

## Importance of Marital Characteristics and Marital Satisfaction: A Comparison of Asian Indians in Arranged Marriages and Americans in Marriages of Choice

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### **Abstract:**

To date, little research has been published related to cross-cultural differences in such marital factors as love, intimacy, happiness, and satisfaction. The present study compares factors contributing to marital satisfaction and examines correlations between the importance of these factors and the level of satisfaction for three groups: Asian Indians in arranged marriages living in India (n = 229), Asian Indians in arranged marriages living in the United States (n = 185), and Americans in marriages of choice (n = 173). Results indicated significant differences between the three groups on both total importance and total satisfaction mean scores. Implications for multicultural marriage counseling are discussed and recommendations for further cross-cultural research are presented.

**Keywords:** marital satisfaction | arranged marriages | multicultural marriage counseling | Asian Indians

### **Article:**

Marriage is an important institution in almost all societies in the world (Myers, Madathil, & Tingle, 2005). Bachrach, Hindin, and Thomson (2000) defined marriage as a legally and socially recognized union, ideally lifelong, that entails sexual, economic, and social rights and obligations for the partners. Larson and Holman (1994) described marriage as the most important and fundamental relationship because it provides the basic structure for establishing a family and raising the next generation. Consequently, marital satisfaction, or what helps people maintain happiness in their marriages, has been studied extensively (Larson et al., 1995). Although there has been substantial research on how individuals develop intimate relationships and, in particular, how love develops over time (Sher, 1996; Sternberg, 1986), few researchers have examined cross-cultural differences in such marital factors as love, intimacy, happiness, and satisfaction (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000). Despite the fact that marital traditions and practices vary widely across cultures, the vast majority of articles published on marriage have focused solely on Western marriages of choice. These marriages are predicated on the concept of romantic love in

which marriage partners freely choose each other. In India and many other cultures throughout the world, however, marriages of choice (in which partners first fall in love and then choose to marry) are discouraged because it is believed that these might interfere with family closeness and prescribed familial obligations (Medora, Larson, Hortacsu, & Dave, 2002). Thus, in these cultures, marriages typically are arranged by parents or other family members.

Arranged marriages are the norm in India and more than 90% of all Indian marriages are arranged (Gautam, 2002). Clearly, very different cultural values and practices suggest a need to understand and examine marriage relationships from a multicultural perspective. The purpose of this study was to explore and compare differences in importance of marital characteristics and levels of marital satisfaction for Asian Indians (hereafter referred to as Indians) in arranged marriages (living in the U.S. and living in India) and Americans in marriages of choice (living in the U.S.).

### **Cultural Context for Understanding Marriage**

Cultural norms of individualism or its polar opposite, collectivism, have strong implications for the nature of intimate family relationships (Sastry, 1999). Individualistic cultures allocate priority to goals concerning the personal identity of individuals, whereas collectivist cultures emphasize the value of the extended family or the immediate community (Hui & Triandis, 1986). American culture is primarily individualistic, viewing people as independent, free, and responsible for themselves, with an emphasis on self-discipline and accountability (Medora et al., 2002). From this individualistic perspective, family and society exist to maximize the individual (Sodowsky, Kwan, & Pannu, 1995). By contrast, most Indian adults live in a collectivist and sexually conservative society where interdependence is encouraged and self-identity and expression are inhibited (Sinha, 1984). Instead of focusing on the individual, group identity and group cohesiveness are emphasized and rewarded.

The processes of mate selection and marriage differ quite dramatically between Western and Eastern cultures. In most Western cultures, mates select one another directly, based on interpersonal attraction. In American culture, falling in love and selecting a potential mate is considered a normal developmental task for most late adolescents and young adults (Medora et al., 2002), with love being seen as the primary prerequisite for marriage (Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986). In India and the majority of the world's cultures (Batabyal, 2001), marriages are arranged by family members, not by the bride and groom (Skolnick, 1987). According to Bhopal (1999), arranged marriages are seen as an agreement between two families rather than two individuals, and are based on a contract where both sides have to fulfill their obligations. Bhopal also stated that arranged marriages are considered to be ritual and sacramental unions, and have been the customary norm for centuries among South Asian peoples, as well as in many cultures in Africa and the Middle East.

Kalra (1980) concluded that Indian arranged marriages in the late 20th century had not departed significantly from the traditional method of mate selection. Most Indian marriages continue to be arranged by the individual's extended family and reflect economic, religious, political, and social considerations. Romantic love is considered to be impractical, unnecessary, and dangerous, whereas companionship and practical love is seen as a more legitimate form of affection and bonding between spouses (Desai, McCormick, & Gaeddert, 1989). Young adults are socialized by family and Indian society to have more practical and realistic expectations, so that they can accept their parents' choice of partner and still live happily (Medora et al., 2002).

Thus, marital bonds between married couples in India are based on a sense of filial commitment and an adherence to cultural tradition, rather than on spousal intimacy (Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988).

Even within Indian society, however, there are different cultural variations to the process of finding a mate. Mate selection may vary from autonomous, in which individuals select their own spouses, to completely arranged, in which family elders select and negotiate for spouses for their marriageable children, with many gradations existing between the extremes. Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1990) suggested a typology of arranged marriages among Asian groups that consisted of (a) a traditional pattern, where parents and elders of the family choose the spouse; (b) a modified traditional pattern, where the individual has the power to make the final choice; and, (c) a cooperative traditional pattern, where either the young person or the parents might make the selection depending on the timing of events (e.g., when and where the match is made, timeframe for decision making). Even in the cooperative traditional pattern where the actual decision to marry is made cooperatively, parental consent is considered to be essential.

### **Marital Satisfaction**

Durodoye (1997) defined marital satisfaction as an individual's subjective evaluation of the specific components within her or his marital relationship. Moreover, factors that lead to marital distress may not be the simple inverse of the factors that lead to a satisfying relationship (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1994), in their study of marital interaction in long-term marriages in middle-aged and older couples found that marital interaction was more affectively positive for older couples than for middleaged couples. Gottman, Coan, Carrere, and Swanson (1998) identified positive affect during marital conflict as the only predictor of marital satisfaction after 6 years of marriage. Carstensen, Gottman, and Levenson (1995) found that humor and affection were characteristic of happily married older couples. The rationale for studying marital satisfaction arises from the benefits that accrue to society when strong marriages are formed and maintained. Moreover, the quality of a marital relationship is recognized as having an impact on the psychological well-being of individuals in the marriage (Shek, 1995).

Although a considerable body of research exists on husband–wife relations, including marital satisfaction and intimacy, few studies have explored these variables among ethnically diverse populations (Markides & Hoppe, 1985). Research on the marital satisfaction levels of individuals where the marriages were initiated based on factors other than romantic love has been very limited (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000). In addition, method of spousal selection and its correlation with marital satisfaction has received little attention in the literature (Myers et al., 2005). Add to this the fact that people of South Asian origin have been one of the least studied ethnic groups in the United States (Bhatt, Kalra, Kohli, Malkani, & Rasiah, 1993; Dasgupta, 1986; Durvasula & Mylvaganam, 1994), despite the reality that Indians are one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Because most marital studies have been conducted with marriages based on the Western model of romantic love and marriage (Myers et al., 2005), literature is sparse on arranged marriages, including the importance of marital characteristics and satisfaction of individuals in these unions. Findings from the few studies that exist, however, suggest significant differences in the importance of characteristics of marriage to the marital satisfaction levels of Asian Indians in arranged marriages as compared with Americans in marriages of choice (Myers et al., 2005;

Sastry, 1999; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). Because of vast differences between the two methods of finding mates and because the practice of arranged marriage is so widespread, there exists a critical need to study variables that correlate with marital importance and satisfaction for women and men in these marriages. Clearly, in an increasingly diverse and global society, knowledge of cross-cultural differences in relationships and relationship satisfaction is essential information for counselors who work with these couples and families (Myers et al., 2005).

The current study addressed the specific need to investigate the importance of characteristics of marriage and correlates of marital satisfaction for Indians in arranged marriages as compared to American couples in marriages of choice. In this study, two groups of Indians were surveyed: married couples living in the U.S. and married couples living in India. The overall research question for this study was: How do levels of marital satisfaction differ for Indians in arranged marriages and living in the U.S., Indians in arranged marriages living in India, and Americans in marriages of choice? Specifically, this study investigated the importance and satisfaction of four factors of marriage (loving, loyal, shared values, and finances) for each group in the sample and examined correlations between importance of these characteristics and levels of marital satisfaction for men and women in the three groups.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants consisted of Indians in arranged marriages living in the United States (AI-US), Indians in arranged marriages living in India (AI-India), and Americans in marriages of choice living in the United States (US-Choice). All participants were volunteers obtained using purposive sampling techniques. Members of the U.S. sample of Indian and American volunteer couples were recruited in a major metropolitan area in the southeastern U.S. Indian volunteer couples in India were recruited from Bangalore, a culturally and religiously diverse metropolitan city in South India with a large number of English-speaking individuals. Consistent with a purposive sampling approach, volunteer respondents in both countries were recruited from several venues, such as shopping malls, religious congregations' cultural ceremonies, and picnic gatherings, over several weekends.

The AI-India sample consisted of 229 individuals (114 men, 115 women), which included 114 couples. In this group, 32% had been married for less than 5 years, 14% between 5 and 10 years, 23% between 10 and 20 years, and 31% had been married for more than 20 years. Regarding the mate selection process, 19% reported that their opinions had not been considered at all, whereas 81% reported that their opinions had been considered or somewhat considered. Also, 82% of these participants had met their partners before marriage. Of these participants, 90% had support from their families, 70% reporting having the freedom to reject their marriage proposals, and 34% had other family members residing with them permanently. For purposes of this study, "support" was based on the perceptions of the respondent, and could include financial, emotional, and instrumental support from family members.

The AI-US sample consisted of 185 individuals (93 men, 92 women), including 92 couples. With respect to the length of marriage, 24% had been married for less than 5 years, 25% between 5 and 10 years, 34% between 10 and 20 years, and 16% had been married for more than 20 years. Regarding the mate selection process, 5% reported that their opinion had not been considered at all, whereas 95% reported that their opinions had been considered or somewhat

considered. Also, 92% of these participants had met their partners before marriage. Of the AI-US participants, 82% reported having support from their families, 92% reported having the freedom to reject their marriage proposals, and 6% had other family members residing with them permanently. In terms of length of stay in the United States, 6% reported living in the United States for less than 1 year, 29% for 1 to 5 years, 28% for 5 to 10 years, and 36% had been living in the United States for more than 10 years.

The US-Choice sample consisted of 85 men and 88 women, including 85 couples. Of these participants, 14% had been married for less than 5 years, 24% between 5 and 10 years, 30% between 10 and 20 years, and 32% had been married for more than 20 years. Of these participants, 74% reported being supported by their families, and 4% had other family members residing with them permanently (see Table 1).

The total number of participants for the final study was 587, consisting of 292 men and 295 women. In five cases, only one spouse was able to participate in the study. Although couples were the focus of data collection, individuals were the focus of data analysis, so these data were included in analyses.

### Instrumentation

The Characteristics of Marriage Inventory (CHARISMA; Rosen-Grandon, 1998) was developed as a brief measure of characteristics related to marital satisfaction. Myers et al. (2005) used this instrument previously in a study of marital satisfaction of Indians in arranged marriages living in India. The instrument lists 18 characteristics of marriage, such as lifetime commitment, loyalty, and respect, and respondents are asked to indicate first the *importance* to them of each characteristic and then their *satisfaction* with each characteristic. Responses are provided using a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *extremely unimportant* to *extremely important*. A final item at the end assesses overall marital satisfaction. Scores for the two subscales, Importance and Satisfaction, are simple sums of the responses to each item in the scale. A fourth factor, Finances, was added to the instrument for purposes of this study, in consultation with the instrument's author and a psychometric expert. Because financial security and lack of debt are core cultural values for Indians and because existing research has shown that financial circumstances influence marital adjustment (Kinnunen & Feltdt, 2004), researchers in this study determined that this additional variable would be an important one to explore.

**TABLE 1**  
**Demographic Characteristics of the Samples**

	AI-India	AI-US	US-Choice
Mean age	38.74	37.55	44.92
Mean age at marriage	25.45	26.14	26.92
Mean length of marriage	13.23	11.46	18.14

NOTE: AI-India = Indians in arranged marriages living in India; AI-US = Indians in arranged marriages living in the United States; US-Choice = Americans in marriages of choice living in the United States.

Rosen-Grandon (1998) identified three factors underlying each of the two CHARISMA scales of Importance and Satisfaction. These factors were (1) loving (open communication and agreement on the expression of affection are important, and mutual respect, forgiveness, and sensitivity are

valued); (2) loyal (high level of consensus, a sufficiently high level of sexual activity, lifetime commitment to the marriage, interpersonal loyalty, and strong moral values); and (3) shared values (conflicts are managed, gender roles are traditional, and high priorities are placed on religiosity and parenting). The additional factor, finances (financial comfort, lack of debt, and financial independence) was included in both Importance and Satisfaction scales.

Alpha coefficients for a sample of 201 American adults have been reported as .83 and .94 for the Importance and Satisfaction scales, respectively (Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004), establishing good reliability. Concurrent validity studies were conducted successfully using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) and ENRICH (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1982). Factor analyses of CHARISMA (Rosen-Grandon, 1998), using a four-step factor analytic approach, revealed three factors underlying each of the two scales: (a) loving, (b) loyal, and (c) shared values (Rosen-Grandon, 1998). Factor loadings for all items were acceptably high, with only one item falling below .3 (Rosen-Grandon, 1998). Interfactor correlations ranged from .27 to .42 for the Satisfaction subscale, and from .34 to .70 for the Importance subscale. An examination of CHARISMA instruments completed by participants in the current study found Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient values that ranged from 0.77 to 0.93.

A researcher-developed demographic questionnaire also was used in this study to collect personal data, including socioeconomic variables and particulars of the relationship, questions related to the arrangement of the marriage, gender, age, length of marriage, religion, length of stay in the United States, level of involvement in choosing the marriage partner, number of children, and living arrangements. Questions about involvement in the arrangement of the marriage that included information on whether family considered the individual's opinion while looking for a partner and whether the person met his/her partner before marriage also were included. Spouses were instructed to complete the questionnaires individually without consulting each other or sharing responses.

## Results

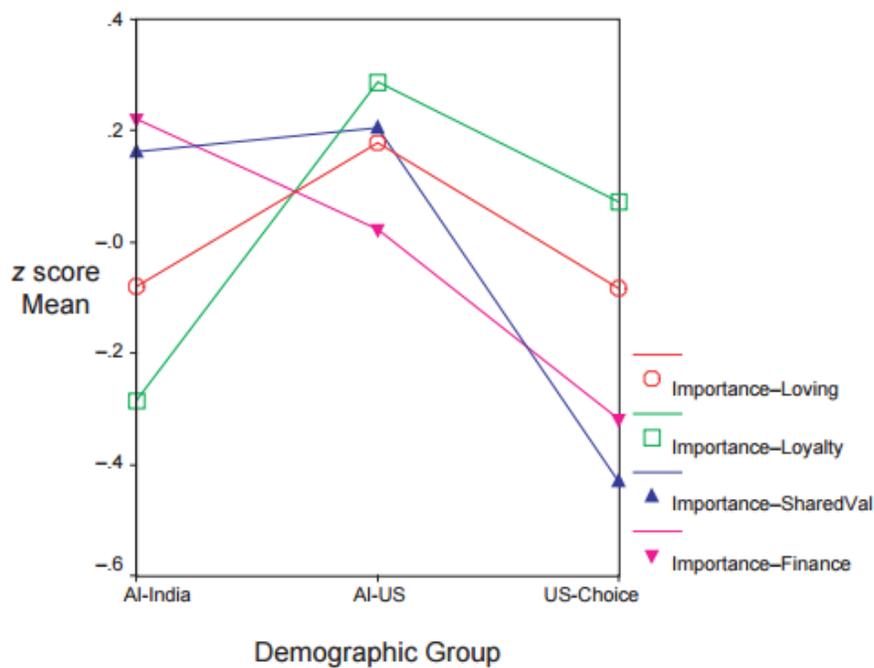
A  $3 \times 2$  factorial ANOVA was used to study the effect of group and gender on the importance of marital characteristics. For the total Importance score, ANOVA results indicated a significant interaction between demographic group and gender. An estimated marginal means plot suggested that the difference between genders was larger for the USChoice sample. The simple main effects of the two factors (demographic group and gender) were examined separately. For women, there were no significant differences on total Importance among the three groups. When group was held constant, no significant differences were found between genders for the AI-India and AI-US groups, whereas there was a significant difference ( $p = .004$ ) between genders in the US-Choice group. These results also indicated significant differences between groups on all of the Importance subscales. A standardized z score means plot, shown in Figure 1, was used to examine differences between groups for each Importance subscale.

For the Importance–Loving subscale, AI-US participants scored significantly higher than those in both the AI-India and the US-Choice groups, with no significant differences found between genders. For Importance–Shared Values, USChoice scores were significantly lower than those of the other two groups, and women had higher scores than men. For the Importance–Finance subscale, there was a significant difference between the groups, with US-Choice scoring less than the other groups, and no difference between genders. For the Importance–Loyal

subscale, there was a significant interaction between group and gender—for the US-Choice group alone, women scored significantly higher than men.

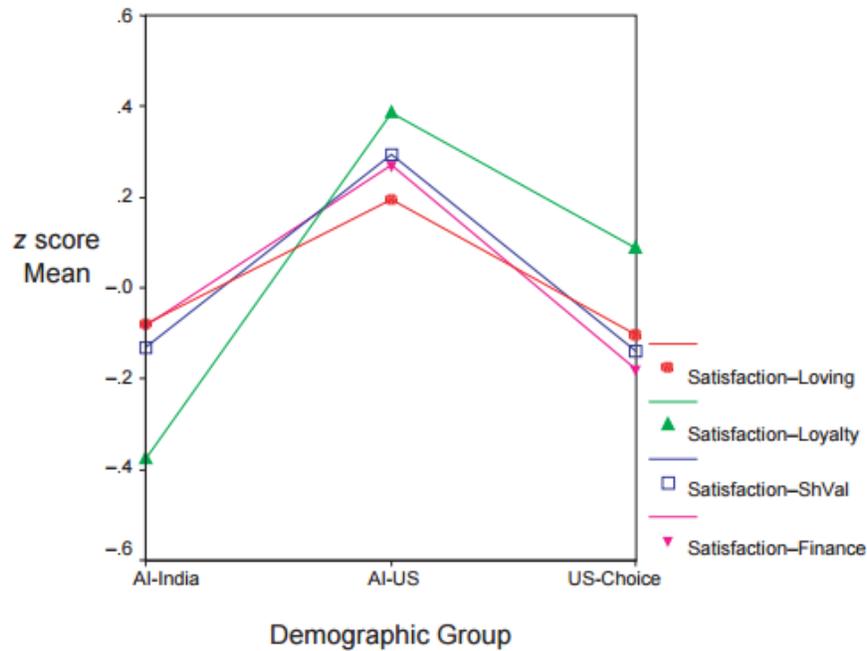
A similar  $3 \times 2$  factorial ANOVA was used to study the effects of group and gender on marital satisfaction. Results indicated significant differences in total Satisfaction scores between the three groups. Tukey’s test for multiple comparison between means indicated that the AI-US scores ( $M = 110.9$ ) were significantly higher than the AI-India ( $M = 103.8$ ) and US-Choice ( $M = 105.5$ ) samples. No significant interactions were found between group and gender on either the total Satisfaction score or on Satisfaction subscale scores. For the Satisfaction subscales, ANOVA results did, however, indicate significant differences between groups. A standardized z score means plot, shown in Figure 2, was used to examine differences between groups for each Satisfaction subscale.

Tukey’s test for multiple comparisons between means revealed that Satisfaction scores on all subscales were significantly higher for the AI-US group, as compared to the AI-India and US-Choice groups. This seems to indicate that AI-US participants were significantly more satisfied with their marriages, overall. Findings in this study also indicated a significant relationship between total Importance and total Satisfaction for all three demographic groups. The Pearson product–moment correlations between total Importance and total Satisfaction scores, shown in Table 2, indicated that correlations were significantly different from zero for all groups, and these results were confirmed using Fisher’s test for the difference between two independent  $r$ ’s.



**FIGURE 1: Standardized z Score Means for Importance Subscales**

NOTE: AI-India = Indians in arranged marriages living in India; AI-US = Indians in arranged marriages living in the United States; US-Choice = Americans in marriages of choice living in the United States.



**FIGURE 2: Standardized z Score Means for Satisfaction Subscales**  
 NOTE: AI-India = Indians in arranged marriages living in India; AI-US = Indians in arranged marriages living in the United States; US-Choice = Americans in marriages of choice living in the United States.

**TABLE 2**  
**Correlation Between Total Importance and Total Satisfaction**

Group	Pearson Correlation
AI-India group	.595*
AI-US group	.689*
US-Choice group	.447*

NOTE: AI-India = Indians in arranged marriages living in India; AI-US = Indians in arranged marriages living in the United States; US-Choice = Americans in marriages of choice living in the United States.  
 \* $p < .05$ .

Although correlations between Importance and Satisfaction were highest for the AI-US group and lowest for the USChoice group, a scatter plot of Satisfaction scores versus the Importance scores for each demographic group revealed potentially influential outliers that may have influenced the correlation values. Still, findings support that AI-US participants seemed to have the best match between their expectations and their marital experiences, leading to significantly greater marital satisfaction.

When an ANOVA was used to investigate the relationship between length of stay in the United States and marital satisfaction for the AI-US group, no significant differences were found based on how long the couples had lived in the United States. To investigate the relationship between participation in mate selection and marital satisfaction for the two Indian groups, a linear regression analysis was performed. Results for the AI-India group ( $r^2 = .026$ ,  $p = .015$ ) indicated a statistically significant, but small, relationship between involvement in mate selection

and total Satisfaction. For the AI-US group, however, this relationship was not found to be significant ( $p = .279$ ,  $r^2 = .006$ ).

## **Discussion**

No significant difference in the importance of marital characteristics was found for women in the three groups. For AI-India and AI-US groups, there also were no significant differences between men and women in their total Importance scores. In the US-Choice group, however, a significant difference was found between genders for the total Importance score, with US-Choice men having lower total importance scores compared to US-Choice women. Analysis of Importance subscales indicated that the difference could be explained by differences between genders on Importance–Loyal subscale scores, suggesting that US-Choice men may not have considered loyalty to be as important a marital factor as their wives. Because the US-Choice group was slightly older than AI-India and AI-US groups, the US-Choice men also might have had more traditional gender role expectations in marriage and interpreted the Importance statements differently. This finding regarding gender differences in the US-Choice marriages warrants further study.

On the four Importance subscales, significant differences were found between groups. AI-US men and women rated the importance of loving significantly higher than both AI-India and US-Choice groups. AI-US participants also rated this characteristic of marriage significantly higher compared to the AI-India group. Explanations for these differences would be merely speculative at this point, and both of these findings suggest a need for further study. On the Importance–Finance subscale, the two Indian groups scored significantly higher than the US-Choice group. This can be readily understood from a cultural perspective, because financial security and lack of debt are key cultural values for Indians. Most Indians continue to be raised to own only those things that can be purchased with cash (not credit); in fact, credit cards were only introduced in India within the last decade or so. This important cultural difference alone may explain the different degree of importance that Indians attribute to financial considerations, compared to US-Choice couples, for whom absence of debt and financial security may be less important issues. Finally, participants in the two Indian groups scored significantly higher than US-Choice group participants on the importance of shared values. This could be influenced by several factors, such as the strong influence of culture, degree of religious commitment and role of religion, shared agreement on marital roles and responsibilities, and similar, culture-based views on child-rearing practices and responsibilities.

It is important to note that although there have been several studies that focused on identifying factors that influenced marital satisfaction (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997, Gattis, Berns, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004), the present study focused instead on comparing marital satisfaction between demographic groups and did not focus on individual factors other than gender. Although there were considerable differences between genders with regard to the importance of marital characteristics, no significant differences in marital satisfaction (i.e., total Satisfaction scores) were found between men and women in the study. This is different from the findings of a study on marital satisfaction by Jose and Alfons (2007), which suggested that men tend to show higher level of marital satisfaction than women.

Significant differences were found between demographic groups, however, with AI-US participants reporting higher satisfaction than those in the other two groups. Although there were no significant differences between AI-India and US-Choice participants for three of the four

satisfaction subscales, scores on the Satisfaction–Loyal subscale were higher for the US-Choice group when compared to AI-India. AI-US participants reported being significantly more satisfied with their marriages overall than participants in other groups. One explanation for this finding may be that the AIUS participants may enjoy the stability of their arranged marriages while also living in the U.S. culture that imposes fewer constraints on them than they might experience at home in India. The underlying premise behind arranged marriages is to ensure compatibilities not only between individuals but also between families. The fact that these Indians now live halfway around the world, often far away from their extended families, may enable them to live very differently, with family involvement in their lives that is more restricted than in India. Thus, whereas AI-US couples may not have the benefit of close support from nearby family, they also may experience less day-to-day family influence and intervention. With less influence from family members, AI-US spouses might feel closer to each other as a couple and thus be more satisfied with their marriages. By contrast, those in both the AI-India group and the US-Choice group live in cultures where their marital arrangements are the norm, consistent with the prevailing practices where they live, and where family involvement in the marriage may vary considerably by geographic closeness, cultural expectations, and needs of family members.

A significant relationship between involvement in mate selection and total Satisfaction was found for the AI-India group, but not for the AI-US group. In other words, the more involvement that Indians living in India had in selecting their mate, the higher their scores on marital satisfaction. Thus, even in matches arranged by family members, individuals who were more involved in that process might have had opportunities to express their personal preferences either to the families or to the prospective partner, possibly leading to greater satisfaction in the marriage. For the AI-US group (where this relationship was not found), the fact that the spouses only have each other in this country might help them feel closer to each other, and perhaps more satisfied with their marriage, than they might have if they were living in India with greater involvement from family in their marriage. These considerations, then, might affect marital satisfaction more than involvement in the mate selection process.

Results indicated no significant differences in total Satisfaction for the AI-US group based on length of stay in the U.S. This suggests that Indian married couples living in the U.S. may not be influenced much by American cultural practices and values regarding marriage. There also is a possibility that these Indian couples might be socializing primarily with other Indians and therefore might still be influenced more by Indian values than American values, regardless of how long they have lived in the United States. Also, a high percentage of AI-US individuals in this study had children. These parents might want their children to be exposed to Indian culture and value Indian traditions. Considerations such as these could lead AI-US participants to create their own Indian-based social support system outside of their American work and educational settings.

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, these results are based on only one measure of marital satisfaction. Second, the sample was limited to Indian couples in arranged marriages and American couples in marriages of choice and did not include Indians in marriages of choice. Third, this study relied solely on self-report measures, with the limitation that participants may underreport or distort various beliefs and behaviors (O'Rourke & Cappeliez, 2001). Generalizability of these findings is somewhat limited by the fact that this study used purposive sampling to recruit a sample of voluntary participants from limited geographic areas of the United States and India. Finally, assessment of marital satisfaction, which often changes over the course of a marriage, was conducted at a single point in time.

## **Implications for Counselors and Counselor Educators**

Results of this research have several implications for counseling professionals. These results can help inform the work of mental health professionals providing services for couples in arranged marriages, as well as counselor educators who teach diversity and couples and family counseling courses. In addition, this research can make a valuable contribution to cross-cultural counseling research, especially because limited research exists on Indians and on arranged marriages. Given that arranged marriages are the prevailing practice in most of the world's cultures, it is important to understand that there are variations in the process of mate selection in both arranged marriages and marriages of choice. Moreover, regardless of societal customs, many individuals experience familial or societal pressures related to marriage and mate selection.

Because marital arrangements are complex processes and marital satisfaction depends on many factors, learning more about how this process begins and maintains itself could be helpful for mental health professionals. For example, based on findings from this study, counselors might appreciate that although Indians in arranged marriages may have different ways of achieving satisfaction in their marital relationships, their level of marital satisfaction can be at least as high as in a marriage of choice. This should be a reminder to be mindful of the assumptions through which the customs and practices of other cultures are viewed.

Results of this study can help family counselors gain insights into family structures that are based on more holistic models of familial integration. These findings also provide support for those theoretical paradigms that view marriage as a complex system of relationships among social, cultural, economic, religious, and psychological factors. More specifically, results of this study can offer mental health professionals a more informed basis for working with Indian clients, most of whom are likely to be in arranged marriages. Moreover, it is hoped that results of this study will encourage helping professionals to recognize that individuals in marriages created according to very different cultural practices can be similar in other aspects.

Results of this study raise additional questions about marriages. For example, are marital relationships in individualistic societies under greater pressure than in collective societies because marriage is expected to fulfill a diverse array of psychological needs? Also, if some aspects of traditionally collectivistic societies change in the direction of greater individualism, will psychological intimacy in marriage become increasingly important for marital satisfaction and personal well-being (Dion & Dion, 1993) and what effect would these changes have on arranged marriages? These are questions that professionals working with these families might benefit from considering.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

The current study, together with the existing research, provides direction for future research on comparing different types of marriages. Further research on gender differences in choice of important characteristics of marriage could help bring spouses closer to each other. Future research may include Indians in love marriages (marriages of choice) as a separate group of participants while studying the importance of marital characteristics and marital satisfaction.

Another area for future research would be to more closely examine the influence that family members have on individuals when it comes to marriage. This study found that couples in the AI-US group were more satisfied than those in the AIIndia or US-Choice groups. The AI-US group also was the only one where individuals had very limited numbers of family members

nearby (because of geographic distance from extended family). Understanding more about the effects of influence or interference from family members on a person's marital satisfaction in his or her marriage (and how that varies across cultures) might help marriage and family counselors. Focusing on the impact of family members on both a person's mate selection process and level of marital satisfaction across cultures (individualistic and collective) would help shed light into the similarities and differences between cultures.

Finally, future research should explore subjective factors that might be important for individuals and measure individual satisfaction on these variables. For example, one important aspect of people's lives (and marriages) not addressed by this study is spiritual or religious beliefs and practices. Future studies also should explore similarities and differences in the process of arranged marriages across cultures, because Indians are just one of many groups that find spouses through arranged marriages.

## Conclusion

The prevalence of arranged marriage as a marital practice and the lack of research on this subject make the current study an important step in examining cross-cultural differences in this area. Further research is needed to study these relationships in detail with a different sample. Ongoing research is also needed to examine the importance of other characteristics in marriage. Based on the findings of the current study, the importance of characteristics of marriage and satisfaction levels differ between the AI-US group and the US-Choice group. To be effective, intervention efforts must be based on understanding and appreciating these different practices and different factors, including culture of origin and culture of domicile.

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