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# First -Generation Hindu Indian-American Undergraduates' Grief After Death of Grandparent(S) in India

Ramya Avadhanam

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**First-Generation Hindu Indian-American Undergraduates' Grief  
after Death of Grandparent(s) in India**

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College William & Mary in Virginia

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In Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Ramya Avadhanam

January 2018

**FIRST-GENERATION HINDU INDIAN-AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES'  
GRIEF AFTER DEATH OF GRANDPARENT(S) IN INDIA**

by

Ramya Avadhanam

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Approved January 2018 by

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Charles R. McAdams III, Ed.D.

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Tracy L. Cross, Ph.D.

## **Dedication**

To my inspirational grandparents (Nagabhushan Etur, Nagaratnam Etur, Ramesh Avadhanam, and Padmavathi Etur) whom I miss every day, losing you consisted of some of the most difficult moments of my life but challenged me to be reflective, thoughtful, and empathic towards others going through similar moments. Your words of wisdom, narratives of tenacity, and limitless care have left impressions on me that are priceless. I know your blessings are forever with me. I dedicate this study first and foremost, to you.

To my parents and greatest mentors, Venkatesh and Rama Avadhanam, your unwavering support and encouragement have been invaluable to me throughout my personal and professional journeys. Your unconditional love and acceptance of who I am at any given moment is why you are my safe space. Because of you, I have had the incredible privilege of spending numerous summer/winter breaks in India with Ammamma, Nani, and Thatha (maternal grandmother, paternal grandmother, and paternal grandfather). And your stories of Bhushan Thatha (maternal grandfather) have and continue to help me make sense of who I am. You have taught me the importance of culture and community. Also, you have modeled that anything can be accomplished when you put your mind to it and work hard. I have come this far because of the invaluable roles you have played and continue to play in my life. I love you and appreciate you boundlessly.

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together when we lost our beloved grandparents. Thank you for being by my side, always. I love you infinitely.

To my best friend, Chamari DeSilva, you have kept all my secrets and have kept me sane since we were 16 years old. I cannot imagine navigating any journey without you and dedicate my achievements to you.

To my brother-in-law, Dr. Karthik Shastri, and other family members, family friends, and friends, I cannot express enough my gratitude for your support from near and far. It is because of you that I do not feel alone in my journey. Thank you for being my village; I dedicate my research to you.

To the participants who courageously shared their personal narratives, thank you for your vulnerability and for trusting me. I dedicate this body of work to you. It is because of your willingness to participate that I am able to act as an agent of change and amplify the voices of our South Asian Communities.

“Young people need something stable to hang on to — a culture connection, a sense of their own past, a hope for their own future.”

— Jay Kesler

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## **Abstract**

The proposed study aims to capture the unique experiences surrounding grief of first-generation Indian-American undergraduate students. Tummala-Narra (2013) defines immigrants as having been raised in the country of origin and migrating to the United States in late adolescence or adulthood and first-generation as those born in the United States or arrived in the United States as young children. Research has shown that bereavement can have profound emotional health consequences for those surviving a loss (W. Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). Additional components such as loss of expectations, traditions, and culture (Price, 2011) may contribute to mental health challenges for the South Asian population that are often overlooked across the immigrant and first-generations (Tummala-Narra, 2013). The United States Census Bureau (2010) stated that the total U.S. population on April 1, 2010 was 308.7 million, out of which 14.7 million or 4.8 percent were Asian. South Asians (i.e., people from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal) were the fastest growing subgroup among the Asian population. (United States Census Bureau, 2007). Trends in Education shifted for Asians over time. In 1988, at least 38% of Asians had earned at least a bachelor's degree, whereas in 2015, 54% of Asians who were 25 years old or older had a bachelor's degree or higher (Ryan & Bauman, 2016) implying that there is a continued increase in the Asian undergraduate student population. Content includes a description of immigrant demographics, reasons for immigration, impact of immigration to the United States on family dynamics across generations, mental health stigma for this population, a review of the literature, gaps in the literature, theoretical foundation for the proposed study, purpose and relevance of the study, and future implications of this research.

**First-Generation Hindu Indian-American Undergraduates' Grief  
after Death of Grandparent(s) in India**

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Between 1980 and 1999, minority college enrollment increased by about 30% of the undergraduate student population (Sue & Sue, 2003). According to the 2012 Statistical Abstract by the United States Census Bureau, the number of foreign, non-immigrant students enrolled in colleges has increased 2.43 times over the past 30 years. As members of a scholastic institution, students at universities and colleges are under pressure to demonstrate strong academic performance. These institutions create an especially unique and unsupportive environment for students who have experienced significant loss (Taub & Servaty-Seib, 2012). Given such an upward incline in racial and ethnic diversity on campus in combination with the distinctive experience of grief, it is imperative to provide culturally sensitive counseling services to students since researchers attribute the underutilization of campus counseling services to culturally inappropriate counseling practices that led to a high premature termination rate of 50% after the first contact (Sue & Sue, 2003). This study is an exploratory attempt to build a more culturally sensitive understanding of the grief experience for first-generation Indian-American undergraduate students in the United States during the death of a grandparent living in India that can in turn help university and college counselors become more effective in helping their non-Caucasian college students during this particular time of need. For the purpose of this study, immigrants are defined as those born and raised in

their country of origin who migrate to the United States as adults. They face acculturative stressors such as language/communication barriers, separation from family and friends who remain in their native land, and adapt to new cultural norms. First-generation are those born in the United States or arrived at the United States as young children and face challenges related to navigating South Asian and mainstream American cultural values that often vary drastically between their parental home and their lives outside the home (Tummala-Narra, 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Overall, bereaved or grieving individuals learn how to effectively cope with loss and are resilient (Bonanno, 2004). Loss is inevitable and with it brings a variety of challenges. The National Vital Statistics Reports (Murphy, Xu, & Kochanek 2013) claim that 2,468,435 residents in the United States died in 2010 leaving their loved ones behind. College students are not immune to these losses (Kim, 2015). Unfortunately, college campuses are not always conducive to grieving (Varga, McClam, & Hassane, 2015). Grieving undergraduate students are geographically distant from their family and other regular support systems, may not receive adequate support from their peers, struggle to meet academic demands, and are surrounded by potentially unhealthy means of coping such as alcohol and drugs (Janowiak, Mei-Tai, & Drapkin, 1995; Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2010). Grief affects students in a variety of dimensions including emotionally, cognitively, spiritually, physically, behaviorally, and interpersonally (Balk, 2011; Neimeyer, Laurie, Mehta, Hardison, & Currier, 2008; Servaty-Seib & Hamilton, 2006; Walker, Hathcoat, & Noppe, 2012). Inattention to this commonly experienced phenomenon for college students has led to the grief experience becoming “a silent epidemic on

campus” (Neimeyer et al., 2008, p. 28). In addition, Asian-Indians do not seek support groups or broadcast their struggles with others for fear of social devaluation (Myers, 2006) further contributing to the ‘silence’ of the grief experience for Asian-Indian undergraduate students.

### **Justification for the Study**

Loss of expectations, traditions, and culture (Price, 2011) may contribute to mental health challenges for the South Asian population that are often overlooked across the immigrant and first-generations (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Like other Asian groups in the United States, South Asians underutilize mental health services due to a lack of access to culturally competent services and stigma against help-seeking behavior from individuals outside of the immediate family or established friends’ circle (Tummala-Narra, 2013). The death of a loved one is considered to be the most disruptive of all of life’s experiences (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) with the mode of death having a significant impact on the grieving process. When a death is sudden or violent, the griever not only has to process the loss (Horowitz, 1990) but they must deal with the traumatic nature of the loss (Redmond, 1996). When coupled with immigrant experiences and contrasting worldviews (Marsella & Christopher, 2004), the mourner’s capacity to grieve and cope can become challenged (Inman, Yeh, Madan-Bahel, & Nath, 2007). When grief, immigrant experiences, and contrasting views are additionally tethered to one’s experience as an undergraduate student, challenges can seem and feel insurmountable. By examining first-generation Indian-American undergraduate students’ narratives about the grief process losing a grandparent in India, researchers may gain a better

understanding regarding specific needs that can inform counselors in guiding treatment when working with this specialized population.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

Social constructivism is seen as an approach and worldview to qualitative research. Social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding and make meaning taking into consideration the world in which they live and work in (Creswell, 2014). The philosophical assumptions of social constructivism, as described by Crotty (1998), are as follows: Human beings construct meanings as they interact with the world they are interpreting. They base these meanings on historical and social perspectives (e.g., contextualizing culture). These meanings are social; therefore, they arise in and out of interaction with others. It is for these reasons that qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions seeking to understand the context or setting of the participant and utilize inductive reasoning to generate meaning from the data by way of themes. Over the past several decades, social constructivist theories attending to race/ethnicity have emerged (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). Constructivist approaches to education and career have been proposed as one way to work effectively with multicultural populations (Atwater, 1996; Constantine & Erickson, 1998; Stead, 2004). Because the theoretical underpinnings of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) relate so closely to social constructivism, this study lends well to its use.

The primary goal of IPA researchers is to investigate how individuals make sense of their experiences. It is assumed that people actively engage in interpreting the events, objects, and people in their lives (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). IPA has been informed by

three main areas of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Phenomenology is the primary theoretical underpinning of IPA and is a philosophical approach to the study of experiences that matter to us relating to being human (Dasein, literally meaning “there-being” as termed by Martin Heidegger) and how we might come to understand what our experiences of the world are like (Smith et al., 2009). Martin Heidegger, a student of fellow German philosopher Edmund Husserl who established the school of phenomenology, moved away from Husserl’s transcendental project and brought light to the beginnings of hermeneutic and existential qualities of phenomenological philosophy. While phenomenology uncovers meaning, hermeneutics interprets those meanings (Bäckström & Sundin, 2007).

Hermeneutics is the second theoretical underpinning of IPA (Smith et al., 2009) and looks for meanings embedded in common life practices that go beyond mere descriptions of core concepts and universal essences (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). These meanings are not always apparent to the participants but can be extracted from the narratives produced by them by the researcher(s). The researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of their experience; therefore, Smith and Osborn (2003) mention IPA involving a “double hermeneutic.”

The third influence upon IPA is idiography. The focus of idiography is with the particular in mind, which consists of a commitment to detail. Therefore, the depth of analysis must be thorough and systematic. There must also be a commitment to understanding how a particular experiential phenomenon, defined as an event, process, or

relationship, has been understood from the perspective of a particular people, in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009).

### **Purpose of the Study and Central Research Question**

The phenomenological inquiry, as part of uncovering meaning, articulates ‘essences’ of meaning in first-generation Indian-American immigrant undergraduate students’ lived experiences when their grandparent dies, or grandparents die, in India during their undergraduate journey in the United States. Using an IPA methodology that draws upon the fundamental principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, the focus is on students’ experience of grief from this life stage and its unique complexities/components that may contribute to the grief process. This perspective facilitates breaking through the silence surrounding grief experiences for this group; it assists in articulating and amplifying first-generation Indian-American students’ stories of loss. Methods of inquiry include phenomenological reflection on data elicited by existential investigation of first-generation Indian-Americans’ grief of a grandparent in India during their undergraduate journeys.

According to Smith et al. (2009), primary research questions in an IPA focus on people’s understandings of their experiences and are, therefore, open and exploratory rather than close ended and explanatory. In addition, these questions often include reflecting on the process rather than the outcome with a focus on meaning. The primary or central question for this study is: When you think about or reflect on your experience of your grandparent’s passing, what comes to mind, what were you aware of, and how did you process?



## **Research Approach**

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) state that in an IPA, participants are selected purposively to find a defined group for whom the research problem has relevance and personal significance. After obtaining approval from The College of William & Mary's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher identified eight interested participants through purposive sampling via the South Asian Student Association Facebook pages at various universities across the United States and then through utilization of snowball sampling. Interested individuals were directed through email to read over the informed consent to determine if they were appropriate for inclusion. Three of the eight interested participants matched the inclusion criteria and were interviewed for the study. Inclusion criteria consisted of participants being at least 18 years of age, having been either born in India or the United States, and been part of the American school system since they were in Kindergarten. Participants should have also experienced the loss of at least one grandparent in India during their undergraduate journey at a four-year institution while not living at home with their family.

Participants completed the informed consent either digitally or by hand. The informed consent outlined the responsibilities of the researcher and the participants, defined confidentiality, explained the process in which the study was conducted, and provided the exact questions being used in the interview to give time for thoughtful reflection and reduce potential anxiety. Furthermore, risks regarding unresolved grief were described for participants to be fully knowledgeable about potential triggers. Participants were provided with referrals to licensed counselors pertaining to help-seeking, if needed.

Data was collected using semi-structured individual interviews with each participant over Skype or in-person at a location of the participant's choosing to range in time from 30-60 minutes. Smith et al. (2009) describe the aim of the interview as being largely focused on facilitating an interaction with the participant to tell their own stories, in their own words; therefore, the main role of the researcher is to actively listen while the participant shares their narrative. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) mention that it is helpful to prepare an interview plan in advance when utilizing semi-structured interviews. Interview plans serve as a guide to facilitate a natural flow of conversation and allow for prompts to be used when some questions may be too general or abstract. The researcher formulated and used the same interview plan with all participants. All interviews were audio taped and conducted by the same researcher to ensure consistency. Participants were provided their transcripts and individual themes expressed via email to member check the accuracy of the collected data. Additionally, a peer review and cross-check were conducted by Dr. Monica P. Band who is a Counselor Educator and Supervisor at Marymount University. She identifies as a heterosexual bicultural cisgender female from Chinese-Catholic and German-Jewish descent, which informs her conceptualization of the participants. Dr. Band is familiar enough with South Asian culture that she may understand and pull cultural nuances but distant enough to maintain relative objectivity in her role for this study.

### **Researcher Perspectives**

I identify as a heterosexual Indian-American Hindu cisgender female. I come from a traditional family. My mother was born in Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and grew up in Devgiri (Karnataka). My maternal grandmother is from Manargudi (Tamil Nadu);

therefore, my maternal grandmother's side of the family is comprised of Telugu people settled in the state of Tamil Nadu. My father was born in Anantapur (Andhra Pradesh) and grew up all over Andhra Pradesh due to my paternal grandparents being District Educational Officers who inspect the quality of educational institutions. Rather normal to South Indian culture is the additional relationship connection between my parents; they are first cousins. My maternal grandfather is my paternal grandmother's older brother. That branch of the family is originally from Etur (Andhra Pradesh).

I was born in Mumbai (Maharashtra), India. My parents and I emigrated to the United States when I was 8 months old. Since then, I have experienced, first-hand, the challenges and beauty of being a first-generation Indian immigrant. My entire life has been a quest of meaning-making through past and present contexts in attempt to understand who I am. Moments of loss, especially pertaining to death, often lead to deeper questioning and introspection accompanied by increased feelings of frustration, confusion, and general wonderment regarding my role within the family system.

My interest in conducting death related studies for South Asians began from the lack of literature and support I experienced during the loss of my maternal grandmother at the age of 19. I was an undergraduate freshman at Virginia Tech at the time. Compared to the loss of my paternal grandmother at age 16 when I was still living at home, losing my maternal grandmother was much more difficult being that I was physically away from my family. My desire to expand research about the universally experienced phenomenon of grief integrated with my passion for expanding South Asian studies fits beautifully with the qualitative paradigm. The theoretical underpinnings of an IPA not only fit my conceptualization of how humans make meaning of experiences

because of my own experiences, but also allow for a strong foundation for future lines of inquiry to build from.

### **Limitations**

Despite gaining a deeper understanding through phenomenological inquiry of first-generation Indian-American undergraduate students' experience of grief when a grandparent in India passes away, some limitations came to light. Though IPA researchers aim for a homogenous sample (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012) and this study consisted of three cisgender female Indian William & Mary student participants between the ages of 20-21, the presence of cisgender male Indian student participants may have offered a different perspective especially within the context of gender roles during the grief process. The same can be said if participants were from other universities or colleges given that campus climates tend to vary; The College of William & Mary is nested within an affluent town and students from the university tend to have a collective build of confidence/privilege. Also, two participants are from the Indian state of Gujarat (North India) and one is from the state of Tamil Nadu (South India). All three participants identified as having been brought up in a Hindu home; a variety in religious backgrounds may lend to different themes/outcomes. Additionally, despite IPA studies ranging from one to fifteen participants, having more than three participants may have given opportunities to study and examine similarities and differences between individuals with added breadth in addition to the depth of the study. Access to a slightly larger, more diverse group of participants may yield richer, more detailed information from which to draw conclusions based on emerged themes. Pertaining to heuristics, changes in these factors may have contributed to greater generalizability.

Time limitations also impacted the study. Despite conducting detailed and thorough Skype and in-person interviews as well as follow-up member-checking via email with the participants, member-checking via Skype or in-person may have allowed for increased depth in the participants' responses to the themes. Additionally, utilizing more colleagues from a variety of ethnic backgrounds in the peer debriefing and member checking process may lead to increased confidence in the reliability and validity of the study. Further research is recommended to include more gender, university and college, and geographical diversity.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 has presented an overview of the phenomenological investigation into the experience of first-generation Indian-American undergraduate students as they experience the loss of a grandparent living in India. The problem statement, justification of the study, theoretical underpinnings, research approach, researcher perspectives, and study limitations were outlined in this section. The next chapter will provide a review of the literature relevant to this study.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

Chapter 2 gives a synopsis of what is known about South Asian demographics in the United States and reasons for immigration and acculturative concerns. Then the impact of emigration on the family dynamic is examined through the literature across three generations: elders left in India, the emigrated adult immigrant generation, and first-generation. Definitions of grief are discussed followed by what exists in undergraduate grief research. Finally, gaps in the literature address and support the utility of the current study.

### **Demographic Information**

The South Asian population (i.e., people from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) is the fastest growing Asian American subgroup in the United States of America (Masood, Okazaki, & Takeuchi, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). The implementation of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 lead to an increase of Asian-Indians emigrating to the United States (Baptiste, 2005; Dasgupta, 1998). Within a 10-year span, from 1990 to 2000, the number of Asian-Indian immigrants increased by 84% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). By 2007, Asian-Indians became the second largest Asian group in the United States at 18.6% of the Asian population with approximately two-thirds of this group immigrating after 1990 (Mehrotra & Calasanti, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

Behind China, India is the second largest country in the world comprised of seven union territories (Price, 2011) and 29 states as of 2014 due to the addition of Telangana (Srinivas, 2015). India's diversity also reflects in the languages spoken. Although English and Hindi are the national languages, there are 300 spoken dialects of Indian languages stemming from 18 distinctly different languages (Price, 2011). Although Hinduism is the dominant religion in India and is practiced by 81% of the Indian population, 13.4% practice Islam, 8% identify as Buddhist, 4% are Jain, 2.3% practice Christianity, 2% are Sikh, and 0.6% of the population identify as Jewish, Zoroastrian, or as people of the Bahai faith (Census of India, 2001; Price, 2011).

The caste system has been in existence for over 2,000 years and has religious elements that influence daily life (Mullatti, 1995). Although the caste system was abolished in 1950 by the Indian government, it continues to be conceptualized as an extension of the joint family and is utilized as a system of organization by putting people into different social strata bound together by specific occupations, customs, beliefs, and rituals. A person's social position is determined by heredity and the expectation often remains that people are meant to work, socialize, and marry within their own caste (Medora, 2007).

The Indian subcontinent comprises of multiple languages, religions, and cultural variations therefore Asian-Indians are a very diverse group (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997); however, the centric role of the family is consistent across the religions and regions in India (Price, 2011). Additionally, shared cultural values, a history of colonization, and similar physical features (e.g., skin color) contribute to this group being

viewed as a unified minority group in the United States (Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004).

### **Reasons for Immigration and Acculturative Concerns**

Better educational, economical, and employment opportunities as compared to one's native land are key reasons why Asian-Indian families choose to immigrate to the United States (Price, 2011). During the immigration process, each member of the family goes through their own acculturative process and, therefore, create and re-create their cultural identities incorporating their culture of origin and American societal norms and expectations (Prathikanti, 1997). According to Marin (1992), acculturation is a process of attitudinal and behavioral change willingly or unwillingly undergone by individuals resulting from contact with new cultures due to colonization, invasions, or immigration. Prathikanti (1997) stated that it is to be expected that acculturation gaps among family members form as part of this negotiation process. It is important to keep in mind that these conflicts happen in family systems that have strong emotional bonds, affection, and loyalty amongst each other (Das & Kemp, 1997).

### **Impact of Emigration on Family Dynamic**

Some families can bring elderly members to the United States, while others are unable to do so due to financial challenges (Price, 2011) such as coming from poverty, medical care expenses, or not being able to obtain visas. When an adult Asian-Indian immigrates to the United States, the structure of the complex family system changes and the well-being of the aging parents gets left behind; however, because of the extended family structure, Almeida (2005) describes Asian-Indian families as being more likely to maintain strong connections while on separate continents (i.e., elderly parents will visit



their children for up to 6 months at a time). Asian-Indian families share a sense of duty and obligation to their family of origin where the needs of the family are placed above the needs of individuals in terms of importance and priority (Medora, 2007).

### **Elders**

Miltiades (2002) examined the effect of a child's emigration on the lives of Asian-Indian Hindu parents who live in Calcutta, therefore expanding family studies of immigration by focusing on the experience of elderly Asian-Indian parents left behind when their adult children immigrate to the United States. The researcher recruited 29 participants utilizing snowball sampling. The theoretical framework used was the Cultural Specificity framework which posits that every culture provides a set of prescribed behaviors and norms which govern family life (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1979). This exploratory study may be among the first to focus exclusively on the effect of an adult child's emigration on non-immigrant parents by asking two questions: what impact does emigration of an adult child have on the family support system of aging parents in India, and how does the emigration experience impact the parent's psychological well-being? These questions are asked and interpreted within the cultural specificity framework.

Miltiades (2002) calculated descriptive statistics manually and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews was grouped using GSR\*NUDIST software. Miltiades explains that for the first time in their lives, some of the elders were not living in an extended family household which had been the tradition through their upbringing. In this study 33% of the participants had grown up in an extended family environment. Due to the tradition changing, several elders expressed pride that they did not need financial

support from their emigrant adult children. While it is a normal expectation in Indian families for older children, especially sons, to take on financial responsibilities of the entire family system, elders sometimes refused help expressing that they did not feel as though they were entitled to financial assistance from children when they lived separately from them as would normally take place if everyone lived and contributed within the same household. Although the small sample size and exploratory nature of the study are limitations in addition to the results not being described in great depth, this study does provide insight into common themes experienced by elders of an Indian family system who are unable to emigrate with their adult children.

Traditionally, elders are expected to play an essential role in the lives of their children and grandchildren as they age; however, both elders' and adult children's altruistic sense of sacrifice to live more successful lives and earn more financially for the family rationalize the decision to emigrate (Miltiades, 2002; Price, 2011).

### **Adult Emigrant Children**

Price (2011) examined the role of immigration in the lives of the adult emigrant children living in the Dallas, Fort Worth area of Texas. Snowball sampling was used to obtain 20 participants for the study. The researcher utilized the theoretical framework of Contextual Theory Perspective with a Phenomenological Approach. Contextual theory is an intergenerational theory and is based on the influences and impacts that an individual may have on the lives of others related to them because of the actions and decisions of the individual (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). It is appropriate when researching and exploring the world of Asian-Indians because their values are based upon maintaining good family relations and the importance of helping and supporting one

another, even if it involves suppression of one's own desires and self-sacrifice (Miltiades, 2002). Price (2011) conducted face-to-face interviews at an agreed upon location with Asian-Indian immigrants varying in ages from 26-47. Participants were asked a single question asking about their immigration experience personal narrative. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by themes found in the study. The three themes that emerged from the study were concerns surrounding fitting in, preserving tradition, and whether to stay in the United States long-term. Participants described feeling loss due to geographical distance and separation from one's culture.

Tummala-Narra (2013) described many immigrant women, who were raised in their country of origin and migrated in adulthood to the United States, as having faced acculturative stressors surrounding language/communication barriers, being away from established friends and family circles, as well as adapting to cultural norms of the host country, which impacts this generation's ability to fit into the host culture. Additionally, the responsibility of raising children who maintain connectedness to the culture of origin becomes especially important when disruptions are caused, and a sense of connection is interrupted with one's homeland (Akhtar, 2011; Tummala-Narra, 2004) which impacts the need to preserve culture.

In the study, Price (2011) found that adult emigrant children wanted to teach their own children native language(s) to pass down the tradition across generations and to provide their own children with the ability to communicate with family in India. Several participants discussed additional challenges surrounding food (e.g., being vegetarian or vegan) and questions regarding their children's autonomy/ability to make their own choices. In addition, concerns were expressed about the continuity of cultural and

religious traditions. Mothers are especially active in helping their children adapt to the host culture (Inman, Howard, Beaumont, & Walker, 2007) and for many South Asian women who work outside of the home, the demands and responsibilities of being a mother, spouse, and care-taker of the extended family remain (Tummala-Narra, 2013).

Navigating life both outside and within the home can be challenging due to the divergent cultural norms and expectations present between the host country and country of origin (Tummala-Narra, 2013). The loss of guidance from extended family can also be profound (Inman, Howard, et al., 2007). Tummala-Narra (2013) states immigrant South Asian mothers initially are willing to let go of some traditional values for more personal freedom; however, they find themselves aligning and identifying more with traditional roots similar to their own parents after relocating to the United States. Immigrant South Asian parents are typically aware of their children's bicultural conflicts, all the while, they are experiencing their own conflicts having to adjust to a new culture and navigate parenting in an unfamiliar environment (Inman, Howard, et al., 2007). Women in this generation face difficulties while navigating South Asian and American cultural values and expectations due to home life and life outside the home varying significantly (Tummala-Narra, 2013); therefore, the parent-child relationship is impacted. An additional struggle is how far they should move away from their parents' homes due to expectations of remaining close by and keeping relatively frequent contact with parents (Mehrotra & Calastani, 2010).

This leads to the theme of how this generation processes whether to stay in the United States long-term in the Price (2011) study. Factors that impact this decision-making process include being able to acquire citizenship status, feeling caught between

two worlds and having to navigate how to live authentically in each, familial obligations and ties that are woven through Asian-Indian culture as a strong thread of connection, ages of the children in order to have the least amount of negative impact on their identities and development, as well as the challenges of integrating back into life in India. Participants described being torn between worlds due to knowing that both cultures have their unique advantages and challenges. One such example participants provided is wanting to return to their homeland to care for aging parents while considering what is best for their American-born or American-raised children. Another example provided is the conflict between deciding to leave when American-born and/or American-raised children are young or to wait until they are fully grown and independent prior to returning to India. Despite only sampling Asian-Indian immigrants who lived in the U.S. for at least 1 year and not more than 15 years residing in a specific geographical area, single Asian-Indian immigrants being underrepresented, educated professionals with occupations that required degrees, more females than males, and the homogenous participant pool from this study, the experiences are supported by other studies in terms of the generalizability of the adult immigrant Asian-Indian's experience.

### **First-Generation**

Acculturation for this generation across different 'socialization contexts' can create obstacles for a smooth transmission of culture across generations and pose challenges for the development of bicultural competence (Saxena & Sanders, 2009). Though acculturation can aid in increasing skill development and promoting malleability within varying environments, it can also lead to identity confusion and internal conflict for this generation (Unger et al., 2002). Whereas American culture tends to encourage

individualism, Asian-Indians tend to be ‘allocentric’ meaning the sense of self and of family are integrated concepts (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002). The family unit is one of the most influential factors in one’s identity development (Tummala-Narra, 2013); hence, parents of first-generation Asian-Indian immigrant children in the United States tend to strongly endorse a belief in filial piety especially towards their parents or the children’s grandparents (Giles et al., 2003).

Iwamoto, Negi, Partiali, and Creswell (2013) conducted a phenomenological inquiry to find, list, and identify significant statements from each individual using the Van Kaam method to determine if the statements could be grouped together (Moustakas, 1994) from 12 first-generation Indian-Americans comprised of six men and six women from the San Francisco Bay Area and Southern California region. Half of the participants self-identified as being South Indian while the other half were from North India. Additionally, most of the participants grew up in middle to upper-middle class neighborhoods due to parents obtaining a college degree or higher. The age range of this sample was 19-34 years and education varied from having obtained undergraduate degrees to medical, doctoral, or law degrees. Although South Asians are a heterogeneous group, this group is often categorized and perceived as homogenous within the United States.

The theoretical framework used was Ibrahim et al.’s (1997) South Asian Identity Development Model. This model is one of the few conceptual models to explore factors that may potentially affect the racial and ethnic identity development of immigrant native-born South Asian-Americans. South Asian cultural values are derived from the sociopolitical and historical context of the Indian subcontinent. Ibrahim et al. contended

that as first-generation Asian-Indians adapt to mainstream U.S. culture, they undergo a dynamic process of racial identity formation through Conformity, Dissonance, Resistance and Immersion, Introspection, and Synergistic Articulation and Awareness (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993).

Results comprised of common themes pertaining to social reference groups, core values, turning points, self-concept and conflictual experiences, experience with racism and stereotypes, and continual development. After clustering the themes, context was provided regarding the setting in which the phenomenon was experienced. The researchers found that across childhood and early adolescence that within the social reference groups, participants' social group identified with the dominant/majority racial or ethnic group in their community therefore causing disconnect with their culture and parents' values. Regarding self-concept, participants expressed hiding their cultural side to fit in with peers, which created conflict with their parents who wanted their children to take an active role in community, cultural, and religious events; however, starting in high school and continuing through undergraduate years, participants began to challenge and break down perceptions of their ethnic culture and actively began to learn about it through parents and peers. Limitations of the study include a small sampling procedure and number of participants despite being within adequate sampling range for phenomenological studies, the possibility of being a biased sample due to geographical location of the sample, and most participants were highly educated, of middle to high socioeconomic status, and from ethnically diverse regions in the United States. However, despite these limitations, this study clearly supports the utilization of a theoretical conceptualization of the acculturation process across generations for Asian-Indians.

Although parent and peer relationships changed over the lifespan (Iwamoto et al., 2013), Saxena and Sanders (2009) studied Asian-Indian immigrant grandchildren through quantitatively exploring the quality of grandparent-grandchild relationship in Asian-Indian immigrant families and state that regardless of geographical distance and across all stages of life, this generation expressed consistently having positive and actively engaging relationships with grandparents through the phone. Saxena and Sanders (2009) sampled 112 Asian-Indian Immigrant grandchildren 10-16 years of age through non-random purposive sampling via contacting Asian-Indian associations in the United States for lists of Indian families and utilized a survey across the United States regarding the quality of their relationships with their grandparents in India. In total, 104 surveys of 250 were completed. The participant pool consisted of 42.9% male and 57.1% females; the average age of the participants was 12.73. Approximately 47.3% of the participants were born in India, 42.9% were born in the United States, and 9.8% were born in another country. One-third of the participants had lived in the United States for more than 10 years, 36.6% lived in the United States between 6-10 years, 12.5% resided for between 3-5 years, 8.9% for 2 years, and 5.4% for a year. About 7% visited India 10 years ago, 6.3% visited 3-5 years ago, 30.4% visited 2 years ago, and 56.3% visited a year ago, meaning families made the effort often to maintain relationships with elders in India. Out of 112 grandparents, about 59% utilized the postal service, 45% used e-mail, and 97.3% spoke to their grandchildren over the phone. Grandchildren expressed being most connected with the following grandparents: 36.6% to their maternal grandmother, 31.3% to their maternal grandfather, 12.5% to their paternal grandmother, and 19.6% to their paternal grandfather.



The study utilizes Symbolic Interaction (SI) theory which considers the role of self-processes and how they influence behaviors (Taylor, 1998). Taylor (1998) found that the quality of the grandchild grandparent relationship depends on the meaning grandparents have for their grandchildren and how their role expectations contribute to the development of those meanings. Saxena and Sanders's (2009) study also reveals how the role of a grandparent is perceived by a grandchild is determined both through social and personal interactions. Additionally, results indicated that health of the grandparent, role importance, and the amount of contact uniquely influence or contribute to relationship quality. The researchers conclusively state that acculturation was not a significant predictor of relationship quality between grandparent and grandchildren; it was stated to be a significant predictor of role importance.

Saxena and Sanders (2009) focused on wanting to explore three questions. The first question is how relationships are interpreted by Asian-Indian grandchildren with their grandparents despite geographical distance. Second, how is role importance perceived by grandchildren considering factors such as age, gender, acculturation rate of the grandchild, frequency of contact, and health of grandparent. The third question is regarding how those factors impact the quality of the grandparent grandchild relationship. A 14-item Family Strengths Scale was utilized to examine relationship quality through inquiring about frequency of contact and the method of contact. And the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans-II (ARSMA-II) was revised to measure acculturation of Asian-Indians. The use of these scales lead to the knowledge of specific cultural traditions grandparents expected from their grandkids which are attending family weddings, religious ceremonies, and wearing cultural clothing and/or accessories.

Because Indian families in India are more accustomed to the extended/traditional lifestyle, the impact of acculturation on relations between immigrant grandchildren and grandparents in India, warrants further inquiry.

### **The Role of Spirituality and Religion**

Death is an inevitable part of life. Conceptualizing death as a transition to another life helps people feel less anxious as compared to death being a definitive end (Chopra, 2006; Deshpande, Reid, & Rao, 2005). Rituals give people facing a loss something predictable and important to do at a time which is often confusing and lends to feeling helpless (Braybrooke, 1998; Crawley, Marshall, Lo, & Koenig, 2002; Eshleman, 1992). In India and other non-Western cultures, death is often described as good or bad (Emanuel & Emanuel, 1998; Thomas & Chambers, 1989). A “good death” is believed to have three qualities which are close relatives of the dead preparing for the event, no suffering occurred to the deceased via physical or mental trauma, and third, friends and families have said their goodbyes. When death occurs suddenly or in a traumatic manner, it is considered to be a “bad death” and is often accompanied by anxiety (Gupta, 2011). Therefore, as counselors aim to be culturally competent, it is important to consider the immigrant group’s pre- and post-death practices when providing support to families in times of grief, especially because their attitudes and beliefs differ from the cultural norms of the United States (Gupta, 2011).

## **Hinduism**

Human life is divided into four stages: dharma, karma, maya, and atman (Gupta & Pillai, 2006). These Hindu belief systems guide both cultural beliefs as well as pre- and post- death rituals for the Asian-Indian population. Dharma is defined as duty. Karma is the concept related to fate stating that one's behavior in past lives as well as in their present life will determine future events. According to karmic theory, illness, pain, suffering, and death are interpreted as the result of prior actions (Coward & Sidhu, 2000; Easwaran, 2007). Maya refers to distorted perceptions of values (i.e., attachment to wealth or fame) that prevent personal growth. Atman refers to conceptualizing one's self as part of a system bigger themselves such as being part of a family, community, or the universe (Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004).

Gupta (2011) conducted a study in Dallas Fort Worth at the Hindu Cultural Center utilizing a Hindu North Indian woman and a Hindu South Indian man. The Hindu North Indian woman was a social worker, spoke fluent Hindi, and networked often within the community. The Hindu South Indian man was a social worker, professor, and had the ability to engage elderly male participants. Three focus groups were used. The first consisted of 25 elderly Hindu senior citizens comprising of 14 men and 11 women, ranging in age from 60-78. They resided with their adult children within an extended family system home. Participants were from three regions of India: Punjab, Gujarat, and the South. Each participant in this group participated in a funeral ceremony of a close family member, friend, or relative within the last 5 years. The second group consisted of five middle-aged men and five middle-aged women where only some participants took

part in funerals in the United States or in India. The third group comprised of second generation participants, ages 15-20.

Interviews were taped and transcribed. The questions asked were guided by wanting to know the meaning of death for that individual, what beliefs and practices related to death, what beliefs relate to good death and an afterlife, and what are their specific pre- and post-death practices. The focus group for senior citizens was conducted in Hindi while the other groups were conducted in English, though all participants understood Hindi despite some speaking other Indian languages with their family (Gupta, 2011). Despite limitations of the study such as the small sample size, reliance on a singular setting, lack of consideration for acculturation levels, regional differences, and educational attainment in understanding death attitudes, the diversity represented in the group accurately reflected regional and linguistic differences among Hindu families. Practitioners need to be aware that all Hindu families in the United States will not respond in the same way (Doorenbos, 2003).

### **Gaps in South Asian Research**

Whether the problem includes marital problems or personal ones, Asian-Indians often hesitate to seek professional help due to being expected to be able to resolve issues on their own or do so with the help of their extended family. Denial of mental illness and stigma were listed as common barriers to seek services (Rastogi, 2007); however, when they do not have the benefit of an extended family network, especially within their host country, they may seek the services of family therapists (Baptiste, 2005; Rastogi, 2007). Marriage and family therapists in the United States are trained to practice models of therapy built on effectiveness for non-Asian cultures. Adapting a model of therapy that

encompasses the values and beliefs of the clients could be achieved through a better understanding of the culture and issues that may bring this population to therapy.

Cultures have their own sets of beliefs about bereavement and death. For example, how emotions are felt and expressed, the meaning attributed to loss, types and length of death rituals used, extent to which others are involved in the death rituals, and disposal of the body vary across cultures (Rosenblatt, 1997). When death or loss occurs outside of one's community of origin, there is a heightened need to apply beliefs and practices that are culturally meaningful. Furthermore, when the death is a traumatic one and there is no structure to assist with cultural practices, the bereavement process can become complicated (Inman, Yeh, et al., 2007). The research on pre- and post-death practices of the total U.S. population continues to underrepresent Asian-Indian immigrants despite the population increase of this group. In the United States, current estimates show that there are about 1.1 million Hindus from different parts of the world living in the United States (Saxena & Sanders, 2009). However, despite the increase in this population there is a severe lacking of empirical studies on cultural beliefs and meanings of death of pre- and post-death practices across generations of Asian-Indians in the United States, especially pertaining to the undergraduate Indian-American population who are often lumped together with other Asians or Indian international students.

Addressing undergraduate first-generation Indian-American relationships with parents, extended family members, siblings, or friends may provide knowledge which could enable others experiencing similar struggles to adapt more easily and efficiently to a foreign country experience. Additionally, it might aid professionals (e.g., counselors,

therapists) in gaining additional insight into their experiences, thus providing more effective help (Saxena & Sanders, 2009).

### **Definitions of Grief**

Prior to discussing grief literature, it is important to know how the literature defines variations of grief. M. S. Stroebe, Hansson, Schut, and Stroebe (2008) defined *normal grief* as an emotional reaction to bereavement that falls within expected norms. Typically, individuals experience a decrease in the intensity of grief symptoms (e.g., anger, sadness, shock, etc.) and an increase in accepting the death over time (Prigerson, Van Der Werker, & Maciejewski, 2008). For the most part, bereaved or grieving individuals, approximately 80% to 90%, are resilient and learn how to effectively cope with loss relatively quickly (Bonanno, 2004). Zisook et al. (2014) described normal grief as being equivalent to *acute grief*, meaning that the bereaved likely experience anger, sadness, guilt, yearning, and so forth, in combination with positive emotions associated with those they have lost. Followed by acute grief is *integrated grief*, where a drastic decrease in loss-related distress is experienced, increase in acceptance occurs, and one can conceptualize more and more what life looks like without the deceased. Those who are unable to move from acute grief to integrated grief within 6 months post-loss feel stuck in their mourning, according to Prigerson et al. (2008). The term describing that state of chronic mourning is *complicated grief* (Prigerson et al., 2008).

Complicated grief includes *abnormal grief*, *atypical grief*, *pathological grief and mourning*, as well as *traumatic grief*. Often these terms are used interchangeably (Schnider, Elhai, & Gray, 2007). Complicated grief is a clinically significant deviation and departure from sociocultural norms either pertaining to the additional length of time

in which it is experienced, the intensity of symptomology, and/or the level of impairment caused on the social, occupational, etc. areas is more apparent (M. S. Stroebe et al., 2008). One's closeness to the deceased or perceived closeness is noted as one of many risk factors that may contribute to complicated grief (Prigerson et al., 2008). Complicated grief can be further sub-categorized into chronic or prolonged grief, delayed or inhibited grief, and absent grief (M. S. Stroebe et al., 2008). M. S. Stroebe et al. (2008) state that those who experience *chronic or prolonged grief* experience intense grief symptoms without expected improvement over time. *Delayed or inhibited grief* are terms to describe when there is little to no sign of grieving early in the bereavement process but is experienced intensely later (Buglass, 2010). Contrary to those challenging reactions, *absent grief* is described as a positive reaction connected to resilience and attributed to strong social support, preparedness for the event, and so forth. (Bonanno, 2004; Prigerson et al., 2008).

Doka (2002) describes *disenfranchised grief* as losses that are not socially recognized; therefore, leading to the bereaved as feeling invalidated and/or isolated in their experiences. Socially unsanctioned grief may include unacceptable relationships such as affairs or may be considered trivial such as the loss of a pet.

Additionally, a term that is used in the literature is *anticipatory grief*. Anticipatory grief describes the grief experience when there is an expectation of impending loss (Overton & Cottone, 2016) and is often overlooked despite the experience being as intense as those that follow the sudden death of a loved one. This period, between terminal diagnosis and death, is when families need each other the most;

therefore, one can imagine that the undergraduate experience of loss, especially if the loss of a grandparent pertains to a terminal illness, warrants an even greater need for support.

### **Undergraduate Grief Literature**

Studies led by Balk (1997, 2008; Balk, Walker, & Baker, 2010) have suggested that 22-30% of the college undergraduates are within the first year of bereavement following the death of a family member or friend and that 25-48% are within 2 years of such a loss. If one quarter to one half of all college students are coping with bereavement-related stress, this issue is an important one to study, as grief can place students at risk of academic difficulties and can interfere with the developmental, occupational, and social demands of the college years (Balk & Vesta, 1998; Janowiak et al., 1995). Bergman (2006) reported that 13.5 million undergraduate students were enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States (Bergman, 2006). Considering the above statistics, three to four million college students were bereaved in that year alone and that number has likely since increased. Normal developmental tasks such as identity formation and working towards meaningful intimate relationships can be greatly influenced by bereavement. Bereaved college students coping with death related loss have been found to be at higher risk for numerous mental health problems including depression (Jacobs, Hansen, Berkman, Kasi, & Ostfeld, 1989).

Bereaved college students are at higher risk for insomnia than their non-bereaved peers and bereaved insomniacs reported higher complicated grief scores (Hardison, Neimeyer, & Lichstein, 2005). Additionally, Servaty-Seib and Hamilton (2006) found that bereaved college students suffered from more academic problems than their non-bereaved peers. Furthermore, Oltjenbruns (1996) found that bereaved college students



experienced secondary losses and incremental grief as their peers reacted with discomfort in encountering a bereaved individual.

The process of grief while in college is uniquely difficult for the bereaved: They are away from home (sometimes a good distance), have expectations to attend class on a regular basis, and have frequent interactions with individual from multiple social networks who may or may not be familiar with the deceased (Balk, 1996).

### **Deficiencies in Grief Literature**

According to Arnett (2008), there has been little research on emerging adult college students' connections to grandparents, despite the possible importance for their adult development. College students may need continued support from their grandparents; however, grandparents may no longer be able to provide the same support as before. These divergent life trajectories can result in changes in their intergenerational relationships. The simultaneous overlap of intergenerational changes between college age emerging adults and their grandparents has not been adequately examined, particularly in terms of the impact on college student development. Therefore, very little literature exists to describe the impact of the loss of grandparents in this populations' world.

### **Summary**

Chapter 2 provided an overview of current research and literature related to Asian-Indian demographic information. Reasons for immigration and acculturative concerns, the impact of emigration on a multi-generational family system in different geographical spaces, the role of spirituality and religion in death related loss, the current breadth of undergraduate grief literature, and deficiencies in the literature overall were also addressed.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The following chapter will explain the rationale for and design of this qualitative study. A description of the research questions, sample selection and site, participants, role of the researcher, bracketing, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis, and strategies for validating findings are given.

#### **Rationale for Using a Qualitative Research Paradigm and Design**

Creswell (2013) states that it is appropriate to use qualitative research when we need to explore a complex, detailed understanding of a problem. Qualitative research is conducted when seeking the role of contexts or settings during a participant's experience of the problem. Where "quantitative studies are generally more concerned with counting occurrences, volumes, or the size of associations between entities" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 1), qualitative research helps to explain them using rich, descriptive accounts of phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Creswell (2013) also states that we use qualitative research to develop theories for certain populations and samples when partial or inadequate theories exist, such as with the South Asian population, more specifically Asian-Indian, population.

The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce human experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. These human experiences relate to phenomena such as grief, anger, exclusion, and so forth (Moustakas, 1994). An

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has become a popular methodological framework in qualitative research. Studies based in IPA focus on examining how an individual makes sense and meaning of their life experiences. Though there is no agreed upon structure for how to design a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013), because an IPA methodology takes into account both participants' and researchers' interpretation of phenomena in the process of analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012) and enables the identification of shared and unique experiences in a small group of research participants (Wagstaff & Williams, 2014), this particular qualitative methodology lends well to this study. IPA methodology typically includes a detailed analysis of personal narratives and a presentation and discussion of experiential themes paired with the researcher's own interpretation which "is an expression of double hermeneutics in practice" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 1), described by Smith and Osborn (2003) as trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world.

### **Research Questions**

Most qualitative methodology rejects formulating hypothesis prior to conducting research and instead promotes an open, inductive approach to data collection and analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Choosing a research question is the first step, as mentioned in Smith et al. (2009), in creating an interview schedule. Primary research questions in IPA focus on people's understandings of their experiences; therefore, they should be exploratory and open, not explanatory and closed. They may reflect on the process and meaning rather than the outcome by means of concrete causes or consequences of events (Smith et al., 2009). The primary or central question of this study is: When you think

about or reflect on your experience of your grandparent's passing, what comes to mind, what were you aware of, and how did you process?

The next step is to think about the range of topic areas that you want your interview to cover. Smith et al. (2009) suggest 6-10 sub-questions. Questions suitable for an IPA study may focus on exploring thoughts, memories, associations, fantasies, and other mental phenomena along with sensory perceptions, coupled with their individual interpretations of meaning (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Figure 1 illustrates the interview schedule for this study.

Figure 1

Interview Schedule	
1.	Can you tell me about how grief is processed within your family system i.e. spiritual/religious lens, etc.? (Narrative Question) Prompts: What happens for each family member? How did you all cope? What are some of the similarities? How do you feel about these similarities and differences?
2.	What are the main similarities and differences between grief processes that you have noticed between cultures? (Contrast Question) Prompts: How do you feel about these similarities and differences?
3.	How might being an immigrant impact your experiences and your family's experiences? Prompts: How might being an immigrant impacted you and your family's experience of loss? (Evaluative Question)
4.	How might the experience differ if living elsewhere i.e. living at home in lieu of living on/near campus or in India? (Comparative Question) Prompts: How do you feel about this? How might the climate of your environment i.e. the geography, campus climate, majority ethnicity/dominant group at your school etc. impact how you view grief and loss?
5.	What does support look like on/near campus? (Descriptive Question) Prompt: colleagues, peers, friends, family, family friends, professionals i.e. counselors via in-person, phone, and/or social media How do you feel about this?
6.	What might you need for the support to improve? (Narrative Question) Prompt: colleagues, peers, friends, family, family friends, professionals i.e. counselors via in-person, phone, and/or social media How do you feel about this?
7.	How do you feel about your perceived closeness with your grandparent(s)? (Evaluative Question)

Prompts: maternal vs. paternal grandparents, frequency of communication, ability to visit/frequency of visits to India, language barriers

8. Can you tell me about any moral, ethical or familial responsibilities that you have been held to during this time? (Narrative Question)

Prompts: gender roles, birth order

### **Sample Selection and Site**

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological studies have ranged from a single participant to hundreds. Similarly, in an IPA there is no rule regarding how many participants should be included and have ranged from one to fifteen participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The sample generally depends on the depth of analysis, richness of individual cases, and how the researcher wants to compare and/or contrast single cases.

In qualitative research, the concept of purposeful sampling is used and means that the researcher selects individuals and sites that can intentionally inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of study (Creswell, 2013).

### **Participants**

Because the primary concern of IPA is with a detailed account of individual experience, IPA studies benefit from a more concentrated focus on a smaller number of cases. Smith et al. (2009) suggest between three to six participants as being a reasonable sample size for a student project using IPA and suggest that a sample that is too large is more problematic than a sample that is too small. IPA researchers usually attempt to find a homogenous sample for whom the research question will be meaningful. Sampling must be theoretically consistent with the qualitative paradigm, in this case with IPA's orientation; thus, samples are selected purposively due to being able to offer a research

project insight into a particular experience (Smith et al., 2009). Participants were recruited through Facebook group pages of undergraduate organizations across the United States such as the South Asian Student Association; therefore, offering year-round access to this population.

Seven participants were recruited directly through The College of William & Mary's South Asian Student Association Facebook page. An eighth participant from The University of Virginia was recruited via snowball sampling. Interested individuals were directed to read over and sign the informed consent; three participants met the inclusion criteria of the study and/or actively replied to the email communications. Inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years of age, having been either born in India or the United States, and been part of the American school system since they were in Kindergarten. Participants should have also experienced the loss of at least one grandparent who lived in India during their undergraduate journey at a four-year institution in the United States while living outside of their family home (e.g. on campus or off campus housing).

Moustakas (1994) stated that data collection concludes once saturation is reached and redundancy is noted in participant experiences. In this study, redundancy appeared in the third interview and, therefore, saturation was met.

### **Setting**

Creswell (2014) recommended a quiet space, free of disruptions or distractions where audiotaping can take place. Participants were given the option of utilizing Skype or meeting in-person. Two of the three participants opted for in-person interviews in the researcher's apartment complex and The College of William & Mary's SWEM library

respectively, while, due to geographical distance from campus, the remaining participant chose Skype as the interview avenue. The choice of settings was given considering confidentiality and to cater as much as possible to participants' comfort levels.

### **Role of Researcher**

Smith et al. (2009) state that the researcher will not necessarily be aware of all their preconceptions in advance; therefore, reflective practices and a cyclical approach to bracketing are mandatory. The hermeneutic cycle consists of looking at the whole, which is the researcher's ongoing biography, and the part which is each encounter with a new participant. Smith (2007) describes the researcher starting from a position in the circle influenced by their own preconceptions and shaped by their own experiences and expertise, then moving the focus from the researcher to the participant's experience. The researcher plays a dual role as both being like and unlike the participant; therefore, illustrating how IPA involves a double hermeneutic (Smith, 2004).

### **Bracketing**

This concept is heavily debated among phenomenologists (Finlay, 2002) and refers to two objectives. The first is to see directly by means of putting aside sensory experience to tune into others' sense making and the second is to put aside preconceptions to engage in the sense making process (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Pure phenomenologists argue that it is impossible to see directly and put aside at the same time; however, in IPA, bracketing is used in both ways (Giorgi, 2010). It is contended that bracketing facilitates deeper levels of reflection for the researcher during the interpretation of data (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Smith et al. (2009) refer to an *audit trail* as providing evidence of quality and validity during the process of data analysis through transparency. Elements of transparency through bracketing include annotated transcripts and journals that enable active learning and reflection upon that learning (Thorpe, 2010). Brocki and Wearden (2006) state that validity of the final analysis is, in part, determined by personal analytical work done at each stage of the procedure. Bracketing through journaling allows for transparency to be achieved.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Smith et al. (2009) describe simply talking about sensitive issues as potentially constituting harm for any participant group; in this study, there is risk of re-triggering thoughts and feelings pertaining to the grief experience. It is for this reason that obtaining informed consent from participants is crucial and necessary (Smith et al., 2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), it is important to include an explanation of what to expect from an interview, mention the inclusion of verbatim extracts in published reports, and note that anonymity is all that qualitative researchers can offer. To say that something is confidential is to say that no one else will see it; this is not the case when the goal for studies is to be published. Language construction and composition of the informed consent form is important especially while presenting the option to withdraw from participation. Rather than offer a right to withdraw at any time, Smith et al. (2009) suggest offering the right to withdraw up to the point at which either data analysis begins, or publication takes place. In this study, the right to withdraw until data analysis begins was offered and informed consent as well as oral consent of participation was revisited at the beginning of each interview. Discussing the possibility of unanticipated emerging



sensitive issues is considered good practice (Smith et al., 2009) and the researcher opted to share the interview schedule with potential participants prior to obtaining consent as well.

Because IPA studies are frequently concerned with existential issues, it is critical for the interviewer to monitor how the interview is affecting the participant through their verbal and nonverbal reactions. The use of counseling skills, due to the researcher being a professional counselor, may be useful during this time to support the participant and/or the interview can be stopped to provide professional referrals as well as resources. A member check/review of the transcription and themes for each individual case took place via email and served as a check-in point to inquire about how the participants are feeling since the interview.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Semi-structured one-on-one, in-depth interviews were conducted in this study due to the researcher's primary concern in an IPA being to elicit rich first-person descriptions and accounts of experiences and phenomena. These interviews were conducted either in-person or via Skype. Each interview began with obtaining consent to participate and have the interview audio recorded. The interview questions followed the sequential order as per the interview schedule. All audio recordings were manually transcribed by the researcher. Upon completion of each interview transcription, the researcher bracketed experiences using reflective journaling and pulled themes from each individual transcription. All participants were then offered copies of their transcripts and themes associated with their narratives pulled by the researcher to verify accuracy of the data. All three participants stated that their transcriptions and themes were accurate.

Additionally, they provided further detail in response to the researcher's themes explaining how the theme impacts themselves and/or their family systems providing more context for the researcher to reflect on using bracketing.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

In general, IPA provides a set of flexible guidelines which can be adapted and molded by researchers based on their study's objectives. During the analysis portion of an IPA framework, researchers are expected to fully immerse themselves in the data. Meaning, it is recommended for the researcher to step into the participants' shoes as much as possible (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) explain that "IPA aims at giving evidence of the participants' making sense of phenomena under investigation, and at the same time document the researcher's sense making" (p. 6). Thus, the researcher is constantly moving between *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) perspectives.

The initial stage of data analysis in an IPA involves reading the transcript and listening to the audio recordings of the interviews multiple times. This encourages the researcher to dive into the experience full-on and may lend to new insights with each repetition. For this study, the researcher personally transcribed the interviews in hope of delving even deeper. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) state that at this stage, the researcher can note down observations, reflections, thoughts, or comments about the interview experience and content. The notes may address language use, context, and participant characteristics such as gender, age, social status, etc. and highlight certain sentiments through identification of key phrases.

The next stage consists of the researcher working primarily from notes, rather than transcripts. The aim of this step is to turn notes into emergent themes through creating concise phrases. These phrases are grounded in the details of the participants' experiences but, also provide insight into the researcher's conceptualization of the participant's narrative (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

From there, the researcher looks for connections between the emergent themes and clusters them together according to conceptual similarities. Each cluster is then given a descriptive label and referred to as a superordinate theme. Some themes may be dropped at this stage pending whether it is substantiated enough in the narratives or if they do not fit well with the emerging structure. A final list includes subthemes under each superordinate theme (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

### **Strategies for Validating Findings**

Creswell (2014) states that qualitative validity means that the researcher will take the appropriate steps to check for the accuracy of the findings by utilizing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and projects (Gibbs, 2007). Validity strategies that will be utilized in this study are member checking, a rich description to convey the findings, clarifying researcher bias via bracketing cyclically, presenting negative or discrepant information countering themes in the study, and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014). Member checking consists of consulting the participants themselves during analysis and is particularly helpful when a researcher is coding solo (Saldaña, 2016) and peer debriefing involves locating a person who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the study resonates with people other than the researcher

(Creswell, 2014). In this study, member checking took place via email communication during the analysis portion of the study.

Reliability strategies for this study included checking transcripts to make sure that obvious mistakes are avoided during transcription, ensuring that no shifts occurred in the definition of codes, and utilizing another person to cross-check codes for intercoder agreement which involves assessing whether another coder would code similarly to the researcher (Creswell, 2014).

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 consisted of an overview of the study's design methodology through various descriptions. These descriptions consist of the rationale for qualitative inquiry, research questions, sample selection and site, role of the researcher, bracketing, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis, as well as the strategies for validating findings.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

Chapter 4 describes the findings of this study. The study's primary or central research question was, "When you think about or reflect on your experience of your grandparent's passing, what comes to mind, what were you aware of, and how did you process?"

Sub-questions for the study were:

1. Can you tell me about how grief is processed within your family system i.e. spiritual/religious lens, etc.?
2. What are the main similarities and differences between grief processes that you have noticed between cultures?
3. How might being an immigrant impact your experiences and your family's experiences?
4. How might the experience differ if living elsewhere i.e. living at home in lieu of living on/near campus or in India?
5. What does support look like on/near campus?
6. What might you need for the support to improve?
7. How do you feel about your perceived closeness with your grandparent(s)?
8. Can you tell me about any moral, ethical or familial responsibilities that you have been held to during this time?

Detailed explanation of the research site, analytical method, individual textual descriptions as defined by Moustakas (1994), emergent themes, and superordinate themes

### **Research Site**

Interviews were held in varied spaces (e.g., the researcher's apartment complex, a study room at The College of William & Mary's SWEM Library, and from home via Skype respectively) based on the participant's preference, which was usually influenced by ease of accessibility for a college student (e.g., owning a car) or geographical location (e.g. having moved back to parental home after recent graduation). Hanna (2012) states that the use of modern software, such as Skype, is the most feasible alternative to face-to-face interviews and challenges the criticisms associated with losing visual and interpersonal aspects of interaction with the participant.

### **Analytical Method**

As stated in Chapter 3, this study is modeled off IPA guidelines outlined by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012). First, repetitious listening and reading of the audio recording and transcript took place. In this study, the researcher transcribed each participant interview. Second, the researcher notated observations and/or reflections. During this time, significant statements were highlighted. Third, the researcher worked off notes to pull emergent themes from individual transcripts. Fourth, the researcher grouped similar concepts to seek understanding about the relationships between them leading to the creation of clusters. These superordinate themes or clusters were then labeled.

Participant verified emergent themes within each case are described after each respective participant description in the order in which they presented within the

transcription. After clustering the emergent themes, peer debriefing and a cross-check took place to ensure validity and reliability of the superordinate themes that presented within all three participants' narratives.

### Participants

Three participants were interviewed independently, based on convenience of schedule, over the course of a month. Table 1 includes a chart of participant descriptors. Following that, an in-depth description of the participants and themes that came to light during their individual narratives will be shared.

Table 1 Participant Descriptors

Participant	Undergraduate	Paternal	Maternal	Language	Birth Order	Time of	Extended
Religion	Year that Loss	Side Indian	Side	Spoken at	(Siblings)	Immigration/	Family System
and/or	was	Origins	Indian	Home		Emigration	Yes/No
Spiritual	Experienced	City (State)	Origins			Father, Mother,	Members
Orientation	(Current Year)		City (State)			and/or Participant	
1	Junior (Senior)	Chennai	(Karnataka,	English	Eldest of 2	Adulthood, High	No
Hindu		(Tamil	raised in the		(Younger	School with her	
		Nadu)	state of		Brother)	Parents who moved	
			West			back later in life,	
			Bengal)			n/a – born and	
						raised in the U.S.A	
2	Freshman	(Gujarat)	(Gujarat)	English,	Eldest of 2	Adulthood,	Yes
Hindu	(Senior)			Gujarati	(Younger	Adulthood, n/a -	Paternal
					Brother)	born and raised in	Grandparents
						the U.S.A	

3	Summer After Sophomore Year (Recently Graduated, May 2017)	Ahmedabad (Gujarat) Rural Area	Ahmedabad (Gujarat) City	English, Gujarati	Eldest of 3 (Younger Sisters)	Adulthood, Adulthood, at 6 years old.	Yes Paternal Grandparents
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### **Descriptions of Participants**

A detailed account of each of the three participants will be provided including unique emergent themes substantiated through their narratives and feedback given during the member-check portion of the analysis. Following a discussion of each case, superordinate themes evidenced across all cases will be presented.

#### **Participant 1**

Participant 1 is a 21-year-old senior at The College of William & Mary. She has a younger brother and is, therefore, the elder of two children. Participant 1 was born and brought up in the United States; however, her parents emigrated to the country at different developmental periods of their lives. Her father was born and brought up in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, while her mom was born in the Indian state of Karnataka and brought up in the state of West Bengal. Currently, her family lives in the state of New Jersey.

Participant 1’s paternal grandfather passed away during her junior year of her undergraduate journey. She describes her experience as “something that we had kind of foreseen months before because his health was declining” due to his Alzheimer’s diagnosis; lending to the belief that she and her family were experiencing, in part, anticipatory grief. From sharing her personal narrative about her grief process, many



emergent themes appeared that were unique to her experience. The next section will describe these themes.

**Emergent themes (Participant 1).** The following themes were unique to this participant's interview: Early Emigration, Carrying Burdens Alone, and Rituals Appeasing Helplessness.

*Early emigration.* Participant 1's father emigrated to America when he was in adulthood, whereas, her mother emigrated with her own parents at High School age. Participant 1 described this difference as having tremendous impact on how she grew up. When she expressed wanting to be more Indian, her mom encouraged her to be more American to avoid being ridiculed at school and to aid in the acclimating process. Participant 1 stated that her mom shared stories about two neighbor Indian girls, one was Americanized and popular, the other was "very Indian" and teased at school. She described her mom's advice as having given her "a skewed perspective of being an Indian girl" because of her mother's own internal struggle on how to balance the Indian and American pieces.

According to Bacon (1999), Participant 1's mother was adhering to what the cultural/ethnic identity rhetoric is for first-generation Indian-Americans, even though she is of the immigrant generation. Through the skillful use of American attributes, first-generation is supposed to maximize educational and economic opportunities but remain Indian at the core of one's self. The American persona is appropriate for school, but the Indian true self governed one's presence at home and within the community.

Heinrich (1991) states that humans are capable of simultaneous individual cultural multiplicity. In India, there are two separate cultural systems, a cosmopolitan system and

a traditional system. Many individuals switch between these different cultures frequently and at short notice. This simultaneous individual cultural multiplicity and cultural code-switching allow the co-existence of the two cultural systems. In addition, this reduces the possibility that one of these cultures will displace the other. Based on the results of this study, it appears Indian-Americans are also competent in the simultaneous individual cultural multiplicity between a cosmopolitan American system and a traditional Indian system.

Participant 1 described her experience as being American at school while being Indian at home by way of family temple visits on Sunday, cooking and eating Indian food, and learning a form of traditional classical Indian dance called Bharatanatyam, among other things.

Participant 1 goes further to say:

She put me in Indian Classical Dance, however, was skeptical about me wearing jewelry with the Om symbol on it, putting pictures of God in my locker, and wearing my hair in braids. She was afraid that it would cause bullying for me and pushed me to live a more “American” lifestyle. It was late high school and early college that I had found the perfect balance and she fully accepted it.

Maisuria (2003) explains that children of South-Asian immigrants are socialized into two cultures. The first is the culture of the family and the second is the culture of larger American society. These cultures often pose different systemic demands on the first-generation; therefore, these identity crises are often resolved by one of the following three options. The first option consists of the individual identifying with one culture and completely rejecting the other. The second option entails the individual accepting and

identifying with both cultures through a well-balanced, integrated cultural identity. The third and final option is one where an individual is unable to choose between which culture to identify with and, therefore, stays in a conflicted identity status.

Participant 1 also described the unique role of language in her family. Because her mom grew up in West Bengal and spoke Hindi and Bengali instead of her mother tongue of Tamil, and despite dad's fluency in Tamil, there was no push from either of her parents to learn or speak any Indian languages. Finally, Participant 1 describes her relationship with her maternal grandparents to be stronger due to personality types and emotional expressions. However, the researcher is curious to inquire more about this given that Participant 1's maternal grandparents lived in the United States for 10 years prior to moving back to India. The researcher is curious regarding whether it is emotional expression and/or commonality regarding familiarity of Western culture that binds these bonds at a deeper level?

*Carrying burdens alone.* Participant 1 expressed being an emotional person and often being overwhelmed by her feelings. She mentioned that "I've always thought that, okay, I should not burden other people with my own problems because they don't need to deal with that," but "if I keep my emotions bottled up inside, it'll severely affect my mental health." "It causes a whole lot of problems not only for myself but for other people around me." Even in her description as to why she should change how she handles dealing with difficult situations, Participant 1 displays wanting not to burden others as being the primary drive for practicing self-care. She, like the researcher, wonders how much of burden carrying could be tied to Hindu cultural/spiritual/religious teachings pertaining to doing your *dharma* or duty. However, Participant 1 does describe

her parents as being “extremely wonderful people” who “hated burdening other people with problems.” It is for this reason that they waited to share the moment of Participant 1’s paternal grandfather’s passing until her responsibilities/day was out of the way.

***Rituals appeasing helplessness.*** Participant 1 described rituals as cross-culturally appeasing feelings of helplessness surrounding loss. She states:

In our family, we have a diverse range of people. We have people ranging from those who believe that every single ritual is important and has a meaning to those who believe that rituals are not really important and that one should move on with their life. My paternal grandfather was actually exactly like the latter. He even said to my father that he didn’t want his passing to bring on “unfair” rituals i.e. not attending any celebrations for the year, not going to temple, spending lots of money on minor rituals here and there. My paternal grandmother on the other hand was the exact opposite. My family and I are somewhat in the middle so for the year we had his picture up and garlanded it and did certain rituals at home since his passing. However, we did go to celebrations, parties, and temple that year as well.

## **Participant 2**

Participant 2 is a 21-year-old senior at The College of William & Mary. She has a younger brother and is, therefore, the elder of two children as well. Participant 2 was born and brought up in the United States. Both of her parents were born and brought up in Gujarat in nearby villages Nadiad/Vidyanagar and emigrated to the United States prior to having children to provide better opportunities for their future kin. Currently, her family lives in the state of Virginia; more specifically Richmond.

Participant 2's maternal grandmother passed away during her freshman year of her undergraduate journey. When asked about her grief experience she described it as one of a "weird dissonance kind of feeling where you're like, 'What do I do?'" A singular emergent theme was taken from this participant's personal recollection that was unique to her grief process and will be shared.

**Emergent themes (Participant 2).** Participant 2 briefly brings to light the varying degrees of closeness with family and family friends within Indian culture from her experiences.

*Degrees of closeness.* During the member-checking process, the researcher presented observations regarding the participant's view of family structure and relationships in relation to it. Participant 2 mentioned that Indian families are fundamentally family oriented, however the levels of closeness within this large structure vary. For example, a relationship with a specific aunt or uncle may be completely different than degree of closeness with another. This can be applied to family and friends as well. To this point, the participant responded with the following:

Yeah, we sometimes keep our family friends at the same level of our family and it's just so hard to keep up with everyone! And, then maintaining that relationship and having the same level of grief for each member is sometimes not feasible.

### **Participant 3**

Participant 3 is a 21-year-old recent graduate from The College of William & Mary. She has two younger sisters; therefore, she is the eldest of three. Both of her parents were born and brought up in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Her dad grew up in a rural area right outside of Ahmedabad while her mom grew up in the city proper identifying as upper middle class. Participant 3 was born in Gujarat and emigrated to the United States with her parents at the age of 6. Currently, her family lives in the state of Virginia; more specifically Herndon.

Participant 3's maternal grandfather passed away during the Summer after her sophomore year of her undergraduate journey. Her grief process varied from the other participants in that she was home for the holidays when she and her family received the news of her grandfather's death. From her narrative, two emergent themes unique to her was brought to attention and is described as follows.

**Emergent themes (Participant 3).** Participant 3 touches upon two unique emergent themes. The first is that of delayed/inhibited grief and the other pertains to her experiences as a third culture kid.

*Delayed/inhibited grief.* Delayed/inhibited grief occurs by showing little to no symptomology or signs of grieving early in the bereavement process, but intense experiences of grief take place at a later time. Participant 3 said:

I feel like I haven't entirely processed it. I'm definitely someone who processes grief in a really logical way. And for me, I haven't been back to India since two years before his passing...so, it just kind of feels like, I know logically that he's

no longer there but, I think the next time I go back to my grandmother's house which might be next year, it's definitely going to hit me.

Participant 3 also described that during times of difficult adjustment she usually channels her energy into something else. She stated:

I had a really hard time making friends in elementary school cuz I had an accent and my hair was weird...so, when I moved, I had just started becoming popular for whatever that meant at that age. I really resented my parents for making us move from Herndon because I felt like I had to start all over again. At that point, there was a really huge shift in my academic performance where I just was like "Screw it. I'm going to do well in school and put all my energy and effort into that so that I can focus on that." I think I've done that throughout my life; really compartmentalize.

In this case, focusing on academics served as a way of coping. Therefore, academic push came from herself rather than from the family which tends to present more often as a recurring theme in Indian families.

***Third culture kids.*** Gilbert (2008) defines a third culture kid (TCK) as a person who accompanies their parents to live all or part of their childhood outside the country for which they hold a passport. Because Participant 3 was born and spent a few years of her life in her native country, she falls under the category of a TCK. Often a TCK identifies as part of the culture they live (e.g., being American) but maintain psychological and emotional ties to their native land (e.g., India). Sometimes, they dissociate with their country of origin and identify with the country they live in. Consequently, a TCK turns into a "cultural chameleon" in the process, meaning they

build relationships with all culture while not having full ownership of any (Gilbert, 2008). As children learning to live between and among cultures, a TCK's sense of belonging is often in relationship to others of similar background, not to a particular culture or country. Participant 1 and Participant 2 expressed similar sentiments, forming the superordinate theme of "Feeling Othered," which elicits the question and need for further research regarding whether the TCK experience can be generalized to first-generation immigrants as well.

### **Superordinate Themes and Subthemes**

Superordinate themes are ones that are experienced and common across all the conducted interviews. Listed in no particular order are the six superordinate themes and respective subthemes, in parentheses, that were extracted by the researcher as well as the designated peer debrief and cross-check consultant from the collective experiences of these three participants: Collectivistic Thinking (Grief Impacts the Family System), Geographical and Emotional Distance (Worlds Apart, Mobility and Perceived Closeness, Level of Guilt Experienced, and Frequency of Communication), Birth Order and Gender Roles, Feeling Othered, Timing of Loss (for the Bereaved Participant and Parents Sharing News), and Preservation of Culture (Cultural Identity Development, Code Switching, Adherence to Religion/Spirituality). Each theme will have a concluding statement pertaining to the takeaway for counseling clinicians when working with this population.

#### **Theme 1 – Collectivistic Thinking**

A collectivistic culture fosters interdependence and group harmony through conformity to group priorities and expectations, all the while inhibiting self-identity, separateness, and individuality (Sankar-Gomes, 2005). All the participants expressed



prioritizing according to the needs of the family system whether that entailed having to attend to the parental and/or sibling grief process(es) while simultaneously experiencing the inhibiting of their own grief process.

Participant 1 stated:

I think looking back, I went through grief but not because I was personally upset by what [my grandfather] was going through but because of what my dad had to go through when he had to see his father's health declining.

Participant 2 described her experience as being similar:

My mom is very close with my grandmother but there was a difference between my paternal and my maternal where my paternal grandparents lived with us but my maternal didn't. So, my mom was very much attached to her since she was so far away and that just caused her to be more sad because she had to book a flight in order to hope to catch when my grandmother was passing... so, instead of being focused on my mourning, it was detracted because I didn't have the ability to know her and then compared to my mother who was completely depressed, I can't even be there to comfort her so it was such an awkward moment because it's my grandmother, I should be so sad and I am but I lack the level of mourning I would if my paternal grandmother passed away.

Clinicians should keep in mind that one person's grief process may be connected to the grieving of other family members within the system. If grief and loss are only being addressed within the context of the individual and not the whole, the needs of the individual and family may not be appropriately addressed. In addition, some of what

Participant 2 described also overlaps with some of the qualities of the next subordinate theme, Geographical and Emotional Distance/Mobility.

## **Theme 2 – Geographical and Emotional Distance**

All three participants vividly described how geographical distance from their nuclear families due to being at college and from their grandparents being in a different country impacted them in a variety of ways. The following subthemes are factors that were all extracted out of this concept.

**Worlds apart.** In terms of their families' grieving process, all three participants discussed the challenges of trying to support their nuclear family from campus through phone calls. Participant 2 said, "I would've been at home, helping my mom through this, being there for her as opposed to just calling and checking up on her." She also described the difficult nuances (e.g., for her mom) of travel that need to be navigated to be able to be present for last moments and/or funeral arrangements when important family members live so far away/being less easily accessible.

In terms of their own grieving process, all three participants talked about the challenge of being able to travel to India for the funeral rites when a grandparent in India passes away. Though Participant 1 was able to Skype in for the rites and rituals, she expressed how difficult it was to support her father who traveled to India for them; since her mourning stemmed from her father's, this created disruptions in her own grieving process. Participant 2 described her own internal conflict of wanting to travel to India for closure but not being able to due to academic responsibilities. Participant 3 said, "I feel like distance is just really hard, especially hard when it's not just like, 'Oh my

grandfather lives in a different state.’ No, he lives across the world.” She also stated the following related statement:

I’m sure when I go back to India...when I go back to his house and I go into his room or something or I see something of his, like a relic, I’m sure that will be something that is emblematic of him and his life, but it won’t feel like closure.

There’s something about not seeing the body after he passed that doesn’t make it feel real.

Participant 3 describes this delayed/inhibited grief experience with a self-created phrase, “phantom grief.”

**Mobility and perceived closeness.** Participant 1 described the frequency of grandparents’ visits. Her paternal grandparents’ health was not the best, so, while they visited her for the first five to six years of her life, they could not travel afterwards; therefore, she and her family had to frequent to India more often (e.g., traveled once every two years) to maintain those bonds. While the family’s trips served as time to spend with both sets of grandparents, her maternal grandparents loved to travel and visited them every year. For this reason, Participant 1 describes her relationship with her maternal grandparents as being “closer.” Therefore, when her paternal grandfather passed, it was a tremendous loss, but would have been on a deeper level had it been on her maternal side.

Participants 2 and 3 provided detailed accounts on how living in an extended family household impacts perceived closeness as well. Participant 2, since her birth in the U.S.A, has lived with her paternal grandparents. Participant 3 has also lived with her

paternal grandparents since being born and spending a few years in India, then emigrating to the U.S.A with her parents and grandparents. She said:

Grandparents passing who live with you is always going to be different than grandparents who are across the world. So, I feel like if my paternal grandmother who lived with us passed away, I'm not as close with her as I was with my maternal grandfather and grandmother who live in India, I feel like that would feel more present because she lives with us and she is a part of our day to day lives.

**Level of guilt experienced.** When considering the above subthemes, participants experienced grief caused by multiple reasons. These reasons include but are not limited to being unable to attend funeral rites, wanting to provide more tailored support for family members during this time of grief, and not having been able to visit grandparents as frequently due to academic responsibilities and/or difficulty in terms of travel.

**Frequency of communication.** If grandparents did/do not live with or were unable to travel to their children and grandchildren, all three of the participants' parents placed a heavy emphasis/push to maintain connectedness through Facetime and Skype video chatting software platforms, phone calls, and letter writing.

As clinicians work with undergraduate Indian-American students about grief and loss, examining the role of geographical distance and its impact on emotional closeness is vital in understanding their mourning process.

### **Theme 3 – Birth Order/Gender Roles**

Across the participants' narratives, birth order and gender roles separately and in combination seemed to play a significant role.

**Birth order.** Participant 1 stated that as an older child, she wanted to support her younger brother and parents as “any good child would”. Participant 2 also echoed wanting to be a source of support for her younger brother. Referencing her younger sisters, Participant 3 stated:

I had to be there for them...which I think inhibited a little bit of my grief process and just general emotional processing; I had to essentially keep it together for them which is why I think I had to logic my way through everything.

Participant 3 had to be the translator between processing with adults using medical terminology to adjust to sisters’ cognitive and emotional spaces. All three participants, all older siblings, did not have the luxury to grieve while their younger siblings did.

**Gender roles.** This particular piece was more apparent in Participant 2 and 3’s narratives. Participant 1’s family tended not to adhere as much to traditional culture which can perhaps be attributed to certain members of the family emigrating earlier than others as well as an increased general openness and willingness to acculturate. However, in the other two narratives, where traditions seemed more strictly followed, gender roles seemed to have played a tremendous role in one’s positionality in terms of responsibilities, expectations, and boundaries. Participant 2 described her father and paternal grandfather at her paternal aunt’s funeral as being stoic while her grandmother “wailed.” During her paternal aunt’s funeral, held in the United States, customs of keeping genders separated were followed. Despite being the oldest, she was unable to provide her brother and paternal side cousin’s support during the ceremony, though she was able to do so before and afterwards. Participant 2 states that if her brother was older

than her, he would have talked to their dad and she would still have had to support their mom, but because she is older than her brother by 5 years, she still believes they would turn to her “even though I am a girl.” In that moment she “just realized intrinsically that gender roles and Indian responsibility are so intertwined.” Participant 3 also noted that her dad tends to handle things in a more stoic manner and does not show a ton of emotion.

Each of the participants mentioned the importance of birth order and its impact on their personal grieving process. Two of the three participants referred to adhering to appropriate expressions of grief defined by familial, cultural, spiritual, and/or religious expectations of gender. Further exploration of these pieces may lend to a more holistic understanding of the student’s experience.

#### **Theme 4 – Feeling Othered**

All three participants touched on, at varying levels, wanting to help-seek from those who are more likely to have shared experiences perhaps through culture (e.g., through utilizing organizations on campus where there is commonality of interests and/or experiences such as the South Asian Student Association). “I think if I tried to explain it to someone here in school... I don’t think people would understand the nature of mourning when it’s so different,” Participant 2, despite attempts to seek help from her non-Indian partner, stated:

It was hard for me to explain the cultural pressure I felt, not from anyone in particular but generally of me wanting to be back there [in India] ...So, I think processing it on campus wouldn’t have made sense to me...I don’t think people

would've understood why I was so emotional about it or the reasoning behind my emotions... I feel like I couldn't have articulated it to somebody who isn't Indian.

This also reflected in all three transcripts through the topic of Eastern versus Western religious practices. All three participants described the challenges of figuring out which ways of ritualizing in times of grief fits them more. Often, during the process of figuring out and navigating those contrasting cultural spaces, participants offered their stories regarding Cultural Identity Development as it pertained to their multiple contexts being Indian-Americans.

Participant 2 also stated that her perception of mental health practitioners is that they would not be able to understand as well as South Asian peers, thus, supporting the need for culturally competent counselors. In addition, all three participants shared that they believe ongoing outreach programs from the Counseling Center, South Asian Student Association, and/or the Reves Center for International Studies regarding issues such as loss of grandparents or loss in general may lead to more students seeking mental health support.

The utilization of these campus organizations by way of programming could increase participants in terms of client recruitment due to students trusting the role and presence of these organizations in their personal, student, and professional lives.

### **Theme 5 – Timing of Loss**

Participant 1 stated that had she endured the loss in her freshman year rather than her junior year, "it would have definitely been much harder." She also shared the following during the member-check process:

As a junior, I was in a very stable place both mentally and emotionally so, when the news came, though it upset me immensely, I was able to provide support for my family.

Participants 2 and 3 said that the timing of loss in terms of where in the undergraduate journey you are makes a difference. Participant 3 stated that if the loss she experienced had happened senior year instead of during her sophomore year, she would have consulted her thesis advisor.

In addition to using campus organizations to promote mental health seeking, providing faculty with knowledge regarding resources and referrals may also aid in increasing help seeking behaviors with the undergraduate population due to the trust, rapport, and established hierarchy present between teachers and students.

#### **Theme 6 – Preservation of Culture**

Price (2011) described three themes that emerged from the study with Adult Emigrant Children concerning fitting in, preserving tradition, and whether to stay in the United States long-term. The responsibility of raising children who maintain connectedness to the culture of origin becomes especially important when disruptions are caused, and a sense of connection is interrupted with one's homeland (Akhtar, 2011; Tummala-Narra, 2004); additionally, preservation of language was important to be able to communicate with family members in India (Price, 2011).

Participant 2 stated:

I feel like with them coming here being the immigrant generation they definitely were like “my kids need to know” and I think that shaped me because I’m like “my kids are going to know.”



Participant 1 described, there was no push for her to learn her language of origin; however, for the other two participants, the above statement pertaining to preservation of language seems to fit more accurately. They both learned how to speak their native tongue, Gujarati, due to a parental push.

Despite language differences, all three participants described their homes as operating from and influenced by the practices, rituals, and traditions of Hinduism. Participant 1 attended temple every Sunday with her nuclear family and all three participants utilized Hindu ways of mourning (e.g., through the cremation of their loved ones' bodies, participating in rites and rituals utilizing Hindu priests, and/or placing a garland on a picture frame of the deceased in one's home).

Participant 3 describes the loss of grandparents in the following powerful statement:

I feel like when my grandparents pass, it's not just a loss of an individual or a life but, it's also the loss of cultural heritage and time that I would have to understand where I come from.

If clinicians can understand the role of cultural preservation for this population and provide appropriate interventions keeping that in mind, then treatment may lend to more successful outcomes.

### **Summary**

This chapter described the results of the study through shared details of the research site, analytical method, participants, emergent themes for each participant, and a thorough presentation of the six superordinate themes of this study. For each of the six

superordinate themes of this study, the relevance of the findings as it relates to clinical practice was also briefly discussed.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

The previous chapter presented findings that emerged from using a qualitative methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to explore the narratives of three first-generation Indian-American undergraduate students as they reflect on the loss of a grandparent living in India during their undergraduate journey. Emergent themes per participant then superordinate themes were presented evidenced through excerpts of participant narratives. Within this final chapter, a brief review and summary of the study's purpose will be provided, how this study fills the gaps in the literature will be addressed, and implications will be discussed pertaining to future research, Counselor Education and Supervision, and limitations and delimitations. The researcher's personal statement will conclude the chapter.

#### **Purpose of the Study: Review and Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to gain deeper understanding of the way in which meaning is made during the grief experience of losing a grandparent in India for first-generation Indian-American undergraduate college students. The utilization of an IPA framework that draws upon the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, provided a lens from which to conceptualize the grief experience for this sample. The phenomenological commitment for an IPA is to describe and understand experiences in relation to the world through

engagement with events, processes, things, and especially other people (Kidd & Eatough, 2017). IPA aims to describe and understand things that matter to people in the context of their lives. The reflecting on what matters, and the meaning given to them by the person(s) experiencing them is what IPA researchers aim to capture. Because qualitative research of this kind does not seek to create a representative sample (Wagstaff & Williams, 2014), purposive sampling in combination with snowball sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. In purposive sampling, the researcher recruits participants who have expertise with the phenomenon being studied; therefore, small sample sizes are the norm in IPA.

The social media platform, Facebook, allowed for ease of access to Indian-American undergraduate students across the nation for the researcher. The researcher then submitted a post containing the inclusion criteria for the study on various South Asian Student Association group pages. Interested students that met the criteria responded. Upon receiving emails of interest, the researcher provided the students with the informed consent form to familiarize potential participants with what is expected of the study as well as participant rights (e.g., exercising the right to opt out of participation). Those meeting the criteria and who agreed to participate were all from The College of William & Mary, which is where the researcher is pursuing a doctorate. One-on-one interviews were conducted in-person or via Skype when in-person interviews were not feasible.

The shared experiences of three first-generation Indian-American cisgender females from The College of William & Mary were explored to gain understanding and insight into the lived experience and meaning making during their experience of the grief

phenomenon having lost a grandparent who lived in India during their undergraduate tenure. Of the three participants, one was Tamilian (South Indian) and two were Gujarati (North Indian). One participant was born in Gujarat and emigrated to the United States with her parents, while the other two were born and brought up in the United States. All three identified as being the eldest siblings. And all three participants and their families live on the East Coast (New Jersey and Northern Virginia).

The study was guided by the overarching research question of: When you think about or reflect on your experience of your grandparent's passing, what comes to mind, what were you aware of, and how did you process? Sub-questions for the study were:

1. Can you tell me about how grief is processed within your family system i.e. spiritual/religious lens, etc.?
2. What are the main similarities and differences between grief processes that you have noticed between cultures?
3. How might being an immigrant impact your experiences and your family's experiences?
4. How might the experience differ if living elsewhere i.e. living at home in lieu of living on/near campus or in India?
5. What does support look like on/near campus?
6. What might you need for the support to improve?
7. How do you feel about your perceived closeness with your grandparent(s)?
8. Can you tell me about any moral, ethical or familial responsibilities that you have been held to during this time?

The researcher used a pre-established interview schedule during the conducted semi-structured interviews to ensure flow of conversation and utilized prompts to encourage deeper reflection. The researcher listened to the audio recording multiple times, transcribed the data, reread the transcription, noted and journaled observations and reflections, and from the notes extracted emergent themes employing the idea of the double hermeneutic. Emergent themes were verified by means of a member check with participants via email. Next, emergent themes were clustered together based on their closeness of relationships. During this time, some themes were discarded, and clusters were given names. Before and after emergent themes were clustered, a peer debriefing and cross check took place. These named clusters are the superordinate themes listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Questions and Themes

Primary/Central Research Question	Superordinate Themes
<p><i>When you think about or reflect on your experience of your grandparent's passing, what comes to mind, what were you aware of, and how did you process?</i></p>	Theme 1: Collectivistic Thinking
	Theme 2: Geographical and Emotional Distance
	Theme 3: Birth Order/Gender Roles
	Theme 4: Feeling Othered
	Theme 5: Timing of Loss
	Theme 6: Preservation of Culture

The six superordinate themes that came from the study illustrate that despite diversity in experiences, many commonalities also exist in terms of the grief experience between these three participants.

Theme 1, Collectivistic Thinking, discusses how one's own experiences (e.g., grief process) often stems from conforming to group priorities; all the while putting aside one's own individuality.

Theme 2, Geographical and Emotional Distance, was evidenced through the narratives regarding the relationship between geographical distance and perceived closeness of relationships.

Theme 3, Birth Order and Gender Roles, lend to a dialogue pertaining to cultural and familial norms that stemmed from these two factors.

Theme 4, Feeling Othered, described how feeling isolated in one's experience impacts help seeking; therefore, creating the desire to find those with shared experiences on campus.

Theme 5, Timing of Loss, referred to how different things may have been for participants if the year in which they experienced the loss was different during their undergraduate tenure.

Theme 6, Preservation of Culture, described wanting to be grounded in one's ethnic origins.

## **Implications**

### **Future Research**

This study will provide a research base for past, present, and future first-generation Indian-American undergraduate students, as well as their families, who experience or have experienced grief from afar. Studies like this can inform counselor training regarding modalities and techniques that better translate to the Asian-Indian culture and encompass the values and beliefs of this population therefore being more

effective (Navsaria & Petersen, 2007), unlike current practices in the United States that are predominantly ineffective with Asian cultures (Mittal & Hardy, 2005). To be able to work effectively with Asian-Indian families, family therapists in the United States need to develop a better understanding of their culture and issues that may bring them to therapy (Mehta, 1998); this study is a start to explore just that.

### **Counselor Education and Supervision**

According to Fischer and Turner (1970), attitudes toward seeking professional help include four components: (1) recognition of a need for help, (2) stigma tolerance associated with professional help, (3) interpersonal openness regarding one's own problems, and (4) confidence in the ability of mental health practitioners to be of assistance. Some theorists state that these attitudes are influenced by culturally-shaped beliefs and that self-disclosure may likely be viewed as a sign of weakness as well as raises potential to bring shame to one's family (Masuda & Boone, 2011). Because cultural barriers have been identified as the most imperative factor, despite the high prevalence of mental health related problems, mental health is commonly overlooked in Asian communities (Han & Pong, 2015).

Additionally, death related training was not generally included in mental health or school counseling programs for graduates (Duggan, 2000; Hunt & Rosenthal, 1997) even though research indicated that issues related to death demonstrated a distinct challenge for beginning master-level students (Kirchberg, 1998). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredits master's and doctoral degree programs in career counseling, college counseling, community counseling, gerontological counseling, marital, couple, and family counseling/therapy, mental health



counseling, school counseling, student affairs, and counselor education and supervision. However, their 2009 standards do not require a specific course on grief counseling or mention grief counseling as a knowledge or skills/practice requirement (Sertgoz, 2012).

The combination of Asians being more likely to be overlooked with counselor education programs overlooking grief training may result in countless populations being overlooked during a time where help seeking is of critical importance as evidenced by the results of this study.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Though this qualitative study, using IPA, yielded greater insight into the essence of the phenomenon of grief for the three participants, some limitations and delimitations must be noted. Because participants were recruited utilizing an online platform that may not have been frequently checked by the organizations they represented, it is possible that the number of potential participants who were accessing this avenue was less. In addition, those without internet access or who were active in the organizations but not on the page would then be completely inaccessible to the researcher unless other ways of recruitment were utilized. For this reason, snowball sampling was also utilized by reaching out to those in the researcher's own ethnic community circles; however, a delimitation is the study criteria that had to be met being specific (e.g., being a current undergraduate student or recent undergraduate graduate [May 2017]).

In this study, all three participants identified as cisgender women leaving cisgender men to be unrepresented in the sample. In addition, only 2 of 29 Indian states were represented in this sample. However, because IPA aims to gather homogenous samples, the participants' being all female and representing only two states plays to the

study's advantage. Participants were also similar in age, birth order, race/ethnicity, religion, and education level.

### **Personal Statement**

The journey of conducting this study has been nothing short of transformative for me. What is most affirming is hearing participants, peers, mentors, friends, and family from across the globe validating the need for this work because of their own experiences with grief and loss. This study's origins come from the seed of my own experiences pertaining to the losses of my grandparents. Each loss has impacted me in a profound way; however, the most difficult loss for me was the one during my college years due to being away from home. When I was attempting to seek help, I found myself feeling all the more helpless. At that time, in 2004, there was even less research than the research available now. Since then, my goal has been to expand literature on South Asians and grief/loss somehow and become a voice for populations whose voices often go unnoticed.

I related to so much of what the participants were sharing. At the same time, hearing how their narratives contrasted my own allowed me to be challenged and grow in ways that I am incredibly grateful for. I hope that I have honored and will continue to honor my family, ethnic heritage, community, and the counseling profession.

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## Appendix A

### Message to Potential Participants

Dear South Asian Student Association members at \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral candidate at The College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, VA in the Counselor Education and Supervision program. I am looking for a few more participants for my dissertation study titled: First-Generation Hindu Indian-American Undergraduates' Grief after Death of Grandparent(s) in India

If you match or know of anyone else who matches the criteria listed below, please email me at [ravadhanam@email.wm.edu](mailto:ravadhanam@email.wm.edu)

Participants must be:

- 1) Over the age of 18
- 2) First-generation Indian Immigrants who were either born in India or the United States but have been part of the American school system since they were in Kindergarten
- 3) Have experienced grief during their current undergraduate experience/journey at ANY U.S. 4-year institution pertaining to the loss of at least one grandparent who lives in India
- And 4) who live either on/off campus, not at home, during their undergraduate tenure.

Participation will aid in expanding research pertaining to counseling considerations with South Asians which is important due to the sparse amount of literature available specific to this population. Plus, participants will be given an Amazon gift card of \$20 as incentive shortly after completing a brief audio recorded interview with me via phone. All data collected and reported will remain anonymous as per stated in the study's IRB. The IRB and questions will be provided in advance so that the participant will know exactly what to expect!

Thank you SO much in advance for your time, energy, and support!

## **Appendix B**

### **Informed Consent**

1. Study Title: First-Generation Hindu Indian-American Undergraduates' Grief after Death of Grandparent(s) in India
2. Performance sites: Online via Qualtrics; Initial Semi-Structured Audio Recorded Semi-Structured Interview via Phone, E-mail Sharing of that Participant's Interview Transcript, and Brief Follow-Up Interviews to Member Check via Phone.
3. Investigators: Ramya Avadhanam, Dr. Victoria A. Foster
4. Purpose of the study: The phenomenological inquiry, as part of uncovering meaning, will articulate "essences" of meaning in first-generation Indian-American immigrant undergraduate students' lived experiences when their grandparent dies, or grandparents die in India during their undergraduate journey in the United States. Using the lens of Social Constructivism, the focus will be on students' experience of grief from this life stage and its unique complexities/components that may contribute to the grief process. This perspective will facilitate breaking through the silence surrounding grief experiences for this group; it assists in articulating and amplifying first-generation Indian-American students' stories of loss.
5. Subject inclusion: In order to qualify for the study, participants must be over the age of 18, first-generation Indian immigrants who were either born in India or the United States but have been part of the American school system since they were in Kindergarten, have experienced grief during their current undergraduate experience/journey at a 4 year institution pertaining to the loss of at least one grandparent who lives in India, and who live either on/off campus, not at home, during their undergraduate tenure.
6. Subject exclusions: Individuals who do not meet the inclusion criteria and those who exercise their right not to participate until the start of data analysis will and can be excluded from this study.
7. Description of study:  
Methods of inquiry include phenomenological reflection on data elicited by existential investigation of first-generation Indian-Americans' grief during their undergraduate journeys. According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), primary research questions in an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) focus on people's understandings of their experiences and are, therefore, open and exploratory rather than close ended and explanatory often including reflecting on the process rather than the outcome with a focus on meaning. The interview will take approximately 60 - 90 minutes in the form of a semi-structured interview. The primary or central question for this study is as follows: When you think about or reflect on your experience of your grandparents' passing, what comes to mind, what were you aware of and how did you process? Smith et al. (2009)

suggest an interview schedule with between six and ten sub-questions. The sub-questions for this study are as follows:

- a) Can you tell me about how grief is processed within your family system i.e. spiritual/religious lens, etc.?  
Prompts: What happens for each family member? How did you all cope? What are some of the similarities? How do you feel about these similarities and differences?
- b) What are the main similarities and differences between grief processes that you have noticed between cultures?  
Prompts: How do you feel about these similarities and differences?
- c) How might being an immigrant impact your experiences and your family's experiences?  
Prompts: How might being an immigrant impacted you and your family's experience of loss?
- d) How might the experience differ if living elsewhere i.e. living at home in lieu of living on/near campus or in India?  
Prompts: How do you feel about this? How might the climate of your environment i.e. the geography, campus climate, majority ethnicity/dominant group at your school etc. impact how you view grief and loss?
- e) What does support look like on/near campus?  
Prompt: colleagues, peers, friends, family, family friends, professionals i.e. counselors via in-person, phone, and/or social media  
How do you feel about this?
- f) What might you need for the support to improve?  
Prompt: colleagues, peers, friends, family, family friends, professionals i.e. counselors via in-person, phone, and/or social media  
How do you feel about this?
- g) How do you feel about your perceived closeness with your grandparent(s)?  
Prompts: maternal vs. paternal grandparents, frequency of communication, ability to visit/frequency of visits to India, language barrier.
- h) Can you tell me about any moral, ethical or familial responsibilities that you have been held to during this time?  
Prompts: gender roles, birth order

Smith (2007) describes analysis as a repetitive and inductive cycle that utilizes certain strategies. The first is a line-by-line analysis of each case's transcription from the audio recording that contains experiential understandings, claims, concerns, initial noting, descriptive comments, linguistic comments, conceptual comments and deconstruction of the narrative for each participant. Next is the identification of emergent patterns/themes beginning with single cases then across multiple cases. To do so among multiple cases, the following techniques can be used: abstraction, polarization, contextualization, numeration, and function (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) describe abstraction as putting like themes together and developing a new name for the cluster. Polarization is looking at oppositional relationships rather than like themes. Contextualization attends to temporal, cultural, and narrative themes. Numeration counts the frequency with which a theme is supported in a narrative. And lastly, function is when emerging themes are examined for their specific function within the transcript (Smith et al., 2009). Third,

bracketing and attempting to capture what the experience might mean for participants takes place leading to the development of a more interpretative account. Fourth is the development of a structure that illustrates the relationships between themes. Then, organization of all the material occurs to allow for the analyzed data to be traced through the process from initial comments on the transcript, through the emerging of themes and clustering, leading into the final structure of themes. Sixth is the use of certain validity and reliability tools to test and develop the plausibility of the results. Seventh is the theme-by-theme description evidenced by a detailed commentary utilizing extracts of the interviews to take the reader through the process via a full narrative. Last is the researcher's reflections on their own personal process and perceptions.

Creswell (2014) states that qualitative validity means that the researcher will take the appropriate steps to check for the accuracy of the findings by utilizing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and projects (Gibbs, 2007). Validity strategies that will be utilized in this study are member checking, a rich description to convey the findings, clarifying researcher bias via bracketing prior to the start of data collection as well as cyclically, presenting negative or discrepant information countering themes in the study, and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014). Member checking consists of consulting the participants themselves during analysis and is particularly helpful when a researcher is coding solo (Saldaña, 2016) and peer debriefing involves locating a person who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the study resonates with people other than the researcher (Creswell, 2014). In this study, member checking will take place in a brief, 15 - 30-minute, follow-up conversation after the initial interview over the phone during the analysis portion of the study. Upon completing the first interview, a transcription of the interview will be sent to the participant in order to provide the participant with the opportunity to verify if what they were trying to convey in terms of feelings and thoughts being accurately portrayed.

Reliability strategies for this study will include checking transcripts to make sure that obvious mistakes are avoided during transcription, ensuring that no shifts occur in the definition of codes, and finding another person to cross-check codes for intercoder agreement which involves assessing whether another coder would code similarly to the researcher (Creswell, 2014). Upon cross-checking by using another person, Creswell (2014) also mentions that software could be used to determine the level of consistency of coding i.e. NVivo.

Because the primary concern of IPA is with a detailed account of individual experience, IPA studies benefit from a more concentrated focus on a smaller number of cases. Modern day phenomenologists, such as Smith et al. (2009), suggest between three to six participants as being a reasonable sample size for a student project using IPA and suggest that a sample that is too large is more problematic than a sample that is too small. Classic phenomenologists state that expecting a range from 8 - 15 participants is reasonable; once repeated themes are noticed between cases, then conducting 1 or 2 interviews to wrap up is recommended. IPA researchers usually attempt to find a homogenous sample for whom the research question will be meaningful. Sampling must be theoretically consistent with the qualitative paradigm, in this case with IPA's

orientation; thus, samples are selected purposively due to being able to offer a research project insight into a particular experience (Smith et al., 2009).

8. Benefits: Participants will be furthering the understanding of a specific grief and loss experience that impacts first-generation Indian-American undergraduate students.

9. Risks: Unresolved grief may resurface for some participants; however, the researcher will connect every participant with resources in case any thoughts or feelings of concern arise during the course of research.

10. Removal: Participants who have not completed the Qualtrics form appropriately/accurately and/or who elect not to participate in the study will be removed from the project.

11. Right to refuse: Participants may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the start of data analysis without penalty and without explanation.

12. Privacy: The results of the study may be published. All responses obtained orally and in writing will be confidential and participant names will in no way be associated with the data from the study. Participants will be asked to create a pseudonym that will be associated with their oral responses. Once the dialogue of the phone interviews has been transcribed, the audio files will be destroyed. Only individuals directly involved with this research will have access to individual results and data.

13. Release of information: Any personal or identifying information obtained by participation in this study will not be released in any way to any person. All records are confidential and will not be able to be identified by the name of the participant.

Questions about this research can be directed to Ramya Avadhanam at (571)334-6970 or [ravadhanam@email.wm.edu](mailto:ravadhanam@email.wm.edu) or the principal investigator, Dr. Victoria A. Foster at [vafost@wm.edu](mailto:vafost@wm.edu). If you have additional questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this clinic, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, Dr. Tom Ward, chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at the College of William and Mary at [tom.ward@wm.edu](mailto:tom.ward@wm.edu).

Please provide your signature indicating that you have read and understand the consent form and that you want to proceed with the interview and survey.

I am above the age of 18 and I understand and have read the consent form.

---

Signature

Date

---

Witness Signature

Date

If you would like to receive information regarding the results of this study please mark below:

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to receive information regarding the results of this study as it relates to publication.



## Vita

### Education

- Ph.D. Counselor Education and Supervision, Successful Defense Date – January 25, 2018  
Degree Conferral Date – May 12, 2018  
The College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA (Advisor: Victoria Foster)  
Cognate - Multicultural Considerations within a Family Systems Context  
Proposed Dissertation Title – *First-Generation Hindu Indian-American Undergraduates' Grief after Death of Grandparent(s) in India*
- M.Ed. Counselor Education, December 2012  
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL (Advisor: Pete Sherrard)  
Concentration: Clinical Mental Health
- Ed.S. Counselor Education, December 2012  
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL (Advisor: Pete Sherrard)  
Concentration: Marriage and Family Therapy
- B.S. Psychology, May 2008  
Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA (Advisor, Cindy Koziol)

### Refereed Publications

- Brat, M., **Avadhanam, R.**, & Gamby, K. (2017). Self-compassion: an approach with college millennials to enhance wellbeing. *Counseling & Wellness: A Professional Counseling Journal*.
- McAdams, C.R., **Avadhanam, R.**, Foster, V.A., Harris, P.N., Javaheri, A., Kim, S., Kooyman, B., Richelle, J.J., Sheffield, R.L., & Williams, A.E. (2016). The viability of structural family therapy in the twenty-first century: An analysis of key indicators. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, 38. doi: 10.1007/s10591-016-9383-9

### Grant Recipient

- AMCD Writers' Consortium Grant Recipient January 2018
- The College of William & Mary Individual Community Engagement Grant Recipient February 2017

### Service and Leadership

- Mediterranean Branch of the European Branch of the American Counseling Association August 2017 – July 2018  
(MR-EB-ACA), President - Elect
- IAMFC Emerging Leader January 2017 – 2018
- VAMCD Secretary August 2017 – 2018  
VAMCD Secretary-Elect August 2016 – 2017
- Inclusion and Diversity Committee Member August 2016 – May 2018
- WMER Member and Reviewer August 2016 – May 2017
- Student International Outreach Representative May 2016 – May 2018
- Program Coordinator August 2015 – 2017  
Graduate Assistant August 2014 – 2017  
Doctoral Intern (Registered MFT & Mental Health Intern, VA) August 2014 - 2017  
The College of William & Mary

- New Horizons Family Counseling Center
- Mental Health Intern (Registered MFT Intern, FL) January – August 2014  
Keystone Behavioral Pediatrics, Jacksonville, FL
  - Family Advocate (Registered MFT Intern, FL) September-October 2013  
Jewish Family and Community Services, Jacksonville, FL
  - Outpatient Therapist (Registered MFT Intern, FL) January-September 2013  
Child Guidance Center, Inc., Jacksonville, FL
  - Masters Intern, Grief Counselor May-December 2012  
University of Florida  
Small Animal Hospital
  - Advanced Family Clinic January-December 2012  
University of Florida
  - Masters Practicum Student August-December 2011  
University of Florida  
A. Quinn Jones Center

## Research

- Accepted Submission, 120-Minute Education Session for October 2018  
MR-EB-ACA Annual Conference – Athens, Greece  
*Intergenerational Conflict: An Examination of  
Multigenerational Stressors in Indian-American and Iranian-  
American Families as it Pertains to Family Counseling*
- MR-EB-ACA Learning Institute May 2018  
Florence, Italy
- ACA Annual Conference – AMCD Grant Presentation April 2018  
Atlanta, Georgia  
*Translating Bollywood: Exploring Cultural Identity and Sexual  
Expression of South Asian-American Second-Generation  
Immigrants through a Developmental Lens*
- Education Session for ACES, Chicago, IL October 2017  
*Mail-Order Brides No More: Deconstructing Sexual Stereotypes  
of East and South Asian Women*
- Education Sessions for AASECT, Las Vegas, NV June 2017
  - 90 Minute Discussion  
*Bound to Exclusion: A Phenomenological  
Examination of South Asian-American's Experiences  
of Racism within BDSM Communities*
  - 90 Minute Discussion  
*Translating Bollywood: Exploring Cultural Identity  
and Sexual Expression of South Asian-American  
Second-Generation Immigrants through a  
Developmental Lens*

- Education Session for IFTA, Malaga, Spain March 2017  
*A Phenomenology: Understanding Grief of First Generation Immigrant Indian Undergraduate Students in the United States after the Death of a Grandparent Abroad*
- Poster Presentation for AACTE, Tampa, FL February – March 2017  
*Measuring Grief Competency Levels in Counselor Education Masters Programs: School, Mental Health, and Family Counseling*
- Education Session for VACES February 2017  
 Graduate Student Conference  
*Measuring Grief Competency Levels in Counselor Education Masters Programs: School, Mental Health, and Family Counseling*
- Education Session for ACCA, Tampa, FL February 2017  
*Disentangling the Barriers of LGBTQ+ Student-Athletes in Higher Education*
- Poster Presentation for IAMFC, New Orleans, LA February 2017  
*A Phenomenology: Understanding Grief of First Generation Immigrant Indian Undergraduate Students in the United States after the Death of a Grandparent Abroad*
- Roundtable Presentation for IAMFC, New Orleans, LA  
*Implications of Family Context: Single Mothers, Sex Education, and the Next Generation*
- Education Session for IAMFC, New Orleans, LA  
*Repositioning the Borders of Acculturation: Evidence-Based Strategies for Migration in Systems-Based Modalities*
- Poster Presentation for SACES, New Orleans, LA October 2016  
*An Autoethnography Approach to Capture Doctoral Supervisor Experience Leading Group Supervision*
- Brief Communication for EFTA, Athens, Greece September 2016  
*The Experiences of Single Mothers in Bringing a Stepfather into the Family System*
- Poster Presentation for IAMFC, New Orleans, LA March 2016  
*Acculturation in Mental Health Service Utilization, an Examination of South Asian Families*
- Poster Presentation for AACTE, Las Vegas, NV February 2016  
*Translating Evidence-Based Counseling & Supervision Practices into the Training Pedagogy for Future School Teachers*
- Independent Study January-August 2012

University of Florida

*Literature Review: The Impact of Immigration/Acculturation on South Asian Parent-Child Relationships in the United States*

- Infant Perception Lab July 2007-May 2008  
Virginia Tech

### **Teaching Experience**

- Adjunct Faculty at Marymount University May – August 2018  
Teaching 2 Courses  
(Career Counseling and Marriage and Family)
- Guest Lecturer on Non-Directive Play Therapy January 26, 2017  
University of North Carolina, Greensboro
- Teaching Intern January – May 2016  
The College of William & Mary  
EDUC C42 – Supervised Practicum in CMH & Family Counseling
- Teaching Intern August-December 2015  
The College of William & Mary  
EDUC C34 – Group Theory & Techniques
- Teaching Intern January–May 2015  
The College of William & Mary  
EDUC C42 – Supervised Practicum in CMH & Family Counseling
- Teaching Intern January-May 2015  
The College of William & Mary  
EDUC 624 – Theory and Practice in Multicultural Counseling
- Teaching Intern August–December 2014  
The College of William & Mary  
EDUC C33 – Techniques of Counseling
- Teaching Intern August-December 2014  
The College of William & Mary  
EDUC 645 – Advanced Marriage and Family Counseling
- Substitute Teacher March–June 2014  
London Towne Elementary School, Centreville, VA  
Fairfax County Public Schools
- Graduate Assistant, Athletic Tutor August 2010 -  
University of Florida December 2012  
Department of Athletic Technology
- School Age Child Care Teacher June 2008 -  
Oak Hill Elementary School, Herndon, VA August 2010  
Department of Athletic Technology

## **Professional Development**

- Psychotherapy Networker  
Washington, D.C. March 2017
- VCA Annual Conference  
Williamsburg, VA November 2016
- Psychotherapy Networker  
Washington, D.C. March 2016
- ACES  
Philadelphia, PA October 2015
- IAMFC North Hampton Family Counseling Institute  
London, UK May 2015
- Psychotherapy Networker  
Washington, D.C. March 2015
- STEP Leadership Training  
Fairfax, VA December 2014
- Gifted and Twice Exceptional Children and their Families  
The College of William & Mary September 2014
- Gottman Level 1 Training  
The Gottman Institute  
Orlando, FL September 2013
- Trauma Informed Expressive Arts Conference and Play Therapy  
Interventions  
Association for Play Therapy  
Orlando, FL March 2013
- Military Families  
Florida Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
Miami, FL March 2012
- ACA Annual Conference  
San Francisco, CA March 2012

## **Affiliations/Memberships**

- The Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in  
Counseling (ASERVIC, National and Virginia Chapters) October 2016 - Present
- American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and  
Therapists (AASECT) October 2016 – Present
- Virginia Counselors Association (VCA) June 2016 – Present
- Virginia Association for Multicultural Counseling and  
Development (VAMCD) June 2016 – Present
- Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) May 2015 - Present
- The International Association of Marriage and Family  
Counselors (IAMFC)

- Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES, National and Southern Region Chapters) May 2015 – Present
- Chi Sigma Iota Honor Society (CSI), Omega Mu Chapter September 2015 - Present
  
- Holmes Scholar January 2015 – May 2018
- Graduate Education Association August 2014 – May 2018
- National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) August 2014 – May 2018
- National Certified Counselor (NCC) October 2012 – Present
- American Counseling Association (ACA) August 2010-Present
- Chi Sigma Iota Honor Society (CSI) January 2011 –  
Beta Chapter, Co-Chair for the Social Membership Committee December 2012
- Florida Association for Play Therapy August 2012 –  
March 2014
- Florida Association for Marriage and Family Therapy August 2011 –  
March 2014