of accomplishment was never achieved. I always felt that instead of clarifying their distortions I further contributed to their exotification of my brown body, and South Asian cultures and religions. In these moments, I was expected to hold all the knowledge of my people and our culture and was sought out as an expert who could play the role of the “native informant” – translating the culture for the outsider (Khan, S. 2005).

We were immigrants, racialized people who were distinctly different from the white, middle-class blue-collar norm of that particular slice of society. In those moments my people and our ways were placed on display, poked and prodded by those children, like the carcass of a dead animal that these children found in the forest during a nature walk. In order to gratify their curiosity they treated it with disregard and left it exposed to the world once they were bored with their play.

These invasive questions did not cease after childhood, in fact this very scenario played itself over and over again throughout my young adult life and even seeped into my professional life as a social worker. My native informant role was solidified. As I navigated the world of frontline social work, I was not only expected to hold insider knowledge of all South Asian communities, but was also expected to take on any cases that had South Asian people and their cultures in the story.
The implications of this role are problematic on many levels. For one, the native informant is contributing to the Western gaze and desire to save racialized women from third world cultures and religions by homogenizing the cultural tenants in which she is situated in. The impact of this homogenizing on a community and particularly on women is a “triple bind” that Shanaz Khan (2005) and Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) speak about in their work. The native is expected to inform the outsider of insider knowledge, as well as holding responsibility to her insider community to represent the culture and people in an “honourable” way, and finally the native is required to be ethical to herself. Khan (2005) articulates this bind by asking pertinent questions about this multi-layered role:

I am suspect to myself: Can I do ethical research? Others are also suspicious of me: Is she authentic enough? Will she betray us? Although the “good native” connotes a different person to each of these positions, they all want to know if I am going to be a good girl. This is the triple bind, and I risk alienating one or all each time I speak. (p. 2028)

I found myself in the midst of this “triple bind”. Finding the words to conclude this chapter is difficult for me. How do I conclude a piece of writing that is only scratching the surface of a concept that goes so deep into the history and lived experiences of women in my community? How do I confront the violence that is present historically, as well as in the current discourses of my community? Why am I doing this work?

There are key lessons that we can learn from the analysis, arguments and literature that I have gathered here. As we see in the first half of the chapter, women representing the “honour” of a household is embedded in the creation of heteropatriarchy, which is invested in creating a norm or ideal, all of which contributes to control, power and the regulation of the masses. We see a similar history when we trace themes of izzat in northern India. The shifts in society and women’s role in it are embedded in creating the ideal community/society/man through the control of a “good” wife/mother/woman. Much of the pain that women have experienced because of heteropatriarchy is connected to the image that a society imagines of itself. Much of the cost is at the expense of women’s bodies and the use of the women’s body as the site for enacting this image. Whether it is how we define beauty and bodies, or how the definitions of chastity and “honour” is defined self-sacrifice as we see in the story of Sita, or how the practice of self-immolation to save the “honour” of a family/community in desperate moments of war
and struggle. Each of these instances have shaped women historically and lingers in painful and violent ways in contemporary global society.

In the next chapter I hope to continue this conversation and write about contemporary discourses that are engaging with the concept of “honour” and violence throughout the Western world. Following this short engagement with literature, the process of conducting the research of this dissertation will be unpacked, the methodology and a map of the research journey, the stories that were shared, how they were shared, and what action emerged from theory to practice will be discussed.

Dialogue and action begin somewhere and my attempt in this dissertation is to begin a dialogue with myself, with my sisters, and most importantly with my ancestors. Throughout this chapter, I have felt the whispering breaths of my ancestors as they emerge from the pages and stories I poured myself into day after day. Many times I cried over how so many things have not changed throughout history, and how much work is yet to be done.

The analysis that I have presented in this chapter is focused on trying to unravel how Heteropatriarchy, “honour”, shame, the ideal woman, as ideologies came to be the sites of so much pain in the everyday lives of women/me/you. We are all implicated in perpetuating heteropatriarchy and in this chapter I have attempted to grasp how these ideas emerged in order to begin the healing process. I suppose the next step would be to begin creating theory in order to build what bell hooks calls “a mass based feminist struggle” that addresses the pain of heteropatriarchy and to close the gap between theory and practice.

In moments of pain, I find strength in the acts of resistance that are part of the discourse. There are historical moments of resistance, and there are everyday acts of resistance that happen in South Asian communities in the Diaspora. In order to emerge from the “triple bind” that I find myself in, I focus on the resistance and the stories of women fighting against all odds, against heteropatriarchy that is embedded in izzat, and reclaiming their body and their izzat in this discourse. I focus on my own acts of resistance and how I can play a role in bringing these stories together. Together we can emerge from this history to create our own.
Chapter 3

Part One: Literature Review On Discourses Of “Honour” Related Violence

As a mother of two children, I find myself questioning my actions on a regular basis. I am playing the role of teacher, caregiver, and disciplinarian. Many times when my 4 year old and 2 year old push the boundaries and their actions lead to a “time out”, there is a moment afterwards where I ask them to reflect on what has happened, what led up to the time out and what they would do differently. I am amazed at the times when they are able to recognize the events that led us to this disciplinary action, and other times it seems they just do not want to reflect. Resistance is one of our primary instinctual tools. Each time I am compelled to go through this reflective process with both my son and daughter, even though I know they may not “get it”. I question my motives afterwards and ask myself is this fair? Why am I asking this of them? What am I expecting?

Why do we look back? What compels us to reflect on our actions as individuals and as communities? In the previous chapter, I have asked you to come with me on a reflective journey through history. A historical analysis of izzat and “honour” has allowed us to connect themes of heteropatriarchy and power across time, while providing us with a window into how a society perceives a woman’s role in the family, community and society. History is a way to create linkages, understand power, and scrutinize the present, but most importantly history inspires us to act (Finn and Jacobsen, 2008). How we understand izzat, “honour”, and violence in contemporary discourses in Western society today shapes much of the research and literature on “honour” related violence. This chapter will begin with a look at contemporary research and literature that shape the discourses of “honour” and izzat. In the second half of this chapter I will present the methods of the research.
Contemporary Discourses Of “Honour” And Izzat In The West

Like everywhere things can go wrong…Everywhere, it seems some fathers are violent, some brothers commit incest, there are men who kill their wives and lovers on suspicion, and families and marriages can be dysfunctional and abusive. “Honor cultures” do not have a monopoly on violence against women… (Abu-Lughod, 2011, p. 34)

Lila Abu-Lughod’s cutting words remind us of how persistent and universal gender-based violence is. When gender-based violence becomes a media story, we are witnessing moments of trauma in people’s individual lives. Yet, when the examination turns to individuals who are connected to the Middle East or South Asia, the blame first and foremost is placed on culture/tradition/religion (Abu-Lughod, 2011, Narayan, 1997). Abu-Lughod’s article The Seduction of the Honor Crime (2011) brings together complex, yet pervasive discourses that have become associated with Muslim, brown women and “honour” cultures. I want to follow Abu-Lughod’s argument for a moment and talk about the “complex work the honor crime is doing in the world today” (p. 18), as I believe it is a valuable argument that lays out how current literature, discourses, and research surrounding “HRV” is structured and what the gaps suggest for action and change.

Abu-Lughod identifies five main forces that produce and maintain “honour” crime as cultural violence in order to prevent us from seeing the social and political worlds in which violence against women occurs in our everyday lives: 1) Displaying women without moral agency and autonomy when defining “honour” crimes within “honour” cultures 2) creating a fantasy and seduction of “honour” crimes for Western audiences 3) purifying liberalism so as to distract the gaze of Western audiences from violence within and to establish superiority of liberalism 4) governing honour in human rights arguments in order to give resilience and legitimacy to regulation and transnational governance and 5) situating “honour” cultures as ahistorical and ignoring the transformations of women, families and everyday social and cultural life and experience. As Abu-Lughod identifies in her article, these five forces of cultural racism provide a blueprint for why the West has “seductive” and obsessive need to focus on the cultural practices of the Middle East and the Orient. I am also brought back to Andrea Smith’s (2006) 3 pillars of white supremacy and colonialism. Similar to Abu-Lughod’s forces, Smith effectively argues how white supremacy defines the Orient in relation to the west in order to maintain the
colonial logic that women from these cultures require saving, as well as to give legitimacy for the ongoing war in the middle east.

After conducting a thorough literature review, I see how the forces that Abu-Lughod identifies above intersect with the plethora of literature on “honour” discourses. Abu-Lughod’s arguments provide a solid backbone to my review of literature and discourses that claim to be helping women’s stories of survival be heard and her analysis is essential to understanding the motivational pull much of the contemporary discourses in the West focus on when discussing “HRV”.

In the next few sections I will come back to many of Abu-Lughod’s “forces” when speaking to the major themes that emerge in current discourses of “honour”. I have situated the current literature that contributes to knowledge production on “honour” based violence into three major themes, and each theme makes particular claims about how to understand “HRV: 1) “honour” violence as embedded in deep-rooted cultural beliefs 2) “honour” violence in the Human Rights world 3) Feminist scholarship – connecting “HRV” to violence against women. I will go into each of these themes and speak to the main arguments and literature, as well as to what is missing from the literature.

The Role Of The Native Informant

Dominant discourses on “honour” crimes or “honour” killings in the West have almost entirely defined this violence as a culturally specific phenomenon from “traditional” communities of the global south; and this definition is widely disseminated as truth (See Meetoo & Mirza, 2007, Baker et al. 1999). While investigating these definitions of “honour” killings or “honour” crimes it becomes evident how globally accepted this racist discourse has become. Probably the most pervasive literature that speaks for and with this discourse is popular memoirs with “honour” themes embedded in their storylines. Examples of these types of books are Honor Lost by Norma Khouri, Burned Alive by Souad, and the most well-known and widely discussed memoirs, In the Name of “honour” by Mukhtar Mai (See Zakiuddin, A. 2007). Many journalists have taken an interest in portraying the “barbaric” traditions of the Middle East in books such as Murder in the name of “honour” by Rana Husseini and anthropologists such as Unni Wikan (2008) have focused on writing an account of the murder of Fadime, whose murder became quite publicized in the media throughout Europe. Wikan’s account has been identified as overtly
racist through its engagement with culture and violence (see Abu-Lughod, 2011, Razack, 2008). However, my interest lies specifically in two books, one that comes from the Punjabi community in Canada, *Unworthy Creature: a Punjabi daughter’s memoir of “honour”, shame and love* (2012) by Aruna Papp, and another from Britain also written by a Punjabi woman, *Shame* (2005) by Jasvinder Sanghera.

Both books, popular in dominant media and in mainstream bookstores, have been written by self-identified Punjabi women who are currently working with organizations that support young women who are escaping violence stemming from their families. Both women have subsequently been highlighted as pioneers in their communities and have received various government awards in both Canada and in the United Kingdom that recognize their courage for the work they have done in the area of “honour” related violence. It is safe to say that both of these women have benefited from the currency surrounding “honour” based violence and have used their “stories” to garner public attention and a reputation for speaking the “truth” about “honour” based violence. How mainstream institutions such as the federal government and dominant conservative media utilize the “truth”, is what Abu-Lughod (2011) calls “compulsions of liberal fantasy”. The fantastical story of pain, suffering and, violence against brown women at the hands of her families fit into a fantasy about the “other” that solidifies the values of Western audiences as liberal, free and with an abundance of choice.

Aruna Papp’s story, which is co-authored by *National Post* columnist Barbara Kay, focuses on her personal encounters with violence she experienced at the hands of her father and then later on by her husband. It is an account filled with trauma and unbelievable accounts of witnessing violence against women in the Punjabi community. At various points she suggests that this particular type of violence against women is cultural and needs to be addressed through a cultural lens. Papp states that the ideal masculinity of the male patriarch is situated in the actions of the women in the house, and goes on to describes how South Asian communities have a monopoly over patriarchy (Papp, 2012, p. 200). Furthermore, Papp states that a multiculturalists’ lens on “honour” killings and violence is fuelled by white Canadian fears of appearing racist, and ultimately keeps victims of “honour” violence from receiving the help to assimilate to Canadian values and overcome the cultural ‘brainwashing’ of which they are victims of (Papp, 2012, p. 210).
These types of accounts fit into the liberal fantasy of the other and support the repetitive claim that this “cultural” violence is distinct and specific to the South Asian community and needs to be dealt with by assimilating Canadian immigrants to the values of the West. Papp’s argument is not new and is one that is well supported by dominant media and various institutions in Canada, yet the currency that writers or “activists” like Papp gain at the expense of her family and community who are portrayed in this horrific light, is the part of this discourse that gets overlooked by mainstream audiences.

Jasvinder Sanghera’s account of her own life story is similar in many ways. In her first book, *Shame* (2007), Sanghera writes about growing up in a predominantly Punjabi immigrant community in Derby, England, and witnessing her sisters being forced into marriages at a young age; and subsequently going through the horrors of her own forced marriage. She documents her struggle with and survival of the traumas of violence, and her work to create a shelter for survivors fleeing forced marriages, which she named Kama Nirvana. There is no doubt that Sanghera’s story is intense and ripe with trauma and resilience. I was drawn to reading the book only 2 years after leaving my own family and community with similar pain and abandonment, which was dredged up when I read her account. However, Sanghera, throughout her book and in subsequent public discussions (International Symposium on Forced Marriages, June 2008) solidifies the image of the “good” immigrant who agrees with various state interventions against forced marriages in order to curb the criminality of their community. These interventions include surveillance and constant regulation of immigrant communities, which are supported through legal interventions and public policy.

Sanghera in her most recent moves was involved in supporting a Bill that would introduce a civil law that criminalizes forced marriages in the UK (Wilson, 2007). This bill not only continues the surveillance of racialized immigrant bodies, but also places women at further risk of violence and creates barriers for grassroots organizations that are working to support women in predicaments of forced marriage (Wilson, 2007). Amrit Wilson (2007) thoroughly writes to the racist and colonial underpinnings of policies that have emerged in the UK to legitimize the racist discourse of racialized immigrants from South Asia as poor, traditional communities that need civilizing from their patriarchal ways. Wilson (20070 does a great job of outlining the history of this discourse in policies that directly affect women and grassroots women’s groups in the UK and provides insight into how this intense gaze upon South Asian
bodies not only has colonial roots, but is also further legitimized by the native informant who has been embraced by the colonial system as their own:

…The current concerns of the British state: the pervasive preoccupation with terrorism; the use of women’s oppression to legitimize immigration control, policing and surveillance, as demanded by ‘national security’; and the politics of fear with its ‘hotspots’ of ‘extremism’… These aspects are highlighted by the middle-class and Muslim identity of the speaker himself. The subtext is that here is an enlightened ‘expert’ on all those ‘uncivilized others’ in the communities (Wilson, 2007, p. 26).

Both Sanghera and Papp play the role of the native informant, as a result perpetuate discourses that South Asian cultures are barbaric, and uplift Western colonial values as the bastions of freedom for women fleeing violence. These accounts incorporate little to no discussion about the role that institutions within Western Diasporic nations play in perpetuating racism in the everyday lives of families that are enveloped in violence. Nor do these stories share the nuanced and diverse ways of understanding the roots of “honour” or its connection to izzat. In fact, memoirs, and the policies and research that support these stories, define “culture” for racialized bodies as always and persistently without morality; and women are always victims of this system (Abu-Lughod, 2013).

This increased visibility of “honour” crimes continues to define brown women as having no moral agency or sense of autonomy. Abu-Lughod’s work on systems of morality within the Awlad Ali Bedouin community of Egypt (See Abu-Lughod, 1986, 1993) highlight the central role that “honour” and sexual virtue play in the social imagination of young women. “Honour” is defined as “a part of a shared and complexly lived moral code that guides behaviour” (p. 20). The complexity of these moral systems within communities that practice “honour” is not only simplified to one common denominator, but is also generalized as a universal concept that all Muslim, South Asian, or Middle Eastern people believe. In her own words, Abu-Lughod urges us to “understand that to reduce morality to male coercion relies on far too simple of a conception of either power or social and psychic life” (p. 21). Systems of morality and the role of izzat in this philosophical discussion is an essential element of this research and Lila Abu-Lughod’s work plays a fundamental role in my efforts to respect and try to place the complexity of izzat into the greater conversation about “HRV”, which I will be exploring thoroughly at a later stage in this dissertation.
Yet, what this argument introduces us to at this stage is how the lens on “honour” crimes or “honour” violence has focused almost entirely on the violent nature of this concept, without recognizing the complex relationship women have to the concept of “honour” or izzat. When we simplify something that has existed in a community for generations, we are reducing a complex idea and belief to one that is ahistorical and the implications for current and future generations are directly contributing to what WEB Dubois would term “double consciousness”. WEB Dubois’s (1989) own words describes this strange sensation of feeling like a problem in American:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness – An American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unconciled strivings; two warring ieals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 3)

As second-generation South Asian women in the West, we are racialized and sexualized constantly by western discourses that define our bodies and see us as a problem that can only be fixed through assimilation into western values. Dubois’s work engages with the feeling of being defined in racialized ways, and I recognize a similar “twoness” in second-generation South Asian women who are battling eyes that other their bodies and histories.

Indeed, there are serious implications for the identity development and fulfillment of second-generation girls in Canada if we continue to suggest we are a people with only barbaric practices and a people without history. My focus here is to further examine these implications, as well as the nuanced ways in which second-generation South Asian women are contextualizing their stories of izzat, dual patriarchies, and the racism they experience in their everyday lives. Furthermore, my focus is to fill in some missing pieces to our understanding of “honour” violence in South Asian communities of Canada.

36 WEB Dubois’s was an imminent scholar in the Black/African American community. He coined the term “double consciousness”. Dubois used this term to refer to the process that oppressed people go through to develop a critical consciousness to survive in a racist, colonial society. As eloquently summed up by Finn and Jacobsens (2008): “oppressed people must attune to the dominant rules and be vigilant in their social practice, developing a more critical and complex view of social reality, a “double consciousness” so to speak” (p. 174). This “double consciousness” is a sense of “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (Dubois, 1989, pp. 3) a daily reality that Black people encounter in their everyday lives that lead to the sense that one’s blackness is an ever present problem in the West.
“Honour” Related Violence In The World Of Human Rights Activism

If popular memoirs gain currency and individual gains and place immigrant communities at risk of being continuously watched and regulated by media and the government, the knowledge production that emerges from “experts” on “honour” violence most often perpetuating racist discourses through the lens of human rights concerns.

Recently I discovered an internet tool called the Google Ngram Viewer, which allows one to track the occurrences of a particular word on the Internet going back to 1985. When I searched for the words “honour” killings, the occurrences on the Internet began rising drastically in 1999 and have continued to rise every year since.

As may be evident so far, the rapid increase in attention towards “honour” crimes and violence has gone up in the past 15 years, much of this stemmed from human rights reporting by the United Nations. Radhika Coomaraswamy (1999) as the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women expressed deep concern for “honour” crimes being committed across the world and reported on the connection of violence against women and the regulating of female sexuality. In her 1999 report to the UN, Coomaraswamy’s strongly suggest that the practices of violence against women in families, such as “honour” killings as well as other forms of culturally induced acts of violence, are a product of cultural relativism and are condoned by state regulation in various global communities. The main focus of the report is to highlight these “cultural” practices and what is the “state responsibility to eradicate violence in the family and documents the positive development strategies to deal with harmful cultural practices developed by States in cooperation with women’s organizations” (p. 3). Indeed, Coomaraswamy’s work is one of the first to shed light on the global concern for women who have been forced to remain silent and survive terrible acts of violence in their families and communities.

Yet, as I read Coomaraswamy’s report I am struck by how repetitive her message of “culture” is in the report. Every act of violence that she has highlighted in her report is defined as “cultural practices” that are connected to the “cultural beliefs” that, in turn, are almost always violence against women in the family. Many times, she refers to the region from which these beliefs stem and generalizes them to an entire continent (For example “In some cultures in Africa, a widow is expected to continue to conceive children for her dead husband through
sexual relations with his heir, usually a male relative such as a brother-in-law” (p. 21).

Coormaraswamy’s report was disturbing to read, not only because the practices of violence against women were horrific, but because of how she frames “honour” crimes in discourses of culture. I am curious about how effectively her work has fueled the fires of culturally racist discourses in the West, that are drawn to defining all violence against women in racialized communities as stemming from “barbaric cultures”?

In her final pages, Coormaraswamy identifies “honour” crimes amongst many of the other “cultural practices” as a violation of women’s human rights and recommends that “International and donor agencies should play an intensive and activist role in helping to eradicate torture-like cultural practices that cause severe pain and suffering to the victim” (p. 33). To see “honour” related violence as primarily a human rights issue is a slippery slope on various levels. For one, reports such as this define practices of a community outside their historical and environmental context and place them on a global scale primarily for the eyes of Western societies to consume. By seeing these practices written up in a Human Rights report such as this and using a Western human rights lens to unpack what is happening “over there” and what the West’s role is in eradicating other communities’ heteropatriarchy, contributes to age old colonial practices of defining a community barbaric and in need of civilization. Second, to generalize this violence to large groups of people (such as in the above example), homogenizes the diversity of communities and renders those who are fighting against violence against women from within, mute and ineffective. Coormaraswamy is only looking at violence against women in particular cultural contexts, which is what makes the report so problematic.

These are racist discourses that have a way of engaging us through the veil of “speaking the truth” about “honour” crimes yet subconsciously stereotyping and stigmatizing particular bodies. By narrowing in on the “cultural practices” of “tribal nations” that have “backward” state policies that condone these cultural beliefs, Coormaraswamy’s words are providing valuable reasons for the West to come in and save the women of the Orient and as a result to continue the war in the Middle East (Smith, 2006).

In more recent years a lot of currency has been attached to the words “honour” crimes, and the reporting of “honour” based violence has become more prevalent. I recognize the need for this attention to be drawn to the daily realities of women experiencing family violence and I commend organizations that are witnessing these traumas first hand and gathering the stories of
survivors. Yet, as I continue to read the definitions provided to the West of “honour” based violence and the connection to culturally racist discourses that perpetuate whiteness, I am prompted to deconstruct the impact of these reports.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are both organizations that are concerned with the rights of women on a global level. Consequently, their focus is to define “honour” crimes as a culturally motivated form of violence that is situated in Middle Eastern nations. For example, Amnesty International came out with a fact sheet on “honour” killing, and although they have steered away from naming any particular culture that practices “honour” killings, they have labeled their report *Cultural Discrimination: A fact sheet on “honour” killing* without any reference to how the title is connected to the fact sheet, or to “honour” killings. In fact, the very word “cultural discrimination” is misleading because it can be read from various perspectives. A culture that discriminates? Or discrimination against a culture? Finally, the report has strategically included scenarios of women who have become victims of “honour” violence; each time there is a name that is recognizably Muslim and their Middle Eastern or South Asian country of origin is used as the main identifier.

Convicted killers often speak with defiant pride and without regret about their actions. “We do not consider this murder,” said Wafik Abu Abseh, a 22-year-old Jordanian woodcutter who committed a so-called honor killing, as his mother, brother and sisters nodded in agreement. “It was like cutting off a finger.” Abdel Rahim, a convicted killer who was released after two months, also said he had no regrets. “Honor is more precious than my own flesh and blood” (New York Times). (p. 2)

Lila Abu-Lughod (2011) asks pertinent questions as to how and why this document and ones like it are produced. She argues that reports of such caliber come from an assumed scientific objectivity and “their lists and numbers convince us that there is something out there” (p. 38). In many ways, this is the most dangerous of all systems to perpetuate and circulate racist discourses, since these statistics are generated almost yearly. The numbers that highlight “honour” crimes as being on the rise in Muslim nations are then widely quoted across the world and used to legitimize a colonial gaze on immigrant communities within the West. Yet, as Abu-Lughod (2011) notes there is no evidence or explanation given of where these “increasing” numbers are coming from and how. Hence, the incidents of “honour” killings seem to be increasing from a human rights perspective, but the empirical research to support this claim is not always evident. In fact, the UN has reported that there are over 5000 cases of “honour” killings worldwide, yet how these numbers are conjured, is not clear, and they even report that
the accuracy of these numbers cannot be verified, due to the variance in defining “honour” killings in individual communities around the world. As well, women may not be coming forward to disclose the types of violence they have experienced, and families coming forward to disclose the death of their daughters or wives is inconsequential.

In the Canadian context, Aruna Papp claims that there is an increasing rise in the number of “honour” killings in Canada; however she has not identified any empirical numbers to substantiate this claim. In various media interviews, Aruna Papp claims every year since 1990 we have been seeing a rise in honour killings and goes so far as to have a list of the names of South Asian women that she believes have been killed due to “honour”, on her website. While, I do not contest that the deaths of these South Asian women are “honour” related, the problem with Papp’s assertion and constant focus on the “unknown” numbers relates us back to her central argument, that South Asian cultures are inherently violent and, at any cost will turn to murder and violence towards women that stem from premeditated notions of “honour”. Her numbers are not necessarily about bringing attention to gender-based violence in Canada, but to support neo-liberal colonial notions of saving brown women.

By focusing on the increase of “honour” crimes in the global south, the West distracts the gaze of its audiences from violence within and effectively establishes superiority of its values and ideal. This very act of distracting dominant viewers from the violence within is the discourse of whiteness engaging in what Gabriel (1998) calls exnomination, where white people are encouraged to not think of themselves as a part of a race or ethnicity, and South Asian women are racialized through a discourse of culture and religion.

Furthermore, these numbers give legitimacy to transnational governance which is very evident in Coomaraswamy’s report where she incites a global response to eradicate particular cultural practices, without really giving a sense of how each community cultural practice will be defined and gauged as being potentially violent for women.

As we can see on a more local level, these human rights arguments give resilience and legitimacy to regulating and legitimizing surveillance. In Canada “honour” crimes have been used by politicians (usually women), as platforms to garner support from western white voters on the need to regulate brown/black/Muslim/immigrant bodies in Canada. The most current example occurred on July 9th, 2012 when the Minister for the Status of Women, Rona Ambrose, quotes a report released by the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, entitled “Culturally driven violence against women: A growing problem in Canada’s immigrant community” (July 2010) written by once again, Aruna Papp. In this report, Papp (2010) has laid out a set of recommendations for the federal government on how to address “honour” killings in “non westernized segments of the South Asian community” in Canada. These segments of the South Asian community she is referring to are those immigrants who refuse to be assimilated into the desired immigrant. Each recommendation outlines creative ways of further regulating and selecting which bodies are tolerated to come into Canada, in an effort to weed out potential “honour” killers. However, the recommendations that Minister Ambrose chose to highlight for her media conference, was embedding “honour” killings as a separate charge in the criminal code of Canada, as well all recommendations made in the report that “could better ensure newcomers understand Canadian laws and values” (Carlson, July 12, 2010). If it is not yet evident, Frontier Centre for Public Policy is a right wing think tank with a clear focus on perpetuating and sustaining whiteness in Canada. Aruna Papp is the likely native informant to use as a tool for garnering legitimacy for these culturally racist discourses that legitimate neo-liberal fantasies of saving brown women, while regulating, and criminalizing brown men who do not conform to Western ideals.

Each level of the system and institution of society is utilized in this example to appeal to Western audiences of the need to regulate “barbaric” bodies in Canada. From the individual native informant, to public policy that has so called empirical evidence of “honour” crimes, and recommendations on how to eliminate violence against brown women, to federal government support that has made a commitment to take up these recommendations, all are players in an inequitable system that is designed to appear egalitarian, while perpetuating both racism institutional violence against immigrant communities, and colonialism through white supremacy.
The above article quotes the work of Dr. Amin Mohammad who is an academic from Memorial University and is supposedly researching “honour” crimes. Dr. Mohammad has been quoted extensively by the media and government and, in his work suggests that there is a rise in “honour” crimes in Canada. His research suggests we are currently sitting at 14 murders in Canada that can be classified as “honour” killings. However, I have yet to actually read his research and the findings he has quoted or to deconstruct any of this work on “honour” based violence in the West, since nothing has been published to date. Yet, Dr. Mohammed is quoted as an expert on “honour” crimes, however not having any of his research and writing available for the public to read questions his intellectual rigour. How does he define “honour” killings? What is his methodology? And, more importantly, what theoretical understanding is he using to analyze “honour” in immigrant communities?

Dicle Kogacioglu (2004), the well-known and respected legal sociologist, argued that the very infrastructure that circulates these statistics and numbers needs to be examined and we need to shift our focus to the institutional structures, (both national and international), that perpetuate these discourses (p. 119). Furthermore, Lila Abu-Lughod reminds us of how these discourses:

Give (s) legitimacy and resilience not just to all the mechanisms of regulation, surveillance, and discipline, and punishments that Foucault and others have taught us to understand as intrinsic to modern state power but to specific forms and forums of transnational governance, whether neoliberal, humanitarian, or military, that are characteristic of the contemporary global world (p. 44).

The legitimacy and funding that many non-profit organizations have received in the past decade to examine the “rise” of “honour” killings in Canada, is strongly correlated to post 9/11 surveillance of Muslim or brown bodies and an increased funding or programs for “honour” killings. We see Rona Ambrose again in the media on April 2, 2013 announcing her support for a program for young women and girls living in “fear of “honour” killings”. In another media conference, Rona Ambrose talks about her concerns for immigrant women:

It is an emerging issue, but it’s very real, Ambrose said of “honour” violence. “It’s not just violence committed in the name of “honour”, it’s issues like female genital mutilation and early forced marriages. These are issues that affect our immigrant women’s community and we want to be there to support immigrant women as they tackle these tough issues.” (O’Donnell, 2013, April 2)
Ambrose purposely conflates all “immigrant women’s issues” with these sensationalized examples of female genital mutilation, “honour” killings and forced marriages, which allows for her constituency to see the Canadian government as the white knight with shiny money, coming to save the poor unfortunate brown women who are experiencing all these horrific acts of violence.

Interesting enough, the program she was launching was only contributing $200,000 to South Asian Women’s Centre in Edmonton, which from an organizational perspective is not enough money to sustain any program for more than a year at most. The media attention created at the expense of brown women and their “exotic” issues is not only another form of systemic violence against South Asian women that is overlooked, but is also placing agencies that serve racialized immigrant communities in a difficult position.

These organizations have to use the language of the oppressive government to receive funding, give the government the publicity that supports this racist discourse, then at the end of the day the funding only goes so far to help women. Organizations that support racialized bodies in the West are not only few and far between, but they are encouraged to work even harder for every penny that they receive by engaging in the native informant role. Eve Haque contextualizes the current situation of support services for racialized, immigrant populations in the Greater Toronto Area, and connects the lack of services to the death of Aqsa Parvez in her article *Homegrown, Muslim and other: tolerance, secularism and the limits of multiculturalism* (2010):

As the article, ‘Culture clashes tougher in 905’ noted, ‘soft services’ such as counselling for immigrant families have been slashed in the last 10 years in favour of more language training and employment oriented support for newcomers (Keung, 2007, p. A6). Furthermore, mental health and family counselling aren’t even considered to be part of settlement needs, so given the large number of newcomers settling in the suburban areas of the GTA, these deficits in service are further exacerbated for newer racialized communities. The importance of contextualizing the issue of domestic violence in relation to the uneven distribution for support services for particular communities is critical if the specific tensions and stresses that led to Aqsa’s death are to remain visible (and therefore ultimately resolvable) and not become obscured in a totalizing and monolithic cultural explanation of racialized gendered violence. (p. 89)

As Haque (2010) highlights, immigrant populations are expected to assimilate and demonstrate their acculturation to Canada through language training and employment, which is where a majority of the funding is expected to go. Any emotional support that is essential for the
survival of these families is not recognized as worthwhile spending for our federal government, unless it is election time and Ministers like Rona Ambrose are in desperate need for a photo opportunity that exemplifies her political platform.

**Feminist Scholarship – Filling The Gaps**

Over the past decade the intense gaze that has been cast on “honour” and violence has included research and writing that attempts to look at the dynamics of “honour” violence (Baker et al. 1999); the role “honour” crimes play in the legal systems in Western society (Toor, 2009, Deckha, 2009, Gill, 2009, Volpp, 2000); the very terminology of naming family violence an “honour” crime (Terman, 2010); and the role multiculturalism plays in the discourses surrounding “honour” killings in the Diaspora (Meetoo & Mirza, 2007). There is also research and writing from the Middle East and Nordic countries such as Norway, Sweden and Germany that challenges the culturally racist discourses of “honour” crimes (Baxter, 2007, Brewes, 2011, Kogacioglu, 2004, 2011, Volpp, 2011). Overall the literature is extensive and there are key scholars that have attempted to caution the world about characterizing “honour” crimes as a cultural endeavor and to focus more on how modern infrastructures and institutions contribute to framing the discourses (Abu-Lughod 2011, 2013, Kogacioglu, 2004, Razack, 2007, 2011).

In the Canadian context, “honour” violence and forced marriages gained more attention after the death of Aqsa Parvez, and more recently after the Shafia trials. The first report to be released by a non-profit organization that focuses on forced marriages was released on September 20, 2013 by the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario. This report attempts to highlight the occurrences of forced marriages in Canada and provide quantitative research to policy makers, and front line service providers, of the occurrences of forced marriages in Canada.

In the United States and Britain, some of the primary sources that began framing the discourse have emerged from activists and human rights organizations. Two collaborative books of this sort were (1) a collection edited by Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain, “Honour”**: Crimes, Paradigms, and Violence Against Women** (2005) and (2) Sharzad Mojab and Nahla Abdo’s *Violence in the name of “honour: Theoretical and Political Challenges”* (2004). Both edited books engage the topic of “honour” killings and examples of “HRV”, such as forced marriages, yet there are limits to the extent to which their analysis provides us with an
alternative framing of the issues that is outside the dominant discourses of cultural relativism and even the human rights perspective that women require saving from their patriarchal traditions.

The focus of Welchman and Hossain (2005) is set in the introduction, where they clearly state that the energy that stimulated this collection originates from investigating the violation of women’s human rights and the criminality of “honour” crimes. This book is essential in beginning the conversation, yet it leaves me asking more questions, particularly for a nuanced discussion about culture and tradition and its role in the lives of women. Furthermore, in the introduction to Mojab and Abdo’s (2005) edited collection, the authors also rely heavily on the initiatives and work that has been done by the United Nations and the European Union to counter violence against women, which after a reading of Lila Abu-Lughod’s (2011) work reminds us of the governing nature of such initiatives and the dangers of relying so heavily on such statistics and motivations.

Many of the chapters included in Mojab and Abdo’s collection are well thought out and bring us back to the structural violence embedded in institutions of Western states such as Nahla Abdo’s article “Honour” Killing, Patriarchy, and the State: Women in Israel. However, other articles still rely on distinctions between the West and Islamic societies, a binary that limits our scope of engagement to either worldview without recognizing the grey that exists in between. This dichotomous thinking can be found in Nicole Pope’s (2004, p. 101) article where she begins with a distinction that “honour” killings are a product of patriarchy, but then goes on to reflect on the ways in which this violence is also situated within cultural codes.

As I stated earlier in this dissertation, I rise upon the shoulders of feminist scholarship, such as the two examples I have offered here. However I believe it is also pertinent for research, such as this dissertation, to provide critical perspectives for us and to begin creating new theory or ways of understanding our experiences. The work of Meetoo and Mirza (2007) argue from a critical perspective that takes us further into how these discourses frame racialized immigrant women. In their paper, Meetoo and Mirza argue that immigrant women are “caught up in a collision of discourses” (p. 187), similar to the arguments that Sherene Razack makes, they argue that in a post 9/11 world Muslim women are constructed in public discourses through a everpresent element of fear and risk. Furthermore, Sherene Razack’s (2004 & 2008) work on “honour” violence and forced marriages groundbreaking alternative arguments that allow us to
theorize “HRV” from an anti-racist feminis lens, which I will discuss in depth in chapter 6. The purpose of creating and being a part of new theory in the words of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) “enables us to deal with contradictions and uncertainties. Perhaps more significantly, it gives us space to plan, strategize, to have greater control over our resistances” (p. 38).

What I have attempted to demonstrate through this literature review, is that much of the dominant research and writing that is engaging the topic of “honour” based violence has fallen into engaging with the five forces that Abu-Lughod identifies in her work. These forces encourage feminist scholarship to fall into the trap of contributing to dominant discourses that define “honour” violence as a human rights issue that the West has a responsibility to address. I make the argument that this work is embedded in cultural racism and the potential impact this has on the bodies of Muslim/brown/South Asian men and women. I also understand how addressing and talking about culture falls quickly into engaging in racism and sexism. It is clear that in a post 9/11 world we are living in, the regulation, surveillance, and suppression of Muslim bodies, both male and female, this is an industry that the most powerful in the world want to control and possess. There is no doubt the Muslim body is one that is considered the world’s most wanted right now. Finally, Andrea Smith’s (2006) work reminds us that the overall mission or aim of contemporary white supremacy is embedded in the logic of justifying Orientalist understandings of brown bodies and, in essence, contributing to the war against Muslim bodies, or any marked body that represents the Orient. We cannot escape how this pillar of white supremacy not only relies on the disappearance of Indigenous bodies, and the slavery of black bodies to maintain its power, but also uses these distinct logics in order to maintain a division between marginalized communities that are marked different from white bodies.

So what this spells out for me and, hopefully, for you, is that we are missing multiple voices in research and literature, voices that speak to the impact of these racist forces on lives or racialized Muslim South Asian bodies, as well as voices that are living the realities of violence and trauma in their everyday lives. Yet, how to engage these voices and how to engage this liminal space that negotiates the cultural racism that brown bodies experience and to name that racism, while also recognizing and addressing the violence that brown bodies are experiencing because of the patriarchs in their family/community/nation?

In this chapter, I have attempted to highlight research and literature that is challenging hegemonic structures that perpetuate culturally racist discourses of “honour” violence. This
research is challenging us to reconsider what we mean when we speak to culture and traditions and its role in violence. Which leads me to the final element of this chapter, which is a discussion on how we can move beyond the discourse of culture and tradition to actually address the diverse and layered stories of women who are living with the realities of izzat and “honour” related violence. How do we become inspired to act? How does one fill the gaps in literature and begin engaging from inside a community to talk about violence and trauma?

In the beginning of this dissertation I asked myself: how can I, a second-generation South Asian, Punjabi woman, who has intimate and difficult experiences with izzat, begin speaking to the complexities of my everyday struggle with “honour” and the violence associated with it, without having my words and my body become a representation of dominant liberal culturally racist discourses about “honour” violence? Lila Abu-Lughod asks a similar question—one that shifted my understanding and for the first time gave me strength to understand my inclinations to expand on women’s relationship to izzat that is not entirely violent and painful. She asks:

The question for me…is whether this moral system that sets the ideals for the public and private behavior of men and women, shaped as it is by the social structure of kin relations that organize descent, inheritance, economy, and political and social relations, should be understood and judged as simply one form of patriarchal oppression of women that leads to violence. Is there a way to think about the restrictions on women’s behavior other than as constraints imposed by men on their freedom? (p. 21)

Abu-Lughod’s question is getting to the core of what I have struggled with throughout this research process and in my efforts to convey the complex system and ideology of izzat.

When we first understand and examine the concept of izzat, it is first and foremost portrayed as being situated in culture and religion which, in turn, becomes a site of oppression for South Asian women and communities. If we turn the microscope to the South Asian community and deconstruct the meaning attached to izzat, we see that it has been used as a tool of violence and heteropatriarchy to control and regulate women’s bodies and sexuality. Izzat is such an effective patriarchal tool because it is embedded in systems of morality and comes from women’s own engagement with this system of morality and community engagement. It is like having continual grasp or hold over someone’s heart and squeezing it whenever necessary, yet the person will always think that the pain is coming from inside, not from an outside force. Yet, I agree with Abu-Lughod that this system of morality – izzat, is much more complex than just
heteropatriarchy and oppression over women. Izzat is about women’s own sense of power and, which we will witness through the stories of the courageous and resilient women who have generously offered their stories of izzat. Painful and difficult as these stories may be, the complexity of izzat goes beyond how current research and literature defines izzat, “honour”, and the violence associated with it.

In this final section of the chapter, I will be unraveling the methods that inform the research process and my research attempt to grapple with these pertinent questions, while remaining respectful of women’s stories of izzat, violence and survival.

**Part Two: Research Methods And Design**

*Conducting Feminist Research: Insider/Outsider Positionalities*

At the time I set out to conduct this research, I was unaware of how long, arduous, and painful the research journey would be. During the last 4 years that I have been in and out of the “field”, I have given birth to two children, moved homes twice, and moved my entire family to a new province. Needless to say, this research journey has been a transformative process (Freire, 1974). As a social worker, researcher, student, and second-generation Punjabi woman, I set out to conduct research that would honour women’s stories of survival, resistance to “honour” violence, and would contribute to changing the social conditions that South Asian women are struggling with, all while confronting racism and sexism in “honour” discourses. As far as my own position is concerned, I sit as an insider and outsider to this research. Linda Tuwahi Smith (1997) speaks to complexities of doing insider/outside research and the process of doing such research:

The critical issue with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity. At a general level insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships and the quality and richness of their data and analysis. So too do outsiders, but the major difference is that insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities (p. 137).

Throughout this process, I have been very aware of my intentions and the potential impact of my research process and design. I have recognized from the beginning that this is a political and
personal journey. As Tuhiwai-Smith mentions in the above quote, I cannot “turn off” this research at the end of the day, and the consequences of not being critically aware at all times impact on me at a very personal level. I begin this dissertation by sharing this with the reader, so they can become knowledgeable of the thought process that has gone into the research design of this dissertation.

I also recognize and reflect heavily on the process of being an insider/outsider and its impact on the women’s stories and the research process. As I outline in the first chapter, auto ethnography layers this research and writing. Auto ethnography allows for my story and experience to be a part of the research process; however, the process of writing my own story in between the women’s stories is not to prove that what I have experienced is the only way one encounters “HRV”, rather, I offer my story and the stories of my sisters as a starting point for necessary conversations in our community, in the larger community, and for changes to be made in dominant society about “HRV”. I do not shy away from the fact that I am an intimate part of this research process, and I see my role as facilitating the research process, while also contributing my own story to further inform the outcomes as the other women’s stories inform the outcomes.

I recognize myself as an insider to many of the positions of my sisters. As an insider/outsider, I cannot escape the fact that my lens on the world largely shapes how I’ve come to understand the women’s stories, and how I choose to represent them in written form. I was coming to this research as a cis-heteronormative, able-bodied woman, a PhD student with similar class status to all the women, and with a Sikh Punjabi lens on the concept of izzat, as well as a survivor of displacement from my family because of izzat or “honor”. The women’s backgrounds are different in terms of gender, religious background, sexual preference, and sometimes age, all of which connect us and also create moments of difference. Yet, I wonder if the connection within our stories and our experiences of displacement become the focus of our connection, rather then the differences becoming a source of conflict in our engagement. The process of being an insider allows me to gain access to the women’s stories through a relational engagement that emerges from the similarities we share. Yet, I was also able to gain new insights into their stories and their experiences of “HRV” from the perspective of difference, all of which emerged as I traversed the insider/outsider role throughout the interview process.
Hesse-Biber (2007) speaks to what defines research as a feminist endeavor in the following way:

Research that gets at an understanding of women’s lives and those of other oppressed groups, research that promotes social justice and social change, and research that is mindful of the researcher-researched relationship and the power and authority imbued on the researchers’ role (p. 117)

As a feminist who is actively pursuing a social justice agenda and an insider/outsider conversation, I present this research as pursuing the above goals. The focus of this research is to understand second-generation South Asian women’s experiences of “honor” violence in their family and/or community, their resistance, reclamation, and survival from patriarchy inside their family and/or community, as well as patriarchy and oppression in dominant society. The focus is on survivor-first voice stories, and this research is recognizes that in order to pursue social justice and social change, we must have conversations within our community, as well as strive towards pushing dominant society to reflect on the impact that institutions have in perpetuating racist discourses. Finally, this research hopes to facilitate understanding towards what is missing in current institutions that provide support, care, and healing to women and girls surviving violence. These women’s stories allow for these goals to be reached by using the stories as a basis for change. In this way, I am pursuing a feminist agenda. In the next section, I will reflect on how I engage with the question of hierarchy between myself as the researcher and my sisters as the researched, exploring further the power and authority that is evident in my role as the researcher.

Researcher-Researched Relationship

I have chosen to engage with this topic from a personal and political position, and as a result, there are many complexities that can arise from this position. Feminist researchers speak to the importance of critical self-reflection—a process of looking inward into the research journey, and asking oneself difficult questions about the power a researcher holds in the process of interviewing (Anderson & Jack, 1997, Fook, 2002, Hesse-Biber, 2007, Tuhiwai-Smith, 1997). I share my own story throughout this dissertation as a way of critically engaging with my role as the researcher and sharing why and how I came to conduct this research. I recognize that my lens on the world, my experience, and my community shape the direction I’ve taken in the interview process, and the questions I’ve asked my sisters. My approach to studying the stories
shapes the research process. Sandra Harding (1993) encourages researchers to recognize that the questions we ask participants are not “value free”, since the researcher controls the ontological and epistemological agenda of the research. I wanted to know the women’s stories of izzat, and the actual moment that they were displaced from their family and/or community when they disclosed their choices that transgressed the boundaries of izzat, hence the direction I took in the interview was indicative of this.

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to make my assumptions, beliefs, and feelings about izzat, “honor” violence, and the complexities of being part of second-generation South Asian identity evident as an attempt to make explicit how my knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which I am produced, “and that is grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed” (Mann & Kelley, 1997, p. 392). I also want to recognize the internal, critical reflection process I went through in order to recognize the power I hold as the researcher, and how this may hinder the way the women shared their stories. Did they feel compelled to share their story due to the fact that I engaged in reflecting on my insider status as a survivor of “HRV”? As I discuss in this chapter, my insider status provides me with access to the women, yet it was the process of engagement that I believe allowed the women’s stories to transpire the way that they did.

Our relational engagement as researcher, researched, sisters, and survivors is an integral part of the process to myself as a social worker. Martha Kuwee Kumsa (2006) describes the relational engagement between a social worker and the client as the intimate intertwining of the Self and Other, which she defines as a relational process of healing that occurs when social workers engage with clients whose stories connect to their own stories of survival. She suggests there is a reciprocal process of healing in the space between client and social worker, where the “healing of the self is intimately intertwined with the healing of the Other and whatever I do for Others is also what I do for my Self and one and the same time” (p. 87). I recognize that Kumsa’s engagement with this process is largely centered on the professional therapeutic relationship between a social worker and service user; however, I question whether conversations about maintaining objectivity for the researcher overshadows the fact that in conducting research and hearing the intimate stories of participants, researchers are not affected by the process. As feminist researchers, are we not coming to this work because of our personal connection to the issue? Do our own stories not weave into our lens, our objectives, and our
engagement with the research? Are we not always healing from our past through feminist scholarship?

The interview process was a process of healing for myself as the researcher, and I want to recognize that perhaps there were elements of healing for the women as well. I often asked the women: “was this process healing for you?” because I recognize that I was in a position of power and authority, and would never know if the women felt compelled to answer in particular ways. Each woman maintained a connection to me after the research process, and as I mention later on, some of us continued on to do action-based work after the interviews. With those who were not involved in the action, I worked with them on the process of writing their stories, giving them the space and option of being co-writers of their individual stories.

Moreover, a number of factors were taken into consideration in order to make sure each woman’s story was heard and then written with their co-creation of meaning-making in mind. In the interviewing process, I only used the interview questions as a guide, and generally only turned to it towards the end of the interview to see if there was anything I missed. Hesse-Biber (2007) describes the process of in-depth interviewing as a “conversation between co-participants than a simple question and answer session” which effectively describes the direction that I chose to take in engaging this very personal and difficult topic with my sisters. Anderson and Jack (1991) suggest other factors in engaging with the hidden feelings, stories, and facts that are situated behind the questions researchers are asking, of which include probing for feelings, not just facts, asking yourself what is not said, and being mindful of your own agenda (as referenced in Hesse-Biber, 2007). All of these points are familiar to me as a social worker who has experienced the process of interviewing in various spaces and contexts.

This research used qualitative methods that unfolded in four distinct steps. All of which inform the research process and outcomes which will be explored individually in this chapter in the following order (1) Proposal: Obtaining full board ethical review in order to conduct interviews; (2) The search: finding participants who fit the research criteria and are willing to share their stories; (3) Entering the field: interviewing participants across two cities in Canada over a span of a 4 months; (4) Chai Circles: engage in monthly focus group sessions with sisters who consent to engage in the action element of the research; (5) Content Analysis.
Proposal: Participants And Their Story Of Displacement

The first stage involved the ethical review process. My focus in this research was to speak to women who have been displaced from their families and community due to transgressing boundaries of izzat. My focus on the Punjabi second-generation, which is a very particular segment of the South Asian community, came from various observations and conclusions. These included encounters as a front line social worker, from conducting previous research in my Master’s thesis on the intergenerational impact of partition on South Asian girls and women and their encounters with white, racist society, and from my own personal story.

Prior to entering my PhD, I was working as a violence against women (VAW) counselor in Toronto, Ontario, and during this time I had numerous parents and community members seeking support on how to deal with their daughters who were challenging family/community boundaries. Many times, mothers admitted to consider sending their daughters to India/Pakistan to “focus on family rather than friends” which, from our experience in the VAW field, many times ended in a forced marriage. I also had a number of young women, who were second-generation, ask for support on how to engage their families about this same pressure they felt and the fear of what a “vacation” back home really meant.

Furthermore, after my own displacement from my family and community, I became a sort of confidant/example for anyone who was involved in a mixed race, same sex, and mixed ethnic/religious relationship. Even though I had moved away from my community, the story circulated in my new life in Toronto and my story became an example of someone who went through displacement. I was asked to write about this topic for South Asian magazines (Suhaag, 2009, Fusia, 2010, 2011) and received phone calls, emails, and requests for meetings from various friends of friends, cousins, sisters who were planning for what would happen when they told their family about these hidden worlds. I brainstormed about what could happen if these women exposed the mass distance they had taken from the boundaries that had been set for them by their family and community. Almost always, the women who chose to transgress the boundaries set up around their sexuality were asked to leave their families and communities or they themselves fled to maintain their emotional and physical safety. This displacement that occurs as a result of challenging the terms of izzat, becomes a crucial engagement point and is discussed in dominant western discourses as a choice that leads to freedom, yet from inside the
community, any woman who has left, or is asked to leave, leads a life of solitude and is many times rejected by people that she has known her entire life. This rejection is a core element of this research and was an important part of the story of izzat that I was seeking to unravel from the women who were to participate in this research.

Many of these stories were similar to the ones I had explored during my masters research. In my Masters research, I was exploring partition narratives in feminist literature, as well the intergenerational impact of the partition on young South Asian women whose parents or grandparents survived the partition. The dominant theme that continued to emerge was izzat and how the izzat of the family was wrapped up in the bodies of women and if the “other” raped a woman, the whole family was wounded. As discussed earlier, “martyr” suicides were common occurrences.

Generations later, we still see families using izzat as a tool to control the everyday decisions young women made and in these stories second-generation women identified feeling the strains of izzat in their lives and spoke to the stories of partition that were connected to their understanding of izzat and “honour”. The boundaries around a woman’s sexuality and who she shares her sexuality with, which is very much connected to this idea of virginity, are deemed sacred in a patriarchal world. This is the space from which I witnessed women’s displacement and trauma being enacted to the greatest degree. Izzat seemed to be situated in the bodies of women. When women decided to share their bodies with the “other” izzat was used a tool to regulate and control women’s bodies. Izzat lived in the behaviour of the women in the family. It is in this space that I wanted to expose izzat for all its limitations and transformations.

As mentioned earlier, in order to focus on one particular segment of the South Asian community in Canada, I focused on Punjabi second generation women. This included anyone who identified as Punjabi, and of any religious background, so the identifier is related more to language base and/or region of India from where their families migrated. Being currently situated in the Canadian context was an important identifier, as well, because it is in this context that I was engaging narratives of the “other” as they are defined in dominant media. Hence, all the women are currently living and residing in Canada yet may have been born in another Diasporic context.
It was essential that I spoke to women who were brought up in the Diaspora, as the second-generation, or has Eve Haque calls us, the “homegrown” generation. Haque (2010) argues that national anxieties about Canada’s global status as a tolerant multicultural nation are most pronounced when speaking to and about the “homegrown” generation, or second-generation. Furthermore, Haque’s work (2010, 2012) engages the “crisis of integration” narrative that predominates in Western media discourses, particularly for the “homegrown” generation. As discussed in chapter one, Muslim women’s bodies, in particular, are used to define the “other” as barbaric and uncivilized in relation to the West, and become the “limit case when the Muslims in question are second-generation or ‘homegrown’ Canadians as this throws into sharp relief the crisis of integration that lies at the heart of official state “multiculturalism within a bilingual framework” (Haque, 2010, p. 80). As a second-generation South Asian woman, I have paid particular attention to this narrative and the impact it has not only for our generation, but also for our family and community that is defined in relation to this generation. The particular nuance or engagement within this generation is evident in research and literature as is mentioned in the brief literature review on second generation South Asian women in chapter one (Along with that writing also see Boyd, 2000, Nakhaie, 2006, Rajiva & Batacharya, 2010, Reitz and Banerjee, 2007), yet there is limited research that engages voices of second-generation women who have survived “honour” related violence and speak to their stories of living in dual patriarchies within racist Western societies.

Hence, for this research I gathered stories of second-generation South Asian Punjabi women who have been displaced and/or excommunicated by their family and/or community due to the choices they have made with their sexuality and who they chose as their partners. These women identified as being impacted by izzat or “honour” and the emotional violence embedded in the displacement or excommunication that occurred by their family and/or community. The inclusion/exclusion criteria including the following:

I include women who:

- Self-identify as Punjabi, second-generation Canadian
- Are between the ages of 19 – 45 years of age;
- Have been impacted by the trauma of izzat or “honour” violence in their lives due to the sexual partners they have chosen to date;
I exclude women who:

- Have experienced the traumatic event less than 1 year prior to participating in the study.

From an ethical position I was in essence engaging with a population that is deemed vulnerable because of the risk of re-traumatization in the process of telling their stories. A full board ethical review was conducted and after two rounds I was able to obtain ethical consent (see Appendix A). In order to minimize any potential risk, the exclusion criteria was created, where women have recognized to have had some distance from the traumatic event that lead to their displacement and/or excommunication.

After 4 months in the field I came across a woman who was in a unique situation. She was in the process of deciding whether or not she was going to transgress the boundaries of izzat that were drawn around who she would marry. At the time, this sister was in the process of deciding whether or not she would accept her partner’s engagement proposal and, if so, whether she tell her parents of her decision. After speaking to her, she was interested in participating in this research and so I was brought back to the ethical board to ask for an amendment to my ethical review in order to include her in the research. As you will see in the following chapter, her story is an important part of this research and her voice demonstrates the internal impact that izzat or honour has on women before the act of disclosure happens.

**Search for Sisters**

With the intention of focusing on quality rather than quantity, I sought to recruit 7-10 women across Canada. Since I was living in Toronto and there is a relatively large South Asian, Punjabi community in the Greater Toronto Area, I focused on Ontario first. Furthermore, it was important for me to travel back to British Columbia (BC) and recruit participants from there for a number of reasons. First, the highest demographic of Punjabis live in this province and there have been a number of “honour” related violence cases that have occurred there. Second, I was born and raised in BC and have a relationship to the community and intimate knowledge of the history of immigration of the Punjabi community to BC. Finally, my initial engagement with “honour” violence began in BC and I felt a certain level of responsibility to seek out sisters who have struggled with the particular context that BC provides.
The recruitment process began with a general call out to my contacts in Toronto who would be willing to send out my invitation to their contacts (See Appendix B for flyer). I was relying on a snowballing effect to take place from here, and in essence this became the most fruitful of all recruitment methods. Further to an invitation to my contacts, I also sent out an invitation to all major university social clubs that specifically engage the South Asian community, various agencies serving South Asians, as well as women’s shelters in Toronto and Vancouver that provide support for women survivors of trauma and violence.

At the time I did not turn to social media sites, such as Facebook, to recruit participants, particularly because I was concerned with issues with confidentiality. However, it seems that after sending out my flyer to the above spaces someone put my flyer on an unknown Sikhism Facebook page and as a result I got quite a few women from the United Kingdom, as well as from California interested in the study. Unfortunately, I had to decline these participants as the research was focusing specifically on women living in the Canadian Diaspora. However, I am very intrigued to engage this topic on a more global level at a later stage.

Initially, I received quite a few inquiries into what the study was about. Then there was silence. Some women spoke about this being too difficult for them to take part in, others were suspicious of my intentions. I realized that, in my initial search, I had not identified as an “insider” to the community, or to the phenomena. My fear of what the community would say if they saw my name attached to the research shadowed my actions, perhaps subconsciously. I was afraid of going back into that tunnel of memories that came with my own displacement from the community. Feelings of being shamed, guilt, and fear all circulated in my thoughts about what would happen if people knew my story. Yet, with the help of my colleagues and my supervisor, I had to ask myself some difficult questions. If I identify myself to the women, what does that say about me as the researcher? What does the process of identifying myself in this research do for my family? What does it do for me?

I immediately recognized the political and personal impact that this research could have by including identification with izzat violence. The ethical decision to come forward as a survivor of “honour” violence forced me to confront my fears of being recognized and, ultimately, placing further shame onto my family by “outing” myself and the choices I had made to be excommunicated. Imagine this, as much as my family had displaced me for marrying outside “race”, there were many in my extended family that did not “know” of my decision. My
parents had kept up a façade that I had moved to Toronto to pursue education for career purposes, not because I was fleeing with my husband from a difficult situation that left few options. However, rumors spread very fast and as much as people continue to keep up their own pretense that they did not know the truth about my life, the reality was that almost everyone knew what was going on. My family just did not want to confront this truth. So by making this written and public message that I am a survivor of what I am coinining izzat violence, I am not only outing myself, but also my family.

After great reflection I chose to “out” myself in the call out. I recognized that my story led me to pursue this research, and I cannot run away from what brought me to this point. It was not fair to myself, or to my sisters. In some ways it is not even fair for me to enable my family to pretend that nothing happened and that their daughter has just gone away for a little while. The process of doing this demonstrated how this work is personal and political. Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1997) work on insider research echoed in my ears as I wrote down “survivor” of this phenomenon on the call out. Interesting enough I received more committed participants after this move.

After various back and forth engagements with women in Toronto, I was able to interview 4 women who identified as Punjabi, second-generation South Asian women; each had a unique story of their relationship with izzat and over the course of 4 months each of their stories of izzat transformed this research into a storytelling forum with a very political agenda and purpose.

After interviewing my sisters in Toronto, I moved towards the West coast and began my initial callout in BC. Again, I first started with all my contacts there, relying on a snowballing method of recruitment. Eventually, I researched various agencies serving South Asians in Vancouver and Surrey, which is a suburb of Vancouver, as well as some of the University clubs. In this round, I made it clear that I was a survivor and insider to the Punjabi community and received interest from 3 women, all of whom became a part of the stories of izzat in this dissertation.

The stories of the women and their experience with the phenomena of izzat was central to this research engagement, therefore, I was comfortable doing very in-depth interviews with 7 women. The objective of this narrative inquiry was to hear the women’s story in depth along a
timeline of their lives that began at childhood and ended in their current context. Each interview was conducted in a setting decided by the participant, 2 sisters chose their own home, 2 sisters chose to meet at an office at the university they were attending, 1 participant chose my home, and 2 sisters chose a public setting, such as a coffee shop and restaurant. Every single interview took 3-4 hours to complete. All of them were done in one sitting, except for 1 sister who had a time commitment during the first interview; as a result we met twice.

Even though I interviewed 7 women for this research, I have only included the stories of 5 of my sisters. After interviewing one of the women in Toronto, I realized her story was quite different from the others and that her engagement with izzat violence emerged more from her in-laws than it did from her family and community growing up. Therefore, as much as her story informs this research, I have not included her full story here.

The first sister I interviewed in Toronto, who I will name Sarswati henceforth, is also not included in the final stories that I share in this dissertation, but her story greatly influences the findings and discussion, where her quotes are used. The reasoning for omission is twofold. First, after her interview my recorder broke down and the first half of her interview was erased. As a result we both decided to do another interview, however I did not want her to go through the process of retelling her story, which was quite overwhelming for her the first time. So we carried on from where we left off in the second interview. When it came time to write her story, I asked her if she would like to co-write the piece together, since I did not have a verbatim transcript of the first interview. She was very eager to participate in this, however over the course of 6 months it became clear that this process was too heavy for her and she decided to not continue with the writing. I did not feel right including only half her story here, so we decided that her story would largely inform the research findings and contribute quotes, without her story being presented in its full form. I am grateful to both these sisters as they gave so much of their time, energy and consent to allow their story to influence this research and, the findings; and they contributed to shifting how we engage with “honour” discourses.

**Entering The Field**

Participants’ stories, inquirers’ stories, social, cultural and institutional stories, are all ongoing as narrative inquiries begin. Being in the field, that is, engaging with participants, is walking into the midst of stories (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47)
As discussed in the theoretical framework, this research is conducting a narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of second-generation Punjabi women living in Canada. Narrative inquiry methods focus on “the study of experience as story… To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study” (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). The worldview that is central to narrative inquiry is that “humans individually and socially, lead storied lives” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 45). The past is interpreted through stories and it is through stories that a person enters the world. The past is storied “in midst of living, and telling, reliving, and retelling” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, p. 20).

The “experience” in this research is South Asian women’s stories of displacement from their family and/or community because of izzat. To design research that takes a narrative inquiry focus, Clandinin (2006) and Connolly and Clandinin (2000) suggest that inquirers can imagine engaging with participants along a three dimensional narrative inquiry space, which draws on a Deweyan theory of experience (Clandinin, 2006, p. 46). This narrative inquiry space includes: “the personal and social (interaction) along one dimension; past, present and future (continuity) along a second dimension; place (situation) along a third dimension” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 46). This three–dimensional space focuses on the relational dimension between the researcher and the participant to be part of the engagement process. This space not only allows for the participants stories to be central, but it also allows for the researcher’s experiences to be a part of the story, as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the inquiry (Clandinin, 2006).

As Clandinin and Connelly have stated, the engagement between myself as the researcher, and my sisters as the participants, cannot be understated. My presence in the women’s stories at that time and space was very important part of the storytelling process and in the process of asking women about their stories and gathering information that was pertinent to their stories, I was moving in and out of this three dimensional space. The temporality of the story that the women share, that is the people, events, and ideas, and how they are sequenced over time, is central to narrative inquiry (Schram, 2006). As effectively summed up in the following statement “meaning will change as time passes” (Schram, 2006, p. 105), events in a person’s life are given meaning on a continuum and, as time passes, the meaning attached to that experience will shift (Schram, 2006). Hence, it is essential to capture the temporality of the
women’s stories through the past, present, and future contexts.

This approach focused on the story behind the common phenomena or event in each woman’s lives, which was the moment of their displacement or excommunication from their family and/or community because of the boundaries they transgressed around their sexuality. As an inquirer I focused on asking questions that allowed for the sequence of the women’s stories to emerge, as well as the characters embedded in their stories. As articulated by Schram (2006) narrative researchers ask questions aimed at connecting people’s meanings and motives to how they structure their experience” (p. 106).

Referring to the scholarly and therapeutic work of Michael White and David Epston (1990), I encouraged the women to focus on the meaning they attach to their stories and how that meaning has contributed to the resistance they have demonstrated to survive their experiences. Much of this was coming from a feminist understanding that focuses on the resistance and power that women have gained from their experiences, joined with a narrative analysis that focuses on meaning-making and a re-authoring of stories.

Re-authoring conversations is a narrative therapy concept coined by White and Epston (1990) and speaks to the process of reframing highly negative conclusions that have been created around a traumatic event in a person’s life. In the context of izzat violence, this might include the women being defined as “a bad brown girl” and a problematic identity conclusion is created to support this negative sense of self. The feelings of rejection that all the women spoke to encountering after being displaced/excommunicated/exiled from their family led them to understand their selves, as being the one to blame for their families pain and, as a result, a tremendous amount of guilt and shame is associated with their stories of rejection. Re-authoring explores this notions of self and how an individual interprets the traumatic event of their past, to look at ways of creating alternative story lines. The assumption here is that all stories have inconsistencies and that we cannot see any one telling of a person’s story as an ultimate truth (White & Epston, 1990). Therefore, White and Epston focus on helping individuals to tell their stories by separating the problems in their stories from their selves, and to identify the parts of their stories that have not been told, in essence focusing on alternative stories rather than the dominant story. There is an incredible capacity for consciousness-raising in this process in terms of how individuals make meaning of their stories. This process of meaning making greatly influenced my approach to interviewing in how each of the women told their stories.
White and Epston (1990) have used narrative approaches to engage in therapeutic work with survivors of trauma, and their work informed my own interview process. I was very conscious of the triggering potential embedded in the telling, and retelling of stories while interviewing the women. As a social worker who had training in narrative approaches to therapeutic work, my intent was to engage in these interviews gently and to sit alongside the women as they shared their story, while being conscious of how the story impacts on them emotionally. Also, I am not the women’s social worker or therapist and as a result I made it very clear in the beginning of the interview that if this process became too difficult or they felt triggered, we could stop at any point. I had a list of resources in their community that I could provide them if they needed support once the interview was complete. I also asked early on if they were currently engaged in therapeutic work and made sure their counselor was aware that they were taking part in this interview, which for 3 sisters this was the case.

In order to gather these stories, I’ve focused on in-depth, open-ended, unstructured, informal interviews using a narrative approach. In each interview, I brought along a copy of my interview questions that I had created for the ethics review (Appendix C). Each interview started with the question: “let’s start with your earliest memories of izzat or honour?”. From there, each of the women took various turns in and out of a linear timeline of their life. From early childhood to adolescence and eventually to the place where a disclosure was made, and the displacement took place. The unstructured and informal process of the interviews allowed for the women to share their stories with a minimal amount of control on my part, based on how they should answer. I employed the art of probing throughout the process in order to provide the women with support and encouragement, without pushing my own agenda (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 126). In particular, I probed by leading the respondent towards a specific question, or touched on a specific issue (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 126). I was taking the women’s lead, going with them on their journey with the overall topic in mind. At the end of each interview, I would review my questions, and it became clear that each of them were answered as they shared their life histories and no direct questions were needed. At the end of each story, I ended with the question: “if you could speak to your family and wider community about your story, what would you want to tell them?”, which was one of the direct questions that focused on the action element of the research. Witnessing this process and being a partner on their journey of telling their stories, I recognized the healing capacity of telling our lives through story. Thomas King (2003) recognizes this healing element of story in his transformative writing:
[A] story told one way could cure, that the same story told another way could injure...—They aren’t just entertainment / Don’t be fooled / They are all we have, you see / All we have to fight off / Illness and death. You don’t have anything / If you don’t have the stories (p.92).

King (2003) also cautions the readers about the injury that can occur through the process of telling a story yet, stories are all we have. It is through stories that we see our pain, but it is also through stories that we can reclaim the strength to surpass the pain through this process of reflection and re-telling our stories. Narrative methodology is a collaborative method, one that embodies telling, listening, re-telling, and re-writing stories. I believe in the context of what I intended to do with this research. Narrative methods are transformative because narrative research “seeks to create movement, to displace, to pull apart and allow for resettlement; it is research that seeks what is possible and made manifest when our taken-for-taxonomic certainties are intentionally shaken” (Rolling, 2011, p. 99).

**Chai Circles: Focus Group Meeting For Action Element.**

Finally, the last stage of this research involved action stemming from the women’s stories. In this stage, I asked the group of women from Toronto if they would like to participate in a focus group in order to use our stories as a place of engaging change in our community. The purpose of this group was to start creating consciousness and action in South Asian communities of Canada around the impact of “honour”-related violence on second-generation South Asian women’s lives. The action that this research will aim for is to stimulate conversations within South Asian communities of Canada about “honour” related violence, with the women’s stories and insights at the centre of these discussions. I was only able to start this process with the women from Toronto, as that is where I was situated and I did not have the time or funds to initiate this in BC as well.

As a group, we met over the course of a year at my home, mostly because I always had food and tea available for the women throughout the entire time we were together. Most of the time we met for 2 hours and a lot of that time involved sharing current stories of our lives, as well as our frustrations about what was happening in our current political context around that time.
I began the focus group by asking the question: if you could speak to our families, community, and to wider mainstream society about izzat what would you like to convey? From this question a dialogue occurred and ideas of how engagement can happen with the Punjabi community about “honour” related violence began to be explored. One way to do effective community conversations and speak about taboo topics, such as izzat, is to access the arts and to use creative metaphoric forms of engagement to relay a message. The use of metaphor is not only powerful in expounding a message to groups of people, but it is also a lot more accessible. We talked about various forms of arts based engagement, activism and, research in which we had each participated in. As a group we wanted some form of engagement that would allow us to engage the South Asian community, without identifying either who we are or relationship to the topic. We also struggled quite a bit with who our audience was, and what was our message was about. The struggle was connected to our inclinations each and every time to speak to dominant voices, such as the media, rather than to the communities to which our families were connected to

We brainstormed ideas of using the arts to tell our stories of “izzat” and ways of dismantling the violence that is embedded in it. A collective piece of writing emerged from this discussion. The piece is directed to our families and community about izzat and the impact of izzat oppression in our lives. This writing has been turned into a spoken word piece and recorded for the purposes of dissemination to various media sources and sites that are accessible to South Asian communities across Canada. At this stage it is premature to go into the details of how this emerged, as there are many complexities to the process and the engagement that occurred. Hence, I will be talking to this piece in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Content Analysis

Staying true to the narrative form, I will be focusing the entire next chapter on re-telling each woman’s story in a sequential form, as it was shared with me. I have spoken a lot about South Asian women, and the women of this research, now it is time to let them speak. Yet, as much as we may fool ourselves that the women are speaking to us in this research, I am essentially re-telling their stories here. As Thomas King alludes to in the above quote, the re-telling of a story may suffer some consequences. Some details are lost, changed, re-arranged, as well as identities concealed, yet the main thrust of the story remains. The thrust of their stories is
how they came to the place of being excommunicated, or displaced by their families and/or communities because of their choices about their bodies and their sexuality. Each woman’s story hits a pinnacle moment when they confront their family with a decision that alters everyone’s lives and it is from that phenomena or event that a series of events unravel and the women’s bodies become sites for “honour” or izzat violence. Eventually we come to our current context and speak to how women are surviving in a world where “honour” discourses are rampant and a brown body is a site of great interest and racist tensions.

After completing all the interviews, I went through the long and arduous process of transcribing each of them. The depth of the data was incredible; there were over 300 pages of data to work through. As a result, I finally came to the process of trying to decide how I would capture the different layers of meaning and details that were shared. In order to do this, I went through each woman’s story individually, and after reading them a few times, I noticed that each of their stories centered on distinct times in their life where izzat demonstrated itself in unique, sometimes painful ways; however, what was also evident was how the women demonstrated agency and resistance in these moments. This became my guide, the focus on the life moments, those stages in our life processes that are highlighted by distinct stories and moments.

After deciding that the use of life stages would be my guide, I utilized large flow paper to map out the stories. While listening to their stories and following what was written in the transcripts, I began to map out their stories as they occurred throughout their childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and all the way up to the distinct moment when a disclosure of the event (being the distinct moment when they encountered displacement) happened. After mapping out each individual story, I sat down and re-wrote their stories using these stages and their own words to highlight the trajectory. In order to maintain confidentiality, I changed the names and spaces, and did not include any part of their story that could easily identify them. I began each story with 20 pages; however, I began editing these down to 10-12 pages in order to maintain the reader’s attention and capacity to follow the story. What resulted was a full chapter with each woman’s story being told in a way that reflects how they shared it with me.

There are many ways I could have engaged the analysis and interpretation of the interviews. The question of interpretation and how I write up the women’s story is an important part of the process. I wanted the women’s stories to stand on their own and for their voices to lead us through the meaning that they connected to their life experiences, and how they made sense of
their struggles and strengths. Memory and how we tell our stories is a peculiar process to unpack. There are various tellings of any person’s story and essentially many have argued that to present a narrative based on the participants interpretation alone arouses tensions that cut into the responsibility of researchers to the content and structure of any writing (Borland, 1991) I am drawn to Amita Handa’s work in my process of interpreting the stories of the young second generation South Asian women she interviewed for her own dissertation. Handa (1997) describes the thought process she went through in deciding how to include the women’s interpretations of their narratives, while balancing the responsibility to the objectives of her research project.

There seems to be no easy ways out of this dilemma. Rather than using young women’s words as accounts of their dilemma, I have attempted to negotiate around this dilemma by seeing their words, as Davies suggests, as threads to discursive categories that organize their lives. I use their experience or perspective or “feelings” about an issue or event as a trail, if you will, to discovering these categories. In this respect I treat the experiences of young South Asian women as a reality, partial, but nonetheless important and insightful; as a tool to explore and deconstruct the ideologies that inform, organize and are informed by their experience (p. 110)

In a similar ways I believe in using this space to allow for each woman’s story to sit on its own, without my interpretation entering into the conversation, placing each story in the context in which it was shared and allowing the story to flow from a beginning to an end. Yet in holding tight to the responsibility I have to the overall project, in chapter 6 and 7 I engage with the major findings that emerge from these stories and use the women’s words so that we are taking away learnings that can be applied to change in our society, within the Punjabi community and in dominant society.

The Narrative: Introduction To My Sisters And Their Stories

There’s a story I know. It’s about the earth and how it floats in space on the back of a turtle. I’ve heard this story many times, and each time someone tells the story, it changes. Sometimes the change is simply in the voice of the storyteller. Sometimes the change is in the details. Sometimes in the order of events. Other times it’s the dialogue or the response of the audience. But in all the tellings of all the tellers, the world never leaves the turtle’s back. And the turtle never swims away (Thomas King, 2003, p. 1)

Over the course of these three chapters, I have alluded to the women who have generously shared their stories of izzat. I have spoken to the ways in which women’s bodies are sites for various discourses to be battled on, discussed, analyzed and, scrutinized in Western society. In
particular, the Muslim woman’s body, or any South Asian woman that appears to be related to Islam, is positioned as a symbol of her religion, which is “barbaric”, “inherently violent”, and in direct opposition to Western ideals and values. Hence, a woman who is embedded in discourses of “honour” needs to be saved from her family, community, religion, and culture, while serving the purposes of maintaining whiteness and the veil of neo liberal feminism in Western society. I spend a lot of time in this research being angry about these discourses and reaching out to you as the reader to sit with this anger and the complexities of being a subject of racist, colonial, Islamaphobic, sexist sentiments. I ask you to engage in the arguments that I have strung together about the multiple meanings of izzat. My intentions are clear. I want you to come to this place with your mind and your spirit engaged and hungry for the stories of women survivors. I have told you why, now it is time for us all to listen.

The following chapter is arranged with my voice as the central narrator. I highlight the story of each woman individually and will recount the stories of izzat by beginning with childhood memories, working up to moments in young adulthood, to finally engaging in the event or phenomena of “coming out” to their parents and community, the aftermath of this event and then finally to the present time.

As expected, all the women’s names have been changed to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality. All revealing details have also been changed or rearranged as well, and if need be information has been taken out so that the women’s identity cannot be traced. This is an essential reassurance for each of the women, as many of them are still struggling with their families and working towards reuniting with some family and community that had excommunicated them.

Finally, I sat with each of these women for up to 4 hours at a time. As you can imagine these interviews were long and quite detailed. I do not have the time and space to recount every detail of our conversation together. I have worked hard to respect each woman’s story and to share the pieces that I believe is the core of their story. After completing each story I sent it to the each woman and if there were pieces that I misunderstood or misinterpreted. Initially, most of my sisters wanted to take part in writing these pieces collaboratively. However, in reality none of them were able to participate in this endeavor. I imagine it was difficult to receive their life stories as a whole and to sit back and edit them. At the end of the day each of my sisters
gave me permission to write them as I had. These stories were difficult to write and I hope they have captured the women’s lives and engage the reader’s hearts as they did mine.

Finally, I want to make it clear that I will only be telling stories in the next chapter and any analysis or connection to the bigger systemic pieces that inform further theory and understanding of “honour” discourses will be done in the final chapters of this dissertation. So sit back, grab some chai or whatever substitutes you would like, and open you heart and soul to our stories.
Chapter 4

Sister Sita As Our Guiding Light

You may remember the story of Sita\(^\text{38}\). Sita’s body and story has been used as a trope for many patriarchal notions of a good woman, a good wife, perhaps even how not to be a bad woman. Sita’s story and the story of Rama, her husband, has been told to countless children, sang out by women and men all across the Indian subcontinent at various times of the year. Sita is a name that sits on the lips of many people so readily that she is bitten and suckled like a swollen nervous lip. I seek out Sita’s story here and apologize to her for “using” her story once more, yet I want to clarify how I choose to utter her name. For me, Sita is an ultimate symbol of resistance. She was one of the first stories that I heard, retold to myself, and read through the layers of social construction to emerge with a sense that this woman was a symbol of resistance and bodily transgressions, not a woman of virtue or a symbol of izzat. Sita’s story has been retold by authors Samhita Arni and Moyna Chitrakar in *Sita’s Ramayana* (2011), a graphic novel depicting a retelling of the Ramayana from the perspective of Sita. It is a visual wonder and a telling of Sita’s story that connected to my own re-telling of her story. I use their text to invoke the story of Sita and a re-telling of Ramayana from a feminist perspective.

Following the trajectory of Sita’s story there were clear themes of pain, survival and a sense of her empathy for the world around her. Regardless of how terribly she was tested and treated, Sita seemed to persevere and reclaim a sense of strength for herself. After she was abducted by Ravan and held captive in his kingdom, Sita had faith that her love for her husband would somehow prevail and that he would save her, as she would have done for him. Not only did she believe this, but she also received messages from Rama’s messenger, Hanuman, who secretly came to visit her and give her hope. The war that transpired as a result of her captivity was difficult for Sita to bear. The death of so many because of the greed of two men, her captor and her husband, seemed oppressive. It was only afterwards that Sita came to realize that Rama was not coming to save his wife; he was in fact rescuing his “honour”. The following passage

\(^{38}\) Please refer back to pg. 103
from Arni and Chitrakar (2011) depicts the moment Sita discovers this harsh truth. The scene is set when Sita is finally freed from her jail in Ravan’s home, however the moment does not happen as she had dreamed about over and over again. In her imagination, the first person she would see after her release is her husband who would personally come and free her. Yet it is Hanuman, Rama’s trusty advisor and confidant. When Sita finally sees Rama for the first time it is not how she expects the reunion to go:

Rama didn’t look at me. He was aloof and distant. When he finally spoke he spoke in anger. “Sita you are free. I have freed you. You can do whatever you want. Go wherever you want.” What did he mean? I was stunned. “Ravana must have touched you.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I told Rama that I was pure. That Ravan had never touched me. That – and I was forced to say this – he was honourable. But Rama didn’t speak to me. And that is when I became angry. Then why did you fight this war? If you had told Hanuman to tell me that you weren’t coming I would have killed myself. He then told me he hadn’t fought the war for me. He had fought the war to redeem his honour. His honour had exacted a bloody price….Tara and Mandoori are widows, and so are the women of Lanka. Their children and the children of Lanka are orphans. The battlefield is drenched with blood and corpses. Rama was silent (p. 115)

What transpires after this is the infamous scene where Sita immerses herself in a pyre of fire. In the traditional telling, this is the moment when Sita proves that she was pure however, in the retelling written by Arni and Chitrakar (2011), Sita was defeated by everything she had encountered and immersed herself in the fire to be free of all the violence of “honour” that Rama had just demonstrated. But the fires refused to touch her because, in the words of Agni the fire god, “Sita’s purity makes her burn more fiercely than any fire. I cannot bear her heat. Take her and do not doubt her” (p. 122).

Yet this was not the end of Rama’s doubt. As we know Rama’s “honour” is tested again when he returns to his community and they hear of the epic tale and battle to free Sita. Gossip circulates and no one can believe that the child Sita is carrying is actually Rama’s. So yet again Rama doubts his wife and banishes her from her family, community and life with him. Sita goes through a final process of grief and loss, and reclaims a life for her and her twin boys in the forest. This is where she meets the sage Valmiki, who writes of her tale and captures Sita’s version of the story. Arni and Chitrakar (2011) use the Valmiki text as their primary source for the re-authoring Sita’s Ramayana.

In Sita’s final days in the mortal world, her children eventually confront Rama. He continues to beg forgiveness from Sita and she confronts her husband’s doubts, makes peace
with her life and leaves forever. The following passage eloquently defines the moment when Sita refuses to have her body used for Rama’s sense of “honour” again, and makes a choice to leave this earth without giving him the satisfaction of rejecting her again”

Rama tried to persuade Sita to return to Ayodhya as his queen. The princes need their mother, and the palace waits for its queen. I do not wish to be queen. I have been doubted once, twice, and I do not care to be doubted again. As Sita spoke, lightning rent the sky and thunders shook the palace walls. The ground cracked. From the split in the earth, Agni, the fire god appeared, to convey Sita to where she wished to go – deep into the earth’s belly, abode of her mother the Earth goddess…She disappeared, and was never seen again (p. 145).

I use Sita’s story again to introduce this chapter, because I found interesting parallels in her life story with the themes that emerge in the stories of my sisters in this research. It is through the retelling of Sita’s story that we can connect to themes of resistance, staying committed to our beliefs, surviving in difficult moments of grief and loss, and finally coming through the process with a sense of reclamation and connection.

In the following two chapters, each of the women that participated in this research has told her story during in-depth interviews over the course of many hours. I have carefully retold the stories and thematically organized the trajectory of their stories in themes, inspired largely by the common trajectory that all of the women demonstrated, and in retrospect paralleling the trajectory of Sita’s story that I just shared.

These themes begin with (1) childhood, early moments where lessons of izzat are passed down, as well as a story of difficult moments where the women’s families are traversing racism outside their homes, and trauma inside the homes. During these years, many of the women experience personal trauma that carries on to haunt them in their adult years, and notions of izzat being situated in their bodies are solidified.

We move to adult years when the women speak to the process of (2) maneuvering through izzat and the boundaries that are placed around their bodies. For each of them the story is distinctly different, yet they all lead up to a moment before a disclosure is made to their families and community about their decision to go against the ultimate boundary set by their families. This (3) impossible choice is placed on their shoulders and for some there is an excommunication from one of the many worlds that these women cherished or were intimately connected to. The exile leads the women on their own path and it is from this path that they go
through (4) grief, loss and finally a place of reclamation where they come to a place of recovery or peace from the trauma that transpired with their family and/or community, and many times to a reconnection to themselves that involves a reclaiming of izzat, through a resistance to the violence and heteropatriarchy of izzat. This reclamation and reconnection continues with other relationships in their lives, and each of the women’s mothers play an integral role in the reclamation process.

I ask Sita to be our sister and guide us through the difficult task of telling our stories. Sita was considered a goddess or deity after her death, and a reincarnation of another Devi or goddess. In line with this theme I have given pseudonyms to all the women, however their names are all Devis from Indian mythology. I recognize that none of the women identify strongly with the Hindu religion, however the use of Devi’s here is more in recognition of the strength and prominence these Devis represent and to shift the narrative that the women you will be reading about are victims, and even survivors, but that they are full of power or Shakti. They are true warriors in a battle against heteropatriarchy exercised through izzat on their bodies. Their Shakti is embedded in the names. In the remainder of this chapter, I will be focusing on one story in particular, which is distinct from the other women’s stories in the way it was shared, how I am retelling it here, and its significance to this research. After this first story the remaining four women’s stories will be shared in chapter 5. We begin with the story of Mahavidya, who is the only story that does not follow the thematic trajectory I have drawn for you above.

The Death Of A Daughter: Contemplating Disclosure.

When I was growing up there were a few women in our community we were forbidden to speak of. We were hushed when mentioning their names. We were told that they had gone far away because their father’s had “disowned” them. As a young girl, disowned was this word that I knew and feared. The very thought of being pushed out of our parents’ home seemed so vicious, yet so possible, hence the concept was like a reoccurring nightmare waiting for its next victim. Auntie N’s daughter eventually came back into her parents’ lives, however Uncle M’s daughter was never to be seen, even at her father’s funeral. The thought of it made me cry and I wanted so badly to understand what led to that much resentment and pain. How did this happen? How could Uncle M brush his daughter away so vehemently? What was it like for his daughter to
make a decision that would sever her relationship with her father forever? Did she know these would be the consequences? What is her story? These are questions I know I will probably never get answered; in the eyes of people in our community she was the walking dead. Somewhere in the world she exists but not in the minds of her family or community.

When I was working with my sisters for this research, I had the fortune to meet an incredible woman who was going through the process of contemplating difficult decisions about her life, her relationship to her partner, and her future “existence” in her family. After I met her and she shared her contemplations I saw the furrowed eyebrows, the hunched shoulders, and the far off look that I know I saw in the mirror every day when I was contemplating what to tell my family. I saw in her the process of contemplating the possibilities of what can happen after a disclosure like this is made to your family, who are not expecting to have to deal with the next big trauma in their lives.

I asked her if she would like to talk about her experience and thought process and share the complexities of her daily contemplations for this research. She agreed so generously, and after a bit of a process with Research Ethics Board, we began a conversation. I want to share this conversation first, however to do that I have pieced together her words so that she is speaking directly to you, with my voice coming in and out to speak to the wider context of her story. Her words sit together on the page in an organized chaotic manner, weaving together the thought process that one goes through when making a decision that could affect so many lives. The organized chaos is what is so unique about this particular narrative and the journey she was on the verge of making. However, in order to provide some context to her story I have provided some of my own analysis or thoughts to her thought process in the headings before going into her own words.

Having the opportunity to share what occurs for a woman in the process of deciding how to disclose a part of their lives that they have held so tight, was a true gift in this research process. Presenting this story first allows for the readers to get a sense of the steps leading up to a disclosure, or the coming out process for young South Asian women. I use the terms “coming out” in reference to the process of sharing our compartmentalized worlds that have been separated from our families. You will hear reference to these “worlds” at various stages of each of the women’s stories, it is these secret worlds that allow women to transverse izzat and
heteropatriarchy, yet it is in the disclosure of these worlds that izzat becomes the tool to enact power and control over their bodies.

**Mahavidya**

*I think I’m a little bit afraid of how I communicate in this interview, not because of any confidentiality or anything like that, it’s more about if I can accurately represent the issue, actually represent some of the things in my relationship with my partner and even with my family, so those things are never figured out in our minds, and it feels like however long we spend on this I don’t think I can put it out there. So that’s my one inhibition right now for speaking out.*

**Family Story:** Mahavidya came to Canada when she was very young and went through a process of adjusting to a new country that was drastically different from her everyday life in Pakistan. She experienced a great deal of racism and oppression from various sites growing up as a teenager, including incidents of bullying in school, which she felt she could never disclose to her parents. Mahavidya talks about her father being the primary source of knowledge for her and her family, as he had lived here for many years before sponsoring his family to Canada. He held a great degree of power as not only the father/patriarch of the family, but also as the only member of the family who knew how to maneuver the various systems in this new country. Mahavidya’s family story is embedded in a migration story, a story of experiencing racism and discrimination, as well as the beginnings of compartmentalizing parts of her life in order to survive. This is a theme that sets the groundwork for her survival in her home as well as in public spaces. The boundaries are set in these early parts of a young woman’s life and it is through these experiences that women find ways to work around the boundaries set for them.

... It’s like the immigrant family experience where dad used to go away...the kind of stories that make you appreciate the struggle that your parents have gone through for you to be who you are right now and be where you are right now... My dad became an especially authority figure because he wasn’t really there in my childhood, he was a certain presence in my life...yeah we were just learning from him how things work here. And not wanting to displease him...these moments politicize me but at the same time they distance me from my family.
When we came here my dad was adamant to preserve a certain house environment, which was nearly identical to what we had there. This was his way of trying to keep us all sane and on the same page and have his values filter down to us, or the cultural values expressed within us. But what he forgets is that we are going between different spaces and when I go outside it’s what I experience and what I encounter is very different from what my sister encounters and experiences, and that is what we bring back. So for me when I experienced the bullying and all that, that really changes you and you learn what resistance means through those moments.

Relationships: In the following excerpts Mahavidya speaks to distinct moments she has with her father and her mother, which demonstrate to her what boundaries she can and cannot cross. These conversations are important indicators for how she can broach future disclosures about her life and particularly her choice with marriage. They also are the stories that she contemplates when she imagines not being a part of her family’s life again. There is a history of displacement and excommunication in Mahavidya’s family and she speaks about the lessons she has learned from her sister and brothers. Mahavidya also reflects on the gender dynamics that play out in her family and how her role in the home has always been one to challenge these disparities between the girls and boys. This part of our discussion demonstrates the complexities of family, how we need to remember that women who are dealing with heteropatriarchy inside their homes are also dealing with layers of love, connection, and commitment, which shadow any decision they make for themselves.

I don’t have a very great relationship with my dad, I wonder what it would mean for us to...no, for me to actually go up to him and talk to him about my life, for him to know who I am, and for us to actually have a normal conversation. I tried doing that and it lead to nothing. He was talking to me about how I needed to change certain things about what time I come home, what I’m involved in, but in a very forceful and aggressive way. What I’m doing it’s not very different from what my brothers do the only difference is I’m actually not out at parties every night. That disparity between the boys and the girls in the family is a huge contentious point between us and between me and my mom too, because they don’t recognize it, they’re adamant about not acknowledging that there are those disparities.

So what he said, I said Ma badal nay sakadi, je menu laga re hai ma buri cheez kard hai, ma apna ap nu badaldi, phar menu nay lagada ma har koi karab kar rai hai (I cannot...
change, if I think I am doing something wrong then I would change, but I don’t think I’m doing anything wrong). So my dad says “unless you change” and he said this in a very serious way, and he might deny it, but he said “I’m going to basically tie up your hands behind your back and just get you married the next day”. And that’s when I realized there’s no point in talking to this man right now, that’s what it felt like in my mind there was this man talking to me right now, not my father because he really distanced himself from me in that moment...

Mom takes my dad’s side on these things. It’s strange because there are times when I’ve seen her broken by things he’s said and her talk about things like heteropatriarchy in a way that makes most sense to me more than anything I’ve read. But the way that you sometimes have to accept it is to not think of it as an unjust thing... you normalize it to yourself. My mom I think does that a lot and I think she really has internalized it....

Right now my sister her Rishta (marriage) proposals are all coming in and she was originally engaged to someone from Pakistan, but after finding out that my brother had married a person outside of the religion...(So when my brother converted to that religion for my sister-in-law, he was kicked out of my family by my dad. So there has been a family history of some of these things...) When my dad kicked him out, despite us wanting to have relationship with him we were told not to.... My dad was extremely hurt through this process. His hurt determined what the family would do...after he had a son he was integrated back into the family. So when the Rishta (marriage) broke my sister had to make the decision whether she was going to let go of her brother from her life. That’s kind of the position that the guy and his family put her in...So she made the decision to let the guy go.

My family has given me a lot, not just materially, actually they’ve shaped me in a good way, when I think of my politics I can trace them down to my mom...not explicitly, but when she talks about her struggles with the in-laws, how she would deal with izzat and all that stuff. I’m like no mom you are one of those people that I draw these things from, I learn from.

Love in a time of Izzat: Embedded amongst all of these complexities are the relationships with the person who Mahavidya knows her family would excommunicate her for marrying. The emergence of these relationships in itself is beautiful as is any loving relationship, but also tragic in a sense that Mahavidya is clouded by the burden of her family’s izzat. Building relationships is hard enough in the best of circumstances, however to do so knowing that ultimately if she
continues with this relationship Mahavidya will lose her family. She speaks to the impact of this on herself, and her partner and on their connection. Mahavidya’s story unpacks how the compartmentalizing of this relationship leads to aggressive anxiety on the part of the women and a sense of paranoia that seeps into the intimate relationship as well.

_There’s an expectation that now my sister is going through it (arranged marriage) and next it’s going to be me going through it, so I want to disrupt that continuity that they are envisioning.... I think my mom thinks this is something that she can kind of get me to agree on, which makes me slightly more aggressive in the way that I bring it up next time... she’s seen me cry about it at home.... Then at one point she asked me theray hore koi banda ya thera zindagi ma? (Do you have another man in your life?)_ 

_There’s always that doubt, because you know these things always get out one way or another, no matter how much you try to control that. I wonder what does everyone think and sometimes I’m just like, ok I left my cell phone at home what does that mean. I go home okay is everybody talking to me ok? I look at my sister...you’re just doing these tests; actually the paranoia was a lot more in the beginning. You think are you just obsessing over it, but I think these are very real things and the consequences are very real._ 

_The worst thing that can happen in our relationship is if we are forced to marry at a time that you are not ready...because of that I have to be hyper careful about what gets out in my family and what they find out._ 

_The struggle is often one sided. For example at one point I remember my boyfriend saying...I feel like every time we meet we talk about this. This religious difference what it would mean for your family and what it would mean for my family is very different...it’s not just having to worry about izzat between me and my family, even in our relationship...he doesn’t carry as much boage (burden) from his family, right..._

**The Plan:** There comes a point when the only step she can make is to create a plan. Like making endless “to do” lists, the obsessive nature of this act becomes your only lifeline to a semblance of stability. Mahavidya is at this stage where she is not entirely ready to make the disclosure to her family about her relationship and the choices she knows will create great turmoil in her family’s life. So she makes plans, lists, looks over the plan, changes it here and
there, then goes back to planning. Knowing all along that this plan could ultimately lead to a death of her father’s daughter.

There is a weird plan and I know there’s going to be lots of problems with this but something to just keep me going... is once my sister gets married...So then it’s going to be me...and when they come over to me, one thing I will have to do is say I’m not interested in marrying...like the thing with izzat is there’s worse things than marrying someone they don’t like, worse is having the daughter never married at all...if you can get them to see the possibility that this will happen. And it will happen if I make the decision not to marry him I think I will not want to marry, so it won’t be a lie; it will be a very real possibility. And I think around the age of 28, 29, when I think I’m ready and both of us are in a position that it’s a good time, then it’s something I will bring up with my family. And at that point they’re freaked out and she’s going to end up living her life by herself, so maybe this is something that they’d be more like willing to allow it to happen, or not excommunicate me for doing it.

No matter how much I try to think about it, I know there’s a lot I’m leaving out and a lot I’m just not going to be able to capture in my decision, right. But, I think it will be very difficult if I were to decide to just let him go. Sometimes I think there will be bitterness and resentment towards my family, sometimes I think that I’ll be able to understand them, but in any case my family life will be changed, whatever decision I make... I think the point is for me to get to a stage where I’m not going to regret the decision that I make. I think pain will be there. But if you think this is pain you can bear it because the decision that you made was not galt (wrong)... You can go through it....

Imagining the aftermath: The most difficult part of the plan is envisioning what life will look like after the disclosure happens. Even though there is a moment of relief that some of the little worlds you have created have been opened up and you are allowing your family to see a part of you, that moment does not sustain you for very long. The most difficult part that the women share about transgressing boundaries that they know will lead to excommunication is the possibility of loss and rejection. Mahavidya captures the pain of this when she speaks to the doubt she has of her mother excommunicating her from her life.

So if the worse case scenario that I’m imagining is my family just never speaks to me again, my mom especially. I think I’ll just be removed from the most important world that I’ve
inhabited so far... But there’s a lot of fear associated with that and I wonder if my dad would actually physically exercise any kind of control through this. In a weird way it’s like okay bring it on, but also it would be like, yeah you convinced me, if there was any doubt in my mind now it’s gone.

My mom I think I would try, I would try again and again to connect with her even if she tells me like...you know. And there’s going to be a lot of pain with that...I see her crying about certain things that happen and you just cannot help but cry with her because you’re so affected by it, you’re like an extension of your mother... I do hope my siblings; some of my siblings do stay in touch. I wonder if my mom will actually give up on me?

I – did your mom stay in contact with your brother when your father disowned your brother?

MAHAVIDYA – yeah more than some of us, she couldn’t let him go, but I think again that’s my brother. I can’t trust her to do it with me, right. I think she’ll feel more of a betrayal if it’s a daughter.

I – has she ever talked about that, about what decisions you make that she’s not willing to accept.

MAHAVIDYA – yeah, basically she has said do not force us into a position, do not...she’s afraid of who this person is...and what I might do, so she’s always giving warnings in a way. Like je me thera prava na keetha thu amay nay khar saka dem (Just because I accepted your brothers doesn’t mean you can do what you want). So she’s doing her groundwork.

I think it’s a bit of a insecurity you have within the family but one that you don’t think is unjustified, but also one you wouldn’t let get in the way of you coming to their support...I have them with my right now I just want to do everything I can.

You know you don’t want to be playing some type of game with your family. What does it mean to be strategizing, it just feels shitty, it feels absolutely shitty, you can begin to dislike yourself for this kind of, not manipulation but definitely like a strategic way of dealing with relationships... So in those few years that I have, how do I also just prove to my family that I am somebody they can trust to make a decision on my own. There’s no naiveté in my mind that oh yeah in these three years I can change their mind. But there is a hope...
**Izzat:** Overarching all of our stories of displacement and the possibilities of being dead to our families is this notion of izzat. We are told that it is the loss of izzat that leads our families to make these decisions, but because we have had our own relationship to izzat for so long, coming to terms with this decision is difficult. Izzat is a part of our identity, so when it is turned against us, there is uncertainty in how to reclaim it. How to love it again? How do we focus on the meaning of izzat in moments when it becomes a tool of power and control over our bodies? Mahavidya shares some of her thoughts on izzat and her personal relationship with it, sharing the complex nature in which she negotiates izzat’s role in her life inside and outside her home.

At the present moment questions of izzat on my mind are more about my political life...you can somehow let go of your love life, you can justify to yourself that this is a selfish thing of you to force on your family, but something like your politics... this is not something I can remove from myself. So I try to get them to accept that side of myself by purposely telling my mom, yes I’m going to a protest. Just to familiarize her with that aspect of my life so that over time it will get easier, right.

Izzat and all these things, I’m totally conscious of it when I’m outside but I reject it when I’m at home. For example even with this chunni (long scarf placed loosely on the head), there’s a conflict with religion and culture in my family. Religion says you would wear the hijab (head scarf wrapped tightly around the face), culture says okay you can wear the chunni and this is what I would wear back home in Pakistan. In Pakistan you have like a cultural Islam being practiced, here it’s more like the Arabic Islam and all the clothing and objects that come with it you have to have it if you want to express your Muslim identity. So I’ve kind of rejected that and I kept it so that the person that I’m at home is more the person that I am outside... So if I’m going to be sitting at home like this, I want to be able to do this outside as well, right

I see some things about izzat that I would want to have in my life. But in a family setting it’s kind of like imposed upon you and I think that’s where the rejection comes, not necessarily because it’s imposed, but because a lot of negative things about it are imposed.

Compromise can’t just be made by one person and the izzat of just one person can’t be protected. It’s like a burden, it’s like basically saying you take care of this right now. And I think daughters and women have often been like that, those placeholders of izzat.... Even though
they say we sent you to school just like we sent the other kids, no you sent me to school with another boag (burden) on my shoulders than you did with the other kids, with the sons.

To Disclose Or Not To Disclose

The focus of this chapter is to connect the reader to some of the overarching contexts in which the women’s’ stories evolve. Mahavidya’s story and her interview was about unpacking some of the complexities that women go through in planning to disclose to their families how they have been transgressing boundaries of izzat in secrecy. The secrecy is not only challenging to maintain, but is a painful for our families to hear. Any trust that exists between a young woman and her family is tested in those moments. We know this going into the disclosure and Mahavidya’s piece demonstrates the process of going through with the disclosure.

Throughout the years I have been asked many questions about why I made the decision to be with my partner, how I was able to deal with the excommunication and how I could do that to my parents and family. I wanted to begin with a discussion on how these choices are not taken lightly, that we have an understanding that the path that we are choosing is going to place us in great difficulty and force our families to confront their own demons and encounter stigma and pain from their community.

I acknowledge that, as some read this, there is a sense that perhaps I am creating a binary that suggests all women who are transgressing boundaries of izzat will disclose these relationships to their families and that the “choice” of family versus self is an easy one to make. Even the notion of placing “the self” against “the family” is problematic and places women in these spaces defined by neo-liberal understandings of choice, and individualistic notions of women’s role in their family and society. I want to dismantle this notion here and now.

There are many women who choose to remain with their families, when presented with a difficult decision to choose and that decision is just as difficult and challenging as any other. The complexities and layers of the women’s stories that I present in the next chapter demonstrate how this is not a simple binary of us versus our families. The binary is how dominant discourses would like to portray our stories. Many times these stories are framed like a Romeo and Juliet storyline, two lovers fighting against their family system for love. This romanticized version of our stories contributes to further marginalization of women on a global
scale, further silencing us from our own stories of pain and trauma. We do not want to be examples of fairy tale notions of love; we are not fighting our families for love. We are fighting a social justice cause that involves our bodies, one that is embedded in wider notions of heteropatriarchy and family violence and strife, love for change runs deeper in our veins than anything else.

Perhaps this is a repeat of what I have discussed exhaustively in previous chapters, however before we continue with the next chapter I wanted to insist that we be conscious of these dominant discourses impeding our reading of the stories I am about to share. In the following chapter you will be introduced to the final 4 stories and my sisters, however before ending this chapter, I want to share a slice of my own story after “coming out” to my family, which will hopefully demonstrate the impact of such a moment on the body, and soul.

Eyes Wide Open

The river is rushing past as I run with it. I need to get to a place where I can think. I run down the trail, the December air feels cool and wet on my face. I rush down the path, just like the river rushes through the town and away from the home. We rush together the river and I, to that place where I used to play as a child. It has been raining all day and the grayness of the day weighs down on my thoughts. The river gulps each raindrop with eager persistence.

I finally reach that place, a safe place, and wade through the bushes right to the edge, closer to the riverbed. This is where I need to be. I sit down in the snow-covered bushes hoping to be swallowed by the evergreens that scratch, tingle, and embrace my shaken body. It has been two months since I told my father about David and now I am here at this riverbed, contemplating, deciding what to do with this body and the izzat that it embodies. Things have not gone as planned. I was not sure what to expect, but I did not expect this. Or did I? I remember Amandeep and Jassi and wonder if they knew what to expect.

I told my father about David and at first he was very calm, cool, collected. He said “Puth (dear), you must end this now, this is not going to work for you or for us, end of discussion. I know what is best for you and for this family.”

I protested, pushed, and pleaded for the next month, each time letting him know that I was not going to change my mind. After that the situation changed, he became agitated, even desperate. A month passed and I was called to my uncle’s home for “dinner”. My father was there and so were my uncles, my aunt had a “meeting” and could not stay. I knew what this was the moment I entered their doors, an intervention had been planned. Fear and panic ran like bolts of lightning through my body, as they threw words of guilt, shame, anger, and disappointment at me, each word piercing my body with quick slaps. They let me know that I was never going to have their blessing if I marry a Black man, that I will scar my father’s face with shame if I don’t listen to them. I ran that night like I have today but I could not get very far.

Here I am again, another intervention, this time the women of my family have joined in and the “choice” is laid out for me to make as they say:

“Leave David or else you will lose ties to your family and community forever...leave him or else you will shame your father’s izzat and he will never be able to show his face to the world again...do you want that burden on your shoulders Mandeep? Do you want to live away from your family for the rest of your life? Do you want to be the cause of so much pain in our family?”

I carry this boag (burden) to the river, the burden of izzat, the burden of my family’s shame, my father’s pain, my mother’s loss, my bebe’s gloom for nothing gained from coming to this land of “choices”. As I sit here by the riverbed, I wonder how easy it would be to allow the river to take me away. If I were never to return to my family, to David, to this life, perhaps their lives would be easier without me. I would not have to play this game and be in this body that carries all this guilt and shame.

I reach into the water, wondering how cold it is and if it would end my life instantly. I inch a little closer, my feet go numb, as the water begins to reach up to my shins, my mind goes numb and I close my eyes so I am only listening to the river rush over the rocks.

“Mandeep”
The river whispers to me, travelling up over my body:

*If the circle that is your body falls on a ladder inscribed on the game board of time, you climb. If it lands on a snake, you slip-slide back. Resume your journey again.*

“Maandeeep”

*And if you do not learn what you were meant to learn from your past lives, you are condemned to repeat them.*

“MANDEEP is that you?”

*So angry am I, my eyes are open wide – never open your eyes in a new life without forgetting past ones.*

“MAANDEEEP!”

Jerked back by my name. I hear it from a familiar voice. I back away from the river as the voice gets closer. Moving closer to the voice I realize who it is.

“Mandeep, what are you doing here? Why are you wet? Everyone is looking for you…”

I embrace Sharon, my best friend, like I have never before and hold tight to her warmth. Her small body feeds my hunger for familiarity, for a friend, for someone who shares my experience of i zzat. We do not speak. Not a word is uttered about what just happened as she drives me back to my parents’ home.

I know what I must do.
Chapter 5

Introduction To My Sisters

To write these stories was not an easy task. I recognize reading them may not be easy for many as well. Each of the stories below are about four distinctly different women who have encountered displacement and excommunication with their families due to transgressing boundaries of izzat around the choices they make with their bodies.

We begin with the story of Lakshmi, who was born outside of Canada, however spent most of her adult years in the Canadian context. Lakshmi’s story involves an exiling because of her choice to be in an intimate relationship with another woman, yet her exile comes from her siblings, and moments of control over Lakshmi’s relationship with their mother. Her story demonstrates the intergenerational notions of izzat that haunt a family.

Durga is a woman who is full of hope and love for her family. Her story follows a difficult terrain of izzat throughout her childhood and adulthood to the moment when she asks her family to accept the choices she is going to make with her body. In her story, her family perseveres through this difficult choice, however it is the extended family and community that force Durga through the turmoil of exile and the process of distancing her from her sense of self because of her choice to be with her white partner.

Tara’s story follows Durga’s, which is a story about being forced to make impossible choices about the future. Tara is confronted by her parents’ need to save their izzat through their daughter’s body, and as a result being married to a man she was not ready to share her life with. Tara’s demonstrates a transgression that her family is only willing to overlook if they have full control over how it evolves and is understood by their community. It is a story that demonstrates the resiliency of Tara and reclamation of relations before an unbearable loss.

Finally, we meet Parvati. This story was probably the most difficult to write because Parvati is a woman who shared so many moments of tremendous difficulty at almost every distinct moment of her life. Parvati is haunted by the words “disown” from early childhood and is finally exiled from her family at a moment when she is expected to fulfill the desires of her
father and sister. Her body is used for their izzat and through her resistance we see incredible strength and a reclaiming of her life. She also speaks to the relief of giving forgiveness and reaching out to family after such difficult pain and trauma.

All of the women’s stories have distinct notions of izzat underlying their stories, as well as noticeable relationships with their mothers who become bastions of comfort in the reclamation process. Izzat weaves its way through all the women’s lives and in the aftermath leaves a path of hypervigilance of being rejected by current and future relationships in their lives. It is the fear of further rejection that led Sita to recoil into the earth, and it is this rejection of being rejected that actually gives women the strength to stand up towards any imposition of izzat on their lives, including impositions from wider society, as we will see in the concluding chapters of this dissertation.

As the narrator I have written the stories from the third person position, with the words of the women lingering between the lines. Due to limited space, I was not able to capture every element of their stories and at times I have had to brush over parts of their lives that we can all recognize as layered. Capturing every moment in a person’s life from childhood to adulthood is not only an impossibly difficult task, but is also not fair for the woman. I recognize the power and privilege my sisters have given me to accomplish this feat and do not take the responsibility lightly. I hope I have captured a sense of their lives and their incredible stories of resistance, pain, grief, loss, and strength in these pages and thank them for allowing me to do so.
Lakshmi’s Story

Childhood

“I did not enjoy Bollywood and it still doesn’t appeal to me at all. The only notion I would get of it was women were burned, if you were raped you had to kill yourself, if someone assaulted you, you were in the wrong so you had to kill yourself because you had brought shame.”

Many are aware of the nomadic ventures that Punjabis have been taking since before British Raj. There is a saying in our community that you can find a Punjabi Sikh in every part of the world. From the earliest colonial times, when travel to other colonized nations became viable through the British Army and employment, Punjabi Sikhs have been immigrating to other countries. Lakshmi’s father came to Singapore, well before his nation was broken into little pieces, before partition, before the exit of the British. Lakshmi’s father came to Singapore as a journalist, with his young wife Achal, and carved out a life for himself and the 9 children he would have in this foreign land. Lakshmi was the youngest of these children.

Lakshmi’s childhood begins with this identity, being the youngest in the family. The child who almost did not survive, a surprise pregnancy that lead to her 43 year old mother to be hospitalized for 2 months after delivery. For those first 2 months Lakshmi was shuffled around from sibling to sibling and a caring neighbour who would check in on them to see that the newborn was fed, dry, and cuddled. Growing up Lakshmi did not know her two eldest brothers existed. They had been “disowned” by her father because they had cut their turbaned hair, and married Chinese women. When Lakshmi was around 5 years old she has her first memories of her brothers. “I remember a man coming into our house one a Saturday I remember looking up and all I saw were army boots and this person in an army uniform, and the person would tap me on the head and go in the back in the kitchen and my mother would feed them. So she was letting them come home every once in a while, they were her sons!” Eventually both brothers were accepted back into the home. How this entrance back into the family occurred Lakshmi is not sure since no one speaks of it in her family.

Lakshmi’s father was a “very authoritative figure around the home.” A hard-working-man. Learned. Dedicated to education, he wrote books, published articles, and taught Punjabi to Sikh families all over the country. “Home sort of revolved around him…meal times and everything…my sisters’ had this sense of fear and this uber respect for him, and I didn’t feel it, I
didn’t have it...” The sense of duty to their father meant you prayed, followed the rules of Sikhism, worked hard, went to school, and you always did for your family. Duty meant you got married to whomever your parents chose for you. This sense of duty was not necessarily spoken about, but something inferred to Lakshmi and vocalized when other Punjabi families from the community interfered with matches for their daughters. This same community criticized Lakshmi’s father for educating his daughters, which was not part of the duty code according to the community. However Lakshmi’s sisters were all educated and it was an expectation in her household to complete and do well in school.

Lakshmi resisted the list of “duties” from a very early age in her life and many times when she did resist her siblings punished her. The sibling dynamics were dominant voices in Lakshmi’s life. Being the youngest of such a big family largely influenced her relationship to her siblings. “And that was the thing, because of the age they never really talked to me. I remember people talking to me but not with me.

When Lakshmi was 8 years old, as a low-income family they applied and were accepted into a mixed income housing project, which meant a bigger apartment. It also had four other Sikh families living in the same building unit. This move opened up a community for her parents and siblings, and they all considered each other family. However this move also led Lakshmi to being sexually abused as a child, “as long as I lived there, in that building” by the father of one of these families. He was known as the uncle upstairs “the way these women worked was whatever we cooked we always sent food upstairs, whatever they cooked they always sent food downstairs, or in the next building.” The children delivered this food from family to family. To this day Lakshmi has not told any of her family about the abuse she experienced living in that building. She never told friends growing up. “I’m very good at keeping secrets, but never understanding the meaning of that.” By high school the sexual abuse shifted to stalking, because she was not going into his house anymore. It was when Lakshmi was around 14 years old that tragic news led her to a vicious realization. “One of his daughters hung herself. His oldest daughter who was a nurse and had two children hung herself in the room from a belt in the fan. It was the happiest day of my life. How sick is that? Now I think about it, I’m like oh my god she was probably abused too, but in the moment I was like redemption. I was so happy, but then I started to feel so sick about myself, how can you be happy somebody just killed them self, they just committed suicide, but I was like good.”
The impact of this abuse came back to haunt Lakshmi years later when she was an adult, which is the first time she shared her experience with an adult. It is also when her body began to reject her secret. “…My body couldn’t manage it anymore. I was losing it…my body was exploding. It had been so kept inside it was coming out…it looked like lesions all over my body. So I think it is a testament to how good I was at hiding it, compartmentalizing it… So when I did start to do that work here I was having visceral body reactions.”

Lakshmi’s secret life began at a very early age. “I never shared anything with my family. I never shared who my friends were with my family. I always had a secret lives. I was one person at home and I was one person at school.” This was a part of her survival. Creating a fantasy world and separating all the worlds she was traversing on a daily basis. This was how she managed living and breathing and surviving every day. When her peers were dreaming of their wedding days, Lakshmi was dreaming of having a career, having independence and living on her own. School become one of the places where she could be herself, “I went to school to hide…I used to live in the library and fantasize through reading.”

Going to an all-girls school Lakshmi describes not feeling different in any way, she had a girlfriend, but so did all the other girls in the school. “…We were always making out in the washroom, I just thought it was normal.” The only difference was all the other girls were dreaming of their wedding day with their future husbands. “I never had that I just knew it wasn’t for me, I didn’t know what was for me.” The year before turning 19, Lakshmi began orchestrating her exit from her family. The day of her birthday Lakshmi decided to write a 6-page letter to her father telling him how she felt about him and her life in his home. “Everyday that I went to school I took clothes with me, my friends kept them for me, it was very well planned. On the day of my birthday I got up in the morning, I got dressed went downstairs, I put the letter in the mailbox and then I left and didn’t come home for 3 years. I lived on the street, I lived with friends.”

Homelessness involved working in a factory, staying with friends until they grew sick of her, “and sometimes if you had to be nice to guys, you know so you could go stay in their house for a bit…whole bunch of things.” All while staying in school and finishing her A levels (pre-university credits). It was during school that she received a note that her father had a heart attack and was hospitalized. Eventually, Lakshmi went back home and upon arrival experienced rejection from her siblings who blamed her for her father’s sickness. “I remember my sister
pulling her girls away not letting them come to me... I lived through that for the next few years.” Lakshmi’s father was sick for the 2 years up to his death and Lakshmi moved back home to take care of her parents. When Lakshmi’s father died she was by his side. She was the child that carried him, watched him wither away, and talked to him in those last 8 months of his life. She never spoke about the letter to her father or even her mother. “Nope. I never even thought about that.” She doesn’t know if anyone else knows about the letter and is something that never concerned her. That letter was a silent engagement between Lakshmi and her father, one that will always remain silent.

After her father’s death, Lakshmi was asked a pertinent question by her brother who was settled in Canada. This question and decision set forth the next chapter in Lakshmi’s life, “Hey do you want me to sponsor you? Do you want to move to Canada? I didn’t even think, I just said yeah.” Lakshmi and her mother, Achal, immigrated to Canada within 2 months of her father passing and started a new life together.

**Maneuvering Through Izzat**

“Because in my consciousness no one in my family has my back, I don’t even think about that. So that was a risk she was taking to stand up for me and stuff.”

Lakshmi describes her mother as a “silent partner” always in the background running the show. She was a woman who never let others in the community pity her even though they tried “some people would say oh poor you your son’s married outside to a non Punjabi woman.” She continued to resist even in the most unmanageable circumstances. Achal was a survivor. She shared with Lakshmi how she wanted to have an abortion when she was pregnant with her, but was not allowed by her husband. She was a woman who did not want to see her sons excommunicated from the family, so she saw them in secrecy. “…But what I saw was her letting him do it, so, you know, so I always had a lot of anger towards her, you know. And of course when the sexual abuse happened, I mean I’ve done all my internal work around that. I blamed her because she should have been protecting me, but she didn’t know, even until she died she didn’t know, right. I never told her.” As a young adult it was easy for Lakshmi to see her mother as having no agency, she had a lot of anger towards her mother, she felt alone and abandoned. However, years after they moved to Canada together her relationship with her mother was ignited for the first time. But even getting to this moment took some time.
Within a year and a half of arriving in Canada both Lakshmi and her mother were living on their own in two different parts of Ontario. Lakshmi pursued her dream of independence and was pursuing postsecondary education. “I was excited, it was everything that I always wanted to do, to live by myself to go to university. So I had to learn a lot by myself.” Achal also pursued something she had not yet experienced, living on her own. Lakshmi would come home to visit often, however the two of them were on their own journey of independence for many years.

After high school, Lakshmi describes only dating men, however once she started university she was in relationships with “people” and began pursuing her Queer identity. This involved moments of rejection from the White lesbian community on campus and racism from the wider community. “So it was really confusing. What I was experiencing was racism, right, but not having the words to even articulate the feelings and the experiences I was having around campus.” It was the first time she felt truly “othered” when she moved to Canada and this process led her to doing meaningful political work around race and gender. After completing her undergraduate degree Lakshmi did what many young graduates were doing at that time, teach English abroad. She went to Korea, to Singapore, and eventually came back to Canada when options ran out. She eventually found full time work.

During this time Lakshmi maintained her “compartmentalized” life separate from her mother. “I think the easy thing about being with women is they just assume they are your friends.” Upon her return from her travels Achal insisted that Lakshmi needed her. “…My siblings kept calling me and saying to me she keeps saying you’re living by yourself and it’s not good that you’re by yourself and she needs to be here. And I was like fuck, now I have to take care of her. It felt like a burden. And a part of it was like how am I going to live my life… for over 10 years I have been living my life and now I have to live and have her come and live in my house.” A burden that involved letting her mother see some of her life, the life Lakshmi had spent her entire life up until that moment hiding in secrecy. As much as it was a burden that she did not initiate, she did let her mother in.

During these two years Lakshmi and Achal challenged each other to see the lens from which they viewed the world. They shared conversations over meals, they shared friends, and they shared parts of their lives they never thought they would. “I started calling her by her first name…she was like how come you are so bold you’re calling me by my name. I was like think about it you went from being somebody’s daughter, somebody’s wife, somebody’s mother, and
"the only time anybody calls you by your name is when you go to the doctor’s office, and so I just started calling her Achal.” Lakshmi describes these two precious years with her mother with such nostalgia and pride. Many stories were shared of them navigating daily life together. They had reclaimed something that was taken away from them at Lakshmi’s birth, an attachment that was missing during the first half of Lakshmi’s life.

Yet as much as Lakshmi was reclaiming her relationship with her mother, her siblings continued to remind her of her duties, which involved pressuring her to get married. Without telling Lakshmi, her mother was defending her and keeping her siblings at bay “she’s getting an education”, protecting her from her siblings. When Lakshmi realized her mother was doing this it was uncomfortable for her to witness. “Because in my consciousness no one in my family has my back, I don’t even think about that. So that was a risk she was taking to stand up for me and stuff.”

However, her mother was getting older and the last half of those 2 years Lakshmi found she did not have the capacity to effectively take care of her mother anymore. Achal moved away to live with her eldest daughter after some careful coercion on the part of the family.

An Impossible Choice/Exile

“…you have chosen to lead a life different from all of us, we choose that you are not welcome in our homes.”

A year after her mother left for Singapore Lakshmi met Lila and they began living with each other. A year into their relationship Lakshmi was invited to her nephew’s graduation at her eldest brother’s home, and she made a conscious decision to invite Lila. “I called her (sister-in-law) and I said oh I’m bringing someone, so I know it’s very last minute so if there are any hotels and motels around where we can stay. She was like “no, no, no you’re going to stay here, of course you’re not going to stay in a motel” I was like okay. Then I had a pause and I said, “I would like to let you know that they are not a man” and she just went, “okay you know what I always thought so….””I was like okay I think I just came out to my family.” The visit to the family went smoothly. Both Lakshmi’s brothers and their families were there and everyone seemed to respect her decision. After that visit for the first time Lakshmi decided “to make changes in my life, I want to reconnect with people. So I said we’ll go to Singapore because I
want you (Lila) to see where I’m from, I want you to meet my mother.” They were scheduled to visit that following spring.

A month before Lakshmi and Lila were scheduled to depart for their trip Lakshmi received an email from the second eldest brother who had attended her nephew’s graduation stating: “so the very heavy heart...that all of us (sibling) have decided that you have chosen to lead your life different from all of us, we choose that you are not welcome in our homes...” This also meant Lakshmi was not welcome to see her mother. When a rejection like this happens doubts cloud the mind. Lakshmi doubted herself and saw herself as delusional, “what was I expecting? I didn’t have any expectations, why would I have expected less? When I went to that place, why would I be shocked...You want to think better of them.”

It seems her second eldest brother who was at the graduation had informed the other siblings of Lakshmi relationship to Lila, without Lakshmi’s consent. As a collective they decided that they were going to excommunicate her from their lives and their mother’s life. Emails flew after that initial message was delivered. Lakshmi’s eldest brother and one of Lakshmi’s sisters who lived outside of Singapore did not involve themselves with the other siblings decision. As the turmoil and anger went from sibling to sibling, the three siblings who had power over Achal were holding strong to their decision. “They feel Be-ji (Achal) is too old to be exposed to such things” A decision had to be made, was Lakshmi going to travel to see her mother and bring Lila with her? “I responded to them saying I’m really disappointed with your decision, but we’re still coming...”

With great courage and incredible persistence, a plan was made. With the help of her niece, Lakshmi was able to get her mother’s address, since they had changed all the phone lines connected to her mother. They booked a hotel for 2 days, got a cab “it was a very quiet, solemn cab ride”. The cab driver agreed stayed in the street just in case they needed a fast escape from the gated community her brother lived in. Lakshmi went to the door hoping that only her mother was home. “The worst is if he calls the police we need to get out of here because, this is a Muslim country, we could be thrown into jail we’re not taking any risks.” Luck was on her side and her mother was alone with the maid.

The reunion was bittersweet. Her mother had no idea what was going on and was very confused. “I don’t understand, what’s going on, who said you couldn’t stay here.” Lila was
brought in to meet her mother and Lakshmi said the words that she was not sure whether her mother would understand or accept. “They don’t want us here because we’re gay...” the visit was short and they left before anyone knew they were there. During her stay she received threatening phone calls from her siblings, insults and further rejection. The siblings were making it clear that she was not welcome there.

Later that same day she called her mother. Achal expressed further confusion “I don’t know what they’re saying to me, you know I’m very angry with them I don’t want to talk to them and she’s saying all these things that you can have AIDS. I was like what. Lakshmi arranged to see her mother alone the next day. Many moments were shared in that short and precious time they had. Achal had arranged it so that she was alone with her daughter and wanted clarification on what exactly was going on.

AM: “I don’t understand do you not have your period”

Lakshmi: “no I just don’t want to be with a man”

AM: “That’s it! That’s the fuss they’re making...it’s like so and so’s daughter...that’s it? All this is for this?”

Tears of relief were shared and tears of the powerlessness they both experienced in this situation. Lakshmi could not take care of her mother the way her siblings could. Her mother was old and could not walk. She knew she could not hold onto this relationship any longer. Lakshmi also knew that if she maintained contact with her mother once she returned to Canada, her siblings would distance themselves from their mother and she could not bear to do that to her. This would be the last time Lakshmi would speak to her mother face to face before she died the following year. When she returned to Ontario, she only spoke to her on the phone a couple of times before she passed.

Lakshmi got the opportunity to say goodbye to her mother. “And I was able to say I love you and I forgive you.” The funeral was a difficult process to go through, from washing the body, to the cremation; Lakshmi took a very active and visceral role in being part of everything that happened to her mother’s body after she passed. “It was just something that I had to do.”
Lakshmi brought a part of her mother’s ashes back with her to disperse in Canada, the spreading of ashes here was an important ceremony for her and she believes would be something her mother would have wanted. Ceremony was essential and a symbolic process of letting go for Lakshmi. She described the intricate care she took in every single detail that involved this moment; the power embedded in this ritual was unmistakable. “...We drove around for weeks before to sort of find a place...I wanted to be able to walk into the water to do it.... It was mostly all intuitive...I remember the night before I told Lila “I don’t want to go to sleep because I’m afraid to get up the morning because I know what I have to do”...I know I’m going to do it because I’m afraid, I’m scared...I put tobacco down and asked permission, because it was somebody else’s territory, just to say I’m releasing this and doing it in a good way.... Right after I released it, there was a salmon swimming upstream, it was very beautiful.”

After the ceremony Lakshmi invited all her friends and people in her community that knew her and those who had heard of her, for a feast to honour her life. For the first time Lakshmi let her mother in to her life fully, openly. “It was sort of my way of opening my life to her. I guess maybe I did part of it in the past but I guess not the queer stuff, right.... My mother had to create community when she moved, I don’t think it’s a pattern it’s just what we do, or is it a part of our tradition as a nomadic people?”

**Grief, Loss, and Reclamation**

“I think that was the biggest part of my anger about the situation when we wanted to go and visit her...that they were making that decision for her....

The grief and loss of her mother is combined with the loss of a family and a part of her past. Lakshmi has not stayed in touch with her family very much. She was not able to reconcile a relationship, however she has come to terms with the relationship she has now with many of them, and she is no longer living a life in secrecy. The impact of this entire event reverberates for her and initially when she returned from the funeral the trauma of it all resurfaced.

Anger, pain, sadness, these are common feelings after the passing of a loved one, however this is mixed in with rejection and the way she was excommunicated from her mother’s life without any voice or choice. “I think that was the biggest part of my anger about the situation when we wanted to go and visit her...that they were making that decision for her.... if I go there and my mother says to me I don’t want to see your face again, I don’t approve of this
get out of my sight. Let her say that to me and not let you decide that she can’t even manage the news. Don’t take that agency away from her, she’s going to be the one to say that to me, let her decide that. I think that was what I was really angry about at that time.”

Lakshmi is surviving, laughing, loving and resisting. Her contact with certain family member is minimal, perhaps one day it will be more, or perhaps not. There is always this fear of further rejection that haunts every engagement she has with them. “Maybe the acceptance was because of a death we had to deal with, now there’s not death there, will I have to have these conversations? Will they be willing to have these conversations? Will they have gone back to the stance where we will only accept...we’ve had a year to think about it and we don’t want you near our children. So there’s all those fears that I’m not really thinking about or thinking through...I don’t think they are people who you can sit with and say this is how much it hurt. Because for them all is forgiven now we have moved on, we have gotten over that. Because they don’t ever talk about that...the two brothers who were banished they don’t talk about how that happened to them, you just move one, you just move on...so I don’t know, would I show it to my family? No, but I think I can do it for the community and other women, especially queer women, all the stories are common...they aren’t common but it’s something that happens that you lose touch with family, or lose acceptance, or you’re always doubted, or people are scared of you because you’re abnormal.” Lakshmi is an active South Asian voice in the queer community and she continues to work towards bringing awareness to Indigenous sovereignty and institutional racism that she has witnessed her whole life.
Durga’s Story

Childhood

“Growing up I felt if I don’t follow my heart I’m going to suffocate and die…”

As second-generation Punjabis our parents scattered across Canada in search of labour, employment and a new life in a post partition world. Typically this venture led them to remote parts of Canada, where they confronted the shock of the Canadian landscape, and the harsh realities of racism, oppression, and general discrimination. The 70s are fondly admired by our parents and described as almost a momentary lapse of judgment on the part of the Canadian government, which led to the mass migration of so many of us to Canada. Supposedly, Pierre Trudeau opened the pearly gates and countless immigrants, their parents, siblings, and whole families entered the country, their labour market benefited, and our extended families grew in numbers. Whether this narrative is embedded in any truth or not, it is a part of many of our migration stories and the general voice is “we were lucky we got in”, because after those fond years, immigration was never the same. Durga’s family identifies with this migration story, as did all her neighbours and a majority of the people she grew up around.

Durga’s family migrated here through her mother’s sister, who happened to be married to her husband’s brother. Two brothers married two sisters. As complicated as this may sound to outsiders, this is very common in the Punjabi community, particularly if a family had many girls to be married. Usually a relationship is created with another family that has equal number of boys and the two families are married forever. Durga’s mother is “the fourth daughter of a family that doesn’t have any sons”, which not only played into the dynamics and battles her mother encountered within her family, but also played into how Durga was raised by her parents and grandparents. “Like my brothers would get $50 on their birthdays...girls, we wouldn’t get anything so it’s very much about you need to have boys.”

Soon after Durga was born, her mother fell into serious post-partum depression and as a result her sisters raised Durga for the first few years of her life. Eventually her maternal grandparents moved in to help raise both Durga and her brother. These adults played an integral role in Durga’s life, as a child they were a part of her circle of care. It wasn’t until she was 6 years old that her grandparents moved out. Durga had a particularly close relationship to her late
grandfather. When Durga remembers her grandfather, serenity envelopes her as she speaks about him and it almost feels as if he is watching over her as she shares her story. “He always kept me under his wings”

Growing up amongst a very strong Punjabi, Sikh community there were temples down the street and 60 percent of her school classroom consisting of children that looked like her and spoke the same mother tongue. Yet Durga felt disconnected. “If you don’t fit into the identity of what Punjabi Sikh is, even amongst adolescents that grow up there, you feel like you don’t fit in and you’re always trying to assert who you are.” Durga’s sense of being different from her peers and the expectations of parents came at an early age and was something that her family noticed with burrowed eyes. “Growing up I felt if I don’t follow my heart, I’m going to suffocate and die. I don’t know where it came from, but I was always like that, and I think in some ways that’s why my grandfather took me under his wing, because he knew I was a little bit different and that I could really suffocate in this type of environment…I’ve always had a really strong will.” As her story unfolds around us, I realize this is one of her greatest skills and strengths for surviving a taxing childhood and difficult moments throughout her life. It is this strong will that she reaches into each and every time she encounters a push from the outside to be someone she is not.

Durga grew up with her younger brother, her cousins, and aunts and uncles, and grandparents all around her. Her relationship to each of them was pivotal to her upbringing. Durga describes a childhood filled with fighting parents, much of which stemmed from her father’s alcoholism at the time. This childhood also involved living with tremendous stigma and exclusion from extended family and community towards her mother, who struggled with physical illnesses and “mental health” challenges. Durga describes her mother as always speaking her mind, doing what she wanted, and “a bit of an odd ball in a lot of ways, which is endearing, but it was annoying when I was growing up obviously because you want your parents to fit in.” Her mother didn’t fit in, so she was often oppressed by her family and community, “being ignored, shushed, always put into place, oh what you’re saying is stupid, eh he ke kayh jande ya, ami bole jandi ya (oh what is she saying now, she’s always talking about nothing).”

Durga’s spirit was broken down each time she heard these insults and harmful actions towards her mother. She wished her father would stand up to his family and community, she
wished that people would support her mother with her demons, but the stigma of her “difference” was too great. Durga wished her mother could fit in like her parents’ wished Durga would fit in, but her mother continued to live in a deep depression for most of her life. Durga thinks back to how her mother’s spirit endured the same insults, “my mom’s learned to filter it off, she doesn’t care, it goes like its nothing anymore, she’s so detached from it…”

Durga spent a lot of her time trying to make her mother happy, “but it would never work.” This combined with expectations all around her to be something that she could not be, created a tense environment for her to grow up in. Her parents noticed her resistance to her family and community, her difference, and her strong will. Their natural inclination was to box her in, force her to fit in, to contain her difference. In retrospect we can understand this as their way of protecting her from the cruel world that frowns upon difference. Yet, Durga still experienced this pressure as oppressive and it came to haunt her, as she became an adult. The only person in her life growing up who did not have any expectations of her other than to give love was her grandfather.

**Maneuvering Through Izzat**

“…and I’ve always been hyper ultra annoyingly self aware, I knew what was going on within me which in some ways made it worse, because ignorance is blissful right.”

There were two events in Durga’s teenage years that truly shifted her world. The first was the death of her grandfather, and the second was her mother’s close encounter with death when she was hospitalized for kidney failure. Both events occurred within a short time span as she was entering her adolescence. Durga’s life went from being cared for by adults to caring for her mother and brother and being a parental figure, all while losing the daily engagement with her grandfather, her anchor in life. “I think there was a lot of trauma from losing his support that I didn’t really realize until recently and I also think I was really spiritual because of him growing up and that broke for me at that time too. There were those two supports that weren’t there for me anymore.” Durga’s mother did recover from the kidney failure, yet the sickness comes back to haunt her. Growing up, Durga was anxious about the possibility of losing her mother to the disease.

Durga’s father’s reaction to his wife’s near death experience and ongoing sickness was to become a baptized Sikh, a move that altered his daily realities. He gave up drinking and
committed his life to the Sikh religion and practices, which he tried to push onto his family. 
“...you have wear a braid, and don’t wear shorts...you have to go to Punjabi school...we’re like fuck you...what is this weird shit? I think that it had to do with his own guilt, because my mom got sick.” Navigating life at home looked very different after these two events. Creating other spaces for reclaiming her independence became important for Durga, which was not necessarily an unique concept, lying and altering the truth is a part of the daily realities for most second-generation Punjabi women in her community.

I - did you have to keep your life secret about what you were doing outside?

Durga - oh of course, that’s a given...I’m like why would you ask that question...yeah that’s like normal and in some ways that’s what is good about growing up around Indians, people would know that that’s normal, you know what I mean?

I – because everybody else you have to explain it to.

Durga – yeah and that’s oppressive too...

One of these safe spaces was at her cousin’s home. Durga was particularly close to her Thaïya and Maasi’s (paternal uncle and maternal aunt) children, since there were close in age to her and her brother. Her Thaïya and Maasi became her second parents, as she began to spend her time between their home and her own. Radha was not only her cousin, but also her best friend, although there were a lot of differences between them, there was a safety that Durga felt to the family. She also realized how intertwined the two families were and, many times, her uncle became an overbearing patriarch with her and even her parents. “My parents are the youngest and they have really good hearts in a lot of ways... you know sometimes when we see that...I feel like it triggers other people to have to take ownership of themselves and their own behaviours so they shush you. Do you know what I mean? So they put you in place.”

The loss of her grandfather, the loss of a childhood, the responsibility of caring for her mother, brother, herself, the pressure to be like everyone around her when she only felt further distanced from them, the combination of these obstacles in her everyday encounters became too much for Durga to carry. Her body began to crumble under the pressure of this load, “I got really depressed, I started cutting myself...I got into a relationship with an older man, I shouldn’t have, it was a really hard time for me...I got into that bad place, like I’m surprised I
didn’t start doing drugs.” The relationship with the older man came about when Durga was cutting herself, he became her confidant, and someone she could share her deepest secrets with. He had his own demons and this older brooding man who paid attention to a much younger girl, was attractive to Durga. The relationship ended up being destructive and crossed many boundaries.

Durga got through high school somehow, the relationship with the older man ended, and she registered in university, but even that expectation was too much for her and she dropped out within that year. The trauma of growing up led her to categorize and discriminate about the world that she grew up in. “I was really hating my family and I really hated being Indian, I hated Indian kids, I hated it so much... I used to blame the culture and I used to blame everything on what was happening...it was like an oppressive culture and an oppressive community and feeling like I had to be something that I can’t be, like I saw how my family was being treated and I couldn’t stand it and I hated it... I would get most annoyed with my mom but I hated how people treated her awfully.” This internalized war she was struggling through was also greatly impacted on by her relationship to the older man, who happened to be Punjabi as well. The pain and deceit she experienced with him followed her and it took some time before she could trust people again.

Spiraling through a roller coaster of emotions and moving through circles of “fucked up friends” Durga was rejecting the world in which she had grown up, including her parents, who could see that “something was wrong.” Durga wanted to run away from her life. “For me travelling was a way to just escape and I’ve always been hyper ultra annoyingly self aware, I knew what was going on within me which in some ways made it worse, because ignorance is blissful right.”

Eventually, Durga got a job working at a private recreational club and slowly started going back to school and healing. This involved seeing a therapist for four years, who helped her heal from the trauma and took her off the anxiety and depression pills that her doctor had prescribed. Her perception and relationship to her family began to change, and for the first time Durga was able to feel hope. “My mom would try to comfort me and I would just reject her, I completely rejected my parents during that time. But going to therapy...it was really weird I accepted them for who they are...I wanted to go and do all this travel and leave, but then I realized I was running away, the therapist helped ground me, I don’t know how I would be if I
hadn’t gone to therapy.” Durga’s clouded and hurt perspective on the world started clearing. After 6 years she was able to finish her undergraduate degree and within that year she entered a graduate program and was mentally preparing her family for her eventual move out of their home, something she was determined to do.

“I was always trying to figure out how am I going to move out, because you have to move out when you’re feeling so oppressed at home…I lied and said my classes start really early, I can’t do traffic…I did it so fast that they almost couldn’t respond. I cut my hair really short…our way of rebelling as Indian girls is different as what other people would think of as rebelling, cause you’re rebelling against something else…my whole life I had been pushing back and so it was headed that way and they could tell…And because we’re second-generation we have the financial resources, which is super important…. They couldn’t threaten me with money because I was working already…. I had a response for everything…and they realized that fuck I don’t have anything to hold over her head…”

Going to school was the exit plan, however as much as Durga had an excuse for every transgression she pushed onto her family there was still the fear of pushing too much and what unforeseen reactions she could encounter from her father. “…I would always do it in the daytime when my dad was at work, because there is that fear…you do have that patriarch fear, as much as I pretend I don’t I did.”

An Impossible Choice/Exile

“I also realize at the end this is one thing we always knew, like our parents really did love us and they were doing the best they could with the resources they had and they really do love us, like they do want us to be happy, and I think that’s always been more important to them than honour and izzat.”

Therapy, finishing school, entering a graduate program, moving out, this was a “transformative” time for Durga. “It was the first time in my life I felt happy.” It was also when she met Tim. Their relationship went through various stages, from going really fast, to breaking up for a little bit, getting back together. During this time Durga decided to move in with her parents again, “it looked like a good idea and a part of me was missing being around Indian people…the world made much more sense to me…my parents made sense to me….it was a horrible decision.” Going through the process of moving out the second time was even more
difficult, for both Durga and her parents. This time she moved in with Tim, “it was too stressful...I wasn’t feeling good about it...I felt more dishonest about it.”

Along with the stresses of lying to her family about who she was living with, Durga had finished school was working and making a good income. In the eyes of her family and most importantly to the rest of the world, Durga was of the age of marriage. The pressure came fast and furious and Durga resisted more than ever. “I told them if you keep pushing me I’m going to move to another country. And I would have if I hadn’t met Tim...they didn’t know what was keeping me here.” There comes a point when the lies can only cover so much, when every fight becomes too much for your mind and body to maintain control and resistance. During one of these heated arguments with her mother, Durga blurted out that she was engaged to a white man. “She was like what do you mean and then my mom did something which I’ve never seen her do...she started pounding her chest and saying “mere izzat, mere izzat” (my honour, my honour) and I looked at her and I was like, you’ve never said that word once in my life, this is bullshit, it was embarrassing...And I was scared of my dad and my mom was too, she was like no, no, no it will be okay, we just won’t tell your dad...”

Durga was okay with avoiding her father; in the meantime her mother was doing her best to convince her daughter that this was a bad idea. However, her mother could not keep the secret for very long. One day Durga received a phone call from her brother saying the words that chilled her to the bone. “Mom told Dad.” Durga’s brother had previously met Tim and was very supportive of his sister and her decision. He was also in a relationship with a woman who was Punjabi Sikh and was secure enough to stand up for his sister when his father resisted the decision Durga had made. “…He was like, Dad get over it, it’s not a big deal he’s a nice guy...” Durga was expecting the worst, in fact she had prepared for the worst from her father. “I had a 1 in 10 best case scenario and I kind of knew in my gut...my parents will do what they’ve always done, get really mad and yell, then get over it and then be accepting...I knew my parents wouldn’t disown me because I’d been pushing back long enough.” This is how the months unraveled, from calm interventions “he was like I don’t think you should marry a white guy, he was being rational with me...”, to over-the-top guilt tripping “and then I had a phone call...I’m going to kill myself because I thought about killing you, but then I would be in jail and you would be dead, and I wouldn’t be happy.”
As difficult as the interventions were, Durga had faith that if she persevered with determination, as she had always done, her parents would come through. “One thing we always knew, like our parents really did love us and they were doing the best they could with the resources they had, like they do want us to be happy, and I think that’s always been more important to them than honour and izzat.” Their ultimate fear was what are people going to think, their izzat was in the hands of their daughter’s decisions and in the hands of the community’s reaction to the support they provide to their daughter. The lack of control can drive a person to fear. Inside, her father knew that he could accept this decision, that his love for his daughter was most important, but would his extended family understand this? Would his friends? The turning point for Durga and her parents was when key people in the community that they respected and held in high esteem gave their blessings and convinced her father that their daughter’s happiness was more important than what everyone else thinks. Her parents finally met Tim and in Durga’s words, “they really like him.”

When going through an event like this, there is a moment when the dust settles and everyone seems content. You look around and you think everything will be okay. Durga may have looked into the lovely faces of all her family, of her partner, and realized that her worst fears were just nightmares, that everything would be okay. However, these nightmares did come back to haunt Durga when her Thaiya and Maasi, her second parents, who were such an integral part of her life, rejected Durga’s decision and the support her parents were giving her. “My uncle was the worst, he totally judged my dad, you don’t know what you’re doing, he was being disgusting because a part of him knew that my dad is the younger brother and you know how someone sets a trend…” Durga was a threat to her Thaiya’s izzat and what if his daughter got a whiff of this, she may think she can make the same transgressions, and what would that do for his image if he condoned it, and even worse if he didn’t condone it. Her Thaiya was invested in making sure this wedding did not happen.

Coincidentally, Durga’s cousin Radha was also secretly engaged to a white man. However Durga’s relationship with her cousin had been drifting over the past couple of years and as Durga was healing from her past, she was ending a lot of her old friendships. As much as Durga was ready for the change, Radha may not have been. Radha seemed to also be invested in making Durga’s wedding day a difficult one and had her own bitter internal issues.
Durga’s Thaiya’s interventions came strong at first before turning into a passive aggressive power over her and her parents. “…he would attack me too and then he would do it through my parents. It didn’t last for more than a month, because he knew oh I’m making myself look bad…he’s very manipulative…” These tactics continued even through Durga’s wedding day and fortunately her parents became a buffer from the abuse and negativity. “…as I reflected back I knew that I was the first one to do this, but what I was doing was a trigger. My dad had told people you’re not allowed to say anything. If you say it you are not welcome and you’re leaving. So that’s how my parents became a buffer, but people were passive aggressive like you wouldn’t believe.”

The family and community come to your child’s wedding to remind you of your role in their lives, they will remind you of how much they have done for you and your family, they will remind you of your duty. The courage it took for her parents to not let that impact on Durga and her relationship with Tim is demonstrated in the above statement and perhaps this was their moment to stare those people in the face after years of being ostracized for her mother’s “mental health” challenges. Perhaps this was her parents’ moment too. “I think they’ve also faced things and people have been judgmental of them, and they don’t want their kids to be going through that…you know how people always have that oh we’re not doing good, but we’re better than them. We’re sort of that family but we’ve actually been doing good, you know like the phoenix you go through a transformation and we’re generally happy now and it triggers people”

**Grief, Loss and, Reclamation**

“I was mourning a death of relationships… I think I was mourning a cultural death too.”

Durga’s story is about internal transformation from pain to finding love and realizing the role that love has played in keeping her and her family alive and surviving. Like a phoenix. Radha did get married to her white partner a year later, Durga is not sure what that battle was like for her, however, she can imagine it was not an easy one. Yet, she wonders what role her own path has carved for her cousin, and perhaps other cousins and family members who will be impacted by her marriage to Tim. “…a cousin told me that people actually talk about how I paved the way for the family…oh you’re setting an example just by being who you are.”
Durga didn’t truly resolve her relationship with her cousin, or her Thaiya and Maasi. They were a part of her identity and sense of family for so much of her life and this event shifted everything for her. “...it was a loss, it was hurtful...what I did see was cousins and people who were really happy for me who I would never have expected, it was genuine happiness.” The contrast of those who she trusted letting her down, to those she had never considered as allies was a difficult piece to sit with, yet it was also what helped her heal from the trigger of “hating” her community again, as she did when she was younger.

For a year and a half after her wedding, the trauma of the event continued to play itself out in her body and her life. “I think if my parents had reacted badly, I would have moved to a different city...I almost had to go back to my therapist because it was so awful...it brought up the whole Indian issue with me again...I started to really hate...I started to get sick more, I started to have to take anxiety medications more, I was really negative...it was really tough for me.” Finding a balance in the aftermath of the negativity was difficult, coming back to a place where she could be happy again and leave the anger behind. “...there was a bitterness that was starting to get ingrained and I didn’t want to be like that, it was hard for me to see that I have so many loving people in my life... it was like a death, I was mourning a death of relationships... I think I was mourning a cultural death too. It wasn’t just the relationships, I realized I had tied my identity to those relationships and I had internalized that if you marry a white guy you’re not going to be Indian anymore. Nobody would say it but you wouldn’t know how to be Indian your children won’t, I had totally internalized that.”

However, like any death time is the greatest healer and even though the mourning continues for the rest of one’s life, time does make it easier to dull the pain. Durga does continue to see her Thaiya and Maasi and her cousin Radha, mostly because her parents are still in continuous contact with them and their lives are so intertwined that it was difficult to separate who begins where and where the relations end. Durga still struggles to define her relationship to her family and community, without the influence of what the community expects from her, however she attributes a spiritual understanding of life, love and her izzat as her greatest grounding for survival. “I have a spiritual understanding (of izzat). Because I think a honourable way of being who you are, is being truthful not being judgmental you know all those important values. So if you’re really being that way you wouldn’t discriminate, or you catch
yourself and you try to change it. I think that is the true meaning, more truthful... It’s such a
fucked up way of using the word hey? It means nothing.”
Tara’s Story

Childhood

“I remember that he would, the girls hold the izzat in the family, you make sure that you hold our izzat at all time, that your brother and I can walk with our head held high in the community.”

The daily arduous labour of working in sawmills and mines throughout Canada was a common reality for our fathers. This work involved back-breaking labour, mixed with doses of racism from the foremen and the scars of this work lingered on the mind and body thereafter. The only solace came from the support and shared experiences from other racialized co-workers. Tara’s father worked in a mine his whole life and was one of the first South Asian men to come to this remote part of Canada. “It was very white, my father would tell us stories of racism…they didn’t really know who he was, there was a lot of white people, and Aboriginal people at the time, so they didn’t really know who this person was at the time really, like they didn’t get the concept of Indian.”

Her father secured work for himself in this white country before travelling back to his home country to get married to a woman 21 years younger than him. Tara’s mother immigrated to Canada in the 70s just before Tara was born and had 3 children after Tara. Growing up in this small rural community, Tara was one of the ten South Asian families in the town. With a sister 1 year younger and another brother and sister 6 and 8 years younger. These obligations came from not only being the eldest child in the family, but also from the difficult fact that Tara’s father was a serious alcoholic. “…my mom would say he didn’t become an alcoholic till we were born…at about 42 he started drinking…there’s lots of factors, immigrating to Canada, racism, you know so many pressures, right. But yeah he was an alcoholic for most of our life…” The alcoholism led to many challenges for her family, particularly her mother: uncertainty of whether her husband would make it home each night, living with a man who had two personas, his sober self, and his alcoholic self. As a result, Tara took on a very strong parenting role to fill the void that her father’s alcoholism would leave “I had to take that role of a parent as well as older sister…”

Tara has vivid memories of her father throughout her childhood. “It was really interesting I remember my dad in my life a lot, but as soon as I hit 11, 12, he was gone…it’s
really harsh because you have your dad around you have this loving relationship and then as
soon you hit 12 you’re not really sure what happened…he’s gone then all of a sudden the
conversations start happening about izzat… so you’re confused really.” This magical age where
a child is expected to become a young adult almost overnight, with the appearances of a woman,
yet a mind that still feels like a child. “We would be playing hide and seek with all the boys in
the community, no problem, but as soon as that hit, age 12, the izzat started kicking in.” The
messages of izzat were strong and deliberate. “I remember he would say…the girls hold the
izzat in the family, you make sure that you hold our izzat at all time, so that your brother and I
can walk with our head held high in the community…okay what does that mean…but as you got
older, you understood that means that I can’t really have any guy friends, that means I can’t go
to the dairy queen with a group of girls and a boy, do you know what I mean, because somebody
else is going to tell.”

Tara did take her role in the family seriously and always accepted the boundaries that her
parents set for her, very rarely challenging their decisions. “We didn’t have any boyfriends in
high school.” Tara was hyper vigilant about staying within the boundaries, however those rare
moments when she did let her guard down she encountered surveillance from her community.
“Of course we would have friends, guy friends…like I was very conscious I would never go to
dairy queen with you. I did that once and my mom found out and my dad found out and my
dads said tell her to stop. It was innocent, it was just a blizzard…” Tara was expected to role-play for
her siblings. There is a lot riding on the eldest daughters and their role in the community. “So
basically it was like they all had a chat, well I have a couple of girls, you have a couple of girls,
why don’t you watch my girls and I’ll watch your girls... But other people took their role very
seriously.”

I can relate to the tremendous difficulties embedded in balancing the expectations inside
and outside the home and the impact of these expectations on the mind and body. “Life at home
wasn’t good, life at school wasn’t good, the people who you thought you trusted wasn’t good, I
remember at that time I slept a lot, so I’d come home after school from 3:30 to 6pm I would
sleep, maybe it was a kid depression.” Sleeping became one escape and sports became another.
Tara got very involved in physical activities, however eventually this escape was unexpectedly
taken away from Tara and her sister. “Both my sister and I played field hockey in high school
and I ended up getting selected for the under 18 team for the province, and he just decided one
day, no you’re not doing it anymore…. that day we came home we won the game, we were all excited, the little bus drops us off right in front of our house and we walk out and my dad was like NO not doing it again…there’s no explanation, and we had to stop. I remember telling our field hockey coach and she was like what the hell, so it was really difficult because the one channel was also taken away.”

**Maneuvering Through Izzat**

“I’m so used to people telling me no I was, like, oh okay, alright no big deal, I’ll miss this semester and I’ll do it again next semester, well that was the worst mistake I ever made in my life…”

Somehow Tara got through high school obeying the boundaries set by her father and surviving the challenges of living in a small White community. By the time graduation happened, Tara was ready to pursue a life on her own. Since the closest post-secondary school was almost a 2-hour drive away, Tara and her sister moved out to pursue education and were set up in a 2-bedroom apartment. It was the first time they experienced freedom living on their own; their parents paid for the rent and tuition.

This venture was short-lived though, 1 year after they started school, her parents found themselves in financial distress and could not pay the rent for their apartment. At the time Tara did not even consider finding her own way to finance her education, and went back home as was expected of her. “…we came home and I had to look for a job, so I ended up getting my resume together and getting a phone call from the credit union in town. So I told my mom, she said you think about it, you know school is important but you think about it.

Tara and her sister never went back to school and were brought back to the life they had left a year prior. “I remember going to my supervisor at work and I said I need this day off because I have to register for classes and I’m so used to people telling me NO…I was, like, oh okay, alright no big deal, I’ll miss this semester, and I’ll do it again next semester. Well that was the worst mistake I ever made in my life, because after that why would you even go back to school, right? It’s the golden handshake, just enough money to keep you in the game, but not enough, you know what I mean?”

The year away from their family was exhilarating and as hard as it was to move back home, Tara felt a strong pull to support her family. “Family responsibility is a huge thing; so
you don’t really think about that, you’re just like, okay, I have to do this.” Tara’s parents allowed their daughters to live in their basement so they had their own privacy and space. The second time around did look different; they were challenging the boundaries of their adolescence, in secrecy, however with a confidence and a relaxed attitude “my sister had a whole group of girlfriends at the time and they went out she went out to the local pub, even though it was a no-no, we still did it because everybody else was doing it.”

It was during one of these outings that Tara met her first boyfriend Chris, who turned out to be living next door to her parents’ house. They began a secret relationship for 2 years, which involved covert operations of meeting up in town without anyone spotting her, of spending time together at his home, without her family seeing her next door. “His nickname for me was James, like James Bond right, because we had to drive with the passenger seat down.” Tara was having fun, yet she always knew in her heart that this was not a serious relationship, she did not envision the rest of her life with him. This was her first boyfriend, not her soul mate. Because of izzat this choice was taken away from her when her family discovered her relationship, she was forced into a difficult decision that would impact on the next chapter of her life.

An Impossible Choice/Exile

“we’ve decided that you will get married”

It started with a common fight between two sisters. Tara and her sister were arguing about something insignificant now, however in the heat of the moment her sister said the words “I’m going to tell mom and dad about Chris”. Her mother overheard their argument while doing laundry outside their door. She quietly carried on with things not saying anything to either of them. Eventually she did tell her husband; now they both knew and they sat in silence. “Then finally one day I think we came back from a wedding or something like that and my mom was saying something, like trying to set it up, oh so-and-so’s mother was asking me if your dating because she knows a guy or whatever. And I was like, oh yeah; maybe there might be somebody, and she basically said is it Chris, and I was like, yah. And she was very disappointed; she said dad is disappointed and basically told me the scenario that she was downstairs and heard it...”

For the first time Tara demonstrated resistance to her parents. When her parents asked her to stop seeing Chris, she said NO and continued seeing him. “It was really challenging after
that because my mom and dad knew and every night I would go over to his house; and it was really hard for them to have to deal with that.” Tara’s parents felt betrayed not only by their daughter, but also by their neighbor, who they considered a “good neighbour”. Consequently, they made every effort they could think of to stop the relationship. These interventions carried on for three very stressful months. “Chris slept with a bat because he was nervous…my dad as much as he’s an alcoholic and stuff, I knew he would never, ever hurt us, like I knew that. What was stressful about it is that I let them down, do you know what I mean.” Yes, I very much knew what she meant, the disappointment on a parent’s face is like a dagger in one’s heart, so painful neither you nor your father can breathe.

For Tara this decision to stay with Chris, even with all of the pain and difficulty it was causing in her and her family was connecting to a much deeper decision. It was less about being “in love” with Chris and more about resistance to a pattern in her life of never saying NO, of always giving in to her parents’ boundaries. “Even though we had a really stressful relationship, even my mom said you always were a good girl, and it’s true I did everything that they asked me to, it’s just this one thing that I was like NO, because at the time I thought I loved him, right? It wasn’t even that...yeah maybe I loved him, sure, I also think that there was something inside of me that was like, NO not this time; this was the breaking point I have already given you enough, you’re not going to take this from me.”

However, as much as she was saying no to her parents’ requests, Tara was asking for their support in dating Chris, yet like many parents from that generation they did not comprehend or condone the concept of dating. In fact, in their eyes, Tara wanted to marry this man; otherwise how could she spend so many nights at his home and not imagine spending her entire life with him? Subsequently, her father turned to the next course of action that seemed most reasonable and respectable to his izzat. “My family had to sit the both of us down and my father had to ask, okay what are your intentions? And Chris said I love her, I don’t care about love, what are you going to do now? I guess I’ll marry her. And that’s how it happened…okay I guess I’m getting married. They had the conversation and the next day we’re going to the city and you’re going to buy her an engagement ring.” In retrospect both Tara and her mother have regrets. “Even to this day my mom says I wish I had just let you date him. Because I was, like, mom he was not the man I was going to marry, but I wish you would have let me date him
because I would have found that out on my own.” However, in her father’s eyes the only way he could accept this decision and save his izzat is if he had full control of the relationship.

The wedding was planned and Tara was married to Chris in the local temple with the entire community in attendance. She was one of the first in this small South Asian community to marry a white man and even though people were gossiping and disapproving, her father had made a very direct stance. “…Okay now that WE’VE decided that you will get married they could say what they want to say the fact is we are standing behind you and it’s done--do you know what I mean?”

It took some time for people in the community to get accustomed to the idea; however eventually after seeing Tara and Chris in the community they finally started to accept the relationship. “I think the acceptance came because my mother and father stood behind me--that’s why.” However, her father would let his guard down when he had drunken episodes. “…even while we were marrying and doing our own thing, dad would get drunk and say stuff like thu mere izzat khu thay sitdi (you have thrown my izzat into the well), he would say stuff like that, I thought you were over it, oh I guess not.”

In spite of this, marriage to Chris proved to be difficult. Tara found herself falling into a subservient role with Chris, and her life fell into a similar pattern of giving into Chris’s needs as she did with her parents. “It was hard because I went from one year of freedom, didn’t really know who I was, came back home and lived with my family and from my family I moved in with him. He’s nine years older than me, so I felt like I was subservient, I felt like I was a wife, and had to take on a wife role. As the years went by, I started feeling resentment. I would say to Chris, why did you marry me…you were older than I was why didn’t you put your foot down and say no we’re going to date? Because I started to come to realization that this is not the person…he is not my soul mate, or life partner.” However, divorce was not an option for Tara, as much as she was struggling in the relationship, “this is what I signed up for and I’m doing this.”

Tara tried everything to be a “good wife” and moved to the city with Chris to pursue his career. Yet, within a short span Chris ventured into the world of cruise ships and did this for the last two and a half years of their relationship. Tara had moved to a new city to ignite her marriage and within months her husband decided to pursue work that involve being away most
“So I felt betrayed. I was, like, wait a minute here. I was having a good time at home...everything is said and done, I’m married now. People respect me. I had support and he uprooted me, because he was unhappy there, and seven months later you’re taking off. So I felt really alone at this time.” Tara’s life was tense, and this relationship was falling apart. “I remember him coming home after three months...he was so upset, he was like, I don’t know Tara, I don’t know if I can do this, and that was the turning point. I said you’re going to man up and you’re going to do this; you’re committed to doing this; you’re going to fulfill your commitment, and you’re going to do this.”

The last time he came home from the ships was the final moment Tara had with her husband. “I basically said to him listen I need you home now, because I’m lonely being the good wife...So then I ended up getting an email asking me for a divorce...you know when they say the room was spinning, the room spinned. I thought, wow all the stuff that I basically did for you, this is how you repay me and it didn’t even occur to me that he would cheat on me, didn’t even think of it, I was like, no way.” But he did cheat on her and was expecting a child with another woman. The following months Tara went through the process of a difficult divorce and focused on her anger and resentment towards Chris.

In moments of loss, the body has an incredible way of coping, surviving and moving forward, knowing very well that life will not slow down for your mind and body to catch up. Tara went into completion mode, focusing on the dealings of an ugly divorce that involved separating a marriage of 5 years. The impact of these moments had their toll. “I lost 25 pounds in 2 months because of the stress...I ended up seeing a therapist for a little while just to get my bearings because I didn’t really understand...And then I met Adam totally different, right.”

There was a connection right away between her and Adam, something she could recognize as different than what she had with Chris. Adam helped her through the separation and what started out as a friendship between the two of them, turned to a lifelong connection. “Yeah it felt different...people around me were like, oh my god you’ve met this person really quickly, but you have to understand when somebody is away for 2 ½ years and only pops in two months at a time, that’s not really a relationship.... So when Adam came along, it was like a breath of fresh air it was like, my goodness I have been alone for so long. And yeah, it was just very different.”

During those years Tara realized that she was holding onto her marriage with Chris for her family, for the reputation her family had put on the line, for a relationship that was never in
her control from the beginning. “I know now it wasn’t him asking me for a divorce, it was me putting pressure on him. I decided that this was not good enough so it set the wheels in motion. It was just a long drawn-out death basically.” The death of her marriage was foreseen, however her father’s death came very abruptly during the first year that Chris had left for the ships. Yet that part of her story had a very different ending, one that involved incredible courage and forgiveness.

**Grief, Loss and, Reclamation**

“...but then I think about my experiences and I would never want my child to go through that, but you kinda…I can’t explain it…like will I ever be soft? It’s tough to put away your hardness.”

Tara’s father died during the most difficult time in her life. He did not see this spiral that Tara and Chris were going through before he passed; however the chapter of reclamation between Tara and her father had just begun 2 years prior to his death, and in the midst of her relationship unraveling, Tara’s relationship with her father was being repaired. “Yeah, my dad died. Chris left in June. My dad died in August...heart attack.”

In the year and a half before Tara moved to the city to follow Chris’s dream, her father had an incredible transformation that Tara to this day does not entirely understand. “…he’s been telling us all his life that he’s going to quit, and as kids you pray that dad is going to get better and he doesn’t. Disappointment after disappointment. So one day...he was out all night. We couldn’t find him...he showed up in the morning with a black eye and a scratch. So he must have slept in the ditch somewhere, right? And he says I’m done, and we basically laughed at him and said yah, yah whatever. But every day went by, he was sober, a month went by, he was sober, another month went by; he was sober...oh my god, he’s super serious here.”

Whatever instigated the change, it was an incredible transformation for the family to witness. After having a man that had two different personas when he was sober and drunk, Tara was not even sure she understood who her father was. In that short time of sobriety, her father made amends. “So basically in the two years he paid everybody back; he apologized to everybody there was a point where I was getting transferred to another job...It’s maybe a 10-minute drive from our town and he’d drive me... So we had lots of conversations driving up, driving back. So then there’s this one time before I started work, he apologizes for everything;
apologize for the things that you think he didn’t know because he was so drunk you didn’t think he remembered. He apologized for not being there for our games. He apologized that he pulled us out, that he made us quit. He apologized, just basically for never being there... Automatically when he did that I was like, Dad don’t worry about it’ we’re good now; things are not good now. I thought he’s not going to be around’ he’s come full circle and it’s time for him to go; and sure enough, he lasted maybe two years. My mom fell in love with him again in that two years; we migrated to him. The man we thought we wanted our entire life was there those last two years.”

Tara was grateful he did not witness her divorce from Chris, because she is not sure what that would have done to him and his last years on earth. Yet the forgiveness was essential for all of them to be content and just when they had all reclaimed a new relationship to this man, he passed through their fingertips, like the wind, leaving behind a family full of mourning and a daughter in turmoil. The pain of loss connected to her father’s death was so apparent in Tara’s body as she shared this part of her story.

During our time together her mother had called twice to check in on her. In my mind I was curious why Tara had not spoken in depth about her mother, yet she was such a pivotal person in her life. After her father’s death Tara had to go through a process of reclaiming her relationship with her mother as well. “I basically hated my mother from the age of 19 to 24. Like completely loathed her, because how can a mother put four children through this, do you know what I mean? You had support or I thought she had support. So I basically had nothing to do with her we had major battles and I just hated her, didn’t even despise my dad as much as I despised her. Because she was sober, do you know what I mean? Dad was drunk, so yeah my relationship with her was really tense.”

There comes a point when parents are cast in a new light and we can really see/hear their stories. Tara was empathic to her father because he was sort of an open book when it came to life and his story of survival and a “larger-than-life” character that encompassed attention everywhere he went. “I’ve always had a soft spot for my dad, just because I felt like you know, his dad was a raging alcoholic...I could understand what he was going through a little bit but never understood what my mom was going through; and that’s kind of harsh.” Tara did not know her mother’s story until the attention on her father began to fade. Only then did she realize that her mother’s story of izzat was intimately connected to her own story. “As we grew up we
would hear a lot about my dad’s life, like his very colorful life, right. Never really heard about 
my mom’s life; and she started talking about little bits of her life; then I started to kinda feel a 
little bit for her; oh yeah, you didn’t know that dad was 41 and you were 19; you thought he was 27.”

Tara’s mother immigrated to this foreign land with a man 22 years older than she was, at 
an age that is barely able to comprehend the world. She migrated to this land, with no social 
supports and no way to engage with the world other than through her husband and his family. 
Her story is one of survival in some of the most difficult and challenging elements that one can 
be placed in. Perhaps she had visions of a different life with her husband, only to discover he 
was an alcoholic who struggled with inner demons and struggled with the very world he had 
brought his wife to. “I remember the day she left my father, she took the kids; she left him for a 
week...to my aunt’s, his sister who said leave him, leave him! When is he going to learn...when 
we came back home, he was passed out on the kitchen floor drunk with a bottle of whatever next 
to him. After that she said I’m never going to leave him, because she was afraid that he was 
going to, you know, die”

Perhaps when Tara was born it was a relief to her mother to know she could start to 
share a part of herself with another person. Perhaps that is what led her to rely so much on Tara 
for parenting support. “I love my mom, don’t get me wrong I love her, but our relationship has 
always been different. I’m the oldest; she leans on me in ways she doesn’t with the others--do 
you know what I mean? There’s just a difference. So yeah, I totally think she’s amazing, strong, 
I now know she could not have left, I understand all of that, but our relationship was different. 
My relationship with my father was different; it’s just different. There’s an arm’s-length 
distance between the two of them. My sisters and my brother had a different relationships with 
my mom.”

As we were sitting across from each other sharing these intimate stories, both of us 
drying our tears and blowing our noses, Tara took a deep breath and talked about the process or 
recalling her life story. “Oh my god, I haven’t talked about this stuff. I don’t really talk about 
this stuff...gosh, so much pain and hurt; and it was such a different life, and I don’t really want 
to...my sisters’ talk it to death and I’m just like, I don’t want to deal with it; so I don’t really 
express my feelings towards that.” Having space and permission to grieve and mourn losses and 
the circumstances that surround izzat is something Tara has rarely been given permission to do.
This has never been her role in the family, to be vulnerable. She has never had the privilege to give in to that. “Because like my role wasn’t a vulnerable role either, right? My role in the family was my brother and sisters had a place of support; so then I never talked about it; I’m going to be their cheerleader; I couldn’t communicate that because then they’d stress out that I was actually going through something...so basically you fall into this pattern, and all of sudden you’re 38 years old; and this is what I’ve been through, and this is my life now. I have good life now, but certain things kind of creep up a little bit...”

Doubt creeps into the mind. Doubt that she will ever be vulnerable, ever be “soft”, and ever be able to let go. “My heart may be hard because of my experiences...my mom said the other day, Menu nay patha kithay there dhil pather kay jasa hai, (I don’t know why your heart is hard like a rock) like why it’s so hard, well because that was survival.” Tara speaks of writing in a journal to help her get through the most difficult moments of her divorce, and now her spirituality being a source of solace, which involved going back to Sikhism. Captivatingly, her greatest survival has been channeling her anger when she feels most vulnerable so that she can diligently move beyond the pain that threatens to creep into her daily life. Finally, compartmentalizing her world has been a part of her survival from very early on in life and has made her the warrior that she is to move beyond the limitations and boundaries set around her. “Yeah, okay, that’s what I’m going through, yah, whatever, put it away, put it away and it now comes out in different ways like anger, depressed sometimes a little bit...you can’t put it away forever.” Overall, Tara sees her role as one that strives on no matter what.

Today Tara has two beautiful daughters of her own with Adam, and many times she is haunted by the anger which turns to depression, which comes out in cold hard ways. “I said to Adam, yeah I guess kids don’t raise themselves hey? He’s like, no Tara they don’t...I think about my experiences and I would never want my child to go through that. I can’t explain it...like will I ever be soft? It’s tough to put away your hardness.” These questions haunt Tara, and they make me think about how much loss she has encountered. Yes the hardness is necessary for survival, but the love for forgiveness is a sure sign that softness is a part of the spirit too, as much as it may seem hidden.
Parvati’s Story

Childhood

“So that's where I learned that if you don't follow the family rules, you going to get disowned; and that means you get cut off by the whole family; there's no secret meetings or anything like that; so if you're looking at how young izzat played in my life...”

When we are thrust into this world at birth, much of what we encounter in our everyday lives we have very little control over. We are born into a story that has already occurred and is in performance. This story becomes a part of our life history, a history that can sometimes torment us and follow us without you ever having a memory of it. The memory of this story lives in our bodies and many times lights the future events to occur.

Parvati was born into a household at the brink of excommunication. “I'm the youngest of six children. I have five sisters...one brother, and I don't have any memories of my oldest sisters...two of my sisters were disowned when I was really young, about 5 or 6.” The very word “disowned” accounts for the layers of power that were a part of Parvati’s family home. Parvati’s two older sisters Kelly and Sunny were “disowned” by her father due to scandal and what he saw as dishonour being brought to his name. As the story was told to Parvati, after Kelly was married, Sunny began living with her and her husband. During this time Sunny began having an affair with Kelly’s husband. Sunny became Kelly’s husband’s mistress, and they all lived in the same home for almost 15 years. Everyone in their community was gossiping about this arrangement, and as a result her father experienced a great deal of shame and “disowned” both his daughters, packed up and moved to another country in Europe. From a very early stage in her life Parvati learned an important lesson about izzat, “...if you don't follow the family rules, you are going to get disowned and that means you get cut off by the whole family; there's no secret meetings or anything like that.”

Parvati’s father packed up his life and his children and moved away from England, her mother did not follow until 8 months later. Her brother, Shaan was given charge of the house and since the eldest daughters had been married off the daily household chores fell on the shoulders of the two remaining daughters, Parvati and Nikki. Shaan was many years older than both of them and felt it was his responsibility to “discipline” his sisters. “So I started being
abused when I was really young. The first time I got hit was when I was 6 years old.” This violence continued throughout Parvati’s childhood, into young adulthood.

After a year away, Parvati’s father felt it was safe to return “home” and he moved the family to the South of England, far enough away from his old neighbourhood that he could be anonymous to the South Asian community living there. When Parvati’s father first migrated to England, he built his life on the core concept of izzat. As one of the first goldsmiths in the community, people relied on his word to provide them with quality gold for their daughters’ weddings, and he relied on the honour of his customers to pay him. Parvati’s father was very much a man of honour and he told his daughters “it took me my whole life to make my reputation; it’s going to take my daughters two seconds to ruin it.” In his affecting words, he was almost expecting his daughters to disappoint him.

Living in England during the 80s was a life full of daily racist encounters. From race riots to being called “Paki” on a daily basis. What Parvati recalls the most is her father’s sense of this daily reality. “The racism, I don’t think really molded his belief system on how to control us; it validated that we were in somebody else’s country...” It was essential for Parvati’s father to have full control and power in his household if he did not have it in the outside world. Yet even this proved to be a battle that would leave him isolated and alone. Living with a man of such standards, who also suffered from alcoholism, took its toll on Parvati’s mother. “...She kept on telling me my whole life that she was going to leave, I was like, yeah, right...It was like she just didn’t want to be a mother anymore.

By her teenage years, Parvati was the last daughter left at home. Life at home became a daily routine involving physical assaults from her mother and brother and witnessing a difficult relationship between her mother and father. This was further exacerbated when her parents came into financial problems, leading her father to sign his house over to his son. For Parvati, living in this space was barely tolerable, yet she did not have much power to change it. For her mother, however, it was this shift in power dynamics that instigated her departure from the home for good. “Then came a day when my brother decided he was really going to dig his heels in. So my brother says you have to pay all the bills, not only the electricity bills, but all the bills...So my mom decides to say no... So he's like, okay fine, if you don't pay all the bills, you have to be gone by 3pm tomorrow. She says okay then... Then I get this pounding knock on my door at 7 o'clock in the morning...She's like ma daas bajay lakay sara saman lajana (I’m going to come
back at 10 o’clock to take everything and leave), I’m like, Fuck she said 10 o’clock...Shit...what if she comes back and really takes shit, what am I supposed to do, right? 10 o’clock rolls around...my mother brings garbage bags, she comes home and says ma sara saman lajana, (I’m going to take everything). She seriously went in every single room and took everything. Shadara (sheets) off the beds, we had no bed sheets. She went and took everything...she felt that this was her God-given right; so she took everything."

Her mother never returned. Parvati became the collateral damage to the hate and anger her mother harboured towards her husband and son. Her mother demonstrated incredible resistance in her departure, one that took years to build up to this moment. In the aftermath of her mother leaving, Parvati found herself full of a similar shame that her father carried on his shoulders. The shame of having a mother leave her teenage daughter behind to live on her own was not only painful for Parvati, but embarrassing to confront in the face of a community that judged her family for this predicament. Parvati was angry and resentful towards her mother for leaving and even more rejected after her mother left. “So I think two weekends later we went to a food market…and I see her, ready to talk to her and she looks right through me as if she didn’t see me; and that was so heartbreaking. Dad didn’t even stop me. He said I could talk to you, and here you are acting like you don’t even see me. That’s when I was very resentful. I hated her for doing all that she had done to me.”

In the years following, Parvati found herself taking care of the remaining family members. She recalls building a newfound attachment to her father. Parvati also realized that her father lived in the fear that she would eventually dishonour him like all the other women in his life. Parvati internalized this prophecy, resented the expectation, and made certain vows to herself. “I always did what dad wanted me to…because I had always heard it and I had always vowed if I’m going to do something I’m going to make sure it’s good. If I do something bad I’m going to make sure I never come back into their lives again.”

Perhaps in his fear of losing his last daughter to izzat, Parvati’s father made his own vows and arranged for her to be married to a man in Canada as soon as she was legal. Parvati discovered the arrangement through a girlfriend’s sister and came home to realize that her future had been decided. “This was always my fate. Falling in love was not a right I ever had. So I don’t even think of that.” When her father disclosed his plans to Parvati, she expressed her opposition. “I don’t want to go to Canada; I don’t want to marry this guy. He said asa fare,
Due to her sisters’ dishonour and her mother’s departure, her father had decided that it would be easier to marry Parvati to someone who is not exposed to the shameful rumours about his family. Parvati was married to a man 9 years older than her, which was something she only discovered after she was living with him. The marriage led her to a major city in Canada and the second chapter of her life away from her family, her life in England, and into the arms of another man who saw her more as an object to control than a partner.

**Maneuvering Through Izzat**

“*jay theray adami na thenu nay rakhaya usay kida rakh laynga? (if your husband won’t keep you, how do you expect us to?).”*

Before leaving England to start her life in Canada, Parvati wanted to see her mother to have her blessing. With her best friend, Vikram’s help, she tracked down her mother. “*So myself, Vikram’s mom, Vikram’s sister all went to my mom’s house. I said to Auntie, why don’t you go and talks to her ask if she wants to see me. If she does great. If not, I will walk away. I don’t want anything. I just want her to put her hand on my head, and I want her blessing—that’s all I want. So I stood outside…about 20 minutes later they came out, and his face just dropped and I just knew. He said Parvati I’m really sorry; she doesn’t want to see you. And then Vikram’s mom was like, when we told her, she said my daughter can do whatever the hell she wants and she can go to hell. I was just like, okay, that’s fine. “* I can only imagine the impact such rejection has on the mind and soul. She wanted her mother to know that her life was about to change, and maybe she would intervene. Parvati left for Canada without this blessing.

The wedding took place a mere 2 days after Parvati and her father arrived in Canada and met Barry. Her life with Barry and his family was a shock to her system. The power they demonstrated over her was as difficult as her own family, yet insidious in its form and manipulative in its nature. “*So they changed my name, cut my hair…and they made me wear
skirts, whereas it was forbidden in my father’s home. They fed me beef even though they knew
that I don’t eat it...Within a month or so, Barry lost his temper and broke the phone-- I was so
scared, 17 years old I had no idea.” Very soon after marrying, Parvati realized this relationship
was destined for pain. She recalls feeling distant from her husband and unable to connect on any
level. It was not long before she was pregnant, and by the age of 22, within 4 years of marrying,
Parvati had two daughters, Nila and Phul. They became her lifeline.

Life in this marriage included very little contact with the outside world, other than work
and his family. Barry continued to party and drink in his social circles and would come home at
night to abuse Parvati, when he felt the need. The only support Parvati found was in her sister-
in-law, who was supportive. Yet, there were some things Parvati could never share with anyone
about her relationship to Barry. She was unable to utter the words that surrounded the everyday
violence she experienced in her marriage.

When Barry introduced Parvati to another couple, Parvati felt that perhaps she was
becoming involved in Barry’s social circles. “I thought they were awesome; so I encouraged us
to spend more time with them.” Unbeknownst to Parvati, Barry was having an affair with the
female friend, and neither her husband nor Parvati were aware of it for 2 years. It was not until
she contracted Herpes from her husband that she realized that he was being unfaithful. “The
warning signs were there, but when you’re vulnerable little person...because you’re scared. And
who is going to back me up?” Not only did Parvati not have support, she also did not want her
father knowing about her life and potentially bringing him shame. She wanted to be the one
daughter that did not bring dishonour to her father. So she stayed and confided in her eldest
sister Jaz, who encouraged her to “hang in there” and so she did until she was pregnant with her
third child. When she told Barry about the pregnancy, he forced her to go through with an
abortion. “I just couldn’t understand that you want me to get rid of this. How can this be? So
yeah I was scheduled for an abortion 4 days before my 24th birthday. He didn’t even come with
me to the hospital. I told myself I’m going to go through the emotions, and when it gets to be too
much, I’m going to say stop; I can’t do this and I’m going to leave. And I’m going to tell him I
tried this but I couldn’t do it. No I didn’t have the courage to say stop.”

The anger and pain of going through this experience gave Parvati the strength to
confront Barry and his lover, with adrenalin in her veins she not only confronted them, but she
also made the other husband aware of the affair. During this time she began planning her escape
from Barry, calling a lawyer and figuring out her options. Before leaving, she organized a family meeting with her in-laws, as her father had taught her to do if things begin to fall apart in her marriage. She gave his family one last chance to redeem the relationship. The meeting was not only a disappointment for Parvati, but also placed her at further risk of abuse from Barry after the meeting was over. They supported their son, they gave him excuses, and they even blamed her for his lifestyle. Parvati spoke up for the first time and confronted their hypocrisy and talks about what she said to her mother-in-law that day: “At the end of the day I’m somebody else’s daughter and that’s why you don’t give a shit. I’m asking you for help, and if you’re not going to help me, remember you have daughters too-- how can that be? She’s like eda khor ghalthi ho gai, enu maaf kharde (he made a mistake, you must forgive him). Are you kidding me? How about I go out and do what he did and I’ll come back and say menu ghalthi ho gai, menu maaf kharde (I made a mistake, forgive me). Can you? She’s like puuth eda-dhi ghal nay ha ge (dear, it’s not like that). I’m like, why it’s a double standard, you’re saying it’s okay for your son to do this and it’s not okay for me to do this.” After the family’s departure a physical altercation ensued, and at one point Parvati was fearful that Barry would kill her. The police arrived; Barry was not charged, and the next day after he has left for work Parvati calls her lawyer and gets a restraining order against her husband, and applies for full custody of her children.

The events that occurred afterwards were a mix of pain, trauma and further rejection. Parvati’s father was involved, and he sent Shaan to “take care” of things. Another mediation was organized. However, this time the matchmaker was involved as her father promised. During the meeting Parvati was not complying like she “should” be, and as a result Shaan did not support his sister and went back home to their father with the notion that Parvati was being difficult and should remain in the marriage. After his return to England, both her brother and father made a statement that continues to disturb Parvati to this day, yet also gave her the strength to leave on her own. “They get drunk one night and call me on speaker phone...They said “jay theray adami na thenu nay rakhaya usay kida rakh layngai? (If your husband can’t keep you, how are we expected to? I was devastated this was my father and my brother, the only family I had ever really had...it was horrible.”

Before this, Parvati had explored the option of going back to England, after hearing her father’s words she felt she had even less options. Like many women caught in an intimate...
partner violence situation, Parvati was afraid to leave her husband. The fear of being a single mom and not knowing how to survive on an everyday basis with two young children was what held her in that relationship for this long. Parvati felt she had nothing to gain, and so much to lose. “I didn’t know how to pay bills…I didn’t know how to pay rent.” Parvati was uncertain about the daily realities of life that she had not been exposed to because of the control the men in her life had over her. Nonetheless, 5 years after she first got her restraining order against Barry, Parvati rebuilt a new existence for her and her daughters. She entered subsidized housing, and with the support of her lawyer was able to gain full custody of her daughters, and through many moments of disdain and manipulation from her ex–husband, she was eventually able to come to some semblance of peace with him. Parvati did what many women have to in order to survive; she took a plunge into vulnerability and came out stronger, yet also scarred by the process.

_An Impossible Choice/Exile_

“…and this is what dad wants you to do. So here I am, stuck in a pickle, this is dad’s wishes. I haven’t gone against dad’s wishes, here I am stuck again.”

There is this moment after a whirlwind storm when the body is tense, not sure whether it is truly over, waiting and searching for the next crisis to occur. The mind and body cannot sit still, ever vigilant to fight, to flee, to save the self from further pain, confusion, and rejection. I imagine Parvati sitting after her divorce, wondering where the next onslaught of pain was going to come from. Not sure how to sit with what she had experienced for the first half of her life, and caught up in the everyday world of caring, loving, and nurturing her daughters.

Parvati’s sister Jaz was someone she looked up to. She was the first in the family to be married and she always performed in a way that honoured her father. At least that is the story that Parvati was told throughout her childhood. So when Jaz called Parvati one day and asked her to “vacation” in India with her, she did not hesitate. In fact she looked forward to the break away from the chaos of her life and to spend time with her sister. Jaz’s daughter was going to come to Canada to take care of the girls, and a flight was booked. Upon arriving in India, Jaz sat Parvati down and explained the purpose of their trip. No this was not a vacation, Parvati was expected to re-marry Jaz’s husband’s nephew while they were here. “…this is what dad wants you to do. So here I am, stuck in a pickle, this is dad’s wishes? Well, Parvati you have herpes, you have two kids from a previous marriage. They’re girls; no one’s going to accept them; this
man is willing to accept you with all your flaws. In my head I’m thinking, makes sense, she’s right; nobody is going to want me, you know, and if dad says it’s the right thing to do, maybe that’s what I should do."

Parvati felt trapped once again between the expectations to uphold her father’s izzat and the uncertainty of what a decision like this truly meant. “I went from being the Western girl to being pulled back into that same haan-ji, haan-ji (yes, yes), don’t want his bassati (shame), and it’s the right thing to do.” Parvati did go through with the wedding under her sister’s watchful eye and under great duress. At the time there was a tornado of confusing messages that something was not right about this arrangement. Parvati noticed her sister’s relationship with the groom, and the lack of relationship between her sister and her brother-in-law. Parvati’s own relationship with her sister had shifted quite a bit a few years earlier when Jaz had suffered a stroke, which caused permanent brain damage. “It affected her personality; she was no longer the same person.”

All the lies unraveled when Parvati discovered pictures days after the marriage that her sister had taken with the groom. Upon confronting her new husband and sister, it was clear that their relationship was much more than nephew and aunt. It was not until she returned to Canada did she realize the weight of what she had witnessed and what she had been coerced to do. As soon as she touched Canadian soil her family, his family, everyone began harassing her to begin the process of sponsoring the man she was forced to marry. As soon as she got back to Canada the anxiety and impact of this decision led to a major mental breakdown. Parvati lost her cognitive ability to form words; she literally could not find the words in her mouth for what she was feeling. Everything had been taken out of her. The final conversation she had with her father led her spiraling down into pieces that could only be put back together through medical intervention. “I call my dad... he told me if I didn’t respond to this guy I was dead in his eyes, and that this is the right thing to do, and that I had did baasati (shame) way too many times before, even though I hadn’t and if I didn’t do this, this was it for me.” That very day Parvati was hospitalized due to a severe nervous breakdown. “On that day I was hospitalized. It gave me an opportunity to think. Okay, every time I’ve tried to do things my father’s way he’s said anything I’ve done it. When is enough enough? So I decided enough was enough. That’s why I was willing to be disowned, but it was kind of mutual: If you’re willing to disown me, I’ll disown
you back; you can’t disown me twice in one lifetime. So that’s how I fought. In the aftermath, it took over 3 months to heal from the physical impact this trauma had on her body.

Parvati began putting the pieces of her life back together. She sought legal advice and understood that she was caught in a forced marriage and began the process of unhinging herself from the ties that bound her to this man she knew so little of. Family and friends from work played an integral role in supporting Parvati’s healing process. In particular Parvati’s relationship to her now partner Krish played an integral role in her recovery. Parvati had met him online in the early part of her relationship to Barry. At that time it was a friendship that saved her from the trauma and abuse she was experiencing with Barry. It gave her an escape to talk to him online, and eventually they began talking on the phone and after her trip to India they solidified their relationship. They have known each other for 11 years and are in a committed union.

**Grief, Loss and, Reclamation**

“He had so much hate towards me but love towards the girls…I fumbled a lot because I was so scared, I was like that little girl again.”

There was a hole in Parvati’s life that her family used to fill. There was a sense of freedom from izzat; yet the holes in her life were begging to be filled with a sense of closure so she could move on. Filling these holes meant unpacking her relationship to her mother and her sisters. It seemed that her mother very easily set her aside and continued with her life, and she needed to know whether that was true. *I missed her when I had Nila, because everybody felt sorry for me that I gave birth to a girl, even though I wanted a daughter... Everything else I had no feelings towards her. I was so used to surviving on my own it didn’t matter. Did her mother think about her?*

At work Parvati experienced a death that made her question whether she could move beyond her anger and loss and come to a place of forgiveness. Could she face her mother and ask her the difficult questions that she has been searching for, since she was thrust into this world from her mother’s womb: Parvati found her mother’s phone number. “*I called my mom. I said do you know who I am. She said Nope. I said do you know a Parvati, she’s like, nope. I was like; did you have a daughter named “Parvati”? She said yes, I said I’m your daughter. Somebody I cared about has passed away and life’s too short I wanted you to know that I wish*
you well and I hope you are happy and healthy where you are. I don’t hate you anymore, and you’re never going to hear from me. Then I hung up.”

Six months later she called her again and told her mother her story. She told her about her marriage, about moving to Canada, the terrible abuse and violence she experienced from her husband. She told her about how her sister deceived her and the impact of that experience on her body and soul. Parvati shared with her mother all of the pain and hardship she has endured since her mother left them; and for the first time she heard her mother cry for her and with her and a new relationship was born. Parvati began the process of filling the holes in her life story that she had yearned for. “I felt like I had this puzzle with tons of pieces missing that didn’t make sense.”

Her sisters had each come in and out of their mother’s life. Their stories were altogether full of struggle and loss. Sunny was living with her mother after being kicked out of Kelly’s home. Kelly’s husband had died, and soon after she got the courage to force Sunny to leave. Parvati wanted to ask her sister and mother questions face-to-face and she wanted her daughters to meet her mother before she dies. So Parvati arranged a trip to visit her mother, to find some solace and unearth the stories she was never able to complete.

The trip lasted 2 weeks, and during that time many reunions happened. The first place she went to was her mother’s home. “So I’m thinking it’s going to be emotional; I haven’t seen her in 20 odd years or whatever...she opens the door. I see this woman who has jet-black hair, burgundy lipstick, gold up to here. I’m thinking holy shit, she hasn’t changed one bit... So she lets us in. It felt kind of cold, like weird, just weird energy there. She’s really polite and stuff... I don’t think I belong here. I don’t think I belong in her real life. I belong in her phone life but not in her real life. Why didn’t I cry? Why isn’t there any emotion?” The disconnection that Parvati felt towards her mother, continued with her sister Sunny, whom she barely had a memory of since she had left the home when Parvati was very young. That night the three of them stayed up, and Parvati drilled them with questions. She discovered that when Kelly married her husband, he had actually impregnated her eldest sister Jaz, which only her father knew about at the time and arranged for her to have an abortion. This explained Jaz’s relationship to her father, and it seems that as much as her father had a hold on Jaz, she also had a hold on their father because of his own adultery that Jaz had witnessed as a child.
Sunny described her life with Kelly and her husband. This man had coerced and threatened Sunny with violence to become his mistress. He forced his wife to remain silent, or he would kill them all, including his children. Sunny described a horrific story of abuse and trauma and revealed a man who was sexually abusing not only his own children, but also some children in their neighbourhood. When he died, Sunny truly emerged from a prison that she had been living in for most of her life. The stories were incredible and Parvati was uncertain how much she truly believed or wanted to believe. To believe is to live in uncertain multiple truths, especially when you grow up hearing a single story about the women in your life. However, at the end of the day it was more about hearing each woman’s experience and unraveling their truths. To begin the process of reclamation.

After a few days Parvati was forced to decide whether or not she was going to see her father when her daughters, who had an intimate memory of their grandfather and uncle, requested that they visit. So through courage unbeknownst to many, Parvati ventured to her father’s home. Her father lived alone above a meat shop. He had created a world full of isolation and solitude there becoming a hermit, which became his primary form of survival. “Every time something bad happened he would always isolate himself from everyone around because that was his way of protecting his honour, because if he’s not talking to anyone, they won’t ask questions and they won’t know.”

The meeting was tense. “He had so much hate towards me but love towards the girls…I fumbled a lot because I was so scared; I was like that little girl again.” He encouraged them to go and visit her brother. So they ventured to his home after and that reunion was a little more energetic. Her brother had come to terms with his anger, and she was able to see his kids and see how much he loved them. And then something unexpected happened. While Parvati was visiting Shaan, he asked if he could take her to the store that his wife worked at so she could see them before they left. On the way there, Shaan mentioned that Jaz worked at the same store and was most likely working today. Parvati had not seen or spoken to her sister since her return from India and did not want to have anything to do with her.

So when Parvati entered the store, she was uncertain what she would do. After visiting her sister-in-law, she saw Jaz, and in a last minute decision she approached her. “We were about to walk away and I said actually no, I want to see her... My sister works at customer service; she finishes working with the customer; customer walks away and she looks up and the blood
drains from her face. She goes pale like she had seen a ghost. I look at her and I’m like you fucking bitch. I wanted her to see that we came to your country, your city, your work, now what? Do you think I’m scared of you? No. I walked past her again and walked to Shaan and the car. He said, are you okay? I said, yeah, I’m okay.”

Parvati left behind all the anger, the pain, and the resentment of her past. She reconnected with her mother and sister who she had searched for, and made peace with whatever she could salvage with her father. She remains in contact with her brother, mostly due to his interest and diligence. And finally she closed the door to her relationship with her sister Jaz. Months after her visit to England, Jaz divorced her husband and her father finally believed what Parvati had told him about their trip to India. “So I now have closure from my brother, my sisters, my father, my mother everybody. If I dropped dead tomorrow, I would feel like I got it out. I don’t feel like there’s any unfinished business. I took care of everything, and the fact that my father knows. The flipside is I don’t have a desire to have a relationship with him just because he knows the truth. There’s no point. I know that I’ll turn into that little girl all over again and I can’t be that girl.”

Parvati has moved far beyond that little girl that was afraid of her brother, afraid of hurting her father, angry with her mother, uncertain about her sisters. Parvati has survived and is at a place where she continues to be an incredible inspiration for her daughters, as well as for other women who struggle with the little girl inside of them, crying for acceptance, fearing rejection, and ultimately truly desiring love and connection. As difficult as it was to tell her story, Parvati does and continues to so that she can break the mould of honour in her family.
Letter to My Sisters

It is difficult to know how to speak after telling stories of great pain, beauty and survival. It is difficult to know how a reader will want to move forward. There is so much to say. Many lessons that emerge from the stories can be applied to our understanding of izzat, family violence, women’s bodies, and women’s resistance. Yet, before merging into this discussion, which will occur in the next chapter, I need to recognize the gift that we have been given by my sisters’. I have chosen to write an open letter to my sisters’, as well as other women who find themselves in the stories I’ve told here.

Dear Sisters,

For the past year I have come to tattoo your stories into my skin. I have bonded to your stories with my tears. When I touch the skin in which your stories have pierced I am brought back to the day we came together to share our stories. I came to each of you and asked you to share moments of pain, grief, loss, and utmost beauty, in your life. Somehow you opened up yourself, many times your home, and your heart. I feel incredible privilege to be the vessel in which you have filled your stories. I thank you wholeheartedly for these moments.

You spoke to your stories in the physical space that existed between us, now they have been written down on these pages with my nervous hands. I have cried with you on the day of sharing, and now my sweat, tears and exhaustion stain these pages. In the process I have changed your name, left out many beautiful, yet difficult and complicated details that are a part of your life. There are many stories I could not share, having to make a choice on whether they would become a part of this public space. However, in my heart each and every detail is written and I will carry them with me forever, for that I thank you.

Each of you has spoken about the moments of your life where you resisted the many forces of heteropatriarchy that can imprison the mind and body. I am in awe of your resiliency, about the impact of these decisions, and I hope that your mighty spirit is evident on the pages that are filled with your stories. Each of your stories demonstrates the injuries that can occur from izzat, yet each of you have reclaimed izzat for yourself and demonstrated your resistance to how heteropatriarchy uses izzat to claim bodies. There are many symbolic deaths in each of your stories, the death of relationships, and your death to the ones that nurtured you as
children. The grief of these losses is evident in your stories. I embrace each of you; the grief will always be present and is a part of our everyday preoccupations.

Now that you have given us these stories, can your stories lead us to a place of action? How can our readers witness your stories and ignite within them an understanding of heteropatriarchy and izzat? How can our community support each other to move beyond pain and excommunication, to a place of understanding, connection, and forgiveness? How can those outside of our community who read these stories reflect on their role in supporting families through the violence that lives in the private spaces, or the violence that threatens to show its face when women transgress boundaries of izzat? How do we speak to the world about our experiences? Can we ask the media, the government, and national entities to not see our stories as contributions to the single story of “honour” based violence, but the multiple stories of heteropatriarchy and violence against women that is so pervasive in our world today? I believe your story will be a source of support and connection for other women and families struggling with the complexities of izzat and I thank you for that gift.

When we first came together to speak, each of you were in a very distinct part of your journey in life. It has been almost 4 years since I started this project and I know that you are all living, surviving, dealing, and engaging with life’s journey. I wish you light and love on your journey. In traditional Punjabi way I ask, je metho koi galthi hoo gai, menu maaf kardo, ma suchay dhil nhar ehay chiiti liki hay (if I have made any errors, please forgive me, I have written this letter with a true heart).

Sincerely your sister,

Mandeep Kaur

In the following final chapter of this dissertation I will be going in depth to analyze how my sisters’ stories can transform our current discourses of “honour” based violence. These stories have lessons to share on how we can move us to a place of action, transformation, critical consciousness, and engagement within the Punjabi community, within service provision across Canada, and within international discourses of “honour” related violence.
Chapter 6

Liberation From Discourses Of “Honour”

How can we second-generation Punjabi, South Asian women confront the violence and patriarchal aspects of izzat in our lives and reclaim our izzat and bodies? I began this dissertation with this question, and I return to it again as a reminder of what is at the heart of this research. This chapter is organized in two parts. In the first part of this chapter my intentions are to have a thorough critical conversation that unpacks the context in which “honour” related violence discourses are situated. In order to do this, I want to revisit the “culture” argument that circulates “honour” discourses. In the following section, I center theories of racism, heteropatriarchy, and colonialism in order to discuss how action can occur around “honour” related violence against South Asian women. Finally, I will end the first part of this chapter with a focus on the broader context of gender-based violence and the collective battle that is necessary for critical consciousness to occur in the South Asian community, as well as on a national and global level. In the second part of this chapter I will be speaking directly to the three major themes that unravel the above question and engage the women’s stories at a more theoretical, practical, and critical consciousness level. I have included quotes from all my sisters, ones that you have read in the previous two chapters, and others that were not included, but speak to the themes that emerge in this research.

The Liminal Space Between Patriarchies

This research journey began with the desire to have an imperative conversation about how South Asian women’s bodies, particularly second-generation Punjabi women, are a site of violence within their families and communities, as well as in wider national discourses that perpetuate culturally racist ideologies of South Asian, Muslim, immigrant communities in the West. Within this conversation, I have attempted to articulate how cultural racism works to use South Asian women’s bodies to create binaries and maintain white superiority. Unpacking the racism embedded in this discourse is an imperative part of the conversation and we come to a place in this dissertation where the “how” of my above question needs to be unpacked a bit further. This chapter is intended to engage in what action we can take to address the patriarchal
features of izzat, while constantly considering the culturally racist context that second-generation South Asian women are navigating outside their family homes.

As I carefully write each word here I recognize the complexity and intricacy of this task. Ideologies of whiteness, heteropatriarchy, racism and colonialism sit comfortably in my subconscious as they do in the collective consciousness of my family, community, and of mainstream society. I find myself almost being pushed into writing about “honour” related violence first from a cultural relativist lens. The trickery embedded in these systems of power are so prevalent in discourses surrounding immigrant communities, especially post 9/11 where the Muslim body or any body that appears to resemble Islam, is seen as a threat and defined in hyper “cultural ways”. The repetition of the media to take up these messages is so prevalent that one’s mind can easily go to simplistic cultural relativistic explanations or arguments for why and how violence happens in South Asian communities. So I ask you, the readers, what first goes through your mind when you do a superficial reading of my sisters’ stories in the previous chapter?

The frequency of discourses that define violence against South Asian women’s bodies as being first and foremost embedded in culture, forces all interpretations of any type of violence or trauma that emerges from our community through this lens. Sherene Razack (2008) effectively unpacks this discourse as one based in notions of multiculturalism or cultural relativism, where cultures and religions are tolerated and respected, as a result “naturalizing violence against Muslim women, viewing it as simply a condition of belonging to their oppressive families and communities” (p. 142). Razack (2008) reminds us to pay attention to the “cultural, material, political, and historical contexts” in which “honour” related violence occurs (p. 137).

The particular nuances that are embedded in the material, political and historical contexts were spoken about quite extensively in chapters 2 and 3; however, what is essential to speak about further is the impact migration and racism have on immigrant communities and how many families find themselves struggling with the “homegrown generation” (Haque, 2012) raised in the Western context (the Diaspora) which often leads to violent and oppressive action on their bodies.

First, I turn to an article written by Abdullah An-Na’im (2000) entitled Forced
Marriage. An-Na’im speaks about first and second-generation immigrant women living in Britain and their negotiations with tradition, culture, and “honour”. An-Na’im situates immigrant communities and their everyday survival post migration in nations that are not only racist, but also threatening to their very identity and the identity of their future generations. Embedded within notions of multiculturalism, accommodation and assimilation agendas of the West, immigrant communities read these socio-political expectations as a threat to their cultural identity. Rightfully so, their cultural identity which is embedded in language, customs, food, values, and beliefs, is altered and shifted as soon as they touch the foreign land that they migrated to. Their survival in this world is deeply embedded in a fear of losing their cultural identity. Fear responses in the context of cultural survival lead immigrant communities to “turn inward and reinforce[d] the very practices that those on the outside are seeking to change (p. 2)”.

This includes more strict rules about the language spoken in the home, wearing traditional clothing inside and outside the home, and as my sisters spoke about in their stories having stronger moral and value based codes for their children to follow, with consequences attached to any transgressions from these family codes. An-Na’im (2000) goes on to unpack this threat and states that any work that addresses forced marriages must see these forms of violence as a response to the social and cultural influences of the wider society on immigrant communities.

Other researchers have explored similar responses in immigrant communities in North America. Research conducted by Yen Le Espiritu (2001) examines Filipino immigrant communities in America and their juxtaposition with Western notions of sexuality and whiteness. In order to assert their own identity and what Espiritu defines as their own “superiority” over whiteness, Filipino immigrant communities have created strongly defined boundaries around what is acceptable sexuality, all of which are in relation to their white counterparts. This assertion over whiteness perpetuates gendered discourses of morality in order to decenter whiteness while maintaining a dominant cultural identity over whiteness for their children. This is the community’s way of surviving against the potential loss of their cultural identity and the demoralization they experience through racism (Espiritu, 2001). Espiritu’s (2001) important research speaks to the response Filipino communities have to the racist context in which they survive and do so by maintaining a “rhetoric of moral superiority [which] often leads to patriarchal calls for a cultural authenticity that locates family honour and national integrity in the group’s family members” (p. 435).
Both researchers conclude that an immigrant community’s response to racist contexts transpires in the policing of women’s bodies in order to assert moral superiority, as well as to maintain a sense of their cultural identity. As I have asserted throughout this dissertation and, as An-Na’im (2000) and Espiritu (2001) support in their own research, women’s bodies and the regulation of their sexual behavior are where family “honour” is situated, hence the status of women and family “honour” is intimately connected. Espiritu (2001) in her final words articulates how a form of resistance on the part of a collective community turns to disempowering or oppressing women in their community, essentially reinforcing heteropatriarchy:

In other words, the immigrant community uses restrictions on women’s lives as one form of resistance to racism. This form of cultural resistance, however, severely restricts the lives of women, particularly those of the second-generation, and it casts the family as a potential site of intense conflict and oppressive demands in immigrant lives (p. 436). Sherene Razack’s (2008) words are a necessary assertion at this stage of the conversation, of how “powerful patriarchs control communities” (p. 144) and “patriarchy shapes how communities are organized in the first place” (p. 141). Yet, what makes heteropatriarchy become so necessary when communities move away from their homes and migrate to the West? I ask this question to address the discourses that occur inside my Punjabi community, particularly by second-generation youth, who get a glimpse of their extended families in South Asia living with less restrictions on their daily lives, living in urban spaces of the parents’ natal land, who are somehow are less traumatized by their parents. We must not underestimate the impact that racism and discrimination can have on individual and community.

In Razack’s most recent book *Casting Out: The eviction of Muslims from Western law* (2008), she particularly investigates two studies conducted on arranged and forced marriages in Muslim communities in the United Kingdom (Samad & Eade, 2002), and in the Norwegian context (Bredal, 2003). Throughout her analysis, Razack strategizes an approach for creating change on the legal regulation of forced marriages that involves institutional shifts, rather than solely individual and community responsibility for violence against Muslim women. Leading up to her recommendations for change, the above studies, conducted primarily with young Muslim women and their communities on their perceptions of arranged and forced marriages, make important conclusions that exemplify what An-Na’im (2000) and Espiritu (2001) support in their own research. Razack eloquently concludes:
There is little doubt that both arranged and forced marriages spring from an impulse to control women’s sexuality, and that such controls are exercised more vigorously when communities feel themselves to be losing control…. we need to see migrant communities in context. First, instead of seeing them as composed of foreign newcomers and uninvited guests, we might view them as populations displaced by colonialism and now under siege in late capitalism. As communities they struggle for survival in an increasingly racist context (2008, p. 140).

Migrant communities are confronted with racism and the limits of capitalist imperialist, hegemonic whiteness, which asserts that they are what Sara Ahmed\textsuperscript{40} (2010) so effectively describes as “immigrants, aliens, strangers” (p. 5). Not only does racism lead a migrant to want to protect, hold on stronger, and control their protected world (family) at any cost, but also the trauma of racism leads to an anger and dispossession that can be quite scary and sad. Furthermore, as discussed in the first chapter, the impact of this dispossession or lack of belonging as Aujla, Puar, Handa and Rajiva have explored in their own research lead second generation girls and women to a place where they are constantly negotiating a sense of belonging, as well as trying to balance the expectations within the family to represent the values of their family and community.

I grew up seeing this dispossession in my father’s body every day for the first half of my life. I remember his anger when he came home from working long shifts at the local sawmill. He was a man constantly regulated by forces outside his control, such as whiteness and classism. His internal struggles and many decisions he made for our family will have repercussions for many generations. From physical violence, to emotional trauma, my entire family felt the reverberations of the daily racism he encountered in his workplace. My father has been running away from demons his whole life by abusing alcohol. Many experiences contribute to his alcoholism and I recognize the racism he experiences in Canada as one of those demons and perhaps the one element that keeps his anger fuelled.

We must recognize the intersection of racism, heteropatriarchy and colonialism in the emergence of “honour” related family violence in order to move towards action-based work

\textsuperscript{40}Sara Ahmed’s work engages the intersection of feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory and postcolonial theory. An eloquent and engaging writer, Ahmed’s work is influential in this research, particularly for her engagement with identity of immigrant communities, particularly second-generation women and girls.
inside and outside South Asian communities. Migrant families encounter racism, which fuels heteropatriarchy inside and outside their home, and women feel the effects of these intersecting institutions of power in how their bodies are constantly regulated. As second-generation women, our bodies become a place for our families to demonstrate their resistance to the racism in these new nations they have migrated to, and in the outside world we are managing capitalist heteropatriarchy in spaces that we constantly maneuver, as well as the racism, Orientalism, and colonialism evident in Western society. Second-generation women are so bombarded by power and control over themselves, it is hard to imagine how we survive, thrive, and continue to live.

Second-generation South Asian women are situated in a liminal space between heteropatriarchy enacted in mainstream society that intersects with their experiences of racism and historical colonialism, and the heteropatriarchy inside their family and community that uses their body as a space to enact power and control over their cultural identity. Yasmin Jiwani (2006) speaks to this liminal space and states “it is the convergence of these internal and external patriarchies that demands scrutiny” (p. 23). I would like to claim that this dissertation has expanded that liminal space and has been speaking from liminality throughout this dissertation. The word liminal derives from the Latin “limin” or “limen” meaning threshold, “the space between a state of being or a condition/phase” (Merriam Dictionary, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liminal, March 8, 2015). Existing in the gap, or in a state of heteropatriarchy, provides for a particular experience of always being regulated by what Jiwani (2006) defines as “morality and mobility” (p. 25):

The regulation of morality suggests boundaries defining the limits of acceptable sexual, social, and representational behaviour, and the regulation of mobility can be defined as the imposition or exercise of limits within which one can physically leave the violence situation, or alternatively, the ways in which one is forced through persuasion or punishment, to remain within a given situation. Alternatively, mobility can be understood as that which defines a person or group’s ability to cross borders and boundaries. For racialized peoples, mobility is severely restricted by the constraints imposed on them by the states through immigration criteria and the like, as well as by the constraints imposed on them by economic conditions (p. 25).

Jiwani’s articulation of the regulation of women’s bodies as serving the moral purposes of heteropatriarchy within the family, as well as maintaining the boundaries of state imposed sanctions and institutional racism, articulates how women are constantly negotiating these spaces or moments of regulation on their bodies.
Both Jiwani and Razack articulate the regulation of immigrant communities, yet I want to insert a more specific reading of their arguments on heteropatriarchy, regulation, and the moral and mobile means of regulating women’s bodies by speaking to the experiences of second-generation South Asian women. This particular generation raised in the West from birth or childhood is defined as “aliens” (Ahmed, S. 2000), serving a different purpose for the imagination of a colonial state, such as Canada. The second-generation body is a site of hope for assimilation and the construction of regulation is framed within these ideals. The second-generation is expected to strive for these egalitarian Western ideals of what is termed equality, by denouncing any connection or belief in the cultures, traditions or practices of their families. This regulation is framed within the conception of “choice” and the “freedom” that Canada provides second-generation youth, particularly women, to choose between patriarchies, internal or external.

The second-generation South Asian woman is expected to challenge the heteropatriarchy of her community and embrace the “liberal” values of the West, as they are portrayed in the media. Yet, this embrace comes at a cost and the expectations of the second-generation woman, who is portrayed as struggling for her life, must renounce all ties to her family and community and continue to suffer the racism, oppression, and sexist values of the West, which is considered liberal and egalitarian in comparison. This embrace communicates the minuteness of Western heteropatriarchy compared to South Asian culture, which constitutes the ultimate personification of heteropatriarchy, so much so that any of the struggles that a second-generation South Asian woman is facing in this context could not possibly be interlocked with Canadian systems of oppression.

My Liberation Is Bound In Yours

Choice, freedom, and human rights. These words may conjure images of what many believe will save South Asian women from their “cultured lives”. Those who follow an assimilationist agenda with multiculturalism as the leading force, propose all immigrant/second-generation women desire these ideals. Numerous reports, position papers, and online essays have been circulating as expert knowledge on the issue of “honour” killings in Canada (MacIntosh & Shapiro, 2012, Muhammad, A. 2010, Papp, 2010). Much of this literature is set to applaud Canadian citizens for their generosity and openness to outsiders, yet remind the masses that
racialized bodies require civilizing, especially if they want to live and be a part of a white Canada. The agenda is very clear here: South Asian women need saving and civilizing, and their bodies become the sites for these colonial, patriarchal notions of whiteness to be exercised.

Associating “freedom” and “liberation” with izzat or “honour” related violence shrouds the violence of assimilation. These words carry incredible currency, as do the words “honour” killings, forced marriages, and “honour” crimes. Many may read the stories of women who have been excommunicated from their families and hear the words barbaric and cruel to define their family’s actions. I shudder each time my father is defined as being inhumane for maintaining a disconnection to me, my children and my life for almost 10 years. Yes, his choice in doing this has led to much turmoil and pain for my family, and myself, but not because he is a merciless man. In fact his decisions have left him with very little to gain, only incredible losses.

There are words that circle the South Asian community and carry currency in how they can lead to violent actions. Words like “shame”, “dishonour”, and “what are people going to think?” stifle my family/community from inside our immigrant hovels. Collectivist notions of izzat have travelled with immigrant communities to the Diaspora, shifting, turning and maintaining particular constructions of heteropatriarchy and women’s responsibility to their family and community. At the intersection of both mainstream discourses of “honour” related violence and the insider discourses of izzat, we find second-generation South Asian women resisting, surviving, and reclaiming.

The above words stifle any collective engagement against gender-based violence and heteropatriarchy. These words are what bell hooks (1999) define as “imperialist white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy” at work, suppressing dominant society by occupying our attention with fantasies of the exotic/primitive other (hooks, 1999). These words continue the oppression of women who are struggling with heteropatriarchy embedded in izzat and the overbearing discourse of “honour” killings that have overrun mass media to perpetuate a dominant narrative about brown bodies, Muslim women, South Asian cultures and religions and the men that shape those nations. These words represent common themes in literature, research, and reports that focus on analyzing South Asian women’s bodies and stories by “eating the other” (hooks, 1999), a phrase bell hooks uses so effectively to describe encounters of difference between whiteness and the racialized other in the realm of pleasure and desire. “Eating the other” is about whiteness using the body of the other for its personal desires and transformation,
and it is about distracting the masses by consuming the other through a colonial lens.

Racialized women’s bodies, their cultures, ethnicity and to some degree their religions become an “alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other” (hooks, p. 180). bell hooks speaks to the sexual nature of this preoccupation in the context of black women and whiteness, yet I would argue that the preoccupation of whiteness to “save” brown women emerges from a similar colonial engagement of settler nations such as Canada. Brown women not only need to be saved, but after they are saved and brought into the fold of whiteness through the rejection of their family, community, culture, and religion, they are now safe to play with.

Uma Narayan (1997) provides a similar analogy in her own work by speaking to the exoticized link between colonizers and the colonized. Using the phrase “eating cultures” as a way to draw her analogy, Narayan uses food and particularly Indian curry as a metaphor to talk about “identities engendered by the colonial experience” (p. 163). Both hooks and Narayan are engaging with an integral concept embedded in colonialism and heteropatriarchy, to consume, devastate, and devour the other, for the nourishment of whiteness, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism. It is no coincidence that heteropatriarchy, colonialism, and racism, fundamental systems of power and control, intersect with each other to violently impact on racialized women.

Recently, the author and activist Harsha Walia spoke to the intersecting ways that settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy is organized so intimately to destroy and annihilate Indigenous nations through the targeting of Indigenous women (Walia, 2013). The target on Indigenous women is intentional and an effective way of destroying and settling Indigenous land, while contributing to the genocide of Indigenous communities, especially if you remove the bodies that are responsible for keeping, preserving, and fundamentally populating the land with future generations. Andrea Smith (2005), in her eye opening book *Conquest: Sexual violence and American Indian genocide* engages her reader to be conscious of how the historical genocide that has plagued North America Indigenous communities is situated very carefully in the violence against Indigenous women. The bodies of Indigenous women are defined as “dirty, they are considered sexually violable and “rapable,” and the rape of bodies that are considered inherently impure or dirty simply does not count…the history of mutilation of Indian bodies, both living and dead, make it clear that Indian people are not entitled to bodily integrity” (Smith,
Struggles against “honour” discourses and gender-based violence are a struggle against systems of heteropatriarchy, colonialism, and racism. Our struggle as an ethnic, racialized community in Canada is intimately connected to the struggles of other racialized and Indigenous women in Canada. It is by recognizing our common struggle that I wanted to set the stage for larger discussions on how change and consciousness on a broad level across Canada is connected to fighting against the genocide of Indigenous communities: it is about fighting against the genocide of racialized women, and it is about fighting against heteropatriarchy and the web of violence it perpetuates in the lives of all families and communities across Canada.

"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come here because your liberation is bound up with mine, let us work together." (Lilla Watson, quoted in Faith, 2000). These eloquently strung words by Indigenous activist from Australia, Lilla Watson, articulates not only the misled history of feminists work in racialized and Indigenous communities towards “saving” their counterparts, but also to the space we can share as a movement towards liberation from heteropatriarchy and gender-based violence. Lilla Watson I speak directly to you and take your outreaching hand to join your movement and I ask our readers to see these last few chapters as my way of connecting us back to the necessary work of fighting against heteropatriarchy, gender-based violence, and family violence. To confront the racism, colonialism, and “imperialist white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy” (hooks, 1999) in this movement and to do so with my sisters voices is central to the discussion.

Themes Of Izzat Or “Honour”

Listening closely to the stories of women’s experience of izzat requires us to transform and re-define narrow individual neo-liberal notions of “choice”, “freedom”, and “human rights” and to think about the wider context in which these stories unfold (Abu-Lughod, 2013). Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) urges us to widen our lens and listen to the voices of the Muslim women. The wider context is shaped by struggles embedded in “global politics, international capital, and modern state institutions, with their changing impacts on family and community” (p. 202). These struggles implicate everyone and should be a part of the struggle against heteropatriarchy and gender-based violence that impact women on a global scale.
Indeed, Inderpal Grewal’s recent scholarship complicates how current discourses about “honour” killings and the focus on particular societies is a way to “outsourced heteropatriarchy from the USA and Europe to do its messy work elsewhere” (Grewal, 2013, p. 2). Both Abu-Lughod (2013) and Grewal (2013) present exceptional arguments that focus our attention to the currency embedded in the fascination, oversimplification, and circulation of “honour” discourses in the West in order to continue anti-Muslim, anti-Immigration beliefs so strongly held since colonial times and resurrected post 9/11. Abu-Lughod, Grewal, as well as various other scholars that I referred to in chapters one and two, remind us that beyond this veil of cultural racism, women continue to be subjected to power over their bodies through economic, sexual, and political control; and mass media plays a great role in maintaining the veil so that the stories of survival are muffled by colonial, racist logic.

These are essential arguments that demonstrate how the power of the West to colonize the East continues through modern media practices that are readily accessible on a global scale. These scholars speak to me, they speak to many of the frustrations and arguments I have laid out in the first 3 chapters of this dissertation, however they do not speak to how women who survive the horrors of izzat can engage their family/community after experiencing patriarchal violence? How can survivors heal from this violence? And how can we speak about our experiences of both patriarchies inside and outside our private homes and communities, to create moments of critical consciousness around “honour” and violence. How do I give meaning to the stories in order to move us through our struggles of liberation from heteropatriarchy and violence and critical consciousness in my community, while recognizing the racist, colonial discourses that suffocate the message and continue to define our experiences/stories as a result of a specifically barbaric cultures and religions, coming from backward nations? How…?

This chapter will unpack how the stories in chapter 4 and 5 can contribute to individual and community healing from the violence of izzat and heteropatriarchy. I am a social worker and have been practicing for over 10 years in the field. My lens on the world is to think about change and how to embed change on a societal level, as well as in the lives of individuals and communities. Therefore, much of my aim in this chapter will be focused on the transformative capacity embedded in the women’s stories to shift how we engage discourses of “honour”, heteropatriarchy, family violence, and South Asian women’s struggles within the various domains they navigate in this society.
The power of the women’s stories presented in the previous two chapters sits in the various meanings and interpretations that evolve for the reader. Each time the women shared their stories, the story transformed as it left their mouths and was picked up in my ears. When I sat down to write the stories, they are transformed through my lens and intimate engagement. This is the power of storytelling and contributes to the incredible draw we have to stories. We become intimately connected to stories.

Yet, I am taking us to the next level of storytelling to have a critical engagement with what these stories can do for not only my community, but also the world. I want us to imagine how these stories have the power to shift the discourses of “honour”, heteropatriarchy, cultural otherness, and white supremacy. These stories are individual, yet have multiple lessons embedded within. My reading of the stories, as well as my own personal story contributes to the analysis and my argument for the changes that I believe need to happen on a systemic level, on a service delivery level and on a community development level. This chapter will be structured in a familiar manner to chapter 5. I will continue with the themes that are present in the women’s stories and use them as basis for an analytical politicized discussion about how current discourses engage the violence of izzat or “honour” and how we can reframe or critically transform current discourses through the stories of my sisters. We begin with the early years of (1) maneuvering through izzat and the boundaries that are placed around women’s bodies. The second section will engage with the notions of the (2) impossible choice. Third section will be with (3) grief, loss and, reclamation of izzat.

Maneuvering Through Izzat

When I was a young girl there were particular words, images, and behaviours that I knew were taboo not only in my family, but also, to various degrees, in my community, for example, watching intimacy on TV, interacting with boys who were outside my family, and demonstrating any behaviour that accentuated my female body in private and public spheres. All these behaviours were frowned upon. The consequences of transgressing any of these codes varied and shifted, as I grew older. Ultimately, the underlying theme was the forbidden act of sexualizing my body. Sex and all behaviours associated with sex, including the functions of my female body, were off limits and I grew up knowing that any associations to this concept or word would bring shame to my parents. Sex made my siblings and me pretty uncomfortable as
well since we were a product of our environment. As much as this was an overarching sentiment in my family home, there was a particular flavour in how the women in my family maneuvered around sex and the sexualization of our bodies.

Largely my mother, not through words, but through her body language, dictated the policing of my body and my access to information about sex, and her eyes spoke louder than any uttered language. Eventually, as I got older the fear my family had of my body and of sex was finally articulated on a memorable trip to India that I took with my mother and sister. I was about 12 years old and I was already very aware of how I was developing and going through the changes associated with puberty. My young teenage female body was a draw for leering eyes and inappropriate touching. Within days of arriving in India, I was sexually harassed on a regular basis by young men in public spaces. The most traumatic part of this harassment was that I could not share these experiences with anyone, particularly my mother.

Before we left for our trip my mother said one sentence to me that led to my silence and also articulated her fear. She said “Mandeep men, especially men in India, can’t be trusted, don’t ever put yourself in a place where they can hurt our izzat.” In this simple phrase I realized that my mother was afraid of the possibility of rape and assault on her daughter’s body, which was a huge possibility anywhere in the world; however, on this trip my mother did not have my father to escort us in our travels. She was emphasizing my responsibility in making sure that I did not put myself in a position where the possibility of rape was open. Being hyper vigilant of your body at all times was the only way she knew how to protect herself and her daughters, especially when there was no male to protect us. Because no men can be trusted, being in the presence of men was not a boundary to be crossed, ever. Somehow I knew that the rape of my body was directly connected to the rape of my family because my family’s reputation would be tarnished and victimized. Being a victim of rape does not bring sympathy or solace. A common global response after a sexual assault is to locate how the woman played a role in the rape, essentially victim blaming or slut shaming. We see this in the legal proceedings that transpire after sexual assault charges: the entire premise of these proceedings is based on how women contributed to their rape or assault (Sexual Assault Victim Service Handbook, 2007).

Many lessons of my sexualized body occurred during that trip and I still sit in awe of and resentment towards my mother for how she imparted these lessons. I admire her strength and determination for teaching me how to protect myself, but also resent the cold, harsh manner of
centering my body as a burden for her and our family. Fear is an emotion that can lead to peculiar behaviour. I think back to my family’s fear of my body and recognize the logic behind it, but do not always welcome these memories or how they enacted control over my life. In the following section I will be speaking to the regulating of women’s bodies, theorizing this regulation of morality and mobility of women’s bodies, through an analysis of my sisters’ stories.

Creating The Third Wall

Connecting back to Jiwani’s (2008) earlier quote that speaks to the regulation of morality and mobility in the lives of young second-generation women, restrictions on mobility are tied to fear of potential rape of the female body, which in turn is a rape of the family and community of to which the female body belongs. By situating the blame and shame as much on the woman as on her family, there is greater likelihood of maintaining protection over the woman’s body. This is no excuse for slut shaming, victim blaming, or even maintaining izzat. How morality codes are drawn up around women’s lives is an important concept to understand before we unpack the stories of my sisters and the conclusions we can draw from the maneuvering around izzat.

Moral codes and mobility of women surround izzat boundaries, and as my sisters spoke to in their stories, it is the moral codes of each of their families that they were maneuvering in and around in order to survive and strive in a world outside of their home that had its own code of conduct and ideologies. In Tara’s she describes particular codes of conduct in her family that are enforced, particularly so her brother and father can walk in their community with pride not shame which was regulated heavily as soon as she hit puberty. Lakshimi’s family described these moral codes as “duties” that her siblings regulated, particularly their duty towards her father and the fear of transgressing boundaries of disrespect, which was evident in their fear of her father ,yet something Lakshimi could not embrace: “this sense of fear and this uber respect for him, and I didn’t feel it, I didn’t have it... ” (Lakshimi).

The moral codes of my sisters’ families and my own, were largely centering on izzat and it was through the use of izzat that much of the emotional trauma that we experienced was exercised. We would be fooling ourselves to believe moral codes are only located in South Asian families, or that the boundaries that surround women’s bodies only occur in cultures of colour. I will not take up time to engage in the global dynamics of heteropatriarchy and how the
family as an institution is invested in maintaining the patriarchal dynamics of power and control over women’s bodies; this was demonstrated in earlier chapters. It is important for me to contextualize some of the maneuvering that my sister demonstrated in their stories and how each of them demonstrated tremendous resiliency. My sisters’ stories demonstrate a resiliency in their movement in and out of these boundaries, transgressing them, as they needed throughout their lives.

In each of my sisters’ stories there was the ultimate disclosure of a boundary that the woman had crossed that led to their displacement/excommunication/exile from their family. However, leading up to the that moment each of the women had spent their childhood and young adulthood maneuvering around the moral codes set in their family, as well as those set in wider society. Some of these transgressions had particular consequences, while others could be passed in secrecy without anyone in the family discovering them. Yet, as Tara demonstrates so effectively in her story, the community had eyes that were watching for any moral transgressions, and were more than happy to share these with her family. As well, it is because of the watching eyes of the community that families were in an ever-vigilant mode to circumvent any transgressions that could be viewed as shameful and potentially harmful towards the family izzat, as is evident in Tara’s depiction of her adolescence:

So basically it was like they all had a chat, well I have a couple of girls, you have a couple of girls, why don’t you watch my girls and I’ll watch your girls, do you know what I mean, so it was very much like that... But other people took their role very seriously, like if they saw so and so’s daughters hang around here or there, they were going to let them know. (Tara)

The role that community plays in regulating second-generation women as a whole is important and has been discussed to some degree by scholars who recognize the collective nature in which this surveillance occurs (Handa, 2003, Nayar, 2004) Amita Handa’s (1998) engages with the concept of community pressures and surveillance, suggesting that young girls are searching for not only family approval but also community approval of their behaviour and without it they risked social ostracism. Community role of watching young women is not only about an investment in the collectiveness of the community, but is also intimately connected to the regulation of the women in each individual family. There is a common belief that their peers easily influence young adults. Many sociologists and psychologists have dedicated their time to theorizing adolescence and the role of peer influence in the lives of adolescents. Mythili Rajiva
(2006) looks specifically at adolescence and second-generation South Asian women in Canada who are depicted as struggling with a cultural clash between dominant society and their own family and community culture. Rajiva contextualizes how expected adolescent behaviour in young brown girls is defined and structinized as being different from the expected development of their adolescent white peers, particularly when they are defined as a part of a racialized and religious family. Subsequently, transgressing boundaries in the family home and the reactions of parents from brown families is seen as violent, “barbaric” and essentially a result of the religious and cultural beliefs of their ethnic origins.

Peer influence is characterized as a normal stage of development, however it can also lead to various transgressions in a young person’s life, which concerns all parents who are invested in their child’s health, wellbeing and future endeavors. We do not need to turn to specific cultural notions of adolescence to understand this concept, as it is one that has been generally theorized for adolescents throughout Western nations. Yet, in the context of immigrant communities, our families use the collectivist lens on the world to keep a watch on all youth behaviour, because of this implicit understanding of peer influence. However, heteropatriarchy comes sweeping in and the family and community are invested in controlling female behaviour and bodies more than their investment in their male counterparts.

The woman’s body as the vessel of family izzat is controlled due to the belief that her body is vulnerable to rape, to loss of virginity, and to a tarnished reputation if she is perceived to be performing outside the boundaries of piety and a “good girl” image. The grooming of a “good girl” is paramount in maintaining the izzat of the family. Lakshimi’s first description of izzat comes from her interactions with Bollywood movies and she describes her anger, from an early age, towards the message that these movies portrayed. In this description, we can hear the association that izzat has to the potential rape of a daughter/sister/wife and the implications this can have for the rest of her life:

*I did not enjoy Bollywood and it still doesn’t appeal to me at all. The only notion I would get of it was women were burned, if you were raped you had to kill yourself, if someone assaulted you, you were in the wrong so you had to kill yourself because you had brought shame.* (Lakshimi)

Lakshimi’s sexual abuse from an early age and her experience of never coming forward to disclose this trauma as a child was only discussed in the periphery of izzat discourses. However
I wonder if the dominant narratives about rape, assault and women’s bodies as vessels of other people’s izzat prevented Lakshimi from coming forward to speak about her experience. I wonder how many women Bollywood silences every day? I wonder how much izzat silences women by shaming and blaming? The image of the good woman is so easily perpetuated in media and as I outlined earlier in chapter 2 the regulation of a woman’s body through the concepts of beauty, piety and “honour” is, ultimately, heteropatriarchy’s greatest tool of power and control.

Concerns with women’s behaviour and purity are a concept that, again, is not specific to South Asian communities. The central concept of heteropatriarchy, which Sherry Ortner (1978) so effectively articulates is about maintaining the purity of women that is intimately tied to the status of a family “and the ideology is enforced by systematic and often quite severe control of women’s social and especially sexual behaviour” (p. 19). Ortner’s work, as well as the work of Gerda Lerner (1986) situates us back to the fundamentals of heteropatriarchy and the investment that families have to status and community perceptions of each family’s “honour”.

Yet, in the context of migrant families, particularly for women in my community, the maneuvering around these patriarchal tools of control need to be contextualized not only within these wider notions of heteropatriarchy and racism, but also within the specific ways women resist and work through these controls. We live in a racialized and oppressive society that “others” our experiences more so than our white peers. The particular ways in which South Asian women’s transgressions speak to izzat and how the family and community give power to izzat and the threat of shame becomes the central reason for placing these boundaries on women’s lives.

The constant negotiation of transgressing boundaries is a woman’s survival and resistance, which involves negotiating which boundary to transgress, when to transgress them, how to perform these transgressions, and how to respond if discovered. Homi Bhabhi’s (1990) work on third spaces recognizes this engagement with spaces and the process of negotiating a performance required to survive in particular colonial spaces. Each of my sisters speak to a third space, that secret space or world where they are free from these particular codes and generally these spaces include other people who are also outliers in their own private lives. These third spaces or worlds involve a compartmentalizing of the self-story and portraying only parts of the self in those spaces. Whatever these spaces look like for each woman depends on their personal
desires, but the one common factor that ties many second-generation Punjabi women is that this world is kept very distant and secret from the family and community. This secrecy is a necessary survival tactic since the consequences for transgressing particular boundaries varies. Family members may punish any perceived transgression that demonstrates sexual behaviour outside a social or moral order.

All of my sisters used particular words to define these third spaces and there was an unspoken understanding between us that we did not necessarily have to articulate to define this third space. Lakshimi called it being especially good at keeping secrets and having secret lives:

*I never shared anything with my family. I never shared who my friends were with my family. I always had a secret lives. I always had a secret life. I was one person at home and I was one person at school.* (Lakshimi)

Similarly, Tara defines the secret world as a part of the reality of all young girls in her community, and transgressing boundaries became easier once she was older and as a group of girls, “*even though it was a no-no, we still did it because everybody else was doing it.*” (Tara). However, it was in my conversation with Durga where I asked her specifically about the third space and she turned to look at me with incredulous doubting eyes, as if I was voicing the obvious:

*I - did you have to keep your life secret about what you were doing outside?*

*Durga - oh of course, that’s a given...I’m like why would you ask that question...yeah that’s like normal and in some ways that’s what is good about growing up around Indians, people would know that that’s normal, you know what I mean?*

*I – because everybody else you have to explain it to.*

*Durga – yeah and that’s oppressive too, and it’s weird that I would want to be friends with non-Indians, do you know what I mean, go outside of that and be interested in other cultures, because then you get called white washed, which is the complete opposite of what I mean, right.*

The reality of creating multiple worlds or third spaces is a shared experience amongst second-generation South Asian women, and I would suggest many other immigrant families. The underbelly of this survival tactic is about resistance and negotiating the boundaries that women are expected to adhere to. By doing so in secrecy or through what others may define as “lying” to their family, women are working within the confines of heteropatriarchy demonstrated in
their home and maneuvering through expected rituals and ways of being a young adult in public spheres. These ways that are taken for granted if you are not from the community, and everyday engagements with adolescent stages become even trickier for second-generation women because of the added maneuvering inside the home.

Amita Handa (1997) also addresses the question of secrecy amongst second-generation South Asian girls in her own research, sharing young girls stories of navigating this third space. All the women in her research spoke about not communicating with their parents about most of their experiences in this third space, particularly because of the importance for family and community approval of their behaviour (p. 33). They also spoke in great length of not being able to fully share their experience with their white peers or mainstream social service agencies because of lack of understanding about their navigation in this third space. In the following passage, Handa eloquently describes this third space and how young second-generation South Asian women are constantly negotiating their identities:

Their experience of “self”, in this sense, is very fragmented, a constant pulling on and off of masks and negotiating of “expected” roles, depending on the context. They expressed both a desire to meet and break out of these “expectations”… all the women were in constant resistance to, and negotiation of, the circumstances of their lives. Sometimes this resistance came in an explicit show of courage, such as running away from home, albeit a "last resort." More often their defiance was expressed in the form of lying and secrecy (p. 104)

Handa articulates how this secrecy can be quite difficult for the emotional and mental health of young second-generation South Asian women. Yet, secrecy is also how they demonstrated their resistance and capacity to navigate around the adults in their lives working with the “ineffectiveness of mainstream social service agencies, and the ineffectiveness of parental guidance” (Handa, 1997, p. 45.)

The impact of having to negotiate two worlds is illustrated in Durga’s story when she talks about the anger she began to feel towards her own Punjabi community. This anger emerged from feeling like an outsider both inside her community and in the outside world:

*I was really hating my family and I really hated being Indian, I hated Indian kids, I hated it so much... I used to blame the culture and I used to blame everything on what was happening...it was like an oppressive culture and an oppressive community and feeling like I had to be something that I can’t be, like I saw how my family was being treated and I couldn’t stand it...* (Durga)
Years later Durga was able to come to terms with these feelings and start to see the beauty in her community and accept her family for who they were and the world they themselves were navigating. This reclamation process was important for her survival and mental health and I believe we need to shift our engagement of “honour” violence by widening our understanding of what “honour” means, how women negotiate the heteropatriarchy inside and outside their family homes, and the impact this all has on their everyday engagement and survival in a society that functions on heteropatriarchy, racism, and sexism.

Continuum Of “Honour” Related Violence

Recently, Anna Korteweg (2012) has written about the complexities of understanding “honour” related violence in the context of immigration to Western countries such as Canada, Germany, Netherlands and Britain. Korteweg’s research and arguments demonstrate many of the sentiments that earlier researchers, like Sherene Razack and Lila Abu-Lughod, have stimulated in their own writing. However, Korteweg begins a discussion on how the perception of moral codes being transgressed is what “honour” related violence relies on. The perception rather than facts of a transgressions becoming public to the community outside of the immediate family is what has stimulated “honour” killings and “violence can be avoided altogether if gossip is minimized or lessened if families can negotiate alternative solutions” (p. 145). These alternative solutions can include forced marriage, without the enthusiastic consent of the both individuals involved, or the excommunication/exile/displacement of the individual from the community.

Korteweg carries on in her paper to examine some of the policy and legal implications for preventing and protecting “honour” related violence, as well as prosecuting “honour” killings. However what is important for my argument in this research that will have implications for practice, procedure and policy, is Korteweg’s distinction of the “alternative solutions” that I believe needs further examination. Furthermore, there may be an insinuation that an “honour” killing is inevitable end of “honour” and I wonder how that argument transpires in the context of cultural racism being so evident in the discourses and media explanation of “honour” violence. As I theorize in the following section, the implications of transgressing boundaries of izzat or “honour” have particular consequences for women along a continuum and we need to include notions of “honour” in broader discussion of gender-based violence, by expanding our understanding of “honour” related violence beyond “honour” killings.
As I conceptualize these very difficult, yet essential parts of this research, there are some common discourses that circulate around acts of “honour” in mainstream society, as well as in research and theory that purports conclusions of second-generation experiences and identity. First, there is a common trajectory that most research and reports take when speaking to “honour” violence, which generally involves a positivist lens. This positivist perspective on “honour” related violence creates the image of a linear line that goes from culture and tradition to extreme violence, such as forced marriage, physical violence and, ultimately, death directed at young South Asian women (See Papp, 2010, Mohammed, 2010, MacIntosh & Shapiro, 2012). Dominant media sensationalizes the deaths of South Asian young women as the ultimate fate of all women who transgress family and community “honour” codes and boundaries. In fact, this is so ingrained in the discourse that when I initially began interviewing my sisters, they all stated that they did not feel they fit the definition of a survivor of “honour” violence, that this definition of “honour” that is being talked about right now is not reflective of their experiences because they are still around to tell their stories. Yet, when we unpacked what izzat meant for each of us and the ways in which we define violence, we were able to unpack a very complex story that placed us on the same continuum as Aqsa Parvez, Amandeep Atwal, and Jassi Sidhu, however the end to the stories of these young women was a murder/death. The question is, could this have been predicted, prevented, or subverted?

Other discourses, particularly from racialized women who are working in the field of violence against women, suggest that the terminology “honour” violence or “honour” killings, is serving racist stereotypes. The common title, “there is nothing honourable about honour killings” is used to circumvent this discourse. For example, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (2012) focuses on defining the recent “honour” violence that has occurred in the Canadian context as femicide and have written extensively on their stance:

Our argument is that no murder of a woman should be categorized by the rationale provided by the murderer, or by society itself, whether it be a so-called “honour killing” or a crime of passion. We urge that all murders/killings be identified as femicide—the killing of women and girls simply because they are females. This includes the killing of girls as infants—infanticide. This term does not separate women and girls into distinct groups based on race, culture or religion, and murders are the crimes committed against any one of them (Hogden, 2012, p. 38)

Alia Hogden, in this specific article entitled Femicide not “Honour Killing”, focuses on the murder and death of women as it connects to “honour”. Hogden continues to theorize “honour”
within families as a form of “tribal patriarchy” and does not speak to the everyday workings of “honour” in the lives of young women and the impact of living in the Canadian context.

The problem with confounding all “honour violence to femicide, and to use the term “tribal patriarchy”, is that it contributes to the discourses that silence young women from coming forward to seek help and, ultimately, labels our community, that is convicted of such behaviour, as “tribal” or backwards. This contributes to further divide-and-conquer tactics that colonialism expects and supports. There is a grey zone that is left wide open, and generalizations that occur when we label the experiences of young women encountering “honour” violence as femicide contributes to further oppression. This not only contributes to further silencing, but also to the very racist discourses that women of colour are challenging.

The challenge with current discourses is the definition of “honour” related violence as extreme cases of confinement and ultimate death. We can conclude from discussions in the field of violence against women and, more specifically, intimate partner violence, that this definition leaves out many voices and does not speak to the everyday experiences of women who struggle with power and control from their partners. Ellen Pence, a well-known activist at the Duluth Project, created the wheel of power and control that has been widely used and as an educational tool to unpack how to speak about violence against women. The primary aim of this wheel was for women to understand violence as being embedded in “institutional, structural, economic and cultural forces” (Price, 2012, p. 21). The wheel originally provided a tool for communities, raising critical understanding of violence and the everyday workings of living with violence. Joshua Price (2012) critically examines the historical shifts the wheel has taken to become less of a political project and more of a tool for defining the psychological effects of domestic violence. Price’s article provides an interesting read on the history of the wheel, which speaks to how dominant discourses shift a political project that holds structural power and violence central to the discussion, to one that is individual and embedded in the personal uniform experiences.

I see similar discourses happening in the “honour” related violence field, however the difference is that we are still at the beginning of this discussion. Research and interventions that want to embed a counterhegemonic politicized analysis to understanding the everyday experiences of “honour” violence are only just emerging. The emergence of this research and analysis is necessary; yet there is tremendous push back from dominant voices and discourses that are invested in the currency associated in “honour”. However, speaking to the everyday
workings of izzat or “honour” in the lives of South Asian women is one of the most powerful outcomes of this research.

Upon unraveling, writing, and analyzing my sisters’ stories, a shift needs to occur in current discourses that allow for izzat and “honour” to be understood on a continuum. This continuum gives practitioners as well as feminists a tool to engage in conversations about “honour” and shame that places many more women’s stories in context. By exploring further the concept of a continuum, the climate of regulation can be contextualized deeper.

Recently the Quebec Council for Women (QCW) released a research report titled Honour Crime: From indignation to action (2013), and speak to notions of looking at “honour” within a continuum. Within the report, the QCW lists 7 recommendations to the Quebec government to challenge “honour” crimes and support young women. The report is well written and starts the conversation on the concept of the continuum, as well as spending some time reviewing current literature that defines “honour” crimes and the discourses that surround “HRV”. Many of its recommendations outline key strategies that can be implemented nationally to address “honour” based violence within a broad effort towards ending all forms of violence against women. There is work that is happening in spaces such as Quebec Council for Women that needs to be highlighted and supported. An analysis of their general arguments and comprehensive research demonstrates that much work still needs to be done to shift how we currently engage in discourses of “honour”.

Within the general discourses of violence against women and girls, scholars such as Aysan Sev’er (2002) use the concept of the continuum of violence to emphasize the climate of misogyny that surrounds extreme cases of not only intimate partner violence, but also gender-based violence that targets women and girls. Sev’er effectively argues for a continuum that considers a “culture of machoism, wide spread misogyny, and the troubling nature of work and intimate relations all over North America” (p. 75) and demonstrates the triangulation of power, control, and sexuality in this continuum which sets men/boys against women/girls at various personal and structural levels.

Taking Sev’er’s lead, as well as the direction of other feminist scholars who have asserted their voices for a broader discussion on gender-based violence, particularly concerning the family unit (Eichler, 1997, Korteweg, 2012), I have theorized a continuum of “HRV” that
emerge from the women’s stories, from my own comprehensive literature review, and from my front line experience as a violence against women social worker in Toronto, Ontario. Furthermore, I have consulted with key front line social workers in Toronto who are actively working with women who are fleeing situations of “HRV” and forced marriage. I have created a diagram that conceptualizes the continuum and allows for women to find their stories in the diagram and for practitioners to visualize all the various elements that are at play when speaking to the continuum of “HRV”.

In this continuum (see figure 1.), the emphasis is on the everyday negotiations that women are making with the boundaries that are set around them. These boundaries are operating through a triangulation of power, control, and regulation of their gender and sexuality. At the centre of these boundaries is the concept of izzat or “honour” and shame that is used as a tool to regulate women’s behaviour and to hold women accountable to their family’s conception of izzat. Finally, situated around the continuum is the words patriarchy as the entire continuum is filtered through this ideology. The codes that dictate what behaviours are deemed or perceived to be transgressing boundaries are very specific to each family unit, and each woman’s story speaks to what has led to these moments of violence to occur in their lives. It is important that these codes of conduct that are situated around morality not be defined for women, that we allow for them to emerge from their stories. If we find ourselves defining what constitutes an izzat code, then we fall into the same trap of cultural competency and cultural racism that is evident in current “honour” discourses. What is more important is that women have a way of contextualizing how power and control and the regulation of mobility is a form of violence.
Figure 1. Continuum of “Honour” Related Violence.

In order to demonstrate the workings of this continuum (see figure 2) I have broken down the various sections of the diagram into key terms. “Honour” related violence is about controlling and regulating women’s behaviour and in extreme cases women find themselves in the smaller corners of the diagram entitled 6. “Forced marriage” and 7. “Honour killings”. However what many women encounter regularly are the wider corners that speak to the insidious forms of power and control over their bodies, the regulation of women’s mobility and how they exercise their sexuality. The general shape of the diagram is that of a triangle, which I chose as a way to talk about the triangulation of each of the systems that contribute to the
workings of “honour” violence, while also allowing women to situate their stories anywhere along the inner corners of the triangle.

As my sisters spoke to in their stories, the everyday negotiations they had with emotional, and sometimes physical trauma at an early age, stemmed from notions of “honour” that were embedded in the codes of conduct their family, community, and wider society placed on their bodies. For example, Durga defines some of the ways in which her father regulated her after he became a devout Sikh and reexamined his parenting style as compared to other strict households. Her description of the regulation of her body is an example of what I define in the above figure as 1. Emotional violence Shame and Guilt associated with the body, “...you have to wear a bun, you have wear a braid and don’t wear shorts...you have to go to Punjabi school...” Parvati’s experience involved 4. Physical violence from her brother, was given free will to demonstrate control and power over his sisters. “So I started being abused when I was really young. The first time I got hit was when I was 6 years old.... It was so bad that he would knock on the wall and if he was downstairs I would come running down because that was his signal to come downstairs...I would think about you know I'm going to commit suicide by doing an overdose.” These forms of regulation were evident in many of the stories, however the power of izzat and its capacity to control was a dominant part of all the women’s stories, and whether or not it was using the word izzat, all the women knew that there were particular boundaries they could not cross. Parvati’s words describe the power of izzat when she describes what her father would say to her and her sisters: “it took me my whole life to make my reputation, it’s going to take my daughters two seconds to ruin it.”

Finally, in the following diagram each of the corners are defined; however, it is important to note that I have strategically placed each form of violence in this particular order to demonstrate the prevalence of each in women’s lives. As my sisters demonstrate, most of their experiences did not go past number 5. Displacement/excommunication, and 6. forced marriage. This research is about expanding our minds to think beyond the extreme cases of “honour” killings and to think about the everyday encounters women have with the regulating of their bodies that sit on a continuum. Women are more likely to find themselves situated towards numbers 1 to 5 and in extreme cases find themselves towards the numbers 6 to 7.

The following diagram breaks down the specific definition and description of each corner of the continuum. The final column to the right lists the various structural forms of
violence that emerge from navigating heteropatriarchy, racism, islamaphobia, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, colonialism and classism in society on a daily basis, which on the continuum circulates around the diagram and is ever present at all times. The examples used to define the navigation of these forces emerge from the women’s stories and their struggles with structural violence throughout their lives.

**Figure 2.** Continuum of “Honour” related violence: Transgressions and Consequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;HONOUR&quot; RELATED VIOLENCE WITHIN THE HOME:</th>
<th>EXAMPLES:</th>
<th>NAVIGATING HETERPATRIARCHY, CULTURAL RACISM, ISLAMAPHOBIA, SEXISM, HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA, COLONIALISM, CLASSISM:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Emotional violence to control behaviour and transgressions: | • Everyday experiences of guilt and shame associated with your body;  
• Verbal and non-verbal cues of what is acceptable behavior and what constitutes transgressing unacceptable boundaries;  
• Being told that your actions will lead to the death of parents’ and elders as a way of deterring from behaviours that transgress izzat or “honour”. | • Feeling pressure from friends to participate in activities that could potentially lead to transgressing boundaries of izzat.  
• Being told that your family is “cruel”, “unusual” or “barbaric” for placing these controls on your life  
• When speaking to professionals about your story, encountering silence and a resistance  
• Fear of child protection services and their interpretations of your story  
• Friends, acquaintances, and professionals suggesting that the choice between family and “freedom” should always be freedom  
• Being triggered by reading media depictions of “honour” violence that defines South Asian/Muslim communities as barbaric  
• Having to justify support or help when describing your story to service |
| 2. Economic violence to control behaviour and transgressions | • Financial control and limits placed on your access to education;  
• Limits on who you can engage with outside of the family;  
• Limits on what activities you can engage in outside the family home. |  
| 3. Confinement and threats | • Interventions by extended family that involve various forms of coercion;  
• Confinement, control over social mobility, phone calls being tracked, being watched and followed by family members;  
• Threatened with being taken to another country;  
• Threats that the parents will commit suicide;  
• Threatened to be murdered |  
| 4. Physical Violence | • Witnessing physical violence against mother, siblings, or care providers as a result of the transgressions |  

5. Displacement or excommunication and violence

- Experiencing physical violence as a result of the transgressions.
- Proving the impact of emotional abuse in order to get support/services.
- Encountering difficulty in shelter systems that are usually full of young people who are fleeing very different situations (i.e. parental neglect, sexual abuse, drug addiction).
- Experiencing financial constraints after being excommunicated that lead to a precarious lifestyle.

6. Forced Marriages/non-consensual marriage

- Being forced to have an arranged marriage;
- Being excommunicated if you continue transgressing
- Displacement from family and community;
- Excommunication from the family and community.

- “Coerced to be married to a chosen suitor against their will, under duress and/or without full, free and informed consent from both parties”\(^{41}\);
- Marriage can occur abroad, or in Canada.

7. “Honour” related killing

- Violence that leads to murder that can be instigated by shame or potential shame of a perceived transgression from the boundaries of izzat.

This model is intended as a tool for engaging in a conversation about “HRV” and allows for communities and practitioners who struggle to piece together all the individual, collective, and institutional elements that are involved in a complex narrative of “honour” violence. This tool is intended to create collective consciousness around how socially constructed ideologies come together to impact on women’s lives; thus, women’s stories need to be centered in this model.

The stories of my sisters are the backbone to how this continuum has emerged and it is through the narrative inquiry as a methodology that I was able to focus on how izzat has taken shape and form in their lives. From a practice perspective, narrative therapy follows a similar trajectory of restructuring stories so that the teller and the listener are actively engaged in a therapeutic alliance (White, 1994). The basic premise of narrative therapy is that we make sense of our lives through stories (Brown and Augusta-Scott, 2007). The process of externalizing, or

\(^{41}\) Definition of Forced marriage by Anis, Konanur & Matteo (2013).
finding alternative meanings to one’s story, recognizes how dominant cultural stories are given power in mainstream discourse and allows for this telling of a story to be challenged (Brown and Augusta-Scott, 2007). If we think about the ways in which women’s stories of izzat and/or “honour” have been structured in our society today, the power that is given to mainstream stories, as well as the stories that live in dominant voices in the family and community, greatly impact how women see themselves or identity.

Guilt and shame are largely connected to how my sisters shared a lot of their experiences with izzat and it is through the process of guilt and shame that women are bound into particular boundaries of izzat. The fear of going beyond the boundaries set by her parents stopped Tara from pushing her family too much at a young age:

_We didn’t have any boyfriends in high school…_I never did, I just didn’t. Also, I didn’t even know people went out to parties, my first dance was the spring fling and that was in grade 12, and then at that point, I would ask can I go to a dance, my mom would say ask your dad and then that was stopped, I’m like I’m not going to ask dad._

As we reflected further on these moments in Tara’s life, she expressed a lot pain associated with the constrictions in her life and the non-verbal cues that surrounded these moments. The phrase “_hor na ne khe khanna?_” (what will other people think) was used quite frequently in Tara’s, Parvati’s and Lakshimi’s stories, and within this phrase is the element of shame surrounding women’s actions and the guilt of putting parents through the confrontation with their community when they start gossiping about their daughter. Lakshimi articulates this connection in her story and describes her siblings preoccupation with shame and izzat, “_yeah I think that shame is tied really closely to this idea of honour, because I don’t think if you ask them (siblings) what honour is they could explain that, you know. Maybe in my family they would explain it as being a good Sikh_”

If we think about the continuum, the emotional violence that occurs regularly for women is largely controlled through a process of implementing guilt and shame for transgressing family codes of conduct. Guilt and shame are useful tools of control, particularly for women, because of how intimately they are internalized by an individual. Brene Brown (2006) has conducted extensive research on the construction of shame and its impact on women. In her article entitled _Shame resiliency theory: A grounded theory study of women and shame_ (2006), Brown defines
shame as “an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging” (p. 45).

Brown (2006) conceptualizes a theory she coins “shame resiliency theory” that breaks down shame into three main concepts, “feeling trapped, powerless, and isolated… it is the intricate weaving of these concepts that makes shame so powerful, complex, and often difficult to overcome” (p. 45). Investigating these three concepts and the impact they have on over 215 women that were interviewed for her research, Brown effectively articulates the power that shame can have on an individual. Feeling trapped emerges from experiencing very little options outside of what is laid out for you. Feeling powerless is about individuals not having the capacity to produce a countereffect to shame, as well as the silence that commonly accompanies shame. And finally feeling isolated is a product of feeling both trapped and powerless to change the situation.

A common response to shame is to flee from those who view you as being flawed or bad person. Guilt, which is commonly associated with shame, results from behaving in a flawed or bad way. The differences, as simple as they may seem, have a tremendous impact on people and Brown’s research is very applicable to the construction of izzat and/or “honour” and the regulation of women’s bodies. Brown (2006) carries on to define the shame resiliency theory as a “web of layered, conflicting, and competing, expectations that are, at the core, products of rigid socio-cultural expectations” (p. 46).

Izzat and “honour”, as I have spoken about extensively in this research, are tools of controlling and regulating women, however at their very core is the construction of shame and the interplay with guilt, that allows for them to be such an effective way of controlling women. Brown states, “the socio-cultural expectations and the expression of these expectations by individuals and group are, in turn, constantly reinforced by media culture…” (p. 46) demonstrating how systemic shame is constructing particular behaviours in women. Brown’s theory offers an excellent way of engaging the continuum of “honour” related violence, as it conceptualizes the universal power of shame and explains how effectively it can become a tool of control over women’s bodies.

Themes of guilt run through my sisters’ stories. Parvati’s family narrative circles around the shame that her father continued to encounter in his community, because of the transgressions
the women in his family made against the social order. Parvati witnessed each of her sisters being exiled from the family, as well as her mother leaving her father, and the impact this had on her father led to her own guilt and convictions to not bring shame to her father’s honour. This became such a part of her commitment to her father that she was confined to wanting to please her father’s izzat and trapped in an abusive marriage, and after finding a way out of that was forced into another marriage that suited her sister and father more than her own choices. When Parvati was hospitalized with posttraumatic stress she describes thinking about her situation clearly for the first time being unwilling to let the protection of her father’s izzat control her life.

When I was hospitalized and it gave me an opportunity to think, okay every time I’ve tried to do things my father’s way, he’s said anything I’ve done it boom. When is enough enough? So I decided enough was enough. That’s why I was willing to be disowned, but it was kind of mutual if you’re willing to disown me I’ll disown you back, you can’t disown me twice in one lifetime. So that’s how I fought.

The fear associated with shame and the guilt of going against the social order are also very evident in Tara’s story, as she describes never saying no to her family and the responsibility she continued to take on “family responsibility is a huge thing so you don’t really think about that, you’re just like okay, I have to do this.” The first time Tara did say no to her parents, the events led her to marry a man she did not love and was not ready to live with forever. To this day, she describes a tremendous amount of guilt for that part of her life

“Even my mom said you always were a good girl, and its true I did everything that they asked me to, it’s just this one thing that I was like no...Even to this day my mom says, because she regrets, she says I wish I had just let you date him. Because I was like mom he was not the man I was going to marry, you know what I mean, but I wish you would have let me date him because I would have found that out on my own, right?”

Tara feels guilt about going against the social order and her mother, interestingly, regrets making decisions about her daughters future because of the fear of shame from the community.

As much as shame becomes a great tool to control women, I would also suggest that shame is largely used as a way to effectively control marginalized communities, such as Muslim and/or South Asian communities in Canada, particularly in a post 9/11 world. After the death of Jassi Sidhu, Amandeep Atwal, and Aqsa Parvez, the South Asian community found itself in a similar trap or web of shame, where they felt cornered or powerless in their choice of how to speak about the death of these three women who were framed as victims of their culture and religion. My community felt isolated and the most common response was to deny or defend the
culture and religion in order to condemn these acts. The shaming of a community as a collective, in my understanding, has devastating impacts on every individual in that community because it not only leads to a denial of acts of violence, but it also leads to a silencing of survivors currently struggling with violence.

If we think back to the conversation of how the South Asian community and/or Muslim community define the murder of the above women, there are dominant voices that suggest that this is femicide, or family violence and should only be termed in this way, that no connection to “honour” should be made when speaking about these tragic deaths. This, in my opinion, is a response to shame associated with the socio-cultural expectations placed on the “good” immigrant who has strayed from the boundaries of how they should behave in Canadian society. Media played a dominant role in perpetuating this shame and as a result we have a community of women who are silenced, trapped, and feeling powerless to voice their stories of izzat or “honour”.

Brown’s (2006) research carries on to identify empathy as the opposite or counter emotion to shame and she uses empathy as a way to increase resiliency to shame responses. Having an empathic response involves “mutual support, shared experience, and the freedom and ability to explore and create options” (Brown, 2006, p. 47). Empathy requires a great deal of engagement between individual and communities. Yet, it is clear that empathy can also be the most powerful counter tool for critical consciousness-raising for individuals and communities. I agree with Brown’s insistence on empathy and wonder what an empathic response to women, marginalized bodies, and racialized communities could look like.

Empathy is about accepting vulnerability, being conscious of the impact of shame and guilt, reaching out to survivors and, most importantly, speaking out about “honour” and shame (Brown, B. 2006). Brown talks extensively about the importance of understanding shame and how it works as a socio-cultural construct to have a psychological impact on our lives. Similarly, Paulo Freire (1970) and bell hooks (1994) engage the process of raising our critical consciousness and vulnerability by recognizing our humanity and how our stories are interconnected.

In the final hour that I had with each of my sisters, I asked if what would they say if they could speak to their family, community and to the world about their experience, and if they
could teach each system about the impact this experience has had on their lives. The way in which each of them spoke to this question varied; however, each thread came back to a similar response that was missing in their personal stories: Having an open dialogue and conversations about where they were coming from; being able to share with their family what choice they were making and why; being able to share with their community the impact their expectations were having on their lives; and being able to tell the media to back off so that we can figure this out on our own.

Lakshimi answered the question by asking her family pertinent questions: “Who are you hurting when you are do this. Are you examining how you are being hurt when you also do this?” This is speaking back to the impact this will have on her siblings and their children, and any future generations that do not have an opportunity to know their aunt Lakshimi because of her exile from her family. Tara engaged my question by reflecting on what she would do differently in hindsight and by giving insight to other young women who may be going through something similar:

...if your parents feel this way you’re not going to change them, you’re just not going to change them. So I mean try to do it in as loving way as possible I think, as much as you can. But don’t take the responsibility of...your happiness is your happiness, go for that, you are not responsible for their happiness, but you can do it in a way, try to do it in a way that is loving....the one thing that I could change was to be able to collaborate with them, let’s come together with a solution. Do you know what I mean, I love you, you love me, this is what I want but let’s do it together, let me understand where you’re coming from, I want you to understand where I’m coming from and let’s do it together

Ultimately, empathy is the response each of my sisters were expecting from the world, however the response they received was further imposition of shame and guilt for how they chose to challenge the boundaries placed around their bodies and their behaviour. In the following section, I will unpack the process of making this impossible choice, leading to excommunication and displacement, complicating notions of choice and how they impact on survivors.

Impossible Choice – Breaking Down The Third Space/Wall/World

For my sisters the distinct part of their story, and essentially the unique part of this research, is the fact that the invisible wall between their third space/wall/world and their family and community is broken down and for the first time their family and community has an explicit view of all that their daughter has been up to, and ultimately the lies that have led to creating
this third space. Their disclosure lead to this crumbling wall and the consequences varied for each of the women yet, ultimately, led to loss of family/community or loss of power and control over their own lives. How this happens for each of my sisters will be explored in this section however, before going into the stories again, I want to speak about some of the underlying themes that are at the foundation of the third space.

Sara Ahmed’s feminist writing, *Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects)* (2010), supports my attempts to theorize how the threat of a woman’s transgressions creates those distinct moments of panic, anger, and shame in a family and community, when a woman breaks down or discloses their third space/wall/world. By using a metaphor of a table with a family gathered around it, Ahmed creates an image in the reader’s mind of our own familial contexts and all the codes that are implicit in our families. Women who transgress boundaries are upsetting the hegemony or status quo that all members at the table are expected to maintain and perform accordingly. Ahmed describes the process of being a “feminist killjoy” at the family table in the following passage:

To be the object of shared disapproval, those glances that can cut you up, cut you out. An experience of alienation can shatter a world. The family gathers around the table; these are supposed to be happy occasions. How hard we work to keep the occasion happy, to keep the surface of the table polished so that it can reflect back a good image of the family. So much you are not supposed to say, to do, to be, in order to preserve that image. If you say, or do, or be anything that does not reflect the image of the happy family back to itself, the world becomes distorted. You become the cause of a distortion. You are the distortion you cause. Another dinner, ruined. To become alienated from a picture can allow you to see what that picture does not and will not reflect (p. 1).

Ahmed describes the true meaning of a “feminist killjoy” as the woman who is willing

To goes against social order, which is protected as a moral order, a happiness order is to be willing to cause unhappiness, even if unhappiness is not your cause. To be willing to cause unhappiness might be about how we live an individual life (not to choose “the right path” is readable as giving up the happiness that is presumed to follow that path (p. 3).

A “feminist killjoy” is the woman who disrupts the status quo, speaks out against the hegemony, and demonstrates behaviour that essentially shifts something inside each person at that table. Women who have created the third space/wall/world within their family know that the path they are following is going against family codes and a moral order that the family is invested in preserving, under claims of happiness. Yet, to disclose this third space/wall/world is “to be
willing to cause unhappiness, even if unhappiness is not your cause” (Ahmed, S. 2010, p. 3).
The choice to disclose is a process that emerges similar to “coming out” of the closet of queerness.

In Lakshmi’s story, being queer was a part of the disclosure, and after coming out to her family some of her siblings made a collective stand to excommunicate her from the family, thus taking away Lakshmi’s and her mother’s choice to have a relationship with her daughter. Lakshmi describes her anger at her siblings for taking away her opportunity to disclose her identity to her mother on her own terms, all to maintain their own judgments on Lakshimi’s sexuality “…if I go there and my mother says to me I don’t want to see your face again, I don’t approve of this get out of my sight. Let her say that to me and do not let you decide that she can’t even manage the news. Don’t take that agency away from her, she’s going to be the one to say that to me, let her decide that.” From her siblings perspective Lakshimi would bring shame and unhappiness to their mother’s life, and they saw it as their role to protect their mother from their sister’s transgressions.

In Tara’s story, the disclosure involved relationships to people who did not fit the status quo and being one of the first to get married to someone outside the community pushed boundaries that went beyond people’s capacity to understand how to interpret her behaviour: “I was the second in the community to get married to a white guy, there was another girl whose family was really lenient, they were Indian but they weren’t as traditional, so it wasn’t a big deal, but because my father was well known in the community, like everybody knew him and I was the oldest daughter, that’s bad…” Similarly, Durga was one of the first to get married to a white man in her family. Even though her parents’ accepted her decision, it was her extended family that rejected her and, largely, because of the consequences this would have on any decisions they made with their own daughters. Furthermore, the extended family believed Durega’s parents were taking unacceptable transgressions by accepting their daughter’s choice and standing up against the community stigma at the wedding. Durga describes the reaction her aunt and uncle had to her choice,

“…my aunt and uncle were really bad, because they were second parents for me and that was really hard for me…my uncle was the worst, he totally judged my dad, you don’t know what you’re doing, he was being disgusting because a part of him knew that my dad is the younger brother and you know how someone sets a trend…”
Each family has been oriented towards a compulsory moral and social order (Ahmed, S. 2006), in which their daughter’s sexuality and as potential bearers of future generations is in need of preservation. These sexual partners did not fit the social order. In each of the stories, there was a moment right before the disclosure or crumbling when my sisters considered remaining in the secrecy of the third space/wall/world, and for some the secret was forced out of them, while for others it was a distinct moment of coming out to their family and/or community. Mahavidya’s story is the first one I shared in this research and the entire interview is situated on the brink of whether to disclose or not to disclose her third world to her family. Mahavidya’s contemplations led us to unpack the impact this type of decision can and will have for the rest of her life, and there was still the ultimate question of whether or not she would go through with the disclosure. One of the fears she articulated was seeing her family exercise control over her decision that would change things between them forever, and whether or not she could go through with a disclosure that would bring out the worst in her father:

So if the worst-case scenario that I’m imagining is my family just never speaks to me again, my mom especially. I think I’ll just be removed from the most important world that I’ve inhabited so far... And you never want to destroy something to create another thing, right? But there’s a lot of fear associated with that and I wonder if my dad would actually like physically exercise any kind of control... But again that’s something that I’ll almost be like...okay bring it on, but also it would be like, yeah you convinced me, if there was any doubt in my mind now it’s gone, you know? In my darker moments I sometimes wish he would do that, because I don’t want to live with that uncertainty for the rest of my life. ...when you leave someone crying, versus when you leave somebody as they’re being aggressive towards you, very different things in terms of how you continue to live with yourself afterwards, and I would want the anger more than I would want hurt.

When the third wall crumbles down, the “feminist killjoy” fully emerges in each of my sisters’ stories, and their “willful behaviour” is a threat to izzat. As is apparent in each of the women’s stories, the very act of disclosing required a great deal of thought, courage and resistance, and the trauma that this moment created has clearly remained with us to this day and for Mahavidya she can already imagine the impact this decision will have on her, her life, and her family from the moment she makes the disclosure.

To be removed from the table of happiness is a necessary act, yet one that carries a great deal of pain and rejection. However, it is important to consider that the removal from the table of happiness is not always a cordial affair where one is simply excused and asked not to not return. To view this process as anything but violent would be minimizing many women’s stories
of displacement/excommunication/exile from their family and/or community. Many times this removal is violent, involving great trauma and interventions exercised with power and control over women to shift their behaviour and beliefs before she is seen as a hopeless convert, and then removed with force. The removal process, or as we have spoken about in this dissertation, the displacement/excommunication/exile, of women from their family table must be conceptualized on a continuum of violence. A continuum recognizes the pain associated with any removal, yet also recognizes that each woman’s experience of being removed is individual and has the capacity to be very violent.

There is very little choice embedded in women’s removal from the table and the misconception that women are “choosing” to become “feminist killjoys” in not only their family but also in society, needs to be unpacked further. Women are demonstrating incredible agency and power over their lives when they determine when it is no longer safe for them to be at the family table discussing their behaviours and beliefs that challenge the family status quo, and knowing when it is no longer safe requires incredible strength, resiliency and support. The concept of choice, the rejection associated with choice, and the capacity to exist beyond the family and/or community are themes that emerged from my sisters' stories and are rarely discussed in “honour” discourses. I will unpack each of these concepts in this part of the chapter.

Choice

In mainstream discourses, such as media and research, the common terminology used to define an “honour killing” is to suggest that a family is cleansing the “honour” of the family that has been lost because of their daughter’s behaviour, by killing/removing the culprit (Khan, T, 2006, Papp, 2010). There needs to be a reframing of this simple conception of what happens in a family when transgressions occur. In reframing these conceptions, what if we challenged these notions of cleansing and suggest that “honour” violence is less about cleansing the family “honour”, and more in line with a family being pushed into a decision that comes from upholding the “honour” of the community. The excommunication of a daughter can be understood as a painful act of needing to excuse the body from the family table (to continue using Sara Ahmed’s imagery) for self-preservation. The daughter reminds the family and community of transgressions against a social order that each member of the collective is
invested in preserving. When our transgressing bodies are present at the table, we are reminders of all the pain and anger that is associated with the event or disclosure, which led to the crumbling of the third space/wall/world, and the choice that each family/community may have felt they had to make in order to maintain the social order. The terminology of cleansing does not sit accurately with my sisters’ stories, since the family continued to sit at a precarious place within the community and to live in solitary pain. There was no cleansing and going back to the pure self before the disclosure happened.

The terminology of cleansing places survivors in opposition to their family, particularly the men in their family. As bell hooks (2000) describes in her influential work, “men are not exploited or oppressed by sexism, but there are ways in which they suffer as a result of it” (p. 73). The men in our lives suffered and continue to suffer the persuasion of shame to excommunicate or displace women who have transgressed boundaries of izzat. This notion of “cleansing” as it is framed in dominant discourses does not alleviate the pain and suffering associated with this decision. In fact, the expectation to excommunicate is as traumatic for the family as it is for the woman who is removed from the family table.

Korteweg (2012) effectively articulates how the dynamics of moral standing and community perception play into who is involved in the “honour” violence and how it occurs in a family, speaking to the dynamics of hierarchy and seniority operating around gender. “We see both father and mothers (or other key female family members) involved in planning how to restore the family honour. This can create a secondary victim in the form of the young man, often the youngest brother, who is charged by the family with cleansing the family honour” (p. 145). The various layers of responsibility that lie within the men to uphold izzat, and the level of power and control over women that emerges as a result of izzat, is such an integral discussion that sits at the periphery of this research and other discourses. With the limits of how I conducted this research, I am unable to expand any further on the role of men in maintaining izzat in their daughters or sisters lives, yet it is pertinent that future research and discussions happen where this can be given space.

As I speak to in the previous section, the continuum places threats of excommunication above the actual act of displacement, because the very thought of being removed from the family table is as big a threat as being physically hurt. The loss of family and community, which are vessels of love, support, and safety from the daily navigations in a racist society, is difficult
to bear, and, as is apparent in many of the stories, this is not an easy “choice”. As I speak to in the previous chapter, my intention is not to create a binary here between those who exit from their families, and those who remain within their family’s fold. Even the word choice is troublesome, because it is associated with a process of stepping forward in a disclosure, a connotation to ideologies of free will or an informed choice. Most of the time when the disclosure happens and the third space/wall/world crumbles, there is very little free will involved, it is more like being nudged by various forces to be placed in a moment when nothing can hold up the space/wall/world any longer. As we recall from my sisters’ stories, Tara’s family overheard her and her sister talking about her boyfriend, which led her father to take full control of their relationship and impose marriage on the young couple. Lakshimi’s queer identity was disclosed to her siblings by one of her older brothers, and subsequently held secret from her mother. The process and moment of telling her mother about her queerness came about under great duress and Lakshimi was never able to process this with her mother due to her siblings’ imposition and control over her elderly mother’s life. Choice is not an element of free will in these stories.

Yet, there is a discourse that suggests women are choosing freedom, and are finally exiting a situation where they have been held prisoner their whole lives. This image is not only inaccurate, but also demeaning to a woman’s story and life within her family. This is a narrow neo-liberal engagement of what choices second-generation South Asian women have, particularly when dealing with family conflict. Tara so eloquently articulates the context, in which these moments of distress are happening in families that are vessels of attachment and love:

...There’s a part of us that feels like your parents don’t understand what you’re going through and you’re just like oh whatever, this is what I want to do whatever, but at the end of the day we’re connected...at the end of the day they don’t want to be estranged from their child, but if this is the decision you’re going to make, go for it, but try to be as loving, and hopefully your parents will be as loving and they’ll come to accept you.

Neo-liberal conceptions of choice in the Western quickly lead to notions of human rights and the word “freedom” is strongly associated with a neo-liberal egalitarian lens that maintains a universal belief that all women everywhere should and do have the same choices. For marginalized women, notions of choice are also situated on a continuum and are strongly associated with the level of violence and pain that will emerge out of each decision they make.
and the impact it will have on their relations. Furthermore, existence within a family and community does not simply occur in a one-dimensional form, where there is only oppression, pain, and violence. We exist in relation to our families. The opposition to our choices and the violence that stems from izzat is one dimension situated within layers of love, support, and attachment. Hence, the events that led up to the excommunication/displacement/exile have lasting impacts on the family, which shift the family narrative for everyone involved; many times this includes the community as we saw in Durga’s story, where her extended family that she was attached to as intimately as her immediate family, distanced themselves from her marriage and her life after her marriage.

Other times, it is situated primarily in the family, as was the case for Lakshimi and Parvati, who were both exiled from members of their immediate family after making choices about their bodies that went against the social order. Nothing about the choices made in the moments before, during, and after disclosures (or events that bring about transgressions from “honour” codes), are straightforward, informed or standard practices, as particular discourses would like us to believe.

Yet, as I write these complex ideas, I must also recognize that the third space/wall/world that women have created in their lives is a result of knowing, seeing and feeling that the construction of izzat requires resistance. Bonnie Burstow (1992), effectively examines notions of resistance as they relate to women and defines these moments as “seeing through” (p. 17) the compulsory heteronormativity, sexism, and violence that we are living through as a result of heteropatriarchy. Women, who resist heteropatriarchy and the many tools of maintaining heteropatriarchy, are situated on the awareness continuum that sees through the “myth, propaganda, and institutions” that perpetuate violence (Burstow, 1992, p. 17). My sisters created this world in order to survive and when the space/wall/world crumbled they continued with the resistance through their actions and bodies. Active/passive resistance is a part of our war to “disobey patriarchy” (Burstow, 1992), and is a form of survival.

Whether a disclosure happened, as was the case for Lakshmi and Durga, or whether the secret came out on its own, such as in Tara’s and Parvati’s story, there was a confrontation between my sisters and their family that may have led to various stages of interventions and negotiations to prevent the secret from coming out to anyone outside the family. Tara’s family called in extended family to “talk some sense into me”, while Parvati’s family interventions
involved continuous threats of excommunication that resembled her sister’s fate. After Parvati separated from her abusive husband, her father and brother made it clear that they did not want the shame of her returning to her family home: “*they said don’t come back, you can come for a visit, but don’t come back here to live.*”

The process of making the relationship that instigated the sexual behaviour transgression public is when the choice was placed upon my sister and an expectation was made to leave the relationship, or leave the family. As Foucault’s work demonstrates, where there is power there is resistance (Sawicki, 1991). Jana Sawicki theorizes Foucault’s work in the following fashion: “Foucault does not define power as the overcoming of resistance. When restraining forces are overcome, power relation’s collapse into force relations. The limits of power have been reached” (p. 25). In these particular moments, the limits of the power our families and communities had over our lives have reached a breaking point and resistance to this power is possible and imposed in that moment. Many women take the imposition of “choice” between family and continue with the perceived transgression, as an opportunity to demonstrate resistance and push back to say “*this is my body and I want to be able to decide who I share it with*”. Other times, the variables are not there to make this statement and women continue to live in the family negotiating izzat and the boundaries placed on their bodies. Regardless of what “choice” a woman makes, the disclosure or breaking down of the third space/wall/world changes individuals, families and communities from that point forward.

**Existing In Displacement**

Each woman in my research was displaced as a result of the disclosure and a choice was either imposed on them or they were compelled to make one after the disclosure. The active displacement by family and/or community and the trauma and pain associated with this, is likened to feelings of shame, guilt and, ultimately, rejection. Feelings of rejection have rarely been explored in research related to “honour” related violence and the trauma associated with emotional violence against women. Brene Brown (2007) unpacks how rejection is used a tool to threaten women into behaving and performing in particular ways, relying entirely on the association of rejection to shame and guilt. The fear of rejection from persons who we are attached to, respect, and whose approval we want, can be a strong enough reason not to cross particular boundaries. This feeling of rejection sits as the trigger for much of the trauma that
stems from the excommunication/displacement/exile after the event. Many of my sisters spoke about navigating the world with the fear that every relationship they encounter will eventually involve rejection and displacement. In Lakshimi’s story after being exiled from her siblings, they are all brought together when her mother passes away and for the short time they are together, there is a cordial engagement between her and her siblings. Lakshimi talks about the fear of further rejection from her siblings if she chooses to make contact with them now that her mother has passed, not knowing whether her siblings have gone back to their original position:

“Maybe the acceptance was because of a death we had to deal with, now there’s not death there, will I have to have these conversations? Will they be willing to have these conversations? Will they have gone back to the stance where...we’ve had a year to think about it and we don’t want you near our children. So there are all those fears that I’m not really thinking about or thinking through.... Because for them all is forgiven now we have moved on, we have gotten over that. Because they don’t ever talk about that...the two brothers who were banished they don’t talk about how that happened to them, you just move on, you just move on...all the stories are common...they aren’t common but it’s something that happens that you lose touch with family, or lose acceptance, or your always doubted, or people are scared of you because you’re abnormal.”

A deep sense of loneliness likened to depression, consistent and persistent anxiety, a fear of further rejection and displacement in current and new relationships, and persistent physical symptoms without a clear diagnosis, are some of the common affects that my sisters described feeling after the disclosure and displacement. Researchers have explored the health impact of intimate partner violence on women and have defined some of the posttraumatic stress in similar symptomatic ways (Archer, 1994, Kurz & Stark, 1988, Ristock and Health Canada, 1995). Examining research on “honour” related violence and the health impact on young women, we continue to encounter research that suggests young women are mentally abused by their families and are at risk of suicide (Schlytter & Linell, 2010, House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2008). The emotional impact of such encounters again, must be understood within the context of a continuum. Yet what service providers are encountering in current research is a discourse that either focuses on very extreme cases of physical and psychological abuse and violence, or research that is focused on defining women as victims of barbaric perpetrators of heinous violence (Papp, 2010). Discussion on the impact of everyday violence of heteropatriarchy on second-generation racialized women is limited, and any discussion on the impact of excommunication/displacement/exile for young women has not yet been thoroughly discussed. There are discussions on the periphery, but no articulation or recognition that what happens after such displacement can impact on the mental health of women.
Living and existing after being displaced by the family, whether or not communication still exists or has been cut off entirely, involves a process of starting a new life and there is what one of my sisters terms “a blip in the narrative when you get to start again”. This pause or restart button in the narrative of our lives can be refreshing, yet most of the time is terrifying; and it is in these spaces that most of the work and support happens. It is in these spaces where autonomy and having the capital means to survive become necessary. Each of the women spoke about having access to education and the financial capacity to turn to, which gave them the autonomy to move through systemic and social institutions. Not only does education and the capital associated with education and having a job, contribute to the resistance against heteropatriarchy, but it also gives women the strength to move through the loneliness that occurred after the trauma of the event. Durga effectively articulates this when she describes the moment she recognized the autonomy she had was due to economic stability:

“I think everybody deals differently, but if you are feeling like I can’t be who I am and I can’t live with not being who I am at some point you just have to break out of it. And because we’re second-generation we have the financial resources, which is super important…. they couldn’t threaten me with money because I was working already….I had a response for everything…and they realized that fuck I don’t have anything to hold over her head and I think that moment they realized they didn’t have anything to control and the things they tried to control it wasn’t going to work, it would push me more…”

Coming back to Mythili Rajiva’s (2013) most recent research and work, she engages with the complex ways that second-generation South Asian women experience class and occupational identity and, encounters with the “ordinary trauma of migration”. The sense of questioning, and knowing how children of immigrants experience their parents’ immigration and the trauma that emerges from this, are embedded in a concept she describes as “ordinary trauma” across generations. Rajiva highlights how belonging for second-generation South Asian women is complicated by the daily encounters of racism, as well as the narratives of their family story pre-migration which lends to a lack of integration into Canada. Second-generation South Asian women, from her study, speak to accessing education as a way of moving the family class to an elevated status. Rajiva’s work speaks to the role of young second-generation girls navigate and negotiate questions of identity and survival regardless of the trauma of migration that reverberates through the family, which further supports what my sisters spoke about overwhelmingly in their own process of navigating their family and community, while also healing from the trauma of displacement.
Initially, the short time after the event or disclosure, each of my sisters encountered a sense of numbness that allowed them to navigate survival and move through what they needed to do in order to sustain their individual lives. This moving through and staying busy involved focusing on school (something Lakshimi spoke about), creating a new family (as Parvati speaks about), or moving to a different city or space, which was the case in my own personal story. Having supports and this internal strength to get through the first few years after the event was essential to their survival. It is here that the most difficult work occurs, and as is evident in research and writing that examines what happens for women when they have passed the initial crisis stages, social supports tend to stray and women are expected to do this personal work on their own. It is in this stage that service provision is necessary and supports need to be more accessible so women do not find themselves suffering from psychosomatic symptoms and posttraumatic stress triggers and symptoms.

After my own excommunication from my family and community, my body felt foreign to my mind. A deep sense of loss existed in the separation between my mind and body and breathing through the symptoms hurt. My partner would leave for an hour and this anxiety would creep up to suffocate me everywhere and ignite every fear instinct that lived within me. He would leave for a couple of hours and I would start worrying that this fear would take over and I would not be able to move any muscle in my body. When he was late to come home, he would find me crying buckets of tears, not having moved from the fetal position that seemed to be the only thing keeping me from running. In my mind he was dead and I was left alone in the world, what other explanation was there for him being late? No family, no connection, no way to imagine a life without my most important relationships existing. This feeling was at its height in the first year of leaving my family. It subsided the year after, and the year after that. After my mother and brother began speaking to me again, it subsided even more. But to be truly honest this feeling has never left and still lives deep, deep inside me, somewhere, ready to rear itself if needed, reminding me of the precariousness of relationships and how much loss I have experienced.

The stress and traumatic symptoms after the excommunication varied for each of my sisters, yet what was an overarching theme in each of their stories was the sense of loss that they each felt for a connection and attachment to their families or community. Each of the women encountered a process of grieving a life, selfhood, and connection that was evident before the
event occurred. Whether it was the physical loss of a loved one, as in Tara’s story where her father passed away at a critical time in her life, or in Lakshmi’s narrative where she also lost her mother at the moment when her third world had collapsed, or whether it is the death of a daughter in the eyes of their family. Furthermore, the role that our mothers play in this entire process is important to highlight, as it is through our complex relationships with our mothers that we continue to maintain a connection to our own izzat and the izzat of our families. Mothering discourses and the specific relationship to our mothers, is an important part of the research findings and will be discussed further in the final theme.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will unpack the grieving process that was necessary for each of my sisters to go through in order to feel whole again and the implications this grief, loss and reclamation process has for service provision and our understanding of “honour” related violence and izzat.

**Grief, Loss And A Place Of Reclamaton**

In the process of conducting this research, I realized that the discussion on displacement and excommunication as a result of perceived transgressions is commonly associated with the experiences of the LGBTQ2 community and the process of disclosing their identity to their parents, which may result in an eviction from the family home. In reviewing literature that speaks to the experiences of an individual’s disclosure of sexual orientation, I came across limited research that defines the coming out process and the reactions of parents (Saltzburg, 2004, 2007) and adolescents (Potocznik, Crosbie-Burnett, & Saltzburg, 2009). In earlier research there are various findings that speak to the ejection of youth from the family home, emotional rejection and family violence as a result of learning of their child’s sexual orientation (Hammelman, 1993; Hunter & Schaecher, 1987; Savin-Willimams, 1989, 1994). Much of this research is limited to quantitative studies that speak to the number of young adults who consider suicide after coming out, and the level of violence and emotional turmoil they experience.

Recent research conducted by Potocznik, Crosbie-Burnett, & Saltzburg (2009) has challenged previous research on young adults experiences of coming out and the racial diversity of the respondents, recognizing this limitation may impact to the level of support they provide to racially diverse youth. In their own study Potocznik, Crosbie-Burnett, & Saltzburg (2009) focused on the experiences of African-American, Hispanic, and white and South Asian GLBTQ
adolescents. Findings from previous research reveal various levels of responses from families to their child’s sexual orientation disclosure, the most frequent being that families come around to accept their child’s sexual orientation after initial feelings of shock, denial and resentment (Muller, 1987; Savin-Williams, 2003). Furthermore, Herdt and Boxer’s (1993) research reported that the most notable negative response that young adults experience from their families after a disclosure is complete estrangement or expulsion from the family and home, yet this only occurred in 3% of their sample (202 adolescents).

However, what is most notable about Potoczniak et al. (2009)’s research with racially diverse youth is not that it supports previous research, but that the young adults they interviewed described their family and extended family as constituting “a profound symbol of one’s origin and may be the focal point of one’s ethnic-racial identity, or source of pride and strength. Thus when ethnic minority adolescents declare LGBTQ2 status to their family, they may risk not only a source of social support but also a source of self-identification and association within their community” (p. 200). These social support and sources of self-identification are important to recognize and pay homage to. The coming out process and the loss of family and community has significant impact on how the person is able to navigate the world, their need to create new social supports, and the impact all of this has on self-identification. This is not only true for the LGBTQ2 community, but also for my sisters and any other person who has experienced the loss of family, community, and a connection to their racial, ethnic, religious self-identification.

Furthermore, their research also revealed that although a percentage of the participants experienced excommunication from their family and/or community, the majority spoke to this being a temporary situation (Potoczniak et al, 2009, p. 200). The researchers suggest this is a source of hope not only for practitioners working with young adults in this situation, but also for racialized youth who are going through the process of planning to come out to their family and/or community. These research findings not only reveal how current research unravels the process and common experiences of coming out for LGBTQ2 communities, but they also indicate the need to pay particular attention to the time between being excommunicated, or expelled from the family, to being reconciled. Quantitative research has suggested that many

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young adults encounter social isolation, depression, suicide and homelessness after being expelled from their family (Kourany, 1987, Proctro & Groze, 1994, Remafedi, Farrow, & Deisher, 1991), which can have lasting psychological impact. I would conclude that women who experience displacement from their families after “honour” related excommunication/displacement/exile also encounter social isolation, depression, suicide and homelessness, yet this is rarely discussed in current discourses of “honour” and second-generation women.

When a person is excommunicated due to izzat or “honour”, they can be considered dead to their family from that point forward. For some in the family this is a hard line and there is no reconciliation after this declaration has been made, as was the case for Parvati and her father’s position on his daughters and even his wife. Similarly, my own father has yet to accept my choices and I am dead in his eyes, even when I am in front of him staring directly into his eyes. Both our fathers turned inward as a result of this severing of relations and Parvati describes her father’s hermitage as his survival technique, “Every time something bad happened he would always isolate himself from everyone around because that was his way of protecting his honour, because if he’s not talking to anyone, they won’t ask questions and they won’t know.” Not only does this closing in onto oneself serve as a useful way of protecting the self from social scrutiny, but it also allows for the anger and pain that stimulated the excommunication to fester and grow for our fathers, fuelling the fires of stubbornness that led them to decide their daughters no longer exist for them.

However, for most, there is a process of reconciliation and new relationships emerge after some time. However, the relationship is new and will look very different from the relationship before the disclosure. So many of the women are, in fact, going through a process of grieving the losses they have encountered as a result of the “honour” related excommunication/displacement/exile. It is essential to consider what happens in the gap between being excommunicated and reconciliation; the grief, loss and process of moving forward is extremely difficult to navigate and communicate to a world that does not see you as a grieving body. The grief is silenced.
Does Izzat Mean Loss? Finding Meaning After Loss

Grief and loss have generally been associated with the death and dying process, yet as Goldsworthy (2005) effectively argues in her article on *Grief and Loss Theory in Social Work Practice: All changes involve loss just as all losses require change*, our understanding of grief and loss requires expansion, because “whenever people experience change they are touched by loss in one form or another and its ensuing grief” (p. 169). Goldsworthy (2005) carries on to discuss numerous theories that engage the process of grief and loss and its impact on therapeutic practice. From psychodynamic theory (See Freud, 1957, Bradbury, 2001) to cognitive-behavioural theory (See Kramer, 1998) and attachment theory (See Bowlby, 1980), there have been significant contributions to the field of death, dying, grief and loss by dominant social science theorists. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s (1970) stages of mourning and Worden’s (1991) nine principles of grieving are the most widely known theories on grief and loss, yet both have been critiqued for their limitations as they are largely applied to the grieving process related to a death (Corr, 1993, Goldsworthy, 2005, Raphael, 1984). Both theories, particularly Kübler-Ross’s widely discussed stages of grief and loss, play an important role in our understanding of the impact that death and loss can have on an individual. Regardless of its criticisms, many continue to use it as a preliminary resource. Yet, for this research I am not interested in using the above theories that consider a prescriptive nature of grieving and construct the process into a pathology that can be medicalized and potentially “viewed as illness rather than a response to changes in life (Goldsworthy, 2005, p. 174).

In the context of this research, there is no actual death to grieve, yet there is evident grief and loss of family relationships and a multiplicity of emotions women experience after being displaced from everything they knew about their lives and the important relationships in their lives. As eloquently articulated by Goldsworthy (2005), “while death is not the only loss that we suffer, traditionally it has been the only loss that is validated as legitimate grief experience” (p. 170), emphasizing the need to move beyond death to examine loss as a social experience.

A social constructionist approach to practice emphasizes the meaning-making process of experience and how we construct and then reconstruct meaning to our experiences (Goldsworthy, 2005). From a meaning-making perspective we can look at grief and loss as a social experience that can be unpacked throughout time, and understand how we have
historically constructed meaning to particular relationships and what happens when we encounter experiences that we have not previously created meaning for, such as being displaced from your family and/or community. Richard Neimeyer (1999) defines the process of grief as reconstructing meaning following a loss and outlines a social constructionist approach to grief and loss theory that engages the individual uniqueness of each person’s experience. Yet, Neimeyer also emphasizes that as personal as grief is, it should also be linked with wider systems and with the context in which it occurs. So grief does not only affect an individual but also family, friends, work colleagues and people you encounter in your everyday lives (Neimeyer, 1999). Suzanne Thompson (1998) articulates this moment when the loss of a relationship shatters our “adaptive assumptions that had previously given structure and meaning to life” (p. 21). We associate meaning and purpose with particular relationships and structures in our life and when we lose control over these meanings, we are vulnerable to a host of emotional effects, including the “perception that one has some control over protecting oneself from harm and that life has meaning and purpose” (Thompson, 1998, p. 21). Reconstructing a new meaning to our experiences is essential. The fear and constant anxiety of rejection from intimate relationships is one of the responses to this lack of control, and the vigilance to avoid any relationship that will result in rejection and pain is how women keep themselves safe. Many of my sisters identified with these feelings; for instance, Sarwati stated that one of the ways in which the loss that she has encountered from her story is “most significantly the desire to run away from what is causing pain.” The notion of running away from those moments she is unable to create meaning for, is something that resonated with many of my sisters and that could be actually moving, travelling, or even just isolating themselves from others in their lives.

Narrative theory engages the concept of reconstruction and the meaning-making process for individuals. Jan Fook’s (2002) influential work on social work practice and narrative theory and therapy has always been a valuable source for me as a social worker and community based activist, because of how she situates narrative theory within difference and oppression. Fook suggests that the process of narrative reconstruction involves “uncovering and/or deconstructing the narrative (as appropriate) to externalizing and creating an alternative narrative” (p. 137). Fook carries on to identify major features of narrative reconstruction and breaks down the process for social work practitioners. Both Thompson (1998) and Fook (2002) emphasize the process of finding meaning in one’s story of self and whatever losses one has encountered.
It was clear through the process of telling their stories that my sisters had all come to a place where they had moved beyond the initial trauma, shock, and loss, to a place where they had control over the meaning they associated with their experiences. Each of them came to a unique place with their family relationships and found new relationships that were either fostered or transitioned over the years. Parvati travelled back to her home in England and reconciled her relationship with her mother, estranged sister, and brother, and saw her father one last time: “So I now have closure from my brother, my sisters, my father, my mother everybody, if I dropped dead tomorrow I would feel like I got it out.” Lakshimi saw her siblings during her mother’s death and funeral and reconnected with some of her siblings for that brief time and made connections with her nieces and nephews by sharing stories of her mother to them so they could remember her in a way that Lakshimi herself is able to remember her. Tara and Durga remained in their family, yet each of them came to appreciate their family in a new way that drew on the collective experience they had as a family.

Overall, each of my sisters spoke about how the process of grieving the loss they incurred after being exiled form their families took some time and many factors played a role in how they were able to make meaning of their experiences. Survival in this time of grief meant tapping in to their resilience, demonstrating resistance, and reconstructing how they made meaning of their story. When I asked each of my sisters what helped them through this process, each of them spoke to specific pieces that were important in their survival, however the common key elements amongst all of the women came down to 5 parts of their life that were supported and fostered:

1. **Spirituality:** Each of my sisters spoke about being raised in religious households, yet they did not necessarily practice religion in their own individual lives. Yet, in the process of grieving losses and reclaiming identity all of them referred to their spirituality and their individual practice being an important part of the healing process. Whether it was listening to Kirtan (Sikh religious chanting), which Tara described as a part of her life, or sitting amongst wildlife and the natural world, which was a part of Sarswati and Lakshimi’s process, all of the women defined their personal spirituality as being essential to the process of healing. If it is not evident so far, there are sacred elements embedded in izzat; as with any moral system the sacred and spiritual elements of these practices is what continue to keep us coming back to them. We are drawn to connection: whether it is to an idea of what
happens to the body and mind after death, or whether it is following tenants of values and rules on how to live a “good” life, it is clear that humans are drawn to spiritual connection. Yet, there was an underlying question in this research on how to balance the sacred aspects of izzat with the violence that results from its construction as a moral system to control women. There is no direct answer on how to balance the complexities of gender-based violence with izzat, yet all my sisters speak at one point to their belief and hope for something inside themselves and to so many forces outside of themselves. Seeking spiritual connection was one way to gain perspective and create new meanings for the trajectory of their life and the relations they had lost, as well to as move forward to create new relations and rebuild old ones. A connection outside of the self is an important part of balancing the sacred and violent aspects of izzat and my sisters speak about the importance of having that spiritual connection in order to feel that balance inside themselves.

2. **Social Supports and/or Therapeutic Support:** Having friends to turn to during this process contributed to feeling less isolated and disconnected and allowed each of my sisters to feel hope that relationships can be a place of healing and meaning. Many of my sisters defined their friends as their “chosen family”; they chose to spend significant moments with their friends and accepted that they could turn to their “chosen family” many times before their biological family. Furthermore, having family members who remained connected to each of my sisters also contributed to the sense of connection and supported the process of reclamation. Parvati and Tara spoke to creating a new family for themselves, a chosen family, and focusing more on this part of their lives, while remaining connected to their biological families. Finally, all the women sought therapeutic support after the disclosure and the significance of this process was emphasized by all of them. For example, Tara and Durga both sought therapy at different points in their lives and spoke about the importance of reconstructing new meanings for their life stories and finding a way to heal from the pain and violence they encountered on the continuum of izzat. Yet, as much as they were able to string together a way to see a counselor, this support was only possible when each of my sisters were in a financial and mental state where they had the time to devote to this. This is not necessarily what they were able to turn to right away. One important piece that contributes to outside support is encountering social workers, health care providers, professionals in universities who had empathy and were willing to listen to their stories of struggle, survival, and their requests for support. Women encountering violence in their lives need to be heard with a sensitive ear and most of the time they have a sense of what they
need in terms of support from the professional they are seeing. Each of the women emphasized how important it was to not have a worker that was judgmental of her family, her experience, or her story. This underscores how important it is for professionals to be aware and actively engaged in empathy and listening skills in these institutions that encounter women who are living with violence, and to be willing to work outside the boundaries and parameters set around their institution. For example, in my work with different agencies throughout Toronto, many young women speak about some of the barriers to accessing education in university settings while also maintaining and living within the confines of the boundaries their family has set for them. We have witnessed women whose timetables are followed by their family members and the university becomes a site to search for women once they flee. Having professionals within these institutions that are willing to change the women’s names on their records with pseudonyms and to change their schedules so they appear one way and in actual fact are different are ways of addressing this violence. These small steps that blur the lines of “rules and regulations” contribute to women living safe lives and contribute to women fleeing situations that are violent. We need to listen to women and what they believe will keep them safe, because they know better than anyone how to work within the confines of these boundaries.

3. **Education and Financial Resources:** There was a moment in each of my sisters’ stories where they realized that either they needed to be self-sufficient in order to move beyond the power and control their family had over their bodies, or they were able to be autonomous in their position after they had gained economic control over their lives. For most of my sisters this was done through education, and accessing school was always defined as the safe haven as it gave them some autonomy from their private home life, and was rarely challenged by their families. Furthermore, having education also meant opening doors to economic and resourceful possibilities. Once they had control over their financial resources, my sisters described feeling less fearful of being confined by their family, because the control over their lives was largely verbal and emotional. Having the economic resources to start their own lives usually was the right time to make the disclosure and resist the power and control of izzat. For example, Durga describes living at home with her family until she had built up enough financial resources and economic autonomy to move out and begin slowly challenging her family’s resistance to her transgressions. Parvati describes a moment after she left her husband when she had relied so heavily on the men in her life to do everything for her, that she did not even know how to pay bills or maneuver around the city.
learning her husband she began focusing on building her power and autonomy so that she did not rely on anyone else, which she then focused on teaching her daughters.

4. **Witnessing:** Having the space, time and recognition to tell their stories and mourn the loss of relationships was identified as being an important step in creating meaning out of what happened, while recognizing the resilience it took to be in the present moment. This happened in very individual ways for each of my sisters. From speaking out in public talks about violence against women, which Parvati has avidly pursued, to working as an activist in various marginalized communities which has been the focus of Durga, to attending grief and loss groups as Lakshimi did after her mother’s passing. All of these experiences allowed my sisters to tap into their story and share it in a public manner in order to have it witnessed by others. The strength it takes to get to this place is admirable and demonstrates the unique resilience of each of my sisters. Yet it also speaks to how important it is for women to feel connected to their communities again and to “honour” the stories of other women who are struggling with violence in their lives. All of my sisters are active in their communities and are focused on work to end gender-based violence; hence the personal is very political for each of them in their respective spaces.

5. **Starting new relationships with family:** All of my sisters came to create a new relationship with their families and/or communities. The role they played in their families may have shifted a bit after the event, and some relationships became stronger, while others continue to be strained and/or estranged. Yet, the process of creating these new connections took tremendous courage on the part of my sisters, as well as each of their mothers, brothers, fathers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews and individuals in their communities. All of the women spoke about the process of reclaiming power over their izzat by making these newfound connections. Even though it was because of the family and/or community izzat that they were displaced/excommunicated/exiled each of the women was not willing to succumb to what izzat expected of them and in many ways each reconstructed what boundaries were placed around her body and pushed to reclaim how izzat would be a part of the new relationships created after the displacement. The most significant connection that all the women spoke to was their relationship to their mothers. The role of mothers in each of their stories was significant, beautiful, and yet also very stormy with ups and downs throughout their lives. It is through our mothers that we first learn about izzat; it is through our connection to our mothers that we reclaim izzat for ourselves.
Reclaiming Izzat: The Role Of Mothering

Oh God, Oh God. . . Oh my Aqsa, you should have listened,” Anwar Jan said out loud in a police interview room. “Everyone tried to make you understand. Everyone begged you, but you did not listen. . . (Mitchell, 2010)

The above words of a mother haunted the pages of newspapers across Ontario on June 15th, 2010. These are the words of Anwar Jan whose daughter, Aqsa Parvez, was murdered by her own husband and son. As a mother she lives with the trauma of her daughter’s death, the trauma of the men in her life being not only imprisoned, but also brutally portrayed as “barbaric” men in the media. She lives with the trauma of having to live in hiding for the remainder of her life because of the attention this horrific event has stirred in the media and in the orientalist imagination of neo-liberal Canadians. Yet, the focus in the discourses surrounding Aqsa’s death is her mother’s role in maintaining the patriarchal notions of “honour” and “allowing” the men of the family to demonstrate violence and control in Aqsa’s life. The role of the mother, in stories of violence against second-generation South Asian women, circulates around blame and her role as the carrier of “barbaric” cultural knowledge.

How women are portrayed as the ultimate teachers of izzat in our families and communities is a vital connection that is seldom spoken about in mainstream discourses, yet our mothers are almost always portrayed as either victims of the same culture, or perpetrators of barbaric violence (Mitchell, 2010). As I speak to my own story and experience, my mother, grandmother, and aunts were the ones who held the responsibility to pass down izzat to the younger generation and to do so in a way that continued the control over women’s behaviour outside the family home. This is how heteropatriarchy continues to work globally, to encourage women not to question the control and power of these key ideologies, as well as to continue to enforce, and pass them on to, younger generations (Bannerji, 2001).

Yet, if we turn the gaze away for a slight moment from the history and context in which mothers play this role, we will see that the same violence, power and control is demonstrated in their own lives. We see that mothers continue passing down lessons of “honour” or izzat to their daughters because of the fear that if they do not maintain these practices their daughters will be victim to violence from all the men they encounter. We see that mothers are constantly juggling a precarious balance of maintaining family and community “honour”, while resisting the violence embedded in the heteropatriarchy that is demonstrated in the family, community and
wider mainstream society. I recall moments where my mother would lie to my father about my whereabouts, would look the other way when she did not want to know about my outings with my friends and would defend my actions to my father when he got wind of the lies. My mother and grandmother carried the lessons of izzat, which involved heteropatriarchy, but they also became the ones who taught me how to resist the heteropatriarchy and violence that had the potential to emanate from izzat, through their behavior and their resistance. The messengers of izzat are the women in our lives, but they are also sometimes the resisters and the ones to protect us when izzat turns ugly and violent.

There was a distinct moment in my own story of displacement where I felt I had lost all control over what my family was going to do and how we were all reacting to my disclosure of marrying a man they did not approve of. I had secretly married a week before and was seeing them all for the first time. They could not look at me, did not understand how I could get married without their blessing, and most importantly were not sure how they would face their world after this event. An intervention was staged for two days and, by the end of it, I was broken. I could no longer fight and this break resulted in me running into the street barefoot, searching for a place to hide. My sister and mother ran after me and somehow brought me back inside the house. My mother held me tight; witnessing the effects of this burden, as I swallowed a couple of Ativan pills that my doctor had so avidly prescribed to calm my daily anxiety attacks. She held me in that moment and said, “I love you”. My mother had never spoken those words to me before that moment and I realized she was telling me that her love for me was unconditional. She handed me a wad of money and said goodbye. In that moment, she was encouraging me to make my own choices and the support to continue with my resistance.

For a year after I left, she would secretly call me on the phone and could only cry. She went from anger to resentment to deep sorrow over what had happened. She had lost her daughter and did not know how to get her back. A relationship that had existed since my birth into this world had died that day and we were mourning the loss, but then we slowly began to regain the courage to start a new relationship. This process is still ongoing, yet my mother’s support for me has meant her resistance to my father, to our community and to her own father and family in India. She has been the messenger of my transgressions to my extended family and she also shows the world through her acceptance that she chooses love and connection over izzat and shame.
My sisters each have their own story of displacement and reconnection to their mothers. Many of them speak to the troubling relationship they had with their mothers growing up which involved a lack of nurturance and learning hard lessons of izzat from their mothers. Lakshimi describes seeing her mother in a particular light growing up and having a lot of resentment towards her mother, “...you know, her life was dictated. But what I saw was her letting him do it... so I always had a lot of anger and issue towards her, you know. And of course when the sexual abuse happened, I mean I’ve done all my internal work around that. I blamed her because she should have been protecting me, but she didn’t know, even until she died she didn’t know, right I never told her.” As a young adult, it was easy for Lakshimi to see her mother as having no agency, she had a lot of anger towards her mother, she felt alone and abandoned. Similarly, Tara describes a particular anger towards her mother growing up that began shifting after her father passed, “I basically hated my mother from the age of 19 to 24. Like completely loathed her, because how can a mother put four children through this, do you know what I mean? You had support or I thought she had support. So I basically had nothing to do with her, we had major battles and just, I just hated her, didn’t even despise my dad as much as I despised her. Because she was sober, do you know what I mean, dad was drunk, so yeah my relationship with her was really tense.”

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) articulates the complex role that mothers play in socializing their daughters for survival in systems of oppression. Collins (1990) voices the difficult balance Black mothers negotiate in the upbringing of their daughters in the following quote:

Black daughters must learn how to survive in interlocking structures of race, class, and gender oppression while rejecting and transcending those same structures. In order to develop these skills in their daughters, mothers demonstrate varying combinations of behaviors devoted to ensuring their daughters survival – such as providing them with basic necessities and protecting them in dangerous environments – to helping their daughters go further than mothers themselves were allowed to go. (p. 124).

This delicate balance that Collins unpacks in her writing defines the institution of motherhood that is entrenched in heteropatriarchy. The demands of heteropatriarchy place tremendous expectations and responsibility on mothers to uphold the institution of motherhood and heteropatriarchy (Rich, 1976). Yet, as Collins offers in her discussion, our mothers resist these constructions of motherhood through their rearing strategies that involve their interpretations of survival.
When we look at the stories of my sisters we see that there was a process of reclaiming a connection that was hidden behind izzat, and after the dust had settled each of our mothers came back to our stories in profound ways. Parvati searched for her mother and after decades of not being in each other’s lives, they began rebuilding a connection on the phone. Tara started to listen to her mother’s stories after her father died and realized how silenced her mother had been throughout her childhood, largely due to the incredible space her father took up in the family: “As we grew up we would hear a lot about my dad’s life, like his very colorful life. Never really heard about my mom’s life and she started talking about little bits of her life...So what I realized was that she also has a story, and she did the best that she could, and then I started to soften towards her.” The distinct nature of this process is evident in each story, yet what is noteworthy here is recognizing the layers embedded in each story of our mothers and finding ways to challenge the dominant discourse that speaks to the role of our mothers in “HRV”. Parvati sought her mother at a time where she felt she needed answers to the abandonment she felt after her mother left, to hear her mother’s telling of her story and to begin the process of filling the holes in her life story that she had yearned for: “I felt like I had this puzzle with tons of pieces missing that didn’t make sense.” Perhaps, if we begin to recognize how our mothers are connected to our reclamation and resistance to izzat, heteropatriarchy, and violence, they can play a more transformative role in systemic change and community engagement around izzat, and “HRV”.

I recognize that the role of mothering is complicated and cannot be simplified by suggesting that all mothers are playing this role in their daughters’ lives, or that there are not contradictions. Rachana Johri (2013) writes about this complicated and contradictory role in the narratives of mothers who demonstrate resistance in their narratives and maintenance of heteropatriarchy, “A mother’s narrative of love for her daughters may be moved between a sense of loss and powerlessness in not having borne a son, to preparing her daughter to be a good married woman. Yet the same mother may vociferously demand that her daughter be brought back home (from her in-law’s house) when she is faced with serious harm” (p. 18). In order to come back to their daughters, our mothers were faced with moments of challenging tradition or the lure of maintaining izzat in order to reclaim a relationship.

The resistance that our mothers demonstrated against heteropatriarchy throughout our childhood was not entirely evident until adulthood and all of my sisters speak about having a
resentful or angry relationship with their mothers as they were growing up. In order to see the resistance, we needed to be separated from them for a period of time and then come back to hear their narratives of loss, love, and their own violence. And then we must find a way to sit with the painful past and still be okay with moving forward. Tara articulates this difficult task of moving forward in her own story and how her stories comes back to creep up on her in unique ways:

“...there’s a little bit, little bit, where I felt I don’t know if denial is the right word, but I kept everything compartmentalized, like in its own box. Yeah okay that’s what I’m going through, yeah whatever, put it away, put it away and it now comes out in different ways like anger, depressed sometimes a little bit, do you know what I mean, you can’t put it away forever.”

In a recent newspaper article, acclaimed novelist Anne Marie Macdonald (June 20, 2014) writes about her own exile from her family after coming out as a lesbian. She writes about eventually reuniting with her family and parents after she created her own family, yet asks pertinent questions about how one remembers the painful past, full of anger and resentment, when the present is situated in a place of love: “How do you remember the past without holding a grudge? How do you assert your identity without in turn exiling others? How do you know the difference between privacy and silence? And the difference is crucial because silence equals death...Exile is hard; coming back from exile can be harder” (p. 3). The past is a part of our stories, our mothers are a part of that story, and so is our excommunication/displacement/exile from our families. Coming back to that relationship many times begins with our mother, yet the process as Macdonald so eloquently expresses, can be embedded in complex difficulty, which continues to impact on the mind and body in peculiar ways. Macdonald goes on to talk about this impact and how the past can “grow inside you” so much so that you find yourself hurting your self and your own children the same way you were hurt.

“We need our stories. Remember who we are. Remember where we come from. Don’t skip over anything. Celebrate but never forget.” (Macdonald, 2014, p. 3). Macdonald’s piece was intended for a speech she gave to the Law Society of Upper Canada in Toronto, and was condensed and reprinted in the Globe and Mail Newspaper for Pride week. Pride Parade and the festivities that happen around it are about celebrating the strength and resilience of LGBTQ2 communities that were marginalized historically and continue to encounter exclusion in our present heteronormative world. Macdonald’s writing connects us back to this history and I am
drawn to it here because her piece reminds us of how important it is to open our arms to the love we encounter in the present, after reconciling with our families, yet how important it is to never ever forget the past and how women continue to encounter violence when they transgress boundaries.

Never forgetting the past is an essential part of ensuring we do not repeat behaviours that cause further marginalization, oppression and pain. But it is also an effective way to dismantle social constructions, such as heteropatriarchy and the tools of violence and control over marginalized bodies. This chapter has demonstrated, through my sisters’ stories, incredible evidence of resilience and resistance that women demonstrate after living through a continuum of violence that has aimed at regulating any perceived transgressions that go against izzat and the social order of the family and community. There are recommendations that emerge from this chapter giving readers, social workers, policy makers and social justice activists’ suggestions on how we can begin having conversations that can create consciousness and change in our world. These suggestions include: understanding “honour” violence on a continuum; embedding grief and loss in our conversations about gender-based violence; and hearing about the impact of “honour” on the lives of women who have been displaced from their family. Finally, my sisters’ stories have allowed us to engage in the parts of their lives that encouraged resistance and survival and recognizing how we can support women fleeing situations of “honour” violence and the importance of support post-disclosure or event.

In the following concluding chapter of this dissertation, I will be speaking about the process of doing action-based work with my sisters in order to engage in critical consciousness in South Asian communities across Canada. As you may recall from the methodology section of this dissertation, the final element of the research process was to conduct a discussion group with my sisters, in order to embed some form of action-based engagement to our stories. The concluding chapter of this dissertation will speak to the process of creating, conducting, and implementing an action element to this research and what emerged in these circles.
Chapter 7

Concluding And Reflecting On Future Directions

When I first began this research journey, I was determined to engage in a counterhegemonic conversation about izzat, “honour”, and the discourses that surround South Asian women’s bodies in the West. My anger against mainstream discourses of “honour” fuelled my determination, and my personal experiences with my own displacement instigated the research journey. In these final chapters, I am anxious to end this writing with a few necessary lasting discussions. These include a discussion on how funding streams focused on “honour” killings and forced marriages have contributed to the racist discourses, while distracting from the important work of addressing gender-based violence in Canada; a discussion on how this research can impact on future policy and practice; and finally a discussion on the importance of listening to women’s stories of resistance and survival. There is a great deal of exciting collaborations that have emerged as a result of this research, which I hope to share before ending this writing.

As a social worker, it is evident throughout my writing, that I am constantly concerned with what impact this research will have on practices and discourses that surround South Asian women. As Karen Potts and Leslie Brown (2005) reflect in their work on research, “conclusions have a particular power because they are the construction of knowledge that leads to recommendations and actions…How conclusions are constructed, therefore, has particular impact on how consumers will take up the research in their own lives” (p. 276). This research is whole-heartedly about relationships and the connections that were created as a result of the research. This research is also about what Potts and Brown defined as “a site for practicing democracy” where one “reframes research as practice that produces radical democracy” (p. 276).

Radical democracy means presenting conclusions so that they not only matter to the researcher and other academics, but they represent the participants who have so generously given us the most precious and personal part of themselves, their story. Thus, this chapter will be speaking about the recommendations and actions that can contribute to change that my sisters
shared from their stories, and most importantly the need for action-based work to speak back to the world about our encounters with transgressing boundaries of izzat.

**Modern Infrastructures Of “Honour Crimes”**

One of the most important statements that Lila-Abu Lughod (2011) and Dicle Kogacioglu (2011)(late Turkish legal sociologist) make when speaking about “HRV” is that we need to examine the institutions (national and international) that shape the “honour” crime discourses, and highlight the role these institutions play in perpetuating such practices. Abu-Lughod asks a pertinent question: “What are the modern infrastructures of honour crimes?” Abu-Lughod goes on to identify US social service organizations, police, medical institutions, prisons, judicial legal systems, mass media, international political debates, and border and immigration control as a part of the modern infrastructures that support, manage, and manufacture “honour” crimes in the West. Abu-Lughod sums her argument in the following way:

> Honour crimes, in other words, do not occur outside these modern institutions of the state and the international community. To a great extent, the construction of the honour crime gives legitimacy and resilience not just to all the mechanisms of regulation, surveillance, discipline, and punishment that Foucault and others have taught us to understand as intrinsic to modern state power but to the specific forms and forums of transnational governance, whether neoliberal, humanitarian, or military, that are so characteristic of the contemporary global world…(p. 44)

I turn to Abu-Lughod and Kogacioglu’s work here because they encourage us to examine the wider picture, the structural engagement and political analysis that is required to move “honour” discourses to a place of action beyond culturally racist explanations. If we place discourses of “honour” related violence in the Canadian context, we must examine the modern institutions and infrastructures that rely on “honour” to give legitimacy to the regulating of particular bodies in Canada, such as social service organizations, police, border and immigration control, and child protection agencies.

In recent years, particularly after the 9/11 attacks in New York, “honour” killings and forced marriage have become topic that carry tremendous currency in the funding world of a conservative government. This discourse is being steered in a particular direction, with a political strategy that involves short term grants aimed at defining, re-defining, and then using native informants, such as Aruna Papp (see Chapter 4), to become the spokesperson and lead on
training professionals on how to respond to “honour” violence. The conservative government in our current state of political affairs requires insider puppets that are a consistent presence in the media speaking to “honour” violence as a cultural and religious tool of the Muslim immigrant who must be persecuted and monitored (Razack, 2008). As one might suspect, the volunteers for this position are readily available and willing to take up the job with enthusiasm.

Throughout this dissertation, I have continued to come back to the central argument that the focus on and preoccupation with South Asian women’s bodies and their “barbaric” families, is a form of cultural racism, as supported by prominent scholars (see Abu-Lughod, 2013, Bannerji, 2000 Jiwani, 2006, Narayan, 1997, Razack 2008). In order to shift this racist gaze that maintains surveillance on South Asian families and restricts the mobility and morality of women, we need to include “honour” in our discussion of gender-based violence and understand it as a tool or construct that emerges from heteropatriarchy that supports white, supremacist, heteronormativity in Western nations. “Honour” violence emerges in immigrant communities not as a result of culture, but from heteropatriarchy intersecting with the experiences of immigrant families in the Western context, including intense encounters of racism, and shifts in class status, and as a resistance to the forced assimilation of racialized bodies to the West.

Now, after hearing my sisters’ stories, we are contributing to a shift in the dominant discourse and seeing “honour” violence as being situated on a continuum of violence. We are recognizing how izzat has been used as a tool to regulate women’s mobility and morality through punishing perceived transgressions of moral codes that are specific to each family and to a larger moral code of preserving one’s standing in the community, therefore avoiding any transgressions that can lead to feelings of shame. Most important to this engagement of my sisters’ stories is an understanding of the impact of izzat violence on the everyday lives of young women who are navigating heteropatriarchy inside and outside their family and community, as well as navigating institutional violence emerging from sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and islamaphobia. This research insists on recognizing experiences of displacement/excommunication/exile as forms of violence and a push for recognizing the grief and loss associated with all of these experiences. There is a silent grief that my sisters encounter in their experiences and witnessing that grief and the stories associated with izzat is the ultimate accomplishment of this dissertation.
How does this counter narrative on “honour” and gender-based violence shift our current practices in the Canadian context? How does this impact on future policy? What can we learn from my sisters’ stories, as well as our sisters who have died as a result of izzat and gender-based violence, so that women’s stories are not silenced?

Of the many texts that analyzed for this research included the agreed statement of facts for the criminal proceedings that convicted Aqsa Parvez’s brother and father, as well as Amandeep Atwal’s father, and finally the case of the Shafia family. The disturbing details of what happened in the moments leading up to the murder of all these young women were not only difficult to read, but also quite eye opening. However, there is a great wealth of knowledge that their bodies left behind for Canadian society to recognize and reflect on, particularly evidence that they had been living in families that struggled with and demonstrated family violence. Furthermore, it becomes clear in these documents, as well as investigative reporting into their lives before the murders, that each of the women had sought support from outside authorities to flee this situation of violence. In analyzing these parts of these young women’s stories, I was drawn back to Abu-Lughod’s above words that steer us to a place of re-examining the role of institutions in perpetuating and sustaining gender-based violence and using “honour” related violence to give legitimacy to the regulation of racialized bodies in the West.

In Aqsa Parvez’s story, there were key moments when she attempted to reach out to professionals and sought support for the family violence she was experiencing, witnessing, or anticipating in her life. Aqsa Parvez had spoken to a school counselor that she was fearful of her father, and the counselor arranged for her to stay at a youth shelter, yet somehow during this time, her story did not raise enough red flags amongst the professionals that worked there to warrant serious support and crisis intervention. Aqsa went back to her family after a few days at the shelter where deeper tensions remained and on December 10, 2007 Aqsa was killed by her father and brother in her home. There were numerous professionals who may have had the opportunity to hear Aqsa’s story, hear the fear and the consequences that she was encountering after transgressing boundaries her parents had drawn for her. What prevented these professionals from supporting Aqsa’s need to flee violence and her plea for support to leave a situation that she identified as being volatile?

Moreover, in the Shafia sisters’ case, a recent documentary by CBC entitled Inside the Shafia Family Case (2012), revealed many professionals at the girls’ schools who were not only
 aware of the boundaries that they encountered at home, but also the well-founded fear that they had of their father, mother and younger brother. The school demonstrated concern and called child protection services in Montréal who went forward with an investigation. However the social workers chose to interview the young women in the presence of their parents, and as a result Zainab and Sahar Shafia retracted their statements and the social workers did not follow up with the family. No intervention was put in place, no contact was made again, and no one spoke to the young women about what they needed, what they were afraid of, and what exactly was going on in their family.

From a practice perspective, institutions such as schools and child protection agencies need to be held accountable when women’s stories of violence are ignored and overlooked. There were claims from various professionals that they feared appearing racist, or were not familiar with the cultural practices of the family. Both excuses are embedded in a racist, Orientalist lens that discounts women who are reaching out and disclosing very difficult moments in their lives that have the potential to be extreme cases of violence. Large institutions that carry such power and control over the lives of marginalized bodies require training and education on the continuum of gender-based violence that is situated in the context of power and control and uses “honour” as the tool to enact that power and control. In both cases, the women were seeking support to flee a situation of violence. As one would provide support to domestic violence survivors, young women in crisis need support and provisions to strategically leave situations of abuse and potential violence. These young girls had sought similar support but each time the authorities did not take any action, even though they recognized the signs of family violence and power and control over the lives of the young women. What prevented them from doing their job?

Since these women’s bodies first aired on dominant media, there has been a shift in funding strategies and the conservative government has used “honour” violence and forced marriages as a platform to portray to the nation that they are concerned not only with women who encounter violence, but that they are also in control of immigrants who do not know any better and kill their own. This is evident in the recent changes to the welcome package that immigrants receive upon entering Canada. The booklet is entitled Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship (2012) and is provided as the guidebook for all newcomers
who are applying for citizenship. New immigrants are encouraged to study this booklet for their citizenship test. When speaking to the equality of women and men the guidebook states:

In Canada, men and women are equal under the law. Canada’s openness and generosity do not extend to barbaric cultural practices that tolerate spousal abuse, “honour killings,” female genital mutilation, forced marriage or other gender-based violence. Those guilty of these crimes are severely punished under Canada’s criminal laws.

Defining these forms of gender-based violence as tolerated by particular immigrant cultures, confirms the divide that this nation has created between immigrant bodies, who are defined very clearly above as barbaric, and that of the white heteronormative, able bodied “Canadian”. Now with this in mind we must consider how support is provided for those same immigrants who are “practicing” gender-based violence in the Canadian context. Just as simply as the changes to the Discover Canada booklet appear in our national discourse, we see funding streams targeting immigrant women who are struggling with “honour” violence. In a recent article written by Emily Paling (March 7, 2014) entitled Why does Canada care more about ‘Honour Killings’ than missing and murdered aboriginal women, she compares the manner in which “honour” killings are targeted from a funding perspective to missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada. Paling states:

While between 12 and 84 native women go missing or are murdered every year, Status of Women Canada—the government organization tasked with promoting "equality for women and their full participation in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada"—spends its money elsewhere. In the last fiscal year, the department gave out 34 grants to programs targeting violence against women. Of those grants, two target violence against aboriginal women. Nine target “honour-based violence” or crimes committed due to “harmful cultural practices.” That means while $335,000 was spent on ending violence against aboriginal women, $1.7 million was spent on “honour crimes”—a problem that some experts say doesn’t exist at all.

Paling goes on to describe how Indigenous women are silenced and erased from any national discourse, as compared to South Asian women who appear in media articles twice as much, yet account for less than half of the violence that Indigenous women experience. Paling speaks to the lack of funding that Indigenous agencies receive to bring awareness to the evident gap in services. I agree with Paling that there are serious gaps in funding; the staggering number of Indigenous women who encounter violence and the over 1000 missing and murdered Indigenous women need to be heard (Sisters In Spirit, 2009). Yet, the binary Paling creates between Indigenous women and South Asian women is not only problematic, but also largely
inaccurate and in many ways contribute to Andrea Smith’s (2006) pillars of white supremacy, because as Smith articulates so effectively: “what keeps us trapped within our particular pillars of white supremacy is that we are seduced with the prospect of being able to participated in the other pillars” (p. 69). This way of organizing is based on the notion of shared victimhood, as a result people of colour and Indigenous people have internalized the logics of white supremacy which keeps the three pillars functioning.

Funding that has been filtered to “honour” killings is not necessarily addressing any violence or supporting women. In fact most of the money has been allocated to agencies doing repetitive workshops and trainings that are circular in nature. They continue to train those who are already involved in the work, or are using native informants like Aruna Papp to deliver training that is embedded in colonial racism and cultural essentialism. If the government was actually allocating that money to addressing issues of “honour” and gender-based violence, we would not be shutting down shelters but opening up new shelters that recognize the complexities of young women, as well as the diversity of young adults who seek shelter, such as trans youth who are largely excluded from these spaces\(^{43}\). We would be supporting violence against women counselors, we would be providing more support and housing for women fleeing situations of abuse, and we would be working with large institutions that have power and control in the lives of families on the complexity of “honour” and its role in gender-based violence. The money may appear to be going to address violence in immigrant communities, but it is not being directed to any helpful spaces that support women’s current situations.

These are strategic band-aide solutions that are not about helping but more about setting up appearances that a government is “doing something” about one of the “sexiest” topics of the last decade. This is about the white conservative government saving brown women from their barbaric cultures and from the men that practice them. This is the image that sells newspapers, not the image of Indigenous women being targeted by serial killers, or the authorities’ complacency about not protecting Indigenous women. As Andrea Smith reminds us colonialism relies on the disappearance of Indigenous women to have claims over Indigenous lands, it relies

\(^{43}\) Recently Ilona Alex Abromovich’s PhD dissertation (2014) revealed the disparity of young trans youth and their access to shelters in Ontario, speaking to the lack of support and training that shelters receive to work with marginalized populations.
on the slavery and capitalism of black bodies and in this case, it relies on Orientalism, where brown women are being saved by white bodies, which in turn supports the excuse for war in the global South. Together these pillars of white supremacy divide people of colour, and in order for each to continue the work of white capitalist heteropatriarchy, each community impacted on by these logics of colonialism are pitted against each other for resources. This sustains colonial power and whiteness.

There is already very little support provided to organizations that are working with women who are survivors of gender-based violence, and targeting and preventing gender-based violence through psychoeducation. In her article Paling interviewed Kate McInturff, a researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, who wrote a study titled The Gap in the Gender Gap: Violence Against Women in Canada (2013). McInturff identifies how much of the funding that the federal government has allocated towards addressing violence against women ($25 million investments made in 2010), has gone towards police and RCMP and their responses on the ground. McInturff states that the investments made by the government to address violence against women are misrepresented: “it’s not going to people who provide services, it’s not going to Indigenous rights organizations, it is not going to women’s organizations. Very little of it is actually going to the places most likely to address the problem”. I agree with Paling’s sentiments that there is undue attention being focused on “honour” killings, especially since there are probably only a handful of cases that have emerged in the last decade, as compared to the over 1000 missing and murdered Indigenous women, yet the proportion of grants and token money given out to agencies who focus on this area of work is disproportionate. None of that money is actually addressing any of the required shifts in policy and practice that will actually address issues of gender-based violence or even “honour” related violence in the Canadian context.

McInturff’s report on addressing violence against women in Canada outlines some key recommendations for our national government to take on and implement in their national strategy to address violence against women. Each of her recommendations is well thought out, strategic and implementable in our current context. We need to support reports such as the one conducted by McInturff and put pressure on our governments to stop giving out band-aid money in short spouts that do not amount to any substantial shifts and supports for women living with violence. However, this would require agencies and NGOs to stop playing the “grant game” that
their survival is based on and that supports their little worlds. This would require national action from all women’s organizations to work together to demand more from our government. In an ideal world we would all have the same goal and focus, yet we know very clearly that this is not the case. I have worked too long as a social worker to know that NGOs are stuck between a rock and a hard place when it comes to funding and survival. The love hate relationship involves applying for these grants, even though one knows it is not sufficient or effective.

So how can this research create change? How can we direct policy and practice so that our current engagement of gender-based violence recognizes all marginalized women’s stories of survival? How can we learn to listen to women’s stories of negotiating heteropatriarchy and violence in their lives and provide them the support they need if they need to flee; or, if they need to stay in situations of violence how do we give them the tools to stay safe? And most importantly how do we support and recognize Indigenous sovereignty and the layers of violence that Indigenous women encounter in their everyday lives and the interconnectedness of Indigenous women’s struggle for survival to our own? How do we not fall into the trap of divide and conquer that white supremacy has so effectively created?

From this extensive research, I suggest that we need to start by having a conversation with mainstream agencies that fear appearing racist towards immigrant families and, as a result demonstrate discrimination towards families that do not fit into traditional understandings of gender-based violence. These fears of appearing “racist” led to Aqsa Parvez, and the Shafia sisters from not receiving due attention for their struggles. These racist constructions lead to the erasure of Indigenous women’s stories from dominant discourses and from any investigations on the part of national authorities. McInturff identifies in her report that Canadian policies need to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different communities, such as Indigenous women and the disproportionate rates of violence they experience. I agree with McInturff’s recommendation and believe that the physical erasure of Indigenous women’s bodies, and evident silence in our national discourses of this genocide, is embedded in a colonial project and this history of relations between the government and Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. Indigenous communities need to be part of a national conversation and no other community should ever be made to compete for funding and support with Indigenous communities. We need to find ways to always support Indigenous sovereignty and if funding and grants are asking immigrant populations to compete with Indigenous women, we must highlight this and work to
end this process of divide and conquer that colonial nations are so good at creating and maintaining.

I would also suggest that unpacking the continuum of “honour” violence could be a helpful tool for having a conversation about what second-generation immigrant women encounter in their daily lives. Recently, I had the opportunity to implement my research findings to training for social service professionals who are encountering what appear to be “honour” related violence and forced marriages in their agencies. The feedback on the training was positive, yet I still do not know about the impact. There is a lot of work that needs to happen for any direct shifts to occur, and perhaps this research is one step forward.

**Multiple Stories**

In the very beginning of this dissertation, I connected the readers to a TedTalk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), who spoke to how pervasively and persistently the single story of a marginalized community becomes a part of dominant discourses to support incomplete stereotypes. In her eloquent piece Adichie urges us to go beyond the single story of a people to multiple stories that push stereotypes beyond their boundaries and reveal the limitations of seeing people, communities, and nations from a single lens. Listening to multiple stories requires openness to multiple voices at various levels. This research in particular speaks to both the need for the voices of women to be a part of the conversation of “honour” related violence, as well as the need for these voices to be evident at multiple levels: on a personal level, familial level, community level, and at a national and international level. All layers of a person in their environment can engage the voices of women who are living and surviving “honour” or izzat in their lives and this is necessary if we are to truly shift “honour” discourses and create action and eliminate gender-based violence.

There is a need for each individual woman to listen to her own story and internal voice. At the risk of sounding like a self-help advertisement, as a social worker, I believe internal change happens when we accept that not all the choices we make for ourselves are in line with the choices our families or community expects from us. As South Asian women, the pious image of the “good Indian girl” plays on our psyche and the guilt and shame associated with transgressing these boundaries can live within us forever. We can only shift these internal dialogues if we begin to define our morality for ourselves and not for others. Morality is an
important aspect of one’s self-concept and values, and whether or not this is defined differently from our family and community, we need to recognize these similarities and differences and be okay with these complexities in difference. My sisters in this research have demonstrated that they are constantly constructing their izzat for themselves. Whether it is a direct engagement with izzat, there is a reclaiming, redefining, and re-creation of what meaning women give to their izzat and the process of taking back their “honour” is an essential part to engage in for the possibility of deconstructing the “good Indian girl” image that embodies our subconscious.

There is a need for the family to hear from the voices of second-generation women who are struggling with the boundaries of izzat and morality that impact their lives. If families hear from their daughters and sisters about their daily engagements with the world and within the family, perhaps we could have a conversation about the limits of izzat boundaries and how young women navigate them within a society that is largely embedded in heteropatriarchy, racism, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, ableism, and xenophobia. Conversations need to occur early on and as a community we need to start encouraging families to start having these conversations about boundaries not only with young women, but with young men as well. Any child that is transgressing perceived boundaries of izzat is not doing this to spite their family, they are transgressing boundaries that do not work for their daily survival in this society. Let us hear about the struggle and work to shift definitions of izzat in the family.

There is a need for our community to hear from the voices of second-generation women and their struggles with izzat and the shame and guilt that come from community judgment when a young woman is defined as ruining a family’s izzat. Conversations that need to occur inside our communities are an essential part of the change we are seeking as second-generation South Asian women. The voices of second-generation women are seldom a part of these community conversations. Generally, leaders, patriarchs, or other women who define themselves as the activists working in the community take up these spaces and survivor voices are silenced. I recognize that these voices are important and that on greater level the voices of leaders in the community are needed for people to begin listening. Yet, how do we know how to help young women through their struggles if we do not hear from their experiences directly? How can we confront violence and embrace change if we are not willing to listen to those who are impacted by the violence of izzat? Community engagement involves active listening to all members and recognizing the voices of all generations.
Finally, there is a need for us to confront the discourses of “honour” that shape culturally racist stereotypes of South Asian women, families, and communities. National and international discourses must engage survivor stories and voices, and they must be present when any change in policy or practice is contemplated and implemented. As I have spoken about throughout this chapter, institutions play a big role in shifting heteropatriarchy and gender-based violence, and as a result the lives of women on a national and international level. We must be a part of the conversation for this change to happen and it must begin now.

Working inside our communities requires a great deal of patience and creativity; when I first sat down to write the proposal for this research, I was determined to begin a conversation with the Punjabi community on the issue of gender-based violence against second-generation women. As a result, I created an action group that we titled “chai circles” with three of my sisters who participated in the research. Over the course of 2 years we met intermittently to focus on creating some form of action that spoke to the change we want to see in the world, with our voices central to the project. As a result, we created a collective open letter addressed to our families and communities that gives meaning to our experiences while asking families and communities to recognize our struggles and embrace the change we seek, to end “honour” violence. The concept of writing an open letter is one that, again, emerges from narrative inquiry and therapeutic approaches building on the notion of recreating counter narratives to one’s story.

The second letter is written entirely by myself, but was instigated by many discussions with my sisters on how important it is to shift the narrative of izzat for our children, their children, and future generations of young women and men. I dedicate this letter to my children, particularly to my daughter whose body will be read in particular ways, yet she is a part of a new narrative of izzat. In the final chapter of this dissertation I will unpack the context, process, and action that emerged from this group to create the letters.
The last, and most important, aim of this research is the action-based component. After being a part of various research projects throughout my academic career my determination to make my PhD research contribute to more than just scholarship directed this aim. However, as I have gone through this writing process I realize that embedding true action into research is a very difficult task and one that requires ongoing commitment that does not end when the dissertation is submitted. In this following section, I will outline the dynamics that unfolded in the “chai circles”, what emerged, and the ongoing action that I have continued to implement out of this project.

After each interview with my sisters, I received consent (See Appendix A) from the ones who were situated near Toronto, to participate in some form of action around izzat or “honour” with the intention of speaking back to the South Asian community from a survivor voice. I was limited to situating this group in the Toronto area since that is where I was living at the time. After completing all of my research interviews, I began the first meeting at my home in June 2011 and we continued to meet 6 times over the course of 2 years, usually in my home, or in the home of another sister.

In that first meeting, I made it very clear that there is no one person leading this group. Though I brought everyone together the intention was to use our stories as a launching point for potential action and engagement with our community about the impact of “honour”/izzat on our lives and the lives of other second-generation Punjabi women. That first meeting set the stage for what this group represented and we were able to gain perspective on the vision for the group. Each of us had come from an activist social justice background, so we were aware of the dynamics of sharing and the potential for action. However, we all reflected on how this was the first time we were using our stories as the place of action engagement. Interestingly, we revisited this challenge at various points throughout the process and as a result we gained insights on how difficult action and activism is for survivors or “insiders”.

Chapter 8

The Voices, The Action, The Letters
Over the course of the sessions, we brainstormed and talked about how we might reflect on our experiences. The following questions directed our brainstorming sessions: what messages would have been important for us to hear as young women going through those traumatic moments of being exiled from our families and/or communities? What message would we want to convey to our families? To our community? What needs to change? We also spoke about speaking directly to the media, however as we continued on in our sessions we realized that this endeavor was futile, as the media will take our stories as a means to support culturally racist sentiments of our family and community, which we were not willing to participate in.

No one used this time to share their personal survival stories of izzat, in fact I was the only one who knew each of their individual stories, and they all knew mine. The meetings were spent talking about a collective experience and the racism and sexism we encountered through the media, through our frustrations with patriarchs in our communities, and through our navigation in the third spaces/worlds of our lives. Since I had brought us all together, I took on the role of organizing and doing the extra research involved and any outside work that was necessary for the group to evolve. I arranged all the meetings, emailed, and organized food for our times together. I was very conscious of making the process go smoothly; it was very evident early on that this group was not easy for the women to participate in. There were many internal struggles along the way and each woman took a break from the group at various points throughout our time together. However, it was not until the end of the project where we were deciding to go forward with the action that the true impact of this work started to really weigh down all of us.

After the second meeting decided to create a podcast that could be played on radio shows, on iTunes for download, and on agency websites. At first we were unsure what would be in the podcast, who would be in it, or who it would be directed to. However, after a few meetings pondering these questions, we finally came to a decision that we wanted to speak back to our families and communities, but through an open letter.

The concept of an open letter has gained popularity in social media over the years. According to the Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com retrieved on July 24, 2014) an open letter is “a published letter of protest or appeal usually addressed to an individual but intended for the general public”; the first known use was in 1878. So open letters are not a new phenomenon, however they have been used avidly since the dawn of social
media, probably for the open appeal of media sites like Facebook and Blogs, where you can have a large audience at your fingertips. As a group we were not focused on mass audiences, but more specifically a targeted audience, that is speaking to our community and other young women who are struggling with notions of izzat and the impact of heteropatriarchy.

It was at this point that we decided to move away from talking directly to mainstream media, as this task brought too much risk and my sisters were very conscious of remaining anonymous throughout the process. We also agreed that this was not about sharing our individual stories and making this about our survival, but more specifically about sharing with our community that these boundaries of izzat are not helpful, are hurting all of us, and need to stop so that other women do not encounter displacement, shame and guilt because of family and community izzat.

So after almost 6 meetings over two years, we finally agreed to spend an entire day together to write this open letter. I had written the shell of the letter after transcribing all of the recordings from our meetings and collecting the overarching themes that we all identified as being important in the group. After writing the shell I asked the women to make changes as they saw fit through a Google docs program, which allows anyone given permission to edit a paper.

However, it was at this stage of the writing that each of the women expressed the heaviness of completing this and for each of my sisters there was a trigger associated with this task. It was a painful undertaking to edit such a personal letter that had different levels of meaning for each of us. One of my sisters articulated the difficulty so eloquently in an email exchange to the group: “You wrote a beautiful letter and it hit me right in places where I realized that I still needed to work on strengthening for myself.” After reflecting on these barriers, I asked if we could spend a full day together and go through the piece word for word, sentence by sentence, and write it collectively. This seemed to work for everyone and spoke to the importance of collective engagement on interpersonal connections when witnessing stories of trauma and pain. A day and time was agreed upon.

When the day arrived, one of our sisters was unable to participate, she described having trouble even getting out of bed when thinking about what we were doing that day. I realized that the process of speaking back to our past experience and relationships, and writing about the past is a harrowing task and brings up many internal struggles to make meaning of those experiences,
while also living and breathing through the everyday struggles of life. As the three of us pondered each word we chose to string together to write the letter, we were conscious of the heaviness in the room and took many collective breaks, gave each other hugs, and shared in food and of course chai. At the end of the day we had written a beautiful piece that each of us were very proud of. We sent it to our sister who was unable to participate so she could make changes to it as well.

At this stage in the group process I had already moved to Halifax, so I did not have physical contact with my sisters’, as a result I was unable to meet regularly with them in person. After completing the writing I asked them if they would like to do the recording of the podcast, however each of them did not feel comfortable with this and asked for me to take over the action from that point forward. Nor did they want their names attached to the piece. This was as far as they were able to go.

Since then I have critically reflected on the meaning of this process and what it felt like to write this letter. I believe that the catharsis of doing this work was incredibly satisfying, yet troubling at the same time. I also believe that the collective writing process was necessary and it held us together to finally complete the task of writing the letter. Action-based research requires a lot of a participant to be open and reveal a lot of their personal stories to the world. My sisters were not willing to be the representation of this piece to the world, or have their stories demonstrated in a public way. Each of them was very private and it took tremendous strength for them to share their stories with me, as is apparent when I was checking in with them about their personal stories in this dissertation. They were satisfied with taking it as far as the letter and gave me permission to see through the action part. One of my sisters articulated the struggle that lives under the silence that emerged after I asked the group to participate in the next level of action. In an email exchange between all of us one of my sisters spoke to the silence and to the spirit of the work we had done together, “this work is painful, so it makes sense that there is silence although challenging for the dissertation writer - it frustrates me when other folks are doing work that doesn't involve spirit and emotion…”

In the current moment the piece has not become part of the public sphere, however much action has emerged since our first meeting in my small Toronto apartment. Over the last year I have teamed up with other professionals who are focused on “honour” related violence and forced marriages and we have come together to create a NGO entitled The Pomegranate Tree
As a group we have completed a few projects, one of which is a comic book by young women who have fled from their families after being forced into marriages without their consent. The comic book has generated interest in the US and is going on a cross-country tour after being sponsored by an organization called the Tahirih Justice Center. Tahirih provides a combination of legal services, advocacy, and public education programs on gender-based violence. We are using a small bit of funds from the book to contribute to our next project, which will be a professional recording of our open letter as well as some of the stories that the young women wrote in the comic book, which we will then distribute from The Pomegranate Tree Group rather than our research group. This allows us to maintain anonymity while still distributing a very powerful piece of writing.

So the action is ongoing. Other strong survivor women have come aboard and it is now becoming a collective form of action that is sustaining itself. I have strong convictions that the Pomegranate Tree Group will be a powerful voice in our community speaking and engaging in dialogue with our sisters, mothers, brothers, fathers, uncles and aunties, at various levels across Canada.

This action piece has taken this research to a necessary place of witnessing and engaging second-generation South Asian women’s stories, while recognizing the love and connection that we have to our families and communities. Before I began this process, I was unclear what could happen when a group of women who are survivors of izzat violence come together to create something that has personal and political meaning. I realize now that the piece we created was a necessary part of our individual journeys and stories, and will be witnessed by others when it is read in the public sphere, however the witnessing that happened in our small group was as powerful as any public form of engagement that can and will occur with our work. The process we went through together will remain the most personal and powerful part of this research and I am thankful to have been a part of the chai circles.

**Letters Of Resistance And Love.**

In this final part of this dissertation I want to end by sharing the collective open letter to our families and community we wrote in the chai circle, as well as a personal letter that I have written to my daughter, who came into this world as I started writing this dissertation, and to my son. I look at my children as my family’s future generation and I am conscious of not passing
down the guilt, shame and expectations of izzat that have burdened my shoulders. I want my daughter to embrace her own izzat, respect it and cherish it; for it will be a part of her moral compass to the world. I will teach her about izzat because I believe in the collectivity it binds us to, and the complex ways in which it encourages a sense of self and a concept of connectivity. Is it possible for us to reclaim izzat as a powerful tool against heteropatriarchy? Is it possible that resistance to izzat is about reclaiming our bodies and by doing so reclaiming our izzat?

Lila Abu-Lughod’s (2011) work on systems of morality and the meaning we attach to “honour” as women throughout the generations is important to explore and give voice to. Abu-Lughod notes the intergenerational changes that occur with systems of morality and urges us to understand how systems of morality play in our communities:

…they are forged in religions, tied to forms of social organization, inseparable from systems of status and property. They are debated, experimented with, pushed to their limits. Our task is to analyze these moral systems and their connections to forms of economy and society, to develop sharp understandings of the workings of social and cultural life, the meaning of agency, the formation of subjectivity, the notions of personhood, the force of moral systems, and the different configurations of responsibility and authority divided among individuals kin groups, communities, nation-states, and international organizations (p. 51).

Values and philosophical engagements with the world are part of a parents’ role in educating their children, something I have been taught continuously over and over again from my children who ask very deep questions about how the world works. Can I give my children an understanding of izzat that gives them only strength and connectivity to their relations, rather than pain, shame and a fear of their connectivity? This is my attempt to do so and I hope my children, your children, and their children pick up these letters and look back on our stories as something of the past that will never be a part of their stories.

Letter To Our Families

Dear Family

This is an open letter to our families. It is a letter to our individual families, our mothers, brothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, those faces who said hello phuth (hello dear) to us every week at the gurudwara, temple, masjid…. the aunties and uncles who made us dinner while our parents were working long hours. To our nieces, nephews and little cousins
who look up to us as their big sisters. To our children, and to our children yet to come. And finally to our future generations.

This is a letter for our fellow Punjabi sisters who may hear our words and struggle with these conversations with their own families.

This is a letter to the families that feel the distance from their daughters but can’t comprehend why we see the world differently. This is for families who are hurting because they feel we, your daughters, are abandoning the family izzat and betraying your trust.

Families that believe they are protecting their daughters yet don’t realize that this protection feels like control. Control over how bodies are read and who has access to them.

We are writing to call for a moment of silence and invite you to hear us.

Who are we, you ask? We are women who have survived/experienced displacement and have been wounded by our families’ words and actions. We have come together to speak in a collective voice to our family. To your family. To you.

We are here to speak in a collective voice about the imposition of izzat in our lives. But most importantly we are speaking so you can bear witness to our struggle, and we can come to a place of mutual respect and reciprocity. We are speaking about our pain so that for a moment we can sit together with these words between us, in all our rawness and see/hear each other, actually see/hear each other. So you can for a moment hear/feel what we have to say.

Yet, we are not here to share our personal stories of trauma and tragedy. The details don’t matter. The details that we have so often lingered over. In fact you know the details that shattered our sacred bonds, the relationship that we had before that moment of revelation. The day we came out of our closet of secrets. That day is the first day of our displacement from each of you, the day we were excommunicated from a world we called home. That day when our relationships died and new relationships grew from the ashes of the familiar. Relationships that will forever be filled with a shadow, a memory of pain, anger and words that stir tears in each of us each time we remember them.
We see the tears in your eyes, even though they are dry, we feel the pain that you sometimes hide and other times refuse to hide even though we beg you to stop. But we are not here to speak about what happened on that day...moment...time when our worlds collided and you saw us with new eyes. The day you saw shame in our bodies and were convinced that we had shattered your izzat and the izzat of the family in the eyes of our community. When we chose to share our bodies with those you deem unsuitable. Other bodies that represent shame. That day we became outcasts. That day we feared what your eyes suggested. Where you were willing to go for your honour.

We write what we have thought of sharing with you numerous times. Words we have repeated in our heads but were too afraid to say out loud. Afraid that no one would listen. That you would not listen. There are those who can take our words to fuel their fires of hatred of our foreign bodies and foreign ways. You warned us of these enemies of our culture many times, and we understand the risks we are taking by speaking out about izzat, “honour”, pain, but we must speak! We take this risk in the hopes that you will be our foremost audience.

We speak and write here not so you can feel shame or even understand why we do what we do, why we choose this life, this partner, this solitary existence. We want you to come with us for a moment to remember our collective bond. You have taught us that the actions of a member of a clan reflect on everyone in that clan. This is the collective bond we value and it is from this worldview that you chose to excommunicate my body.

Yet, in the spirit of this collectivism we ask you to listen with that teaching in mind.

We are here because of you.

And you are a part of us as we are a part of you.

Therefore your actions impact our bodies as much as my actions reflect your izzat.

Let us sit in this reciprocity and come to terms with our actions.

It is important to go back to the beginning. You may wonder when we turned into daughters that you couldn’t recognize. But we have been carrying the pain and work of creating multiple worlds that we live in, without your knowledge. We worked hard to lie. So hard that sometimes
those lies became truths and we couldn’t distinguish between the lines of reality and the world of lies we were creating around us. Covering tattoos and hiding partners, masking love, this was our burden. But when our worlds collided and for a moment we could not bear to lie anymore, we were asked to erase this world and continue with the mask of lies that we had built for you to believe.

You demand us to forget, to move on, to not speak of this relationship ever again. This is a sacrifice that was expected because this is what we are supposed to do as women. Sacrifice in the name of our family. The moment of resistance when we said nahin, was scary. However do you understand how difficult that choice was? Do you understand that to make that choice meant loss? Tremendous loss either way. The day you said we must choose between family and {her...him...myself} we were condemned to an impossible place. A place of loss and trauma. And when we did chose the path away from you family, your rejection of my body followed.

Maan, ammi, biji, bebe (mother)... you are usually the first to have a window into my world of resistance. It is with you that I most vulnerable, and where my need for acceptance is greatest. To be denied your love is a violence that I cannot bear. That moment when I was afraid you were going to deny me was a moment I could not comprehend. I need your acceptance and love, and feel I deserve it. I know you deserve so much more from me, but I don’t know what else to do. I hope you will always forgive. Ma you saw my worlds and as much as they haunt you and you fear my future, know that you remain the constant I always come back to.

The pain of rejection is a wound that is so easily opened. It is trauma that we carry with us in our everyday life, and will forever haunt us in our relationships. A shadow hanging over every relation. The threat that anyone that loves us can reject us at a moment’s time. The loss that comes from this choice is like losing a womb sibling. Losing people who we have felt even before birth. And then the loss turns to a rebirth and there are many of you that have carried on with us. There are those who could not let go and despite the pain and sorrow, you still chose to communicate.

And many of you that choose to remain in the ashes. Is it possible that we can come to a rebirth with you? Or will we forever be dead to each other?
With some of you there is a rebirth, with others there are still lies and the rest may still continue to reject our bodies and whom we chose to share our bodies with. Yet, there still continues to be an erasure of this world we shared with you, an erasure of our partners that represent our transgressions. But do you know that those same partners crave your love? Do you know they have conversations with you when you are not there? Did you know that these same partners that you have erased have not erased you? Yet your conditions for contact with us are based on this erasure. You have created a world that involves just us, without our partners, our children, and our political struggle. Our world seems to be too scary for you to embrace so it does not exist for you. This erasure is easy for us to fall into; we participate in erasing our partners when you need us to. But do you realize that in order for us to be truly present with each other we may need to address these erased bodies? We want you to come to a place where we can stand together and say to the world: **Yes this is who we are and only join our movement if you are happy to share in our truth.** But then again we may not be interested in having you recognize our world, not because we are scared but because when you acknowledge this world there is always so much pain. Avoidance has become a constant companion in our lives.

So you believe you did nothing wrong to lead us down this road. We reel in guilt, while you sit there in the power of knowing that heteropatriarchy is on your side. You left us with no home, no place to run to when we need help. Our only home is in the acceptance of our mother, and for that we are relieved.

We are trying to move on and hope that you will search for us with love, before one of us carries on beyond this world. We will always leave a door open for you to call us back home.

To those families who find themselves struggling with their daughters transgressions, move beyond what you believe society, community, “honour” is telling you to do. Think with your heart and see the child that you held on your laps, arms, or held hands with as a child, see that this daughter/sister is a part of you and whatever actions you expect of her body for your izzat, is coming from a place of power and control, not from a place of safety, security or even love. This daughter is transgressing because this is how she is surviving and defining herself in this racist, colonial, heteropatriarchal world. She is surviving.

To those sisters who are finding their selves struggling to share these words with their families, remember why you are transgressing. You are not a bad brown girl or daughter. Your desire to
not participate in the “good brown girl” ways is justified, because this image of the “good brown girl” was created to never be fulfilled, it is an image that you are meant to fail.

Sister you are not alone, yet the road is lonely and scary, but the road is scattered with many of us who have chosen to carry on. We are here, come find us.

Letter To My Children

Dear Nandi and Khumalo

The story of izzat began long ago and has lived through the bodies of my grandmother, my mother, and was passed down to my body through my mother’s womb, like a genetic trait that one inherits through blood. My mother said that when my brother was born they passed out boxes of sweets in our natal village of India, and in our local village of Canada. When I asked what was passed out on my birth, there was only silence. Yet it is through my body that the story of izzat is told, it is in my body that the story of izzat is expected to live on and passed on to my children, my daughter, my blood. The story of izzat will now change as I tell it to you.

Nandi and Khumalo you are a part of my blood, a part of my story away from izzat and my story back to izzat. Before you were born many told me that you would be the ones to bring my family back to me, that I should not worry too much because “grandchildren change everything”. I refuse to place that responsibility on your little bodies. Even when we enter the corridors of your grandfather’s home you encounter silence from a man you are so curious of. A man you yearn to embrace, as much as I do. So you are not the placeholders for reintegration to the family. You are a part of the narrative that will shift our family story, our world.

Nandi, you enter this world as a brown/black woman in a world that tries to regulate, sexualize and ultimately disregard your body. I will do all I can to prepare you for this world, but I want you to remember that you are connected to many women before you and many brothers who are our allies. We are connected through a common struggle and fight against heteropatriarchy. It is love that binds us and you must always come back to that love, it will guide you to a knowing embrace. Nandi hold your izzat with strength, you guide your izzat, and no one else has the right to do so. It means “honour” and love and respect for your self. If it is
ever used and defined as a way to control your body, fight against it and speak up for any injustice you see as a result of this imposition of izzat on your body or another’s body.

Khumalo, you enter this world as a brown/black man and the world will try to police, persecute, and regulate your body. I will do all I can to prepare you for this world, but I want you to be aware of the lure of power and control that comes from heteropatriarchy. The deception of heteropatriarchy will suggest that you do not need consent to act on the bodies of women or other marginalized bodies, this is never the case. You must respect the bodies of any other person as you would your own. Your izzat is in your hands, you guide it and let it only be a compass of love and respect for yourself and others.

The story of izzat will change as you grow and pass it on to your children, and them to their children. Tell our stories to every generation so that we never forget where we come from, what we have struggled through and learn from our past. You are a part of a new narrative of izzat, one that resists representations and above all fights heteropatriarchy and violence.

Love your mama, Mandeep Kaur Mucina.
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Appendices

Appendix A Consent Form

University of Toronto

Adult Education and Community Development – OISE

In the name of “izzat”: Exploring honour-related violence in the lives of second-generation Punjabi women

What the research or study is about:

I am a PhD student at OISE in the Adult Education and Community Development conducting a study for my PhD thesis. I identify as a Punjabi, Sikh woman, and as a second-generation South Asian and would like to hear about your experiences of honour-related violence.

In this study I am exploring the impact of “izzat” on the lives of Punjabi women. I am particularly interested in the stories of women who have experienced trauma, violence or displacement from their family and/or community because they chose to be in relationship that went against their family’s wishes. For example women who choose partners that are ethnically, racially, and/or religiously different from their family, or women who chose to be in a same-sex relationship.

I am looking at interviewing up to 7 second-generation Punjabi women from major urban centres in Canada.

What is involved in this study?

I believe that there are many women in our community (Punjabi, Sikhs of Canada) who have experienced or witnessed violence in the name of “izzat” or honour. I believe these stories are important and need to be heard by our community so that we can create some change and work
towards ending this violence against Punjabi women. I am hoping we can have a discussion about your story of honour-related violence and how the concept “izzat” has impacted your life here in Canada.

In order to participate in this study you must be a woman of 19 years of age or older, a second-generation Canadian and you have disclosed to your family/community your partner’s identity (sex, race, ethnicity) and as a result you experienced distress in your life as a result. Furthermore, at least a year has passed since your experience of trauma, violence and/or displacement from your family and/or community.

Or you have not disclosed your partner’s identity to your family/community but are considering it and are anticipating potential emotional, physical or psychological distress as a result.

As a participant you will be asked questions about your experiences of violence, trauma and/or displacement in the name of izzat. You will be asked to commit to two interviews. The first one will be between 2-3 hours. If after the first interview you do not feel like your story was fully gathered, we can meet a second time for another interview. Finally, there will be a final session closer to the end of my study to check with you if you agree with what I gathered from your interviews.

I will also be conducting a talking circle (focus group) later on in the study with all the women who have participated in this study to come together and talk about your experiences as a group. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may decline to be a part of the study at any point. During this focus group we will be focusing on sharing our stories, as well as talking about possibilities of creating some arts based action with our stories and experiences.

In order to effectively capture your stories I will be audio taping the interview, however you have the option of choosing not to be audio taped, in which case I will be taking notes during the interview. If you do choose to be audio taped, each tape will be transcribed immediately after the interview for content analysis and will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed. All data that identifies you personally, such as your name and contact information, will be removed from the transcripts, as will any third parties mentioned in your story. Tapes will be destroyed immediately after the interview. The transcribed data will be kept in a password protected external hard drive until I have finished writing my dissertation and then destroyed at that time.
Your name will not be shared with anyone. I will be gathering your story and elements of it will be included in my final dissertation. When the study is presented to others or written up, no information that identifies you and your story, will be included. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts and the dissertation before it is finished and let me know if there is any part of it that you feel may render you recognizable to anyone who will read the dissertation and I will exclude anything that you do not agree with.

You will have the opportunity to discuss this study and have questions answered to your satisfaction. This study is fully voluntary and you can refuse to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without penalty. You can withdraw before, during or after the interview or at any time during the process. If you wish to withdraw your transcribed tape will be destroyed and will not be used in the study.

**What are the risks and benefits?**

There are no immediate benefits to you for participating in this study. The long-term benefits relate to having your story heard and recorded by another South Asian woman, who is interested in understanding and recording your experiences. It is hoped that this research will lead to further research that looks at women who experienced or witnessed violence due to izzat, which will help the South Asian community to tackle this violence in our community. Furthermore, this research is the first of its kind to actually speak to women survivors of honour-related violence. Another benefit for your participating in this study is that you will have the benefit of speaking about the complexities of this decision with a trained social worker and survivor of similar experience. The benefit of doing this is that you will be able to share what internal thinking is contributing to your decision making, with another South Asian woman who has experience both personally and professionally on this topic. Having the space to talk about this experience is a benefit since very rarely do South Asian women have the space to talk about the complexities of disclosing hidden truths and the decision to disobey family/community beliefs to be in partnership with someone who is considered an outsider to the family and community. Finally, if you do take part in the focus group and some form of action emerges from the gathering, you may benefit greatly from this experience by sharing your experience with other Punjabi women who have similar, yet different experiences.

The risks to participating in this study are as follows:
1. You may be triggered by remembering and re-telling your story to myself and to other women, if you choose to participate in the focus group. There is the risk of you being traumatized by your past stories or the stories of other women who share a similar experience to you. To reduce the risks to you we will make every effort to make sure that if you are not feeling comfortable with the topic or need to stop at any point, we will do so right away. Also, I am a registered social worker with over 10 years of experience and expertise in working with women survivors of trauma, therefore during the interview if you feel triggered at all we can review grounding techniques and you will have full control of stopping the interview and ending it at any time. As well, if you feel the need for further support with the topic, I have a list of services that can assist you if need be.

2. The topic that we are exploring is one that has been silenced for some time and there may be people within the Sikh, Punjabi community who may be resistant to the objectives of this study and would like to maintain silence about the topic of violence and women. It is important for you to know that you are participating in breaking a code of silence, which may be uncomfortable for many. However, your participation in this study will be kept entirely confidential, yet you can chose to back out for this reason or any of the other perceived risks at any time during this process. The only limits to maintaining your confidentiality is if at any point you demonstrate a very high risk of seriously harming yourself or others. At this point I am obligated by law to report this. However the only information that will be shared is that which concerns the risk of harm to yourself or to others. I also have a duty to report of any reasonable suspicion of risk or harm to children. Again if this should arise, only information that will be shared is that which concerns the risk or harm to children.

3. Since the Punjabi community is quite small your story may be identifiable to anyone who may gain access to this research, its findings and any action that emerges from the focus group. This may include people from the Punjabi South Asian community who may guess your identity. However, I am aware of this risk and the impact this can have on your life, therefore I will be maintaining a high level of vigilance with your confidentiality and anonymity by using pseudonyms that you choose at every stage of the research. Pseudonyms will also be used for the names of any third parties that you mention in your story. Your original name will not be used on any of the documents, other than the consent form, which will be kept in a locked drawer in a locked room at all times, with myself as the only person who has access to the key.
4. If you have not disclosed to your family your partner’s identity and are considering disclosing this information to your family/community there is a possible risk that the process of telling your story will shift your current perspective of your dilemma to disclose or the decision making around this dilemma. As well there is the risk that if after being a part of this interview you decides to disclose to your family/community your partner’s identity you may experience trauma (physical, emotional, psychological) as a result. Knowing these risks, if you would still like to participate in this study and want further support in disclosing your relationship to your family/community, I will go over an in-depth safety with you focusing on what pieces may need to be put in place before and after the disclosure happens. As well, we can have an in-depth discussion about what life after the disclosure could potentially involve and from this discussion work through what supports I can provide you as a trained social worker and South Asian woman who has personal and professional experience with this phenomena. I will have a counselor in both Toronto and Vancouver who is willing and available to speak to you if after the interview you would like support around disclosing your relationship to your family/community.

5. If you choose to participate in the focus group and some form of action does emerge from the group and as a consensus the group decides to bring awareness to honour-related violence to the Punjabi community in a public manner, we will need to review your safety and whether this will place you at risk. However, you will not be forced into participating in this part of the research and at any point you can withdraw from the study if you feel at risk.

There are no perceived costs to participating in this study and all means will be taken to make sure the interview is conducted to your comfort level. Dr. Bonnie Burstow, a senior faculty in Adult Education and Counselling Psychology, OISE, is overseeing this study and can be contacted at any point if you have any questions or comments.

Results of the study will be made available to you at the time of completion. If you have any questions or concerns about the study or would like an update on the status of the study, please do not hesitate to contact:

Mandeep Kaur Mucina  Or  Dr. Bonnie Burstow, AECD, OISE
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mandeep.bhalru@utoronto.ca  bonnie.burstow@utoronto.ca
Contact information for the Office of Research Ethics in you have any questions about your rights as a research participant:

Email: ethics.review@utoronto.ca
Phone: 1-416-946-3273    Fax: 1-416-946-5763
Address: McMurrich Building, 12 Queen’s Park Crescent, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8

CONSENT

I understand the information presented about the study. I have had the opportunity to discuss this study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to take part in the study and to participate in two interviews between two to three hours each with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I can also refuse to answer any questions at any time without penalty. I understand that my participation in the focus group is entirely voluntary.

I have received a signed copy of this consent form. I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

_________________________  ___________________________  ___________
Participant’s Name (Please Print)  Participant’s Signature             Date

I voluntarily consent to being audiotaped for both interviews:

☐  ☐
Yes    No

_________________________  ___________________________  ___________
Participants’ Name (Please Print)  Participant’s Signature             Date
I voluntarily consent to participate in the focus group

☐ Yes            ☐ No

_________________________________  ___________________________  ______
Participant’s Name (Please Print)  Participant’s Signature  Date

I confirm that I have explained the nature and purpose of the study to the subject named above. I have answered all questions to the participant’s satisfaction.

_________________________________  ___________________________  ______
Name of Person Obtaining Consent  Signature  Date
Appendix B – Flyer

University of Toronto

Adult Education and Community Development – OISE

Are you a PUNJABI WOMAN who has experienced trauma (An event or situation that caused you great distress and disruption in your life) because of who you have chosen as a partner.

Did you experience any of the following trauma(s),

- Emotional (such as guilt, or humiliation),
- Psychological (such as asked to leave your family or community),
- Physical (such as hurt or threatened by family or community members)

...because who you chose as a partner was against your family and/or community beliefs?

If so I would like to speak to you about YOUR STORY...

- I am a PhD student at the University of Toronto in the Adult education and Community development program.

- I am focusing my research on second-generation Punjabi women and their experiences of violence, displacement and trauma resulting from choices in their lives that go against their family and community, resulting in trauma and/or displacement from their family and community.

- My focus is on the cultural concept of “izzat” or “honour “and how it impacts second-generation Punjabi women.

- This research has been approved by the University of Toronto, Research Ethics Board and is supervised by Dr. Bonnie Burstow, Senior Professor at OISE, University of Toronto.

If you are interested in participating please contact me at: mandeep.bhalru@utoronto.ca

Or call me at 416-998-2241
Appendix C – Interview Guide

Exploring honour-related violence in the lives of second-generation Punjabi women

Interview Guide

1. Can you start with your current situation?
2. Share your story of izzat to date. What past experiences have impacted how you decide and feel about your current situation?
3. What are some of the barriers you are experiencing in your decision making?
4. What factors played a role in your decision to be with someone who is racially and/or ethnically and/or religiously and/or sexually and/or culturally and/or economically different from your family?
5. What is your relationship to izzat or honour before this event?
6. What is your relationship like with your family and/or community now?
7. What impact is this having on your life?
8. How do you think you will make this decision?
9. What factors are contributing to helping you get through this?
10. What internal factors helped you survive this experience?
11. What external factors helped you survive this experience?
12. What is your relationship to izzat or honour after this event?
13. How has izzat or honour impacted your life?
14. If you could openly speak about izzat or honour-related violence to your family and community what would you say?
15. How would you show your family and community the impact this experience has had on your life?
16. What would it look like to share you experience with other women in your community?
17. How do your react to the media perspectives of Izzat