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OUT OF BOUNDS:
AFGHAN COUPLES IN THE UNITED STATES
A STUDY OF SHIFTING GENDER AND IDENTITY



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I N T R O D U C T I O N

If you wear that short skirt, no decent man will want you. You will not find a husband.
If you talk to non-kin boys and flirt, your reputation will be destroyed. You will not find a husband.
If you do not know how to cook and clean and take care of children, no one will propose to you. You will not find a husband.
If you ever have a boyfriend, he will dump you and marry someone who is pure. You will never find a husband.
If you are not a virgin, you are not Afghan. You are not a Muslim and no Muslim man would give you the time of day. You will be branded for life. A Muslim husband is out of the question.
If you do not work hard and make money, you cannot afford to get a good wife.
If you are a womanizer, very few families will give you their daughter's hand.
If you drink alcohol too much, your reputation will be tainted and we cannot find you a good wife.
If you do drugs, you will be considered weak and unstable; no good family will want you for their daughter.
If you are caught having sex with other boys, you are not a man. You might as well stay single or marry an impure woman.

In Afghanistan, these are the warnings boys and girls will hear from their family, relatives and friends until they are married. For girls, these warnings will decide their fate. Being single for Afghan girls is an unnatural state (Lipson, 1994, p. 177). They are taught to live their lives according to the rules and roles set out to attract the best suitors—the boys who have a good family name, money, education and an honorable reputation. The sought-out girls are those reputed to be modest, obedient, good cooks and from a renowned family. The important of family name and education generally apply to the middle and upper classes, the elite. Arranged marriages, however, are the custom among all classes of Afghans.

Arranged marriages are essentially like business contracts but the definition of arranged marriage differs according to families and the degree of control they give their children in choosing their mates. Mothers usually find an available girl compatible for their sons to marry. Then the elders in *his* family, who are his representatives, will propose to the girl's family. Traditionally, the families make the final decision regarding which household their child marries into, but more liberal parents will ask their daughters and sons for approval before proceeding with the transaction. In some cases, the boy and the girl will be cousins and therefore, know each other very well. In other families, cousins are betrothed to each other when they are born while in marriages among "strangers," the boy might see a picture of the girl or see her in college or a wedding. Most married couples are from the same ethnic group, religious sect and class. Afghan males and females are considered boys and girls until they are married and then their status rises to men and women (Omidian, 1996: 138).

Interactions between non-kin boys and girls are highly disapproved of in Afghan society. In Kabul where some schools and the university were co-ed, non-kin boys and girls interacted but as classmates, and very rarely as friends. In fact, in the Dari language, the word friend does not imply the relationship between a boy and girl. If a girl refers to a boy as a friend, then he will be seen as a boyfriend or a lover. In Afghanistan,

love marriages take place but as the exception. Generally, love marriages are considered disgraceful and impractical. For Afghans, romance is only expressed in movies, popular music and poetry. In this case, art, in Afghanistan, does not imitate life.

This is the way it was when I was living in Herat, Afghanistan 14 years ago. My cousins, my aunts and my parents married traditionally. I describe these traditions in the present tense because these rules may still hold true in my country, where now a 17-year-old devastating war continues. I do not think social conduct between genders and marriage customs have changed since I was there. Perhaps the limitations and behavioral precepts for boys and girls are more stringent with the current militant Islamic regime enforcing stricter codes now. But my focus is not the Afghans in Afghanistan.

This paper is about the approximately 60 thousand Afghan refugees who fled the war and settled in the United States. It is about first-generation Afghan boys and girls, men and women, who bear those warnings in their soul and psyche but are conflicted when they are thrown into an alien "American" culture. It is about the dilemmas they experience reconciling two antagonistic worlds. It is about forming bicultural identities and the plight of expressing that duality. It is about Afghan men and women's interaction with each other, their relationships, their marriage, and their perceptions of who they are and who they want their children to be.

My family and I fled Afghanistan to escape the war in 1981 and have been living in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1983 when there were only a few Afghan families in California. We lived in apartments on a Mexican-populated street in the suburb of Union City. My Afghan friends were females and we played hopscotch, cards, danced and talked about music, clothes, and movies but never openly about boys. Thirteen-years-later, there are an estimated 25 thousand Afghan refugees living in the Bay Area; in Union City, an Afghan family resides practically on every other block. Some Afghans who are more established have left their two-bedroom apartments and moved into two-story houses. I have more Afghan girlfriends now. We still dance and gossip but our conversations have changed. They are not about lighthearted, fun, and inconsequential topics. Most of my friends are in their early twenties and on their minds are Afghan men and marriage.

Whenever I go home from college, almost every dialogue I have with my single Afghan girlfriends turns into a discussion of our dual identity, our limitations as females, and finding or being found by a compatible Afghan man. When we get engaged, our fiancée gives us the legitimacy to say, to do and to go places which are taboo for single girls. Single girls are generally limited to socialize only with their families and in family events, such weddings and picnics. (Afghans only refer to married or widowed females as women; single females are girls. I will be using the same terminology to avoid confusion.) Currently most of my girlfriends are either engaged or married.

I am writing about Afghan newlyweds and engaged couples because they are negotiating new rules and roles for Afghan men and women. As the young Afghan generation, these couples have a familiarity with American society which eases the integration of the isolated, fearful, displaced refugee community into the mainstream culture. Afghan elders tend to be segregated from and unaware of the mainstream culture but the young, as a result of their exposure in school and work, are helping the elders understand *Amrika*, the young, in effect, create a space for themselves which maintains a connection both with the community and the larger society. There are three main regions where Afghans have settled in the U.S: the New York boroughs, the Washington Metropolitan Area and the largest population is in the Bay Area in California.

This study discusses all three regions and examines the varying stages of assimilation among young Afghan individuals in each area. The first chapter outlines a brief history of Afghan refugees drawing on the geopolitics of Afghanistan and their status as refugees in the U.S. It is a general overview of young Afghans' perceptions and reactions to the transformations occurring in the community.

The second chapter concerns the problems of first generation young Afghans coping with two "clashing" cultures, acknowledged as American and Afghan. The necessity for a dual identity and the development of that duality is examined. The dilemmas of each gender are interpreted. Some young Afghan men are dealing with displacement and a loss of Islamic patriarchal status but an increased responsibility of supporting their families, while others are suffering from a lack of role models and direction. The community grants boys implicit consent to break the Islamic moral codes. They participate in America's social life (i.e., clubbing, dating, pre-marital sex) but they want an untouched, inexperienced Afghan wife. The women, on the other hand, are more restricted in their activities and lifestyle. Their major conflict is sustaining an honorable reputation of purity and modesty to keep the family dignity and attract respectable suitors and at the same time try to fit into American society by being sexy and romantic (expect to fall in love). Males and females voice a personal desire to stay loyal to Afghan traditions although in their lifestyle, many deviate from traditional bounds.

Both genders build a bicultural identity but it is seldom manifested at the same time. In the community, only the Afghan self must be present to avoid offending elders and to keep the traditions alive. The American self is expressed at work, in school and in some cases, among Afghan peers. Furthermore, the Afghan self is not affirmed outside the community because neither the Afghan nor any other Islamic cultures are widely represented in America as one of the recognized minority cultures. Thus, Afghans tend to keep their moral values and differing social life hidden in the public sphere in order to avoid being different. Also, young Afghans fear being outcasts if they tell their American friends or classmates about their Afghan self. One attractive 19-year-old who receives constant attention from boys told me, "Of course, I can't go out with them when they ask me. So I just tell them I have a boyfriend. They'll think I'm weird or something if I tell them we have arranged marriages." Weddings and concerts are few of the settings where hybridities emerge. Afghan boys and girls, otherwise, assert their duality when they get engaged or married.

The bulk of this paper focuses on the relationships of the hybrid generation. I traveled to the three areas and collected data through participant observation and conducting interviews. Of course, my personal experience as an Afghan girl will be a guide for examining the dynamics of change in the community. I will use other literature about the Afghan community and writings concerning acculturation, dual identity and gender in Islam to investigate the conflicts of the refugee community and the shifting concepts of gender.

The implications for the increasing number of marriages and engagements are explored. Besides gaining status as adults, Afghan boys and girls have diverse reasons for marrying, such as achieving autonomy or exerting control. Some of the conflicts these couples encounter will be analyzed. Tensions rise in relationships when the males suffer from a loss of power and leadership, while the females have gained more independence. Afghan females are armed with mobility, financial self-sufficiency, and education which they use to delegitimize and disobey their partner's traditional demands. Many of these females, however, feel guilty for this newly found power and tend to self-restrict themselves due to their internalized sense of shame. Certain couples find their ordeals unsalvageable and their relationship ends in divorce or breakup. Other couples have begun to construct new roles for a husband and wife, mother and father in order to resolve their conflicts.

The partners who fell in love discuss the battle they fought to be together and be accepted as a couple by their families. Some of the interviewees said their marriage or engagement was arranged with consent from both sides but the remaining asserted they committed to each other because they fell in love. In the community, dating is explicitly prohibited but it happens among a considerable number of Afghans behind closed doors. Love marriages are a manifestation of the social transformations in the community. Even arranged marriages have liberalized in America; most females choose which suitor to marry and certain families allow their daughters to get to know their suitors before deciding to commit to wedlock. The rules are changing every day and the elders, the current lawmakers in the community, are forced to accept these changes.

The preceding statements are generalizations. I apply certain stylistic aspects of anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod's approach to studying culture in this ethnography. Abu-Lughod suggests that defining cultural patterns and traditions homogenizes and simplifies culture and therefore, it is more "useful" to write "against culture" and let the subjects define themselves (Abu-Lughod, 1991). I recognize cultural patterns and traditions to set up a context in which to understand the informants but at the same time, I avoid simplifying culture by including detailed narratives (Abu-Lughod's ethnographies of the particular) in order to emphasize the tensions and inconsistencies contrary to typical patterns and traditions. I concentrate primarily on what culture means for the informants.

I formally interviewed 12 engaged and 20 newly married Afghan individuals. Two Afghans are involved with non-Afghan Muslims in this sample and these "outsiders" will be included in this study. The

approximately two-hour interviews were taped and in some I just took notes. The tape recorder was an imposition for some who did not tell me their feelings and thoughts until I turned it off. The sample I have of 11 individuals in the Virginia/Washington D.C. area, 17 of Bay Area Afghans and six of the New York City boroughs is by no means a comprehensive representation of Afghans in the U.S. but it is telling of the general conflicts Afghan couples face in this country. Some of the interviewees are my friends and relatives while others are former classmates and contacts I made through networking in the community. The interviews were conducted in Dari, the Afghan dialect of Persian, and English. Twelve couples were interviewed together and again individually where possible. Certain responses to questions were different when couples were interviewed separately but those differences were not significant. I interviewed nine females and one male whose mates were not available or refused to talk to me. Altogether, 21 females and 13 males were interviewed. All names of interviewees and some places have been changed to respect the privacy of the informants. All names and certain places have been changed to respect the privacy of the informants.

The group I interviewed was in Afghanistan from middle and upper class backgrounds in terms of income and status. Their parents were mostly the educated elite or top merchants in their homeland. The interviewees were all born in Afghanistan except for one male, who was born in the U.S. but lived in Afghanistan for a short time. The informants fall into the age range 18 to 38. They have been engaged or married for no more than six years. Seven interviewees have children. One couple is pregnant. Most of the informants lived either in Pakistan, India, Iran or a European country before settling in the U.S. All have been in this country or Europe for at least six years.

Thirty of the 34 interviewed are employed. Eight of the interviewees—four females and four males—are working in the professional fields while six own small businesses. The rest work in the medical, service or manufacturing industry. Three of the females have never worked outside the home to earn money. Thirteen informants are in college studying various disciplines or getting technical training for vocational work.

My reputation in the community, gender and appearance as the interviewer influenced the responses that were given by these couples. Those who knew me were more open and expressive while the ones that had heard of me or saw me for the first time were more apprehensive in their answers. Since I was an insider, many held back, fearing that I would share their personal lives with other Afghans. But my blond hair and college education-away-from-home (both a rarity) either encouraged them to be more open or give me answers acceptable by American values. The females were more comfortable disclosing information about their current problems with their partners but the males revealed much more about their past relationships than the females did. Some males felt uncomfortable talking about any conflicts; they tried to paint a perfect picture of their relationship and their lives. For the most part, I was surprised that these culturally private individuals responded with ease to the personal questions I asked. I tried to speak to couples and individuals from a diverse group of Afghans in order to reflect the varying family backgrounds, ideals, education, shifting mentalities and ordeals.

C H A P T E R O N E

The Acculturation of the Afghan Refugee Community in the U.S.

In 1978, the Afghan Marxists overthrew the existing dictatorship in Afghanistan and instituted a Soviet puppet regime. A brewing resistance movement among the different Afghan ethnic groups united to form the Afghan *Mujahideen* (freedom fighters) and, with American arms, they began fighting a 13-year war against the former Soviet Union and the Afghan communist government. When the war first started, the population of Afghanistan was approximately 16 (Dupree, 1988: 146). Today, six million of those are refugees as a result of the prolonged war, making Afghans the largest refugee population in the world (Refugee Reports, cited in Omidian, 1986). About three million Afghan refugees live in camps in Pakistan and three million in Iran. The rest, about 100 thousand are scattered across the globe but more than 60 thousand have settled in the United States (Voice of America broadcast reports, 1995).

A BRIEF HISTORY

Afghanistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia. Foreign contacts, especially with Britain and Russia, have influenced Afghanistan but since its inception in 1747, the country has never officially been colonized. Afghans make up a diversity of ethnic groups that have differing physical features and numerous tongues. Essentially though, they are predominantly Muslim, Indo-European speakers of Caucasian descent (Dupree, 1980: 55). At least twenty distinct ethnic factions that have separate languages and cultural traditions live in the multiple landscapes of this nation. The primary languages are Persian (Farsi, Dari) and Pashtu. The Pashtun ethnic group was the monarchical class for 150 years. The kinship system is patrilineal, authority is patriarchal, and residence is patrilocal. The fundamental social and economic unit is the extended family. Afghan society is highly stratified and hierarchical based on class, age, gender and family background. More than 90 percent of Afghans were agriculturists, herdsman, or both before the 1978 war broke out (Dupree, 1988, Shorish-Shamley, 1991).

SETTLING ON AMERICA'S COASTS

Most Afghan refugees came to the U.S. seeking political asylum. Almost every Afghan family has a story about their flight to safety and the dangers encountered on the way to one of the transitional countries of Pakistan, India or Iran before migrating to the U.S. Many have lost family members and relatives in the war. They come to America disillusioned by tragedies and the loss of their homeland, paranoid from living under a police state. Mental health problems are common among these victims of war. Under the heading "Afghan refugees in America," research guides list titles in numerous mental health journals.

The initial group of Afghans who became American immigrants in the early 1980s is the urbanite-educated elite. Many gave up government posts, professional positions and family businesses in Afghanistan. Women in this group tend to have less education than the men. Those who worked mainly held elementary or high school teaching positions (Omidian, 1996). As refugees in the U.S., many Afghans received federal aid and some continue to collect welfare and disability funds (Omidian, 1996: xiii).

Afghans at first lived in various states in America and an consolidated community did not develop until the last eight or nine years. Through the family reunification laws, many Afghans were able to sponsor their entire families to come to the U.S., which included those who were less educated and from a lower class status. When immigration policies toughened, some paid smugglers to bring them to America (McGrath, 1982: 35).

In the mid eighties, a small but growing Afghan community began to establish in primarily three areas of the U.S. Perhaps the mild weather and the high federal aid drew the majority of Afghans to California where population estimates range between three thousand to 40 thousand (Omidian, 1996: 4). A more reasonable inference is that currently around 20 (to 25) thousand Afghans live in the Bay Area (Omidian, 1996: 4). Maybe promises of entrepreneurship and the diversity of the New York City boroughs attracted the second largest population of Afghans which is about 10 to 15 thousand. Seven to 10 thousand reside in the Washington Metropolitan Area, which includes parts of Virginia, Maryland and the capital. (These estimates are taken from various sources such as the Afghan Academy in Virginia and scholars studying the Afghan community. There are no exact or accurate census data on Afghans in the U.S.)

Afghan enclaves developed in these areas partly because the first refugees established successful small businesses, such as pizza parlors and beauty salons. As a result, an economic network has formed and many who may have been living in separate states moved to the three regions, either to open businesses or join their immediate or extended families (fieldwork observations). The enclaves are social units segregated from mainstream America. The social life revolves around family parties, weddings and picnics. In New York there is a large Pashtun population, while in California and Virginia the enclaves consist of almost every ethnic group. Afghans in the different enclaves maintain frequent contact with each other and with relatives in Afghanistan and abroad (Omidian, 1996: xiii). However, "The Afghan community is undergoing shifts in focus, from viewing themselves only as members of extended families or on a larger scale as members of a particular ethnic group, and are starting to see themselves as an ethnic group in the landscape of American life" (Omidian, 1996: x).

REACTIONS TO CHANGE

Informants in each region have strong impressions regarding the metamorphoses of the different enclaves. The young Afghans seem to have adopted the varying characteristics of the host cultures in the three

areas, theorizes Nageen, 21, from New York. Nageen has traveled to see her relatives in the two other areas and she has noticed differences.

New York and California are equally diverse but New York is more of a mixing bowl where immigrant communities are given the space to remain traditional whereas in California, there's a melting pot effect. Afghans assimilate more into mainstream America there. My cousins used to live here (New York) and they moved there. Now the boys wear Armani suits and the girls have that valley-girl accent. As for DC Afghans, they are conservative like New York Afghans but more political and organized as a community.

Fahima, 21, from Virginia elaborated.

The Afghans I've met from San Francisco (Bay Area) are much more laid back compared to us. Here we're really ambitious and career-oriented, not to mention nationalistic.

Barri, 28, lived in Virginia for several years and is currently a Californian; he interpreted the differences from an economic standpoint.

You see, young Afghans have more time to have fun (in the Bay Area). Most of their families are receiving some kind of money from the government, so they don't have to really help support them. They work but they end up spending their money on clothes, parties and cars. But those in Virginia and New York must work to support their families. Those states don't give much welfare money. That's why Afghans are more *azad* (free) here and why a lot of them from other states are moving here.

These are popular notions that young Afghans have about their peers in the three regions. There is no reliable data to support these impressions since no comparative studies have been completed about the three enclaves. These stereotypes, nonetheless, reveal young Afghans' awareness of the influences changing the community. Change, however, is feared among the young and the old. In the Bay Area, psychologist Khalil Rahmany found that the young have the same fear their parents have: that America allows excessive independence and freedom to adolescents (Rahmany, 1989: 36). There is a nostalgic push to regenerate traditions and remain "Afghan" while simultaneously, reevaluating and reinterpreting identity and culture has become an endemic part of young Afghans' lives. "The biggest worries that the parents have right now is that their kids would change; and the biggest worry that the kids have is they don't want to change, but they change" (Omidian, 1994: 55). The issue of loyalty to Afghan traditions and the fear of assimilation that the young generation has will be assessed further in the second chapter.

In many cases, the young generation's practices betray their ideologies. For example; some couples who dated before marrying do not want their children to date. Korosh, 29, from Virginia explains.

I married the woman I dated and it just happened, you know. But I don't want my children dating because they will be following the wrong path. I mean we should continue our Afghan way because our marriages don't end in divorce. These people's (Americans) do.

Change has crept in the minds and lives of young Afghans; the numerous definitions and perspectives of what Afghan means to this generation signal a break in conventions. The adjective traditional has taken on new meanings and ramifications. Young Afghans in one enclave may be more conservative than the other but as a whole, the Afghan community in the U.S. is in a transitional stage.

There is one statement which the young Afghans in all three regions made. "We want our children to have freedoms within the Afghan limit." What is the Afghan limit? The definition of the Afghan limit is the most contested idea among young Afghans in the U.S. The older generation tends to have a clear consensus about Afghan traditions and codes of conduct (elements of the limit) but due to the younger generation's bicultural identity, that limit is vague and determined by individuals, families and the enclaves rather than the traditional Afghan culture.

For Soraya, 21, from New York, who is currently engaged and has never dated, dating and boyfriends are the ultimate sin and dishonor of culture—out of bounds. For Yasameen, 32, from Virginia who has divorced, dated and is remarried, dating is within the limit but pre-marital sex is "American," un-Afghan. For Rayhana, 22, from the Bay Area, who married the only boy she dated, having romantic relationships is fine as long as there is no physical contact, such as kissing, between the couple.

The males also have varying delineations of the Afghan limit, although their Afghan identity is challenged in different terms than females. In these interviews when the Afghan limit is discussed, it rarely regards Afghan males; value judgments and boundaries usually concern females. Part of being Afghan for males is their machismo mentality and while some interviewees questioned the mentality, many did not. Kamran, 32, from the Bay Area, who married an non-Afghan, expresses his viewpoint on being an Afghan male.

You see this is the way Afghan men are brought up. We're the ones making the decision. Ok, this is certain roles and you have to fall within these roles. But we are compromising. I'm not like other men. I'm not very old mind, very open mind. I like my wife wearing nice, open and beautiful clothes but she doesn't want it. So I love that. Otherwise, for me it doesn't make any difference. The problem is in our society, people talk too much...I don't tell her what to do and what not to do.

Males embrace the power and authority they are given in the public sphere. Issues framing identity for Afghan males did not necessarily concern dating but family loyalty and respect.

Neglecting to provide for your family when they are in need shows a neglect of Afghan values and an embracing of "American selfishness" for Rashid, 26, from the Bay Area. Siavash, 23, from Virginia, pondered marrying his French girlfriend but concluded that matrimony with a non-Afghan might threaten his authority. He stated that by simply thinking about marriage with a non-Afghan, he was crossing his boundary as an Afghan male. Zaid, 25, from Virginia, considers drinking, gambling and pre-marital un-Islamic and therefore, a disgrace to his Afghan as well as Muslim integrity.

Individuals have their separate notions of the Afghan limit but the community does not validate these diverse definitions. "The children have to translate American culture for their parents, but they do not have the status in the family to make that knowledge acceptable" (Omidian, 1996: 150). The legitimate judge of the Afghan limit is the family; what the family (or ethnic group) define as their limit is recognized and accepted in the community. In other words, if I am the only young female in my family wearing short skirts, I will be talked about and judged by the community, but if all the young females in my extended and immediate family wear short skirts, there is no conflict. An Afghan might make a remark about the length of my skirt, but it is most likely that the reply will be, "Her family is *azad* (free). It is ok for them to wear that." Therefore, varying definitions of the Afghan limit (essentially behavior and lifestyle) exist in the community but are normally accepted when the family supports those definitions. The young Afghans who live their lives within the boundaries of their family limit are respected, accepted and praised, not just by the older generation but by their Afghan peers as well. Those who rebel openly against their families are ridiculed and ostracized. They are labeled "Americanized."

Gossip among members of the community is one method which keeps the young generation in bounds. Gossip functions as a means for controlling Afghans and instilling fear against resistance. Emler writes that "gossip can function as a form of social control discouraging individuals from straying too far from collective standards through fear of public criticism and its consequences...by dealing with concrete instances of moral transgression, (gossip) gives routine operational definition to otherwise rather abstract principles of morality" (Emler, 1994: 134-35). A Dari warning commonly harped at those who ignore defined limits is *bad ast*, literally translated as "It is bad," but the underlying connotation is that social misconduct or ignoring social expectations can damage the family and the individual's reputation.

Afghans who are protective of their family name may rebel against family or cultural rules but they usually do so in private, out of other Afghans' sight. For instance, the couples who dated in this study avoided meeting in places which Afghans frequented. Others are scared of gossip to the extent that they often ignore their desire to rebel. Mitra, 23, from California remarks, "I'd never do anything that would hurt my name because once you're reputation's messed with, it's over. You'll be stared at and talked about for the rest of your life."

The threat of gossip is so powerful in the Afghan community that several couples married before they wanted to in order to avoid perpetuating "talk," as referred to in Dari. Young Afghans' cultural dilemmas normally remain private and discussed only among family members. Again, who is talked about and why depends on the individuals' family standing. Families who are "conservative" or "free" have been so historically and there is seldom a subtext of gossip about the "free" families. Nahid, 19, from the Bay Area elaborates.

How *azad* you are, what your limits of dress and mobility are depends on your family standards, not necessarily the community you live in. I mean California Afghans are more *azad* as a whole (compared to Virginia and New York) because really westernized families, like the Mohammedzais (Afghanistan's royal family), live here. But believe me, we have our conservatives too.

In Afghan families, whether conservative or *azad*, one of the major ordeals is the generation gap between parents and children (Omidian, 1996: 151). The crux of this gap is the old generation's need to keep the young generation within Afghan traditions and the young generation's struggle to break free of these barriers without disappointing their families. A central factor leading to the despairing attitudes toward "American culture" and competing values between the young and old is an American education. The young become integrated and exposed to multitudes of cultures and ideologies in academic institutions and as a result, their conceptualization of identity and culture may vary from their parents' generation. Parents encourage their children to excel in their education and to become economically established. The control they hold over their children, consequently, minimizes and the "Americanization" of the young generation is harbored. What kind of an education the young receive and how they find ways to succeed in the American meritocracy system is essential to their mutable disposition.

AGE, EDUCATION AND CHANGE

A noticeable generational difference among the informants is that young Afghans are generally less educated here in the U.S. than their parents were in Afghanistan. Their parents came here as refugees who were forced to leave their status and money behind. "The major employment for this generation is buying and selling goods at local flea markets, an activity that brings in cash while allowing families to keep Medi-Cal and other benefits to which they have become accustomed" in the Bay Area (Omidian, 1994: 107-108). Therefore, the younger generation of Afghans do not have the status, wealth and resources to succeed in the U.S. that their parents had had in Afghanistan.

The younger generation must hurdle obstacles that a new culture entails. For those young Afghans who came before their teens, it was easier to learn English and accomplish in the American education system. Nineteen of the Afghan interviewees came here in their teens, nine were preteens or younger and four were in their early twenties. Some of those who arrived in their teens had some knowledge of the English language

from taking English courses in either Pakistan or India, but most said that learning English in high school was the hardest challenge to adjusting in America. This group includes many English terms in their conversations, but the sentence structure, main ideas and feelings are expressed in Persian. Another obstacle to higher education and professional careers was the lack of money. Many interviewees said they had to work during high school and afterwards to help support their families. "I dropped out of college twice to work. My family needed the extra income. We were eating bread and tea for six months," Dina, 21, from the Bay Area confides. In many Afghan families the kids, parents and at times extended family members combine salaries to make the lower-middle class income break in the U.S. (Rahmany, 1992: 65).

Besides economic and language barriers, the teen immigrants also had to learn about the new education system. They had to familiarize themselves with college preparatory courses, college application forms and standardized tests. And then, they were told they had to pay to go to a good college. Where were they supposed to get the money? Financial aid was available to students who had taken honors courses and had good grades. They were still in ESL or Beginning English. Discouraged, overwhelmed and burnt out, these refugee teens turned to community college and two-year vocational programs for their future. As Zorah, 22, from the Bay Area put it, "I entered as a freshman. The work was extremely hard because I didn't know the language. The fact that I graduated high school in four years is a miracle." She was attending community college on and off and finally decided to enroll in an occupational program to become a certified nurse. She has a year left to complete the program and while she's studying, she's also working part-time in a retail store and taking care of her husband and her two-year-old son. However, her dream was to be a heart surgeon and that she feels is unattainable now.

Some teen arrivals overcame the hurdles and received a four-year college degree. From the pool interviewed, two are engineers, one male and one female and one male is a computer graphics artist. A few others who currently have blue-collar jobs are striving to get their degree for white-collar work. Nadia, 30, from Virginia, came here in her early twenties with an engineering degree and experience but ended up as a low-paid restaurant worker. Engineers and doctors educated in Afghanistan must go back to school and obtain the American license to work in the U.S. (Omidian, 1994: 108).

I could've gone back to engineering but I had to get my license and we (her family) thought why ruin our siblings' futures? Because if I had gone to school again, none of them would've been able to study. Besides, I had worked and had my opportunity to be someone. I thought now was my younger siblings' turn.

Nadia has worked her way up from a bus girl to restaurant manager; now her income falls into the middle-class range in America.

The nine who arrived before their teens, two—married first cousins—are working professionals with degrees, three are in college, three are skilled workers with two-year degrees and one is a housewife with a high school diploma. This group learned English quickly and is more comfortable speaking it than Persian. In high school, they did not have to help provide for their families in part because their parents were more established than those who immigrated in their teens. The preteen arrivals had a better understanding of the education system. In other words, the doors to higher education and "meaningful" employment are wide open for this group and most are taking advantage of their opportunities. "I'm majoring in political science and English literature. I'm not sure what I want to do but I'm going to be somebody," says Soraya.

The male and female informants both said their parents pushed them to do well in academics but a gender bias is evident; it is more important for males to receive a better education than females since they are the expected leader of the family. Females receive support to become educated but within cultural bounds. Single girls generally live with their families until they are married and only certain families allow their daughters to move away for college. For example, Soraya asserts that she was accepted to several accredited colleges distant from her home but her parents would not allow her to go. They said it was good enough for her to attend the local four-year city college in Queens while her brother was permitted to attend college in Manhattan. In some cases, however, the females have more opportunities to continue their education than the males. Afghan males are expected to contribute to family incomes and at times responsible for supporting their families. They are forced to take menial jobs and put their educational endeavors to the side. Shafiq, 38, settled in New York when he was 24 and he had to support his family, who were living in India, plus himself. He began selling Persian carpets for \$130 a week and now his salary has increased but he has not had a chance to go to college. "My biggest regret is not being able to get an education which is one of the best advantages about this country."

So how is education the impetus for change in the Afghan community? Zorah's perspective is elucidating.

In our country, there was a lack of education, which explains a lot of the backward behaviors Afghans have. Here we have the opportunity to learn and really communicate with each other. I learned that a married couple can be friends, that women have rights and choices. I'm working day and night to be a nurse. I'm doing something for myself...As for my children, I will treat my son and daughter (if she has one) equally, give them equal freedom.

This chapter has been an overview analyzing the elements contributing to the transformation of the Afghan community as well as a general background of Afghan refugees in the U.S. I tried to relate the array of attitudes toward change and responses to this transformation plus the ways of restoring traditions. The Afghan community's fear of disintegration has sparked a campaign among the old and some of the young to hold on

tight to the "old way" and forge the solidarity they left behind in Afghanistan. But the young individuals are re-examining and reinventing the "old culture" and forming a new discourse. This struggle and process of Afghans becoming bicultural will be analyzed in the following chapter.

C H A P T E R T W O

**Forming Dual Identities:
Dilemmas of the Afghan male and female**

I think the reason we came here (from Afghanistan is because), you realize that God could take everything from you. When you realize you're a minority, you start to look for your identity; you start to search for it. You could just disappear and be one of the crowd. You'll never be an American, so you might as well be strong in your own identity.

--Behnush, 25, New York

What is "your own identity" to the 32 Afghans interviewed? It is Afghan. It is American. It is Muslim. It is Afghan-American and American Afghan. It is none of those labels and it is all of those labels. In the midst of two cultures that the informants say collide almost every time they cross, another culture is created. This new culture is a mixture of dual languages, values, and interaction. "The constructions of self are simultaneously cultural constructions in that they reconstitute" definitions (Bruner, 1988: 6). It is a new discourse conquered by those who have learned to compromise and create. The pioneers thrust into this midst are individuals whose agency has emerged through two competing worlds. Some struggle daily to build an identity that will allow them to be two people at once, accepted in both cultures. They yearn to belong but find themselves displaced in both societies. Others find comfort in isolation; they segregate themselves from anything marked "American" by the community and try to build a "pure" Afghan identity.

These first generation immigrants are confronted externally with contesting value systems and lifestyles and internally with a desire to formulate a sense of self that integrates those differences. This reflexive process of developing a bicultural identity sharpens their consciousness of the other, which they perceive as America and Americans and in some cases, Afghans in their own community. Through a dialogical conceptualization of self and culture, the informants basically construct an accentuated dual identity or split self. Hybridization and duality are not isolated to Afghan individuals; practically every individual experiences hybridity. Due to displacement and deterritorialization, Afghan individuals deal with an *accentuated* duality rooted in biculturalism. In this context, there is a dual self who reconciles the perceived two cultures comfortably (in which the split is not conflictive) and then there are those who constantly feel they must meet the environmental demands and deliberately adjust their personality according to where they are, and feel as if they're "putting on an act" all the time. They have a "divided self" (Bandlamudi, 1994: 475).

Culture is fluid and temporal. "Whether conceived of as a set of behaviors, customs, traditions, rules, plans, recipes, instructions or programs...culture is learned and can change" (Abu-Lughod, 1991: 144). Bruner

adds that "self and society are not taken as given, as fully formed, fixed, and timeless, as either integrated selves or functionally consistent structures. Rather, self and society are always in production, in process" (Bruner, 1998: 23). My goal is to specify how, in concrete situations in the Diasporas Afghan cultural setting in America, self and society reformulate. How the young Afghan generation combines the "American" and "Afghan" cultures is contingent upon many factors such as the time, place, background and especially gender. How does agency—the ability to redirect influence—emerge in these subjects? In other words, how do Afghan individuals blend discourses to reinvent counter discourses? What are the struggles they experience in developing this new identity? How and when is this duality expressed, if at all?

COMMON STRUGGLES

Afghan male and female immigrants encounter different dilemmas when they are introduced to American culture. (American culture will be defined by the informants' perceptions throughout the chapter.) Generally, the female's battle breaking traditional boundaries to gain more autonomy while the males try to maintain their traditional authority and status. (I refer to traditions and traditional pertaining to the Afghan community as "views given content through the practices of daily life and talk and organized in particular ways in rituals, but views whose coherence depends ultimately on continuities people experience among the things they do, the organization of...'a form of life' " (Rosaldo, 1980: 26).) However, conflicts that force an evaluation of ethnic/national identity which transcend gender are a shared feeling of displacement and a connection to Afghanistan. Furthermore, problems of language and expression cause tension in asserting the self. There is also the common struggle evident for both Afghan males and females in acknowledging a bicultural identity and an ambivalence to be authentically Afghan and Muslim.

DISPLACEMENT

Jila is a 25-year-old engineering student in California. She lives alone with her mother in an Afghan-populated apartment complex. Her father, a businessman, and one of her brothers died during the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and her two other brothers live in Europe. She came to the United States with her mom at 17 after five years of living in near-poverty in India. Jila confides that she immigrated to the Bay Area determined to take care of her mom and herself. After eight years, she has a semester left to get her engineering degree, a guaranteed job awaiting her and a South Asian fiancée whom she deeply loves. Yet she still feels torn.

I don't consider myself a traditional Afghan girl. I don't follow those guidelines. You understand what I mean. I'm stuck in the middle trying to figure out who I am...I'm trying to please everyone (family, fiancée, in-laws) and sometimes I fail. It's frustrating.

Jila wishes she had been born in the United States or still lived in Afghanistan. She said then she could have avoided the split she feels in herself.

Zaid is a 25-year-old engineer in Virginia. He lives with his parents and his two sisters. One of his brothers, who chose to fight in the Bosnian war supporting the Muslims, died three years ago. His father worked in the Ministry of Information in Afghanistan and in Virginia, his family is very active in the community. They lived in Pakistan for five years and attended a Pakistani school where he and his siblings learned English. The entire family was politically involved in the resistance movement against the Marxists, including Zaid. In the eighties his family had planned to go back to their homeland until they realized that Afghanistan was not safe for living. Nine years ago, they immigrated to Colorado. Since there was no Afghan community in Colorado, they relocated to Virginia. Zaid entered college with one goal in mind—to go back to Afghanistan and help his people. "I had planned to go back and stay there. I was so interested that every time I thought about it, I wanted to cry." Immediately after his college graduation, he took his engineering skills and innovative ideas for reconstruction to his hometown, Herat, only to be shunned and sent back by his compatriots. They told him that he was an American whom they did not trust and they did not want his help. Betrayed and disappointed, Zaid recounts, he returned to the U.S. Today's Afghanistan was not his country anymore and he could never call America his homeland. Zaid felt homeless and displaced.

These are examples of two individuals who have succeeded in America's meritocracy system and have become professionals who will most likely have prosperous futures. However, they identify strongly with their nationality and feel culturally dislocated living in America. Rahmany's dissertation on the "...Psychological Adjustment of the Afghan Refugees in the United States" posits that losing one's homeland is comparable to losing a loved one (Rahmany, 1992). The mourning process involves the same feelings of guilt, anxiety and sadness. Rahmany found that young *and* old Afghans had difficulty adjusting to the American environment. Integrating into the work place, learning the language and the unfamiliarity of the education system were obstacles which made acculturation difficult for these Afghans. His informants thought the drawbacks of American culture were "too much freedom for adolescents (this includes adolescents' perceptions), premarital sex, drug and alcohol abuse and a lack of respect for elders" (Rahmany, 1992). Most of Rahmany's informants voiced a desire to return to Afghanistan if peace and stability were secured (Rahmany, 1992).

After coming back from Afghanistan, Zaid not only lost his homeland but his cause. Jila feels the loss of her country contributed to the loss of a stable social identity. Few of my informants expressed a desire to return to Afghanistan permanently but felt this connection, whether romanticized or "real," and explained that they would go back to visit.

CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY

The common feeling of displacement in America among Afghans is the impetus for a call to be authentically Afghan/Muslim and not American/Western. The lack of representation of Afghan culture and the misrepresentation of Muslims in mainstream culture cause a feeling of alienation. No matter how isolated

their lives may be at home, Afghans must assimilate and accommodate to mainstream America at some point. Even inside their homes, the media penetrates their lives and influences their thoughts. There is very little choice in deciding whether to allow American culture to affect one or not. The power dynamics between America and the Afghan self are extremely unequal. There is little control in how to be and who to be when the mainstream culture is omni-present and there is no recognition of one's subculture within that mainstream. Further, Afghans encounter discrimination like other minorities and immigrants in this country, which exacerbates the sense of Otherness and alienation. When Behnush says, "You'll never be an American," she explains that she feels Americans do not view her as one of them. She has an American accent when she speaks English but her bronze skin and dark hair set her apart.

Do you think there's such a thing as an Afghan-American?

-No, because Americans will always be prejudiced against you. Always. You know how I know? They never say anything bad about you in front of you but an American Chinese, an American Jewish, any other ethnic group, if you're sitting with white people, as soon as (ethnic people) leave the room, you hear the prejudices. What makes you think that you're so special that when you leave the room, they're not going to say that about you? You always have to have your own identity. I mean yeah, I'm American Afghan but I'm Muslim first but then American Afghan.

Some say that you have to be one or the other, that you can't be both. How do you feel about that?

-No, I think that you have to be both. You were born there (Afghanistan) and to a certain extent, you have the morals of there, you were raised there.

And being Afghan

-There's all the memories in Afghanistan, going to school...I have a lot of positive memories of my uncles and my aunts.

Do you feel a special connection to the people?

-Yeah, I do... Afghanistan is always first. I don't know if I have any loyalties here, I just know I could never leave this country because I'm used to living here and the language and everything. Afghanistan is my country first. My loyalty is there.

Behnush has two definitions of "American" here: one is that of a white-American whom she feels discriminates against her and therefore, she distances herself from this definition; the second meaning of American which Behnush applies to herself encompasses language (English) and familiarity. The first definition is external—what Behnush sees as others' (whites) view of American, while her second interpretation is internal—what *she* considers American. Previous to this Behnush says, "You could disappear and be one of the crowd," implying that she may be *recognized* as an American but then her Afghan self will not be acknowledged unless she asserts it.

Behnush's perspective of "being Afghan" seem much more determined and fixed to morality, memories, birthplace, and patriotism. Her public identity is a Muslim Afghan although she recognizes her duality. The pressure from the community to be Afghan has perhaps also influenced Behnush to embrace the difference which excludes her from mainstream (popular) culture. Behnush does not authenticize being Afghan so much as being Muslim. Behnush tells me she practices Islam in its pure form, clean from Afghans' cultural bias. "It's not a menu...you have to take everything that's a part of Islam; it's there (in the Koran or Hadith) for a reason." She strives to be first, an authentic Muslim and then Afghan.

Cultural authenticity suggests that each culture is pure and original and exclusively different than any other culture. It emerges from the concept that culture is coherent and fixed, a set of rules and behaviors, which can be applied to all who are a part of that culture. Many of my informants perceive culture as a given blueprint for how they should live their life. In short, inequality, alienation, insecurity, fragmentation which essentially turn to fear, result in the need for authenticity. "Authenticity as a need to rely on an 'undisputed origin,' is prey to an obsessive fear: that of losing a connection. Everything must hold together. In my craving for a logic of being, I cannot help but loathe the threats of interruption, disseminations, and suspensions. To begin, to develop to a climax, then, to end. To fill, to join, to unify" (Minh-ha, 1989: 94).

Traditions, language, history, religion and patriotism provide the basis to define the authentic and inauthentic. Hence, the perceptions are: Afghans who speak Dari or Pashtu fluently are more Afghan and more secure of their Afghan identity than those who do not, Afghan sons and daughters who obey their parents are more Afghan than those who do not, etc. Some families who were "modern" and *azad* in Afghanistan have shifted to a more conservative lifestyle in America in order to remain "Afghan." Nadia describes how her family's social life changed since they have immigrated from Afghanistan to Virginia in 1984.

You are Afghan, we told (our younger siblings) from the beginning and our home environment was such that (she changes from Persian into English and apologizes)...After I got settled down and my father died and all that passed, we had to set some standards. I said, 'Mom, I'm old enough. I know what to do now. These others, we have to be careful and we stick with the religion really hard. We pray all the time. We followed every religious ritual and we took on complete Afghanism. Never would anyone talk English in the house. No one had a right to be out of the house after 10 at night except for my sister and me who were working. In fact, even though I had a car, my mom would take one of my brothers and pick me up at night. My mom always talked about God and the Qur'an so they would have a fear. And a respect. Our lifestyle changed here. We became much more conservative here. In Kabul, we were liberal, liberal within limits that is, but now we've cut it all off. Eighty percent of the social life and interactions we had in Afghanistan, we cut off. Because of that now, my brothers go to Friday prayers.

The yearning to be authentic is so strong that some informants, reactionaries, believe it is not possible to be Afghan and American because the two cultures are mutually exclusive and although one can adopt positive values, like "working hard," from Americans, it would be "wrong" and a betrayal to the community to call oneself an Afghan-American. To do so indicates confusion and a loss of ethnic identity. Sophia, 23, talks about her reaction to a classmate who did not call herself Afghan.

I've asked one of my classmates where she was from because I could tell she was Afghan because of her features. She told me 'I was born in America but my parents are from Afghanistan.' Well, say you're from Afghanistan! You're Afghan too. And those who have grown up here, I haven't seen them act in a positive way. They're always-- in their clothes and the way they act - I don't like it.

Authenticity encourages conventionalism and gives the community and the individuals within it a sense of security and empowerment. The loyalty that the informants expressed toward Afghan traditions pointed to a need for unity and solidarity. That label—Afghan—symbolizes stability and no matter what it can impose—confinement, oppression, confusion—it seems to hold a relentless power over this young generation. They reevaluate, reinterpret and transform the concept of its meaning but the word, the nationality, does not change. "The order and the links create an illusion of continuity, which I highly prize for fear of nonsense and emptiness. Thus, a clear origin will give me a connection back through time, and I shall, by all means, search for that genuine layer of myself to which I can always cling. To abolish it in such a perspective is to remove the basis, the prop, the overture, or the finale—giving thereby free rein to indeterminacy (Minh-ha, 1989: 94).

GENDER CONFLICTS

A study was completed by two American anthropologists about Afghan females in the Bay Area (Lipson, Miller, 1994). Although their sample group includes females from a broad age group and generations, their findings are similar to mine. "The interviews revealed a number of the conflicts and role stressors experienced by the Afghan refugee women: intergenerational and intergender conflict over women's freedom, the conflict between maintaining traditional values and becoming Americanized, role overload from adding new American roles to preexisting or expected Afghan roles, lack of role models and suitable spouses for single women, and parenting difficulties" (Lipson, 1994: 175). The issues that my female informants dealt with, since they are the young generation, mostly concerned independence and Americanization vs. keeping traditional roles and values; however, among the older women "role overload" is a major difficulty.

Soraya's family arrived in New York after a three-year stay in Pakistan in 1984. She was nine-years-old. She would wear traditional Pakistani outfits (a long straight dress and loose pants) when they first came, but her cousins, who had been in the U.S. for awhile longer, were embarrassed to be seen with her in public

because she looked different. Feeling left out, she bought herself a pair of pants and wore them to school one day.

-It was only a few weeks that I had come to America. I wore it and I thought I was cool. I came home and my dad said 'What are you wearing?' He gave me a real bad look. 'What the hell are you wearing? This is not what I expect from my daughter.' Since we were living with other family, my uncle and his wife, they convinced my dad that I was just a kid and it was okay to be wearing that. But the first moment, he gave me a real bad look.

Did you know what was bad about it?

-No, I'm telling you, I thought it was very cool.

You didn't know why he was upset?

-No, but he explained. 'What are you wearing, dear? Your pants are too tight. We're Afghans. We don't wear such things. People see and look at you.' When he said these things, I understood. I wasn't stupid but I didn't predict that if I wear this, my dad's going to see and scold me. When he did, then I understood.

By wearing Western clothes that seemed revealing, Soraya jeopardized her modesty, her purity, her shame and thus, the integrity of her family. She did not know this at age nine but when she says she "understood" later what her father meant, she became aware that if she was modest, untouched, and carried a sense of shame in her behavior and appearance, then she would be respected by other Afghans and bring honor to her family. These "qualities" in addition to beauty and housekeeping skills attract the most suitors. These female attributes, which are rooted in Afghan ideals and some in Islamic customs, legitimize a woman's existence since the only acceptable roles for her are marriage and childbearing (Lipson, 1984: 173).

It is important to provide a background for the gender issues my informants encounter and in this section, historical perspectives of gender are examined. Concepts of gender in Afghan culture are not homogenous but have been constructed in a patriarchal structure that assigns women roles as mothers and caretakers. In most places in Afghanistan, women are segregated and limited to the private domain (Sharif, 1994: 62). One interpretation for this hierarchical system is the assumption of a nature/culture dichotomy in Afghanistan in which women's reproductive capabilities demonstrate their connection to nature and their closeness to their child shows their nurturing character. "Thus, men and women divided roles according to their natural and biological capacities: women chose to stay at home and nurture the children—the domestic sphere; men hunted and protected the community—the social and cultural sphere" (Sanday, cited in Sharif, 1994). This ideology is deeply problematic and inaccurate from a historical and cross-cultural perspective but it is noted here because "...the origin of inequality lies not in naturally different abilities or temperaments, but in cultural attempts to explain or control women's central role in reproduction. Women's biology does not make

her weaker, less intelligent, or more submissive than man, but it does make her society's source of new members... Cultures tend to interpret, organize motherhood in ways that accentuate differences between the sexes and lead to sexual asymmetry" (Coontz, 1986: 12). However, the nature/culture dichotomy is validated in Islamic interpretations (here, I refer to people's perceptions and way of life in certain Islamic cultures, not necessarily the actual meaning or intention of Islamic scriptures) which is the most powerful legitimizing force in Muslim societies such as the Afghan community.

Many Afghan cultural values and beliefs stem from Islamic interpretations, including the prescribed roles and conduct for men and women. Mernissi's deconstruction of male-female relations in Islam relates to the general Afghan mentality regarding women. Mernissi writes that in Islamic tradition, a woman's sexuality is her greatest power to be feared and contained (Mernissi, 1987). Women are armed with *fitna*—being sexual, nurturing and provoking men's desires. *Fitna* can lead to disorder. Men have an ambivalent relationship with women; they love and desire women but at the same time, they have no power to control this desire. If women are given the freedom to exercise this power (ie, the ability to evoke men's uncontrollable desires) in the *umma*—Islamic community, sexual interaction will take place outside the "home," destroying the sanctity of the family (the central unit in Islam) and resulting in chaos and social disorder (Mernissi, 1987). Therefore, women's sexuality puts them in a paradoxical position; their ability to give birth and pleasure to men justifies their status and existence but their provocative bodies are a potential source of disturbance. Women can bring shame to men's honor. Women are insecure, clean and in need of protection against offenses to their moral purity, yet they are also threatening due to their enticing nature (Afshar, cited in Sharif, 1994).

"Honor and shame are the two main aspects of people's mentality towards social interactions, behaviors, and relations in Islamic tradition, which even existed in pre-Islamic Arab culture" (Sharif, 1994:43). Women are keepers of shame and men are seekers of honor yet this categorization must be expanded to include the understanding that both genders have a *sense* of shame and honor. For example, modesty, an honorable value, is given to men and women but it entails different implications for each. For females, modesty suggests silence, passivity and hiding of feminine features (Sharif, 1994: 39) whereas for men, it indicates humility, hospitality and straightforwardness. Men engaging in homosexual activity can also bring dishonor to themselves and their families. Kafatou's analysis of honor and shame in Greek society parallels Afghan ideals of this dichotomy. "...the honourable man is clever, active, fearless, etc.; the honourable woman, in contrast, is humble, subservient, respectful, silent, and--above all—chaste. In fact, sexual shame is such an important aspect of a woman's honour, that on the whole shame and sexual shame are interchangeable terms" (Kafatou, 1992: 10). In essence, women become the property of their spouse and male relatives (Tapper, 1991: 207). Subversion of the honor and shame system are not uncommon as Tapper found in her research of Maduzai Pushtuns in northern Afghanistan (1991) but the family and community in Afghan discourses are the primary components of Afghan society, and maintaining order and solidarity in these two units are central to every individual, man and woman. Thus, individuals tend to gain a sense of power by remaining loyal and submit to the status quo because they are participating in keeping the family/community united.

The two dichotomies I discuss in this section—nature/culture and shame/honor—exist in Afghan culture but of course, there are distinct interpretations and practices contingent on the tribe, ethnic group or the rural/urban factor. Afghans who have come to the U.S. do not all hold such beliefs but they are aware of these dynamics and the older generation, like my mother and middle-aged brother, continue to view gender relations within these structures, however modified. (Though, I have met very few Afghan women whom I would call submissive or silent, especially in their private domains.) Shorish-Shamley conducted a study in the Virginia Afghan enclave which included some of the older generation's prevailing gender perceptions. She found that some men think of a woman as "simple" and easily manipulated. She can be made to lose her path. She is naturally "pure...soft...and delicate" but at the same time she is "impure" due to her menstruation and she is physically and emotionally weaker than a man. She is more capable of "evil doings" because she is more susceptible to "jealousy," "foolish pride" and her "wisdom" is conquered by these negative feelings. Women's ideas about the two sexes are not much different. Some women believe that a man is "sacred and above the women." He is "strong and powerful" and she is weak...every part of her body except for her hands, feet and face are "forbidden...Women also believe that a woman is like a horse and a man is like the rider of the horse. He should always carry a whip so that he can break the woman and afterwards she will be under his control" (Shorish-Shamley, 1991: 316-318). Some of these notions are manifestations of the nature/culture and shame/honor systems but others like females' evil nature can be attributed to distinct cultural biases that do not necessarily relate to Islam or the general Afghan culture.

In addition, these conceptions are exhibited in hybridized settings of the U.S. Afghan community. For instance in weddings, where the guests are wearing the highest Western fashions and dancing to Afghan pop music, a Persian song plays at some point. "We're bringing a bride tonight...a bride with shame and modesty..." the performer sings while the bride is boogying down with her low-cut white wedding dress on the dance floor.

The conventional concepts of gender in Afghan society were examined to shed some light on the conflicts that my informants, such as Soraya, experience. Soraya's father comes from a conservative feudal family. Her maternal grandfather was a *Sheikh* (religious leader). Her father's traditional beliefs about females can be ascribed to his background. Although Soraya's paternal cousins wear more revealing Western clothes than she does and are allowed more social mobility by their fathers, Soraya's father has built a conventional reputation for his family and he controls his daughters according to the narrow boundaries he has chosen to keep.

Compared to the other females I interviewed, Soraya had one of the most confined lifestyles growing up in New York. She was subjected to almost every traditional rule that an Afghan girl must follow.

They (parents) were also controlling me. They'd say, you want money, here take the money. You want new clothes, you can have it. But remember, don't open your hair, we don't like it...Don't sit with guys and laugh. We don't like such things. We don't like it and people see it as bad (taboo) and will say this and that...

Soraya could not wear make-up or style her long, brown hair, wear a skirt which rose above her ankles, go out without her parents or another family member, stay after school for any reason, date or even converse with a nonkin male. Drinking, smoking, dating and sex are not part of her vocabulary except when alluding to Americans. Soraya does not agree with all her parents' guidelines but she tells me she never disobeyed them.

I had desires—to let my hair down, to travel—but I never acted upon my feelings. You know, there were times when I said to my dad 'why can't I do this? I don't do much.' He'd say 'This thing is bad and when I tell you don't, don't.' I'd say 'why should I not?' He'd get mad (she whispers). And because I live with him, I know where to stop because I know he's going to get upset. He has a temper too. Of course. In Afghanistan, he was tortured and his nerves are weak. They (the Marxists) had electrocuted him. They had tied up his hands and feet and tortured him. He has no patience.

Soraya sacrificed her "desires" because she wanted to avoid upsetting or disappointing her parents. She complied to preserve her own reputation. Yet the main reason she kept following orders was a fear of being outcast by her family and community.

Did you ever think of going against your parents?

-Oh no, no, no, no. I was not brought up that way...I was brought up in a way that I felt that I *can't* do it. There was one more thing in my mind- If I go, I can never come back. If I go somewhere against my parents (will), I can never come back and I'm going to fail them if I go. Because I was never supposed to change.

When Soraya felt that she did not have the ability to rebel, I think she meant that she relied too much on her parents' guidance to venture out alone. "Do you realize how big America is? I mean I don't know enough to just take off." In her eyes, America seems to be too big and too dangerous to explore and she thought she was not equipped with the knowledge or the financial assets to do so. The love that she has for her family kept her within bounds but also she feared their power to excommunicate her. Although she may identify with American characteristics (e.g., speaking English more comfortably than Persian), she feels no emotional connection to any group or nationality except Afghan. Therefore, she is dependent on the acceptance of the community and her family, which hold her within the "limit."

In Kafatou's discussion of Greek women's "shifting identities," she uses Gilligan's theory of co-feeling to explain the reasons for women's continuing subservience, which also applies to Soraya and some other Afghan girls. Gilligan argues that adolescent girls' moral senses are led by empathy. "Co-feeling" is "the ability to put oneself in another's position...(which) implies the possibility of generating new knowledge and transforming the self in the experience of relationship" (Gilligan, cited in Kafatou, 1992). In other words, co-feeling suggests that girls understand how others see them and they empathize to the point where they shift their behavior to respond accordingly. For instance, Soraya insists that her parents' strictness toward her is for her own good, that they love her and want to protect her. Moreover, when she does question her father, he gets angry but she justifies his anger by describing the suffering he has endured. She talks about how he was tortured as if she was tortured herself and rationalizes his temper.

Soraya's conflict is not just with her parents but also within herself. She feels entrapped by the restrictions imposed on her (apparent in the argument she describes with her father), yet she thinks these rules have guided her to be morally righteous and honorable. She has internalized the concepts of shame and modesty to some extent.

-Shame and honor- it had an effect on me. Shame and honor - shame and honor- you know, I think shame and honor develops in how you're brought up, who preaches in your head. I'm saying maybe if you go into a room full of men, your parents will think you're courageous, but my parents will say that the room which is full of men you can't go into because it's *bad* (taboo). That's how people develop shame.

When did you become aware of your sexuality and that you were a woman who had to act a certain way?

-Guidelines were always there for me. Always. I told you before, I didn't play with [nonkin] boys. I always knew that I'm a girl. I was brought up in a way that my parents did not want me to get close to [nonkin] guys, from the time when I didn't even have a brain. It wasn't 'I'm female' and I gotta do this' but the fact that my parents don't like it. I sensed it from a young age that I'm different from [boys].

Her awareness of these ideologies does not free her from their impacts completely. Soraya does not believe that if a single girl wants to wear make-up, it means she is a "whore," as her mother believes. But she does think a woman should be sexually pure until she marries whereas for a man, it does not matter in her mind. She feels guilty if she wears clothes that may reveal a forbidden part of her body. She is proud of her purity, which now has earned her parent's trust, the community's respect, and an educated fiancé who is "a good person."

Soraya's dilemma is multifaceted and representative of many other Afghan girls' conflicts. Basically, her quest is to be more independent and do what she wants to do. However, her desires to "let her hair down"

and "travel" are influenced by American popular culture. Other than in school, Soraya does not integrate with non-Afghans, but she watches popular television programs frequently.

The things you saw on TV didn't have any effect on you?

-Of course they influenced me. I completely changed. I mean I didn't agree with everything but I liked some things and I did it.

Tell me what.

-You know, until I was in the twelfth grade, I couldn't let my hair down. (Father) would ask, 'why are you letting your hair down? When you're going to school, go for studying.' I told my mom one day that tomorrow's picture day and we were in high school and I wanted to let my hair down. My hair was below my bottom. She said your dad will scold you. I said no, when they take the picture, I'll let it down and then I'll tie it back up. All my classmates had beautiful hair, some of them dyed. I didn't say I would dye it but I wanted to style it, thinking I would look pretty. I looked too plain. They didn't like me to put on make up. That's why I didn't insist. Until I finished high school, even the day I received my diploma, my hair was in a braid. They told me I couldn't put it in a bun because if I did, then I might open it.

You said you liked some things you saw on TV. What?

-I liked that people would go to other cities, not with their parents, especially at the end of my high school. I would say, look they go alone... They were so independent. That's what I wanted. I had the feeling of being independent but I couldn't do anything about it. I couldn't act on it. So I didn't care. I just shrugged my shoulders and said if I can't do it, then I can't do it.

Desire is relative, socially constructed. If her classmates had not dyed their hair, if they had all braided it, then she would not want to style her hair differently. Wanting to let her hair down and "look pretty" shows her desire to fit in to her American school. Her need to travel alone and be independent concerns power relations and a desire constructed by the forbidden.

Now that I'm engaged, I don't care. I don't have that desire anymore. Now I have permission but I don't do it. With me, the thing that I couldn't do, I wanted to. I did not have freedom. I was too much strained into their power. They would tell me not to do this and I wanted to, don't go there, I wanted to. They wouldn't let me travel alone, I wanted to. Now they told me to go to California after I got engaged - alone - and I'd say 'I don't know.'

Soraya has been my case study for discussing some of the struggles that Afghan girls have, the expectations which limit them and the internalized ideals which confine them. The ways in which these dilemmas are dealt with will be analyzed later but first, an investigation of Afghan males and their dilemmas in America is necessary. (One of the most pressing problems for Afghan males is a loss of their solid patriarchal role and status, which is manifested in their relationships with their partners. I will examine this matter in the next chapter.)

LACK OF GUIDANCE

Lack of role models for young Afghans is one of the vital issues in the community; it seems to be more of a problem for the males than the females (Fieldwork observations). The generation gap between adolescents and parents is widened due to the young generation's assimilation into mainstream America, and the older generation's isolation from it. Some Afghans who have grown up here are estranged from their elders and feel misunderstood. They do not feel they can turn to non-Afghans for direction because they ultimately recognize themselves as Afghan in that they aspire to marry an Afghan and remain a member of the community. Non-Afghan role models do not have the background to help the young Afghans obtain these goals although many confide in their teachers and coaches, seeking sympathy (Omidian, 1994: 55).

For young Afghan males, the generation gap involves problems of behavior and communication. Tamim, 18, from the Bay Area, who has lived in the U.S. for five years, explains.

They (elders) can't talk to me and I can't talk to them. I can't relate to the elders and they can't relate to me and can't understand me.

Although the same rigid restrictions that are imposed on girls are not usually imposed on boys, expectations of good manners and respect are demanded from every young Afghan. Parents claim "talking back" and ignoring traditional practices, such as hospitality, are the fault of American culture, while Afghan youths defend their disobedience. Ozaer, 19, from California articulates this problem.

They tell me not to dress this way and that way because it looks weird if I wear baggy pants and it's bad (taboo). I say I don't care what people think and neither should you. Then we have guests coming to our house every night and I have homework to do and I'm just busy. I can't come out and entertain the guests like they want me to. What am I supposed to talk about with them anyway?

Ozaer is frustrated because his parents "don't get it." His parents are unaware of the peer pressure he endures in school to dress in fashion but more importantly, they cannot accept his choice to put his own needs and desires above theirs and the community's (in that he does not care what people think and he will not receive guests because he does not have time.) His parents call this "American selfishness" and refuse to acknowledge their son's need for "more space."

Tamim, on the other hand, says that his parents are more "liberal" compared to other Afghan parents and they do not restrict his lifestyle. He feels a schism, however, with his extended family and the community where his Afghan loyalty is questioned.

Even though men have more freedom in societies, there's an expectation from them...I don't go to family parties...because everywhere you go, it's like deja vu; it's the same people, the same music, the same talk, nothing new that you can learn from and I do attend sometimes cause it's part of my culture...My uncles think I'm pulling out of the Afghan way, out of the community (because he doesn't attend most gatherings) but that's not true. I love (my culture)...We (sister and he) know our limits. We proved ourselves to our parents.

Tamim considers himself an Afghan partly because he follows certain rules; he seems to view Afghan culture as fixed. However, Tamim does not believe his absence at family gatherings threaten his Afghan identity or loyalty while to his "uncles," Tamim's absence suggests his Americanization. Some of Tamim's Afghan limits differ from his uncles' and therefore, demonstrate contesting values between the two generations. Tamim's dilemma is to keep his extended family content and simultaneously not compromise his own preferences and needs.

Tamim elaborates that he has Afghan friends but these friends are future valedictorians. They want to accomplish something. They want to be with everybody, not just Afghans. I'm like that too. They know about respect and tolerance.

These comments suggest Tamim's admiration for individual achievement and cultural diffusion—two popular American ideals. When I ask who his role models are, he replies, "No one. The only role model I have is myself. I don't need any role models, I do but I take parts and pieces of (what I admire in people)." Tamim seems to be reconstructing and reinventing; his notion of a role model involves combining values and characteristics while he expands his boundaries as an Afghan. The absence of a role model in Tamim's life is not a deficiency; as he affirms, Tamim is confident enough to look up to himself.

Ozaer also confides that he has no role models but for him, the lack of one seems to create a sense of loneliness.

I don't look up to Americans cause they don't really know where I come from and there are really no Afghans I can look up to cause well, they're all screwed up. So I guess I gotta look up to myself. It's hard to be making your own rules but I guess I got no choice.

The tension in Ozaer's statement that he has no option but to make his own choices reflects his longing for guidance and a group to belong to rather than independence. His attitude, however, is that of a rugged individual, an American who takes on the burden of righteousness and humanity.

In Fremont and Hayward, California, where a large Afghan population resides, Afghan youth gangs have formed (Marinucci, 1994: A9). It is not too farfetched to presume that one of the reasons these young boys are joining gangs is their alienation and lack of communication with the community and their parents. By being a part of a gang, they feel a sense of belonging with Afghan peers who understand their conflicts.

LANGUAGE AND (ABUSE)

Walid, 25, from the Bay Area, is an Afghan male who has lived in America for 10 years. He struggled with issues which influenced the lives of several other informants: language and abuse, as separate matters. Walid's ordeals are not particular to Afghan males and not necessarily tied to gender issues but I discuss Walid's case because he is one of the few Afghan male informants who shared his feelings and discussed his conflicts openly. Cultural displacement and a split self are underlying and recurring themes in Walid's dilemmas.

Walid's father used to hit his children and wife in Kabul and but Walid's mother tolerated the abuse until the family immigrated to America.

How did you adjust to America?

-Well, the war had an effect in our home. My father didn't have a job when he came here. He was home. That was a big problem. Anything he did, my mom didn't say anything. He hit my mom in Afghanistan but nobody could say anything. We were kids, we couldn't do anything. When we came here, he realized he doesn't have that kind of control. He would get frustrated. That's why he didn't like America. It was difficult for us and for him.

Walid states that he understands his father's positionality but his father's loss of status made him more controlling at home and affected Walid's behavior.

They (abusive fathers) expect you not to talk, to be quiet and agree with them and from all sides there was pressure on me. Then I realized that this isn't just my family and that in some way relaxed me, made me forget. All the Afghans have these problems. This has affected everyone.

Identifying with other Afghans consoled Walid temporarily but it did not raise the "low self-esteem" he had. Walid was an introvert. "I always felt ashamed. I was embarrassed that everyone was saying that 'he's from the family where the police came other night or there was a fight.' Because of this, I was quiet, outside

and inside." Walid could not assert himself at home because he feared his father and he also could not express himself in school due to his limited knowledge of English "slang." How could he find friends and belong in school if he could not speak?

I started ninth grade and I was closed and self-conscious and scared. Very low self-esteem. I didn't know the language. I mean I knew it by the book and the writing but I didn't know how to speak English. I didn't know the slang. It was a big problem in the beginning and I'm still learning. I haven't integrated into this culture yet (partly because of language). I want to integrate, not to be totally Americanized but to be comfortable.

Walid and his father were happier living in Afghanistan because they both fit in better than they do in American society.

What comes to mind when you think of Afghanistan?

-Carefree, no worries, it was very comfortable. In the society I was very comfortable because everyone knew my language. I felt one with the people, a part of the society. When we came here, even today, I don't feel as one of them.

Walid's alienation and cultural displacement are clearly expressed in his words. Walid finds comfort in developing a bicultural identity. Although he was not comfortable speaking English, he found other connections with Americans that surmounted words. His outlet and coping method are intriguing and demonstrate an excellent example of reconstructing identity and the emanation of agency. Before I discuss Walid's "resolutions," it is necessary to set up a theoretical concept of duality and the constitution of a bicultural self, and then I will assess how the Afghan individuals studied cope with these ordeals.

CHANGE AND "INVENTIVE COPING"

Within the Bakhtinian framework of the dialogical process, I will try to analyze how the bicultural self develops in young Afghans and how this dual self may give them the sense of individuality (agency) to cope with their identity conflicts and may create a cultural space around themselves that allows them and the community to change. My analysis is based on Bandlamudi's interpretation of Bakhtin and his study about immigrant adolescents' perceptions of culture in Queens, New York (Bandlamudi, 1994).

In Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, people do not act as objects when interacting with each other in society. In the social sphere, there is a relationship of reciprocity. As we interact, we anticipate responses from others and act in accordance with the particular cultural pattern. Because of this anticipation, our speech and

thought becomes dependent on the Other. This is the dialogic process (Bakhtin, 1986). In other words, for me to know who I am, I must know who you are in relation to me.

Meanings are formed through social exchange which requires the interdependency of the self and Other. Therefore, the emergence of agency requires the Other. Basically, social intercourse develops agency and meaning is located between the self and Other. "Deep meanings are revealed when one comes in contact with the other. Such an encounter lead to a dialogue that transcends a one-sided view of particular meanings. It is such a dialogue encounter that compels one to raise questions about foreign cultures and one's own culture simultaneously" (Bandlamudi, 1994: 465).

Young Afghans normally acculturate by going to school or work and by exposure to the media. What they see on TV is an object from which they can separate themselves. They may acknowledge the differences in the two cultures in which the Other becomes American and Americans, but they do not see themselves in an active dialogue with the American Other until they interact outside the Afghan community. Through this human interaction, they learn English, becoming bilingual—the first stage of developing a bicultural identity. As the young Afghans enter the American education system, they integrate into a secular, individually-oriented moral code based on meritocracy and self-reliance. At this point, the Other, which was America has been incorporated into who they are—their value system, behavior, and desires. They know what is expected of them and they conduct themselves in a culturally appropriate manner. This is the result of a dialogue with the Other.

Although the community encourages them to achieve in the education system, it does not allow them to participate in the social life and it expects them to conform to the radically different family-oriented structure at home. Now the bipolarity of the two cultures poses a dilemma. Their internalization of some "American" values clash with some of their "home" values. The young Afghans begin to question what home and being Afghan means. Hence, the Afghan community also becomes an Other which with they are in another dialogue. It is at this centrifugal point that agency emerges and the bicultural self forms for young Afghans. This self is not a randomly constructed combination of the two cultures but a reflexively developed identity that aids young Afghans in coping with the internal and external dilemmas they encounter. "Culture...comprises both the publicly expressed and sanctioned 'objective culture' (Afghan OR American) and the privately contested and internalized 'subjective culture' (Afghan AND American). The disjunction between the two...provides the space for individuals to cultivate their own personal meanings of the external structures and, in turn, find their own niche in the society (ies) and eventually bring about transformation both in the self and in the culture. The redefinition of the given external codes suit the internal structure of the mind...such a transformation is necessary for 'inventive coping' " (Bandlamudi, 1994: 464). This process, however, is not all cognitive (internally structured). Multiculturalism, affirmation of ethnic identity and individuality are prevalent discourses in America which are external influences in the development of the bicultural self and a new discourse.

For the young Afghans dealing with the traditional vs. American dilemma, there are three general coping patterns 1) Remain obedient and play the part of the good son or daughter. 2) Find ways to be "Afghan" in the community and "American" outside it. 3) Open rebellion and acculturation (Lipson, 1994: 178).

Soraya applies the "good daughter" method to deal with her struggles. She avoids external conflicts with her family and the community and is rewarded with appraisal from the community and a clean reputation. In this sense, Soraya gives "meaning" to her obeisance by "shaping" herself to the the objective culture and "shaping" it to herself (Geertz, 1973: 93). As for her subjective culture, she expresses her self in dancing. Daily, she practices Indian, Arabic, Persian and Afghan folk dance in front of the mirror at home. This multicultural activity makes her feel "powerful" and "graceful"— manifestations of agency. She has become such a beautiful dancer that at weddings, the hosts insist on a performance from her. Her father allows her to perform if it is a family wedding and there are few nonkin males. This is one freedom she has gained through negotiation. "He knows this makes me happy and since I do everything I'm supposed to, he doesn't say anything. But he doesn't like it when I dance."

Ozaer has chosen the third coping pattern: subversion against his "home" values. He is conflicted with himself in his decision to disobey because he feels guilty for upsetting his parents. Ozaer will not, however, compromise his own desires for his parents.' He does not fully identify with being American or being Afghan; he says he feels "broken."

Tamim subscribes to the second coping method. In the community and with his relatives, "I'm more conservative. I try to do what's expected of me not to cause an uproar." Yet he feels "freer" in American society. He comfortably calls himself an Afghan-American. Tamim reconciles his problems by being a "good Afghan boy" at home and being "himself" outside. For example, he attends certain family and Afghan functions only to appease his relatives. He identifies with his Afghan peers but not with the older Afghan generation. Tamim believes the community will "reform" once the older generation holds no control but in the meantime, "it's better not to upset them."

Walid takes a different approach in dealing with conflicts. He discovers punk rock, self-help books and philosophy and in them, a motive for life.

I wanted to do something about (bitterness). I wanted to get it out of me. I read a lot. I went to bookstores and searched the self-help section and bought books about "How to heal your inner child," or "How to heal your inner self." It helped me figure things out. How did I find interest in music? We're talking about pain. Most of our generation has this pain, even Americans, working hard. We're temperamental, we want to fight. You have this

anger and pain that you want to express. I had this but when I discovered heavy metal music, that has a lot of anger in its music, all of it is about anger and pain and if you analyze the rhythm and beat of gam, gam, gam, it's just like letting it out. It was very appealing, to me. When I started playing the guitar, it was an outlet. I would go to concerts and there they would draw a circle and everyone would slam dance...It was a healthy release...I would think of the pain inside, in that situation, I would talk to myself, 'it's ok that this is happening in your home.' That was a kind of heaven for me. I went with Americans but we weren't such good friends that we hung out after the concert. We would go to the concerts and that was it.

Punk rock allowed Walid to express himself. He found a group that indulged in rebellion and an assertion of anger. But the punk rockers and their subculture were an imagined community for Walid since he did not socialize with them outside of the concerts. Walid declares that he wanted to be known as a "rocker," so he dressed similar to the other rockers but he remained "a loner." As a rocker, nevertheless, Walid could cast off the world. Being alone and inexpressive gave him the rocker image and that imagined community served his need to belong and in effect, raised his self-esteem.

Walid also expresses that he "healed" himself through self-help books and Eastern philosophy (Confucism, Maoism). These have given Walid an perspective on who he is. He accedes to a universalist ideology. Walid asserts that he is only Afghan because he was born in Afghanistan and he feels a cultural connection with the people but he is neither proud of his nationality nor a cultural essentialist.

What do like about being Afghan?

-I guess I see everything from a higher level. Always. I don't like it for people to say I'm Afghan. We're all humans. But when it comes to our Afghan culture, of what I like (pause)

What do you tell people when they ask you where your from?

-Well, I say I came from Afghanistan but when it comes to pride, am I proud to be Afghan? No, I'm proud to be human.

Walid experienced inner healing by reading about these inclusive theories and identifying with punks but his parents disapprovingly noticed the change in his alternative clothing style and long hair. None of Walid's introspective coping methods were useful in this case. Once his hair grew long, his father nagged him to cut it, Walid recounts. Here, Walid, for the first time, found the courage to defend his desire—keeping his brunette locks; he lied to his father and said that "people would laugh at me" if he cut it. By disobeying his father, Walid undermined his father's authority and he recalls that after this incident, his relationship with his father deteriorated. Walid may have lied about his motives but he, nonetheless, openly rebelled against his father to acculturate.

Walid dealt with the objections about his dressing style by being "Afghan" at home and "American" outside.

When this change came, my clothes also changed. I would wear torn clothes, ripped jeans. I guess I was lucky that I found my identity there. Ripped jackets with pictures of skeletons. I liked these clothes a lot and that's why the family really put pressure on me. That's why I would fill my bike with clothes while everyone thought they were books, they were jeans and a jacket, and there was a narrow street in the back of my house where I would change. It was funny. I would take my clothes off in the middle of the street. Then I would go to school. When I got back from school, the same process.

In the preceding cases, Afghan individuals struggle with asserting their bicultural selves. They lie, rebel, suppress their desires to belong in both the Afghan community and American society. But there is one outlet which saves them from hypocrisy and guilt—wedlock. Marriage has become an escape from the reins of the older generation. Young Afghan couples relate to each other in a way which separates them from the elders. They are exposed to mainstream discourses and their hybridized ideas, lifestyle and interactions draw them together. As an official couple, they are able to express their bicultural identities without shame or fear. They can talk English *and* Persian with each other, they can go to nightclubs and the mosque, and they can negotiate gender roles within the transitional state of their community and the fluidity of their cultures.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

Marriage and Shifting Gender Roles

"Hurry up, we're going to be late, we'll miss the bride's entrance," my cousin Nusheen yelled as I sculpted my eyebrows with a black eyebrow pencil. Then I carefully applied red lipstick drawing lines beyond my lips to get the illusion of the fashionable full lips. Ok, I'm ready, I thought. "I'm coming. Just give me a minute. You know she won't show up until after nine anyway," I responded to Nusheen's demand. One last time, I looked in the bathroom mirror, wondering how the five hundred Afghans would compare me with all the other single girls tonight. I tightened the belt on my \$150 Macy's dress, skillfully hiding the price tags. The dress was beige, sleeveless, sewn with lace and sheer material and had a flowing skirt that hung two inches above my knee. It was sexy. I had bought it knowing that it would attract attention because tonight, I was allowed to show off. But of course I would return the forbidden dress in the morning. It would only be worn once and I could not afford to keep it.

I rushed out of the bathroom into my bedroom to meet Nusheen but she wasn't ready yet. She was fussing with her neckline. "My neck is too bare. Do you have a necklace I can cover it with?" she asked me with concern. "Don't worry, no one's going to 'talk' tonight. It's a wedding, Nusheen," I assured her as I handed her my lapis pendant. She clipped on the necklace and I patted my \$20 beauty-salon-styled French twist to make sure no hair was sticking out. I had just dyed my hair black and thank God, my natural blond roots weren't showing. My sunny blond hair at first made other Afghans think I was an American, a foreigner, an outsider. Or once they heard me speaking Persian, my blond hair gave them the impression that I was a dyed blond ashamed of my dark hair and very Americanized, since light blondes are an anomaly among Afghans. The black dye asserted my Afghan heritage and saved me from the dreaded label of rebel or outsider. I explained this to the two Afghan beauticians who styled Nusheen's and my hair that afternoon as we chatted about tonight's wedding.

"So the wedding at Flamingo tonight is your cousin's? I heard this is going to be the wedding of the year," considered Malalai, who called herself Molly, as she stuck bobby pins in my hair. Flamingo is the Afghan-owned glamorous banquet hall in the Bay Area where all the classy Afghan weddings and concerts take place. The cost is \$25 per person for weddings. I wondered how families on welfare afforded it. Some invited from three to six hundred guests.

"Yeah, the bride is our cousin. She's really beautiful," Nusheen replied proudly.

"Who's the groom? Is he Afghan?" asked Nusheen's hairdresser Shalla, who hadn't changed her name since it could be pronounced easily in English, I assumed.

"Of course, and he's from Herat, not Kabul," Nusheen answered snidely. Both of the women had Kabully accents and fearing they would take offense to Nusheen's brash comment, I retorted quickly. "True, but our cousin (the bride) is half Kabully and there's nothing wrong with that. I think mixed couples are interesting."

I saw Molly's eyes light up in the mirror. "That's so true. My sister's married to an Arab and they're very happy together. He speaks Persian better than her and their kids are gorgeous."

Her reaction surprised me. She seemed so approving of her sister's deviation from marrying an Afghan. My sister is married to an Egyptian but I recalled the resistance she fought with my family, the community and me to be with him. Was Molly's family that different from mine? "Didn't your family object to your sister not marrying an Afghan. Was it arranged?" The inquisitive journalist in me couldn't resist asking.

"They did at first and no, it wasn't arranged. They knew each other from working together but we accepted her choice. See, it's not like he's American or an infidel. He's Muslim and he speaks Persian. There isn't much difference in our cultures either, you know," she answered defensively.

Shalla interjected before I could ask another question. "Sweetie, Afghans are marrying everybody these days. Things are changing. We're in America now and whether we like it or not, this is it. Go to this wedding tonight and you'll see the young boys and girls flirting and exchanging numbers. The parents can't stop them. They have no choice but to accept it."

Nusheen and I arrived at the wedding when there were no seats left. Our parents had come before us. We spotted them in the corner. Our moms were engaged in an intense conversation with our oldest aunt. The three wore long dresses which left nothing bare except their hands and feet, and their heads were covered with silk scarves matching their muted dresses. As we approached them, I noticed Nusheen's mom frowning at us. "Salaam, sorry we're late. There was too much traffic outside," Nusheen joked to ease the tension. Flamingo was ten minutes from our homes and there was no traffic on a Saturday night in Fremont.

"Your dress is too low-cut and it is taboo for two girls to walk in by themselves. Imagine what everybody is saying!" Nusheen's mom shot back angrily. We had expected her reaction and through the years, we discovered the best response was to act indifferent. "It's ok, girls. Why don't you ask for two chairs and sit here next to your mothers. We've been missing you," My mom, the facilitator, said warmly. Nusheen went on a search for chairs as I noticed the spectacle before me.

Our mothers' covered hair was overshadowed by the long-haired brunettes and redheads, who catwalked toward the restrooms to touch up their make-up or have a cigarette. The bride's and groom's family were on the dance floor, dressed in Armani suits, Liz Claiborne minis, and Saks see-through gowns, moving their arms and feet in rhythm with the fast beat of the tabla (an Indian drum) and the energetic voice of the Afghan pop singer. The sisters danced with their brothers, uncles and cousins. A few nonkin males stayed on the sidelines of the waxed floor, dancing with each other. All the other guests watched as the two families displayed their tricks and talents.

Later, when the bride and groom sat on their gold-lace decked sofa facing the dance floor and dinner had been eaten, Flamingo turned into a discoteque, dark with strobe lights and non-stop movement. In the darkness, the rules changed. No one

watched anyone. The elders sat distant from the speakers holding their ears as the music boomed and the young let go. The dancing family circles broke as unwed couples met up to "express" themselves. Single girls and boys admired each other; the girls first glanced, then cast down their eyes and the boys slyly smiled to show their interest. In the front lobby of the Flamingo, hidden in the corner, stood the bar. Renters had to pay a fee to keep the bar closed but very few families did. Yet only men were seen buying drinks. The women's arena was on the other side where the restrooms and phones were, while the young and old men gathered around the front lobby, smoking and drinking. Those who couldn't afford the bar drinks smuggled cheap alcohol from their cars and drank it in bar-owned glasses. The alcohol was kept out of the main hall. Geety and I went to get fresh air in one instance but my brother admonished us to go back inside. We had crossed our veiled line.

Inside the main hall, the 21-year-old bride and the 26-year-old groom smiled nervously while numerous photo and video cameras circled their seat with shining lights. As the dancers sweated and cheered, the mothers and sisters performed the traditional Afghan wedding rituals on the newlywed couple. A green scarf is placed on top of the couple while a mirror is held in front of them with the Qur'an. They read a verse in the sacred book and then smile for the camera. Click. When my parents got married forty-two years ago, the bride and groom first saw each others' faces during this ritual. My parents do not have any pictures of their wedding since photographing women then was taboo in my hometown, Herat. Next, the bride endures the discomfort as her in-laws adorn her with gold and diamond, piercing her lobes with earrings, hooking on the same set necklace and pushing twenty rings on her ten fingers. She cringes inconspicuously and shows her teeth. Click. Finally, the grandmother steps forward to dab some henna on the palms of the couple and ties a shiny silver cloth wrapper around their hand. The couple stare at the lens one more time. Say cheese. Click. The bride has no clue what these rituals represent and she breathes a sigh of relief when the ceremonial duties are completed. Now the couple can have some fun.

The dance floor clears as the new couple steps in. The bride, with her three-inch heels and skin-tight white wedding dress and the groom, in his black tuxedo, hold each other and sway to the soft tune of "Sea of Love." The elders seem outraged. Couples dancing at their own wedding is a newly- approved ritual but slow dancing to Western music! Why, that was going too far, Geety's mom whispers in my mom's ear. But the newlyweds on the dance floor are locked in a dreamy gaze, enraptured by the melody, oblivious of the horrified stares.

These weddings which take place almost every weekend in the Bay Area, Queens and the Washington Metropolitan Area are a metaphor for the random mixing and shifting of ethnic identity, gender and culture in the Afghan community in America. Traditions become stale but rituals take on new meanings. Reappropriate, reconstruct, reinterpret, renegotiate RECOGNIZE—are active verbs which come alive at these weddings and hence, in the new marriages. Marriage has become a contested ground for change, a transformation in gender and family roles. Who is getting married and why? What conflicts do these new couples encounter and how do they deal with them? How do fiancées, husbands and wives interact with each other? What happens to those who divorce or break their engagements? The informants narrate their stories and I attempt to articulate the tensions and transformations in their gender perceptions.

WHY MARRIAGE?

Marriage is popular among first-generation Afghans, as my informants revealed. To find interviewees for my project, I found a list of Afghan Club members from my high school in California. I called all the girls on the list and two-thirds of them are either engaged or married. From my own group of Afghan girlfriends, only a few have remained single. The pressure to marry for both genders has intensified in the refugee community.

Some of the girls are getting married younger than their mothers did in Afghanistan. There was only one Afghan female interviewee who married at age 27; most were engaged or married in their late teens or early twenties. (The males were older; the youngest was 23 when he married and the rest were from mid/late twenties to early thirties.) In one of my interviews in the Bay Area with married couple Sabrina and Barri, Sabrina's grandmother was present. She had some insights about the young generation that explained one of the reasons why girls are marrying at a younger age.

Sabrina is very uncomfortable that her grandmother is there at the same time that I am. Her mom is also present but that doesn't seem to bother her as much. Before we start the interview, her grandmother looks me up and down suspiciously. I am a stranger she has not met before. It seems that she disapproves of this interview. The conversation begins between grandma and me:

G: Are you married?

F: No, I'm studying right now.

G: What are you doing? (She doesn't hear me.)

F: Studying. Going to college.

G: Oh, so many girls are getting married these days before they get their education.

F: Why do you think that is? Isn't it better if they finish first?

G: Well, yes. My daughters were like that in Afghanistan but here things have changed.

F: What do you mean?

G: The environment's different here. They must get engaged. They don't have a choice. Then they can finish their education. (I assume she means since they cannot date or have boyfriends and there is so much peer pressure to do so, the best solution is to get engaged young.)

F: How so?

G: Well, the boys are going to Pakistan and Iran to marry the Afghan girls there because the Afghan girls here have gone bad.

Sabrina interrupts: Or the boys are so bad that the girls don't want them. So they have to go out of the country, find a girl who doesn't know anything about them.

Barry jumps in: Yeah, I was a good boy. So I married a girl from here.

G: Yes, if the girls are good like my granddaughter, then she can find a man to marry. She's married and she's continuing her education and so are many of the other girls. Why don't you get married?

Dating is strictly forbidden in the community, especially for girls. From my observations, boys have an implicit consent to date but the ideal male does not. Many girls want to marry a boy who has had no previous relationships as much as the boys want an untouched wife. However, according to some of the informants, dating in secret is rapidly becoming a norm among the young generation, especially in California. Boys do not encounter many problems dating girls from other nationalities but once they go out with an Afghan girl, they are risking her family honor. So when unwed couples are caught dating by their families, which often occurs, they either have to stop seeing each other or make a lifetime commitment.

EXPOSED

Anita, 21, and Omeed, 25, have been married for eighteen months. They first saw each other at a wedding. Omeed thought she was pretty and decided to pursue her. She was in high school at the time and she had not gone out with any boys. Omeed came to her high school one day and offered his phone number. He did not intend to marry her. "He just wanted to play with me at first," Anita says, laughing. Omeed is embarrassed when she tells me this but he finally admits that she is right. "I lived in (France) for twelve year and (Afghan) girls there are more traditional. When I came here (three years ago), I saw Afghan girls dress looser and are freer. They wanted to pass time and have fun. I thought (Anita) was one of them. I just wanted to sleep with her," he tells me and then breathes a sigh of relief now that confession was over.

Anita was suspicious of Omeed's intentions from the start but she called him anyway. "Slowly, I liked everything about him. At first we were friends." But their friendship developed into a romantic relationship and they dated for six months. She said she kept it a secret from her family because she feared their reaction. They fell in love as Omeed realized that she was not a loose, free, Americanized woman; she had not any boyfriends before him. Many of her friends had dated but she refrained because of several reasons.

I never did anything against my family. Our father (who has passed away) was a man we respected. We never disobeyed him. I was afraid for my reputation. Girls are bad here-well, not bad, just like me. (She laughs and looks at me for understanding) I just took a chance. Besides, I was never wild. I was always shy. I just went out with my friends sometimes. (The phone rings and Omeed picks up and leaves the room to talk as Anita continues), If I had (had) a boyfriend, he would treat me differently. Divorces happen because boys find out about the girls' past. I saw so many girls get hurt. That's why I didn't have a boyfriend.

Anita seems to think that having a boyfriend is acceptable but when she says she "took a chance," she was gambling that Omeed would judge her. Since she had allowed him to become her first boyfriend, there was a chance that he might leave her. The impression is that boys do not marry the girls they date. Omeed, seemingly ashamed in front of me, conceded that he had many girlfriends before Anita.

Anita and Omeed's secret dating was short-lived. One day while walking in the park hand-in-hand, Anita's cousin, whose proposal she had rejected, saw the couple together and reported it to Anita's family. At first, the family (her mother and older brother) were upset but she she "communicated" with them. Anita told them that she loved Omeed and he felt the same way about her. Her mom "understood" but they were pressured to get engaged. "I didn't want to get engaged quickly. I wanted to enjoy our time together."

Anita probably wanted a longer engagement so that she could indulge in the privacy of their relationship. Once official, relationships become public and family interference complicates the couple's interaction. Marriage rituals bring forth the issue of finances—the bride's worth and husband's wealth. The groom and his family are supposed to offer the bride and her family precious jewelry, lavish clothes and gifts, while the bride's family is expected to throw an extravagant engagement party for the couple. Watching Anita's and Omeed's wedding parties on video, I noticed their families had done their duties.

Another couple who got engaged because they "got caught" are Dina, 21 and Walid, 25 from the Bay Area. These two were friends for over eight years before they started dating. Walid is Dina's brother's best friend. Walid became interested in Dina soon after they met, but Walid hid his adoration because he did not want to dishonor her brother.

Well, we met through her brother. I was friends with him and we worked together. He was someone I could lean on and when I went to their house, I saw her and this is where I can answer your question about my pride. I had it. I had the mentality. I would see her and asked myself should I talk to her? And then I'd tell myself, come on, she's your friend's sister. We're Afghans. She should be like your sister, like all of us Afghans think, you know. That's why I would step on my feelings for years.

Dina and Walid go to the same community college and they ended up becoming very close friends. Dina secretly dated several other Muslim boys but she confided in Walid when she had problems. Walid, like many other Afghans, did not judge her for dating.

You were her friend while she was seeing other guys. Did that bother you?

-A little but I was happy for her. I wanted her to be happy. I missed her; I wished she was with me.

How did you find the courage to tell her you liked her?

-I guess I was really comfortable with her. When I talked to her on the phone, she would tell me that every Afghan guy I befriend gets interested in me. Then one night I told her 'do you remember when you told me that every boy you befriend develops feelings for you?' She said yeah. 'I think I'm one of those victims too.' She was quiet. She was really shocked.

Eventually Dina fell in love with Walid after her other relationships did not work out. While a large number of Afghan girls persuade their Afghan boyfriends to propose to them, Dina had a "phobia" against marriage. She broke up with her previous boyfriends because they hinted marriage or proposed to her.

I do have a phobia, very much so. The reason my other relationships didn't work with - Behzad, Kamel or Hisham - is because they wanted to get married. Kamel came and proposed and we had a big argument and Behzad was about to come proposing, and I said no. Hisham toward the end, he was talking about getting a house and this and that. I was so afraid of marriage. Because to me marriage is more than this party or gathering or these rings. I wanted - it's not that you get married, and that's it you're together. It's something that you have to work on it. And I was very, very and am comfortable with Walid because I can talk to him. We would laugh together. (She describes how her friends pay attention to a man's looks and clothes) The first time Walid and I talked, I told (her girlfriend) Walid talks! I was so excited. She said 'what?' I said I can talk to him. I was more into someone- you know boys, they talk about normal things, they don't share their feelings. I wanted someone who would communicate with me, compromises, listens, not say this is bad or good, accept me for what I am. Don't go out with me to change me when we get married or engaged, just share a life.

Because Walid was a family friend, Dina was permitted to go out with him, although her family thought they were just friends. Dina wanted to tell her family who were her older siblings. (Her mother is deceased and her father lives abroad.) "I was ready to tell them. I just didn't know how. If I had told them Walid and I love each other, I didn't think they'd mind at all. I'm closer to my oldest brother than I am with my sister. (Sister) judges me." But Dina did not tell them directly until one day her younger brother saw the couple kissing. The brother ran off upset, not because he thought his sister was "bad" but because she had not told him that she and Walid were seeing each other, Dina recounts. However, this incident forced Dina to tell her other siblings about her feelings for Walid; her older brother was "the most patient" and approving but they could not escape an official commitment, as Walid narrates.

That day I noticed now they know and the issue of marriage is going to be raised. In Afghan culture, these things happen. Either take her or don't take her. Don't play with

her. My friend asked me if I wanted to marry her and I said yeah, I do. Before, I had thought about marriage but I didn't bring it up because of her (older brother). I needed to talk to her (older brother) and this forced me to. That night we sat with my friend and we wanted to find a way to calm everyone because it was like a bomb had exploded. (My friend) said (the families) are Afghan, they don't have your beliefs, they're not open-minded like you. He told me that I always run away from our culture and its system but you have to deal with it now. You're in it. I didn't want (her family) to be separated from her. I wanted to make them happy too. So I said let's do something that will make them and us happy. And I guess what made us all happy was an engagement and proposing.

This time Dina had no objections. Her fear of marriage vanished because she felt Walid was the right one.

It was hard for me. Trust. I was scared of it. I mean nothing is guaranteed. Anything can happen. I'm not saying that (Walid) and I will be married forever and be happy. He's going to work with me and be very comfortable. He asked me and I said yes.

Anita and Omeed and Dina and Walid have broken several Afghan traditions. First, they became friends with nonkin males and females. In the Dari language, *dost* is the non-gendered term meaning "friend" but Dari speaking Afghans usually do not use this term when referring to opposite sex friends because traditionally, friendships between nonkin boys and girls are discouraged. Boys call their male friends *rafiq*, which also means friend, but if a girl calls her male friend *rafiq*, it implies that he is a boyfriend. Girls call their female friends *khohar-khonda* (like a sister). For a girl, the only neutral term to use for a male friend is *brader-khonda* (like a brother) and for a boy, the term for a female friend is "like a sister." However, in some circles among the young generation, the word *dost* has been rediscovered and it is used to refer to nonkin opposite sex friends. When these two couples refer to their partners as their friends, they say *dost*.

Another significant factor is the shift in the traditional Afghan male mentality. Walid and Omeed marry the girls they date and do not judge them for disobeying their families and going out with boys. Omeed, however, probably would not have married Anita if she had seen other boys; Anita's purity and inexperience made it possible for her to be Omeed's wife. Nonetheless, Anita considers herself lucky for having an "open-minded" husband like Omeed. Unlike Omeed, Walid's acceptance of Dina's other relationships show that he is not preoccupied with notions of purity and innocence. He views women and relationships differently.

I saw that a boy, a husband, when he goes out with his friends, he's laughing and happy and then with his wife, he's not happy. I would ask why isn't he happy with his wife? Why isn't my father friends with my mom? Those things affected me and I said no, I don't want someone my mom has to propose to, who's quiet. I want a girl who had a relationship because...a relationship...helps a person grow, learn. That's why when Dina

and I became close, I would encourage her to go and talk to guys. I believe that we all have a lot of pain and we're disappointed with our parents and when you have a relationship, you feel loved. When you hug and get nurtured, that's when your childhood pains all surface and that's when you can heal it and go above it. I would tell her to go out with guys, get to know guys. I see relationships as a process of growth. It's not about guys fooling girls, like we say in Persian.

Walid recalls that his ideas about women were influenced by his maternal uncle who told him that women are not men's property when he was in Afghanistan.

His words affected me from childhood and when I came home, I saw how my dad treated my mom. For example, I would see how my father told my mom who to talk to and what to wear, with who to shake hands with and I would remember my uncle's words. When I came here, I saw how America's woman is so independent and stands on her own two feet, and how women know not to let men treat them that way. They were like parasites in Afghanistan, they took from the men but here no, a woman is on her own, it's not necessary for her to be attached to her husband. And this influenced me. Because of this, ...whether it is my sister or wife, I don't own her. She's not mine. When a woman and man get together, they do it to share life, not to take each other's life, but to share it together. That's all.

It seems that these couples dated without feeling ashamed for violating family rules. There do not seem to be references to an internal conflict about breaking traditions, other than Walid's guilt for his interest in Dina. Walid's guilt, however, is not about "I should not be dating Dina because *I* think dating is wrong" but a fear of disrespecting Dina's older brother and his beliefs. Therefore, while these two couples may not think dating is immoral, they give in to family pressure that dating is dishonorable. To keep their families content, they agree to get married. These couples still believe in commitment and respect for the family, which are tenets of Afghan culture.

"I WANT TO CONTROL ME"

There are many other reasons why young Afghans are getting engaged or married before they finish their education or at a fairly young age. For some girls, marriage means autonomy and control. Some girls who come from strict, traditional families see marriage as a way out in America. They assume their husbands will be more liberal than their fathers. As a wife, they feel they will have more control over their own lives than they do as a daughter. Many feel that the rigid hierarchical relationship which must be respected between a daughter and her parents does not have to be tolerated between a husband and wife. Also, with a fiance or husband, these girls get an opportunity to say, to do and go places which are taboo for single girls. I discuss

two narratives of girls I spoke to who married to be "free." They had traditional arranged marriages. These two girls told me they never dated.

Soraya, 20, the obedient girl whose dilemmas were analyzed in depth in chapter two, became engaged about a year ago to a nonkin suitor. She did not speak to him for any length of time before she agreed to marry him. Sameer, her fiancée, lives in the Midwest with his family. His family has been friends with Soraya's family since Pakistan, where they lived before migrating to the U.S. Sameer's family has been proposing marriage to Soraya for over five years. Soraya recounts that her father did not "give her away" until after she was old enough to be married. She was 19 when the proposal was finally accepted. At first, Soraya was hesitant about getting married because she did not know Sameer but her father's advice made the decision for her. "My father was very happy. I heard from (a lot of people) that (Sameer) was a good person. I had known him in Pakistan but I never paid much attention to him." Thus, Soraya consented but not only because her father wanted her to marry; she had other motives. "I didn't have a life...I did everything I was supposed to...I want to be active, travel, do things." A husband is the ticket to freedom for Soraya.

Sameer and Soraya had an extraordinary engagement party in New York but Sameer, 25, has gone back to the Midwest to continue his education in dentistry while Soraya goes to college in Queens. The couple already had the legal Islamic *nikah*, which means they are officially married but they have not had a wedding ceremony yet. When Sameer came for the engagement party, Soraya was shy around him. "I didn't do anything when he was here. When he came (inside), I'd go outside." Since the engagement, the couple's interaction has been mostly over the telephone where they have been getting to know each other.

He's open to other ideas...He encourages me to study...He knows he should help me with housework." But is it love? "He says he loves me but I don't. It makes me feel powerful when I don't say I love you...I really like him because I never had a (nonkin) guy so open, mushy with me."

Soraya gains control when she does not reciprocate Sameer's affection. She redirects silence—a common indication of subservience—to feel "powerful." Soraya "likes" her fiancée but her apathetic attitude when she is with him shows her urge to protect herself and be independent from him.

When Soraya moves to the Midwest once the wedding ceremony has taken place, she has agreed initially to live with her in-laws in the traditional extended family system. "I don't mind living with his parents. I like his whole family. Everything will be ready when I go home...I respect them." I gasp at her acceptance of this tradition since extended families are rapidly fading with newlyweds. Very few brides today will agree to live with their in-laws. (Fieldwork observations). So she quickly explains to me that the shared living arrangement is temporary and more practical until Sameer and she finish their education. Soraya plans to work while she is married.

Soraya has many expectations from her fiancé and her marriage. Besides gaining more independence, she expects Sameer to always be an equal partner.

I want my marriage to be different than my parents'. If my dad tells my mom how to dress, she's affected. I would be furious...But they can't live without each other. They both make decisions. He listens to her. In public, they show hierarchy; in weddings, he gets food before her. At home, it's much more equal. Mine will be different, same in public and private. I'm not going to be subordinate, I'm going to be supportive.

Soraya's expectations may dispare greatly from reality when she moves in with her in-laws. The patrilocal system often operates to keep brides under the supervision of the groom's family. Soraya may find herself under the same restrictions and influence that she submits to in her own home.

Soraya is subordinate to her father. She sees her father as an authority figure in her life who can tell her what to wear, where to go and what to do. She obeys his rules and she says she will do so until she leaves his home. She fears and has a certain respect for her father that she does not feel for her husband; her mother, by contrast as she describes, allows her husband in some instances to control her. Soraya is reconstructing the traditional Afghan husband and wife roles by regarding her husband as an equal. However, by continuing to obey her father, she reinforces patriarchal concepts of gender.

She has thought about rebelling. "Who cares about obedience? Why don't I break away from this chain? Then I thought I was being irrational. I have identity problems." Soraya has remained the dutiful daughter because her father has instilled a fear in her that she will disappoint him, that she will make him and her family unhappy, if she does not obey. Also, because she listened to her father, her reputation, which she is proud of as a "good" Afghan girl, was untainted in the community. Nonetheless, she took her opportunity to "break away from this chain" by getting engaged.

Even though Soraya continues to live with her family, her life has changed since her engagement. She can go to the movies now. She can wear clothes above her ankle but not above her knee. She went to visit her aunt in California alone, something her father forbid when she was single. "When I went on the plane, it was a whole different experience. I felt independent. "This is fun,' I thought." Plus, her attitude toward her parents has changed.

I'm not afraid of them anymore...the fear I had was not from being hit; it was that I was going to let them down. I know for a fact that from here on, I will never let them down because I'm married.

Paradoxically, now Soraya is grateful that her parents gave her "guidelines." She is afraid of having children because

I don't like it if my kids grow up in America. It's too free...What if they don't listen to me? I'll kill myself. My parents were for me but what if I'm not there for my kids. That's why I don't want to have kids.

Zorah, 22, was in a more desperate situation with her family than Soraya. Zorah recounts her story so articulately and with such passion that there is little need for analysis. Zorah had an "evil" stepmother and an abusive father. When she was two-years-old in Kabul, her parents separated. Since then she has not seen her mother. Her father, who was a well-off, respected pharmacist, gave Zorah to his parents and until she was five, she thought her grandparents were her parents and that her father was her uncle. But when Zorah was five, her father remarried and decided he wanted his daughter back. "I was shocked when I found out (that her uncle was her father). My whole world shook...I've been grieving it all my life."

In 1984, when Zorah was 11, her father, stepmother and three younger half siblings fled the war in Afghanistan and remained in Pakistan for five years. Zorah was devastated that she had to leave her grandparents and be alone with her father's family.

I never liked my father even when I thought he was my uncle. We've never been friends. He spent time with his other kids but not with me. He'd just come home from work upset and watch TV.

In Pakistan, their lifestyle changed from luxurious to near poverty. Zorah was miserable. Her stepmom, young and illiterate, was the prototype of Cinderella's stepmother. "She made my father a stepdad as well." At 11, the oldest child, she was expected to do all the housecleaning and take care of her half siblings. Zorah was constantly abused by her father and stepmother. "I was their slave."

When her father was present, her stepmom would act like the best mother so that if

I complained about her, he wouldn't believe me. When I did the laundry, I would let it dry on the rope line and she would come and inspect each piece of clothing to see if it was washed clean and if there was one stain, she would snatch the cloth and throw it on the floor as I nervously watched. I developed an anger so deep toward my stepmother that I can never fully cleanse myself of it.

Zorah kept herself busy in Pakistan by taking English language courses and attending the religious, Quranic school. She became very religious. Zorah thought her only hope was God; only God could save her. So she prayed and read the Quran diligently.

In 1989, Zorah's family came to California where they settled. Nothing much changed in her life except that school became her escape. She entered as a freshman in high school. "I'd sit daydreaming in class, hoping the bell wouldn't ring for me to go home." She had found some East Asian and Afghan friends.

Her family was on welfare and her father was either at home or with his friends lounging while her stepmom bossed her around all day long. She had no freedom. She did not have permission to go see her aunt and when her grandparents finally came to the U.S, she wanted to live with them but her dad would not let her.

His sense of humanity is dead...He could see that I'm unhappy but he never had time to ask me what was wrong. Men always see the external. (She starts crying.) In front of everyone, I smiled and tried to do all my chores and be good to keep their mouths shut but inside, I was in hell. I've suffered so much that I pray every day, thanking God that those days are over. (She wipes her tears.)

Zorah witnessed the independent lifestyle other Afghan girls but she could not bring herself to rebel.

I never even talked back. I didn't have the courage. If I mentioned anything about (stepmom) to my father, she would do crazy things like beat herself and take pills to scare me so I wouldn't tell my father the truth. In front of him, she would come and clean my room. She was very manipulative. She wanted me to rebel so my father could abuse me. I knew her game well. I didn't rebel (go out with boys, lie, smoke, drink, disobey) because my conscience wouldn't let me and because I didn't want to give her the satisfaction.

After two years in the U.S., Zorah found solace by confiding in her Afghan friends in school, though she never went out with them. And she had a love interest. An Afghan boy was in love with her for four years in high school. Zorah liked him too but fear held her back. She never even spoke to him. On one Valentine's Day, the boy sent her flowers and a card. "I was so scared for my reputation (and that the news might get to her parents). I was shaking in the school office when I received the flowers."

When Zorah graduated from high school, she enrolled in a community college but her home life got worse. Her classes were at different times in college and she did not have a routine schedule like school so her parents accused her of doing "bad things." Zorah thought the only honorable escape was marriage.

One of her friends who had been neighbors with them in Pakistan told Zorah that her brother wanted to come and ask for Zorah's hand in marriage.

I didn't want to marry a man (parents) chose for me. Because of my father, I had decided never to marry an Afghan man. I had anger toward Afghan men. I thought they were all bad. I was wrong.

Zorah accepted the proposal because this was not someone her parents picked but a trusted friend's brother, and he came from an open-minded, educated family.

I didn't know him or love him. It wasn't a big deal. I didn't care who came proposing. I just wanted to get out. It was scary...but I had to get out before I ended up in an insane asylum.

When her current husband Darius proposed to her father, Zorah confessed to her parents that she wanted to marry to escape them and once they heard this, her father rejected the proposal. Eventually, her father agreed but he would not let Darius even speak to her on the phone before their engagement was finalized. "I married because I wanted to be my own boss." Three months after graduating from high school, she was engaged and quickly married.

Zorah has been married for three years. Darius comes from a close-knit family, Zorah tells me. He has a stable, blue collar job and he works at the flea market on weekends. Darius' father died before their marriage and he became responsible for supporting his mother and younger siblings. Zorah says Darius has had his fun before they married.

He had his girlfriends. I'm okay with it. All boys have them. He tried to get to know two other Afghan girls but they weren't interested in marriage; they just wanted to have fun. He's had mostly Mexican and American girlfriends. He told me he was embarrassed (because he wasn't as pure as I am.) He said he wasn't worthy of me.

Zorah praises Darius' more open-minded attitude compared to other Afghan men. She gives an example to illustrate her point. Darius caught his sister with her boyfriend but he did not yell or hit her, something other Afghan males might do; he just talked to her and then supported her until she married the boyfriend. More importantly, Darius does not mind if girls have boy friends.

Married life is wonderful, Zorah says. The couple are like girlfriend and boyfriend, they go out together to concerts and have intimate conversations, and there is romance.

I got lucky when I married because my husband turned out to be a wonderful man. It was like getting out of hell and entering heaven. He encourages me to get an education. He doesn't tell me what to wear or what to do. He trusts me completely. In fact, he sometimes

offers me to join him in a cigarette or a drink and if I refuse because of what other people might say, he says to me, 'I'm your husband, if I'm okay with it, don't worry about what others think.'

However, in the first year of marriage the newlyweds had some conflicts as they discovered each other's habits and moods. Darius had too many friends and he went out with them too often.

I didn't trust him at first. I didn't know what he was doing with them. We had many arguments. Now I know. He goes kite flying, plays volleyball, soccer, plays cards. He knows that if he's ever unfaithful to me, I'd leave him. We're very honest with each other. Zorah blames herself for their initial problems.

I expected everything from him. I wanted him to be more romantic, more this, more that. Since I had given so much to my family, I was tired of being taken advantage of and demanded more than he could give me. I'm moody and impatient. He's so good with me, he knows how to handle my moodiness.

Now that Zorah and Darius got to know each other better, they have very few arguments. Zorah says they have both changed for one another. Darius is more considerate of her. When he hangs out with his friends, Zorah accompanies him and she sits and plays cards with them while the other men's wives sit separately and gossip.

The couple has a two-year-old son and Zorah believes Darius' is more affectionate with her since they have had a child. He also helps her with housework sometimes.

He works a lot so I don't pressure him to do any housework but he washes dishes sometimes, makes tea. But I have trained him to pay attention to special occasions like our anniversary.

At first, Zorah lived with her in-laws because her "mother-in-law was alone and needed company." Now they live separately but are next door neighbors. Her mother-in-law babysits their son during the day while Zorah works at a retail store and finishes her nursing degree. "My dream was to go away and study like you are and become a heart surgeon. My parents gave me no support. What I am, I owe to myself."

Zorah and Soraya's cases illustrate the complexities and contradictions of achieving autonomy as an Afghan female. On one level, they feel oppressed and reinvent a tool for empowerment—marriage and a husband—which allows them to have a less restricted lifestyle and be more independent. On the other level, why do they need a man and matrimony to gain this freedom? Perhaps Zorah and Soraya fear being disowned

by their families or ostracized by the community. They do not want to be isolated from the ethnic group they identify with. Perhaps they do not feel they have the ability to achieve this autonomy without a man; they need the financial support. It seems that only a man can provide them with an honorable independence. Hence, these two females fortify the traditional belief that a woman needs a man to be recognized and valued.

Furthermore, within the context of the marriage, Zorah says she married to be "her own boss" but is she when Darius has to give her permission to have a smoke or drink with him? By comparing herself to other Afghan wives and Darius to other Afghan husbands, she reconciles the contradictions and considers herself "lucky." In Zorah's case, the degree of self control shows the change in gender roles because she has more autonomy in her husband's home than she did in her father's. It seems to be a privilege, not a right, for Zorah to wear and do what she wants and not to be abused.

In addition, Zorah's gender perceptions seem to subjugate her. She understands her role as the wife to be the caretaker. When Zorah states that she does not "pressure" Darius to do housework, she upholds the idea that housework is the woman's responsibility, even though both Darius and she work outside their home. She is grateful that Darius brings tea (to guests) and washes dishes sometimes as if he is doing her a favor. Zorah's comments are a manifestation of the nature/culture assumption in which females are nurturing and caring, willing to sacrifice their desires to satisfy others. Zorah seems content with the freedom she has in her marriage to the extent where she does not acknowledge the power Darius has over her. Perhaps the main reason Zorah continues to depend on a man for independence is due to her own beliefs.

However, Zorah has no qualms about divorce if Darius is unfaithful, demonstrating that she does not fear the taboo of divorce in the Afghan culture. Many Afghan women tolerate infidelity in order to avoid being the dishonored divorcee but Zorah seems to consider a faithful husband more important than her reputation in the community. Also, Zorah's openness to speak against her father and stepmother with me, a mere acquaintance, exhibits her courage to rebel against the family privacy code. The code is to remain silent and keep conflicts within the private domain.

"I WANT TO CONTROL YOU"

For Afghan girls from traditional families, marriage may serve as an instrument for self liberation but for Afghan males, marriage can be a means for power and control over others. Control has a twofold function in this context. Families control their sons by getting them married to a girl they choose and then their sons control their wives by carrying out their duty as the guardian, the provider, the husband—the head of the house. Yet as a result of living in America, some Afghan males have modified the patriarchal function of these roles. They tend to subscribe to more egalitarian ideals of gender relations.

Siavash, 23, comes from a feudal family in Herat. He has five sisters and two older brothers. Siavash is the youngest. Seven of his siblings have had traditional arranged marriages and about two years ago, his mother told Siavash it was his turn to get engaged, although he had one older single brother. Siavash's mother is in charge of making decisions in their family since his father died in Afghanistan. Six months ago, Siavash married his mother's choice—his first cousin Shirin, 22, who has grown up in Holland. (Traditionally, marriage between paternal cousins are preferred in order to keep property within the family, although in Siavash and Shirin's case, familiarity among the families is the motivation for their union.)

Siavash's family immigrated to Virginia when he was 13-years-old. He started school in the sixth grade and quickly made American friends. He avoided interacting with Afghan peers. Siavash felt so insecure being Afghan and "different" that he did not acknowledge his ethnicity and joined his friends while they mocked foreigners.

-For example, when I was with Americans, I thought of myself like an American. We would go to the shopping malls, when we saw foreigners. I didn't feel like I'm a foreigner. When we saw foreigners, we would joke or giggle. I didn't have a thought that I'm a foreigner, why am I doing these things.

There weren't any problems with the family?

- Not really because...I went to school in the morning, when I got back, I didn't go to parties with the family and sit with the guests. I wasn't interested. (Mom) would say why is your hair so long, why is this, I didn't listen. It would go in from this ear and out the other. There was (pressure) and I knew certain things...were harmful for me, I didn't do. Like some friends I had who were into drugs, I knew not to do. And when I went to parties where my American friends would sit and drink beer and smoke, I had it in me because...my family (had taught me) not to. I was used to not doing it, so I didn't. No matter how much friends would say why don't you smoke or drink, I dislike those things. And even when I started interacting with Afghans, I saw some friends, 90 percent of them, I would see them drinking beer and stuff. For me, it's surprising, how can an Afghan do these things. My family never said not to but I saw that no one in my family did that stuff.

But Siavash had many girlfriends like his American friends, though his girlfriends were not Afghan.

Siavash shows the generational shift and flexibility of the Afghan limit by reinterpreting its boundaries. Dating foreign girls does not betray his Afghan dignity but drinking, smoking and dating Afghan girls do. He explains that his older brothers did not believe in dating at all. Siavash says he did not date Afghans because he did not want to jeopardize their reputations.

Were your girlfriends foreigners or Americans?

-When I was in high school, they were Americans. After that, there was a French one and European, with Afghans never.

What was the difference between Afghan and foreign girls?

-Afghan girls were in college. There was opportunity to go out and they were pretty girls too but I didn't think of going out with them because I thought of them like sisters. I had respect for them.

Do you have more respect for Muslim girls?

-Yes, very much.

Why?

-Hard question. I don't know. When a girl is Muslim, you should see her like a sister and think of your sister going out with such a boy. Is it right in our Muslim way? Foreign girls and Americans, for them, it doesn't make any difference. That's the way they are. Like one girl might go out with one person or with a hundred people until she finds the right person. That's how her mother and her grandmother grew up. It doesn't make a difference to them. For an Afghan girl, until the family doesn't see the boy (they aren't supposed to date)- that's how they've been raised and taught and that's their experience.

Siavash never brought his girlfriends home because he says it was improper but his family knew he had girlfriends. Before Siavash married Shirin, he was dating a French girl for 18 months and had contemplated marrying her. According to Siavash, his mother did not forbid him from dating but she was concerned that her son was "crossing the line." She was "scared for him" and thought the best solution was "to get him engaged."

Siavash's description of his mother's attitude indicates the tactics of family control practiced over Afghan males. It seems that Siavash's mother fears her son's involvement outside the community and perhaps her ultimate concern is if a foreign bride joins the family. Therefore, it seems she does not apply more common methods of parental control such as reprimanding or forbidding her son to date, but uses marriage to restrain Siavash within family expectations.

When we went to Holland, my mom wanted (Shirin and I) to see each other and when we saw each other, I didn't think of her- she was still my cousin. They asked me what I thought of her and I was taken by surprise, not knowing what to say. Then I thought and by God, it's time. She's my cousin and I know her background and I know my uncle and my family will approve it. Family was important because my family brought me up. When I thought

about it, if I want to continue with this French girl or not, I looked at the examples of my (Afghan) friends who had married American and those who had married Afghan. Most who had married American had divorced. My fear of these things- divorce, I was scared of. I said French or Italian, if I marry them, it's possible that in five/10 years, they'll divorce me. I thought it was time and the girl is a good girl.

Siavash and Shirin's marriage was not completely arranged. They both requested to speak to each other (over the phone) before their engagement became official.

I had a lot on my mind. I wasn't like other Afghan men who get married around the ages of 35-40. They go proposing several times for a girl and most of the time, that girl isn't happy until later it becomes normal for her. I didn't want from the beginning for her parents to force her. I didn't have that patience that tomorrow we get married and she says my parents forced me. Then I talked to her. What do you think? Are you happy with what they're saying? Will you be happy with me since we hadn't seen each other since we were little? She said what do you think. I said...if my parents are happy and we're happy, I think we'll be happy with each other.

Thus, they were married a year later. The couple has an apartment in Virginia close to Siavash's family. Siavash works in a bank and sells cars on the side. He is the breadwinner although Shirin recently got a job as a clerk at a retail store. They are getting to know each other and falling in love. Siavash's lifestyle of going out and partying with friends has changed to spending all his time with his new bride. To his delight, Shirin has the qualities he was looking for in a wife: "very pretty, sexy." He also wanted someone "like me. Like she would want to go places...if I tell her to go to a nightclub she would go." But Shirin is more traditional than he expected in that regard. They have gone clubbing twice and Shirin says "It's not for us (Afghans) and I'm not used to the environment."

Although Siavash wanted a wife who would "listen" to him but he jokingly says "She's the boss. I'm always apologizing." Shirin concedes that Siavash tries to control her sometimes but "I have my own head."

Siavash's perceptions of women and gender roles manifest layers of inconsistencies. He seems accepting of varying gender concepts but he embraces the patriarchal Afghan roles, taking advantage of the dominant male status. Siavash essentializes Muslim and "foreign" women and with each, his role as a man shifts, conforming to culturally-approved standards. For example, he can only be a "sister" and husband to an Afghan girl but he was a boyfriend to foreign girls. Siavash seems to believe in permitting women autonomy within traditional cultural norms. For instance, I ask him if he minds if Shirin has male friends.

-Since my wife is Afghan, I don't like it...Like if she was American, it would be different because that's how she was brought up.

You have different expectations of Afghans and Americans?

-Yes, Afghans are very different than Americans.

His choice to marry an Afghan explains the desire to please his family but also to be in control. The taboo of divorce for Afghan women gives Siavash power and comforts him that if he has an Afghan wife, she will not subvert against his governing status as the husband.

However, Siavash says his exposure to the mainstream culture have introduced alternative notions of gender to which he appropriates at one level. For instance, Siavash comments that he does not mind if his wife wants to wear revealing clothes as long as "no Afghans are around," implying that he himself does not believe in the traditional Afghan/Islamic creed that women must be covered. At the same time, fear of the community drives Siavash to conform and hence, maintain this doctrine. Siavash is also interested in a wife who embodies the physical characteristics prevalent in American popular culture, a "pretty" and "sexy" girl, but simultaneously, he wants a girl who will resign to his authority. Displaying sexuality and being sexy are traditionally viewed as negative qualities in Afghan society but Siavash has adopted the common Western notion of beauty. Furthermore, Siavash's ideas about husband and wife roles and what he expects of his wife reflect his willingness to negotiate husband/wife roles. The following dialogue between Siavash and Shirin displays Siavash's pattern of thought. Ironically, Shirin is the one who encourages the hierarchy.

What do you expect from each other?

S- Fifty-fifty. If I work forty hours, she can work forty hours a week. If I wash the dishes once, she can wash the dishes.

Sh- You're just saying that. I'm sorry. Everyone says that but they're not like that.

S- If she wants it fifty- fifty, if she ...doesn't work and spends her time shopping, I would start to demand because I'm the one that works. I'll want her to do the cooking and cleaning around the house and I will just come and lay down. Just pay her bills. But if she wants fifty-fifty and if I spend a thousand dollars, then she should do it.

Shirin, what do you expect from him?

Sh- Right now is fine. He works, pays bills and I sometimes, maybe once a week, I'll cook something. I'm not home a lot. (She visits her in-laws.) If I need extra money, now I've started working, I'll go buy myself what I need. He buys me clothes and stuff.

Why did you decide to work?

Sh- I was alone at home and I wanted to be in contact with people. Go be with people, talk to them, and learn English and at one point, start a real job.

If he decides to sit at home and cook for you, will you work?

Sh- I can't take the responsibility.

S- It's hard. If she was in Afghanistan, I could tell her not to work because it's bad (taboo). It's different. I don't think here it's bad for one's wife to work. There, it was shame if a wife worked. In Afghanistan, a boy got his income through his father. Here, we have to...We're both forced to work.

The newlyweds tell me they often bicker since they are both "stubborn." Most of their arguments involve family and in-law issues. Sometimes they have problems communicating because Siavash's strongest language is English and Shirin's is Dutch. "When we argue sometimes, he starts screaming in English and me in Dutch and neither of us understand each other. It's better that way," Shirin remarks.

Shafiq, 38, is the oldest informant I interviewed. He has been married for six years to Monisa, 32, and they have two children, a boy and a girl. Shafiq came to New York with his single aunt and uncle when he was 24-years-old in 1981. The rest of his family fled the war and settled in Iran then India. In New York Shafiq worked hard to support himself and his family abroad by making \$130 a week as a salesman in a Persian carpet shop. Shafiq's life had taken a drastic turn in Herat when he was 13-years-old; his father died and he became responsible for providing for his mother and eight younger siblings.

His father was a merchant and Shafiq continued the family business. He finished the tenth grade in Afghanistan but dropped out of high school to travel and trade across Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Shafiq's business trips exposed him to varying cultures and ideologies but he recalls that when he finally settled in New York, it was not what he had imagined.

My impression before I came was that most of them were cowboys like those Western films.

Also, I thought people would be classier, not so insensitive. These people, no one knows anyone. There are too many freedoms that aren't necessary for young people.

Shafiq, nonetheless, integrated and made friends with Americans and his English language teachers. He also had a Rumanian girlfriend for almost three years. Yet he says he never thought of marrying her nor did he love her. So why did he stay with her for so long? "Well, you know, you need someone. All the (Afghan) guys had girlfriends. You got to have a woman. What shall I say?"

While he was with his Rumanian girlfriend, his mother called from India and said it was time for him to marry.

-So finally, my mom and brothers said that I have to stop thinking about others and think about myself and get a wife. I said okay, but find me someone, I joked. Then two, three months later, my mom called (to say she had found a girl, Monisa)...I told her you have the right to decide.

It wasn't important to you what her personality was like or you didn't want to talk to her directly? You followed the traditional pattern?

-Yes. Us Afghan people can't speak to the girl directly or date and we push our family to find out more about the girl's family. What are they like. Since if the family is good, then the daughter will be good. My mother knew their family. They were our next-door neighbor. I trusted my mom.

Why did you not get married to an Afghan girl here in America?

-No, I never thought about that. I have respect for Afghan girls here but I didn't know any and my chances were better abroad.

What kind of a girl did you want?

-(He laughs.) Beauty wasn't that important. I wanted someone who had a nice body and had long hair. And be tall.

What about her morals?

-Well, you know how us people from Afghanistan are: good and righteous. I wanted her to be from Herat. My mom said that the girl you want is this one.

When (the girl's family) accepted, I felt very regretful. I thought to myself...what have you done? You didn't even see her picture. You don't know her or her family. Your mom just said she's a good girl. How could you do such a thing? I tell you, there was no place on earth. So when I went to sleep every night, I would pray to God that if you love me, then the girl will change her mind.

Shafiq allowed his mother to pick him a wife and at first explains that he felt comfortable with the arranged situation but later contradicts himself. Once the engagement was announced, he feared the arrangement. This discrepancy implies that Shafiq was committed to a traditional arranged marriage but questioned its outcome. Shafiq's afterthoughts imply that he "regretted" giving up the option to get to know his wife. He *chose* a girlfriend and therefore, was exposed to the alternative of finding a spouse on his own. Dating gave Shafiq the chance to be in control but that conflicted with a tradition in which mothers have control of choosing their son's wives.

In addition, Shafiq seems to hold Afghan women on a pedestal like Siavash, essentializing them as "good and righteous." However unlike Siavash, I cannot conclude that Shafiq married an Afghan girl in order to gain control over his wife. On the contrary, at first impression, Shafiq's relationship with Monisa and his understanding about gender relations portrays a touching tale of transformation.

When Shafiq met Monisa, he was relieved. They both liked each other. Monisa was a shy, quiet, traditional girl, describes Shafiq. She was ready to submit to her husband but Shafiq refused to accept her obedience.

-For example, when we were in India (where they married), she was washing my clothes in a tub and I brought another tub to wash her clothes in. She stood up and went inside the room. I went after her and saw her crying on the bed. I asked her why she was crying and she said it seems that you don't like the way I wash clothes. I told her, you goat, I didn't do this because I don't like the way you do it, I did it because I love you, to help you, so that you won't be bothered. I like to sit with you together and do this and we can laugh. Then I saw that she understood a little and we helped each other out in washing clothes, washing dishes and cooking. She had thought, since it's like this in Afghanistan, that if a man meddles in the women's domain, then she must not be good at her work.

Did you think like that before you came to the U.S?

-Yes, even in Afghanistan, (Monisa) was my neighbor, she saw. My brothers and I used to knead dough, wash clothes because we love our mom very much (implying that he helped his mom with housework).

What aspects of this culture or the cultures you were exposed to have you adopted?

-A lot of things that I didn't know. How to give respect to others, not to (disturb) others' rights. They teach you that you shouldn't...

Also, brother-in-laws used to come and hit their brother's wives because others thought they had the right. What right do they have to do that? We've been married for almost six years and there hasn't been a time when we got up to hit each other or raise our voices. There has been an agreement between her and I. I'm happy with her and she's happy with me. I've never believed that it's okay to hit her because she's my wife.

What do you expect from your wife. What do you expect her to do for you?

-Nothing. Why should she do anything for me? She can go work, study, wear whatever she wants, talk on the phone with whoever she wants, cook whatever she wants...

Do you have any other problems or did you that you have solved? Any differences of opinion?

-No, from the first time we were alone in our bedroom, the first thing I did was go kiss her feet. I told her don't think that I'm a man and I have rights over you. I have just thrown my pride upon your feet. I won't use her because she's innocent. I'm really happy with her.

Shafiq's deconstruction of traditional Afghan notions of male-female roles is apparent in the preceding quotes. Shafiq does not seem to consider himself the head of the house or his wife's governor. He is aware of the status he holds over her but does not embrace the dominant position. Furthermore, Shafiq encourages Monisa to relinquish her deferential status, which she seems to have accepted. Also, Shafiq is conscious of his own chauvinism. When I ask how he plans to raise their daughter versus their son, he replies

Completely equal. If my boy has a right to have a girlfriend, then my daughter will too. (Monisa winces at this idea.) I swear. In fact, we went to the park, there are waterfalls there and I took off his clothes and (let) my boy go and play and she (his daughter) all of a sudden (wanted to join him), and I heard myself say no. I did this without thinking...Why should we let him go and not her and from this age differentiate between them like that? This all depends on your own upbringing and you have to decide where your limits are and where your children's limits are. If she wants to bring a boyfriend home, then there's the boyfriend. You just have to keep in mind the trust between you. It doesn't matter if it's a girl or a boy.

Shafiq's somewhat egalitarian conceptualization of gender can be attributed to his "own upbringing." When his father died, his mother was in charge of the family and according to Shafiq, she divided household chores between her sons and her daughters and told them that they were no different from each other. Perhaps this upbringing has caused him to evaluate male-female relations differently and at one level, to rebel against the hierarchical system in his marriage. Additionally, his experience and integration into varying cultures may also have contributed to his acceptance of alternative gender concepts. For example, Shafiq says he learned "how to give respect to others, not to (disturb) their rights" through his exposure to other cultures. I assume this includes respecting women and their rights.

A further examination of Shafiq's relationship with Monisa, however, reveals the hierarchy in their marriage. When I interviewed Monisa individually before her husband, she was nervous and uncomfortable. She repeatedly suggested that it would be more useful if I spoke to Shafiq because he could answer my questions correctly. I assured her that I only wanted her opinion and that there were no right and wrong answers. She was not convinced. Monisa, however, praised her husband and similar to Shafiq, presented the image of a perfect marriage in which neither of them have authority over the other. My positionality as an Americanized college student greatly influenced this couple's responses.

During the joint interview with Monisa, Shafiq was in charge, giving me all the answers. In one instance, he ordered Monisa to quiet the children so that he could continue his storytelling. In other words, Shafiq is the leader in their relationship whether he opts to be or not. Monisa's subservience is convenient for Shafiq because he is given the authority to tell her how to be. Perhaps if Monisa was outspoken and demanded balanced control in the marriage, Shafiq may not have been willing to surrender his power.

In this section of this chapter, I have tried to examine the reasons why Afghan couples marry and note the discrepancies inherent in some of the prevailing notions of gender among the young Afghan generation in the U.S. Essentially, my focus was on the shifts and stagnants in gender and family relations. Many traditional ideologies are changing but much remains the same. Preserving family honor, personal autonomy, and power/control are just some of the motivations discussed for marriage. There are many other reasons; the most crucial is to gain legitimacy and status. Afghan males and females are considered children until they are married. Marriage is the route to adulthood and respect.

However, the most compelling force for marriage among my informants was love. From the 32 engaged/married Afghan informants, 18 rebelled against an arranged marriage by choosing their own partners. The concept of marrying for love is slowly becoming a norm in the community largely due to the impact of the media and popular American ideals. Romance was prevalent in art in Afghanistan but it has become an actuality in the Afghan community in America. Couples go on honeymoons, celebrate anniversaries and show affection in public—rituals and practices which were either unknown or disapproved of in many parts of Afghanistan. Love is the one objective for marriage which indicates the demise of traditional Afghan values while the other intentions discussed, demonstrate an attempt and a desire among the young generation to regenerate indigenous ideals.

CONFLICTS AND BREAKUPS

Lying, cheating, hitting, controlling, no trust, no communication, family, money and confusion of roles and status are just some of the problems Afghan engaged and newlywed couples encounter in the United States. Afghans who have married outside their nationality also may struggle with cultural and linguistic differences. Acculturation and displacement have added extra strain to regular marital conflicts. Gender roles are shifting. As the new couples attempt to find a position in this transitional stage, contradicting expectations and problems rise in relationships.

Shaista, 19, and Isaac, 26, have been engaged for ten months. They dated for a year before they announced the official engagement. Isaac is from Herat and comes from a Shi'a Muslim family while Shaista is from Kabul and a Sunni Muslim. They have had a tumultuous relationship which so far has survived through a breakup, family opposition and constant arguing. Isaac wants her to alter her clothing style and mannerisms, especially when they are around Afghans, and Shaista asks him to accept her the way she is at all times:

outspoken, bold and carefree. But she also expects him to buy her gifts, open doors for her and pay the bills. Their past relationships are also a subject of dispute. For the interview, the couple and I went to a restaurant and what I thought would be a question and answer interaction turned into a therapy session. Unfortunately, this conversation was not taped and I have only notes to discuss their interview.

Shaista was in high school and working in a fast food joint when she and Isaac got together. Isaac works in his family-owned restaurant. The couple met on Halloween night, which they view as symbolic for their "freaky" relationship. They flirted with each other and eventually talked on the phone. Neither one knew the other was Afghan. Shaista thought Isaac was either American or Mexican and Isaac thought Shaista was Middle Eastern. For Shaista, flirting with a foreign boy was safe; her reputation would not be questioned. For Isaac, pursuing a non-Afghan, since he did not plan to marry, had no strings attached. Once each found out the other was Afghan, the relationship became complicated.

Sh- From the first day I made my intentions clear. I wanted a husband and marriage.

I- How can you get married if you don't know each other?...If I wanted to get married, I would've got an arranged marriage.

Sh- You can't get to know someone until you're married. You change your personality once you're married.

I- I never thought of marriage...My (male) cousins married Americans.

You never dated other Afghan girls?

I- I went out with one girl. She came to me. She didn't have a brain...She was too restricted inside (her home) and outside, she had no control...I thought Afghan girls have no personalities.

S- I would not go out with him because I'm Afghan. I wasn't going to be played with...I wanted commitment.

However, Shaista did go out with Isaac for awhile and they fell in love. Isaac wanted to continue dating and avoided the words engagement and wedlock while Shaista continuously probed him to propose to her family. She was afraid of getting caught and being forced to let go of Isaac. But Isaac kept resisting, saying he was not ready until her family found out about their relationship. At this point, marriage became inevitable for Shaista. As she told me later over the phone, she and Isaac broke up for a short period because he would not propose. They also had other problems. Shaista had told Isaac about her "past"—that she had had a South Asian "male friend, not a boyfriend," but Isaac "changed" after she told him about this, Shaista remarks. "I shouldn't have told him anything about my past." In addition, "He kept pressuring me to have sex. He kept saying 'I'm a man, I need sex' and I gave him permission to have sex with someone else if he needs it so bad." During the time they were apart, Isaac slept with another woman and confessed to Shaista later when they got back together. Shaista forgave Isaac but this time, she gave him an ultimatum—propose or it is over.

Every man cheats. I went back to him because I love him. Even my parents who were very happy together cheated. My dad cheated on my mom...(Isaac) said he slept with her—a one night stand—because he thought the relationship was over. He told me it was a way out if I wanted to get out.

Shaista wanted an engagement ring and finally Isaac agreed. They announced the engagement and had a party but Shaista did not enjoy the ceremony. She complains that his family is not compatible with her family. (Their fathers have both passed away.) Shaista feels her mother-in-law discriminates against her because she is not a Herati Shi'a. Shaista's mother initially "disliked" Isaac but later wanted only my happiness.

My family accepted him but his family won't accept me...They hate my guts. None of them danced at my engagement. He didn't talk to me during the engagement party once. He asked me 'Am I a prisoner now?'

With all this turmoil, why do they stay together?

Our love is the only thing that brings us back together...He told me that at first, he just wanted to play with me but he couldn't help falling in love with me. He said to me 'I gave you my heart.' I did not speak to Isaac separately but the collaborative interview reveals his perspective.

What kind of a girl did you want to marry?

I- Open-minded, well-mannered, from a good family, knows what to wear.

S- When you went out with me, I was wearing the same thing. (She wears sleeveless and short skirts and dresses at times.)

I- When you're engaged, you change.

S- He doesn't respect me, (turns to him) if you want me to change.

I- I knew from the beginning how different we were. If we got to know each other I thought we might be able to compromise. I realized that if we argue about clothes for a year, how can we live together forever?

Do your sisters dress conservative? (Directed to Isaac)

S- No!

They know what to do.

But you think you have more of an authority over Shaista as your fiancée than your sisters?

I- Yes, if she's going to be my wife. We have to compromise.

S- He wants to control me.

I gave the couple my analysis of their problems. Isaac seems to feel trapped; he loves Shaista and does not want to lose her but he is not prepared for wedlock. However, he cannot date Shaista since her family will not allow it. Isaac is forced to conform to traditional customs and must guarantee a commitment. But now that Isaac has sacrificed for the "Afghan way," he expects Shaista to do the same. He wants her to act and behave in a manner which his family and the community deem "proper and respectable." As a girlfriend, Isaac held her under a different set of standards. As an unofficial couple, they avoided Afghan settings and in the American realm, Shaista's dressing style and frankness was not necessarily considered immodest. Thus, Isaac had fewer problems with her. Yet as fiancées, they have moved into the Afghan realm where judgments are passed on Shaista which reflect on Isaac's reputation as well. Isaac may dread gossip that his partner is "loose" or immodest. Isaac's concern may be that his mother disapproves of Shaista's behavior. In other words, Isaac accepts Shaista according to the cultural standards she is subjected to and it seems that he will not stand up for her "differences." Also, Isaac seems to be confused about his "ideal woman." The fact that Shaista dated him and disobeyed her family leads Isaac to be suspicious of her purity. During the interview he asks her why she went out with him if she was "so Afghan." Further, Shaista says Isaac's suspicions rose when she told him that she had had another "male friend." I speculate that Isaac is conflicted with wanting a submissive and innocent wife and having strong emotions for Shaista who for him, does not fit that category.

Shaista realizes Isaac's dilemma but refuses to accommodate her attitude or style for him.

He wants me to compromise and I will about certain things, like smoking. I don't smoke anymore. But I can't change my personality. That's who I am.

Shaista agitates Isaac to understand her "modern" ways on the one hand but she validates sexist notions when she forgives his "adultery" on the basis "that every man cheats." In addition, Shaista blames herself for his suspicions when she mentions that she should have hidden her "past" from him. This statement suggests that Shaista upholds the ideals that unwed girls should be naive and pure. Indeed, Shaista's solution for the couple's lack of trust and communication is to manipulate her fiancée. "My eyes are open now. I have to make him trust me." However,

I'd leave him if he cheats on me again or ever hits me...I don't care about dignity- I do maybe a little but that wouldn't stop me.

The couple state they are not sure about wedlock. "We think of letting go sometimes," Shaista utters. They dream of building a family but "We have to solve our problems before we get married. There has to be more understanding between us," Isaac declares. The interview ends with the couple angry and upset.

In the cases of Shaista and Isaac, the issue of diminishing male authority and the dilemmas it poses in their relationship has been analyzed. The loss of patriarchal status has caused the strengthening of women's voices in marriages, which in some relationships has led to friction and trouble. In this couple's involvement, Isaac attempts but fails to execute his authority over Shaista by appropriating community and family expectations to control her. Shaista demands not necessarily an equal partnership but respect.

Shaista and Isaac think they can solve their problems by better communication and understanding. Shaista, however, resorts to manipulation when she says she has to "make" Isaac trust her. Compromise is another method of reconciliation for couples in general but who should compromise and to what extent is another topic of contention between the males and females. Shaista and Isaac struggle with their relationship but they have remained together. Many other Afghan couples who cannot resolve their conflicts separate.

BREAKUPS

According to my informants, breaking up is becoming as common as getting married among the young generation of Afghans. From the 34 interviewed, four, one female and one couple in the Bay Area and one male in Virginia, have divorced or ended engagements with their partners in the last nine months. One of the women I interviewed, Yasameen, had divorced her first husband and remarried. The couple who are now divorced, Sabrina and Barri, had separated once before but they had reunited when I spoke to them. These informants divulge the trials and tribulations of breaking up and life after separation.

Yasameen, 32, came to the U.S. at age 15 from Afghanistan. She spent her formative years in France with her mother, who studied social service and psychology there and then returned to Afghanistan to become a director in the Afghan Women's Organization. Yasameen's family and her mother, especially, have had a strong influence on her decisions in life, she says. In Kabul, Yasameen's family had led a "Westernized" lifestyle, so living in America did not pose many cultural conflicts for them.

And my family was extremely open-minded...We were indifferent to the differences (in the U.S.). We weren't the kind of family who took off our veils when we came here.

Yasameen enrolled in the eighth grade in Virginia and soon after high school, she married an Arab man with whom she fell in love. From the beginning of her marriage, her husband was unfaithful and abusive.

-My life was that my husband was very much a womanizer. He would go out and drink and then- you know, I have this thing, I don't care what others think. I see what's good for me. Of course, you do think of what's good for your family but you must also think about your own happiness.

The issue of dignity ruins a lot of people's lives?

-Yes, that's right.

How long were you with him?

-Three years. Fighting and arguing. It was very hard

When did you decide to end it?

-Well, because I was pregnant and I knew he was seeing someone else. That's it. No matter if the child comes or not, my decision is to separate. I was two months pregnant. I wasn't going to deal with it. For who should I deal with it? Because once you're abused, they don't change. Once they hit you, they'll hit you twice, three times. He won't change.

So you did get abused physically?

-Oh yes, emotionally, physically, verbally.

Why didn't you separate the first year?

-Family. My parents would tell me don't do it; we're Afghans. Separating isn't good. Children will come and it'll be okay. When I got pregnant, I said no, this is my life, my child.

Was your pregnancy an accident?

-No, I was planning to have a kid. I wanted to have children and live with him. I thought it might get better but I saw that it got worse. Then I decided that I was important and that I wanted my child to be raised in a home- I see many Afghan married couples who fight 24 hours and curse and shout in front of five/six-year-olds. What does the child learn from that? Bitterness. Lies...In this way, I think once you have a child, you should separate. (The child) would be more at peace emotionally...It was very hard for me to separate. I didn't want to but in my heart, I knew what was best for my life.

How did you deal with Afghans' judgments of you?

-Actually, I said I don't care about people's judgments because I'm Afghan and I see how Afghan girls are. All Afghan mothers and fathers say their daughters are moral and righteous and all behind their backs, I see they enter college from one door and exit through another with their boyfriends' cars kissing and fooling around...I've been a teenager here and I know what it's like. I think about myself, not what other people think of me. They'll talk if you're good or bad...Our mentality is just like that. We'll never change.

Yasameen thinks that if she had been in Afghanistan, she might not have found the strength to divorce because of family dignity.

You become more open-minded here (U.S.). Like here, when you're not happy with your husband, you say that's it, goodbye. You take your kids and that's it. In Afghanistan, you can't do that. Because of the culture and the way you were raised, you couldn't do that...People talk here too but that kind of gossip doesn't happen here.

Yasameen tells me that she never thought she was compromising her Afghan identity when she divorced but feels she was taking advantage of her rights. Yasameen's resolution to divorce is revolutionary for an Afghan woman. She is able to do so partially by adopting Western notions of feminism. Yasameen contests the belief that a married woman with children must tolerate her husband's abuse when she divorces while pregnant. She appropriates the ideal that single parenting is healthier for children than an abusive family. Patriarchal authority, nevertheless, continues to influence Yasameen.

Yasameen reiterates several times that she is indifferent to other Afghans' opinions of her but during the interview, she is defensive of her decisions. Before Yasameen finishes the reasons she left her husband, she pauses and asserts that she "doesn't care what others think." Instead of showing Yasameen's indifference, her defensive comments imply that she is affected by gossip about her in the community. She further justifies her resolution to divorce by affirming that she cared about her family dignity but her happiness was more important. One of the reasons which hinders Yasameen from divorcing sooner was guilt, it seems. She seems to feel guilty for jeopardizing her family name and becoming a dishonored divorcee. The other reason she endured the abusive marriage, as she states, was direct family pressure to preserve her family honor. But later Yasameen declares that her family eventually supported her choice to separate, vindicating herself for making the decision.

My parents tell me whatever you want, we're a hundred percent behind you. Well, when I was married, they wanted me to be happy and if you're really not happy, then separate. I decided that I wasn't and that I was going to raise and support my own child. In life, you have to make these decisions.

It seems that until Yasameen's parents approved her choice to divorce, she did not go through with it. Thus, family support was central to Yasameen's choice; she may still have been married to the Arab if her parents had continued objecting to divorce. By divorcing, Yasameen rebelled against a major cultural taboo. She assures me that many of her Afghan friends divorced when she did but those friends were not much of a consolation. "When you want to have fun, everybody's there for you but when you're lonely, nobody cares. Now I've learned that in my life." This quote is an indication of how alienated Yasameen may have felt after separating from her husband. I assume that Yasameen may have been more susceptible to criticism from the community since her husband was an outsider. By marrying an outsider, Yasameen broke a major rule and by divorcing him, she probably substantiated the doubts of those who criticized her.

Yasameen proclaims that she is stronger and tougher after her divorce. "I'm hard. I can take anything now. Life does that to you." Yasameen avoids the word divorce throughout the interview. In the preceding quote, she does not attribute being "hard" to divorce but to "life," even though my question was how has divorce affected her. When she refers to divorce directly, she says "separation," exhibiting a fear of the taboo word. Yasameen did not think she would marry again after her divorce. "I was like that's it (for a few years) and then I thought why that's it? You know. Life goes on."

Yasameen remarried; this time, to an Iranian immigrant. In high school Yasameen declares "I wasn't thinking about boyfriends and such things. I was busy with my life. It wasn't because boyfriends are bad and my reputation would be ruined and my family wouldn't like it. You know, I didn't like it." Nevertheless, when I ask her how she met her first husband, she refuses to discuss it. But when I inquire about the second husband, she openly tells me she met him on a blind date. Perhaps Yasameen feels that as a divorcee, she was exempt from the taboo of dating but as a maiden, she was still bound by communal expectations. The popular notion is that once an Afghan woman has divorced, no respectable Afghan man will marry her. I ask Yasameen why she never married an Afghan.

I never thought I'll go with him and not with him. It's fate. When we first came here (U.S.), there weren't a lot of Afghan guys. They were silly and childish. Opportunities were little and what I wanted wasn't there. I wanted a strong man who knew what he wanted.

Yasameen reconciles her lack of opportunity with Afghan men after her divorce to fate. Yasameen, however, had a preference for marrying an "Easterner" because of cultural similarities. She recalls that she had an ideal husband in mind but it doesn't always work out that way.

There's never an ideal husband. There's nobody for nobody. You create your ideal...It should be a good man, just get along and have a good relationship with each other, love each other.

Yasameen has two children, one from her first husband and one from her current marriage. She "never compares" the two men she married but she makes a distinction between "Eastern" and "American" relationships.

-I think the man's role is more of an issue if you marry an Easterner. Between Americans, it's 50-50. They always compromise. You pay your share, I'll pay mine. That's your car, this is mine.

Do you prefer that?

-Sometimes, but life gets boring that way. I know a lot of Afghan girls who married Americans and life gets complicated in terms of religion. More problems are created even if they love each other. In an Eastern marriage, women shouldn't be slaves but there is a lot more compromise on the woman's part. Eastern husbands demand a lot.

Do you compromise more than your husband?

-Me, yes, I compromise a lot. I'm very easygoing now. I take it easy. I don't want to make things more complicated...So far, so good. I'm prepared for anything. To the point that I am able, I want to be a good wife and a mother...A good wife must be faithful, must love, there must be chemistry, compromise, think the same way (as the husband) and ask each other's opinions, you know, a good wife. A good husband is the same.

Yasameen refers to her second husband as a "good man" but does not elevate him above her first husband. Yasameen says she is happy now although, her relationship entails "normal" marital conflicts, such as "family, finances and children." The couple "talks a lot" to resolve their problems. Yasameen recognizes her role as an "Eastern" wife and accepts it, it seems. She says she is easygoing "now," implying that she was not in her first marriage. This suggests that Yasameen is more aware of what is expected of her as an "Eastern" wife and more willing to comply. As a result of Yasameen's divorce, however, it seems she has clearly defined her limits and expectations. She does not expect an equal partnership with her husband but she demands fidelity. When Yasameen states "I'm prepared for anything," she gives the impression that she is neither hesitant nor fearful of divorcing again. She also has no romantic illusions of a lifelong partnership. "You never know what's going to happen next. Maybe I'll be with him for 10 years and then things will change."

Yasameen continues to have a close-knit relationship with her family. She has no role models; "I look up to myself." Yasameen is currently a beautician and has a year left before completing her certification for drug and alcohol counseling. She also hopes to have her own business in the future.

I spoke to Sabrina, 24, and Barri, 28, seven months ago when they had recently reunited after a short separation. A few months after our interview, I heard they divorced. I have not contacted either to discuss their divorce but the interview we had reveals some of the reasons which might have led to the legal separation. First, before I went to the couple's home, Sabrina called me to confirm the interview and also to ask if I can lie to her husband about where she and I met. "Don't tell him we met at a party, please. Can you tell him we met at the mall?" I agreed but Barri never asked.

Sabrina and Barri met at a wedding. A few months after they met, they became engaged for one year before they married. Barri wanted most importantly, a virgin, then, a white-skinned, "modern," smart,

educated, hospitable, moderately religious, cultured Afghan wife who knew how to cook and who was willing to get to know him. He did not want an arranged marriage.

You (points to me) will like me because I'm one of the few guys who doesn't like arranged marriages. I couldn't marry an (Afghan) girl from abroad (Pakistan, Iran) because I'd have to train her and teach her to adjust here. Besides I want to be able to communicate with her on the same level and talk in mixed English and Persian, like I do with (Sabrina).

Two of Barri's brothers are married to Americans but Barri wanted an Afghan wife who had European features. "I like American women's appearance but they're dirty. I think of their private part as dirty...Women should be virgins until marriage. Virginitiy is a gift to your husband." Barri considers himself more "liberal" than other Afghan males.

Compared to Afghan men, I'm not close-minded. I'm unquestionably Afghan...I was with Americans a lot. I learned a lot from them and my attitude toward women are a reflection of that. My dad abused my mom and gave her no freedom. I'm the opposite with my wife. I don't care what she wears, which guy she talks to, but I don't want her to smoke or drink. In marriage, I believe it should be forty-sixty. The husband should be the head and the woman his assistant.

Barri desires a sexy spouse who mirrors the archetypal beauty of popular culture: tall, thin and white in appearance and in terms of character, a subservient wife who embraces her submissive status. In Barri's perspective, wearing sexy clothes which enhance Sabrina's beauty are fine but smoking and drinking which threaten her purity and innocence are not permitted. He wants the combined package of the modern plus traditional Afghan woman. His wife, Sabrina, defies this ideal.

Sabrina settled in California with her family when she was 12-years-old. Her father abused her mother but after five years in America, her mother divorced him. Sabrina remained with her mother. "My mom was and is everything to me," she declares. Sabrina integrated into the "American social life;" she drank, smoked and dated. At home, she was pampered. "My family stressed education; I was not raised to be a woman of the house but an independent woman." Sabrina did not learn to cook or be the gracious Afghan hostess.

Sabrina mentions her preference for a husband: rich, handsome and open-minded. Barri originally fit the mold but as she discovered, he was also the victim of an abusive father and the brutal war in Afghanistan. Barri immigrated to the U.S. when he was 20-years-old. His mother and other siblings came to America when Barri was 12-years-old and Barri was left with his militant father in Kabul. His father hit him regularly until he was 18-years-old.

Barri grew up during the Soviet-Afghan War; the violence he endured inside his home, he witnessed in school and on the streets. Barri dealt with his pain by becoming a bully outside of his home. "I wanted to be tough. I was a wimp inside the house. Outside, I wanted to be like a king." Barri was paid to beat up other students in school. He tells me that he gouged out a boy's eye once and felt no remorse. "I learned violence from my dad. I have a ruthless side I fear."

Once Barri arrived in America, he escaped his father's violence and distanced himself from the rest of his family. He integrated with other minorities, found well-paid construction work and eventually built a lucrative contracting company. When Barri proposed to Sabrina, he was an established businessman.

Initially, Sabrina's and Barri's relationship was a living fantasy. "He treated me right at first. He had a different glow. He made me laugh. You could call it love at first sight," Sabrina reminisces. Their problems began, however, when Barri saw Sabrina smoking. Barri demanded that she to quit "because I'm allergic," not because smoking is taboo for Afghan women, he assures me. Sabrina agreed to stop smoking but Barri caught her again and threatened to break off their engagement. He also snitched to Sabrina's mother that her daughter smokes. She agreed to stop. Sabrina quickly explains why she smoked.

He would get moody, snap at me for nothing and make me feel out of control. He made me feel nervous and I needed something to calm myself down...At first, we didn't know how to communicate.

They married, nevertheless, and moved to Oregon, away from Afghans. "I wanted to get away from everyone. I didn't want any more responsibilities. And we were tired of Afghans and their talking," Barri explains. He gave up the partnership in his business (for reasons the couple avoids discussing) and became a waiter while Sabrina stayed home. Suddenly the couple was bored and broke, Sabrina describes their situation.

We needed family and Afghans. The weather was bad, there was nothing to do in (Oregon). I missed home but we didn't have money to visit my family. (Barri) became a monster. He treated me like nothing. He yelled constantly, expected me to cook and clean all the time. I was in shock. I didn't feel anything at first. Then I couldn't take it anymore.

Without my inquiry, Sabrina and Barri mention that he did not abuse her physically. There were many other conflicts which led to their breakup.

B- Other people tried to break us up. She got calls that I was a drug dealer, with the mafia, wife-beater, player and I got calls that she's a gold-digger and this and that. We had enemies. I was frustrated. Here I was with all that money and glamour in my life and now we were

living very poor. I hated it. I took my frustrations out on her. I couldn't stop being like my father. She doesn't know how to cook and be very hospitable to guests and that really got to me. Girls in my family were taught to cook and be very good hostesses.

S- (interrupting) Education and independence was stressed in my family.

B- Well, whatever. I know how to cook and all because I raised myself but she has to learn.

S- I still don't know but he's more patient with me. He's teaching me...Then he was impatient and disrespectful.

B- (Continues the story) One day I came home (in Oregon) and my brother-in-law was in my living room and she had her suitcases packed. I told her if she stepped out that door, I didn't want her coming back. I said 'you're Afghan and my wife. You're a bad wife if you leave.' She left.

For two months the couple was separated. Sabrina vowed never to go back. She wanted to be treated with respect. Sabrina emphasizes that she did not care what others said about her but her family tried to reunite the couple. Barri came to her repeatedly, apologized for his behavior and promised to change. Sabrina agreed to get back together under one condition—that they live in California where her family is. "In (Oregon), we realized we need to be around Afghans and family. I'm happier when I'm with family," Sabrina affirms. They can communicate better now. Barri has changed a little but he continues to have mood swings. "I don't let him get to me as much. I just ignore him whereas before I tried to fix it." Barri blames his moodiness and temper on his father. Sabrina shoots back sarcastically,

You can't always make excuses for your behavior- 'well, my father beat me, so I can yell.'
He thinks he has to take care of me. I don't need that. I'm capable of doing things myself.

Barri has returned to his contracting business. Sabrina also has gone back to her marketing job. Barri wants them to be secure and comfortable before they have a family. "We need to grow before we have a family," Barri says. He encourages Sabrina to go back to school and finish her hygienist degree. The couple tell me they understand each other more now but Barri has an intense fear that Sabrina might leave him again if he is not "nice enough." He is scared of his own temper.

From this interview, it is evident that Sabrina's and Barri's marriage was based on dishonesty and control. Sabrina permits Barri to dominate her when she lies about quitting smoking. Sabrina's dishonesty reveals that she feared her husband and therefore, allowed him to control her habits. Sabrina, however, shakes her head several times during the interview in response to Barri's comments about women and gender roles in marriage. For instance, when Barri remarks that American women are "dirty," Sabrina retorts, "You shouldn't make generalizations like that. Not all of them are like that." Her defense of American women does not necessarily indicate she objects to the reproach but at least she contests the generalization. Sabrina's response

demonstrates that she does not submit to her husband's stereotypical perceptions. In addition, Sabrina sighs with frustration when Barri accords to the hierarchical husband and wife roles in which the man is the "head" and the woman is the "assistant." She whispers under her breath that "it should be 50-50." Also, Sabrina refuses to accept Barri's justification (that he was a victim of violence) for his temper. She additionally asserts her autonomy by declaring that "I can take care of myself." Sabrina, nonetheless, tolerates her husband's attitude and behavior. Sabrina adapts her reactions to Barri in order to avoid conflict between them; she no longer gets upset from his tantrums because she ignores them. Plus, Sabrina defends her inexperience as a cook and housewife but at the same time succumbs to Barri's criticisms and expectations regarding her lack of skills.

Barri's expectations of his wife and notions of gender roles in marriage and Sabrina's objections of his attitude create irreparable dilemmas between the husband and wife. Barri's justifications for his domineering and (perhaps abusive) conduct illustrate that he is not prepared to change the way he treats Sabrina or their unbalanced relationship. It was predictable that this couple's problematic marriage has ended in divorce and Barri's fear has come true.

The preceding discussion on breakups illuminates the irreconcilable tensions in the concepts of control. Afghan females want control of their own lives while Afghan males enforce control over them; the men see it as their obligation and responsibility in some cases. The confusion of positionality in the midst of two cultures and the absence of a coherent patriarchal place may be one of the reasons that Afghan men have the need to assert power by controlling their partners. Barri manifests a superiority complex which can be ascribed to an insecure self-image resulting from his abusive childhood. Whatever the motive behind their male chauvinism, Afghan females are taking advantage of their rights and voicing their objections. They negotiate their power; some find consolation in separation while others manipulate or incessantly argue with husbands, fiancées, boyfriends, brothers or fathers. No more! shouts Anita, Dina, Soraya, Zorah, Shaista, Yasameen, Sabrina. But this is the voice of transformation, hybridization, REALIZATION.

What are your expectations of your wife when you get married?

-Communication...A better question is what are the roles of two people in a marriage? Of course, there are certain things that I can do that she can't do physically but to think in terms of husband and wife creates problems. I don't think of it in that way. When she needs me, I'll be there for her and I expect the same.

—Omar, 29, Virginia

C O N C L U S I O N

My examination of shifting gender and identity among the young generation of the Afghan community in the United States is over. No summaries or reiterations are needed. Instead, I have something to say to my Afghan peers living in America:

I wanted to write your untold stories, invoke your unheard speeches, understand your dilemmas. You are me and you are the Other. You intrigue, inspire, mangle my heart. I know your "displacement—cultural hybridization and decentered realities, fragmented selves and multiple identities, marginal voices, and languages of rupture" (Min-ha, 1989). I sympathize, empathize, realize. But tell me, how?

Girls-women-females, my sisters, how do we free ourselves? They—our blood, our lifeline, our security—AND you ask us to bargain, surrender, hide, kill our sexuality, desires, dreams, autonomy. Autonomy. Autonomy. We say NO! but surrender midway. Are we afraid or do you believe...in our limitation, seclusion, incapacitation, confinement, oppression? I fear isolation, dissemination, loneliness. Do you? Tell me how to soothe them and you and me. They want my shame, my modesty, my purity, my dignity—but that is mine. I want to please them AND us? Tell me, how? Lie. Submit. Run. Revolt. Adapt. I can't do it alone. Will you join me?

Boys-men-males, my brothers, you are distant. My ambivalence toward you separates us but I see your disposition, your dislocation. You have lost stability, security, coherency, guidance, prestige, power. You must work to earn, to support, to provide, to prove your masculinity, your heroism, your capabilities, your loyalty. You must be the leader, guardian, head—you have no choice. Tell me, how? How will you find the status, the control? You want to be a hero. You want to save and protect. You want to control me to empower you. Do you long for the strength you had or could have had in the homeland? Can you surrender it—the insecurity, the need for vigour? You surrender but you halt. The wave of your white flag—your call to equality—quivers midway. It turns green and you hide behind Islam. It turns black, red, green and you cover yourself with Afghan. Tell me, how will you find the courage to let go?

My Afghan peers, my compatriots, how do we belong? Tell me. America is ours. Afghanistan is ours. But where is our nation? Germany, England, France, Holland, Japan, Canada, Pakistan, Iran, India, Australia... Oh, the globe is ours. But tell me, where is our place? Midway. Where is that?
BEGUID KOJAST?!

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