Sharam Nahi Aundi?

Navigating Culture, Religion, Gender and Sexuality in a Colonized World

by

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ABSTRACT

A preliminary critical ethnographic study was conducted to garner Punjabi Sikh U.S. young adults' understandings and experiences with their cultural, religious, gender, and sexual identity development. Nine participants from King County, Washington were interviewed and engaged in a weeklong self-reflective journal writing activity. This data was then analyzed alongside existing scholarship. This study indicates that participants experience challenges in navigating their bicultural identity, grappling with the historical and present trauma their communities endure. Additionally, to navigate such challenges, Punjabi Sikh U.S. young adults invoke various methods to negotiate their various cultures, identities, and desires, and remain resilient.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated firstly to the nine powerful individuals who agreed to give their time and energy to this study. I thank you for trusting me to hold your experiences and stories and allowing me to share them.

Thank you to my family who supported me throughout the entirety of my thesis. Without your encouragement, I would have been unable to finish my study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On January 20, 2017, the night of the inauguration of the 45th president of United States (U.S.), the University of Washington, Seattle, in King County, Washington was in an upheaval. Tensions were high between individuals from marginalized communities who either lived around or attended the University of Washington, and conservative, largely white community members, who had come to listen to Milo Yiannopoulos, known for his white supremacist, sexist, homophobic, and neo-nazi rhetoric. As the two separate crowds collided, I was present as a conflict de-escalator, and had worn a salwar kameez, my traditional Punjabi clothing that included a chunni (thin scarf), which around my neck. As the crowds collided, and I tried to deescalate the violence, I felt myself being pulled to the ground by my chunni, being choked by individuals who were shouting racial slurs. I thought to myself, "Is this how I am going to die? By being strangled by my chunni?" Luckily, I did not die, and was pulled away by others nearby. In that moment, I physically experienced the conflict between my identities as a Punjabi Sikh born on the stolen land known as U.S.. My brown, feminine body, dressed in the clothing of my culture, was at odds with the colonial, white supremacist reality that is the foundation of this nation (Kang, 2012). Though I knew the risks that night, I did not wish to accept that all I could do in that moment is watch violence occur on the campus I walked on every day as an undergraduate. In an act of resilience, I threw my body in the middle of the messy conflict that many individuals of marginalized backgrounds experienced that day.

I open my thesis with this personal anecdote to center the messy conflict experienced by those who share both U.S. identity and identities of marginalized

communities in this nation, in this case those who identify as Punjabi Sikh in the region of King County, Washington. While this moment was an extreme case of culture clash, Punjabi Sikhs who have grown up in this region negotiate with clashes in their daily lives, whether it is with U.S. culture, or Punjabi Sikh culture, or their own desires. When I was growing up in King County, an important part of mine and other Punjabi Sikh youths' lives that was a place for culture clash were our gender and sexual identities. These identities are not ones we had the space to easily share about or explore outside of our most trusted spaces. The gender and sexuality of Punjabi Sikhs is a site through which an exploration of the histories of trauma, current moment of violence, and the active resilience of Punjabi Sikh U.S. youth can be dissected and pieced apart by the very individuals who live these identities. And so, this thesis seeks to explore gender and sexuality in the lives of Punjabi Sikh U.S. youth of King County, Washington, by examining the different realities that shape our identities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I frame this study through a lens of Queer of Color Critique. People of Color navigate the world from various vantage points, their bodies the intersecting point of multiple systems of power. This reality means that the gendered and sexual individuals experience work in hand with the racialized meaning placed on their bodies. Black Feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins describes this as sexual politics, "a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame all men and women's treatment of one another, as well as how individual men and women are perceived and treated by others" (Collins, 2004, Pg. 6). In order to understand the socio-political oppression and overall experiences of Black people in the U.S., one must understand how gender and sexuality of their bodies has been constructed over time to maintain the system of white supremacy. Additionally, Collins stresses how sexual politics are not solely enacted by systems and people in power, but rather are internalized and normalized by Black people and thus are enacted between each other. Collins recognizes the presence of sexual politics in all racial formations within the racial hierarchy, based on the foundation of Black sexual politics.

I introduce sexual politics in order to recognize the foundations of Queer of Color Critique within Black Feminist thought, as well as introduce the notion of Queer of Color Critique. Queer of Color Critique, as defined by Roderick Ferguson, seeks to understand the sexual, gendered, racial, and class formations of social and systematic powers (Ferguson, 2004, pg. 4). This definition of Queer of Critique overlaps quite vividly with sexual politics, however it seeks to center deviant experiences, particularly of queer

bodies of color as spaces through which to understanding the intersecting configuration of these identities in the formation of the U.S. Queer of Color Critique means to complicate the traditional understanding of the nation-state and capital, questioning both the sites where deviance and resistance takes place and where it maintains white heteropatriarchy. In this way, bodies of color as a whole exist as deviant, their gender and sexualities that which is meant to be controlled (Gopinath, 2004; Rodriguez, 2015). This reality becomes more salient as bodies are further removed from formations of power, i.e. when bodies of color are darker, non-masculine, non-cis, non-heteronormative in nature. Queer of Color Critique seeks to destabilize the normalized systems of power through uprooting the ways in which systems of power intersect with one another. To dive deep into the complex realities of people of color, it is necessary to examine it through the lens of Queer of Color Critique. For Punjabi Sikh U.S. youth, this looks like breaking through taboos surrounding topics of gender and sexuality, as well as the harmful Western notions of gender and sexuality in South Asian spaces. It is to center the experiences and stories of Punjabi Sikh young adults, and to allow for them to be seen for the trauma and pain, as well as the strength and resilience they enact in their lives.

An individual's identity development begins from an early age, soaking in meanings of the world deeply rooted in the culture they are raised in (Durham, 2004). This culture passes on traditions, values, expectations, and normative identities of which an individual is to follow. But for many communities of color, including Punjabi Sikh U.S. youth, their identities are influenced by more than one culture. While being raised in the white, western, heteronormative, and cisgender culture of King County, Washington,

Punjabi Sikhs are also raised within the religious-cultural group of their families. This experienced has been labelled as bicultural identity development and is defined as the development of identities within two or more different cultures (Kankesan, 2010). This can prove to be challenging for bicultural individuals, due to the fact that there can be conflicting messages given from the different cultures, creating confusion, stress, and anxiety for individuals (Bal, 2016; Durham 2004; Kankesan, 2010). Particularly for Punjabi Sikh individuals this is true when discussing gender and sexuality—while both normative ideas of gender and sexuality are based in cis-heteronormative patriarchy normative ideas, they different meanings between Punjabi Sikh and Amerikkian cultures.

Punjabi Sikhs are a sub religious-cultural group that originates from Punjab, currently known as the states of; Punjab, Pakistan; Punjab, India; Haryana, India; and Himachel Pradesh, India (Kurien, 2018). The region of Punjab has a history of resistance, it being the historical northwest stronghold against imperializing and colonializing forces. While the ethnic culture of Punjab, Punjabi, is influenced by multiple religions, having present in the region Punjabi Muslims, Punjabi Hindus, and other religious groups, Punjabi Sikhs are unique in that the faith was founded in the region (Singh, N., 2012). The majority of religious sites and historical events occurred within the region, and through that Sikhi and Punjabi culture are deeply influenced by one another, sharing language and traditions. For instance, the religious event Vaisakhi both celebrates the day Sikhi was form, as well as spring harvest, important for all members of the Punjabi community who are traditionally farmers. The Sikh faith believes in the equality of all people, having been formed and developed during the struggle against the Mughal

imperialism in the region (Singh, N. 2012; Tewari, 2009). The faith condemns gender-based violence, caste violence, religious violence, and all other forms of violence against marginalized people. God is a formless and genderless being in Sikhi, representative of the belief that all living beings on earth are at their essence the same (Chilana, 2005). There are various traditions that devout Sikhs are required to follow, including the maintenance of unshorn hair, and individuals, particularly men, cover their hair with a *paag* (turban) (Chilana, 2005; Singh, N., 2012). The faith has what are called the *pang chors* or roughly translated, the five evils. These sins are kaum (lust), lobh (greed), krodh (rage), ahankar (ego), and moh (attachment).

Scholarship surrounding Punjabi Sikh gender and sexuality is limited, much of it focusing on the greater South Asian diaspora of which Punjabi Sikhs are a part of, carrying similar values, lived experiences, and notions of sex, sexuality, and gender. South Asians are considered those who are descendants of the nations of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Bal, 2016; Chou, 2015). Within U.S., South Asians often fall under the racial stereotype of the Model Minority, similar to their Asian counterparts (Sandhu, 2014). The Model Minority myth is the belief that individuals from the Asian diaspora are intelligent, successful, and of higher economic class in comparison to other racial groups, despite how actual this reality is to them (Bal, 2016). South Asians exist in a reality in which they are no longer in their homeland amongst community where their values are held, but instead in the adherently different nation where they are a marginalized group, stigmatized for their race and cultural deviance. In order to exist within that reality, South Asians create a

strong, respectable identity that includes aspects of their culture, adhering to the myth of being a model minority. Anything deviant of that image, such as mental illness, undocumented status, sex, sexuality, and gender are silenced, for the sake of respectability. This identity therefore leads to members of Punjabi Sikh community, and other South Asians to be held to rigid standards of cis-heteronormativity, instructed to them from a young age. Maintaining, rejecting, and negotiating these gender and sexual expectations are tied to the South Asian values *Izzat* (communal honor) and *Sharam* (communal shame) of one's family, a point of pressure for young adults and silencing narratives of sexuality and gender outside of that construct (Ahmed, Bipasha, et al., 2009; Kanukollu, Shanta N. and Ramaswami Mahalingam, 2011; Masood, Nausheen, et al., 2009; Singh, Anneliese A., et al., 2010). In order to keep up their honor, South Asians are unwilling to engage with social services, leaving them without resources to turn to. (Brar, 2013; Kanukollu & Mahalingam, 2011).

Though Punjabi Sikhs share values and traditions with other South Asians, it is necessary to understand their identity development, particularly their gender and sexual identity development, as distinct from other South Asian identities. In her discussion of Asian sexual politics, Rosalind Chou states;

> "Race is central to how sex, sexuality, and gender can be understood in the lives of Asian Americans… Gender and sexuality act as fundamental mechanisms in maintaining white supremacy and white hegemonic ideals. Racial stereotypes crawl into bed with people of all races" (Chou, 2014, pg. 16).

While Asian sexual politics plays out in similar ways for Asian people, Chou stresses the necessity to understand the histories and diasporic realities of populations within the racial category Asian, due to the different understandings of gender and

sexuality that vary from the U.S. and particular ethnic identities, which inform the sexual politics of different Asian populations. The unique history of the colonization of Punjabi Sikhs, as well as their present experiences in the U.S., inform the ways in which individuals within this religious-ethnic minority develop their identity.

Punjabi Sikhs were the first South Asians to arrive to North U.S. in the late 1800's, their migration sparked by the British Regime's impact on the region (Kurien, 2018). They arrived in the Western U.S. and Canada, and faced immediate discrimination, labelled as "dusky peril" threatening the wellbeing of white U.S. citizens (Puget, 1906). For Punjabi Sikhs who had migrated to the Pacific Northwest, where King County, Washington is currently, this tension led to a series of race riots running Punjabi Sikhs out of the region (Bhatt & Iyer, 2013; Kurien, 2018). Additionally, this fear became the foundation for several laws and court cases that barred Punjabi Sikhs and other migrants from citizenship, land rights, and family reunification. In the midst of this, South Asians came together both to address the discrimination they faced in North U.S. and apply pressure against the British Regime in India. When British Regime lost control of the region in 1947, the partition of India and Pakistan had a drastic impact on Punjabi Sikhs, who's homeland was split in two (Kurien, 2018). Punjabi Sikhs from Pakistan were displaced, and religious violence in the region was rampant. Caught in the center of this religious violence were Punjabi Sikh women, who were targeted, raped, and often either killed or committed suicide due to the trauma (Daiya, Kavita, 2002; Hayden, Robert M., 2000; Pettigrew, Joyce, 2006). Following the partition, Punjabi Sikhs struggled in Punjab, India, where they had limited access to government support,

economic opportunity, and civil rights (Kurien, 2018). This struggle led to the formation of the Khalistan movement, which called for a separate nation separate from India. The escalating tension in the region began a migration of Punjabi Sikhs from Punjab to North U.S., including into King County, Washington. In 1984, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi responded to the movement with a military attack on the Sri Harminder Sahib, the holiest place of worship for Sikhs, and subsequently a turbulent period of violence against Punjabi Sikhs throughout Punjab. Similar to the violence of 1947, this violence was gendered, the target however being Punjabi Sikh men through brutal torture and murder (Daiya, Kavita, 2002; Hayden, Robert M., 2000; Pettigrew, Joyce, 2006). Punjabi Sikhs fled from Punjab at large rates, and continue to do so, some of whom made their way into King County, Washington.

The first Sikh gurdwara in Washington state opened in South King County in 1984 (The Sikh C., 2012). The Punjabi Sikh community in this county is young, consisting of first- and second-generation migrants, many of whom are refugees of violence in Punjab. King County as a whole is a diverse region, consisting of Indigenous, Black, and migrant communities throughout the world (Felt, 2016). However, this region is still deeply influenced by the colonial white supremacy of U.S. This became vividly apparent to Punjabi Sikhs in the region following September 11th, 2001. History found itself repeating in King County and throughout the country as Muslims, Sikhs, Middle Easterns, and South Asians became the targets of anti-terrorist hate (Iyer, 2017). As of 2016, Sikhs experience the highest rates of bullying in schools (The Sikh C., 2014). For Punjabi Sikh U.S. youth, the history of Punjabi Sikhs and the current moment of white

supremacy against them places their bicultural bodies at a crossroads. While they have been deterritorialized from their homeland due to violence, this violence continues in U.S.

This history and current moment of violence impacts the realities of Punjabi Sikhs in two major ways; it reinforces strict gender norms for which Punjabi Sikh men and women are required to operate from; and it reinforces notions of the Model Minority Myth, as well as sharam and izzat as a defense from the violence they experience in U.S. The recent history against Punjabi Sikhs in India and Pakistan has been gendered based, specific bodies being the targets for abuse. This in turn reinforces the need to hold onto the izzat that Punjabi Sikhs have within their families, as an act of resilience against such violence, particularly the izzat they hold around gender and sexuality. Additionally, due to scrutiny Punjabi Sikhs are held under in U.S., holding onto their izzat and appearing as "model immigrants" is a way through which they try able to protect themselves, particularly around gender. Jasbir Kaur Puar invokes notions of "U.S. gender exceptionalism", calling into question the post 9/11 call for universal human and women's rights in the Middle East and South Asia (Puar, 2007). Through this call the U.S. confirms those of the Middle East and South Asian world as the savage, less superior other that must be saved by the white, Christian, secular U.S. In response, Punjabi Sikhs have worked to distance themselves from a narrative of gender inequality, in hopes to fit itself into the fold of U.S. gender exceptionalism, silencing any issues of gender and sexuality that may be present in our communities in order to appear as model members of U.S. This is done without any questioning of why we must be the ones who

are perfect, despite the rampant issues of gender, race, indigeneity, sexuality, and class present on this settler colonial land. Additionally, this attempt to defend one's self through the projection of being a Model Minority has not protected Punjabi Sikhs in U.S. from violence and discrimination (Judge & Brar, 2017). These contrasting messages Punjabi Sikhs experience in our daily lives, particularly surrounding our gender and sexuality, has the potential to cause great stress and trauma in our lives, as well as allow for spaces in which we may negotiate and build resilience as we develop our bicultural identities.

Experiences of unacceptance in an individual's life has the potential to cause distress in their lives. Youth who are considered deviant from social norms of gender and sexuality are more likely to experience violence as well as mental health concerns, the likelihood of these effect increasing for youth of color (Pritchard, 2013; Singh, 2013; Vaccaro, 2011). Additionally, risks to an individual's mental health also increase when they feel disconnected from their identities (Kankesan, 2010). Experiences of gender and sexual deviance for Punjabi Sikh and South Asian youth invoke concerns of mental health that are different than other cultures. For Punjabi Sikh and other South Asian U.S. youth, their identities are highly intertwined with their parents due to the interdependent nature of a youth's development to their parents (Bal, 2016). This interdependence spreads out into their cultural community, who reinforce and polices the behaviors of other members of the community, bringing forward an additional layer of stress. Lastly, the history and current moment of racial discrimination in the U.S. continues to fill Punjabi Sikh youth with fear regarding their wellbeing (Bal, 2016; Iyer, 2013; The Sikh

C., 2014). In light of these factors playing into the mental well-being of Punjabi Sikh U.S.'s, it is also important recognize the ways through which individuals negotiate as well as enact agency and resiliency. In situations of adversity it is still possible to negotiate what options are available, and enact agency (Bal, 2016). Negotiating and resiliently addressing challenges of bicultural identity can occur in different ways—the possibilities are endless for bicultural youth and are unique both to the cultures in which they are experiencing challenges, as well as their individual desires.

My interest in studying the gendered and sexual identity development of Punjabi Sikh U.S. youth is to bring to the surface the nuanced ways in which individuals describe their identities and negotiate the challenging realities of their bicultural identities. I focus on the Punjabi Sikh youth in one specific region in order to understand how the context of the region's history against Punjabi Sikhs and its currently young Punjabi Sikh community play a role in the identity development of the participants in my study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

I invoke critical ethnography in my methodology alongside a lens of Queer of Color Critique. Critical ethnography is a methodology that intentionally aims to ensure the participant and researcher are co-creators of knowledge (Chang, Welton, & Martinez, 2013). This methodology holds to the understanding that objectivity is an impossible reality, that the experiences of the researcher and the socio-political realities that surround the researcher and the participants will always inform the research taking place, regardless of the method used by the researcher (Madison, 2011). Critical ethnography has a responsibility to bring forward experiences of injustice that are presently taking place and making intentional space to explore notions that exist outside the status quo. With this in mind, the methodology takes into serious consideration who the research is meant to benefit, making the decision to center the communities they are working with to co-create meaning.

Critical ethnography in its dedication to understanding socio-political realities already creates space through which Queer of Color Critique is possible. In the questioning of socio-political realities, the potential to unearth the queer of color archives during critical ethnographic research is present. However, to invoke critical ethnography through the framework of Queer of Color Critique, the researcher must actively seek to destabilize normalized notions within their research (Munoz, 2012). As the researcher, it is my responsibility to critically question what is commonly understood about Punjabi Sikhs, their genders, and their sexualities, allowing for an ethnographic space through which both the participant and I can create authentic understandings of their experience.

I myself am a member of the Punjabi Sikh community of King County, Washington, being born and raised in the region. My parents are well known members of the community having arrived in the state in 1995, a year before I was born. I personally identify as a cisgender straight woman and come to this study bearing my own beliefs and experiences regarding my cultural-religious identity, gender, and sexuality. My proximity to the participants in age, as well as my connection to the community allows for a sense of trust between participants and myself necessary for a study of this kind. Discussing gender and sexuality in Punjabi Sikh spaces can be cause for sharam to occur to participants, if the content of their conversations with me are connected to their identities. For this reason, any and all traces of their identities have been removed from the published work, and participants were given the opportunity to revise and remove any information they shared with me from the transcriptions and final draft of this study.

Individuals were recruited through social media pages and email listservs at universities and colleges. I reached out to active social media pages that Punjabi Sikh young adults follow in King County, Washington. Additionally, I promoted the study on my personal social media pages on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. The recruitment information included general information about the study, excluding information regarding the study of gender and sexuality, the criteria for the study, and contact information. I did not immediately disclose that my study investigated gender and sexuality, due to the social stigma in the Punjabi Sikh community around these topics When an individual reached out interested, we would either over the phone or in person

and discuss the full nature of the study, and if still interested set up the date for the initial interview.

On the day of their first interview, participants were given a hardcopy of the consent form, which we discussed. From there participants were given the option to either consent to the study or choose not to participate. All recruited participants consented to the study. Based on the taboo nature of this study, I recorded a verbal consent from participants so that there is no document with their name. Immediately after consenting to the study, participants decided on a pseudonym to be referred to as throughout the study. Thereafter they were handed an optional confidential demographic survey to fill out to whatever extent they would like. All participants completed the entirety of the survey. Following the survey was the first open-ended interview, in which participants were asked open ended questions regarding their experiences with their religion, culture, gender, and sexuality in the context of being raised in King County, Washington (see Appendix A). The initial interview lasted on average one hour and thirty minutes, with one interview lasting three hours.

Following the initial interview, participants were given a journal to record their daily experiences with the topics discussed in the interview (for prompt see Appendix B). While the expectation was that participants meet after one week for the closing interview and to return the journal entries, often due to the participants' schedules, it would take 2-5 weeks before they would be able to meet again. Two participants were only able to meet to return their journals and were not able to conduct a closing interview. The other eight participants were asked in their closing interviews to discuss their journal entries, as

well as any additional questions I had prepared for them. The closing interview lasted on average 45 minutes.

The surveys were recorded digitally onto an excel spreadsheet and the audio recordings of the interviews as well as the journal entries were transcribed digitally. All identifying information was not included in the digital copies. The audio files and written documents were destroyed. Participants were sent a copy of their dis-identified transcript to review. These transcripts also included additional optional questions for them to answer. Three out of the nine participants chose to write back responses. The other six participants approved of the use of their transcripts. Following the approval to use their transcripts, I began my analysis of the data. Each individual transcript was examined for major themes, based both in past scholarship, as well as emerging themes that were unique to this population. Following the individual analyses, the data was analyzed in mass, stringing together themes found in individual transcripts in order to form several major themes. Once complete, the analysis was sent to all participants in order for them to both approve and add their personal thoughts to the analysis.

While this study provides a valuable depth of qualitative data, there were several limitations to this study. The nine participants do not represent the full scope of identities of Punjabi Sikhs in King County, due not only the small number of participants, but also the demographics of the participants. There were no queer or trans participants in this study and all participants had educations beyond a high school diploma. Additionally, not all participants were able to participate in providing feedback regarding the transcriptions

and analysis. While all participants approved of them, only three participants provided feedback on their transcriptions, and only three for the analysis.

There was a total of nine participants between the ages of 18 and 29 in this study. All identified as cisgender and straight with there being six women; Monica, Parmvir, Maroon, Ananya, Rosie, and Nainpreet; and three men; Bob, Jack, and David. Each participant had graduated high school and were pursuing some sort of higher education. Three participants identified with being from Punjab Pakistan, their families having been displaced from the 1947 partition. Two participants also identified with having family outside the state of Punjab, again due to the partition. One participant was born in India and arrived as a young child to King County, while another though born in the U.S., began school in India, before returning to King County. All other participants were born and raised in King County. The major themes identified were; Punjabi; Sikhi; sexuality; gender; sharam and izzat; sharam, izzat, and desire; sharam, izzat, and intergenerational trauma; breaking down intimacy; and Punjabi Sikh women's desirability.

Chapter 4: Analysis

The participants in this study over the course of two interviews and independent journal writing, shared with me reflections of their religious, cultural, gender, and sexual development. Through our conversations, we began to pick apart the webs that entangled their identities, finding spaces in which they faced great challenge and found the resilience to face the challenges of their identities head on. The analysis covers nine themes discussed in the interview; Punjabi; Sikhi; sexuality; gender; sharam and izzat; sharam, izzat, and desire; sharam, izzat, and intergenerational trauma; Punjabi Sikh women's desirability; and breaking down intimacy.

Punjabi and Sikhi

Participants were asked to define their culture (Punjabi) and religion (Sikhi) separately. All participants found this confusing for two reasons; 1) both pieces of their identities had been deeply ingrained into their lives by their families; and 2) the ways in which being Punjabi and being Sikh overlapped in their lives. For participants, they could identify being Sikh and Punjabi from a very early age. Being socialized into the norms and behaviors their communities taught them about being members of those two groups. Additionally, this socialization occurred together. Sikhi as a faith began in the region of Punjab, and as such share language, traditions, and values with the Punjabi culture. Many participants discussed recognizing their religion and culture more distinctly when they began school, the first time they interacted with people of different backgrounds; "Probably from like preschool to kindergarten, when I was like, 'What the heck, why are there all these white people around me?' 'Oh no, you're Sikh and Punjabi from India.'

I'm like 'ah yea, that made sense'" (Bob). Initially, participants had difficulty distinguishing the two, but after progressing in the conversation they were able to explain the differences.

Punjabi

When discussing Punjabi culture, all participants discussed the Punjabi language. Through understanding the language and communicating with it, participants identified being able to learn from and carry relationships with family members only fluent in Punjabi. Additionally, the language enhanced their ability to more deeply engage with the cultural norms of the culture through their ability to understand values and concepts, as opposed to meaning being lost in English translation. Some participants shared with me their desire to improve their Punjabi, revealing the insecurities they had in the lack of ability to fluidly speak, write, and understand the language. In a journal entry, Rosie discussed this challenge;

> "Today, I realized how bad I am at Punjabi. I guess when I think about speaking it; it's harder for me to actually get the words out. I hate having the pressure on me to only speak Punjabi. I want to be able to throw a couple words of English in there. I realized this when I was talking to my grandma. I couldn't find the Punjabi word for 'yard'" (Rosie)

During our initial interview Rosie was able to discuss with me how words in Punjabi that have cultural value cannot easily be translated in to English. In this journal entry she reveals her insecurities with solely using Punjabi. Maroon also discussed her insecurities with the Punjabi language, sharing how she feels uncomfortable speaking in Punjabi with strangers in fear of being judged. Additionally, Nainpreet expressed not being Punjabi enough to others because of her ability to speak Punjabi.

Participants recognized Punjabi to be the culture originating from the region of Punjab. They defined that region to both as the current state within the nation of India, as well as much larger region that stretched into Pakistan prior to the 1947 partition (Kurien, 2018). Three participants' families were displaced by the partition, causing them to different parts of India; Punjab, Haryana (originally part of the region of Punjab), and Mumbai. The rest of the participants' families fled India after the 1984 Sikh genocide, having experienced and watch state violence against their communities (The Sikh C. et. al., 2012). The instability caused by these events in Punjab was a place for concern for participants;

> "I think it's kinda heart breaking in a sense, cause it's like, we have such rich history but there's so many barriers that we can't reach that history, or like we can't be in touch with that history, you know, just because of like everything that's going on in Punjab right now, it's really hard to go there and its really heartbreaking to see that all our history is being destroyed and like being covered up" (Parmvir).

Other participants expressed their concerns as well, discussing issues such as religious violence, environmental destruction to the water and soil, issues of farmer rights, and political corruption. While some identified Punjab to be their home, none of them expressed a desire to return to Punjab permanently due to the unstable situation in Punjab.

Other aspects of Punjabi culture mentioned by participants was the music, bright and colorful clothing and shoes, the food, and the traditions passed down from generation to generation (Mooney, 2008). Several participants stressed the importance of understanding these elements of being Punjabi, and that an inability to do so was taken as a sign that an individual was losing their identity. This concern of not being Punjabi

enough or not carrying on the culture came up for several women interviewed, them stating it as reason they would like to marry Punjabi Sikh men. In stating this concern, the women in this study reaffirmed the understanding that in South Asian culture, Punjabi Sikh women are expected to maintain the family's cultural identity and pass it down to their children (Bal, 2016; Page & Yip, 2012). The need to do this was further reinforced for participants due to the history of violence Punjabi Sikhs experienced.

While many participants held strongly to their Punjabi identity, Nainpreet, Parmvir, and David did not strongly identify with being Punjabi. Parmvir and Nainpreet in particular stated their concerns with patriarchy present in Punjabi culture as rationale for this distancing;

> "In Punjabi culture there's this big idea about toxic like masculinity, and like, not that, you still have that in the Sikh community don't get me wrong, but like the ideal is there that like you should be equal, whereas in Punjabi culture I'm not sure that ideal is there" (Nainpreet).

Parmvir and Nainpreet were not the only participants that expressed this concern with Punjabi culture. As will be discussed further in the gender section, all participants recognized that Punjabi culture perpetuated patriarchy through having different expectations for women than men, allowing men to do certain things that women could not do, and fostering traditions in which men were more valued than women. Several participants brought up their concerns with *Lohri*, a holiday that now celebrates the birth of a male, who is automatically gendered as a boy. Occurring in January Lohri originally celebrated the end of winter and reenergize people to begin and work on the fields again, as many Punjabi people were farmers. The birth of a boy would also be celebrated because it would mean that there would soon be another man to work the fields, ignoring

the fact that women's labor also contributed to successful harvests. Currently, *Lohri* is only celebrated when a child is born, particularly if it is a child assigned male/boy, families often choosing not to have such a celebration when a child assigned female/girl is born.

Judgement and gossip was another topic that came up within Punjabi culture. Essentially, Punjabi people in participants' experiences tend to judge the choices of others in the community and speak ill of them. Especially behaviors that are not considered acceptable by other Punjabi Sikhs, as will be discussed later. Several participants feel as though they need to remain overly cautious when operating in their day-to-day lives, in fear that others may speak ill of them and eventually to their parents. The Punjabi Sikh community is fairly large in King County, and continues to grow, meaning that it is not uncommon to see other Punjabi Sikhs in public spaces. If such judgement were made, participants could risk losing their *izzat* (honor), as well as the *izzat* of their parents, which will be discussed later on. While participants spoke to issues of gender, gossip, and judgement within the Punjabi culture, they also brought up the fact that they have seen these concerns take place in other Indian cultures and did not believe they were issues that only Punjabi Sikhs experienced. This speaks to a broader culture of community policing in South Asian communities, through which individuals are monitored by others to ensure cultural values and traditions are followed (Bal, 2016; Deepak, 2005; Ibrahim et al., 1997; Kay,2012; Ludhra & Jones, 2009).

Though all participants shared their disdain for the gender-based discrimination, gossip, and judgement of others that occur in Punjabi culture, only David, Parmvir, and

Nainpreet chose not to strongly identify with being Punjabi because of these behaviors clash with Sikhi, which they more strongly identified with.

Sikhi

All participants identified their faith to be an important aspect of their lives and had very early memories of Sikhi. Rosie and Maroon shared fond memories of their grandmothers who would pray with them and share stories with them about Sikh history. Jack discussed how it was likely that his first word was *Waheguru* which roughly translates to "in the name of God" and is how Sikhs refer to God. Generally, all participants discussed Sikhi to be a faith dedicated to the well being of all living creatures, that does not stand for the injustice of any individual regardless of the identities they hold. A key part of Sikhi that participants mentioned was *seva,* which translates to selfless service.

Participants described their adherence in two broad ways; adhering to the values of Sikhi and adhering to the customs of Sikhi. To adhere to the values of Sikhi for participants meant to live by the overarching principles of the faith, mainly the ones of *seva* and respecting all others. To adhere to the customs of Sikhi was to follow the protocols that come with Sikhi. This includes not using recreational substance, not drinking alcohol, not eating meat or eggs, keeping uncut hair and cover it, acting modestly (both in what you choose to own and wear) and reading prayers from the holy book daily. All participants fell somewhere in between these two ways of adherence of the faith, while all stated that they did follow the guiding values of the faith, and their adherence of the customs varied. Nainpreet and Parmvir were the most adherent to the

customs of Sikhi, following almost all the customs except reading prayers, though they both listened to prayers every day. The other participants all varied in their adherence to Sikh customs, mentioning different ways in which they did or did not. I did not directly ask what customs participants followed, but instead let them organically discuss them. A custom that was regularly brought up was keeping uncut and covered hair.

All three men who participated in this study kept their hair and covered it either with a *pagg* (turban), or a *batka,* which is when the hair is wrapped into a bun on the top of the head and then wrapped with a cloth. They all discussed their experiences growing up with their hair, which made them targets of racial discrimination after the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Center. They described having to explain their hair to other students growing up and having to face people making jokes or bullying them for their hair. Even as an adult, David continues to feel the weight of the stereotypes that comes with his appearance; "Taking public transportation everyday can be a mentally grating experience. Being a dude and being someone that looks like I do (turban and what not) makes me feel like I intimidate most individuals around me" (David).

While all of these men had negative experiences due to their turbans and beards, they have chosen to maintain these representations of their faith, both remaining true to the customs of the faith and receiving respect within the Punjabi Sikh community. Men who do this are considered to be strong and the pride of the community, especially in this current time when it is dangerous to do so. Thus, while these men endure racist harassment throughout their lives in U.S. society, they also are valued. The valuing of Sikh men who keep unshorn hair allows for young Sikh men to positively relate to this

Punjabi Sikh cultural expectation, despite it playing against expectations of Western masculinity. These participants' ability to positively move on from facing discrimination ties to the importance of positively associating with one's culture with their identity development (Kankesan, 2010). For Bob, Jack, and David, their positive development as Punjabi Sikh men was influenced by the acceptance, they experienced within the Punjabi Sikh community of King County, Washington. Women on the other hand have a deeper and more complicated reality with their body hair and covering their hair, with only two participants choosing to keep their hair uncut and covered. This reality will be discussed later on in the discussion.

In discussing Sikhi, the land of Punjab also came up. Sikhi was created in the region of Punjab and thus the violence that has been experienced on that land and to that land was something distressing to participants, even if they did not identify with the Punjabi culture; "Punjab is more associated to me with like Sikhi and like our history and like our roots right… Punjab is like where we live and where you know, our like roots are based off from" (Parmvir). While Parmvir does not strongly identify with being Punjabi, she does identify with the land of Punjab's history of Sikhi. Other participants mentioned this connection to Punjab as well.

Lastly, participants discussed their relationship with *gurdwaras,* Sikh places of worship. Some participants found the *gurdwara* to be a place where they could pray in community and feel in one with their faith. While this sentiment was felt by some participants, they and all other participants identified concerns they had with *gurdwaras* and with the leadership present there. Nainpreet herself discussed the extreme levels of

patriarchy she had felt throughout her time at *gurdwaras* by the men in positions of leaderships, whether they were *baba ji* (priests), or individuals on the governing board of the temples. Monica discussed how she did not like how the space became one for gossip, having challenges sitting through prayer due to the level of gossip they have witnessed taking place. These sentiments were shared by other participants, regardless of the degree to which they valued the *gurdwara.*

A sentiment that was shared by Monica alone was her disdain for idolization of *baba jis;*

> "I feel like a lot of people follow babae (Sikh priests), instead of what we're supposed to follow which is the Guru Granth Sahib. I dislike how they come to our house and, how they're treated superior than you. For example, in their presence, they are seated above you (them on the couch and you on the floor) and you have to cover your head in their presence. They are also expected to be served in freshly clean steel dishware instead of what we normally would use. We are also expected to give them money in return of their prayers. This becomes an issue because Sikhi preaches equality and I feel if we don't have equality amongst ourselves, how are we to preach it and apply it to everyone else? It's also difficult for lower class Sikhs who can't afford to pay the babae money." (Monica).

Monica discussed with me how she felt the treatment of *baba jis* goes against Sikh principles of modesty and devotion only to *Waheguru.* In Sikhi, there is not meant to be any middlemen between *Waheguru* and living beings, but instead a relationship that is fostered by each individual, regardless of their economic status. Yet in Monica's experiences, the *baba jis* are idolized and held to be higher than others.

Participants mentioned praying alone, whether that is through listening to prayer or reciting it, as a peaceful space through which they were able to connect with their religion. In their own space, participants were able to focus on their own relationship with

Waheguru, without having to navigate the un-Sikh like judgmental and patriarchal social climate of the *gurdwara*.

To close this section, it is important to discuss the value of community that was discussed by participants in regard to Punjabi culture and Sikhi. In Punjabi culture, family is the foundation to an individual's support system. Participants held a deep amount of respect and gratitude for their parents and other elders in their lives, regardless of what other conflicts participants may have with them. Additionally, participants discussed the importance of extended family, having a close group of cousins, aunties, uncles, grandmas, and grandpas to grow up with. This need for community is also seen when discussing Sikhi. For participants who discussed them, it was encouraging to have around them a *sangat*, or an intentional community of other Sikhs to whom they could go to with questions, thoughts, or to just hang out with. Many participants engage with the *gurdwara* for this reason despite their concerns with the space. This interdependence on family is indicative of not just Punjabi Sikh culture, but South Asian culture more broadly (Bal, 2016; Brar, 2012; Deepak, 2005; Gupta et al.,2007; Inman, 2006). This interdependence causes greater stress for bicultural participants of this study, due to the fact that challenging the cultural expectations surrounding their Punjabi Sikh identities are directly tied to their relationships to their families.

While participants understood their faith and ethnic culture are closely related to one another, it became apparent throughout their interviews that Sikhism and Punjabi cultures are in fact two separate cultures. Their differences on issues such as gender and keeping unshorn hair, being spaces in which participants had to carefully navigate their

identity development. Alongside these two cultures, participants also had challenges navigating their identities in relation to their U.S. identity. Many participants discussed how they understood themselves to be Punjabi Sikh because they realized how different they are from their peers, and/or they had to correct their peers about assumptions their peers in King County would make about them. This was especially true when participants interacted with people of different socio-economic status and when they were white. Participants were able to relate more positively with other people of color and people from poorer economic backgrounds but found themselves being unable to relate to individuals who were affluent and white, due to the fact they did not have remotely the same experiences. This was also true in individuals' workplaces and schools, where they had to navigate institutions that are heavily influenced by white, western culture. In those spaces, participants described having to carefully perform their religious-cultural identities. For instance, Maroon shared that while she was willing to discuss the concerns she has with Punjabi and Sikh cultures, she admitted that she would be unwilling to share those same concerns with those who are not Punjabi Sikhs, and further is careful in how she shares her culture so not to enforce stereotypes. In spaces that were more related to their King County, U.S. identity, participants upheld the idea of exceptionalism that Puar discusses, hoping to defend their cultural and religious identities regardless of the challenges they experience in those cultural spaces (Puar, 2007). This navigation of multiple cultural expectations that participants discuss becomes more apparent when issues of sexuality is discussed.

Sexuality

Sexuality was a very broad term for my participants, with multiple factors contributing into their sexuality (Durham, 2004). Many of them started by speaking about who they are attracted to. All participants identified as straight but were aware that heteronormativity is not the only way attraction works. All participants were supportive of queer identities, many of them believing that it was not something sinful in the context of Sikhi. One participant said they were unsure about this only because they had not studied scriptures enough to understand what Sikhi's views on non-heterosexuality were. However, all participants make clear that if a person born in a Punjabi Sikh family were queer, they would face extreme challenges. There is an expectation of heteronormativity present in the Punjabi Sikh community, though participants still said that they do not believe that normativity is based off of Sikhi. Parmvir believed that the disdain towards non-heteronormativity was based off of this idea of the natural way of things, (quote here) When participants expressed to me that they identify as straight, I decided to push them to explain to me what their ideal partner looks like and what they like overall. Some participants had difficulty with this, expressing uncertainty in how to describe an ideal partner to me. Many were able to describe characteristics and personality traits, and it took a bit of pushing to convince some participants to talk about who they are attracted to. Two participants discussed their attraction to men who very strongly represented Sikh masculinity, meaning man who wore turbans and kept their beards as individuals that they would almost automatically be attracted to. Others discussed physical features such as height and hair styles, some did discuss weight as well, but over all participants were

broad about what would physically attract them to someone. Many participants spoke to the idea of intimacy being important which is something I will discuss later in this paper.

Participants also stated that sexuality is about more than who they are attracted to. Sexuality to them was also about how sexually active one is, what individuals enjoy sexually, and the expectations of their families as well as the overall Punjabi Sikh community had about sexuality. Participants' sexual activity varied from no sexual activity to have had penetration sex. Though many participants brought up that likes in dislikes in sexual activity are an important part of sexuality, most participants did not go into detail about what they liked or disliked. Participant spoke in detail about the expectations their families and the Punjabi Sikh community had which will be discussed later on in this paper in their discussion of sharam and izzat.

I will note here that some participants believed that these expectations around sexuality, particularly around having premarital sex was not present in all Punjabi Sikh communities, and that this expectation is in part present in the King County Punjabi Sikh community due to their recent and violent migration to the U.S. Monica spoke to the fact that she personally is aware of multiple individuals in the Punjabi Sikh community still choosing to have sex despite of this. Maroon also mentioned this, and spoke to the fact that in her experience particularly Punjabi Sikh men do have sexual experience and are not criticized the same way as women are for it. Additionally, she has seen these expectations look different for Punjabi Sikhs who live in older Punjabi Sikh communities, Such as ones in California and in Canada. As mentioned in the literature review, Punjabi Sikhs are largely a new community in King County, many of them

having migrated to the US after the 1984 genocide or around the time in which the June 1984 genocide occurred (The Sikh C., 2012). This means that Punjabi Sikhs in King County are growing up with more of the traditional values their parents grew up with in Punjab India around gender and sexuality. These values around sexuality furthermore are influenced by intergenerational trauma that comes with the degrees of violence experienced by Punjabi Sikh families. Similarly, the experiences of gender that participants had were also impacted by the histories their families had endured.

Gender

All participants identified as cisgender. While all participants could identify their gender, the majority had difficulty describing their gender. Participants recognized the ideas told to them about gender were performative in nature; there is no defined way to be a man or a woman, instead individuals are socialized to perform the behaviors associated with the gender they are assigned at birth, and thus have the potential to perform in different ways (Butler 1993, 1990). Participants did not fully fit into the norms of their gender but did not see themselves as anything other than the gender assigned to them at birth and found their assigned gender to be the best gender identity for them;

> "Yes I do remember being curious… I think it was just like "can I identify with any aspect of being female?" I think that, I think there is a lot of aspects that we, that society has learned to push onto being "female" or "male"[1] and I think I have aspects of everything, I think I have more, I think I identify as male because that's convenient and easy, and a lot of my traits fall into those societal norms, but I think overall I'm just human." (David)

[1] Several participants in this study used male/man and woman/female interchangeably; many did not discuss the difference between biological sex and gender with me, and when they used male/female they were speaking to gender. I choose to maintain the language used by participants to represent the language they are using.

David shared with me his complex relationship with gender, recognizing the ways in which he conflicted with identifying as a man due to parts of his identity aligning with characteristics associated with women. Yet, he states that identifying as a man is the most "convenient" for him, that he more closely relates to characteristics of a man. Other participants shared the same view as David, speaking to the convenience to identifying as their assigned gender. David diverged from other participants in that he also stated his sexuality and genitalia as rationale for identifying as a man. Because he identified as straight and recognized his penis to be a symbol of his manhood, he could not see himself identifying as anything other than a man. This does not mean that David believed that all individuals with penises or all individuals who are straight would identify as cisgender, but that these elements played a role in his decision-making process. The dis-identification with gender labels that participants experienced may be related to the inability for these terms to fully recognize the full complexity of their gender identities, as discussed by Surinder Bal in her study of South Asian women engaging in same sex relationships. Her participants did not strongly identify with a particular label to describe their sexuality in part due to the inability for those western terms to fully connect with their experiences (Bal, 2016). Similarly, while participants identified with being a man or woman, the lack of ability for the majority of them to strongly define their genders may also come from this place that these labels and the ways in which they are defined are unable to fully capture their gender identity.

While no participants identified outside of being cisgender, they recognized the taboo present in the Punjabi Sikh community. The disdain towards gender-queerness and

trans identity in the Punjabi Sikh community was considered by several participants to be cultural and social in nature, as opposed to Sikhi where participants believed it is acceptable to not identify as cisgender;

> "In Sikhi, for me the religion itself, I don't think it will matter. But the people who surround the religion and how they interpret would have different interpretations and would have different ways of thinking about it. So they formulate their own opinions. Sikhi always have general concepts of how a person should be, how they should live their lives… And there are just general concepts, never like "oh a guy should do this, a girl should do that," its never been like that. So I don't know I feel its more of the people who surround the religion that will formulate their own opinions, not the religion itself"

This acceptance participants felt about non-cisgender identities were strongly based in the fact that Sikhi's scriptures did not enforce a strong gender binary, and rather believes in a genderless soul in each individual that is representative in a genderless Waheguru. While participants did not believe the older generation of Punjabi Sikhs were supportive of gender deviance, they themselves appeared to be. Participants actively spoke on their privilege of being cisgender and thus their lack of ability to fully grasp the experiences of trans and genderqueer individuals. Furthermore, participants defended the right for individuals regardless of gender identity to be who they are. Bob for instance, spoke strongly in support of genderqueer and trans individuals in his initial interview, as well as admitted he did not know as much as he would like about gender identity. Afterwards, he journaled about how he researched about gender and sexual identities to better understand then, and even proceeded to have a conversation with a co-worker about trans and gender queer issues. This dedication to better understanding and supporting genderqueer and trans individuals was found amongst all participants.

Gender Norms

As stated earlier, participants faced difficulty in defining their gender, in part due to the fact that defining their gender would invoke gender norms that they themselves did not actively identify with. Participants as a whole spoke to the gender norms associated with their assigned gender, pointing to the confusing entanglement of expectations stemming from their Punjabi, Sikh, and U.S. identities. In this section I will break down the gender norms participants described.

Participants in trying to define what their gender was, identified that there were gender norms placed on the genders which they identified with. They also recognized how those norms allow for the disparate treatment of men and women, both in broader U.S. society, as well as in the Punjabi Sikh community. All participants recognized these norms occurring in their day to day lives, speaking to the fact that men and women in Punjabi Sikh spaces, particularly in their households were treated differently (Bal, 2016; Brar, A., 2013; Masood, Nausheen et al., 2009; Page & Yip, 2012;). They discussed in detailed expectations around household tasks, clothing, and interactions with people of different genders.

When discussing household tasks, several women shared their frustration with how labor was divided in the house;

> "I had family visit from Canada today. My dad's brother, his wife along with my cousin and her two kids came around 6 pm. After spending about 3 hours cleaning, I spent another 2 in the kitchen cooking along with my aunt and cousin. Both my dad and uncle did not participate in any of the process from making food to cleaning up after. This got me thinking as to how it would be different if I wasn't a girl. Would it be acceptable not to participate as well? Most likely yes" (Ananya).

Ananya journaled about this experience and then elaborated on it in her closing interview. She shared that her mother was out of town that day, and that the responsibility had rested solely on her and her younger sister to prepare the house, and later the food for their guests. And so, the lack of support or aid from her father was even more frustrating for her because there was not a parental figure present to support her in hosting. Additionally, Ananya's suspicion that if she was a boy, she would not be expected to participate in household tasks was not unfounded. Maroon and Monica both described how they alongside the older women in the household hold all the responsibility to host guests, clean the home, and cook meals. Their brothers are not expected to participate in household tasks, nor are their fathers and other men in the household. Maroon states that the reasoning her father gives is that he works full time, but her mother also works full time and is expected to maintain the house. She herself is a full-time graduate student who works part time and yet is expected to make sure the house is tidy and that the men in the house have eaten. All women who expressed their concern with this expectation were either students, working, or both. For South Asian women, this expectation around their labor is based in notions of how they should perform as women (Bal, 2016; Deepak, 2005; Durham, 2004; Gilbert et al., 2004). They are viewed as submissive, self-sacrificing, and devoted to their families, and as such are expected to give out excruciating amounts of labor.

This responsibility for women to complete household tasks also has to do with women's marriageability. Rosie described an instance she witnessed regarding her sister;

> "Today is not really about me as much as it is about my sister. We went to my cousins' house and there was a grandma there… But anyway, when we were

> leaving she started asking my sister about cooking and how its important to know how to make roti. And then, she asked her how old she was. Once we left and I was connecting the dots in the car, I realized she was asking all this because she was thinking about my sister's marriage. Then, I was thinking about how tricky the grandma was" (Rosie).

Rosie and her sister went to their cousin's house to find a grandmother who they had never met before there. This grandmother, who did not personally know them, felt it was appropriate to question Rosie's sister about her ability to cook, and further connect her ability to do so to her ability to get married. This concern around marriageability was present for several women in this study, concerned their actions, whether it was regarding their ability to do household tasks, or how they dressed even, would impact their reputation and thus harming their ability to get married, similar to the experiences of other South Asian women (Page & Yip, 2012).

While clothing was not mentioned by all participants, there was a distinction mentioned by Jack, Maroon, and Nainpreet about what women from the Punjabi Sikh community in King County, Washington are expected to wear;

> "They think a girl should, uh, well its really for guys and girls. To dress modestly. I usually walk around my house wearing only shorts, boxers. I don't think a girl can do that in their house, in a Punjabi family" (Jack).

While Jack mentions there's an overall expectation for men to dress modestly, to not show much skin, he shows that there is a clear distinction between the expectation for men and women. In this example, he believes that women wouldn't even be able to wear shorts in their own household, having to maintain modesty even amongst their families. Maroon and Nainpreet spoke to the expectation of modesty as an unspoken rule, while

they did not say they received direct pressure to dress a certain way, they feel an internalized pressure to do so;

> "I feel like it was a unspoken thing of like, you kinda, I feel like I was more of the, of my sister and I, I was more of the one who wears the one shoulder off, and it was super scandalous. But it was like we've never been told not to," (Maroon).

Maroon has never verbally heard from her parents to dress modestly, but she has felt that expectation on her so much so, that when we discussed her desires to wear summer dresses and clothing that does not completely cover her body, she stated she would never do it because of how much it would hurt her father specifically if she did that. In her negotiations with both her religious-cultural identity and her U.S. identity, Maroon prioritizes her desire to remain close to her family, despite her desires not to. This decision is indicative of closely interdependent nature of Punjabi Sikh and more broadly South Asian families, in which individuals are willing to negotiate aspects of their desires for the sake of their desire to maintain close familial ties (Bal, 2016; Brar, 2012; Clark, 2005; Gilbert et al., 2004; Gupta et al., 2007; Inman, 2006). Nainpreet also stated that while she was not directly told to dress modestly, social cues such as how her mother dressed made her recognize that dressing modestly was appropriate and necessary behavior for a Punjabi Sikh woman. While men have this expectation of modesty like women do, there seems to be two primary reasons why the pressure is more severe for men than women. First, having grown up in Western society, where women's clothing is often more revealing than clothing that women wore in India when participants' parents lived there, Punjabi Sikh women experience this clash between cultures. Whereas for men, it is not as common for them to wear clothing that is revealing. Second, when

women wear clothes that shows more skin, they are considered to be more promiscuous, or "scandalous" as Maroon called it (Bal, 2016; Durham, 2004). While Maroon and Nainpreet said they were not directly told to dress modestly, it is not uncommon for Punjabi Sikh women to be told so, or for people to make disparaging comments about women if they do dress in a revealing manner. This concern around Punjabi Sikh women being viewed as promiscuous is not only found in the case of clothing but also when interacting with people of different genders.

All women in this study discussed the pressure women face when in spaces with men. They detailed how women are watched carefully when around men and are scrutinized for any interaction they may have with them. Maroon discussed an instance in seventh grade that shook her;

> "Being with guys, I think that's a big, big thing, I got in 7th grade. I was really close friends with this guy. And we would come from middle school on the bus and my dad would pick me up at the bus stop. So my dad pulls in and I was talking to my close friend like normal and I just like waited a second to finish our conversation, and then I walked over to the car. And my dad was like "who are you talking to?" and I was like "my friend." And he was like, he, I literally cried… It was a legitimate conversation of like "I've never had to have this conversation with your sister, you don't have to have any guy friends." Something like that and I was just shook ... And I was, I literally cried, I was like "are you kidding me, like I've known this friend forever," …. "I couldn't talk to a guy, you know I don't go to an all-girls school, right? Like I don't know what you expect." It was mind-boggling, that was a wake-up moment for that my dad isn't as chill as I think he is" (Maroon).

Maroon was in seventh grade and was chastised by her father for having a friend who was a boy to the point of tears. Interactions with men are not seen as normal, everyday interactions due to the deeply rooted notions of purity and morality Punjabi Sikh women are meant to uphold (Bal, 2016; Brar, 2013; Durham, 2004; Kanukollu, &

Mahalingam, 2011; Kapur, Preeti, & Misra. 2010; Page, & Yip, 2012). Instead they are seen as sites for which sexual relationships are occurring, making it extremely challenging for women. This concern around sexual purity and morality for women intersects with intergenerational trauma, rooted in the history of targeted rape against Punjabi Sikh women (Daiya, Kavita, 2002; Hayden, Robert M., 2000; Pettigrew, Joyce, 2006). Due to having experienced gender and sexual based trauma historically, Punjabi Sikh parents seek to prevent any sort of immoral action around sexuality to occur with their daughters, not wanting to experience the sharam (shame) that their ancestors endured. Parmvir and Maroon both brought up the judgement women face when dancing at parties, especially when men are on the dance floor. While dancing is an exciting part of Punjabi culture often encouraged by families, dancing around men for women is seen as promiscuous. Women in this study discussed how they have often heard their mothers, aunties, grandmothers, and even other women their age judge women for how they interact with men. The men in the study also described that they have pressure to not interact sexually with women, yet this pressure does not translate to their daily lives in the same way (Page & Yip, 2012). While the men were able to make jokes out of this expectation to not interact with women, women described it be area of their life where they feel a deep sense fear and mental stress, largely because of the *sharam* they may experience, which will be discussed in the next section.

It is important to note that participants believed that the gender norms they experienced were not influenced by the Sikh faith, but rather by the culture that surrounds Sikhi, which in the case of these individuals living in King County, was Punjabi culture.

Jack in his discussion of gender stated that while individuals use the Sikh faith as rationale for their gender expectations, the Sikh faith pushes for gender equality and for the dismantling of gender-based discrimination. Whereas, the participants clearly identified the ways in which the Punjabi culture did perpetuate gender-discrimination through holding close these expectations along with other traditions. Though not directly discussed by participants, expectations around gender norms for Punjabi Sikhs, specifically for women are also related to the stereotypes and assumptions that U.S. culture places on South Asians. In order to promote U.S. exceptionalism they promote the notion that South Asian women are in positions of weakness, beings that need to be saved from their cultures (Puar). When this is done, not only does it cause for issues of gender and sexuality to be hidden, it also places Punjabi Sikh women and men in the stressful situation where speaking about their concerns may cause further scrutiny upon their communities, as discussed earlier. Both pressures, from the Punjabi Sikh culture and U.S. culture, place Punjabi Sikh U.S. youth in situations of destress, where they must negotiate their desires with the expectations of the cultures that surround them (Bal, 2016). However, these negotiations are where participants show their resilience and ability to invoke agency.

Sharam and *Izzat*

All participants recognized *sharam* and *izzat* as terms of value in their daily lives. Participants all defined *izzat* to be one's honor, and *sharam* to be the shame associated with losing such honor (Masood, Nausheen, et al., 2009). While describing these terms, participants identified two communal elements to *izzat* and *sharam.* The first was that the

importance of *izzat* and *sharam* came from their parents; "To me sharam means doing anything that may be considered not respectable towards traditional outdated standards. I don't care for it as much, but my parents definitely do so I understand what it means" (Monica). When discussing *sharam* and *izzat*, Monica was forthright in her lack of consideration for them, stating her only reason for recognizing them was her parents. All participants recognized that *sharam* and *izzat* were terms of extreme value in their parents' lives (Bal, 2016; Page & Yip, 2012). This in part was due to the second communal element they identified, which was community pressure to adhere to the terms;

> "*Izzat* is more translated towards family respect, how others view your family. And again, that bounces off like how honorable your parents are, what your kids are doing, things like that. Cause people are, at least in our community, are very judgmental about everything. I mean if they even find one little thing to knit-pick off of, your *izzat* is a little less in their eyes" (Bob).

In his experiences, Bob found that others in the Punjabi Sikh community were quick to judge the actions of youth, and thus when youth were to act outside of the expectations of *izzat*, members of the community would not only believe that they had lost *izzat* through that action, but that their parents had as well. This correlation between the participants' and their parents' *sharam* and *izzat* contributes greatly to their adherence to norms that are associated with *izzat*.

While participants identified many of the norms that contributed to *sharam and izzat* were based in Punjabi culture, they also identified that there were norms of performing Sikh identity that contributed to one's *sharam* and *izzat.* Norms that they identified to be more Punjabi in nature were things such as; abstaining from drugs and

alcohol, following the law, and an understanding of Punjabi customs, traditions, and the language. Norms that were related to Sikhi mentioned were keeping one's hair uncut, respect for others, and service to others. Most importantly when speaking of *izzat* and *sharam,* all participants discussed gendered and sexual norms.

Sharam, *Izzat*, and Desire

> "*Izzat* is just like your like (laughs) I guess for me I think of izzat as like your virginity as, as in a sense right. So like I don't know but like that's just the way I think of it… you know when they say "oh you're gonna lose your *izzat* " or like whatever that's like, I know like they don't mean virginity I think they just mean like just your like womanism, which I, which I think they associate with virginity right. So like I feel like they mean that like when you're hanging out with a guy you're gonna be like *"theri izzat ke rehgii"* right so like that's like kinda saying "oh this guy touched you or like he was- you're spending time with him so you're like unpurified now" you know its like kind of stuff." (Parmvir)

Parmvir's perspective on *izzat* illuminated both the impact of one's gender and sexuality on their *izzat* and the ways in which this impact varies between men and women. When the men discussed their *izzat* in relation to their sexuality, it was solely about their sexuality. And if they were to not follow the norms in place regarding their sexuality, *izzat* would be lost in the eyes of their parents and their community, but it would not be the sole focus of what *izzat* is in that man's life. For women, that pressure around sexuality bleeds into all aspects of their lives and is an indicator that they lack any *izzat* whatsoever. In Parmvir's explanation of *izzat*, she relates her *izzat* directly to her sexuality and by extension to her womanhood as well (Brar, 2013; Gilbert, Gilbert, & Sanghera, 2004; Page & Yip, 2012). While the men discussed the caution they needed keep in regards to having partners, the women in the study went further, discussing the way they talk to men, the way they dress, even the way they participate at family

functions, in order to not seem promiscuous because even seeming as if they are interested in men would call their *izzat* into question. Though the pressure is different for men and women, all participants did recognize a pressure from their families to maintain their *izzat* in relation to their sexuality.

When stating their preferences in terms of romantic partners, participants made clear that their families had particular expectations of them, in large part so that the *izzat* of the family remained intact. The primary expectations were that participants were to; 1) never date; 2) pick a partner of the "opposite gender" approved by the parents, and 3) that the partner be of the same religion, culture, and caste as them. Participants were highly aware of these expectations and spoke to the level of responsibility their parents placed on them to meet them. While these expectations were coming largely from their parents, participants recognized the pressure being placed on them by others, due to the sense of *izzat* placed on complying with these expectations. Each participant spoke to the ways in which they negotiated with these expectations and their own desires. I categorized these negotiations in three broad categories; 1) complete acceptance of the expectations; 2) experimentation with the boundaries of *Izzat*; and 3) complete rejection of expectations.

Complete Acceptance of the Expectations

Three participants described their plans to adhere to sexual expectations. They discussed two primary reasons for this. Two participants stated their agreement with all aspects of their parents' expectations as the rationale for it. For them it was important that their life partner had a similar lived experience, and thus the idea of marrying someone that is only of their race, religion, and caste made sense. Additionally, the idea of having

sex before marriage did not interest them. One participant stated her need for intimacy as rationale for not desiring sex before marriage. While intimacy was part of the reasons the other participant did not want to have sex before marriage, she also stated her perspective on Sikhi as rationale for not having sex, bringing up her concerns with *kaum* (lust), one of the 5 *chors,* or sins of Sikhi;

> "Like kaum, it says in Sikhi, that basically the paang chor take you away from Sikhi, and that sexual desire and like that wanting to lose your virginity, I think that's what it means when it says kaum right. And when you do lose your virginity before you get married, I think that's what it referring to. But after marriage, I think that like as long as you talk to your partner and you guys are on the same terms, its only like considered kaum if you, if you cheat on your wife, or you cheat on your husband and you do that with someone else right."

For this participant, having sex before marriage is *kaum* (lustful behavior) and thus has the potential of moving her farther away from her Sikh faith. She speaks to it as something that begins to preoccupy and consume one's mind, and thus refuses to take the risk in engaging in sexual behavior. While this participant does not plan to engage in sexual behavior for religious reasons, she recognizes that others may perceive *kaum* differently and a practicing Sikh could potentially be engaging in premarital sex. Additionally, this does not mean the participant is not attracted to men. Instead it means that she is not looking for a sexual partner, but instead a lifelong partner, and as such mentioned to me that as she is starting to think about marriage, she has been keeping an eye out for men she may be interested in marrying. Other participants' views on Sikhi's approval of premarital sex were different from this participant, as I will discuss later on in this section.

While these two participants had their personal reasons for adhering to expectations of *izzat,* they also stated the pressure they felt to do so for their families. This participant, having been raised by a single parent described her need to present herself as perfect as possible for her mother's sake;

> "It's really frustrating because… like I grew up with a single mom… my mom doesn't like care what other people think about her, but I care what other people think about my mom. So I've always tried really hard to be a good girl, that like follows the rules, like never gives my mom a bad name. So like I never talked to boys at the gurdwara… I don't date, I don't whatever, I've always tried to play by the rules."

The participant, as well as all other participants recognized that their sexual actions would not only impact their *izzat* but also their parents. And thus, even if some participants did not feel direct pressure from their parents to conform to these expectations, they knew that those expectations were present in their families. Other participants did experience direct pressure from their parents to adhere to these expectations, such as the third participant who accepts the expectations of *izzat*.

This participant stated that it was solely due to his parents' wishes that he planned to adhere to their expectations. He did not want to risk the sense of *sharam* and pain their parents would face if it were discovered he was acting outside of sexual and gendered expectations. The participant was perfectly willing to go with the way in which his parents expected him to get married and interact with women. This meant that while he has been interested in women and some have been interested in him in the past, he does not allow for anything to come from that attraction. That is a line that he has personally chosen not to cross, just like the two other participants.

Experimentation with the Boundaries of *Izzat*

Three participants all described a desire to engage with sexuality deviant from the expectations of *izzat.* While all participants planned to find partners to marry that fit the checklist of qualities that made for a suitable partner in the Punjabi Sikh community, the journeys they are taking toward that end fall outside the standards of *izzat.*

One has dated around, exploring sexuality with different individuals, but has never actually had someone who he has called a girlfriend. While he shared that he's kissed women, he "pled the fifth" to discussing if he had explored other elements of sexual touch. He explained that choosing not to speak more about his sexual behavior was not because he felt like he had done something wrong, but rather he was concerned with the potential harm that could come to his parents if anyone were ever to find out. He did not want his actions to bring *sharam* upon his family and so keeps them private, only sharing them with his most trusted friend. Additionally, for the sake of his family, he still plans to marry someone who is Punjabi Sikh, following the other expectations outside of premarital dating and sexual contact.

The second participant has never had a partner, but desires to have a causal partner;

> "Casual dating means that you're not in it to get married… I don't think everyone dates to get married, or that they should have to. Like right now… I don't wanna marry anyone, I don't… if I met someone cute I would casually date but I would never make it something, like marriage isn't the goal, marriage isn't the end goal."

This participant believes that it is completely alright to date someone for the sake of dating them, as opposed to having the goal of marriage. Additionally, she is open to

the idea of having sexual contact with that individual and does not consider doing so wrong in terms of her Sikh faith. However, she recognizes that the repercussions for her as a woman can be severe, and can cause serious harm to the izzat of her family. Again, like the first participant, she plans to marry someone who falls under the expectations of *izzat* in place, being unwilling to devastate her family if she were ever to be found dating or wanting to marry anyone outside of the expectations.

The third participant is currently in a long-term relationship, having dated them secretly for a long time. She goes into detail the level of pressure she experienced in doing hiding her relationship;

> "There's always been a very, very intense fear, because I do have a boyfriend, and there's always been an intense fear of people seeing us together, because they're gonna assume things about us, there's yea, there's just, I guess my navigation has to avoid it and be afraid of it… it was worse a couple years ago, but now I've already told my parents and their on board and everything's fine you know. So like it was worse with a younger age but literally the last 6 months to a year have been a little bit better (laughs)"

Prior to telling their parents about their partner, this participant experienced extreme fear that she and her boyfriend would be exposed as a couple and bring upon the consequences of *sharam* on her family. While this man is a Punjabi Sikh, she carried with her large amounts of stress and fear about being in a premarital relationship. All other participants spoke to this fear that they personally have experienced or have seen other go through when thinking about or choosing to act outside the norms of *izzat.* This fear comes from participants' concerns about their relationship to their parents and how they, but more so how their parents, may be impacted by their decision not to participate in expectations.

While these three participants were willing to not follow all the expectations *izzat* placed on their sexuality, they still operated from a space of fear of being discovered not following these norms, as well as from the standpoint that they would follow through with aspects of *izzat* for the sake of their families, separating them from those who completely rejected these expectations.

Complete Rejection of Expectations

The last three participants all reject the expectations *izzat* places on their sexuality. Two participants both desired to be with Punjabi Sikh men, and the third with a Sikh woman, but not because of the expectations that are in place, and furthermore they refused to be tied down with the expectations of how they should find this partner and their family's approval of that partner;

> "The way my mom thinks about marriage is in a very traditional sense... But when I think about relationships and especially when it comes to marriage or someone I wanna spend my life with… I would rather struggle and die alone and never be married, but at least I tried to go on the journey."

This participant is unwilling to compromise his need for finding fulfilling companionship in order to conform to the traditional expectations placed on him by his mother and the broader Punjabi Sikh community. While he is not opposed to marrying someone, who does fall within the expectations of a suitable partner, he does not prioritize that in his search, nor does he prioritize the disdain for dating that is present in the Punjabi Sikh community. Instead he is searching for someone who connects with what he is looking for and is doing so by dating.

The other participants also prioritized what they were seeking in a life partner over the expectations of their families. One participant discussed however the harmful

impacts such a decision had on her family, due to their difficulty accepting her choices. Because she could not let them in on this part of her life in which she was actively dating, it drove a wedge between them, due to all of the hiding she had to do to keep herself safe from the repercussions of not following expectations. As her parents and others in the community became aware she was dating, her parents initially were outraged but over a long period of time they became closer and more accepting of the participant, to the point where the participant was comfortable enough to introduce her parents to her current partner, a Punjabi Sikh man who she is now engaged with. The pressure she once had subsided when this participant had found a suitable partner for her parents' standards, though it was not her reason behind choosing to marry her partner. This participant also spoke to the reality that while older members of the Punjabi Sikh community did not accept premarital dating and sex, this behavior is becoming more acceptable and common amongst Punjabi Sikh youth. Another participant also mentioned this, particularly that men are more sexually actively, yet reprimanded for it less than women are. When reviewing this paragraph with me, the participant realized how common for women to hide their dating lives from not just their parents, but the entire community. She was not concerned that her identity would be discovered because of how common this experience is for so many women. This experience of hiding relationships for instance was shared by another participant who I discussed in the last section.

The third participant no longer finds it necessary to stick to the expectations of *izzat.* Being the youngest of two sisters, as well as the youngest in her extended family, this participant had watched others challenge, negotiate with, and conform to these

expectations, all of them having varying success in their relationships and family relationships. Due to this exposure, this participant felt more willing to reject the sexual expectations of izzat in a way that was different from other participants who did not have that same exposure, to challenge more openly to her parents *izzat's* expectations on her.

All participants, regardless of where they fell in these categories, recognized the expectations of *izzat* to be present in their personal lives, yet all participants thought about and chose to how they would respond to them in their own personal way. This exploration shows that there is not one way that participants interact with *sharam* and *izzat*, but instead it is a multifaceted negotiation for participants between their own wellbeing, the wellbeing of their parents, and their desires.

Sharam, Izzat, and Intergenerational Trauma

The pressures that come with *sharam* and *izzat* is a heavy burden to carry for the participants, as discussed above. This pressure comes from other members of the Punjabi Sikh community in King County, particularly from the older generations, both from immediate family and extended community members. Several participants recognized the added weight on their parents' shoulders to continue on with traditions of *sharam* and *izzat* in light of the historical trauma to Punjabi Sikhs, such as the recent events of 1984;

> "Just seeing the look of anger in my dad's eyes whenever that topic came up, I knew it was bad, but I didn't know it was bad to that extent… I mean at that point, again that's what causes anger and hate for me, and that is what caused it after doing all that research, and then I sorta understood my dad's pain, and my mom's as well, obviously, of you know the events that had taken place, and all the friends and family that were lost in those times, and in the way they were lost as well" (Bob).

Bob and other participants recognized the painful experiences their parents went through due to practicing their faith, causing them to leave their homeland behind. For those who were displaced and lost their loved ones during the 1947 partition, this pain was two-fold. As stated in the literature review, both the 1984 genocide and the 1947 partition involved gender based violence that was enacted on both men and women.

Additionally, this need to fit into expectations of *sharam* and *izzat* was influenced by the need to properly assimilate into U.S. society, having to live up to the expectation of the Model Minority myth even though many, if not all the participants' families are lower-middle class or in poverty. Several participants spoke to how their parents had to work diligently in order to provide for them, and continue to do so, and feeling a great sense of debt to their parents for it. The Model Minority myth works hand and hand with *izzat* and *sharam* because in adhering to the model minority myth, one is not to act out in a way that draws attention, just as with maintaining *izzat.* Participants were fully aware of the sacrifices made by their families to arrive and provide for them U.S., as well as the struggles they faced when in India. These realities influence the degree to which participants respected their families, and the degree to which they wanted to fulfill their families' wishes, which include maintaining their families' *izzat.*

In our conversations, it was apparent that the decisions that each participant made in relation to their sexuality was based in careful negotiation and agency that sought to incorporate the cultures they were raised in. For those who chose to maintain all expectations of sexual izzat, it was based in the prioritization of their families' needs as well as what they desired in life. Participants who toed the line between meeting and

rejecting sexual izzat, they carefully negotiated aspects of their identities and desires that were important to them, which including enacting their personal desires alongside that of their parents. Those who completely rejected sexual izzat were clear that in doing that they were not seeking to disconnect from their Punjabi Sikh culture or families, holding great respect for both. Instead they believed that it was possible for both their desires and Punjabi Sikh culture could exist together. These intentional choices made by participants were active choices of resilience against the conflicting identities they exist in. In the next section, I will discuss another area of bicultural conflict that particularly Punjabi Sikh women have to navigate in their daily lives—body hair.

Punjabi Sikh Women's Desirability

As discussed earlier, the maintaining of uncut hair is an important custom of the Sikh faith, and the faith asks that all followers of the faith do so. This expectation can be challenging for girls and women in a way that is unique from men. Women maintaining uncut body hair while treasured in the faith itself, has varied support amongst the Punjabi Sikh community, with some members of the family demanding their daughters maintain uncut body hair and others demanding that their daughters do not. Additionally, keeping uncut body is challenging in Western nations, such as U.S., where uncut body hair on women is looked down upon and seen as undesirable. Three women in this study discussed their challenges with this expectation; their adherence and comfortability with the expectation varying.

Monica shared with me that she never understood why keeping uncut hair was important to the Sikh faith. From a young age, she did not enjoy the idea of keeping long

hair at no influence of others. It was just something she did not like. Her family however insisted that she and her siblings keep their long hair. As a result, Monica had constant conflict with her parents, and would even go so far as to secretly cut her hair. She did not believe that cutting her hair made her any less devoted to her Sikh faith, despite the pressure surrounding her stating otherwise.

Maroon has a complicated relationship with her body hair, having received mixed messages from her family and broader society. She recognized that her family, particularly her father, found pride in the fact that she appears to keep uncut hair. At the same time, she has experienced the stigma by Punjabi Sikhs and in broader U.S. society of having uncut body hair. It became a heavy burden for Maroon, who would wear layers of clothing and limit her clothing choices in order to hide her body hair, which to her made her seem hideous. Unable to cope with the stress of keeping her body hair, she began to secretly shave. This decision, while giving her a peace of mind in terms of the social pressure, carried guilt. For Maroon, keeping uncut hair, especially when it is not socially acceptable is an important part of being dedicated to her faith, and in not being able to do so points to a sense of weakness, as well as a belief that she is not Sikh enough. For Maroon, her physical appearance becomes a site of bicultural conflict. Having not fully come to terms with how to best address her uncut body hair, she remains uncertain and stressed about her identities.

Nainpreet keeps all of her hair uncut. This decision has led to her experiencing critiscim from both her U.S. culture and her Punjabi Sikh culture, particularly in India, where her family has judged her for her decision, making comments about how her hair

negatively impacts her desirability to men. This stigma that she receives from her family in India, as well as Punjabi Sikhs in the U.S. represents the ways in which white Western colonialization and globalization has impacted the beauty standards of the Punjabi Sikh community. While historically, women keeping uncut body hair in Punjabi Sikh spaces was respected, as Western nations have made their impact throughout the world, the beauty expectations for women have shifted, becoming more uniform with that of nations such as the U.S. (Bal, 2016). This globalization of beauty standards therefore places Nainpreet and other Punjabi Sikh women in a situation where not only are they facing pressure surrounding their body hair from their U.S. culture, but also their Punjabi Sikh culture. Though having faced such comments, she has stood strong by her desire to fully practice her faith, though it has been a difficult process of acceptance for her. She shared with me that she had challenges coping with her body hair when her facial hair came in fuller and thicker than she expected. This happened much later after puberty, when she was in her twenties and so she discussed having to readjust to her thicker hair. Initially she was extremely upset, having difficulty coping with the change. When her hair was less thick, a common rationale that Nainpreet would give is that all women have facial hair, but as her facial hair grew, it came to a point where she could not say that most women had the amount of hair she did. It took Nainpreet time and patience with herself to becoming more accepting of her facial hair.

Breaking Down Intimacy

The topic of intimacy came up quite frequently for participants, the majority of them desiring for some sort of intimacy between themselves and a partner. Intimacy can

be defined as closeness between individuals in which there is a sense of trust and companionship is felt;

> "I think the aspects of dating I prescribe to the most are the idea of spending a large amount of time with someone and being fulfilled for it… and I think there was a few people in my life that I did that with… how bout this, the essence of dating to is the idea of like, like when I think of someone who is happy with someone in a relationship, the aspects that I like the most about that idea, are the act of you and another person sitting alone in a room, you can be reading separate books, you can read the same book with each other, you can be playing video games together, its like that idea. And that's what I think, I think it's the cuteness of dating that I really like the most (laughs)."

This participant discusses his desire to be with someone who he could spend time with, who he feels safe with, and whom he could relate with. This desire to be intimate with others was felt by other participants as well, regardless of whether or not they had been in active relationships. Being able to be intimate with a partner was also brought up when discussing comfortability in sexual relationships;

> "For me its more emotional rather than completely physical. Sometimes I'll just remember my past, and I won't feel as comfortable with that act and feel a little more vulnerable. But to get that reassurance from my partner who assures me "hey I'm not just here for sex, I'm here for everything else too." … I can just be like "hey I don't wanna do it," and he'll be like, "it's fine" he's not gonna get offended or angry, and he'll just say "oh we can just hang out and talk," and just make me feel like its not just about having sex, he's there for me through everything."

This participant and others discussed the need to have an intimate connection with their partners to be comfortable enough to engage in sexual activity. Sexual activity regardless if with someone who participants planned to marry, or date, was a serious act, and thus for many participants required a close relationship, intimacy, before being willing to engage in it.

While many participants shared passionately about their desire for intimacy, one participant had different views on it;

> "Like attracted is different things, like attracted like "oh my god I love you"… So I don't believe in it, because I feel like love to me is respect for one another and like caring for one another I feel like love is like a not something I can have, its something that like… I don't really know how to explain it, like I love my dog unconditionally, but I don't think I can love a person like that…Like I'm like oh my god, like I can't fully let myself go in front of a person."

For this participant, while she plans to get married and engage in relationships, she does not plan to become closely intimate with her partners or love a person in that way. For her, allowing herself to be vulnerable with another person places her at risk to be hurt by them, something they are unwilling to risk. Part of this came from what the participant had seen her cousins and friends go through, having witnessed marriages fall apart.

As I had these conversations surrounding intimacy with participants, I was surprised by how each participant brought up this topic in their interviews.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Instead of understanding time as linear, queer of color critique acts as a mechanism through which the past bleeds into the present, creating meaning in the present and thus allowing for ever-ending possibility in creating the future (Gopinath, 2004; Munoz, 2009; Rooke, 2012). The participants in this study, through the sharing of their experiences, manifested time as a non-linear reality. They recognized their present to be interconnected with their past and further the blending of the past and present provides the ability to inform new conceptions of the future. In their discussions of bicultural identity, gender, and sexuality, participants displayed the way in which they actively seek to reconceptualize the future for Punjabi Sikhs, for their choices, thoughts, and values will become the past that future generations will build from. Not only in these conversations do participants move beyond linear, but also through space, their experiences and identities interconnected to different places. Through this initial exploration, I hope to advance the work of Punjabi Sikh gender and sexuality. My primary interests after conducting this study are; 1) how Punjabi Sikhs utilize performative gender in liberating ways; 2) how Punjabi Sikhs discuss and express their sexual desires; and 3) how Punjabi Sikhs' gender and sexuality can be understood in relation to their mental health. In addition to these research areas, I further hope to expand the ages that I am studying. Gender and sexuality for Punjabi Sikhs are interwoven with the gender and sexuality of their elders and further inform the gender and sexuality of the younger generations. In the future, I hope to conduct studies that involve older and younger participants.

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APPENDIX A

FIRST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How are you doing today? How are you feeling about all of this? Again, thank you for your participation in this study, it is in hopes of understanding gender, sexuality, sexual desire, and sexual expression more deeply among our folks. We will be starting with an interview and a drawing/mapping exercise. There are no right or wrong answers, this conversation centers you, how you have come to understand the topics we will discuss. I have a base set of questions to get us started and will also ask additional questions based off your responses. You are in charge of this conversation however, I am here to listen. If you do not want to answer a question or need a break or need to stop the conversation, all of these things and anything else you may need is completely fine, please do ask me. I am doing everything in my power to ensure your confidentiality in this study, and so while I will be asking you in a moment if it is ok to turn on an audio recorder, please know that your audio recording and the maps we draw together will only be in my hands and destroyed before August 16, 2018, and that the transcripts that I write from it will not have anything in it that would reveal your identity. In order to further ensure confidentiality, I ask that you try your best to not to use identifying information in what you share with me. You will read that transcript before it is used for anything in my research to make sure of that. Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin? I am going to turn on the recorder now, is that ok?

Broad questions:[2]

When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

What makes you, you?

Do you fit in? Or a time you didn't fit in?

Can you tell me about a time where you held yourself back from doing something?

If you were hypothetically talking to a non-Punjabi Sikh how gender works in our

community, how would you?

When has there been a moment where you have felt sharam?

How do you define virginity?

Sikh

When do you first remember hearing the word Sikh?

What does it mean to be Sikh?

[2] This is a long list of questions, not all of which I will be asking

Punjabi

When do you first remember hearing the word Punjabi?

What does it mean to be Punjabi?

Gender

Can you think about an early time where you did something that was considered appropriate for the other gender?

How do you define gender and more specifically, how do you define your gender?

When did you first hear about gender?

When did you first realize your gender?

Was there a moment where your gender was apparent?

Has your understanding of gender changed over time?

Has your gender ever be challenged?

How does being Punjabi Sikh relate to your gender?

Sexuality

When was the first time you heard of sexuality?

How did you grow up talking about sexuality?

If you were hypothetically talking to a non-Punjabi Sikh how sexuality works in our community, how would you?

How do you define sexuality and more specifically, how do you define your sexuality?

How did you learn sexuality?

When did you first realize your sexuality?

Was there a moment where your sexuality was apparent?

Has your understanding of sexuality changed over time?

Has your sexuality ever be challenged?

How does being Punjabi Sikh relate to your sexuality?

Sexual Desire

When was the first time you felt sexual desire towards someone?

How do you define sexual desire and more specifically, how do you define your sexual desire?

How did you learn about sexual desire?

When did you first realize your sexual desire?

Was there a moment where your sexual desire was apparent?

Has your understanding of sexual desire changed over time?

Has your sexual desire ever been challenged?

Sexual Expression

Have you ever expressed your sexuality? If yes, what was it like? If no, why? What would you imagine it being like?

How do you define sexual expression and more specifically, how do you define sexual expression for yourself?

How did you learn about sexual expression?

How do you express your sexuality?

How would you like sexuality to be expressed? In public? Between you and an intimate partner?

Mapping Exercise

So now I will be asking you to participate in a mapping exercise. I am going to hand you a piece of paper and some different colored pens. What I want you to do is imagine that this blank piece of paper is a blank map of where you grew up in the U.S. in need of labels. I am going to ask you a series of questions about where things are, and I would like you to draw and label them accordingly, but do not label them in a way that is identifying (for example do not put the name of your middle school on it—instead write that its middle school). Does that make sense?

Questions:

Where is your home on this map?

Where is your favorite place to go on this map as a child? Label what that is.

Where do you feel most Sikh? Where do you feel most Punjabi?

Where do you feel most comfortable with your gender? Your sexuality?

Where do you feel most comfortable with yourself? Is there only one place?

Where do you feel the least like yourself?

Where is the place where you feel the most like you could be yourself? Or where you feel comfortable/safe?

Where is the place where you feel the least like you could be yourself? Or where you feel uncomfortable/unsafe?

Where do you go to hang out with friends?

Where was the place where you first talked about gender?

Where was the place where you first talked about sex?

Where is the first place you first felt sexual desire?

Where is the first place where you expressed your sexuality?

APPENDIX B

JOURNAL WRITING ACTIVITY PROMPT

Thank you again for your participation in this study. One of the primary objectives of this studying is to attempt to understand how the concepts we discussed- **gender, sexuality, sexual desire, and sexual expression**- are experienced in day to day life of Punjabi Sikhs in King County. So, with this in mind, I am asking you to write daily in this journal for a week and reflect on moments when you think, feel, discuss, and/or observe these topics. You can write as much or little as you can. In order to further ensure confidentiality, I ask that you try your best to not to use identifying information in what you share with me.

At any time you can inform me via calling the google number if you would like to no longer participate in this portion of the study or in the study overall. You can do this by sending an email with the subject line of either "opt out j" or "opt out all" respectively. There will be no anger or animosity from me if you choose to make either of these decisions. At the end of the week when we meet on (date of the final interview) at (time of the final interview) for our final interview I will collect the journals from you. It will be only in my hands, transcribed, redacted of any revealing information about yourself, and destroyed by July 10. Like the interviews, you will be able to review the transcripts and make any additional redactions before it is used in the analysis.

If you have any questions, please call me. Good luck!