

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTION  
AMONG INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study sought to explore the transmission of and motivation for sex-selective abortion among Indian immigrants in the United States. Using a theoretical framework incorporating social learning theory and self-determination theory, the research design consisted of semi-structured interviews of 20 married Indian immigrant women. Based on an analysis of these interviews, the following emergent themes were discovered: "Problems for and from Girls", "Dowry", "Education (lack of)", "Familial Pressure", "Familial Preference", "Familial Ties", "Inheritance", "Son's Duty", "Money", "Name Carried Forward", and "Want a Boy". Theoretical and social work practice implications based on the findings of the study were discussed. While findings from this study cannot be generalized, they do open the door to future study of sex-selective abortion among immigrant populations.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Problem Statement

There is evidence to support the preference for male children among Indian immigrants in the United States, and the use of sex-selective abortion to express that preference. 1.9 million Asian Indians live in the U.S., according to the 2000 U.S. Census (Almond & Edlund, 2008). Within that population, recent birth statistics have shown an abnormally skewed sex-ratio- one which favors male children over females.

According to the *2006 National Vital Statistics Reports*, the sex ratio in the United States was 1.049 males born for every 1 female. In the past fifty years, this ratio has maintained relative consistency, ranging from 1.046 males for every female to 1.059 males for every female (Martin, et.al, 2009). In 2006, the sex ratio for Asian or Pacific Islanders (the population within which Asian Indians would be included) was 1.063 to 1, the highest of any racial group examined (Martin, et. al, 2009). While this difference might not seem high enough to be significant, further examination of more detailed statistics on U.S. births reveals evidence of highly skewed sex-ratios among specific immigrant populations.

Almond and Edlund's (2008) analysis of the 2000 U.S. Census information examined sex ratio data in relation to birth order. Their study found the sex ratio between firstborn children of Asian immigrants to be consistent with that of the general population. However, in second-born children the ratio rose to 1.17 boys born for every 1 girl, if the first child was a girl. In families with three children the ratio climbed to 1.51 boys for every 1 girl, if the first two children were female (Almond & Edlund, 2008).

Additionally, Abrevaya's study (2008) used both U.S. Census and federal natality data to examine this issue among specific ethnic groups. The study showed similar findings to Almond

and Edlund (2008), specifically noting higher percentages of male births among Chinese, Indian, and Korean populations, with the most marked increase among Indian and Chinese families (Abrevaya, 2008, p. 12).

Abrevaya's (2008) study shows that the general sex-ratio in the United States does not support the existence of gender-selective practices in the nation as a whole. Even when minor sex-ratio variances were detected, the ratios actually favored girl children. According to Abrevaya, "For white births, the likelihood of a boy becomes slightly lower at higher parity, even when other variables are included as controls. This finding holds during the 1970's, the period in which gender determination would have been either impossible or very unlikely, and then continues in the later periods" (p.12).

The question then remains, why is this discrepancy between the number of male and female births seen in certain immigrant groups? The highly skewed sex-ratio among specific Asian immigrant populations in the United States reflects an already identified epidemic of low female birthrates in these groups' native countries.

A 2007 United Nations Populations Fund report showed the steady decline of India's at-birth sex ratio from 1981 to 2001. Skewed sex ratios have been documented in India since the British conducted their censuses of the colony in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Guilmoto, 2007). This was due primarily to "the prevalence of systematic differential treatment that caused these lower survival rates: poorer food intake, lesser access to medical care, etc." (Guilmoto, 2007, p. 2). However, in the 1970s and 80s, the cultural preference for sons coupled with the introduction of modern methods of prenatal sex determination led to sex-selective abortions becoming "the primary method used to alter the sex composition of children" (Guilmoto, 2007, p. 3).

Many studies have examined the possible motivations behind son-preference in India. While each focuses on different aspects of Indian culture (religious influences, economic structure, technological advances, etc.), virtually every study notes the extremely patriarchal system within which India operates. Garg and Nath (2008) commented on the unique role that sons are expected to fill in Indian culture:

The bias against females in India is grounded in cultural, economic and religious roots. Sons are expected to work in the fields, provide greater income and look after parents in old age. In this way, sons are looked upon as a type of insurance. In addition, in a patriarchal society, sons are responsible for preservation of the family name. Also, as per Hindu belief, lighting the funeral pyre by a son is considered necessary for salvation of the spirit. (p. 277)

Das Gupta et al's (2003) study comparing son preference in China, Korea and India discussed the financial obligation attached to having daughters:

The costs of daughters' weddings are a major drain on household resources in India, and there is growing evidence of dowry inflation (Rao 1993). Indeed, advertisements for sex-selective abortion sometimes state that making a small expense on an abortion today will save a large expense on dowry later. Although marriages entail some costs also for the groom's family, these are trivial compared to those for the bride's family. In India, dowry costs are indeed a major disincentive for raising girls. (p. 15-16)

Many have thought that the abolition of dowry systems, increases in standards of living and urbanization would completely change the role women play in modern Indian society. However, urban areas in India have actually shown higher sex ratios than rural villages. Additionally, statistics have shown a "positive linkage between abnormal sex ratio and better socio-economic status and literacy" (Guilmoto, 2007, p.7).

Also, multiple studies have cited the advent of modern medical procedures such as amniocentesis and ultrasound as a contributing factor to the increase in female feticide (Guilmoto, 2007; Government of NCT of Delhi, 2008). Garg and Nath (2008) deemed such technologies to be "the single most important factor responsible for decrease in sex ratios and increase in female feticides" (p.277).

Specific efforts have been targeted towards alleviating this issue in India, with preliminarily encouraging results. From 1991 to 2001, Delhi, the capital city of India, saw a consistent downward trend in female-to-male sex ratios, with the 1991 ratio of 867 females for

every 1,000 males dropping to 809 females for every 1,000 males in the ten-year time span. However, the implementation of the Ladli Scheme- a financial incentive program for parents of girl children- was implemented by the Department of Women and Child Development of Delhi in an effort to combat this steady decline (Government of NCT of Delhi, n.d.). Since then, the *2008 Annual Report on Registration of Births and Deaths in Delhi* documented a positively-skewed female-to-male sex-ratio in the city for the first time. According to the report, in 2008, 1,004 girls were born in Delhi for every 1,000 boys. While no direct evidence of Ladli's contribution to this dramatic increase has been given, the government of Delhi has attributed this unprecedented turnaround in the city's sex ratio, at least in part, to the scheme (Government of NCT of Delhi, 2008, p. 20).

Efforts to combat the issue of son preference in India are encouraging. However, Indian immigrants in the U.S. do not benefit from the interventions being implemented abroad. Rather, the nonresident Indian population in the U.S. faces a unique problem of coming from a culture that values sons over daughters and moving to a country that makes regular use of procedures such as ultrasounds, amniocentesis and abortion which would allow them to choose the sex of their unborn child. Without further understanding of the manifestations of this issue among Indian immigrants, one cannot hope to end the discrimination being shown towards girl children.

### 1.2 Significance of the Study

While the issues of declining sex-ratios and sex-selective abortion practices have been studied fairly extensively within the Indian subcontinent, their incidence among immigrant populations has not benefited from such examination. This study of the transmission of and motivation for sex-selective abortion practices among Indian immigrants in the United States aims to open the door for future research on the subject.

There is evidence to suggest that technological advances in the field of fertility research may actually increase the net proportion of unaccounted-for female children (Das Gupta et al., 2003). The United States has access to some of the premier medical procedures in this area. It is therefore unlikely that this problem of disproportionate female births among certain immigrant

populations will disappear on its own. Rather, modern scientific advancements could compound the problem.

Also, while numerically speaking the number of “missing” female children in the United States is not significant enough to skew the sex ratio in the entire country, as it has in China and India, the message that son-preference sends to the culture in which it is practiced is potentially incredibly damaging. The devaluing of female children affects the treatment of girls who are not selectively aborted. According to Sen and Sen’s (1995) study of girl children in southeast Asia:

[M]ore boys are immunized than girls; boys are breast-fed longer; girls eat after all of the male family members have finished; girls get less food and what they do get is of poorer nutritious quality; also, mortality related to diarrhoea, respiratory infections and measles is higher among girls than boys. (as cited in Sumner, 2009, p. 66)

Additionally, cultures with higher preference for sons value hyper-masculinity and reinforce stereotypes about male and female roles (Mahalingam & Balan, 2008). This could lead to unhealthy male/female relationships in the future, and problems of domestic violence. With both parties feeling that men have the right to abuse women simply because of their sex, and women being traditionally blamed for being unable to give their husbands a male heir (Mitra, 2006), women in cultures who value sons over daughters potentially face problems across their lifetime. If the issue of sex-selective abortion transcends immigration to the United States, it is likely that other manifestations of gender discrimination could persist.

In seeking to understand the nature of this phenomenon among Indian immigrants in the U.S., the current research hopes to facilitate the creation of interventions which target multiple correlating issues stemming from son preference.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

The current research operated on a dualistic theoretical framework. By combining social learning theory and self-determination theory, this study explored both the transmission of and motivation behind sex-selective abortion.

### *1.3.1 Social Learning Theory*

Social learning theory emphasizes two distinct methods of learning: learning through response consequences and learning through modeling (Flor, 1998). Simply stated, this theory holds that “most social learning is accomplished through observation and modeling behavior” (Flor, 1998, p. 9). While the concept of “operant conditioning” in behaviorism also relies on response consequences to modify behavior, the difference between this behavioral theory and social learning theory is the latter’s emphasis on an individual’s awareness of learning outcomes and of the self (Flor, 1998). Social learning theory asserts that an individual who models a behavior makes a conscious decision to do so. This self-motivation component to changes in behavior is a key difference between social learning theory and other theories of behaviorism (Flor, 1998).

Albert Bandura delineated four specific steps to vicarious learning. The first step is one in which the individual “notices relevant cues” (Flor, 1998, p.9), or perceives that a certain behavior is important to a parent or other significant person. The second step involves the individual’s translation of how the important behavior is manifested. Thirdly, the individual attempts to reproduce the desired behavior based upon the perceived manifestation in step two. Finally, the individual continues to reproduce the behavior so long as it yields positive results (as cited in Flor, 1998).

Social learning theory has been applied and tested in a wide variety of domains, such as: the establishment of gender roles (Hardin & Greer, 2009), influence on suicide rates (Stack & Kposowa, 2008), development of antisocial behavior (Bjornebekk, 2007), and use of alcohol as a coping mechanism (Knox, Breed, & Zusman, 2007).

One area in which social learning theory has been applied extensively is drug and alcohol use in adolescent populations. Past studies have shown a positive correlation between social learning and substance abuse among teens (Johnson et al., 1987; Krohn et al., 1982; Miller, Jennings, Alvarez-Rivera, & Miller, 2008; Monroe, 2004). These studies have spanned across gender and cultural divides, finding positive correlations between social learning and substance

abuse in both men and women (Hartjen & Priyadarsini, 2003; Svensson, 2003) and among youth in rural France (Hartjen & Priyadarsini, 2003) as well as South Korean adolescents (Hwang and Akers, 2006).

Likewise, social learning has been shown to have an influence on religiosity (Flor, 1998). Past studies have found that mothers and fathers' religious beliefs were the greatest predictors for an adolescents' beliefs (Acock & Bengston, 1978; Dudley & Dudley, 1986), but that other individuals such as Sunday school teachers and youth directors had a positive influence as well (Erikson, 1992).

It is important to note, however, that social learning theory only shows externalizations of ideologies, not internalizations. An individual does not have to agree with the ideology to exhibit its physical manifestations. Miller, Jennings, Alvarez-Rivera, and Miller's (2008) study of the influence of social learning on Puerto Rican youths' substance abuse found that "Students who perceive greater peer approval of substance use are far more likely to report lifetime cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use regardless of their own personal definitions of such behavior" (p. 262). Similarly, while studies of social learning's effects on religiousness showed positive correlations between adolescents' religious behaviors and those of their parents, some of these same studies found much smaller correlations between adolescents' actual religious beliefs and those of their parents (Erikson, 1992).

### *1.3.2 Self-Determination Theory*

To examine the internalization of a given ideology, one turns to self-determination theory, which says that understanding motivation is essential in determining whether or not a belief has been internalized. According to Ryan, "most human behaviors are not intrinsically motivated. Many values and behavioral regulations are neither spontaneous nor pleasant. Nonetheless, the acquisition of such behaviors are necessary to the socialization and integration of the individual to his community" (as cited in Simoneau & Bergeron, 2002, p. 1223). According to self-determination theory, this occurs through the "process of internalization":

Progressively, individuals learn to enact behaviors with contingencies more and more distal, and eventually removed. They then understand the importance of doing the behavior to get the desired result. Finally, this identification with the results is integrated into the structure of the self. At that moment, social values are accepted as personal values. (Simoneau & Bergeron, 2002, p. 1223)

Self-determination theory divides motivations into categories along a continuum ranging from extrinsic motivations to intrinsic (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Gagne & Forest, 2008; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2006). Extrinsic motivation “refers to doing an activity solely to obtain rewards or to avoid punishments” (Gagne & Forest, 2008). With extrinsic motivation, there is an obvious and direct association between a certain behavior and an outside reward or retribution. Next on the continuum, introjected motivations are “rule[s] for action that [are] enforced by sanctions such as threats of guilt or promises of self-approval”...“One is behaving because one feels one has to and not because one wants to, and this regulation is accompanied by the experience of pressure and tension” (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994, p. 121). People who are operating under introjected motivations might appear to agree with a behavior. There might be no visible signs of pressure to behave a certain way. Even still, introjected motivations involve controlled, not volitional action (Gagne & Forest, 2008), which indicates that an individual has not internalized a belief. Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, and Kaplan (2006) identify both extrinsic and introjected motivations as “relatively controlled”, rather than “autonomous”. Many studies of self-determination theory only distribute motivations among three categories in the self-determination continuum. These studies consider all autonomous behavior as falling in the category of intrinsic motivation. However, Roth et al. choose to divide this group into three categories: *identified*, *integrated* and *intrinsic motivations*. According to Roth et al., identified motivation results from “identifying with the importance of the behavior vis-a-vis one’s personal values and goals” (p. 366), while integrated motivation involves “reciprocally assimilating the identifications with other aspects of one’s self” (p. 366). At the far end of the continuum is intrinsic motivation, which “refers to internalization in which the person identifies with the value of



an activity and accepts full responsibility for doing it” (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994, p. 122).

Past studies applying self-determination theory have examined individuals’ motivations in a variety of areas: participation in physical exercise programs (Sebire, Standage, & Vansteenkiste, 2009; Ullrich-French & Cox, 2009), engagement in substance abuse treatment (Simoneau & Bergeron, 2003), affiliation with a specific religion (Flor, 1998), and high academic performance (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2006; Ryan & Connell, 1989). While the strength of relationship between type of motivation (intrinsic versus extrinsic) and outcome has varied between studies, all studies of self-determination theory propose that one’s motivation for engaging in a behavior matters.

Based on their research of the effects of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations for physical exercise, Sebire, Standage, & Vansteenkiste’s (2009) suggest that one’s motivation determines the emotional associations one has with an activity, as well one’s level of dedication:

[A]lthough relatively intrinsic and extrinsic goal-oriented individuals may not engage in exercise to a quantitatively different degree, the exercise engagement might be associated with more feelings of anxiety and negative affect rather than vitality and positive affect. (p. 204)

They also cite Vansteenkiste, Simons, Soenens, et al. (2004), who “found that the exercise engagement of participants involved in an extrinsic goal framing condition was less authentic relative to those involved in an intrinsic goal condition”, and predict that “longitudinal assessment of exercise engagement might reveal that extrinsic goal valuation is unlikely to foster long-term exercise adherence” (Sebire, Standage, & Vansteenkist, 2009, p. 204).

Ryan and Connell’s (1989) study of schoolchildren’s academic motivations found that motivation did not determine children’s perceptions of their level of effort or their parents’ perceptions of the children’s level of motivation. However, introjected motivation was “strongly associated with school anxiety and maladaptive coping with failure, whereas the more self-

determined style was associated with school enjoyment and proactive coping” (as cited in Deci et al., 1994, p. 122).

Just as social learning theory has been applied across cultures, self-determination theory has proven valid in diverse social settings. Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, and Kaplan's (2006) study of motivation's effect on academic performance among Israeli children stressed the theory's applicability across cultures. Likewise, Jang, Reeve, Ryan, and Kim (2009) found the theory to be relevant in their study of South Korean students.

The majority of the literature surrounding self-determination theory examines it in relation to one's motivation to engage in desirable behaviors. However, the theory's potential for application to other behaviors should not be discounted. All of the studies involving self-determination theory examine the type of motivation an individual experiences when conforming to an expected behavior in his or her social circle. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that one could apply self-determination theory to measure motivation for any behavior that is approved of by a culture- regardless of how that behavior is viewed by the outside world. Sex-selective abortion would be an example of such a behavior. While it is not carried out in all societies, the practice is commonly accepted in large portions of the world.

This study attempts to explore possible reasons for the pervasiveness of sex-selective abortion among Indian immigrants in the United States. Past studies conducted in India have explained this practice in correlation with cultural issues that demonstrate the inferior position of women in Indian society. There is little doubt that these factors influence the problem of sex-selective abortion in India. However, Indian immigrants in the United States are isolated from their native culture and are now living in a country with a history of evenly distributed at-birth sex ratios as well as comparably equal treatment of men and women. Yet statistics suggest that Indian immigrants still practice sex-selective abortion even after leaving their native land.

Social learning theory would say that Indian immigrants in the United States who practice sex-selective abortion do so because they are modeling a behavior exhibited either in popular media or by friends and family members in India. Based on Bandura's four step model (as cited in

Flor, 1998), these individuals first perceive the importance their culture and social circle place of having sons. They subsequently interpret this belief to a meaningful behavior- sex-selective abortion. In accordance with the third step, these individuals then model this behavior by engaging in sex-selective abortion themselves. The fourth step- repetition of the behavior- could apply to later pregnancies, particularly if the individual is successful in giving birth to a son.

While social learning theory can explain how the transmission of this behavior occurs, it does not explain whether or not Indian immigrants retain the actual preference for sons which originally motivated the practice in India. By dividing types of motivation into specific categories along a continuum ranging from intrinsic to extrinsic (Vallerand, et al., 1992), self-determination theory allows for an explanation of why someone engages in a particular behavior.

#### 1.3.2.1 Extrinsic motivation

According to Ryan and Connell (1989), extrinsic motivation involves “rule following” and “avoidance of punishment” (p. 752). Vallerand et al. (1992) explain extrinsic motivation as “regulated through external means such as rewards and constraints” (p. 1006). Ryan and Connell (1989) cite the following as examples of extrinsic motivation in the academic setting: “Because I'll get in trouble if I don't; Because that's what I'm supposed to do; So that the teacher won't yell at me; Because that's the rule; So others won't get mad at me” (p. 752).

Based on this, possible extrinsic motivations for sex-selective abortion could involve a sense of obligation toward one's family or spouse to produce a male heir or a fear of punishment for producing a female child. Example motivations that would fall under this category include:

*My husband wants to have a son, My friends and family want me to have a son, I will be treated badly in my family if I do not have a son, It is expected in my culture to have a son, My husband will be angry with me if I do not have a son, and My family will be angry with me if I do not have a son.*

#### 1.3.2.2 Introjected motivation

Introjected motivation is defined by Ryan and Connell (1989) as “internal, esteem-based pressures to act, such as avoidance of guilt and shame or concerns about self- and other-

approval” (p. 750). Their examples in the academic setting include: “Because I want the teacher to think I'm a good student; Because I will feel bad about myself if I don't; Because I'll feel ashamed of myself if I don't; Because I want the other students to think I'm smart; Because it bothers me when I don't; Because I want people to like me” (Ryan & Connell, 1989, p. 752).

Possible introjected motivations for sex-selective abortion could include: *I will be looked down on by others if I do not have a son, I will feel more important if I have a son, I believe girls have more difficulties in life than boys, I believe I need a son to take care of me when I am older, I believe it is more difficult to raise a daughter than to raise a son, and I think it is more expensive to raise a daughter than to raise a son.*

#### 1.3.2.3 Identified motivation

Identification is defined as “acting from one's own values or goals” (Ryan & Connell, 1989, p. 750). Measures of identified motivation are usually framed in terms of desire (Ryan & Connell, 1989). Vallerand et al. (1992) add that identified motivations occur when a “behavior becomes valued and judged important for the individual, and especially that it is perceived as chosen by oneself” (p. 1007). The examples Ryan and Connell (1989) give of identified motivation in academia include: “Because I want to understand the subject; Because I want to learn new things; To find out if I'm right or wrong; Because I think it's important to. . .; Because I wouldn't want (like) to do that (negative behavior)” (p. 752).

Identified motivations in the context of sex-selective abortion might consist of statements such as: *It is important to me to have a son to carry our family name, I believe sons fill a necessary role in the family that a daughter cannot fill, I want to have at least one son in my family, I would not want our family name to die out, It is important to me to have a son to participate in religious ceremonies, and I do not believe my family is complete without a son.*

#### 1.3.2.4 Intrinsic motivation

Finally, intrinsic motivation involves actions “done simply for [their] inherent enjoyment or for fun (Ryan & Connell, 1989, p. 750). In their initial study, this type of motivation was only measured by Ryan and Connell in the area of academic achievement. In the corresponding study

of pro-social behavior, the construct of intrinsic motivation was omitted, as the authors did not believe pro-social behavior could elicit enjoyment in and of itself. Ryan and Connell (1989) explain this reasoning by saying, "It made no sense in the context of this style of survey to say, for example, that one refrains from hitting 'because it is enjoyable not to,' or that one keeps a promise 'because it's fun'" (p. 757). However, subsequent studies of motivation in relation to other behaviors that one might not deem "fun" (involvement in treatment after intimate partner violence; Neighbors, Walker, Roffman, Mbilinyi, & Edleson, 2008) have included intrinsic motivation. This has been accomplished by couching this type of motivation in terms of personal fulfillment and growth (Neighbors, et al., 2008). Similarly, one would not expect a person to engage in abortion because "it is fun". However, one could reasonably suppose that a person could derive pleasure and fulfillment from giving birth to a child of the desired gender. As such, this study will consider intrinsically-motivated sex-selective abortion as a possibility. Statements such as, *I prefer sons over daughters*, *I believe that raising a son is more rewarding than raising a daughter*, *I have always wanted to have a son*, *I do not want to have a daughter*, or *I enjoy boy children more than girl children*, would qualify as intrinsic motivations.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Demographic Variables and Social Learning

Past studies of social learning have examined various demographic characteristics as potential variables. Examples include: age (Houts & Kassab, 1997) gender (Houts & Kassab, 1997), political orientation (Hunseberger, 1983; Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992; Stack & Kposowa, 2008) and education level (Houts & Kassab, 1997; Johnson & McGillicuddy-Delisi, 1983; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Chyui-In, 1991).

In many studies, ethnicity has been shown to be a contributing factor in how influenced one is by social learning. Houts and Kassab (1997) give a possible explanation for this, saying, “Subcultural variations in socialization or social learning experiences may systematically affect all SLT [social learning theory] variables” (p. 124). Their study’s examination of the relationship between social learning and fear of crime found that social learning influenced Nonwhite participants’ fear of crime much more than it influenced White participants’ fear. White participants were more influenced by trusting neighbors. This offset the socially learned fear which resulted from knowing a victim of crime. Likewise, Benda and Corwyn’s (1998) examination of socially-learned sexual behavior in impoverished rural adolescents showed age and peer association were the best predictors of sexual behavior in White participants, while age, gender, and family structure before age 12 were the best predictors among Black participants. The differences were explained, in part, by stronger extended family ties in African American populations (Benda & Corwyn, 1998). Lottes & Kuriloff’s (1992) study of socially-learned sex-role ideologies identified differences between White and Black and Asian respondents, with Asian subjects showing “more traditional attitudes toward female sexuality than did blacks or whites”

(Results section, para. 6), as well as “more support for the justification of male dominance than did whites” (Results section, para. 6).

The relationship between socioeconomic status and social learning has also been examined. Reddan, Wahlstrom, and Reicks (2002) considered socioeconomic status in their study of school children’s decision to consume or skip breakfast, and Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, and Chyui-In (1991) correlated income to cross-generational transmission of abusive behaviors in families. Ataca and Berry’s (2002) study of social learning’s effect on acculturation in Turkish immigrants found differences in attitudes and adaptation-levels across social classes. Likewise, Johnson and McGillicuddy-Delisi’s (1983) study of preschool-age children’s awareness and rationales for rules and conventions found that “children’s awareness and rationales for relatively simple rules and conventions vary with socioeconomic status of the family” (p. 222).

Additionally, religion has been identified as a factor in studies involving social learning. Lottes and Kuriloff’s (1992) previously-mentioned study examined multiple demographic variables in relation to socially-learned sex-role ideologies. Of those variables, religion was identified as one of the most salient. Comparing Catholic, Protestant and Jewish respondents, the study found, “Jews as compared to Protestants were less traditional in their attitudes toward female sexuality, less accepting of male dominance and negative attitudes toward homosexuality, and more accepting of feminist attitudes” (Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992, Discussion, para. 3). Stack and Kposowa’s (2008) cross-national study of attitudes toward suicide in 31 different countries also included religion as a “leading predictor of attitudes toward suicide” (p. 56). Their study found “Self-defined religious persons were considerably less supportive of suicide than nonaffiliates and atheists” (p. 56). The significance of religion in social learning cannot be deemphasized, nor can it be generalized across faiths. As O’Connor, Hoge, and Alexander (2002) note in their study of youth and adult spirituality, “Social learning theory would suggest that religious learning will vary from one denomination or religious group to another depending on the kind of religious modelling and practices that are most prevalent in each group” (p. 724).

## 2.2 Direct/Indirect Experiences and Social Learning

Past studies have used a social learning perspective to explain the media's ability to influence behavior. Aubrey, Harrison, Kramer, and Yellin (2003), Martino, Collins, Kanouse, Elliott, and Berry (2005), Nabi and Clark (2008), Ward (2002), and Ward and Friedman's (2006) studies all focused on the influence of television on one's sexual activities. Each found that repeated exposure to sexually-explicit television content was "associated with greater acceptance of risky attitudes toward sex, overestimation of adolescent peers' sexual activity, and females' earlier expectations for their own sexual experience timing" (Nabi & Clark, 2008, p. 408). These studies also found that watching televised sexual content led to "less negative expectations about the potential consequences of having intercourse" (Martino, Collins, Kanouse, Elliot, & Berry, 2005, p. 921). However, subjects' direct experiences with sex proved to be a mitigating factor in more than one study. Nabi and Clark (2008) noted that their findings were only consistent in groups who previously had no direct experience with their study's target behavior (engaging in "one night stands"; p. 423). Similarly, Ward's (2002) study of socially-learned sexual stereotypes among college students found that "students' preexisting levels of experience with sexual relationships... predicted stronger acceptance of the sexual stereotypes studied" (p. 12).

Studies relating to the media's influence on people's perceptions of public health risks have shown comparable results. Wiegman, Gutteling, and Boer (1991) found:

[R]eaders of the newspaper with the highest hazard coverage, compared to those who read the newspaper with the lowest hazard coverage, had (a) a more negative attitude towards these risks, (b) perceived them as more threatening, (c) showed more feelings of insecurity, and (d) were more inclined to seek information and less inclined to avoid the hazards. (p. 329)

By contrast their study showed that "People who do have direct personal experiences with hazardous industrial activities, for example, those who are living in the surroundings of a hazardous complex, base their conceptions primarily on their direct experiences and these experiences will form their major standard" (p. 329). This finding that direct experiences have



more effect on people than vicarious learning is consistent with previous studies (Gutteling, Seydel, & Wiegman, 1986; Seydel, Gutteling, & Wiegman, 1985), which showed that people with direct experiences with epilepsy were “less affected by information that was incompatible and contrary to their own experiences” (Wiegman, Gutteling, & Boer, 1991, p. 330).

The aforementioned study on fear of crime by Houts and Kassab (1997) also noted the influence of direct experiences on socially learned behavior. According to their results, “[W]hite respondents who had been or knew a crime victim report[ed] greater fear of crime than [did] nonvictims” (p. 130).

In the same way, Stack and Kposowa’s (2008) previously-mentioned study of socially-learned attitudes towards suicide across multiple cultures found that individuals living in nations with high suicide rates were “more supportive of the idea of suicide than persons located in nations with relatively low suicide rates” (p. 55). However, despite this correlation between national suicide rates and suicide acceptance, the relationship between these two variables was “not among the most powerful ones in the analysis. Indeed, individual-level differences are much more important than country-level differences in explaining suicide attitudes” (Stack & Kposowa, 2008, p. 56). Stack and Kposowa (2008) cited religiosity as a key “individual-level difference” that has a “direct and negative socializing effect on approval of suicide” (p. 42).

All of these findings would suggest that more direct experiences, such as those occurring to an individual or within his or her close social circle, are more readily internalized than are indirect experiences with groups or people outside of one’s immediate peer group.

### 2.3 Motivation and Social Learning

Past studies involving motivation have compared intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in a variety of areas such as voluntarism (Degli Antoni, 2009), engagement in substance abuse treatment (Simoneau & Bergeron, 2003), religiousness (Flor, 1998), and academic achievement (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2006; Ryan & Connell, 1989).

Motivation for engaging in physical exercise is one area that has been frequently studied. In their examination of exercise motivation among the elderly, Dacey, Baltzell, and Zaichkowsky

(2008) found that “motivation differentiates activity levels and that an increase of intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motives is positively associated with more physical activity behavior in older adults” (p. 560). While Sebire, Standage, and Vansteenkiste’s (2009) study of exercise motivation in adults did not see significant correlation between exercise levels and motivation, it did show extrinsic motivation for exercise “might be associated with more feelings of anxiety and negative affect rather than vitality and positive affect” (p. 204). Finally, Scioli, Biller, Rossi, and Riebe’s (2009) study of physical exercise in college students found that intrinsic motivation would likely lead to long-term adherence to exercise plans, while extrinsic motivation such as weight loss or improved appearance would not sustain previously-sedentary individuals. These studies suggest that motivation can influence the frequency and duration of one’s engagement in a behavior as well as the emotions and psychological effects that behavior produces.

Similarly, motivation for academic achievement has been studied in a variety of environments and populations ranging from young children to medical school students (Ryan & Connell, 1989; Sobral, 2008). In virtually every study, motivation proved to be a contributing factor to academic achievement. However, depending upon the environment and the population being studied, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations produced divergent results. Areepattamannil and Freeman’s (2008) study comparing academic motivation and performance in immigrant and nonimmigrant Canadian adolescents found differing results between the two populations. While nonimmigrant adolescents’ academic achievement levels showed no significant relationship with their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation subscales, “extrinsic motivation-external regulation (behaviors that are not self-determined) was the sole motivational predictor of academic achievement of immigrant adolescents’ motivation” (p. 729). However, in their study of academic motivation at the university level, Faye and Sharpe (2008) correlated intrinsic motivation with “healthy psychological development” (p. 196), as well as academic performance.

## 2.4 Gaps in Research

As indicated in several previously-mentioned studies, culture and ethnicity play an important role in both social learning and the influence of motivation on behaviors (Areepattamannil & Freeman, 2008; O'Connor, Hoge, & Alexander, 2002). As such, populations whose traditions and norms differ significantly from those of previously-studied groups leave room for future studies with potentially divergent results. Past studies of social learning have shown demographic variables such as ethnicity and religion as significant factors (Benda & Corwyn, 1998; Houts & Kassab, 1997; Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992; O'Connor, Hoge, & Alexander, 2002). However, none of the studies examined looked at social learning in Indian immigrant populations, nor did any of them examine Hinduism -the predominant religion in India (Office of the Registrar General, India, 2001).

In the same way, most western research on motivation examines it in the context of specific ethnic and racial groups. Wang (2008) points out this gap and notes its significance, saying, “[P]sychology researchers have become increasingly aware of the importance of contextual and cultural variables affecting motivational processes, especially the difference between Asian students and American or European students” (p. 634).

Additionally, virtually all of the studies of motivation examine it in relation to engaging in desirable behaviors. Past studies of positively-viewed behaviors have shown that motivation has significant influence on one’s persistence in a behavior as well as the psychological effects of that behavior (Faye & Sharpe, 2008; Sebire, Standage, & Vansteenkiste, 2009). However, little is known about individuals’ motivation for performing acts that the larger society might consider unpleasant or objectionable- such as sex-selective abortion. More research is needed to determine the relationship between motivation and engagement in taboo behaviors.

Finally, the current research integrates social learning theory and self-determination theory as a means to explore both how individuals adopt the practice of sex-selective abortion and why they choose to engage in the behavior. Flor’s (1998) dissertation combined these two theories to explain the transmission of religious behavior from parents to children. However, he

acknowledged that few other studies have examined the relationship between social learning and motivation in this way. In his review of existing studies operating under either of these two theories, Flor (1998) identified “the lack of clarity in the distinction between internalizations and externalizations” (p. 24) as an area in need of improvement.

Based on the review of literature related to the postulates of social learning theory and self-determination theory, the research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What, if any, indirect experiences (through media) do Indian immigrants in the United States have with sex-selective abortion and/or son preference?
2. What, if any, direct experiences (through friends and family) do Indian immigrants in the United States have with sex-selective abortion and/or son preference?
3. What type of motivation do Indian immigrants give for engaging in sex-selective abortion?
4. What type of motivation do Indian immigrants perceive for others engaging in sex-selective abortion?

CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative methodology was chosen for this study because of the relatively small amount of information known about sex-selective abortion in Indian immigrants in the United States. As Allan and Skinner (1991) note in their book on social science research, qualitative research is “held to be useful as a kind of insightful pilot stage, capable of generating interesting ideas and hypotheses that can be ‘properly’ tested by more systematic and thorough quantitative investigation” (p. 179). While this study aims to learn more about sex-selective abortion, it also seeks to serve as an introduction to significant future study of the issue. Allan and Skinner (1991) also note that “qualitative research is often concerned with social processes” (p. 178) and is the method of research best equipped to answer questions of *how* and *why* things occur. Statistical information from the analysis U.S. Census Reports suggests the occurrence of sex-selective abortions among Indian immigrants (Abrevaya, 2008; Almond & Edlund, 2008; Martin, Sutton, Hamilton, Ventura, et al., 2009). However, no known studies delve into the reason sex-selective abortion occurs in immigrant populations. This study’s exploratory design seeks to “foster new lines of inquiry” (Allan & Skinner, 1991, p. 180) about the transmission of the practice of sex-selective abortion from one generation to the next as well as the motivation behind engaging in it.

Personal interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate method of gathering information from participants. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, interviews were conducted in a private setting chosen by the participant. A standardized open-ended format was chosen for the interviews to “ensure that all interviews are conducted in a consistent, thorough manner-with a minimum of interviewer effects and biases” (Rubin & Babbie, 2005, p. 452). An interview schedule detailing specific question wording and order was used for each interview

(See Appendix A). Questions that were worded as closed-ended, such as those asking for either a yes or no response, also included the option for participants to expand upon their answer, should they so choose.

### 3.2 Research Sample

For the purposes of this study, only married, female, first-generation Indian immigrants between the ages of 18 and 44 were chosen to participate in the interviews.

Women were the target gender for this study because, while men may have a strong influence on a woman's decision to have an abortion, this may not always be the case. However, regardless of a husband's involvement in or awareness of his wife's decision to have an abortion, pregnancy always involves a woman's body, and sex-selective abortion always involves a woman.

Additionally, this study chose married women between the ages of 18 and 44 to increase the likelihood that the sample would consist of women who are in a childbearing stage of life. The U.S. Census Bureau considers anyone between age 15 to 44 to be "in the childbearing ages" (Downs, 2003, p. 3). For the purposes of this study, women under age 18 were not considered so as to not involve minor subjects.

First-generation immigrants were chosen to ensure that all participants had experienced some exposure to Indian culture in its natural setting. A participant was considered a first-generation immigrant if she had lived in India and immigrated to the United States either as a child or as an adult.

A total of 24 women agreed to participate in this research. Four of the women who initially agreed to be interviewed did not meet the study's criteria and were ineligible to participate. The final sample size was 20 participants. The sample was recruited through convenience and snowball sampling via the researcher's personal contacts within the Indian immigrant community. Those contacts were asked to refer women who fell within the age and marital status requirements of the study. At the end of every interview, the researcher asked participants if they knew of anyone who might be willing and able to be interviewed.

### 3.3 Data Collection

An application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was made by the researcher. The interview schedule as well as the research protocol were reviewed and approved by the IRB.

Each woman who expressed a willingness to participate in the interview process was given a copy of the study's IRB consent form. This consent form explained the nature of the research and outlined the procedure for the interview- explaining that the interviews would be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The consent form also offered guidelines specifying IRB requirements regarding human research and privacy policies and gave contact information to the participants should they experience any adverse psychological effects from participation in the study. A copy of this form can be found in Appendix B.

Participants who agreed to the interview were asked to sign the consent form, which was promptly placed in a separate folder from her response sheet. Interviews were conducted in private locations chosen by the participants. The researcher verbally emphasized the confidentiality practices in place for the research and explained that all audio recordings of the interview would be deleted upon transcription. Participants were shown that, outside of their signature on a separate consent form, at no point, would their name be written on any document. Participants were also informed that they could stop the interview at any time and they could decline to answer any question. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours. No incentives were given to participants in exchange for participation in the study.

### 3.4 Instrument

The interview contained demographic questions related to the participant's age, time spent outside of her home country, time spent in the United States, and years of marriage. Participants were asked about the ages and genders of their children. They were also asked what language they speak at home, their level of formal education, their religious affiliation, and their average annual income. These questions were intended to gather information on a possible relationship between socio-economic status, acculturation, religion, and education-level on sex-selective abortion.

Additionally, participants were asked seven questions related to their direct (through family and friends) and indirect (through video and print media) exposure to son preference and sex-selective abortion. Examples of these questions include: *Have you ever seen anything on television, in movies, in newspapers or in advertisements that promotes the importance of having male children rather than female?; Have you ever seen anything on television, in movies, in the newspaper or in advertisements that promotes abortion as an option to ensure having a son rather than a daughter?; Has anyone in your family ever talked about having an abortion to ensure that they had a son?; To the best of your knowledge, have any of your friends or family members ever had an abortion because they knew their fetus was a female?*

Finally, participants were asked if they have ever engaged in sex-selective abortion. If participants answered in the affirmative, they were asked, *When you had a sex-selective abortion, what was your reason?* If participants denied having engaged in sex-selective abortion, they were asked if they have ever considered doing so. All participants were asked to speculate as to why someone might choose to have a sex-selective abortion.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The researcher used ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, to code the participants' responses and look for emerging themes. Immediately following each interview, the researcher transcribed participants' responses by hand. Once all interviews had been completed and transcribed, the researcher began data analysis. Creswell (1998), advocates "reading through all collected information to obtain a sense of the overall data" (p. 140) as the first step in qualitative data analysis. Based on this recommendation, the researcher spent a substantial amount of time reading each transcription and becoming familiar with the data. Creswell also recommends that while reviewing the data, one "looks closely at the words used by participants in the study" (p. 140) to be aware of symbolism in their language. Throughout the process of becoming familiar with the data, the researcher made note of some repeating ideas, or "idea[s] expressed in relevant text by two or more research participants" (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 54).



According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), researchers should use coding to mark repeating ideas and group them into concepts. This process was begun once the researcher felt comfortable with the data. The researcher uploaded each interview transcription onto ATLAS.ti to facilitate the coding process. Each transcription was uploaded as a separate document on the software. The researcher then examined each transcription separately, using ATLAS.ti's code feature to mark individual participants' transcriptions by the themes seen in other participants' interviews. ATLAS.ti allows the researcher to write a description for each created code. Using this feature, the researcher noted a keyword for each coded phrase, sentence, or paragraph. After rereading each transcription, the researcher used the compiled keyword list to search transcriptions for any repetitions of themes that might have been missed in the initial coding process.

The researcher used discretion when choosing quotations containing the keywords mentioned in Table 1.4. For example, not every phrase using the word "family" dealt with familial pressure. After running a search of all the keywords in a given category, irrelevant phrases containing these words were left un-coded by the researcher.

After this initial coding phase was completed, the researcher looked at each emerging theme separately and read the coded segments of each theme to check for consistency within the themes. As Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) recommend, certain codes with commonalities were merged to form broader categories while others with too broad of a scope were narrowed into more specific categories. After developing a finalized list of emerging themes from the interviews, the researcher analyzed the data and determined where each theme should be placed on the motivational continuum described by self-determination theory.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter examines the results of the information gathered through 20 qualitative interviews. This chapter also includes demographic information on the respondents, as well as their experiences with both direct and indirect exposure to son preference through media as well as friends and family. The interviews of the respondents have been coded for themes and patterns. These themes have been divided into the four categories of motivation. Quotes from the respondents have been provided to illustrate the themes that emerged in the data.

#### 4.1 Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 20 women participated in this study ( $n=20$ ). The demographic information recorded included age, years of marriage, number of children, age and sex of children, number of years spent outside of India, number of years spent in the United States, primary language spoken at home, religious affiliation, and household income.

Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 44 (Mean = 31.75 years), with 8 (40%) participants between the ages of 23 and 29, 9 (45%) between the ages of 30 and 39, and 3 (15%) between the ages of 40 and 44 years old.

Participants' length of marriage ranged from 5 months to 25 years (Mean= 7.89 years). Three participants (15%) had been married less than 1 year; 7 (35%) had been married between 1 and 5 years; 4 (20%) had been married between 6 to 10 years; 2 (10%) had been married between 11 and 15 years; 2 (10%) had been married 16 to 20 years; 2 (10%) had been married 21 to 25 years.

Ten participants (50%) had no children; 8 participants (40%) had 2 children; 1 participant (5%) had 3 children; 1 participant (5%) had 4 children. All participants with children ( $n=10$ ) had at least one daughter. Out of the participants with children ( $n=10$ ), only one participant did not have

any sons; one participant had multiple sons; three participants had multiple daughters.

Participants' children ranged in age from 4 months to 23 years (Mean= 8.71 years).

Table 1.1 Demographic Variables: Age, Marriage, Children

Demographic Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Age (years)		
23-29	8	40%
30-39	9	45%
40-44	3	15%
Length of Marriage (years)		
Less than 1 year	3	15%
1-5	7	35%
6-10	4	20%
11-15	2	10%
16-20	2	10%
21-25	2	10%
Number of Children		
0	10	50%
2	8	40%
3	1	5%
4	1	5%
Sex of Children		
1 Male 1 Female	7	35%
2 Female	1	5%
2 Female 1 Male	1	5%
2 Male 2 Female	1	5%

Table 1.1 - *continued*

Not Applicable	10	50%
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The time participants had lived outside of India ranged from 1 year and 3 months to 25 years. Time participants had lived in the United States ranged from 1 year to 25 years. When this information is looked at as a percentage of the participants' life, participants had spent from 5% to 96% of their lives outside of India. They had spent from 4% to 96% of their lives in the United States. A more-detailed breakdown of these two variables is represented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Demographic Variables: Percent of Life Spent outside of India and in the United States

Demographic Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Percentage of life spent outside of India		
25% or less	7	35%
26 to 50%	9	45%
51 to 75%	3	15%
More than 75%	1	5%
Percentage of life in the United States		
25% or less	8	40%
26 to 50%	9	45%
51 to 75%	2	10%
More than 75%	1	5%

Of participants who identified as religious (n=19), 17 (89%) identified themselves as Hindu. One participant identified herself as Christian; one participant identified herself as Muslim.

Linguistically, participants represented seven different Indian languages. One participant indicated speaking primarily English in her home; 6 participants indicated speaking English in

addition to an Indian language; 13 participants indicated speaking one or more Indian language at home, but not English. The linguistic breakdown of the Indian languages is as follows: seven participants spoke Gujarati; five participants spoke Hindi; two participants spoke Malayalam; two participants spoke Marathi; one participant spoke Nepali; one participant spoke Tamil; one participant spoke Bengali.

Most participants had completed one or more advanced degrees. One (5%) participant had not completed high school; 12 (60%) participants had a Bachelors degree; 7 (35%) had a Masters degree. No participants had PhDs; however, two were currently in school pursuing that degree.

Of the participants surveyed, 6 (30%) either did not know or did not wish to disclose their household income. Many explained that they do not handle their finances and/or do not work outside the home, so their husband deals with all money-related issues. Of the participants who did respond to the question about household income ( $n=14$ ), 1 had an income between \$30,000 and \$40,000 a year; 1 had an income between \$50,000 and \$60,000; 2 had incomes between \$60,000 and \$70,000; 1 had an income between \$70,000 and \$80,000; 4 had incomes between \$80,000 and \$90,000; 3 participants had incomes between \$100,000 and \$150,000; 2 had incomes of \$200,000 or more.

Table 1.3 Demographic Variables: Language, Religion, Education, Income

Demographic Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Language		
English Only	1	5%
English and an Indian Language	6	30%
Indian Language Only	13	65%
Religion		
Hindu	17	85%
Muslim	1	5%

Table 1.3- *continued*

Christian	1	5%
Not Religious	1	5%
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Did not complete High School	1	5%
Bachelors	12	60%
Masters	7	35%
<b>Annual Household Income (dollars)</b>		
30,000-40,000	1	5%
40,000-50,000	0	0%
50,000-60,000	1	5%
60,000-70,000	1	5%
70,000-80,000	1	5%
80,000-90,000	1	5%
90,000-100,000	4	20%
100,00-150,000	3	15%
200,000+	2	10%
Don't know/Don't want to say	6	30%

#### 4.2 Direct and Indirect Experiences

Participants were asked seven questions related to their direct (through family and friends) and indirect (through video and print media) exposure to son preference and sex-selective abortion. The first two questions dealt with indirect exposure to both son preference and sex-selective abortion through video and print media.

#### *4.2.1 Indirect Experiences*

Twelve participants (60%) indicated they had seen something on television, in movies, in newspapers or in advertisements that either promoted the importance of having sons over daughters or promoted abortion as an option to ensure having a son. Six participants (30%) had been exposed to media promoting both son preference and sex selective abortion. Four (20%) had been exposed to media about son preference, but not about abortion. Two participants (10%) had seen media about sex selective abortion but not about son preference. The primary example participants cited was sex-selective abortion as a plot line for a character either on television or in movies. For most participants, they were certain that they had seen the practice in the media, but could not identify the name of a specific film or television series in which they had seen either son preference or sex-selective abortion. One participant spoke about the difficulty people might have in recognizing this issue as it is portrayed in the media:

In India, yes. There's a very subtle undercurrent of it [son preference]. Not something prominent or blaring. They'll not be any statement saying, "Oh, you should have a male child." They'll be a soft focus on certain things about a male child. I think there is an undercurrent of it in a lot of the advertisements in India. If they show a family function kind of thing in India I think they're more likely to show the lady having a baby boy as opposed to having a baby girl. Small things like that...It's so subtle and I guess, so ingrained that you won't notice it. (P1)

#### *4.2.2 Direct Experiences through Family*

Participants were also asked if anyone in their family had talked about preferring sons over daughters and if anyone in their family had talked about abortion as an option to ensure having a son. Six participants (30%) indicated that someone in their family had discussed son preference. Two participants (10%) said someone in their family had spoken about engaging in a sex-selective abortion. Participants talked about seeing family members deal with issues relating to son preference on the part of another family member. One participant explained:

My dad's younger brother, they have 2 daughters- my cousins, my first cousins. When they actually had their second daughter, my grandmother was very disappointed with her daughter in-law. She actually mentioned that maybe they should give away the baby. She actually said that within, I think, a few minutes of my aunt giving birth. Obviously my aunt and my uncle were very upset. And they didn't, obviously, pay attention to that. (P1)

When asked if anyone in her family had spoken about sex-selective abortion, a participant whose grandmother had expressed son preference replied, "No. I haven't heard her [the participant's grandmother] saying to get abortion, but it was just more happiness and, the feelings are there I know for sure. Yes" (P20).

Additionally, participants addressed their personal experience with family members' expressed son preference. P15 spoke of feeling personal pressure from her in-laws to have a son:

Especially parents- his parents. Because he's the only son. So when I have a daughter then when I have 2<sup>nd</sup> time pregnancy, they always consider that we need a boy. If we don't get the boy, we going to go to third time. So they going to go for 3<sup>rd</sup> round, that's for sure. If it's not, then it's not. But definitely going to go for third round. So the weight is strongly for the boy. (P15).

However, when asked if anyone in her family had talked about abortion, she also talked about her family's view of the practice, stating, "They never talk about abortion. They think that that's a crime. But at the same time, they think that we need a boy, so...There are the two highlights. So I don't know how you can judge them" (P15).

This participant spoke about son preference from the perspective of a daughter:

I have heard it as a joke for myself. But I don't know how far it's true that I was like an unwanted child because I was a girl. But I guess my parents do love me and they are proud to have me I guess. The fact that I've achieved whatever in life I have. But I know before it was always a joke like, "You were an unwanted child" (P9).



#### 4.2.3 Direct Experiences through Friends

Participants were asked two questions concerning whether or not any of their friends had spoken of son preference or sex-selective abortion. Two participants acknowledged that they had heard this discussion among their friends. However, this could be due to the phrasing of the question, since an additional two participants who said they did not have friends who were involved in either practice later mentioned acquaintances they had who either expressed son preference or had engaged in sex-selective abortion. One participant spoke of a work acquaintance who had expressed a strong son preference:

He really wanted a baby boy. He told his wife that he doesn't want a baby girl. He wants a baby boy. It's a strange thing to tell your wife because it's not something she can do something about. She can't decide to have a baby boy. And fortunately they had a baby boy so there was no blame game. (P1)

Another stated, "I have known somebody who already had two daughters and was desperate to have a boy and had done an abortion after knowing it was a girl. And after that they had a boy" (P5). P5 is the only participant who indicated any friends had engaged in sex-selective abortion. However, this participant also indicated that this friend might have been her family member.

Participants were asked if, to the best of their knowledge, any of their friends or family members had ever had an abortion because their fetus was female. The three previously-mentioned participants are the only participants who said "yes".

#### 4.3 Personal Experience

Participants were also asked two questions relating to their personal involvement in son preference and sex-selective abortion. No participants said they had ever had a sex-selective abortion. When asked "*Have you ever had an abortion because you knew your fetus was female?*" one participant said "yes". However, in explaining why she had aborted, the participant mentioned that she did not know whether the fetus was female or not.

Additionally, no participants acknowledged ever having considered sex-selective abortion. One participant, who had mentioned feeling pressured by her in-laws to have a son, explained that after her first child was a girl:

I was scared because I don't want to have a third child. Do, you know, too much. I also want to continue my education. He wants to go to get his education, so [pause] But praying to the God, we got the son, so that fulfill everybody's dream." (P15)

Because P15's second child was a son, she never had to entertain the idea of abortion. However, she acknowledged that living in the United States was another factor for her: "If I am there I might consider abortion so I don't have many, many children because it's very hard to live in this type of economy. I would consider" (P15).

#### 4.4 Speculation about Motivation

Finally, participants were asked to speculate the reason someone might give for engaging in sex-selective abortion. This open-ended question yielded the most in-depth responses from participants. With the assistance of ATLAS.ti, the researcher used an open-coding method to search for emerging themes within participants' responses. Based on this open-coding method, the following repeating ideas emerged:

Table 1.4 Emerging Themes

Problems for and from Girls	"shame", "rape", "abuse", "worry", "defamed", "society", "control", "happiness", "burden", "pain"
Dowry	"dowry", "wedding" "marriage/marry/married", "pay"
Education (lack of)	"education/educated/uneducated", "narrow- minded" , "open-minded", "aware/awareness", "know"
Familial Pressure* (later divided to	"grandma" "husband" "family" "pressure"

Table 1.4 - *continued*

include Familial Preference)	“parents”
Familial Ties	“give” (up/away) “sent” (off/ away), “go” (away), “leave”, “stay”, “come” (back), “other family”, “different family”
Inheritance	“house”, “property”, “hand-over”
Son’s Duty to the family	“income”, “breadwinners”, “give back”, “look after”, “earning”, “take care”, “care for”, “come back”, “ensure my family’s survival”, “carry the family”
Money	“poverty”, “socio-economic status”, “expense”, “afford”, “economy”, “money”, “financial”, “poor”
Name Carried Forward	“name”, “represent”, “continuation”
Want a Boy	“want”

#### 4.4.1 Money

The theme of “Money” included any mention of general poverty or the cost associated with having children (outside of dowry, which is given its own theme). Financial concerns were cited by eight participants as a reason why someone might choose to have a sex-selective abortion. For example, one participant explained:

There are also other circumstances like raising a lot of children requires financial stability and so people who are not financially stable usually don’t tend to want a lot of children.

And if one of that child needs to be a male, that may influence that decision. (P11)

Other participants spoke of the expenses associated with children:

It's still true in villages and some of the lower class and middle class families. Tuition costs money and, everything costs money. Dresses and all that. Boys, you know you can just put on pants and shirt and go. (P19)

Another commented:

The thing is that to take care of the kid, to give a good education, to give them a good life is not easy. It takes money, not matter in India, not matter in America, not matter in any part of the world. (P5)

#### *4.4.2 Education (lack of)*

This theme pertains to any mention of a lack of education as well as a general lack of knowledge or awareness as a reason someone might engage in a sex-selective abortion. 10 participants gave this possible motivation. Many spoke of “backward” or “narrow-minded” people as being the ones who engaged in sex-selective abortion. In these participants’ minds, sex selective abortion was motivated by a blind obedience to a prescribed standard of rules and regulations in society:

Their thinking is not as open as we are. They are still a narrow-minded thinking and they just follow a set of rules where the man says this, “give dowry” so I’ll just follow him. Blindfolded follow. (P19)

And:

Also not having traveled more or not having seen life outside, not having found the freedom that I can live my life any which way, or that I’m capable of managing it. So that usually narrows their social context much more than people who have lived in the cities or who have been educated or who have felt a certain freedom or who have immigrated elsewhere. (P11)

#### *4.4.3 Familial Pressure*

This theme deals with the sense of obligation a woman might feel towards her husband, parents or in-laws to have a male child. While the theme of “Familial Preference” holds similar ideas, the participant quotations chosen for this theme conveyed a sense of absolute necessity

and lack of choice on the part of the woman. According to the seven participants who cited this possible motivation, a woman would not be acting out of avoidance of shame from her family, but rather would be acting because it was absolutely expected of her. One participant described this pressure as being portrayed frequently in the media:

In television shows they show that a lot of times, yes. A lot of times it is imposed upon the character. Because the character is usually the daughter-in-law of the home. It's usually an imposition thing. (P11)

Another stated: "She has no powers, no control to decide what she wants to do. She doesn't know whether it's [abortion] a good thing or a bad thing" (P7).

In speaking about a relative who had engaged in a sex-selective abortion, one participant's wording exemplified how out of control many women are of the decision to engage in a sex-selective abortion by responding: "My uncle, he did that for his wife" (P9).

#### *4.4.4 Familial Preference*

Familial Preference deals with the obligation a woman might feel towards her family to have a son. However, this theme differs from that of "familial pressure" in that the obligation appears to be coming out of an avoidance of shame or a seeking of family approval rather than coercion. Three participants spoke of this specific family-related issue. For example, P1 spoke of an exchange between her aunt and her grandmother after her aunt gave birth to a second girl child, stating:

...my grandmother was very disappointed with her daughter in-law. She actually mentioned that maybe they should give away the baby. She actually said that within, I think, a few minutes of my aunt giving birth. Obviously my aunt and my uncle were very upset. And they didn't, obviously, pay attention to that. (P1)

Other participants spoke of family members being "more happy hearing about the birth of a boy rather than the birth of a girl" (P20).

Another indicated that women who give birth to daughters will lose favor in the eyes of her family: “And, the woman who gives birth to two girls, now that wife will not be as important as the wife who has a boy in the family” (P11).

#### 4.4.5 Dowry

Dowry referred to any mention of expense associated with marriage as well as the use of the actual word "dowry". Nine participants cited dowry as a reason for son preference in Indian society. While dowry deals with money, it has been given its own theme apart from the general “Money” theme because of the extreme social pressure tied to the dowry system:

Usually in India, in my country they usually have female infanticide because it takes a lot of money to get a female married in your family. You need to pay dowry, if you are have heard of that. You need to give them money or a car or something like that to the guy's family. That's the only reason why people do, why they abort female children. (P8)

Another participant noted that not only is dowry expected at the wedding, but often a girl's family experiences social pressure to continue to provide money to their daughter's in-laws for years to come:

And also, getting them married. Because of dowry. A lot of people cannot afford dowry. The demands from boy's side. And after getting married it's always the girls they have to give, give, give, give, give- that concept is there. At every festival, girl's parents will give, give, give. Even after dowry. Dowry is not a big deal, but even after the girl's parents will keep on giving. That expectation of giving a lot will be there. (P20)

One might assume that dowry was an irrelevant issue for Indian immigrants. However, as the following participant noted, dowry can and does follow immigrants when they leave their native land:

Also, I think, this might be a very minor thing, but I think, if a family has a girl child, it's extremely expensive to marry the girl off as opposed to a guy's family. The girl's family has to pay for the wedding and everything. I think a lot of families in India, even now, have the whole dowry system. In fact, one of my friends who went to [name of university]

and did his master's there, he was telling me that in their community in India, they have a certain system, that if the guy has a certain level of education, then this is the amount of dowry he is supposed to get. And if he has his master's and he's been to the U.S. or if he has a job in the U.S., it actually goes like tenfold or something. Which is crazy. I think the stakes on him were close to 1 crore. [10 million rupees or over 200,000 dollars]. I mean, is that a crazy amount of money?! (P1)

#### *4.4.6 Problems for and from Girls*

Eight participants spoke specifically of the unique problems faced by girls in society and cited that as a possible reason someone might not want a female child. Specifically, participants spoke about concerns over domestic violence, and a general lack of control over one's future after marriage. One participant stated: "None of the parents would like their daughter to be abused in any way. Nice husband, nice family- What if she doesn't find?" (P16). Another noted the difference in control parents of female children have as compared to parents of male children:

But girl is nothing in control. If they [the parents] want to see their girl happy, if they want to see their boy happy, they can make the boy happy. But if they want to see their girl happy, it depends on the in-laws. It depends on girl's in-laws and how they are. What are their demands? If they are demanding, if they are not demanding. (P20)

In addition to the guilt or fear participants said parents might feel for not being able to provide their daughters with a good life, participants also cited guilt and fear of the problems a girl child might bring upon a family. This participant cited sexual assault as a concern:

And they have to be more secure about her, more protective about a girl. What if she goes out and gets raped? So there are a bunch of reasons why people think a girl can be a trouble to have...How will they show their faces in society? What will they tell the people? How will they lead the rest of their lives if something happens to the girl? (P9)

Another spoke of premarital sex: “Also, some people consider that having a girl child is too much of a pain. What if she goes off track and gets pregnant before marriage or has sex before marriage. These are considered as shame in our culture” (P18).

Three participants chose to use the specific word “burden” in relation to having daughters: “They believe if a girl is going to come, it's like a burden. It's like a burden to a family, you know? Who's gonna eat, take the clothes, consume your time for 16-17 years and who's not going to give anything in return. That's the mentality” (P5).

#### *4.4.7 Familial Ties*

The theme of “Familial Ties” specifically referred to any mention of daughters moving to another family when they get married or not coming back to their birth family after moving out. Ten participants noted this reasoning. According to participants, after a daughter's marriage, she is almost considered estranged from her biological family. The idea of daughters being completely cut off from their biological family after marriage came through in many participants' choice of language. One participant noted: “Because in India the daughters are given away. She goes to another family and she is no longer a part of the family” (P9). Another participant also stated: “[O]nce the girl is married she belongs to a different family” (P16). One participant who was newly married noted that throughout the process of her marriage:

[M]y parents have felt like they are giving up their daughter to someone else. I don't know if this is just an Indian thing, though- that sentiment. Whereas my mom-in-law always referred to the whole wedding thing as she getting a daughter-in-law. I mean, my parents never talked about actually getting a son-in-law. They just talked about giving up a daughter. (P1)

#### *4.4.8 Inheritance*

Only three participants mentioned inheriting property etc. from the family as a reason to have sons. The participants that cited inheritance as a motivation for sex-selective abortion couched it in terms of making sure one's wealth stayed within the family:



And they thought that the girl would get married and go away and who would run the house? To whom would go their property, the wealth? The wealthy thought that, “Oh I don’t want to give it to someone else’s son. I would like to give to my own son” (P16).

#### 4.4.9 Son’s Duty

According to participants, sons are expected to contribute financially to their parents’ well-being. Additionally, they are expected to care for their parents in their old age. This correlates with the theme of familial ties, since part of why sons are expected to care for their parents is because daughters move in with their husbands families and become a part of that unit. Thirteen participants included this idea in their reasons someone might choose to have a sex-selective abortion, saying things such as: “And they like male children because they represent the family. They earn money and they come back home. That’s a really silly reason, I think, but that’s the reason” (P8). And: “Maybe like many Indians come from the patriarchal family and they have this notion that like sons are the ones who look after when they grow old, and like, something like that could be a reason” (P3).

Additionally, a few participants noted that a *married* son brings the added bonus of having a wife to help him perform his duties as a son. As these two participants stated, daughter-in-laws contribute to their in-laws’ well-being. However, the credit still goes to the son:

[A] son will take care of you because the daughter is somebody else’s. She’ll take care of her in-laws but she is not theirs. A son is someone who, in your old age will take care of you. This is all kind of rolled into the social structure through the years. (P11)

According to this participant, wives’ financial contributions are also a factor:

One of the important points I forgot to mention, if you know Indian family unit, girls, they get married and go off to their husband’s home. And whatever earnings they do, whatever worth they make, money, they have to give it to their in-laws family. They don’t have share at all to their parents’ family. Back in those days. Even some of the families still. But boys, it’s a different story. You bring them up. They earn income and they give to their family. And their wife’s salary also goes to their family. So that’s why some of the

people think that having female children is a burden. Whereas having male children is prosperity, abundance, money. (P19)

#### 4.4.10 *Name Carried Forward*

Corresponding to the idea of son's being the keepers of the family is the specific idea of males carrying the family name. Eight participants attested to the importance of preserving a specific lineage, making statements such as: "I think because specifically in Indian culture, and in a lot of other cultures, the son carries the family name, and I think that's a big deal" (P2).

In addition to speaking about a son's ability to carry the family name, a few participants talked specifically about a daughter's *inability* to carry her family name forward:

The boy carry the name for the generation to generation. And the girl is just, go away, you know? Take away the name from the father...I think that's the main thing. It's the main difference. Boy's earning same, girl's earning same. In India, all girls is well-educated. They can be advocate, doctor, lawyer, name it. I just think that's the only one that is bothering them. I think that is the one that is missing that she not carry the name of the family. (P15).

One participant speculated as to why the issue of lineage might persist even in the Indian immigrant population:

The ones who are living in the United States wouldn't care about those things but what if they have to go back to India? They will still have those kinds of same fears about taking their name forward - that the family name should go on with the guy there. So those fears which are here with the girl and the reasons for having a male child can still be with them no matter if they have come to the United States. Because they can think, what if they might go back? (P9)

#### 4.4.11 *Want a Boy*

This theme reflects instances when the motivation for son preference and/or sex-selective abortion was cited as simply wanting a boy or not wanting a girl. Only two participants made statements that fit into this category, stating: "My husband has a friend who works with him

and it's been a year they had a baby boy. He really wanted a baby boy. He told his wife that he doesn't want a baby girl. He wants a baby boy" (P1), and: "They had had one girl before that but they didn't want a second girl and they aborted" (P9).

#### 4.5 Additional Recurring Ideas

Many participants spoke about son preference as a problem of the past, claiming that today's generation would not face it as an issue: "A long time back like when my mother, they used to have children, in those days they would prefer son over a daughter. But nowadays it doesn't matter. Not anymore" (P13).

Four participants projected a definite moral judgment on the practice of abortion in general, and sex-selective abortion in particular, making statements such as: "To me that's wrong. It doesn't matter if you have a boy or a girl. It shouldn't be a question of abortion. I don't think that is right. You should be happy with whatever God gives you" (P13), and: "Abortion is a crime we are not going to commit that. Strongly we believe that. Because of the Hindu don't believe in abortion" (P15).

Additionally, many participants expressed disbelief that such a practice could still occur: For Indians that come to the United States, I don't think they'll have that kind of notion regarding the gender because now the world has changed so much and women are so much empowered, so I don't think they would do anything such as sex-selective abortion. (P3)

A few felt that Indian culture had changed so drastically in the last generation that this issue was dying out in their native land as well:

I would say that the problem probably was there 200 years back, but I don't say that's a growing problem in India. I will not say that sex selective abortion is an issue. It may happen on a case to case basis, maybe a discrete instance. But Indian society, I don't think they care about girls or guys anymore. (P10)

Those that acknowledged its continued practice refuted the idea that anyone in their social circle would do such a thing. These participants consistently cited an “other” –someone uneducated, impoverished or otherwise oppressed-who would engage in sex-selective abortion:

Here people are open-minded about it but In India, people are still living in the country side and they strongly believe in it because they do not open their mind, they do not have enough knowledge. The women don't go outside. They might strongly believe in that. But here the women are pretty much either way- boy or girl it doesn't matter. (P 15)

However, this “other” did not necessarily reside in India:

I'm pretty sure Indians in the U.S. bring it [sex-selective abortion] over with them. I've met a surprisingly large number of Indians in the U.S. who are ultraconservative and ultraorthodox as far as some Indian things are concerned. I mean I would expect their horizons to be slightly more broadened than maybe a person in India because they have come across a more diverse set of people, a more diverse set of ideas. It would make you more open to new ideas and maybe even changes the way you think about some of the things. But for some people it just doesn't, I mean, it's like they go back in time. It's very surprising to hear them express their thoughts sometimes. I don't express my amusement or horror at their thoughts, but it's still prevalent. Maybe not all. Maybe people who come from certain parts of the country in India. (P1).

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore possible motivations for sex-selective abortion among Indian immigrants. The research revealed that many participants have experienced both indirect and direct exposure to sex-selective abortion and/or son preference. Participants primarily cited television and movies as the most common sources of indirect experiences with the two issues. With regard to direct experiences, participants spoke much more frequently about seeing either sex-selective abortion or son preference within their families than they did about seeing either issue amongst their friends. While no participants acknowledged any personal experience with sex-selective abortion, all were able to speculate as to why someone might engage in a sex-selective abortion. These responses were read for emerging themes and coded accordingly. This resulted in the discovery of 11 different recurring ideas relating to possible motivations for sex-selective abortion. The emerging themes revealed a wide array of types of motivation for sex-selective abortion, with responses fitting into all four motivational categories delineated by self determination theory. While the study's small sample population does not allow its findings to be generalized to the Indian immigrant population across the United States, the information obtained through these 20 interviews does provide a base upon which future studies of the issue can build.

#### 5.2 Interpretation of Findings

##### *5.2.1 Social Learning Theory*

Indirect exposure (through media) to sex-selective abortion and/or son preference was cited by 12 participants as something they had personally experienced. However, as one participant noted, the irony of social learning is that the more ubiquitous a behavior is, the more

difficult it is for one to be conscious of its presence. The extreme nature of participants' responses to this question- ranging from an unequivocal "no, never" to other participants citing specific examples of its occurrence- provides evidence that son preference is likely still a pervasive theme in Indian media sources. However participants may be so accustomed to this message that they are unable to recognize its existence.

Eight participants cited having experienced direct exposure (through friends and family) to sex-selective abortion and/or son preference. Familial exposure was much more common than exposure through friends. This could reflect the sensitive nature of the subject. Perhaps Indians simply do not discuss son preference outside of their own families. The examples given of family members expressing son preference or talking about abortion all demonstrated the extreme secrecy surrounding this issue. One participant explained:

My mom's brother's wife had to abort because it was a girl child they were having. Because we are first family we got to know about it, but I guess they don't tell about it outside the family. And they won't tell people in the family. They'll keep it like a secret and it won't be out that, okay, they got an abortion because it was a female child. Or for that matter, that they got an abortion. Nobody would tell. (P9)

It should be noted that while very few participants acknowledged having a friend who had engaged in sex-selective abortion, this could have been due to the phrasing of the question. Perhaps if the word "acquaintance" had been used, participants would have thought more broadly about people in their general peer group who had been involved in some type of son preference. It is also possible that sex-selective abortion is a topic that one does not discuss with friends. Given that participants viewed the practice in a negative light, one could assume that participants' friends would be hesitant to discuss their preference for sons with them.

Because none of the participants in the research acknowledged having engaged in sex-selective abortion, the motivations cited in their interviews are purely speculative. However, participants still gave interesting insight into the issues surrounding sex-selective abortion and son preference in the Indian community around the world.

The strong moral judgment many participants attached to abortion should be noted. However, this sentiment does not mean these or other women would never engage in any type of son preference. As Flor (1998) explained in his study of religiosity, external behavior and internal motivation do not necessarily correspond. A person may very well engage in a behavior without agreeing with it. However, this finding does illustrate the level of shame and taboo that could be attached to the practice of sex-selective abortion in modern Indian society.

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that most participants did not personally identify with sex-selective abortion as a potential dilemma which they might face, they were still able to provide a wide range of possible motivations for another person's engagement in the practice. Even individuals who made strong moral judgments against abortion cited a variety of motivations. Some of these motivations, such as "lack of education" or "money" reflected participants' view of the issue as something which affects a group of people to which they do not personally belong. This creation of an "other" who deals with sex-selective abortion and son preference leaves participants free to discuss these issues without the discussion reflecting upon their own culture. While participants were always talking about these issues within the Indian cultural context, many specified that the issues only occur in poor and/or uneducated circles.

However, not all of the motivations cited by participants reflected this creation of an "other". A few participants acknowledged their own ability to relate to women who face these issues in their lives. When they spoke of issues like "familial ties" or "son's duty", they couched them in terms of how they affect Indian culture as a whole. Even motivations like "name carried forward" or "dowry" were explained as still impacting Indians even after they immigrate to the United States. Despite every participants' insistence that they would not engage in sex-selective abortion or son preference, their examples of motivations demonstrate that they do not view themselves as immune to the issues which influence these practices perpetuation.

Additionally, it should be noted that the motivations cited by participants correspond almost exactly to those given by previous studies of sex-selective abortion in India (Das Gupta, et al., 2003). This supports the validity of the motivations given by participants.

### 5.2.2 Self Determination Theory

To examine how these motivational themes fit into self determination theory's motivational continuum, the researcher assigned each theme mentioned in Table 1.4 to one of the four categories established by the theory. Three of the four motivational categories (extrinsic, introjected and identified) were well-represented by participants in their responses.

#### 5.2.2.1 Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic Motivation is motivation involving "rule following" and "avoidance of punishment" (Ryan & Connell, 1989, p. 752). The themes of "Money", "Education" and "Familial Pressure" were considered as fitting into this category of motivation.

Participants frequently spoke about financial constraints as an issue affecting one's family size and willingness to have daughters. Despite what past research in India has shown (Guilmoto, 2007), participants often considered sex-selective abortion to be an issue faced only by the most destitute in India. Their explanations of why someone might engage in sex-selective abortion imply that if people were not impoverished, they would be able to afford to have a larger family. However, it is important to note that while money would allow people to have more children and might curb the practice of sex-selective abortion, it would not do anything to change the issue of son preference. It would simply mask the practice by allowing people to have as many daughters as they wanted until they could achieve that coveted son.

"Education" was placed under extrinsic motivation because, like with the theme of money, participants considered this to be a circumstantial contributor to the issue of sex-selective abortion. Participants' explanations suggested that a lack of exposure to ideas of gender equality as well as a lack of understanding of the dangers associated with abortion were perpetuating the practice. Two participants talked about the misconception of many people that the woman determines the sex of the fetus. They explained that this false notion perpetuated a system of blame on women by making wives who give birth to daughters less valuable than those who have sons.



Familial Pressure is the third theme that the researcher placed under the category of extrinsic motivation. This theme highlighted the coercion many women face by spouses or in-laws to have a sex-selective abortion. Familial Pressure fits into this category of motivation because of the absolute expectation that these women obey their family members' wishes regarding their pregnancy.

#### 5.2.2.2 Introjected Motivation

Ryan and Connell (1989) define introjected motivation as "internal, esteem-based pressures to act, such as avoidance of guilt and shame or concerns about self- and other-approval" (p. 750). The researcher identified the themes of "Problems for and from Girls", "Dowry" and "Familial Preference" as representing introjected motivation.

"Problems for and from Girls" demonstrates an introjected motivation because of the participants' frequent mention of feeling either guilt towards their daughters for not being able to provide them with a good life or fear of shame as a result of their daughters' premature loss of virginity.

The theme of "Dowry" also represents an introjected motivation due to the strong attachment that dowry has to a family's standing in society. While technically an illegal practice in India, dowry is still expected as a way to ensure that one's daughter marries into a desirable family.

"Familial Preference" is similar to the theme of "Familial Pressure". However, the difference between the two themes is the level of coercion involved. In the quote from P1 in which she explains her grandmother's disappointment when the participant's aunt gave birth to a second daughter, P1's aunt and uncle were allowed to make that decision for themselves whether or not to keep their child. Their choice to have a second daughter brought about the grandmother's disappointment, but not punishment.

#### 5.2.2.3 Identified Motivation

Identified motivation occurs when one's actions are "valued and judged important for the individual, and especially that it is perceived as chosen by oneself" (Vallerand et al., 1992, p.

1007). The researcher placed the themes of “Familial Ties” “Inheritance” “Son’s Duty” and “Name Carried Forward” in this motivational category. These four themes could easily be grouped into one meta-theme, as their concepts overlap quite frequently. However, the researcher felt that the subtle differences between these themes merited individual analyses.

The theme “Familial Ties” was considered to fall under “identified motivation” because participants who talked about this concept spoke in terms of sons being more connected to their parents than daughters. Family connectedness reflects an important value in Indian society, so a daughter’s inability to connect makes her less valuable in many people’s eyes.

“Inheritance” represents an identified motivation because it reflects the desire to keep one’s wealth within a family line. Participants who cited inheritance as a reason for son preference spoke about ensuring that one’s own possessions do not go to another household. While parents do not receive any personal benefit from keeping their wealth within their own family, the pride that comes with establishing a prosperous estate certainly provides a personal benefit to them.

“Son’s Duty” clearly falls under the category of identified motivation. Desiring a son because of the cultural expectation that a son will contribute to his family through financial assistance and physical care represents a strong personal interest on the part of parents.

Likewise, the theme of “Name Carried Forward” demonstrates a parent’s desire to see their lineage continue. Just as the theme of “Inheritance” illustrates a parent’s desire to produce some type of legacy for the future, the theme of “Name Carried Forward” shows the importance placed on ensuring that one’s posterity maintains a certain standing in society. While there is no personal benefit to one’s name continuing on to another generation, the pride of such an accomplishment has a strong motivational pull.

#### 5.2.2.4 Intrinsic Motivation

The category of “intrinsic motivation” was the only category without a substantial number of responses fitting into it. Intrinsic motivation typically includes behaviors “done simply for [their] inherent enjoyment or for fun” (Ryan & Connell, 1989, p. 750). Previous research using self

determination theory to gauge motivation for engaging in other socially undesirable activities (i.e. cheating) has avoided using this category. However, the researcher noted that intrinsic motivation has also been considered by past researchers as actions taken to achieve personal fulfillment and growth (Neighbors, Walker, Roffman, Mbilinyi, Edleson, 2008). The researcher chose to keep the intrinsic motivation category since it is possible for someone say they derive pleasure from having male children for no reason other than that they prefer sons. The theme of “Want a Boy” was the only theme which the researcher felt truly embodied this type of motivation. Only two participants gave responses that fit into this theme. However, this could be due to participants’ difficulty with placing themselves in the position of a person engaging in a sex-selective abortion. The strong moral judgment and statements of disbelief that anyone could abort a fetus based upon its sex could prevent participants from providing a genuine preference for sons as the reason someone might have a sex-selective abortion. Had the researcher been in contact with participants who had engaged in sex-selective abortion, perhaps there would have been more intrinsically-motivated responses.

Interestingly, when asked if they had ever thought about or engaged in a sex-selective abortion, 5 participants explicitly stated that they preferred female children to males.

### 5.3 Unique Contributions

Despite statistical evidence of sex-selective abortions among Indian immigrants in the United States (Abrevaya, 2008; Almond & Edlund, 2008; Martin, Sutton, Hamilton, Ventura, et al., 2009), no known studies have explored possible motivation behind this phenomenon. This study provides a unique contribution to the field of sociological research by exploring this issue and paving the way for future studies about the transmission of the practice of sex-selective abortion from one generation to the next.

Additionally, this research adds to the body of knowledge regarding social learning theory by contributing information on both direct social learning (through family and friends) and indirect social learning (through media). The study also provided information on how social learning

affects Indian immigrants in the United States- a population not covered by any of the previous studies reviewed by the researcher.

This research also contributes to the literature on self determination theory. Most studies of motivation examine it in relation to engaging in desirable behaviors. However, this study applied self determination theory's postulates on motivation to a behavior which is considered taboo by a large portion of society.

Finally, this study provides a unique contribution to the field of sociological research by integrating social learning theory and self-determination theory as a means to explore both how individuals adopt the practice of sex-selective abortion and why they choose to engage in the behavior. Because one cannot judge internal motivations based solely on external behaviors, this dual theoretical focus provides an effective way to simultaneously look at how and why a particular practice is perpetuated.

#### 5.4 Social Work Practice Implications

The findings of this study illustrate the multifaceted nature of any social problem. It is not enough to target sex-selective abortion without understanding how dowry, lack of education, financial constraints, family structure and gender role expectations contribute to the matter. As a social work practitioner, one must be aware of the interconnectedness of these issues in the assessment of a situation and in the designing of an appropriate intervention.

Additionally, social workers are called to cultural competency in their practice (NASW, 2000). Sex-selective abortion and son preference as well as many of the issues relating to these two phenomena have deep-seated cultural roots. It is imperative that social workers be educated on cultural practices so that they can understand how these practices relate to an individual's behavior. Sex-selective abortion is not an issue that is unique to the Indian culture. As Hollingsworth (2005) notes in an article on *Ethical Considerations of Prenatal Sex Selection*, couples in a variety of cultural settings have strong preferences as to the sex of their children. When determining an ethical approach to the issue of sex-selective abortion, social workers must

absolutely consider the cultural context so that any action taken on the part of the worker reflects a respect for cultural practices.

Finally, the issue of sex-selective abortion has strong implications for the social work practitioner as it has the potential to cause an ethical dilemma. Hollingsworth's (2005) article examines this potential conflict in relation to the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) *Code of Ethics*. As cited in the NASW *Code of Ethics* (2008), one of the six social work values is that of dignity and worth of the person. In the current context, this value means that, so long as it is legally sanctioned in the United States, a woman has the right to determine whether or not she wants to abort her fetus for any reason. Social workers have an ethical duty to respect that right, regardless of personal convictions on the issue. But it should be noted that the *Code* does set limits to this right:

Social workers' primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of clients. In general, clients' interests are primary. However, social workers' responsibility to the larger society or specific legal obligations may on limited occasions supersede the loyalty owed clients, and clients should be so advised. (NASW, 2008, 1.01)

Hollingsworth (2005) applies this limitation of client self-determination to sex-selective abortion by stating:

The right of individuals and couples to choice, to full access to available knowledge and technology, and to have their desires for family formation addressed competes with the right of society to insist on the protection, equality, and freedom from oppression or discrimination of its members. (p. 132)

Just as the NASW *Code of Ethics* specifically lists dignity and worth of the person as a social work value, it includes social justice as an equally-important part of the social work profession. Specifically, the *Code* mandates that social workers "pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people" (NASW, 2008, *Ethical Principles*, para. 3). In the case of sex-selective abortion, one can argue that this practice contributes to the oppression of women, thereby impeding the progress of an important human rights issue around

the world. Hollingsworth's article recognizes the divergent views social workers may take on how to interpret sex-selective abortion according to the *Code of Ethics*. Rather than offer a final stance on the issue, Hollingsworth recommends that the NASW *Code of Ethics* serve as a "framework within which social workers may begin discourse" (p. 133).

### 5.5 Limitations

The snowball sampling method used by the researcher undoubtedly yielded a biased sample in favor of a specific subset within the Indian immigrant community. The researcher's initial contacts hailed from the state of Gujarat in India. While the researcher did find participants from all four corners of India, no group was as well-represented as those from Gujarat. Additionally, the religious makeup of the sample (85% Hindu; 5% Christian; 5% Muslim; 5% Non-religious), while fairly close to the actual religious demographics in India (80% Hindu; 13% Muslim; 2% Christian) left some groups, such as Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists (which make up 1.87%, 0.77%, and 0.41% of the Indian population, respectively) unrepresented (Office of the Registrar General, India, 2001).

The sensitive nature of the topic of sex-selective abortion made it difficult to design a study in which respondents would feel comfortable disclosing information about the subject matter. Many of the researcher's participants were willing to be interviewed themselves. However, they expressed uncertainty about asking their friends or acquaintances to participate as well. Some participants said they would speak with their friends to ascertain their willingness to participate. When the researcher followed up with these participants, she was often informed that the participant's contacts were not willing to be interviewed. As a result, the snowball effect of this type of sampling became difficult to achieve. A more longitudinal study in which the researcher has opportunity to establish rapport with the participants might assist in generating more participants.

Additionally, it is very possible that the reason none of the participants in this study had ever engaged in sex-selective abortion is because potential participants that had engaged in the practice opted out of participation when they discovered the research topic. While the researcher

has no evidence to back this theory up, it is not unreasonable to believe that women who had experienced a sex-selective abortion might not want to be interviewed on the topic.

The qualitative design of the study, while allowing for a more in-depth examination of the topic, did pose some limitations. Due to the study's design and small sample size, the findings from this research cannot be generalized. A larger study involving quantitative data analysis would yield results about which one could draw conclusions relevant to the Indian immigrant population.

Additionally, because of the lack of existing research on the topic of sex-selective abortion, the interview schedule had to be designed by the researcher. In the data-collection process, the researcher discovered that a few questions would have been more appropriate and might have yielded more information had they been worded differently. Unfortunately, the current study's time constraints prevented prior testing of the schedule before data collection. Future research would benefit from a field-tested interview schedule which has been tested for reliability and validity.

Finally, because none of the participants in the study had engaged in sex-selective abortion, the researcher's data rested upon the participants' speculations about possible motivations for the practice. Future research which looks at women known to have engaged in sex-selective abortion and examines their motivation could yield a greater abundance of relevant information from which to draw conclusions.

#### 5.6 Recommendations

The intention of any sociological study is to add to the body of knowledge on a particular topic. Due to the lack of research on sex-selective abortion among immigrant populations, this study never intended to fully explain how or why this practice is perpetuated among certain immigrant populations. Rather, in instigating this study, the researcher hoped to preliminarily explore the issue of sex-selective abortion, thereby opening the door for future studies related to the topic.

Based on the researcher's findings, there remains a great deal of opportunity for future studies to provide more insight into this phenomenon. Future studies could generate a larger sample size over a longer period of time, or could target different populations within the Indian immigrant community. Perhaps a more focused study of women who have acknowledged engaging in sex-selective abortion would yield more answers about the motivation behind their actions.

Beyond researching this specific issue, the researcher recommends a continued focus on women's rights issues within the United States. While this research was intended to highlight an issue specific to the Indian immigrant population, it was not meant to elicit a sense of proud complacency in other groups. Rather it was intended to promote a general awareness of how inequality between men and women even at the most basal level can have a profound effect on the quality of life experienced by members of that gender across society. Issues brought up by participants in this study such as males' ability to carry the family name, inheritance practices, discrepancies between male and female financial contributions etc. are by no means concerns unique to the Indian culture. Women across the globe face these and other issues on a daily basis. While women in the United States have more rights and freedoms than their sisters in many other nations, they are nowhere near having overcome inequality. A continued focus on women's issues in the United States as well as in the rest of the world is needed to ensure that men and women around the globe are treated with equal dignity and respect.



APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule

**Section A:**

**I'm going to start this interview by asking some questions to get basic background information from you.**

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years

How many years have you and your husband been married? \_\_\_\_\_ years

How many children do you and your husband have? \_\_\_\_\_ child(ren)

Could you tell me how old they are? \_\_\_\_\_

How many of them are boys? \_\_\_\_\_

How many of them are girls? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you lived outside of India? \_\_\_\_\_ years

How long have you lived in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_ years

Are you religious? \_\_\_\_\_

What would you consider to be your religion? \_\_\_\_\_

What language is primarily spoken in your home?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is the highest level of education you have attained? \_\_\_\_\_ (Probe: Did you graduate from high school? Did you go to college? Did you get a degree? Have you gone to graduate school?)

What was your household income last year? (Probe: Would you say it was between \$0-\$10,000? Between \$10,001-\$20,000? Between \$20,001-\$40,000? Between \$40,001-\$80,000? Between \$80,000-\$160,000? More than \$160,000?)

**Section B:**

**Now I'm going to ask you about some experiences you have had in the past.**

1. Have you ever seen anything on television, in movies, in newspapers or in advertisements that promotes the importance of having male children rather than female?

Yes      No

2. Have you ever seen anything on television, in movies, in the newspaper or in advertisements that promotes abortion as an option to ensure having a son rather than a daughter?

Yes      No

3. Has anyone in your family ever said they would prefer to have a son rather than a daughter?

Yes      No

4. Has anyone in your family ever talked about having an abortion to ensure that they had a son?

Yes      No

5. Have any of your friends ever said they would prefer to have a son rather than a daughter?

Yes      No

6. Have any of your friends ever talked about having an abortion to ensure that they had a son?

Yes      No

7. To the best of your knowledge, have any of your friends or family members ever had an abortion because they knew their fetus was a female?

Yes      No

**Section C.**

Have you ever had an abortion of a female fetus?

Yes      No

*(If respondent answered "no", please go to section D.)*

When you decided to have a sex-selective abortion, what was your reason?

**Section D.**

Have you ever thought about aborting a female fetus?

*(If respondent answered "no", please go to Section E.)*

When you thought about having a sex-selective abortion, what was your reason?

**Section E.**

If you had to guess why someone might have a sex-selective abortion, what reason do you think they would have?

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
OFFICIAL CONSENT FORM

FEB 11 2010

**APPROVED**

**INFORMED CONSENT**

FEB 10 2010

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR NAME:**

Jill Tucker

**Institutional Review Board**

**TITLE OF PROJECT**

An Exploratory Study of Sex-Selective Abortion Among Indian Immigrants in the United States

**INTRODUCTION**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation is voluntary. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

**PURPOSE**

This research is to look at differences in Indian immigrant families' size and composition and explore why these might occur.

**DURATION**

The interview should last between 45 minutes to one hour.

**PROCEDURES**

This interview will ask some questions about your family, your life in India, your children, and your personal thoughts on some specific topics. It will include questions about sex-selective abortion, which is the termination of a pregnancy due to the sex of the fetus.

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

This research is primarily to benefit future Indian immigrants through the knowledge gained from this study. You may benefit as well.

**POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

Some of the questions in the interview are of a personal nature. However, you do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. We will provide you will contact information for a counseling center, in case you become uncomfortable with the questions asked.

**WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STUDY**

If you decide not to participate, even after the interview has begun, you may stop the interview at any time.

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:** We expect 25 participants to enroll in this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

18 October 2007

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jill Tucker graduated Summa Cum Laude from Lubbock Christian University in 2008 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work. During her studies at LCU, she completed an internship at the Lubbock Rape Crisis Center and was later hired as an on-call advocate for the agency.

After graduation, Jill attended the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, India and completed a semester of studies in the school's Master of Social Work program. While in India, Jill volunteered at Akshara, a prominent women's rights agency in India. It was during this time in India that Jill learned about sex-selective abortion and developed an interest in studying this topic.

Jill began her studies at the University of Texas in Arlington in June of 2009. She completed an internship at Refugee Services of Texas, and developed an interest in working with displaced populations around the world.

Jill expects to graduate from the University of Texas at Arlington School of Social Work in August 2010 with concentration in Community and Administrative Practice. She will pursue state licensure and hopes to continue working with issues relating to international women's rights.