

# Creating Community in a United States City: Bangladeshi Women Share Their Immigrant Experiences

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## *PREFACE*

In 1997 and 1998 Lisa Young Larance pursued a Fulbright funded research project in rural Bangladesh. During her stay in Bangladesh Nagorik Uddyog provided technical assistance for her work. Her current research, a collaboration with Rubena Malik, “**Creating Community in a United States City: Bangladeshi Women Share Their Immigrant Experiences**”, attempts to demystify the immigration process. It is also intended to bring human feelings and thoughts to an overseas experience that is often only portrayed in a positive light. Nagorik Uddyog believes this paper will shed light on a unique dimension of gender studies.

Nagorik Uddyog, an organization keenly interested in social and gender justice, is now publishing a series of working papers. The central idea behind these publications is the dissemination of knowledge gained from research focusing on human rights, governance, and other areas relevant to Nagorik Uddyog’s focus. We would like to thank the authors of the current paper for their contribution to an issue that has been only on the periphery until now. We hope this paper will be useful for the interested readers and researchers alike.

Zakir Hossain  
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Nagorik Uddyog

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**and**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Immigrant Bangladeshi women in the United States are largely an undocumented and unclassified population because they usually follow their husbands to the United States in pursuit of the husband's career opportunities. Before the journey abroad, the women's anticipated immigrant experiences are often idealized by themselves as well as those living in Bangladesh. Upon arrival in the United States, the women often confront challenges and successes that remain a mystery to those who remain in Bangladesh. Likewise, this growing population's needs and experiences in the United States are virtually unknown to most Americans. This research report shares the immigrant experiences of eight Bangladeshi women living in the United States in order to explore how these women have built community in foreign surroundings. The information in this research report is meant to demystify the immigrant experience for those who remain in Bangladesh and inform social service providers in the United States about immigrant women's community building skills and social support needs for future provisions.

This investigation reveals that many of these women especially desired their husband's emotional support during their early days in the United States. Those who felt supported by their husbands seemed to have adjusted to their new lives more quickly than those who felt less supported. All, however, successfully created their own community. The desire for a husband's emotional support seems to have been a natural part of making a difficult transition — without any established networks in their new country — for these immigrant women.

Many participants stated that they expected their life in America would somehow be easier and more prosperous than the life they had known in Bangladesh. Others did not have such expectations. How these women described their expectations illustrates that each sees herself as part of her family rather than an individual actor. From descriptions of expectations for the future, we learned that each woman found personal success by helping family members realize their dreams. Considering her individual expectations, and working towards them, was done within the context of what was best for the participant's family. None of the women, however, expected — but most found — that childcare provisions and the domestic workload would become entirely theirs.

Loneliness for family in Bangladesh was a common theme in all of the women's stories. The loneliness catalyzed each woman to build her own community in the United States. They sought relationships, primarily with other Bangladeshis, in ways that included attending a mosque or participating in Bangladeshi Association gatherings. But regardless of the strength of the friendships these women made in their new surroundings, each continued to long for the comfort and closeness of her natal family.

## BACKGROUND

### **Immigrant Bangladeshi Women: From Bangladesh to the United States**

Bangladeshi women's lives are largely governed by Islamic law and patriarchal customs. For example *purdah*, as practiced in Bangladesh, dictates that a woman is not allowed in public spaces and that she cover herself totally when out of her home. Patrilocal residence, the residence established when a woman moves from her father's home to her husband's home after marriage, usually dislocates a woman from established networks in her natal village (Blanchet, 1984; Kotolova, 1996). As a new member of her husband's family, she faces the challenge of establishing trust and community in her new surroundings (Larance, 2001). Bangladeshi women who marry Bangladeshi men residing in or moving to the United States confront an additional daunting task of forming an entirely new life in an unfamiliar country (Rutherford, 1984). These brides leave their father's home, their culture, and their friends. Immigrant Bangladeshi brides often dream that life on foreign soil will be easier, more prosperous, and more exciting than life in Bangladesh (Eade, 1990; Leonard, 1997; Rutherford, 1984; Summerfield, 1993). Indeed a move abroad may mean access to education and a relaxation of the *purdah* system (Carey & Shukur, 1984) that often restricts women's movement in Bangladesh. But for these women, arrival in the United States may also present unexpected challenges and opportunities — both professionally and personally. Such challenges and opportunities may require the women to recreate their social lives as they assume roles they would not have (Saran, 1987) had they remained in Bangladesh.

Approximately 70 percent of the South Asian immigrant population in the United States is concentrated in New York, California, New Jersey, Texas, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio (Leonard, 1997). Bangladeshi migrants to the United States are typically educated,<sup>1</sup> unmarried, professional men between the ages of 20 and 30 years (Leonard, 1997; Rutherford, 1984) who often immigrate for non-monetary career related purposes (Leonard, 1997; Rutherford, 1984; Winchic & Carment, 1985). The majority of Bangladeshi women who immigrate to the United States, like other South Asian women (Das Gupta & Das Dasgupta, 1998), are an unclassified and undocumented category of immigrants because the women<sup>2</sup> come to the United States to join their husbands. Although these women are a visible minority on the basis of their color and cultural practices (Lalonde, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1992; Rutherford, 1984), “they are essentially unknown to Americans” (Rutherford, 1984, p. 4). The dearth of documentation about these “associational migrants” (Bhachu, 1993) prevents citizens from both countries, as well as human service providers, from understanding this growing population's immigrant experience and available support resources (Rao, Rao, & Fernandez, 1990).

## **PURPOSE**

### **Shifting the Paradigm**

Much of the immigration literature from the 1970s through the 1980s focuses on the household strategy model of migration and guided subsequent migration research (Dinerman, 1982; Pessar, 1982). The household strategy model assumes that all resources, including social networks, are altruistic (Folbre, 1988) and shared equally among members of the immigrant household (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). The household strategy model does not describe the experience of immigrant Bangladeshi women in the United States (Bhachu, 1993; Das Gupta & Das Dasgupta, 1998; Rutherford, 1984). Upon arrival to the United States, these women have comparatively fewer social resources in the household than their husbands. Unlike their husbands, these women often interrupt or stop their education for the move to the United States and are then unable to complete their educational and/or career goals upon arrival because of family caregiving responsibilities. Unlike their husbands, these women do not have the networks, found at school and work, waiting for them upon their arrival to the United States. Instead, they must create their lives anew. It is important to understand that these immigrant women's resources — and access to those resources — often depend upon each woman's relationship with her husband. Lalonde, et al. (1992, p. 27) go so far as to assert that an immigrant woman's "self-definition will be derived from how she feels her family ... and her neighbors perceive her."

### **Immigrants and Community Building**

Immigration often brings immigrants a sense of loss (Saran, 1987) at having left their home country. This longing for the home is mirrored in Rutherford's (1984, p. 3) finding that immigrant Bangladeshis, who have settled in the United States, continue to regard themselves as *probashi* — “those away from home.” For South Asian women, immigration often means a loss of women's communal space (Das Gupta & Das Dasgupta, 1998) — found in the empty space of afternoons with other women at home while cooking or napping — that allows for gossip, advice giving, and matriarchal support. South Asian immigrant women especially desire and need "emotionally supportive networks that characterize their life back home" (Rao, et al., 1990, p. 239) for adjusting to their new lives in the United States. For these women community, composed of shared identity through friendship, can be the bridge from isolation and unknowing to supportive networks and information.

Other investigators have found that immigrants seem particularly astute at creating community. According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994, p. 55), "[i]mmigrants are experts at developing social networks which reduce migration's financial and social costs and risks by providing the new migrant with valuable information ... and other resources." Similarly, Nagar (1998) found that South Asian women living in Tanzania provided foundations of their communities and families. These women maintained and strengthened their "husband's household" by providing stability and security so that men could go about their lives (Nagar, 1998). But ties made abroad, however strong and supportive, have been found to ultimately be less satisfying than the family ties left behind (Rao, et al., 1990). Understanding if these women choose to primarily form ties with their own kinswomen (Carey, 1985; Das Dasgupta, 1998; Rao, et al., 1990; Rutherford, 1984; Saran, 1987; Sadowsky & Carey, 1987; Summerfield, 1993) or if they have made different choices can expand our understanding of immigrant Bangladeshi women's approach to community building. By illuminating how eight immigrant Bangladeshi women in the Midwestern United States created community in their new surroundings, we can begin to demystify the Bangladeshi immigrant experience as well as inform local organizations of provisions needed for the future.

This investigation does not represent all immigrant Bangladeshi women's experiences in the United States. Nor does this work presume to speak for all immigrant Bangladeshi women residing in the United States. At its simplest level, this research report shares the experiences of eight immigrant Bangladeshi women in order to explore how these women have built community. Their community building experiences will shed light on an aspect of the South Asian immigrant experience for young brides before they leave Bangladesh and inform those in the United States who can improve services for the women upon their arrival. Identifying available social support among Asian Indians is essential (Rao, et al., 1990) for the formulation of effective service provisions.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DEFINITIONS

### Research Questions

The following questions drove the research design:

1. How did you meet your husband?
2. What expectations did you have about your life in the United States?
3. What feelings did you experience when you arrived in the United States?
4. How have you made friends in the United States?
5. What advice would you give to a Bangladeshi bride who is moving from Bangladesh to the United States?

### Definitions

Terms used in this study are defined as follows:

*Arranged marriage* is common practice in the Muslim and Hindu communities of Bangladesh. Also referred to as *settled marriage*, an arranged marriage consists of male family members from the prospective groom's family searching for a suitable spouse. A suitable spouse usually means a woman that is younger, educated, and from a similar class background as the bachelor. When a suitable woman is found, the couple may have the opportunity to meet before their wedding day. Male family members from both families meet and decide upon the terms of the marriage. The terms may include the amount of the dowry, material items, or the bride's education. After the couple's marriage, the bride is expected to leave her home and move to her father-in-law's home to live with her husband.

*Bangladeshi* refers to a person who was born in the country of Bangladesh.

*Bengal* refers to the land area that is now part of India and Bangladesh. The capital of west Bengal is Calcutta. The area formerly referred to as East Bengal is Bangladesh.

*Community* is defined in this paper as a group of people who have created a shared identity through friendship.

*Love marriage* is less common than arranged marriage in the Muslim and Hindu communities of Bangladesh. Love marriage is characterized by a couple finding one another independently and then deciding that they want to marry. In some cases, male family members from both sides may still settle on the terms of the marriage after the couple has notified their families of their decision to marry.

*South Asia* is the geographic term that includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

## **STUDY SITE, FIELD METHODS, AND SAMPLE DESCRIPTION**

### **Study Site**

This investigation focuses on the immigrant experiences of eight Bangladeshi women who were born and raised in Bangladesh and who live in a midwestern United States city. This city<sup>3</sup> has a population density comparable to other large metropolitan areas in the midwestern section of the United States. However, the city's Bangladeshi population is much smaller than that in other metropolitan areas. The city's Bangladeshi population now numbers more than 60 families as compared to fewer than 15 families 10 years ago.

### **Field Methods**

Fieldwork took place over 2 months in the fall of 2000. Interviews were conducted individually by co-ethnic interviewers, in each participant's home, and in her preferred language. Participants were interviewed twice for approximately two hours each. Semi-structured interviews were used because this method offers "access to [women's] ideas, thoughts, and memories" a condition critical for feminist research (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19). The use of interviewing in feminist research, according to Reinharz (1992, p. 19) is "particularly important for the study of women, because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women." As feminist qualitative interviewing encourages control of the conversation to lie with the participant (Reinharz, 1992), the interviewers remained flexible in their approach to asking questions. All questions were open-ended and asked within the same general order when possible. The purpose of the first interview was to establish rapport with the participants and to begin to learn each woman's story (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). During the second interview, answers to questions given during the first interview were explored further and new questions were asked. Six of the eight interviews were tape recorded with the participants' permission. Two of the eight interviews were handwritten, rather than recorded, at the participants' request. The research questions were pre-tested with one woman who is a member of the community.

### **Gaining Access**

Both the primary and secondary investigators were familiar with the Bangladeshi community in this city before the investigation. From this familiarity we knew that the local Bangladeshi Association president's wife was well-known and respected by the Bangladeshi women. In order to reach participants, the secondary investigator contacted

this well-respected community member and explained our research project to her. She volunteered to explain the project to members of the community and to ask Bangladeshi women if they would be willing to participate in the interview process. Thirty-one women were told about the project and asked if they would like to participate. Seventeen women volunteered for the initial interview. When the researchers telephoned the seventeen women to further explain the project and confirm interview dates: two women said they would not participate because their husbands did not want them to; six women indirectly stated that they no longer felt comfortable with the prospect of an interview; and one woman said she would not be in town for both interviews but volunteered to have the researchers test the open-ended questions with her. The final participant pool for both interviews was eight women.

### **Sample Description**

All of the women who participated in this investigation were born, raised, and married in Bangladesh (refer to Table 1 for an overview). The women accompanied their husbands to or later joined their husbands in the United States. The Bangladeshi community in the city is not "residentially clustered" (Leonard, 1997) as investigators (Carey & Shukur, 1985; Eade, 1990; Summerfield, 1993) have found other immigrant Bangladeshi communities to be. Six of the eight participants lived more than 10 miles from each other. Although their mobility was challenged by their dispersion throughout the metropolitan area, most of the participants did work and socialize beyond the confines of their homes, unlike immigrant Bangladeshi women living in London (Summerfield, 1993). Seven of the women identify themselves as coming from middle-class families, one woman identifies herself as coming from an upper-middle-class family. Because of the participants' high social class and class backgrounds, traditionally restrictive Bangladeshi customs on working outside the home and maintaining strict family roles within the home seemed more flexible for them. Three of the women have arranged, also known as settled, marriages and five have love marriages that were later settled. All of the women had traditional marriage ceremonies and their ages at marriage ranged from 18 to 30 years. Each woman immigrated — four directly and four indirectly — to the United States to be with her husband. All of their husbands came to the United States to further their educational and/or professional goals. Four of the women were able to accompany their husbands to the United States — who were residing either in Europe or the U.S. — immediately after their marriage. Four of the women had to wait in Bangladesh, at least 6 months and at the most 2 years, for immigration visas before they could join their husbands in the U.S. The women's ages

upon arrival in the United States ranged from 18 to 42 years. Four of the women had lived in at least one other country before immigrating to the United States, while the other four women had never been outside Bangladesh before their move to the United States. Seven of the participants are Muslim, one participant is Hindu. To protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms were used and identifying information was changed.

## **MAIN THEMES**

### **Husband's Support**

Many of the women stated that they especially desired emotional support from their husband's during their early days in the United States. The women who had lived abroad before coming to the United States focused less on this need, however. The ease with which many of the women initially adjusted to life in the United States, as well as their willingness to begin building their own communities, seemed to have been influenced by the level of emotional support each felt that she had from her husband. A woman who felt supported seemed to reach out to others and begin to rebuild her life more quickly than those who felt less supported. But all were equally successful in rebuilding their social lives.

### **Expectations**

Some of the women said that they expected that life in the United States would automatically mean a better financial position for them and for their family. While others knew that life abroad would simply mean adjustment — one way or another. The women's descriptions of their expectations for their new lives were especially illuminating because they illustrated that each saw herself as embedded within the family system rather than as an individual actor. Looking forward to accomplishing expectations she had for her family or that family members had for themselves, before those held for herself, revealed that she saw her family's success as her own. None of the women expected, but most found, that life in the United States would mean more domestic work, complete responsibility for childcare provisions, less time with family, and an extreme longing for Bangladeshi culture and tradition.

### **Community Building**

Each participant, regardless of her age and amount of time spent in the United States, stated that she was lonesome for her family of origin and longed for a supportive community of women similar to the one she had in her homeland. Her loneliness seemed to catalyze a desire to build community with other Bangladeshi women. The Bangladeshi Association president's wife was usually the first person to have contacted the participants after their arrival. Each woman's extended social network then grew in ways that included trips to the Bangladeshi grocery or pursuing friends made at a mosque. The complexity of a participant's network often depended upon how long she had been in the United States and whether or not she had previously lived abroad.

## **FINDINGS**

Descriptions of each woman's immigrant experience illustrate how she continues to actively shape her future, and her family's, as she daily confronts the challenges of life on foreign soil. Each case study is titled with a brief description of the woman who is telling her story. Her detailed narrative then follows.

*Nafeeza is a 31-year-old Muslim, Bangladeshi woman. She moved to the city 10 months before her interviews. She was 30 years old when she married her 33-year-old husband in an arranged marriage. Her husband had been living in the United States for 10 years before he returned to Dhaka to find a bride. Nafeeza's trip to the United States was her first trip outside Bangladesh. Nafeeza taught elementary school in Dhaka after finishing her degree. At the time of the interviews, Nafeeza was pregnant with the couple's first child and was finishing her bachelor's degree at a local university.*

I grew up in a very nice, loving family in Dhaka, Bangladesh. I have one brother and I am the only sister. My father is a high official in [the legal system], and my mother is a housewife. Sometimes other [family members] lived in our house with us [when I was young], but usually it was just the four of us.

I met my husband in February [1999] and we were married in March [1999]. I met him through one of my friends. She introduced me to him. He was in Bangladesh for four months. He went [to Bangladesh] to get married. It was kind of like that — you know in our country [marriage] is usually arranged. But for me I met him and I talked to him and I had some time to know him. Then he was okay. He was nice. I knew when I met him that I would marry him ... It was on purpose that we met. It was the kind of arranged marriage that we met and we decided [to marry]. He did his associate's degree from [an American university] and then went over [to Bangladesh] to get married. After our marriage he went back [to the USA]. I came here last September [1999] and I visited [Bangladesh] in February [2000]. It was fun [to visit] because my brother was getting married ... so I went to attend his marriage.

When we decided to marry I knew I would be moving to the USA. My husband was already living here. He had been living here for more than 10 years. I thought that my husband was good, and I thought that I could adjust to life [here] because it is always adjusting — you know — my country, here, and in life, women have to adjust. But here there is lots of adjustment. That I did not realize.

Many Bangladeshi women think it sounds very exciting to go and live in America. I did not have those kind of preconceived notions because I found my life good [in Bangladesh]. So I did not have any ambition or things like that [about coming here]. I did not think that I might have a heavenly thing over here. No. I just thought I got married, I came here, I want to live with my husband ... The adjustment is the main thing. I miss my family and my job. The isolation. That is also the main thing. This is a very nice country ... but I miss my family most of all. My job [I] also [miss] because the children were very kind,

nice, and loving. I miss always being surrounded by them. They always reciprocated — whatever I was giving them they were giving triple of it to me. It was so nice. So those things I miss. I sometimes feel I am in total darkness here. I have nothing here. That is the feeling. Otherwise it is okay here.

Each and every day [in Bangladesh] I met with my friends. My colleagues ... were such nice people. They were my friends. Fifteen of us used to sit in the big teachers' room, and [after] we had our class we had a good chat and discussion [about] problems and we discussed everything. It was an exhilarating experience each and every day. You know so much when you talk with other women. It is really something. It is a very basic — a very basic need. Here it is very different for me because I feel I don't know anything now. I am losing contact with the mainstream. I don't like that.

It takes time to make friends. I think friendship comes. You just can't go and grab it. Sometimes I meet with other Bangladeshis. But they are all my husband's friends, and they are all bachelors and I don't like it. I want to talk with the women. It has to be the same level of understanding. Things like that. I am [gradually] getting friends . . . some friends . . . after almost a year. I might feel good a little bit later on when this contact [with other Bangladeshi women] grows. It takes so much time [to meet people]. I am getting to know a Bangladeshi woman here. My husband met [her and her husband] first when I was in Bangladesh in February. He introduced me to them. They came to our house. We went to their house. As my husband is very busy and he hasn't enough time, we cannot mix with others. There is a gap now, so we cannot go to the social gatherings either. We can't call others either. There needs to be [both] of us to socialize or call others.

At school I have met some people who are not Bangladeshi, but they are very busy because they are studying and working and so — somehow we cannot communicate in friendship terms. But we have good terms as students ... but not in terms of deep friendship. The people I usually meet are Muslim because they are Bengali. I find people the same, though. They are not different by religion or anything like that. The basis is the same — human nature.

A typical day in my life here starts at 6 a.m. I help my husband get prepared [to go to work]. I make his breakfast and help him ... when he leaves I have my breakfast. Then I watch TV, study a little bit, then read some story books. That is the thing. I watch TV. That is my life now. Nothing else. [My husband] comes home at 5 p.m. when he is not studying. He is also doing some credit work at a university now, so when he studies he



comes [home] after 10 p.m. That is more time of isolation and loneliness ... from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m..

My husband has tried to help me with my loneliness. Oh yes, he tried, but he can't find a way. He tells me, "You are studying, you are living in America. Try to make it work. Try to think that you are getting a better [life] than some other person. Think in a positive way." He is saying these things, but in my mind it is already set that I lost everything, so I have to deal with it because I have to start everything from the very beginning here, and I already built a career over there and it was a good career because I liked it. So I need it. I need to do the adjustment for my own well being. That I understand. I am trying my best.

I don't drive. Maybe that would make a difference. I cannot say if I have more or less freedom here, because I cannot utilize the freedom here because I am still in progress. The process is still going on. I have just finished studying. I didn't start to work. I don't know my life beyond now. I don't know what kind of freedom is possible yet. I need to take the opportunities. I think I have all the freedom and everything the same as I had over [in Bangladesh].

I don't know if I will stay in the United States. I have to find a better way before I decide. It is still — I don't know. I still have a dilemma. I can go over there, over to my country, and still get my job. They told me any time they are willing to accept me. I don't know. But I think I should stay here because I want to be a family. I want to stay with my husband. He would not be able to go over there now. He wants to complete his studies and work here a little bit. His life is here. He built it up here. My work was over there. I built it up there. Someone has to sacrifice a little bit and I am doing it because I have already done it almost a year — from last September. I will find a way [to cope in the USA] or otherwise I might have to leave for my country. I love my country. That is the thing. It is a very special place.

If I do stay in the United States, I will become a citizen. It is part of the way I came here. I came as an immigrant so I will be a citizen one day ... if I stay here I better stay as a legal person. It is not that I would or wouldn't have citizenship for this reason or that reason because if I am staying here I should exercise my right and I should perform my certain duties toward this country also. It is not fair that I always take everything from this country and not give anything [back]. So I should be a citizen if I stay here.

When I think about my child growing up in the United States, I think [Bangladeshi and Americans] are different. We are culturally and religiously different. So [our] child will face a dilemma between the two cultures. That will be hard for the child. That is the only thing I am thinking. I don't want the child to undergo this kind of dilemma: which one is good, which one is not good; which one he will take, which one he won't. Because people are good everywhere. Religion and culture also make us different, though. We grew up. We understand this now but the child won't. It will be hard for us to guide that child in a different culture in [the midst of] different religious atmosphere. I am not saying this is bad. This country, the people, their religion, their culture — they are very good. Sometimes I feel that they are better than us also. In some ways. But you know we people want our children to be like us. The children might suffer for it. I don't know what will happen in the future and what I will have to do to take steps to deal with it. Maybe he or she will grow his or her own way. That is better. But education-wise, I have hope for my child because [the U.S.] has the best education. Everyone comes here for studying. Especially from my part of the world.

My advice for a new [Bangladeshi] bride coming to the USA? Don't come! But they would not listen because they think that you are having a very good life [in the USA]. The thing is that maybe they would find it much better than me. Usually they come [to the USA] much younger. They just [finished their] studies. They didn't have their own life over there. They are just blooming. So maybe [they would] not have it as hard as I have [it here]. Because two people are so different so I don't know. They had better see [for] themselves and decide. But if they want to stay with their family and in their own country, it is better not to come to the USA and not have this kind of conflict.

*Sadia is a 30-year-old Muslim, Bangladeshi woman. She moved to the city 5 months before her interview. The couple moved to the United States to further her husband's medical education. Sadia was 24 years old when she returned to Bangladesh, from her studies in China, to find that her family had surprised her by arranging her marriage. Sadia's husband is 5 years older than she. At the time of the interviews Sadia described herself as a "housewife" waiting for a green card.*

I was born in Dhaka in 1970. I have a big family. I have six sisters and three brothers. I am the oldest. My mother and father, uncle and auntie also lived with us [when we were growing up] because they were students at that time. They were single, not married. They were from my father's family. When my mother got married they moved [with us]. We had housekeepers too. My father was the oldest [in his family] and my mother was also the oldest [in her family]. So we had a big family.

I finished part of my bachelor's degree in [Bangladesh]. Then I went to China to study in 1993. I was 22 years old. I was in China for 2 years. First I studied Chinese language and then I studied business computers. I was 24 and a half when I met my husband [and] 24 and a half when I married him. He was 29 when we married. I have a settled marriage. I did not know I was going to get married. I thought I was just going to Dhaka from China to spend [vacation time] with my family. In fact, at [that time], my parents had arranged my marriage ... so I had to get married. I did not have a choice, you see. Nobody told me that when I arrived in Dhaka I would be preparing for my marriage. [My family] decided within one week that I had to get married. I did not know my husband before marriage. When I learned that I would be getting married, I was shocked. Two weeks after our marriage I returned to China. Nine months after our marriage my husband went to China to be with me. When we got married my husband was doing an internship after medical school. He completed his internship in Bangladesh and then came to China. [In China] he completed his Ph.D. After my marriage I wanted children but my husband said he had to complete his Ph.D. first and then we could have children. So I waited for him. It is a big sacrifice. Next February he will get his certificate in China. So I will have to wait another year to visit Bangladesh. It has been 5 years since I have seen my family.

I wanted to complete my undergraduate course in [China] but was not able to because of my marriage. I blame my marriage. I am always blaming my marriage. I completed a diploma degree but not a 4-year undergraduate course. I could not finish because I have to take care of my husband and my house and so I could not study that much. I will have to start from the beginning here. I want to study business administration here so I will start

again as an undergraduate. My husband does tell me to go back and try my best. But it is hard. When I first got here I would cry, cry, cry. To make myself feel better I would go outside, call friends, and call my mom.

I came to the United States this year because my husband received a research fellowship at [a prestigious research institute] here in town. He wants to finish his medical boards here so he can be a doctor here. I liked China but my husband wanted to work here [in the United States] and got a good opportunity here, so I had to come with him. I was excited for him about [his] studies because there is a better education system here and my husband could study and finish his U.S. medical exam, because every doctor has to do that before they can be a professional doctor. Every opportunity here was better for him than in [China]. But life in [China] is more exciting than it is [here]. I liked [China] very much. The transportation system there was very good. Trains and buses were very good. [It is] also very crowded so I feel lonely here. I don't have a driver's license. I can drive but I don't have a license yet. That makes [getting around town] difficult for me.

I miss Bangladesh very much, but [for the long term] I prefer life in the USA to Bangladesh. It is hard to say but I do like the United States because everything is more secure – like studies. My younger sisters and brothers are studying in Bangladesh. Their 4-year undergraduate course will take then 6 or 7 years because of the [strikes] and corruption. It is easier to study here. Our country is very crowded and anytime anything can happen. Corruption is everywhere in Bangladesh. When I have children I want to raise them here because the education facilities, everything is just better here than in Bangladesh. But the difficult part about living here is that I never feel secure about going outside. [China] was very safe and in the middle of the night I could go outside. Not here.

I did not have special expectations when I learned I would be coming to the United States. But you see when people come to the United States, their dreams become bigger than they were before. So being here has made my dreams bigger. I applied for my work permit. When I get my work permit I will work. At the same time I will study, whatever I want. My husband's job contract is 3 years. So within 3 years my husband will finish his exam and get another internship here. Then he will be a doctor. I want to stay in the United States for 3 years. We'll see what happens with those 3 years. Time will tell. Now I am a total housewife but within 2 or 3 weeks INS will tell me I am permitted to have a job. I would like a job working with computers.

When I was in China I met regularly with my classmates for fun. Since coming to the United States I have made some friends. Last weekend I went to a Bangladeshi community picnic and made friends. There were about 60 or 70 people at the picnic. Since then I have talked to a few of the people I met [at the picnic]. They invite me places and give me rides. Before the picnic I met a few other Bangladeshis too. There is a Bangladeshi grocery in [this city]. I phoned there and told them which food items I needed. I told them I did not have a car so to please mail the items to me. Then [the person I spoke to] said that they could not mail the items but would have someone pick [the food] up and take it to me. So they had Lamia help me. They gave me her number and she said she could help me get my groceries. That was about a month after I had gotten to the United States. Then she introduced me to some people — two or three families. But I have not felt that lonely since I came here because I spent 2 years in [China]. When I first moved to [China] I was very lonely. I was always homesick but not so much now.

Whenever I felt lonely in Bangladesh my mom would take me shopping, or we would go out and visit friends. But I learned that the loneliness I thought I had there was not loneliness at all. I could frequently meet with friends whenever I wanted to. I have not felt lonely so much as I have felt lonely here. Everybody is busy here. In Bangladesh we have much more time for people. In a foreign country everybody is busy with studies or their job. Over there I could go to a relative's house or a friend's house or out with my mom. Here nobody can do those things with me. There is my husband — he has to go to work.

Also I have a Bangladeshi friend who lives near me. I see her at least twice a week. Her name is Nafeeza. She often phones me. She will call and ask me what I am doing and invite me to go outside. So we gossip a long time with one another — sometimes an hour or a half an hour. We talk about our lives before we came to [this city], what we are doing today, what we will do tomorrow. She is my closest friend here. Everybody is friendly though. But since I have been here Lamia has helped me by taking me such a long distance to go to the grocery store. She took me [to the grocery store] twice and then once to the picnic. Also there is a public library near my home, so I often go there and borrow videos and books. And every Sunday there is a class for those who want to learn English [at the library]. I go there and talk with others. But because I don't go there regularly I always find a different group of people who come together. It is nice though. Even now [after 5 months in the United States] I have not met many Americans since I have been here because I am always at home. But my husband has lots of friends because at his job

he knows many people. They are very friendly to me and ask me how I am and how it is going.

During an average day I wake up in the morning and make my husband's lunch. Get him ready to go to the lab. Then I have my breakfast. I watch TV. That is it. Do some aerobics in front of the mirror. Very casual. Nothing special. Then I make lunch. Phone friends. That's it. When my husband is at work sometimes I will go to the grocery store or restaurants around here by myself to buy vegetables or something like that. But I don't like going out alone. My husband comes home around 6 p.m. During the weekend we go outside to the park or downtown. I need to go outside the house for recreation. People need recreation. Always staying home is not good for [a person's] mental health.

If I could help another Bangladeshi bride coming to the United States for the first time I would tell her that she has to learn to drive and take some computer courses. That would be my advice, because you can get a good job with computer classes and things are so far apart [so you need to be able to drive]. Also knowing about computers helps you to communicate. But email is not enough to help with our loneliness. The only thing that helps with the loneliness is to meet with some very good friends in the Bangladesh community and talk with them.

*Zara is a 23-year-old Muslim, Bangladeshi woman. She was 12 years old when she met her husband and 18 years old when, by love marriage, she married her husband who was 24 years old at the time. Zara's husband had been living in Europe and the United States for more than 10 years before he returned to Bangladesh for their marriage. Zara's move to the United States was the first time she had traveled outside of Bangladesh. At the time of the interviews, the couple did not have children. Zara is a full-time student.*

I was born in 1977. I have two brothers and two sisters and I am the youngest. So everyone adores me. I am so lucky about that. I was born in [a southern] district in Bangladesh. It is not a big city. When I was very young our parents moved to [a mid-sized city]. My father's business moved to [that city], so that is why everybody moved from [my home town] to [that city]. It helped us to reconnect with my mother's side of the family. My parents are very good. I am happy with them and my brothers and sisters are very nice too. We really love each other. Growing up there was my two brothers, my two sisters, and me, and my parents and we had a couple of maids. That was it. I had a lot of friends back home and pretty much every week our family from my mother's side would all get together there.

My husband and I have a long history. The way I met him — we are not supposed to [meet that way]. Usually our marriages [in Bangladesh] are settled marriages. Our parents [usually] pick our groom. My sisters got married like that. Our parents picked their husbands. But I knew [my husband] before I married him. I was in school and my husband saw me at the fair. I was eleven years old. I was a little girl. He was 16. [There are] food stalls at the fair. My family had a little food stall and my sisters and I and my sisters-in-law all together had a little food stall. My husband saw me there. I don't know from where. I guess he was in love with me from that time. He decided — he told me about it — he decided he was going to find me and meet me somehow. When he saw me it was love at first sight for him. So he kept looking for me and found me after a year. I wasn't interested in him until after another year.

I knew I would marry him because [our situation] was so unusual. We would never go out or never do anything, but it was enough for us to see each other for a little while. Every morning I would go to my teacher's home for study. [My husband] would stop there and say hello, how are you, and how is everything? He would tell me he was leaving again [to go back to school] and ask if I was coming [to my teacher's house] again and I would say yes ... He would ask if he could come the next day to see me and say hello. I would say okay. We fell in love. When he moved to [Europe] for his school ... it was the beginning

of a long wait. He was [in Europe] for 3 years. Then he went back home and stayed in Dhaka for a year, and then he came to the United States for 2 years. Then he got a job [in the United States] and he told his parents [about us] and his parents told my parents. My parents were a little mad at me, and it was terrible because I was not supposed to know him before I got married. They were mad because of the way I broke the rules. His parents were very happy and they talked to my parents and my parents settled down a little as soon as they [found that] he was [suitable] to be my husband. So [our parents] set a date and arranged the marriage. Then we got married and moved here. So he was working in [the United States] for a couple of months, got 2 weeks off and went back home to marry me. As soon as we got married we moved here. He was 24 and I was 18 at the time.

I was in the twelfth grade [when we got married]. I finished the end of my twelfth grade but I didn't take the final exam. So I didn't finish my higher secondary school certificate. At that time I never thought about moving to the United States. I felt like I was finally moving with him forever and I was so happy about it. I had no idea what it would be like to move to a different country. So at that time I was only crazy to be with him. I thought, I am finally going to be living with him! So I didn't think about moving with him to the United States. It was hard after I came here.

I had no idea what it would be like when I came here. As soon as I came here — we were in the New York airport waiting for our domestic flight — then ... oh God ... then I realized that I was in a totally different place. I didn't want to show him that I felt bad but I was crying inside and I was hiding my tears. I didn't feel like I should show him. As soon as I came [to this city] I saw that everything looked so empty [compared to Bangladesh]. There was only him and me and everything was so huge and so vast and ... oh God ... I cried inside at that time. I didn't feel like I could show him because he was so excited ... He has no problem with homesickness. He was 18 when he moved to [Europe]. He was never homesick. So he didn't realize how bad I felt. He said, "I used to live away from home. I never felt bad so I don't know how come you have so much homesickness." When I was in New York I decided I was not going to cry. I thought, I am going to [that city]. I will see what my home is going to be like there. I was talking to myself to make myself understand.

When I came to [this city] it was cloudy. It was winter. It was February. We arrived here around 5:30 p.m. Everything was dark and so cloudy and I didn't see a single person on the street. You know how crowded Bangladesh is. Then we went to our apartment downtown. There was no patio and no people. It was hard. God, it was so hard. I spoke



very little English. The next day he took the day off [from work]. Then the day after that he started working and, oh God, I had a terrible day. All day I just sat home doing nothing but missing my family, crying, and cooking. That was my life in that one small apartment over there. Then when he came home he was tired, right? So he went to bed early and he thought I was unusual because I did not sleep at all. All night I did not sleep because I had to think about the next day — what I was going to do when he goes to work. So I could not sleep. I got sick.

When I called home my parents knew [I was sick and lonely]. My mom didn't want me to come here and she knew — in Bangladesh to get married and leave family at our age is very unusual. She knew that I could not live here by myself. She knew it was going to be too much for me, especially when we are so close to our family and friends. Finally I told him, can I just talk to any Bengali people? Don't you know any [Bengali] people here? He said he actually knew one person here — the president of the Bangladeshi Association. He called them before he went to work [one morning] and [the president's wife] started talking to me. She is very nice ... She said, since you aren't working, my husband can go and pick you up and you can stay with us one day. There were two other [Bengali] girls staying there for the weekend. So I went there and I met several families at her house. She is the only one who helped me meet with other Bengali people. She helped me with a lot of things. I didn't know a lot of cultural things here. She gave me a lot of people's numbers ... and told me that I could call her anytime, even though she is very busy. So she gave me numbers and I talked to [other Bangladeshi women] sometimes and they called me sometimes, even though we had never seen each other. Then I started to know people here.

After 6 months we moved from the city to the suburbs. I was a little upset about moving [to the suburbs] because my husband, when we lived close to his work [in the city], tried to come home during his lunch break because he was only a block from home. Then I could get a half an hour or 45 minutes to talk to someone. I was upset about moving out here because he would go to work from morning to evening. I knew I was not going to see anybody all day because I would be stuck [at home] by myself. Then I got used to it.

When we were living downtown, I met an American [woman] who was living in our apartment building. I went downstairs with my husband to say goodbye one morning. Then when I was going [back to our apartment] in the elevator I met her. She said, "are you from India?" Then I said, "no actually I am from Bangladesh." She told me she had been to India and that she loved India and Indian people. Then [the elevator] stopped and

we both got off and we were walking in the same direction ... It was awesome! We lived on the same floor ... The next day she gave me a note and put it under my door. She asked me to go [out sightseeing]. I called my husband to ask if I could go with her. I didn't know if I could ... He said I could go and I went out. She tried her best to make me comfortable ... The next day she asked me to go out again with her. My husband said okay but don't go far and to please call him as soon as I got home ... My husband started to trust her. Then I went with her everywhere. Another reason I felt bad about [moving to the suburbs] was because I was going to miss her too.

One reason my husband wanted to move to [the suburbs] was to send me to school and buy me a car. Then I could drive and I could go out by myself and my school would be close and the insurance would be low. But the lady [I lived near in the city] is so nice. She kept in touch. We are still very good friends. She helps me with everything. So we moved here and the following year, 1997, he was looking for a car for me to drive to school. Then I started to learn to drive and then we bought a car. That was July when we moved out here. I could not take my classes during that fall though because his work schedule was tough and ... I would have had to change two buses [to get to school], so I was not ready to go to school at that time. The next spring the same thing happened. That spring we bought a car and I learned to drive. So I went to school by myself that summer. I took just one class at that time to see how it was ... then I skipped a lot of semesters. That is terrible but I had to go [to Bangladesh] to visit. Then I got hepatitis and couldn't go to school again. I am in school now. It will be a 2-year degree ... I will transfer to University after that ... I was working but I told my boss that I am going to leave because I am going to attend school in the fall. I cannot do school and work and come home and take care of my house. I can't do all of those things. So I am going to quit my work.

I had a few [Bengali] friends here. We were such good friends for about 4 years. We were all like family. A Bengali woman in that group was like my big sister. I respected her. She had two kids and I took care of those kids so much ... I talked to her a lot and all of the sudden she started talking ... behind my back. Even though she had told me a lot of things and I had told her a lot of things ... she started talking against me ... She ruined everyone as my friend. I told myself I was not going to feel bad because of those people. They are not my blood relatives. They are not my real, real good friends that I grew up with ... So I stopped talking to everyone [in the Bangladeshi community] for a year ... Then I struggled with myself ... I had only my husband. I did not have anybody to talk to ... I lost my trust ... They were all phony friends. As soon as you have a lot of money you

can show them everything is okay because you can cook for them and do things. You are good. But as soon as something happens they are not your friends.

So I became friends with people at school and a girl from work and that woman who lived in my apartment building. Those were my friends. I tried to keep myself busy ... I was working part-time and going to school full-time and taking dance classes and swimming classes. I was so upset at that time ... I went home again to Bangladesh. When I came back I had liver damage and was in the hospital ... Then one girl from that group called me. She wanted to know how I was feeling. Then I was so happy. That lady who hurt me never keeps in touch with anybody [from that original group of friends]. No one wants to keep in touch with her. We are all back to being friends again ... We call each other every day and have fun.

I like living here now. There is a little thing both of us are concerned about if we lived with our family ... We go everywhere and we go out so much and sometimes I wear western clothes. That is the thing we would miss — our freedom ... That is a big thing ... If we were back home we wouldn't get that freedom... See, my husband and I — whenever we sit and talk at home we are very close to each other. All the time we are like that. No one is here so we can see and do what we want ... [our parents] believe that husband and wife shouldn't be too close in front of the family. You see all of the time [my husband] holds my hand, kisses me and hugs me. I told him he is so affectionate to me here, but he does not take care of me when we go back home ... I miss his affection so much when we are there ... I told him he acts like a totally different person at home ... He said he knows and that when he goes home he changes. I don't want to go back [to live there] because I would miss [his being affectionate]. I told my parents, if they come back to live in the United States, we are not going to live in the same apartment ... I didn't tell them everything. I just told them it would not be possible. Anyway my parents could not live here. They are used to living another way back home. They have maids and their own shoppers and just a different lifestyle. It is a different lifestyle and people who are solvent back home have a really, really good life. That is why they would not feel like coming here and working for a small amount of money.

I told my husband that the only reason I want to raise my children here is because here they can go to very good schools. I know that here they can start any life or any business they want to — doctors or engineers or anything — because here there is not the competition there is in Bangladesh. Back home it is very, very competitive. Everywhere everybody is very good at studying and doing very good results ... So that is the reason I want to stay

here. But the reason I don't want them to [stay here] is because I am scared of drugs and crime here and the alcohol and boyfriends and girlfriends. Before [children] even go to high school they ... have sex and things and that scares me for my kids ... my husband's family wants us to move back home.

I think I would rather stay in Bangladesh if I were only going to stay home [full-time after having] my children. Here everybody has to get up early in the morning, go to work, and come back at the end of the day. After that they are tired, have dinner, and go to bed. That is not a life. I am so lucky though. I am so happy about my life here because I can drive, I can go out, I know people, I can study. If I get bored I can go to the gym and work out ... Then my husband comes home and takes me out ... We do a lot of things and we have a really good life. I am so fortunate. I see a lot of [Bangladeshi women] and they don't do anything here. One [Bangladeshi] friend who lives here — I am the only girl she talks to. I don't stay at home that much. She stays home all the time. She says she feels so bad and she doesn't know what to do and she says she is getting fat ... She just goes from room to room and sits in front of the computer and watches TV... She doesn't want to work. She thinks her husband makes good money so why should she work? But we don't work only to make money. We work for ourselves, to see other people, and to see what is going on outside of our own door.

I think I can give new brides the advice to just be positive. They need to be positive and they can do anything they want to do here ... When I first came here I barely spoke English and I caught up so fast and I learned a lot of things so fast. I had never done [the things that I do here] before. As long as they are positive that they can do these things, then they will make it.

*Naju is a 28-year-old Muslim, Bangladeshi woman. She was 22 years old when she married her husband, who was 24 at the time. The two had been in love for many years before they married. Naju had to wait 2 years in Bangladesh before she could join her husband in the United States. When she finally arrived she found a life much different than the one she had dreamed of. At the time of the interviews, the couple had one child and were employed at a fast food restaurant.*

I was born in Bangladesh in February 1972. I was born in Dhaka. I have four sisters and one brother. We grew up in another city almost 200 miles from Dhaka. I was 6 or 7 when we moved to [that city]. We moved because there was an accident. My father had an accident and became blind. His sight never came back. So we moved to my father's natal home. We lived with my grandfather and grandmother and father and mother and family. Everyone was there. I stayed in [that city] until I was at least 16 years old. Then I went to Dhaka and finished my bachelors and masters degree there. I finished my degree in 1996 so I was 23 years old then. After that I came here.

My husband was a relative. That is how I met him. His brother and my sister are husband and wife. We met when my sister first got married. That was 1985. So I actually knew him when I was 16 and then I got to know him. Sometimes I went to my sister's house and I saw him there. I was 21 when we got married. He was 23 when we married.

I came to the United States because I wanted to stay with him. First he came to the United States because he wanted to finish his bachelor's degree but he has not finished it yet. He came to [this city] because his cousin was here. So he already had family here. I came to [this city] in 1996. We did not come here together. He was here almost 10 years [before I came]. He came here in 1989. It was a long time. My husband came back to the United States 7 days after our marriage. I came back almost 2 years later. I did not see him in those 2 years. But I started to love him long before I married him. I didn't see him for a long time but I still had the same feelings. After we got married it was different but the same feelings between us.

When I got married I knew I would be coming to the United states. I thought that it would be great! I did not know anything about the United States. I expected that everything would be beautiful and everybody would be nice. But I found that I missed my family and my country. Here nobody is friendly like [they are in] Bangladesh. Before I came here it was all a beautiful dream. After I came it was real life. Real life does not match the dream. It is different. Totally different ... When I came here I though [my husband] had

already finished his education. But then when I came here I finally knew everything . . . then I was upset. I did not want this kind of life. I wanted him to be educated.

People have helped me here, though. Every Bengali family here has helped me. I met them because my husband knew them before. My husband's sister-in-law has helped us the most since we have been here. She has helped me everywhere. She helped me even when I went to work at another [fast food restaurant]. She told me that when I feel alone or feel lonely I have to go to work. If I don't have a ride she will give me a ride and she does. I don't want to say why I have not gotten involved in the Bangladeshi community. I have not met any Americans either.

I got my job at [this fast food restaurant] because my husband is the manager there. The work there is okay. It was my first job. There are no other Bangladeshis. It is only me and white people. I worked there for 2 or 3 months then took some time off because I was pregnant with our baby. When our daughter was a year old then I started working at another [fast food restaurant] closer to our apartment. Usually my husband works the day shift and I work the night shift. It is difficult work. My husband does not really enjoy his job. Every day lots of customers complain. That is that.

So far I have been in the United States for 4 years. Nothing has been good about living here. My degree in management has not helped me. I want to go back to school when my daughter is 5 or 6 years old. I am already a U.S. citizen because I want my mom to come and stay with me. I'm not sure if she wants to or not but that is what I want. I want her here because my son is alone here in the United States. I want my family here.

If I could give a new Bangladeshi bride advice about coming to the United States I would tell her that she may think America is a nice country and everything is beautiful but [she] has to understand that nothing is very easy. You have to face reality. You have to live by yourself and the loneliness is very hard. You will miss your family and friends and you have to work so hard here in the beginning.

*Maya is a 53-year-old Hindu, Bangladeshi woman. When teaching at a prominent Bangladeshi University, Maya fell in love with another teacher who later became her husband. The couple moved to London in order for him to pursue higher studies. There Maya gave birth to the couple's only child. When their daughter was three months old, the couple moved to the United States. The family has been living in this city for eleven years. At the time of the interviews, Maya was a department head in an educational institution.*

In 1950 my father and all of my uncles — all of my male relatives — were killed in a riot between Hindus and Muslims in what was then east Pakistan. I grew up without any brothers, no father, and no uncles — no men in my life in a male-dominated country. I grew up with my mother, whom I credit with all my success in life. My mother was not formally educated but she was "psychologically" educated. She sent me to boarding school, where I did my secondary school certificate, and then on to college and university.

After college I worked on a project with the Dutch government. It was a kind of anthropological project. Before I joined the project I was told that, by working on the project, I would get a scholarship to go to school in Holland. That kind of scholastic enticement was necessary to get young Bangladeshi women to work in rural Bangladesh, at that time, as very few women were willing to do so without sufficient enticement. While [I was] working on the project the Dutch authorities recalled all of the workers because of the riots [going on across the country between Muslims and Hindus]. I had no choice but to flee to India with another Bangladeshi woman who was also working on this project. On my way to India I stayed with the friends of that woman — I did not know any of the people who helped me along the way. I had an extremely difficult time living in India. I was there for 9 months. While in India I contacted the Dutch embassy for help. I was 23 years old and could not contact my mother or anyone I knew. Officials at the Dutch embassy helped me by sending me to Holland. I spent two years [in Holland] earning my diploma degree. There I was able to contact my mother and finally let her know I was all right. After finishing my degree I had the chance to go and work in London. Instead, I returned to Bangladesh and took a teaching job at [a major university]. The friend, with whom I fled from Bangladesh to India, went to London instead. At [the university] where I took the teaching job I met, fell in love with, and then married my husband. One year after our marriage, he was accepted for higher studies in London. So I went to London with my husband.

I got my masters degree in London and also became pregnant with our daughter. As it turned out the woman with whom I fled from Bangladesh to India was at the same

university where my husband was studying in London! When we were living in London, I was busy with my studies and becoming reacquainted with my friend, so I did not take the opportunity to socialize with the British. My friend and I became very close and I had my daughter.

When my daughter was 3 months old, we moved to [the midwestern United States] for my husband's Ph.D. program. That was my first time in the United States. There I had the chance to mix with Americans. It was really a struggle for us there. Our first night in [that town] we did not have furniture — nothing in our apartment. It was a shock. We flew in from London with nothing. There was one blanket in the apartment. I made a bed out of it, put it in the closet and put my baby girl there to sleep. There wasn't even a door on the closet.

My husband met a professor, an American man, at the university. The professor's wife did volunteer work in the community. She gave my family some furniture and came to my apartment to help me. She was very good to me. She took me grocery shopping, out for visits, and to coffees held by American women for the international students. She introduced me around the community. My family was the only east Bengali family in the area. But some west Bengalis were there. She had my family for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. We are still in contact, although not as much now.

We lived in [that city] for 6 years until my husband finished his Ph.D. I wanted to do everything to give our daughter opportunities – even before she was born I wanted that. When I wanted her to have violin lessons, my husband said that was okay but there was no money for lessons. So I babysat to make enough money so there was enough money for her violin lessons. If I want something I will do it. If my goal is set I go according to that goal. At that time I also learned how to drive a car so I could take my daughter to her violin lessons.

In the end I did not make my mother happy and that was my disappointment. She visited us when my daughter was 3 years old. I could not visit Bangladesh because of the student VISA and economic considerations. Her visit was very good. I wanted to keep her with me but after 2 years in the USA she could not get a VISA extension. My American friend even told me not to worry — she would keep my mother in her house — the immigration department would never know! I was extremely touched by that daring statement. But my mother had to return to Bangladesh after 2 years' time. There was no way around it. It was very sad for me when she departed at [the airport]. I told my husband "I will never see her



again." And that was the truth. My mother died [in Bangladesh] the same year my husband finally received his Ph.D.

We moved to this area in 1989 for my husband's job. We chose our first home because we were told that it was near a good Catholic school for our daughter. So we moved there and lived there for 3 years. We have lived in this house for 7 years because of its proximity to the airport — we use it frequently to visit our daughter at college — and work and my daughter's high school. You know in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan we value education and try to put all of our money toward education. My mother did the same for me. I love her very much.

If my daughter decided to marry someone who was not Hindu or Bengali it would be very difficult for me to accept, but if I did not come to terms with it I would lose my daughter. If the man was not Hindu and not Bengali it would be different than not being Bengali. The ideal is for her to marry a Hindu Bengali man. I wouldn't mind if she married a Muslim Bengali boy but I do mind if the Muslim boy's family — the way they always do — made her convert to Islam. I do not like that way. You can love people from other religions. You do not have to change to the other person's religion. I have heard the conversations of Bengali Muslim women that only want their children to marry Muslims, or but for my daughter I don't want a Hindu boy from just any place. To me it is not the main thing but I do prefer that she marry a Bengali boy.

My situation in the United States is much different than Muslim, Bangladeshi women. You see as a Hindu I am not discriminated against here, but I was in Bangladesh. There is a minority problem in Bangladesh but here I don't feel any [problems]. Here it is okay for me to be Hindu. I was even mistaken as being Chinese by a child at work the other day! I don't like to impose my religious beliefs on others. I think religion is very personal.

If I had stayed in Bangladesh I would have always been afraid. Being a minority there — at anytime anything can happen. I would have a good job there because I was a teacher and I would have a normal life except for the religion part. I do not want to return to Bangladesh permanently because of the minority problem and the feelings toward Hindus, and I don't want my daughter to go there either. A visit is okay but I never want to return for very long. I fear for my daughter's safety there.

Bangladeshis in the U.S. meet each other through other Bangladeshis. Let me give you an example. The real estate agent who helped us with our first house happened to take us to a

house owned by Bengalis. The family invited us to a party they were going to have and invited other families that same evening for us to meet. So that is how people get to know each other. [Bangladeshis in this city] are one big family in a way but there is a generation gap right now. For the last 2 or 3 years the families that have come to this area are in their twenties and thirties. The older group members are good friends of mine. In general, though it is one big family. We help each other and get together for important events. We participate in and celebrate many holidays like Bangladeshi Independent Day on the 16th of December. But we don't celebrate any Hindu holidays. There is always an undercurrent of a problem. If some Muslims want to celebrate Hindu holidays, others will object. The Bangladeshi Association will never celebrate Hindu things. I have two Bangladeshi and two Indian friends whom I can trust in this city. So there are four women I can really trust. The two from India are senior to me. I like one of the Bangladeshi women because she is not religiously biased at all. Her family is just that way.

Advice for a Bangladeshi bride moving to the United States? Learn to speak English. Also many people have the wrong idea. They have the wrong idea that you move to the USA and you will automatically be rich, because the streets are paved in gold. That is not true. You have to work hard here. Also, women and men from our part of the world think their religion is the most important thing and what their religion says is the truth, so they forget to respect other religions. Also, when they come they have culture shock. But this is a little different now because the media and all, but there is still a gap [between what they are used to and what they experience here]. There are good and bad things everywhere. For example, [South Asians] don't like [for people] to live together before marriage and we don't like drugs and alcohol. It is very hard for us to remember that there are certain things here we don't have to accept but we can just learn from. For example, Americans do everything — I mean they clean the toilet and the entire house. When we lived [in Bangladesh] we left all of that work to the servants. But it is very good to do all of these things. We can learn from Americans and try to use these lessons we learn here. The most important thing I want to tell other Bangladeshi immigrants, people in Bangladesh, or people reading this article is to have tolerance for other religions and other cultures. Also, accept good things about this culture and apply those things in your life without blindly criticizing other people. For example, I knew this man who said the only thing good about this country is the cereal. That is horrible. Everyone has good and bad things about them. Look at the good. It is hard but you can do it. As they say: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

*Farzaneh is a 45-year-old Muslim, Bangladeshi woman. She met her husband in medical school. Farzaneh married at 26, after earning her medical degree and moved to the middle east for her husband's employment as a physician. Farzaneh also practiced medicine for many years in her middle eastern home. The couple have two grown children. At the time of the interviews Farzaneh was an active volunteer for her mosque.*

I was born in [rural] Bangladesh in 1954. My father was a principal of a school and we were 12 brothers and sisters. I am the youngest. [Of] my eight brothers ... four are doctors and three are lawyers and one is a company manager. [Of my] four sisters — one is a bank manager, I am the doctor, two graduated from college and they are married. My father died in 1974. When my daughter was born my mother died. But that is okay because that is from God. We have to understand that. Life is adjustment. What is coming, we have to ... always go back to God, who created us.

I lived in Bangladesh until I was 26 or 27. I left and I went to [the middle east]. I lived in [the middle east] for my work. Well, my husband, he went first. Then I went there and I got a job there. I worked as a physician there for 14 years and then I came back here in 1996. I went to [Louisiana] first. Then my husband got a job [in this city] and we came here. I have never worked [outside the home] here because I do not have want to work in fast food or anything. To practice medicine I would have to take the medical boards and everything. [It has been] a long time since I have studied ... I have not studied since Saudi Arabia because my husband is always busy. He did his degree in [Europe] and his board exam. So if I leave my children then who will take care of my children? I told you that life is not easy ... we have to sacrifice because we are women.

I have two children. [The first] was born in Bangladesh and the second in [the middle east]. When I worked there I brought [a woman from Bangladesh] to look after my children. In 1988 my husband went to Europe to study but I stayed in [the middle east] ... That was a challenge! You cannot go anywhere without your husband with you ... I had many complications there ... You do not have any freedom there. Not like here. Here you can drive ... But life is challenging everywhere. Here it is challenging because I want to practice as a doctor. When I was growing up my father always wanted me to become a doctor ... So I decided I would and I cannot practice here. I always think this must be from God. Life is a challenge, but if I stayed there my daughters would not have a good education. So I left my job [in the middle east] ... But it has been very difficult ... Everything was free [in the middle east] ... but not here. Also you felt so safe there because they don't allow you to go [anywhere] without your

husband ... I feel frustrated here because [I cannot practice medicine]. That is a good job. But what comes to you, you have to accept.

My husband and I have a settled marriage. Well, we loved each other because then our families settled our marriage. I knew him for 4 or 5 years before we married. I met him in college ... the same college. One day he came to my house and [tutored] me. Then I had feelings but I did not show him that I loved him. But then he went to medical college, then I went to medical college. So many boys wanted me [to marry them], so I thought maybe I would like him to see if he still loved me or not. He told me yes and that he was [available]. So I wrote him letters saying that I loved him.

I came to the United states one year before my husband did. My daughters and I stayed with [relatives] in [Louisiana] until my husband finished his degree in [Europe] ... It was very difficult when we first came. I did not have a car. I did not know how to drive ... it was a new adventure. I wondered why I came because I lost my job and my life in [the middle east]. I had no money and I could not work because we came here as visitors. I was locked up! Then my husband came back and he got a job and we moved here. Life was also difficult then. We had to walk to do shopping and to the bank and everything, and to go anywhere I had to use the bus and everything ... My life was the opposite here. Still, here I am searching. Sometimes I think maybe I could start from the beginning in medical college. I want to do something because I don't want to sit down this way. I applied for a job at the Islamic school that is here. They told me to work as a volunteer. So I am working as a volunteer ... and I feel good.

So it is good. I am helping Muslims here ... I am working with them and if they need me or need some help then I can help them. I call them and help them with problems. I try to help because it is very difficult for me because I am not working. In [the middle east] people would need medicine or help. I would think how I could help them ... I always tried to help. Here I can help.

Since I have come to the United States I have felt lonely. I left my job so it is difficult. Everyone is so busy here — my children, my husband — so I am working with my sisters and children at the [mosque]. I can help those who need help. When I am lonely it makes me feel much better to help people. When I came here I thought about what I could do. I found many people who need my help. I have so many friends here. All religions. All countries. Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Arabian, I have American friends, I have Egyptian friends ... I have feelings for everybody ... One day we have to turn back to Allah. We

... go back to Allah and we have to answer. Anyway, I have met most of my friends through Islam. Mostly the [mosque]. They come to the [mosque] because life is full of problems. Everybody has problems. But when I share my heart I always share my love and affection with God mostly. My husband and children are too busy. They are always busy so most of the time I speak to Allah about what is good and what is bad ... If you don't get what you want you want you become depressed ... Because, you see, when I worked I had a job and I also had money ... But here my husband is giving me money. Still if you earn something you feel much better. If you can help your husband, then you are helping, but you also have something in your own hand.

I had expectations [about my life in the United States], like maybe I could work as a physician. But I am not ... I am working in other ways because I want to help people. I don't want to sit down at home ... I want to spend my time with friends and I want to help people. I am happy that we have a house, thanks to Allah. [Allah] gives me my children, my husband, my children and they are also praying five times a day [as Muslims should] ... We are very blessed ... Many people don't have clothes ... in Bangladesh ... many people do not have houses, did not have anything to eat. Sometimes I feel bad because I will not get everything in this life. [But then] if I get everything I will not remember God.

We met our Bangladeshi friends here through a friend we had in [Louisiana]. They gave us numbers of people here. My husband first came here for an interview. So he came here and he met some — this is the way — we are Bangladeshi. Anywhere we will find each other, be together, help each other ... Our country's tradition is like this. You find [Bangladeshis]. You bring food; if you don't do it this way then you cannot help people. But other Bangladeshi women in [this city] all have different lives. Life is different for different people. [When we get together] we talk about what they are doing, what I am doing. Some women are also physicians. They are sitting here and also they are housewives; also some of them are depressed and we tell that the husband is working at the same jobs that [the women would] if we could. Maybe they have the same degree as their husband but they are [sitting at home]. I sometimes tell them that they will not get everything they want ... At least their husbands are working. Allah gives [their husbands] work. We have blessings. Some doctors are not getting jobs. So what we get here is thanks to God.

But sometimes I am frustrated [here] because no one is telling me that I am doing good. Money is nothing, you see. I have money but maybe God wants me to [live] this way, to help other people. I don't know. But life is different for women than it is for men. Of

course it is good that my husband studied so at least he is doing a good job ... but when he studied I could not study because still I miss my children and I have to take care of my children . . . Even when I worked ... I came home and I would have to be a full-time mother. But you see, God gives us more. In Islam ... the mother gets priority. Heaven is under the feet of the mother. Our prophet said that if you do good things you have to obey your mother three times first ... So we are three times more important than the father. So God also gives us rights. So if you are sacrificing you are not sacrificing in vain. You are the most important person in your family. In Bangladesh I did not realize that Islam is so beautiful, you see ... Now I see.

If I could talk to [a new Bangladeshi bride coming to the United States] I would give the advise that life is difficult everywhere but it is better if you are good, then you can lead your life in a good way. You can help people. If your intentions are good Allah will help you and you will do well. So if they have the chance to come here they must come here.

*Nazma is a 32-year-old Muslim, Bangladeshi woman. She had an arranged marriage in 1990 and came to the United States in 1992. She met her husband, 12 years her senior, two days before they were married. Her husband had been living in the United States for 18 years before he returned to Bangladesh to find a bride. The couple has two children. At the time of the interviews Nazma was looking for and had then found her first job after finishing her degree.*

I was born in 1968 back home in Dhaka, Bangladesh. I was the fourth daughter. Now there are seven sisters, but I was the fourth. They were expecting a son. That is why they finally finished [having children] after seven daughters! My father worked in [a government] department. My mother was a homemaker. I completed high school and university in Dhaka.

I did my bachelors of science degree in Dhaka. The course is 3 years. In this country I have noticed that people are not that concerned about the political situation of the country. But in our country the political situation is not stable. There is always some kind of problem. If the semester is six months it will last for a year with lots of problems. I started studying at the university in 1986. I finished my bachelors in 1991. By this time, in 1990, I had gotten married.

I have a totally arranged marriage. My husband had been in this country since 1982. He came here as a student, but because of the high tuition he could not finish his degree [until later]. He went to night school, dropped the classes, and went back to work so he could survive. He went to Bangladesh in 1990 in September [to find a wife] and we got married in November. My marriage was a little bit sudden. My husband's brothers were looking for a wife for him. His family knew my family. Anyway they had found a girl for him to marry. He saw me from his car but the next day he was supposed to go [with his brother] to meet the girl [they had found for him to marry]. He didn't even see that girl! He said no [I don't want to meet her] because I choose that girl — which was me. My husband said, about me, "She has a very beautiful smile. So I like that girl." That is why he chose me. The same day [his family] sent the proposal [for our marriage] was the same day we were engaged. After the engagement they took me, the family took me out to meet him. We went to a Chinese restaurant. But there were so many family [members] there that I did not even talk with him. I married him two days after that. So within a week everything [in my life] had changed. He stayed with me for 3 months and then [he] came back to this country. At that time we were very close. Women in our country — we learn from the

beginning that we have to compromise, compromise, compromise. So he has sacrificed some things and I have sacrificed some things. The family life is okay now.

I came to this country in 1992 because the immigration permit takes 2 years. It was frustrating — we were newly married and I had to live [alternately with my parents and his parents] for 2 years before I could come to this country. I had never been outside of Bangladesh before [I was married and came to the USA]. [My husband] was planning to go back to Bangladesh and pick me up from there. But he found that would be a little bit more costly, so he just sent me all the papers and my tickets and everything. I had taken English back home but all I could say was, "What is your name?" That was the type of English I knew. So I came all by myself and that was challenging to come that way. I had to change my plane in London ... I got lost in the immigration area. That was really challenging.

When I learned that I would be marrying my husband, I knew I would be moving to the United States. At that time I felt very good because I felt like my new life was going to start in a different country, in a different culture, and maybe money-wise I would become more solvent than other people. But when I finally came here I found that we had to do lots of sacrificing. We had to do lots of work. But that is not because we came from our country to this country. That is this country's culture. You have to do everything by yourself [in this country]. But when you are back home everybody — everybody — even if they don't have enough money, they still have someone like maids or servants to help them. You can get someone [to help you] with very little money ... to do the dishes, make your food, everything. But in this country, everything from morning to evening you have to do all by yourself and take care of your baby too. And sometimes I feel very lonely. Always I feel very lonely. [My husband] is always helping me and his family was here when I came, but still I feel loneliness every single day, especially when we have the religious programs. I feel so lonely. I try to share my feelings with someone ... I share, but I still feel lonely. Every single day. I have been here 7 years but every day I feel lonely. I feel something that is not like me. Something is totally different because of the loneliness.

[I] have friends [in the USA] but family is a little bit different than friends. I am always missing my family. I didn't think that I would feel lonely [in this country]. But on the weekends I felt lonely — especially when I was in school — I felt very lonely. I saw all the other students; they were going somewhere to meet their family but I didn't have anywhere to go ... I didn't have any family to go to. I did not make any American friends.



When I was in school I was so busy. I [knew lots of people] in school but not that close. I didn't get a chance ... because in school I was there only at class time and I had my son and husband to take care of. I don't even have any friends from India or Pakistan. All of my friends are from Bangladesh. Always. I don't feel comfortable with people from other countries. Maybe that is why. That is one of my weak points. I don't feel that comfortable to meet with someone from a different country.

I have found some discrimination here. In my school one of my teachers always discriminated — not only against me but another boy, from our country, and another girl. We found that he was always discriminating against us. Always. If it was the same type of work someone else did they would get 10 out of 10 but we got at the most 8 out of 10. We found that in projects and everywhere. The other teachers at the school were really good and helpful. Also I had a few interviews wearing [*shalwar kameese*<sup>4</sup>]. [The interviewer's] final question was always, "Are you going to dress like *that* when you come to work?" I said I wasn't sure. But at that time I was pregnant and could cover myself better with *shalwar kameese* than in other clothes. Still ... I have been in this country 7 years and I still do not feel comfortable in this country's dress. I feel shy when I wear [western clothes]. So I bought two [western] dresses for my last interviews. So when everything is settled a bit and [I have had the job] for a while I will go back to wearing my clothes again. That is what I think I will do. I just feel more comfortable in my clothes and with Bangladeshi people.

It is very easy to meet Bangladeshis in the U.S. When new people come here they like to know if there is a [Bangladeshi] association going on. Every area [across the United States] has its own [Bangladeshi] community association. They do all the cultural events, all the religious programs, or picnics, all the special days. There is a directory list of all the Bangladeshi Association members. Normally when any events are going on they send [information] by email and mail. Now the place to put a flier is in [the Bangladeshi grocery store].

Our country's grocery store connects Bangladeshi people. When a new person comes [to this city], they know there is a store from Bangladesh so they just stop by and [leave] their phone number [so they can] meet with other people from Bangladesh. There is something like a message board there. If any event is going on everybody [advertises it] in the store. [People] like to go [to the grocery store] on the weekends because every weekend you can meet someone who is new or someone who is old but you can meet them there. If a person is new you should invite her when you have a big party ... I just give out the [new]

person's phone number. There was a girl who came to the store. She was looking to meet other [Bangladeshi] people. She just introduced herself to the store and now she is in the middle of the community! That is the way we connect. It is not only that way in this area but in any other areas too.

The mosque is another place we can meet people. When we go to the mosque on Sunday — we just drop our son there to learn Arabic so he can read the Koran — we like to stay around there so we can meet people. That is a nice thing. We can meet with new people and other people who came here a while ago. That is very good. Another way [to meet people], every weekend there are parties. Not only Bangladeshi Association parties but private house parties too. If it is a big [house] than everybody is invited but at the smaller houses four or five families meet every week. The big parties are usually Friday or Saturday — most of them are Saturday night.

The Bangladeshi families here are like my family. We are very close. There are no problems. When something happens [in someone's life], everyone tries to do something [to help]. If something is good or something bad happens, we like to share with each other. We really like to share with each other.

[My husband] is very good because I had a dream of getting very high education because when I did my bachelor's back home I was not happy with that bachelors. I was planning to go to medical school [in Bangladesh] but 100,000 students applied and around 1,200 spots were available. So I did not get a chance to go to medical school. I kept telling my mom that I would change my life if I had the opportunity to study again. And finally, when I met my husband, he found that I was very ambitious to go back to school and he gave me the chance. The degree was totally a sacrifice for him. He sacrificed more [than I did] because lots of times, when I was in school, I was studying so he was taking care of our son at that time.

The best part about moving to the United States is solvency. Most of our country's people came here first of all to get ... a better degree in this country. The second thing I can tell you, the life is better [here]. Better life means everything — the food, the weather is all very good and there are no problems with anybody — that means no racial problems. The people are not abused. That means they have the right to say if they don't like things [here]. They have the right to tell people. Our country is suffering. Politics is the main issue in our life [in Bangladesh] . . . They make life worse and worse and worse because they do not take care of the people that well ... I was a housewife after I came here. I was

planning to go to school. I went [to school] very easily. I finished my degree with no problems ... Whatever you want to be in the USA, at any age — you can accomplish your dream here. This is the country that I can say that if you dream something and if you struggle hard enough you can do it yourself. But in our country, if you dream, that is only a dream forever. It is very hard to go on like that — like my mom. She wanted to go to school [in Bangladesh] but it was not possible because of her age. This is a very good life here. The worse part about living here is the loneliness. But there are many opportunities.

I am very pleased with my new job. After my interview they gave me an offer right away ... The job that I applied for was already taken but when they saw my resume they said they were going to open another position. They offered me \$35,000. I said no. I know lots of things. My work experience is very little but I do know lots of things ... The next day the vice president called me in the morning. She said ... how much do you want? And she gave it to me. The information — the job is really interesting. I can't say what type of ... work I am doing but it is very interesting. Everyday there are new things over there.

I hired a woman from my mother's village to come and live with us and help us care for our house and our children. I advertised for her in our country's paper. She was living in New York City [with her son]. I placed an advertisement in our country's paper in New York and told lots of people I was looking for someone who could take care of my [children] while I am at work. I pay her \$800 a month to care for my children and cook for us. She has her own room [in our apartment] and we provide all of her food. It is much better this way. I have to have someone from my culture caring for my children. The family I came from, the family my husband came from, they are conservative families. I will try my best to make [my children] conservative like us. I found that ... dating is not any matter for this country. Our country's situation is different ... If I love someone I would try to hide it from them. No dating ... But here they are going out dating whether they are in senior school or not. Until children get married they should live with their parents. It is very challenging to be a mother. Especially in this country. [Some of the immigrant Bangladeshi children] don't take our culture; they don't even take this country's culture. They feel lost and all by themselves. They only see a few families around trying to practice their old culture. I will try my best but I don't know. I have to see the future to see what type of personalities they have — so I know how I can control them.

Now I am getting used to this country. Compared to our country's political situation, income, weather, everything — I am planning to [stay here] until I get older. That is what I am thinking because I will try to raise my kids in this country. Because if I compare my

country to this country — this is a very first going, first world, rich country and our country is one of the poorest in the whole world. There is too much burden in our country. Burden means too many people. The jobs are not that available. Business is not that good ... But when I get older I am planning to go back because ... in our country the older people are treated a little bit differently than here, much better.

My advice for a new [Bangladeshi] bride coming to the USA is silly. It is different from person to person but the quality of their family life will totally depend on her. It is a silly thing but I would give someone the advice to know how to cook before she comes to this country. I knew how to cook — a little bit but not much. But I brought my book and I learned a lot by reading that book and cooking lots of different food. There are some Indian restaurants ... but when you need our country's food you have to do it all by yourself. Cooking is important because we eat every day at home. I feel more comfortable that way. It is not just for saving money; eating together at home means being close to your family.

*Ratri is a 36-year-old Muslim, Bangladeshi woman. She and her husband met while they were medical school students in Bangladesh. After their marriage they moved to Europe and then to the United States. Both moves were for Ratri's husband's professional development as well as the benefit of the couple's only child. At the time of the interviews Ratri was a homemaker.*

I lived in Bangladesh for the first 25 years of my life. My father was a medical doctor. He was a high official in the health administration. During my childhood I went from village to village with him during his working visits. I was raised upper middle class.

I was a medical doctor in Bangladesh. I met my husband in medical school. He was senior to me in school. In Bangladesh we don't date but when you like someone they know and it is assumed you will then be married. We had similar backgrounds so we knew we would be able to marry without any problem. We knew each other for 2 years before we married. Just as a formality our fathers met and settled the marriage one day. So I suppose I have both a love marriage and settled marriage.

After our marriage I lived with my in-laws for 5 months because my husband was in Dhaka doing research. After 5 months I moved back to my parents' house. I was pregnant then. I was pregnant so it was tradition for me to return to my parent's house, as [Muslim Bangladeshi] children are traditionally born in their maternal grandparent's home.

My daughter was born in 1988. In 1989 my husband got a scholarship to go to [Europe] and study. At that time I was working as a doctor in a clinic in Bangladesh. When we went to [Europe] for my husband's Ph.D. work, I stayed home to care for our daughter because my medical degree was not recognized by the British government. At that time our daughter was diagnosed with mental retardation. After she was diagnosed she started going to a special school. Because of the good schools and services for our daughter in [Europe], we decided to stay there for a while. We did not want to return to Bangladesh at that time because there were no services for her. Our daughter will always be with us. She is another reason we moved to the west.

It was hard to stay in [Europe] because there are too many immigrants and they don't want Asian immigrants there. While my husband was doing his Ph.D. he went to a conference in [another European country]. There he met [a man] who was the head of a very important department at [the local] university here in town. He liked my husband and

offered him a job if he would come to the USA. After my husband completed his Ph.D., we moved here for my husband to work in research. That was in 1993.

Once we moved here we found funding was not good in his field. So he decided to prepare for the medical board exams. I also studied [for the medical boards], but I had all the housework and child care to do, so my husband eventually had to study alone. He passed the medical board exam in 1994. We did not want to move to another place after that because of our daughter. There were special services and we had met many people.

Here the main help we received was from a Bangladeshi family we met through my brother-in-law who lives in [the eastern United States]. He knew of some people in [this city] so he put us in contact with them. Wherever we go we look for Bangladeshi families. That Bangladeshi family helped us every weekend. At that time one of the women [we met through my brother-in-law] was the Bangladeshi Association secretary. She called the Bangladeshi Association president and told him we were here. At that time we didn't have a car or driver's license between us. My husband used to walk 2 miles one way to work and then back home. After we bought a car everything was easier.

After we came here I worked at [a drugstore]. Then we lived [closer to the city]. It was a part-time job. I made friends with two American women there. After I moved to the suburbs I lost contact with them. At work we would talk about music and movies. But we never socialized outside of work. But it was hard working there. After all, I am a doctor and I was working at [a drugstore]! Actually I didn't want to work there. Sometimes I felt discriminated against. I noticed that my salary never changed after 2 years. They all knew I was a good employee so I was hurt. My manager was very nice to me. But when he left my salary never increased. After that I quit. Anyway, I didn't need the job anymore because my husband had a good job. But it hurt. Sometimes we can feel the discrimination. We feel we will never be first class citizens here. We understand that some people will always consider us outsiders. But we don't complain. The more we become Americanized, the more they will accept us. You know — the way we dress, talk — just everything. But sometimes I feel hopeless here. Bengali is a very rich language and Bengal has a very rich culture. Americans never notice and don't even care. I mean, even when I was a high school student I knew about America — the food, the movies — I knew a lot of things about America even then and Americans don't even know where Bangladesh is. Americans are always very friendly — they always smile and say Hi. Americans aren't rude or as prejudiced as the [Europeans] were, but they don't want to know about us.

Right now I should study to take the [medical board] exams. It is my dream to be a psychiatrist, but every year the exam is getting more difficult. Every year they are adding new things ... My husband wants me to do the exam. I could do a masters degree or something else but my husband wants me to study hard and take the medical exams and see what happens. It is difficult. When I was a student I did nothing but study. Now my husband does only his job.

My husband was the brilliant student, so I think it was right that he was the one to study for the board exam. It always seems that men come first anyway. I haven't given up. I still have my hope. Maybe I will do something some day. I miss being a doctor. It is a great feeling to see a patient, diagnose that patient, and then see them improve. I've done everything including deliver babies. I miss the feeling of being a doctor. Here I am responsible for everything. It is impossible for me to have time to study. When I was living at home my father did everything for me. He always pushed me and decided where I would go to school. He was my guardian angel. He died when my daughter was born. Now I am responsible for the house and everything.

It has been very hard for me to stay home with our daughter because I am a medical doctor. I don't want to stay home with her. I am depressed in my life because of her. During the summer months I am especially lonely because I have to stay home all day with her. After getting my driver's license, though, my life is better because I can go shopping or out with friends. But when my daughter is home I can't go out because she won't cooperate. When I can, I mix with other [Bangladeshi women] to make myself feel better. I have lots of women friends here. We people in the Bangladeshi community here are like family. We talk every day and try to help each other. We're not related but we are like family. I have many [Bangladeshi] friends here. Some of [them] have the same frustrations. While some of them are like me, some are working and others are doing their residency. Here I am — some people put family first, others think careers come first. To me it is family. At least I have a cause because of my daughter. Another woman here is very frustrated because she feels she will never pass the medical board exam either. At least I have my daughter. Also, my husband and I share everything. We are equal. That is why I don't feel that bad with my situation here. I am frustrated only because of not having time to study but he is a good man and I do not have any family problems. I do not have problems with my husband like the other women here do.

Bangladeshi women coming to the United States should know that there are a lot of responsibilities here. In Bangladesh [women of our class] don't face this many responsibilities. Here we [women] have to do everything. Girls who move to the USA are like me — upper middle class. If you want help at home you have servants to help you. Here you don't. Here you also need to drive. Every time you go out of your house you need to drive. You are dependent unless you do. You have to mentally and physically prepare yourself to face these things here. As a child I went to school and then I went home. Here I do everything. I have advice to men also. Men should understand that these girls that they bring here are from a totally different culture. The men need to share all responsibilities. In our country men make the money and women supervise the household help. If you compare with our country, women don't feel good about themselves here if the men don't help them here, because they are without servants and family to help them. I'm lucky because my husband helps me somewhat, but others just go out and earn money and come home and expect everything to be done. Also, you miss your relatives so you always have to have Bangladeshi friends. I know a man, actually a good friend of my husband's, who was a physician also. His family isolated itself because they did not want to associate with other Bangladeshis who did not share the same social status. That man was in a car accident and died. So during that time his wife was wounded and in the hospital. She needed help and the only person to help her was an American family they knew. The Bangladeshi community did not help them at all because they had not been a part of their family from the beginning. So I must tell Bangladeshis that when they are outside of our country they must not keep status in mind. Here everyone is equal because everyone is Bangladeshi. In America, whenever I notice a Bangladeshi I talk to them. Here we try to be American but we are different and will always be different. Also, they need to be prepared to speak English before they get here.



## DISCUSSION

The household strategy model, which assumes all resources including social networks are shared equally between spouses within a household (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994), does not apply to the participants' experiences documented here. We found that when these women first arrived in the United States they did not have the luxury of calling on established family, friendship, or professional networks. Instead, they were initially emotionally dependent on husbands they may have barely known, in a country that was completely foreign to them. In contrast, the women stated, most of their husbands often had established professional contacts and, in many cases, existing friendships to call on when needed in their American home.

Given this inequity, it is not surprising that most of the participants stated that they especially wanted their husband's emotional support during their early days in the U.S. Emotional support, as it was described by the participants, included: a husband's outward approval of his wife's personal and professional goals, time spent with her when she felt particularly lonely, or verbal acknowledgement that she was going through a difficult time. The level of emotional support a woman felt she had from her husband seemed to directly influence the ease of her adjustment to life in the United States and her subsequent enthusiasm about building her own community. Participants who felt they had their husband's emotional support seemed to have sought out other Bangladeshi women more comfortably, found resources more quickly, and coped with the personal changes of life abroad comparatively more easily than their counterparts who felt less supported. Those who felt less supported, however, were equally successful at the same tasks. They simply approached their new challenges more cautiously. As they made friends and became familiar with their new surroundings, the initially intense desire for spousal support waned for most of the participants.

Whether a woman was a new arrival or had been in the United States a few years, most stated that they had expectations for their "American" lives. How many of the participants described their expectations for their lives in the United States demonstrated that they saw themselves as embedded in their immediate family rather than as individual actors (Sodowsky, 1988). All of the new immigrant women were wives. All expected that life in the United States would mean improving the family's social and economic position by first securing opportunities for their husbands. With that accomplished, their level of "embeddedness" (Granovetter, 1978) within the family was then determined by whether or not they had children. Mothers' were more embedded than childless women because their

expectations for their lives in the United States generally revolved around hopes for their children. The participants who had decided to pursue their own interests carefully pointed out that, because their commitments outside the family ultimately benefited the family, they were worthy of their personal time and effort. Childless women were less embedded within the family because their expectations primarily focused on their own needs. But they stated that, once their children were born, their expectations of and for their lives here would be driven by their children's needs. The childless participants stated that they had purposely chosen professions, or even switched professions after immigrating, that they believed would be more likely to offer flexible hours in a future filled with caregiving responsibilities for their children. Each participant actively promoted the expectations of her family members and worked to realize those expectations. As wives, mothers, and future mothers many found personal success in realizing family members' dreams. The idea of putting one's individual needs before the family's needs was something that each of the women saw as particularly "American" and did not aspire to. Some of the participants stated, however, that thinking of their individual expectations was made possible by their exposure to American culture. While others explained that their ability to conceive of and realize their individual expectations was due to their husband's support, rather than where they happened to live.

None of the participants who had children expected that pursuing their own educational and professional goals in this developed country would hinge upon the need for desirable childcare. Whether they worked out of their homes from necessity or desire — or even had children — all participants believed they would eventually have to personally and professionally sacrifice for their offspring. None of the women wanted their children to stay in institutional care or believed it was even an option. Most were frustrated with the knowledge that, if they had remained in Bangladesh, childcare would not have been a problem. There, they explained, established family networks are traditionally called upon for care giving. But in the United States these women found providing for or finding childcare was entirely their responsibility. Furthermore, seven of eight women stated that they bore the entire burden of household tasks. Such a burden, they confided, was alien to them before their arrival. The participants stated that this would not have been so if they had remained in Bangladesh. There, they explained, domestic helpers provided relief and created free-time used for socializing — thus enabling the establishment and cultivation of friendships. In terms of their domestic lives most of the participants provided, similar to what Nagar (1998) found among South Asian women living in Tanzania, the stability and security in the family so their husbands could immerse themselves in their careers. The

American idea of "freedom," often associated with living in the United States, meant little to these women in the domestic realm as they bore much more responsibility in the U.S. than they would have had they remained in Bangladesh.

The Muslim participants' loneliness for family and country remained constant. They felt a sense of loss at having left their homeland (Saran, 1987). These women portrayed themselves as "those away from home" (Rutherford, 1984, p. 3) in descriptions of their "new" lives. There seemed to be a drive among the Muslim women to conquer the loneliness, or at least make it subside, by recreating the emotionally supportive networks they had back home (Rao et al., 1990) in a way that reminded them of home. In contrast, the Hindu participant stated that, although she missed her relatives in Bangladesh, she felt at home in the United States because she was not a minority in the "same way" she had been in Bangladesh. In the United States she was able to move more freely among people of varied ethnic and religious backgrounds. Loneliness for family in Bangladesh, shared by all participants, appeared to be the primary catalyst for the women's active approach to community building — both initiating the initial friendships of that community and then cultivating those ties. Similar to other investigators' findings (Carey, 1985; Das Dasgupta, 1998; Rao, et al., 1990; Rutherford, 1984; Sara, 1987; Sadowsky & Carey, 1987; Summerfield, 1993), the participants stated, either verbally or by the friends they had chosen, that they felt more comfortable with other immigrant Bangladeshi women — rather than American women or immigrant women from other countries — and preferred close friendships with women from their homeland. The Hindu participant felt equally comfortable with Hindu and Muslim women from the Indian subcontinent.

Similar to Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) findings, the participants in this investigation were experts at developing their own social networks. Immigrant women who were established in this city had built informal associations among themselves which they called on for support. They extended this support network to new immigrant Bangladeshi women upon learning of their arrival in this city. Participants whose husbands were established in this city before their marriage, remembered that their first contact with the Bangladeshi community came from the Bangladeshi Association president's wife who telephoned the women within a few days of their arrival. From that initial connection the new arrivals learned, if they did not already know from their husbands, of the best Bangladeshi grocery store, the nearest place of worship, and latest Bangladeshi Association party. With that information, a new arrival was encouraged by the president's wife to make her own connections with other Bangladeshi women, whose telephone numbers were then provided

by the president's wife. For participants whose husbands were not established in this city before their arrival, the participants remembered that they found other Bangladeshis by scanning the phone book for "Bangladeshi names," friends of friends, or by coincidence, all of which one participant qualified as "the Bangladeshi way." From both arrival scenarios we learned that immigrant Bangladeshi women search for others from their homeland, by visual cues and word of mouth, to build community for themselves and their family members in their new home. These participants did not arrive with formal established ties, provided by a place of employment or an educational institution, nor did they especially need or desire the formal established ties. Instead, they needed the informal community of women like themselves with whom they could share conversation and build social lives. In her own way each participant had, or was in the process of, successfully building that community.

The complexity of a participant's social network seemed to depend upon how long she had been living in this city and whether or not she had lived abroad before settling in the U.S. Those who had lived in the U.S. for a few years seemed to have more complex and satisfying networks with other immigrant Bangladeshi women. They also realized, and had come to terms with, what they could and could not expect from those networks. Two of the participants stated that they had at least one American woman in their lives whom they referred to as a close friend. But none of the participants included American women in descriptions of their most intimate circle of female friends. Participants who had lived abroad before settling in this city used community building skills and coping strategies accumulated during their first abroad experiences to initiate and strengthen their networks in this city and reconcile the unavoidable loneliness. For these women experience, rather than time, facilitated the complexity of their social networks.

In contrast to other immigrant Bangladeshi communities (Carey & Shukur, 1985; Eade, 1990; Kaul, 1983; Nagar, 1998; Summerfield, 1993), most of the participants did not live within walking distance of other Bangladeshi women. Thus their ability to form community was challenged by: (1) the time it took to find other Bangladeshi women, (2) the time needed to form meaningful relationships, and (3) the mobility necessary to establish, cultivate, and nurture those friendships. Without childcare provisions, a respite from domestic tasks, or a driver's license, the intimate communal space (Das Gupta & Das Dasgupta, 1998) they shared with their female friends and family members in Bangladesh, developed very slowly in the U.S.

Bangladeshi Association parties and parties given by Bangladeshi families provided regular opportunities for immigrants and their families to socialize. Many gathered weekly during these events as couples and families, but never alone, to establish friendships or reconnect with Bangladeshi friends. During these gender segregated gatherings, the women had time and space, although limited, to have conversations where their friendships were able to form and blossom. Such dialogue is important because it provided the opportunity for each woman to build self-esteem, confidence (Noddings & Witherell's, 1991), and feelings of security as well as time for self assessment (Solano, 1986). But the intimate woman-only gatherings — found in the "empty space" of daily life in Bangladesh — were rare in their American home. When conversations did take place between the immigrant women, the participants stated that they cherished the time and space they had with other women where they could talk freely and share ideas. Aries & Johnson (1983, p. 354) assert that the opportunity for talking is essential to the formation of women's friendships because, "[t]alk is the substance of women's friendships;" it is the "central feature of women's friendships." Similar to Larance's (2001) findings in rural Bangladesh, conversation was the participants' first step towards community building; it became the participants' most essential tool for establishing and maintaining their new social lives. Each participant stated that she needed to talk to other immigrant Bangladeshi women on a weekly if not a daily basis. Telephone conversations across town had replaced conversations that, at home in Bangladesh, were usually held while collectively preparing meals, caring for children, or passing the afternoon. This change did not make the conversations less important, but seemed to have made community formation much more gradual than gathering and talking collectively may have.

Ironically, it was the fact that these women were far from established networks for childcare and domestic help as well as relatively geographically isolated — rather than *purdah's* restrictions — that most challenged their community building capacity. Despite these challenges, most of the women in this investigation were in the process of building or had successfully built rich social lives with their Bangladeshi "sisters" abroad. The sisterhood ties made in their American home had become strong and satisfying and, in many ways, life sustaining. But, as Rao, et al., (1990) also found, the participants felt strongly that these friendships did not and would not substitute for the family they continued to long for in Bangladesh.

## CONCLUSION

The choices these immigrant Bangladeshi women made as they rebuilt their lives in the United States, demonstrate that the women are as resilient as they are active in creating a community for their families and themselves. This glimpse of their choices and experiences suggests that these women may be viewed as cultural entrepreneurs (Bhachu, 1993), constantly innovating upon newer and newer cultural forms they continuously reformulate through the filters of their American experiences. Succeeding at life in the United States, a process each woman defined for herself, was the focus of the participants' energies. After the initial shock of arrival passed, these women did not dwell on what they could have accomplished or what their lives would have looked like had they remained in Bangladesh. They concentrated on the present and looked toward the future — all the while providing a stable foundation for their families.

Gradually forming friendships with other immigrant Bangladeshi women, and then molding those friendships into fictive family ties, seems to have enabled the women to establish themselves in their new country and to cope with a deep and lasting need for their natal families. The informal community of Bangladeshi women that each participant gradually surrounded herself with provided each with access to the intimate conversation and comfortable community of Bangladeshi "sisters" who shared similar immigrant experiences.

The authors hope that the women's stories highlighted in this investigation have demystified a journey that, from one side of the ocean or the other, may seem as romantic as it does daunting. With this information Bangladeshis still residing in their homeland will have the opportunity to learn about eight women who have made this journey. Similarly, future immigrant Bangladeshi brides will now have access to the wisdom and insight of a few of their kinswomen who traveled before them. Perhaps this information will provide them with a context of what they may encounter in their own futures. Likewise, with this information immigrant Bangladeshi women's spouses and family members will be in a position to better understand and support them. Formal associations in the United States can use this information as a guide to assist immigrant Bangladeshi women who may desire further community involvement. Bangladeshi Associations, and similar formal organizations such as volunteer and community development agencies, are positioned to offer immigrant Bangladeshi women diverse options for support and professional development. Outreach to women from this population that would increase their opportunities to extend their community networks include: pairing them and their

families with established immigrant families, matching them with host American families, or providing them with information about volunteer opportunities in surrounding areas. These women should be viewed by their communities as valuable resources whose energy and enthusiasm could greatly contribute to the vitality of their new surroundings.

**Table 1. Participant Overview**

Name	Age at Marriage	Current Age	Type of Marriage	Number of Children	Religion	Education Before Immigration to USA	Current Activity
Nafeeza	30	31	Arranged	Pregnant	Muslim	Masters Degree	Student
Sadia	24	30	Arranged	0	Muslim	Left School	Housewife
Zara	18	23	Love	0	Muslim	Left School	Student and Employed
Naju	22	28	Love	1	Muslim	Masters Degree	Fast Food Restaurant Worker
Maya	26	52	Love	1	Hindu	Masters Degree	Head of Department
Farzaneh	26	46	Love	2	Muslim	Medical Degree	Mosque Volunteer
Nazma	22	32	Arranged	2	Muslim	Bachelors Degree	Computer Programmer
Ratri	25	36	Love	1	Muslim	Medical Degree	Housewife

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Completion of intermediate school or college which is approximately 12 to 14 years of schooling.

<sup>2</sup> Although most South Asian immigrant women are not primary immigrants, it is important to note here that the first South Asian woman immigrant in the United States was Kanta Chandra Gupta, of Delhi, who arrived in San Francisco in 1910. She became the first South Asian woman to apply for American citizenship. She was a wife and mother and later became a chiropractor (Das Dasgupta, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> The city's name will not be revealed in order to protect the identity of those who participated in this investigation.

<sup>4</sup> *Shalwar kameese* is traditional dress for women on the Indian subcontinent. The *shalwar* is a pair of pants and the *kameese* is a long blouse.