OLD GODS, NEW RELIGIONS, AND MODERN MARRIAGES IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

Emily McKendry-Smith: Old Gods, New Religions, and Modern Marriages in Nepal
(Under the direction of Lisa Pearce)

This dissertation is a set of three papers broadly focused on the role of religion in a context of rapid social change associated with modernization and development. My research design comprises two areas of data collection at three Brahma Kumari centers in Chitwan, Nepal: participant observation at daily religious services and in-depth interviews with female devotees. I complement this with statistical analyses on spousal choice and religious salience using survey data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study.

In the first chapter I address the paradox that in Nepal, religion appears to be shifting from individual to communal worship, in contrast to the belief of many scholars that modernity has a privatizing and individualizing effect on religion. I find that due to unique features of Nepali homes, the role of *puja* in Nepali society, and perceptions of the Brahma Kumaris lead to a case where *puja* in the home is public and congregational meditation is private.

In the second chapter, I address how the Brahma Kumaris frame their movement in relation to value-laden ideas about modernity and how this framing influences acceptance of their "strict" demands. I find that Nepalis tend to accept and follow the group's strict demands when those demands have been framed as modern and that framing is resonant with the prevailing definitions of modernity offered by Western development agencies. When the

modern framing is not resonant, the strict demand is not followed and the frame itself is rejected in favor of the practice being defined in different terms.

My third chapter employs data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study. I examine the relationship between education, religious salience, and the practice of arranged marriage, using interaction terms to examine how religious salience may moderate the relationship between spousal choice and education, and I find a significant interaction between respondent years of education and average neighborhood religious salience. I explain this using the "moral communities thesis," a theory suggesting a relationship between a community's religious characteristics and levels of deviance.

these papers at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Association for the Study of Religion annual conferences, as well as members of UNC's Culture and Politics Workshop.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a set of three papers broadly focused on the role of religion in a context of rapid social change associated with modernization and development. While a number of studies have considered how people use religion to respond to the changes and instability of modernity, studies situated outside the Western world and focusing on non-Abrahamic religious forms are relatively rare within social science research on religion. My research focuses on the Chitwan valley in Nepal as a location with rich religious diversity and a place where significant environmental and social changes are occurring. I examine two examples of religious practice in Chitwan – the new religious movement the Brahma Kumaris and the more traditional practice of arranged marriage. By examining the old and new together, I attain a more complete picture of how people navigate and potentially reconstruct religion in accordance with social changes around them. My research design comprises two areas of data collection at three Brahma Kumari centers in Chitwan: participant observation at daily religious services and in-depth interviews with female devotees. I complement this with statistical analyses on spousal choice and religious salience using survey data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study.

In my first substantive chapter, I consider the location of religion in the modern world. While scholarship has shown a number of examples of modern public religion, we often think of modernity as having a privatizing effect on religion. Religion is removed from public institutions and is reduced to individual and family practice inside the home. The increasing popularity of the Brahma Kumaris in Nepal is noteworthy for scholars of religion as it defies our

current understandings of modernity and the movement of religion from the public to the private realm. In Nepal, the traditional religious practices of *puja* are typically done individually in family homes, while the Brahma Kumaris encourage devotees to give up *puja* in favor of attending daily religious services held in centers. This shift from the home to the congregation seems to contradict the observations of many scholars that modernity has a privatizing and individualizing effect on religion. I address this paradox, using Wuthnow's definition of public religion, explained in his 1994 book *Producing the Sacred*, as my theoretical underpinning.

The second substantive chapter focuses on the relationship between the Brahma Kumaris teachings accepted by Nepali women and the spread of what Thornton (2005) terms developmental idealism: the idea that social and economic development and associated programs are value-laden and viewed as goals by many people the world over. I examine the "strict" teachings of the Brahma Kumaris, the extent to which they are framed as modern by the group, and the extent to which this framing is resonant among Nepali women. I relate these observations to rational choice theories about why people adhere to "strict" churches, noting that while these explanations are useful, they provide little indication as to the *kinds* of strictness people are willing to accept from religious organizations.

In the third substantive chapter, I examine a practice that is often intertwined with religion – selection of a spouse for marriage. In the past, the most common form of marriage in Nepal has been arranged marriage, where an individual's spouse is selected by his or her parents and/or other relatives. However, individuals having more of a say in the choice of a spouse is becoming increasingly prevalent. In this chapter, I use regression models and survey data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study to first examine the relationship between religious salience and spousal choice, looking not only at the individual's own religious salience but also the

individual's family's religious salience and neighborhood's religious salience. Additionally, I examine how religious salience modifies the relationship between education and spousal choice, which has been the focus of other research in this context. This chapter contributes to our knowledge of family by examining the relationship of religious salience and education to transformations in marital behavior, an issue that has largely been studied in Western and Christian contexts thus far. Additionally, as other countries, especially those in South Asia, undergo similar transformations, it is particularly important to understand how religion and modernity are managed in individual lives.

CHAPTER I
PUBLIC HOUSEHOLD, PRIVATE CONGREGATION:
THE BRAHMA KUMARIS AND PUBLIC/PRIVATE RELIGION IN NEPAL

Introduction

Public and private religion and the fate of public religion in modern societies are topics

that have long been central to the sociology of religion. This paper examines the fate of public

and private religion in rural Nepal, a non-Western setting experiencing rapid social change and

modernization. I investigate the Brahma Kumari movement in Nepal as a case of public religion

coming hand-in-hand with modernity, but ultimately conclude that this seemingly public religion

offers more of the private to worshippers than traditional forms of religious practice, which,

although they are undertaken in the home, are remarkably public in nature. This investigation

contributes to the sociology of religion in two primary ways. First, it provides us with a case in

which religion has neither waned nor become less institutionalized in the face of modernity,

outcomes that have been predicted by many scholars both before and after the secularization

hypothesis ceased to serve as a major driving force in the sociology of religion. Second, the

Brahma Kumaris in Nepal illustrate the need for less rigid thinking in terms of defining the

spaces where public and private religion occur. As the juxtaposition of "public" traditional puja

in households and "private" meditation at Brahma Kumari services in ashrams[1] illustrates, public

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[1] While the term "ashram" typically refers to a Hindu hermitage, or a place where a religious has gone to live in seclusion from the outside world, Brahma Kumari ashrams, also known in Nepal as "Om Shanti centers" are locations where daily services are held, as well as where the monks or nuns who conducted these services and public proselytizing activities may live. In this way, Brahma Kumari ashrams more resemble Christian churches with rectories than other Hindu ashrams.

and private are best conceptualized as situational and temporary, not defining features of physical spaces.

Theoretical Background

The dichotomy of private and public has long been of interest to scholars and social scientists and various ways of comprehending this dichotomy are often used as organizing principles for understanding our society. In this paper, I narrow and focus my use of the ideas of public and private by relying on Weintraub's (1997) typology of the four major ways these ideas have been conceptualized in social thought. Weintraub divides social thought on public and private into four schools. The first, based on legal and public policy analyses, understands the public/private dichotomy in terms of the contrast between governmental administration and the market economy. The second school of thought, in which thinkers such as Tocqueville, Arendt, and Habermas can be located, conceives of the "public" as the political community of citizens. Weintraub's third school conceptualizes "public" as "a sphere of fluid and polymorphous sociability" (1997: 7). Last, Weintraub describes a feminist theory of public and private, used to distinguish the "private" family from "public" political and economic spheres. However, it is Weintraub's third school, that of public as sociability, that I draw on for the analyses in this paper.

Scholarship conceptualizing the public in terms of sociability is rooted in the work of French historian Philippe Aries and his work on the evolution of families in Europe. Aries described the evolution of a new private sphere, one of isolation and intimacy, created as people retreated from the more communal spaces of the street, village, and castle court. The development of the new, private home was concomitant with the development of families as we

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understand them today. Aries writes that "the progress of the concept of the family followed the progress of private life, of domesticity. For a long time the conditions of everyday life did not allow the essential withdrawal by the household from the outside world" (375).

In sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, Aries explains, families did not serve as "refuges from the invasion of the world but as the centers of a populous society, the focal points of a crowded social life" (395). Individuals were rarely left alone, and those who sought out privacy were perceived as deviant (398). Houses consisted of rooms with several functions, and several couples, as well as groups of unattached men and women, would sleep together in a single room. This is echoed by Rybczynski (1986) in his history of the idea of "home," in which he writes that "houses were full of people, much more so than today, and privacy was unknown" (18). In the eighteenth century, when families began to retreat from society into the newly private sphere of the home, the organization of the home was altered in a way conducive to this new desire. Rooms were linked by a corridor and specialized bedrooms were devoted to sleeping. Describing these changes, Aries notes that "it has been said that comfort dates from this period; it was born at the same time as domesticity, privacy and isolation" (399). These rearranged homes were inhabited by a reduced family, which included parents and children, but excluded servants, friends, and members of business relationships (400). Rybczynski notes that as a result of these changes "the house was becoming a more *private* place. Together with this privatization of the home arose a growing sense of intimacy, of identifying the house exclusively with family life" (39).

Focusing on religion, I frame my analyses in terms of the criteria for public and private religion laid out by Wuthnow in his 1994 text *Producing the Sacred: An Essay on Public Religion.* Wuthnow's ideas of "public" religion are broader than those that fall under the

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Weintraub/Aries definition of public as the realm of sociability; Wuthnow notes that in considering the difference between public and private, public can take on three meanings.

1. Public can be thought of as having to do with "the people."

2. Public can also refer to "openness or accessibility" (Wuthnow 1994: 9).

3. Finally, Wuthnow assigns to public a third meaning which encapsulates the sense of responsibility that often comes with the word public. He writes that "in its Latin derivation, *public* is associated with the idea of having been altered, probably in the way that an adult is altered by having gone through puberty. Hence, the term *public* also connotes the kind of adult responsibility that we do not normally expect of children" (11).

In this paper, I demonstrate that puja, a traditional Hindu religious practice that is typically done individually and in one's home, can be considered "public" in that it meets Wuthnow's criteria of openness or accessibility and having an association with adult responsibility. In contrast to this, although they worship in congregations, both the congregational setting of the Brahma Kumaris and some of their more unconventional (in the Nepali context) practices render the group somewhat isolated and "unintelligible," or unreadable.

This research makes two primary contributions – one to studies of religion and one to our conceptions of public and private more generally. In scholarship on how religion is faring in the face of modernity, scholars tend to conflate the home and the individual with "private" and groups and congregations with "public." I demonstrate that this is not always the case, particularly depending on how one is conceptualizing public and private. Research on these topics need to go further in explicating how these terms are being defined and in avoiding conflation. In this respect, this paper build's on Regnerus and Smith's (1998) call for analyses of privatization to specify the level (such as individual-level versus societal-level) at which

privatization is occurring. However, Regnerus and Smith largely focus on "public" as referring to Habermas's idea of the public as political communities and political discourse. This paper demonstrates that researchers should go further in their clarifications, specifying which theoretical conceptions of public and private they are using.

This is related to the second contribution, which is that scholars need to conceptualize public and private as temporary and situational, not enduring features of physical spaces. This is acknowledged by Wuthnow himself, writing that notions of public and private vary cross-culturally and historically. He writes that "what public means is itself a matter of cultural definition" (Wuthnow 1994: 9) and that "if the public and the private are always connected, it is nevertheless important to recognize that they are probably more distinct, and problematic, in modern settings than in most of the societies preceding ours historically" (10). While I do not suggest "reading history sideways" (Thornton 2005) and comparing present-day Nepal to Western past, Nepal's unique developmental trajectory, combined with its background in Hinduism, a religion that has not traditionally been congregational, renders our usual notions of public and private religion inapplicable to the Nepali context. Similarly, when considering public and private in the United States, we must be mindful that American homes have not always been "haven(s) in a heartless world" (Lasch 1995) but evolved these characteristics over time. It is further important to note that American homes, and thus our notions of public and private, continue to evolve.

Scholars of religion have frequently hypothesized that as modernity advances, traditional and "public" forms of religion, such as worshiping in congregations, will increasingly be replaced by more individualistic and private forms of religion. This is a contemporary variant of the secularization hypothesis, a theory that has largely fallen out of favor that hypothesized that

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religion would diminish in society in conjunction with the advance of modernity. At the societal level, both Hammond (1992) and Smith (2003) content that a decrease in public religion has occurred within the United States with Smith writing that "something real at the level of macrosocial change, which secularization theory has tried to theorize, has actually happened in history, and we need to account for and understand that change" (2003: 5). Similarly, on an individual level, several scholars have observed phenomena akin to Luckmann's (1967) prediction that as older, institutional forms of religion decline, new and more personal religions will arise in their place. Thinkers in this vein include Wuthnow (1998), with his observation that forms of religion are shifting from "dwelling" to "seeking," Bellah et al (1985) with their famous "Sheila-ism" example of personal religion, Davie (1994) and her believing without belonging, and Chaves's (1994) contention that secularization refers to the declining scope of religious authority in social institutions, not to a decline in individual religiosity.

As I began research in rural Nepal, I my first inclination was that what I observed in terms of religious change was the opposite of these scholars' ideas – that with the advances of "development," religion was, in fact, moving from private to public. This belief was based on my observation that people were either ceasing or supplementing traditional *puja* (worship) in the household in favor of, participation in new religious movements such as the Brahma Kumaris, Sai Baba, or Christianity, where religious activities were done *en masse* in centers intended for religious activity. However, after five months of observations and an improved understanding of Nepali households, my eventual conclusion was that the transition from *puja* to participation in the Brahma Kumaris, despite being a movement from the household to religious centers, is a transition from public to private. In the text that follows, I explain how, according to Weintraub and Wuthnow's conceptualizations, the household can be considered part of the

public sphere in Nepal. I follow this by discussing how the Brahma Kumaris represent a move toward a more private form of religion. First, however, I introduce in greater detail the religious group the Brahma Kumaris, the research setting of Nepal's Terai and the methods employed in this research.

The Brahma Kumaris

The Brahma Kumaris are a Hindu[2] religious movement that developed in India in the late 1930s. The group's founder, a Hindu businessman named Dada Lekhraj Kripani received visions of the Hindu deities Vishnu and Shiva and of the world's destruction and the subsequent establishment of an earthly paradise (Babb 1986; Walliss 2002). These visions are believed to originate from Shiva, the "Supreme Soul," with Lehkraj as a human medium. Lekhraj later became identified with Brahma, the Hindu deity of creation, as is referred to within the movement as Brahma Baba.

The group that emerged around Lekhraj and his visions developed as what we know today as the Brahma Kumaris, with Lekhraj's visions becoming their sacred scriptures, or *murlis*, that are read aloud at services. Brahma Kumari Raj *didi*, the head of the Brahma Kumaris in Nepal and senior brother BK Ram Singh *bhai* explained to me that Raj *didi* was part of a group of ten brothers and sisters from India that brought the Brahma Kumaris to Nepal in Nepali year 2023 (1966-1967). The group first held an exhibition in the southern city of Birgunj, then moved to the capital city of Kathmandu, where services were initially held in a rented room. Raj *didi* estimated that the Kathmandu center, the first permanent ashram in Nepal, was established 25 years ago in 1983. The Bistanagar ashram, the third to be established in Nepal, was also founded

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[2] In describing the Brahma Kumaris as Hindu here, I am concurring with Babb's (1986) assertion that the group can be categorized as Hindu despite the fact that they do not always consider themselves to be so.

by BK Ram Singh *bhai* in the early 1980s. Because the Brahma Kumaris greet each other with "Om shanti," instead of the typical Nepali greeting of *namaste*, many Nepalis have come to refer to this religious group as "Om Shanti" and to its ashrams as Om Shanti centers.

A key point of Brahma Kumari doctrines[3] is the dualist idea that humans are souls, as opposed to bodies. Brahma Kumaris are tasked with forsaking "body consciousness" and instead developing "soul consciousness" through a type of meditation known as *raja yoga* and other behavioral practices. Babb (1986) notes that the practice of *raja yoga* is "standardized…students sit in a semidarkened room facing the teacher. Just above and behind the teacher's head is a red plastic ovoid that glows from a lightbulb within; at its center is a tiny hole, which appears as a point of intense white light against the red glow. This device represents the Supreme Soul, Shiv Baba" (119). At the centers I visited in Nepal, these representations of Shiva were typically located above portraits of Lekhraj, or Brahma Baba. Those engaged in meditation focus on that glow while thinking of themselves as a "point of light" and a "peaceful soul." Brahma Kumaris are encouraged to begin their days with *raja yoga* meditation between the hours of 3 AM and 4 AM.

Other behavioral practices proscribed by the Brahma Kumaris stem from the goal of promoting "soul consciousness" instead of "body consciousness." In order to minimize "body consciousness," these proscriptions are developed so that practitioners avoid "behavior that is an especially dangerous source of further entanglements with the body and material nature" (118). Brahma Kumari practitioners are encouraged to follow a *sattvik* diet and avoid consumption of meat, fish, garlic, onions, and alcohol and tobacco products. Ideally, their food should be

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[3] This is a limited discussion of Brahma Kumari history and teachings as my focus here is on practice in Nepal. For further discussion of history and doctrine, one should see Walliss (2002) and Babb (1986), respectively, as well as the several texts published by the Brahma Kumaris themselves on these topics.

prepared by someone who is "soul conscious" (another Brahma Kumari) and using cookware and dishes that have not been contaminated by improper foods. However, the most important means of avoiding "body consciousness" is through abstaining from sexual activity. As Babb puts it, "more than anything else, lust draws the soul into engagement with the body, thus entrenching the soul in further ignorance" (119).

The Brahma Kumaris are only one of many religious movements coming out of the Hindu tradition. Most famously, these groups include the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishnas), but also lesser known groups such the Radhasoami faith, Ananda Marga, Arya Samaj, and followers of Mata Amritanandamayi, Sathya Sai Baba, and Osho. Both the Brahma Kumari and Sai Baba centers are present in the district of Nepal that served as the field site for this research.

Setting

This research is situated in the Terai, a geographic region located in the south central part of Nepal. Prior to a deforestation program occurring in the 1950s, this area was a dense jungle, populated only by the indigenous Tharu ethnic group thought to be immune to malaria. Following a government program of malaria eradiation, deforestation, and resettlement, the valley is now a site of agricultural production. As people came from all over Nepal to seek land in this area, the area is now home to a great variety of religio-ethnic groups, including high caste Hindus, low caste Hindus, hill Tibeto-Burmese (Tamang, Gurung, Magar), Newars, and Terai Tibeto-Burmese (Tharu). Schools, health centers, markets, road, and electricity are spreading throughout the region, radiating from Bistanagar, an urban area in the north end of the district. Because of its central location in Nepal, Bistanagar has become a transportation hub, with roads

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linking it to other Nepali cities and to India. While life in the Terai had previously been organized around the family, this proliferation of nonfamily organizations has moved an increasing number of activities outside the family (Axinn and Yabiku 2001). So during the past sixty years, the physical landscape has been changed by roads, electricity and hydro-electric dams, the population has been affected by the spread of Western biomedicine and Western family ideologies by schools and health clinics, and mode of societal organization in the Terai has changed to no longer being centered exclusively around the family. The political landscape of Nepal has also changed during this time as the country experienced a Maoist "people's war" and transitioned from a Hindu kingdom to a secular republic in May of 2008.

Nepal historically has strong connections with both the Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions. Today, most Nepalis are Hindu, but there are also Buddhist ethnic groups (Ortner 1989). Many people also practice both Hinduism and Buddhism, as Buddha is believed to be an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu. Religion is a key element of Nepali life. In his book on the character of Nepal, Bista (1991) writes that "religion has always been a central feature of Nepali life…Nepalis love colourful rituals of all kinds and have welcomed a variety of religious traditions" (3). Other religions are also gaining ground in Nepal. Dahal (2003) notes that Christianity is becoming increasingly popular, particularly after the advent of Nepali democracy. There are also a number of Muslims and followers of the Kirat religion. In addition to the Brahma Kumaris, other neo-Hindu religious movements in Nepal include followers of Sathya Sai Baba and of Osho.

Hindus in Nepal follow what is known as the "householder's path" (Bennett 1983). This necessitates following the requirements of traditional Hindu religion, as well as producing sons, who are necessary to perform the funeral ceremonies necessary for souls to go on in the afterlife.

Daily religious practice is often considered to be the domain of Nepali women (Bennett 1983: 45). Hindu women practice their religion by performing *puja*, or making offerings of water, flowers, fruits, lighted candles, and/or bell ringing to images of gods kept in a special box in their home. Bennett explains that "puja is a central feature of the householder's religious life. It is a means for achieving a good rebirth or entrance to heaven in the afterlife and also a means for achieving one's worldly goals in this life" (1983: 48). Women, as well as other family members, may also visit local temples and perform puja there.

Hinduism in Nepal tends to be more focused on practice than on belief. This focus on action is in keeping with the fact that the Nepali term for religion, *dharma*, also means "duty" or "rules." Bennett writes that "ritual and belief are still unselfconsciously integrated – so much so that villagers tend to speak of dharma in terms of action, as something one *does* (or at least should do), rather than something one believes in" (1983: 34).

Methods

The Centers

This study focused on three Brahma Kumaris centers (referred to here as "Om Shanti centers") in three different towns in a Terai district of Nepal – Subhapur, Bistanagar, and Gaida Chowk. There are about 20 Om Shanti centers located in this district. The oldest center was established in the early 1980s and the newest was constructed in the early 2000s. I selected the Subhapur center for observations and interviews because it was one of the newest, the Bistanagar center was as it was one of the oldest, and the Gaida Chowk center because it was founded at an intermediate time, in the 1990s. In addition to the temporal distribution of their foundings, these three Om Shanti centers were also selected due to their geographic locations. Bistanagar is a

large urban area and the juncture between two major highways, making it a transportation hub. The village of Subhapur, located at a middle distance between Bistanagar and the jungle has a population of over 12,000 individuals living in about 2,500 households. While many residents of Subhapur are engaged in farming, it also has a commercial area and is located in close proximity to an agricultural college. The Subhapur Om Shanti center is located just off the main road on the outskirts of Subhapur bazaar, the main commercial area. Gaida Chowk, located near the edge of the National Park, has a population approaching 9,000 individuals living in about 1,700 households. Like Subhapur, Gaida Chowk also has a small bazaar, or commercial area, located on the main road. The Gaida Chowk Om Shanti center is located some distance away from Gaida Chowk bazaar at one of the next *chowks* (locations where roads cross). Sixteen Brahma Kumari sisters and 7 Brahma Kumar brothers live at the Bistanagar center, 2/3 live in Subhapur (a third sister moved in during my fieldwork period), and two live at the Gaida Chowk center. While the attendees at the Bistanagar Om Shanti center are largely from Bistanagar itself, people also come from other nearby communities to attend the Subhapur and Gaida Chowk centers.

Center Observations

At each center, I attended daily services (known as "*murli* classes"), which are held daily at all Om Shanti centers starting at 6:30 AM. From November 2008 through April 2009, I observed a morning *murli* class at one of these three centers virtually every day.

Although individuals may arrive earlier to sit in the center "classroom" and silently meditate, the official class begins at 6:30. If there is electricity, which is infrequently, special Hindi recordings of Brahma Kumari music may be played before the class officially starts. As men and women enter the room, they place *rupees* in a small donation box located near the door

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and then sit, men on one side of the room and women on the other. At 6:30, the Brahma Kumari

sister who is leading the service greets the room by saying "Om shanti," which the crowd replies

back to her. She then begins reading aloud the *murli*, which is in Hindi[4] and distributed to

Brahma Kumari centers worldwide from their headquarters in Mt. Abu, India. Men and some

women will take notes as the *murli* is read, often in notebooks they have purchased at the Om

Shanti center that have images of Dada Lekhraj or the Supreme Soul on them. After the main

text of the *murli* has been read, everyone will recite a greeting to Shiva Baba together. This is

followed by the sister reading off several numbered points that summarize the main essence of

the day's *murli*, followed by the day's "slogan." The service concludes with the sister's "Om

shani" and those assembled replying "om shanti" back to her. On Thursdays, *bhog*, or holy food,

is offered at the conclusion of services. This consists of the men and women in attendance lining

up place donations on a table in front of the sisters and in return receive *tika* (red powder applied

to the forehead), a flower, a spoonful of water, and a food item, such as a fruit or rice pudding.

Interviews

From January through March of 2009, I conducted 70 interviews with Nepali women

regarding their religious beliefs, practices, and family life. Forty-seven of these interviews were

with women currently attending services at Om Shanti centers and the remaining 23 were with

systematically matched women who were not. At the two smaller centers, located in Subhapur

and Gaida Chowk, I interviewed the entire population of women who were attending services at

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[4] Comprehension of Hindi varies according to socio-economic and education levels. Affluent Nepalis may routinely
consume Hindi media, such as films and magazines, or travel to India for tourism. Others, such as members of the
Tharu ethnic group, may experience Nepali as a second language and have little to no familiarity with Hindi.

the time I conducted interviews[5] – 13 women in Subhapur and 14 in Gaida Chowk. At the Bistanagar center, which sometimes had over 100 women in attendance at services, I selected interviewees using stratified random sampling with an oversample of certain ethnic minorities. Using a list of women members modified to include women who had very recently begun attending, I identified the 5 women from the center who were Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Rai, Limbu, Madhesi, or low-caste Hindu. I then took a random sample of 15 interviewees from the remaining high-caste Hindu and Newar women (there is a sizable number of Newars both in Bistanagar in general and at the Bistanagar Om Shanti center in particular, rendering oversampling unnecessary).

I selected women not involved with Om Shanti as interviewees by matching them to Om Shanti participants in terms of three characteristics – neighborhood of residence, age group, and marital status. After leaving the homes of certain Om Shanti interviewees, I would go to the next home not owned by a member of the interviewee's family and go door-to-door until I found a woman with the same marital status (ever married or not) and in the same age group (18-30 years old, 30-50 years old, or 50+ years old) as the Om Shanti interviewee in question. For example, after interviewing a 20 year old, never married woman participating in Om Shanti in Bistanagar, I went door-to-door down the same street until I found an 18 year old, never married woman not currently participating in Om Shanti who was willing to be interviewed. I interviewed 27 of these "other" women – 10 in Bistanagar, 7 in Subhapur, and 6 in Gaida Chowk. I opted to conduct fewer of these interviews than those with women involved with the Brahma Kumaris as other research has well documented the practices of Hindus and Buddhists in Nepal (Bennett, Gray,

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[5] The Subhapur center had a population of 14 women, but one was a respondent in the Chitwan Valley Family Study and thus ineligible for inclusion in my research.

Ortner); these women are included in this study for the purpose of making comparisons with Brahma Kumaris.

Although I did not record them, I conducted several informal interviews on matters of religious teachings and practices with sisters living at the Subhapur and Gaida Chowk centers and both with the head sisters and brother and many of the lower-status sisters living in the Bistanagar center. I also took the seven-day course required to become a member of the Brahma Kumaris twice – once entirely in English at the Subhapur center with an English-speaking senior member of the congregation there and once in both English and Nepali from the senior brother at the Bistanagar center, along with a female Nepali friend. Finally, I received permission from a Nepali family to observe their seven-day course, which was given again at the Subhapur center by the senior sister there.

Results

Puja as Public

Family homes in the Terai differ from homes in the United States and other Western contexts in that they are much more public in nature. Thus, although daily puja is typically conducted in individuals' homes, it is a religious practice that is "open and accessible" in nature and is located in a venue where sociability occurs. Many homes that I observed in the Terai do not have conventional doors, do not have doors that lock, or have sheets of fabric hanging in doorways in place of doors. Even when a house has a door fastener, it is not uncommon for individuals to unlatch this and wander into a home in search of someone. On many instances, my interview assistant Raksha and I entered a respondents' homes in search of them, merely calling out to announce our presence as we entered. This occurred even when we were not

previously acquainted with the respondent, and Raksha explained that this is a common practice in the area. On one occasion in early January, we came unscheduled to the home of Krishna Kumari, a 65 year old woman from the Subhapur Om Shanti center, to conduct a formal interview with her. When Krishna Kumari was not home, we entered her property, sitting on a wooden bench for several hours waiting for her. When Krishna Kumari's neighbors saw us, they did not remark on our presence; neither did Krishna Kumari's husband, who I was not previously acquainted with, when he eventually returned home.

Family homes in the Terai are also less private than American homes in that outdoor areas are considered a natural extension of physical houses and that many tasks considered private both in the United States and Nepal are conducted out of doors. It is not uncommon to observe people in engaged in laundry, cooking, washing dishes, bathing, or brushing one's teeth outside. Just as kitchens are kept ritually pure for Hindus, outside courtyards are also regularly purified with mixtures of mud and cow dung. Finally, many locales that we think of as being public spaces, such as stores or restaurants, are attached to people's homes in the Terai; when I arrived to interview Isha, a 45 year old Hindu woman living in Subhapur, I found her both washing her family's dishes outside at a tap and monitoring the small general store attached to her house. These observations are consisted with other writings on the nature of Nepali households. Gaborieau (1991) observes of Indo-Nepali homes that

> "the courtyard is used for several purposes. It is an extension of the house as well as the agricultural and craftwork buildings. It is used all the time. The children play there and in the cold season…the family members warm themselves in the sunshine of the courtyard. Seated on mats made of rice straw, men and women work, chat and discuss the proceedings of the day. Some domestic chores are performed in the courtyard…The courtyard is also a religious and social space. Some of the ceremonies relating to the life cycle are performed here…" (36).

While my respondents may sit on plastic mats, rather than ones made of rice straw, this description of Nepali homes echoes my experiences in the Terai. Similar to the pre-private European homes described by Aries, homes in the Terai are a social space occupied by not only family members, but also neighbors, friends, servants, and members of business relationships. This sociability is facilitated by fact that a private/public distinction is not necessarily made between indoor and outdoor household space.

In addition to the public nature of Terai homes, *puja*, the Hindu religious practice conducted there within, is traditional and easily recognized and understandable to most Nepalis, even if they are not Hindu. Thus, *puja* is "public knowledge," in keeping with Wuthnow's criteria for public religion. *Puja* is part of public knowledge in two ways. First, at the individual level it is a ritual that individuals are likely to practice, or witness if they do not engage in it themselves. Second, as Nepal had been a Hindu kingdom for most of its existence as a nation-state, *puja* is associated with rituals and ideologies that had until recently been linked with the official State.

Almost all of the women I spoke with in described *puja* as an important traditional practice for Nepalis, even if they had joined the Brahma Kumaris and it was no longer something they practiced themselves. Anusha, a 30 year old woman from Subhapur, said of *puja*, "our forefathers have been doing this, so we have to do it." Similarly, Laxmi, a 40 year old woman practicing Om Shanti, says that "that's the culture...doing *puja* is our culture. It was being followed as culture from a long time ago." Isha explained the importance of *puja* as

> if we don't follow, then our culture will be extinct. Tradition also will be finished. Religion helps us to follow our traditions, these shouldn't be changed...We should keep our tradition on. Everybody like children, family, and future generation should know our culture and tradition in the future... If we don't follow it, the future generations won't know about our culture, right?

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Even among women associated with the Brahma Kumaris, puja remained important as a traditional Nepali practice. Chandni, a 36 year old woman from Subhapur, explained why she maintained a *than* (altar for puja) in her house after joining the Brahma Kumaris by noting "there is nothing to get praying to the stone gods. But it is our culture and tradition. I used to do *puja* before marriage…I couldn't dare to dismantle the *than*. I still love the traditional gods. Maybe I will quit praying to them in the future." Similarly, Lata, a 41 year old woman from near Subhapur practicing Om Shanti said "Om Shanti talks about knowledge and soul. But Hindu religion… we don't oppose Hindu religion, we can't discard our culture." In some instances, the continuation of *puja* practices seems related to women's understanding of the Brahma Kumaris as just another form of Hinduism, something compatible with *puja* and that did not require its discontinuation. However, even women who interpreted the Brahma Kumaris as a distinct religion that asked its followers to cease doing *puja* attached importance to this practice and in many instances continued with it. Laxmi explains this, stating "I do daily work getting up early in the morning. I change the water in the vessel and arrange materials for puja although it is not done in Om Shanti. They say it is not necessary to do *bhakti* (devotion) if one has *gyan bhakti* (devotion to the knowledge of Om Shanti). But I think our children won't learn to do *puja path* if we stop doing it."

As mentioned earlier, religious practices in Hinduism are often referred to as "the householder's path." Many women I spoke with, both those involved with the Brahma Kumaris and those who were not, spoke of *puja* as a necessary household task, something that someone in the household must accomplish on behalf of the household, along with other tasks such as cooking and taking care of animals. When asked if she did daily *puja*, Jyoti, a 26 year old woman who had just begun coming to the Om Shanti center when I talked to her explained

"Father always does it. I only do (it) when he is not at home. And mother does (it) sometimes. I do other external works. I (am) busy looking after kids and pets." Relatedly, many women mentioned when asked this question that their daughter or daughter-in law did *puja*. Krishna Kumari, who no longer does *puja* since her involvement with Om Shanti noted "I am…doing in my own way but I am fulfilling my duties from my side properly." These statements illustrate that unlike individual worship in the United States, *puja* is a form of religious practice that is done by individuals on behalf of the entire household. I interpret this 'household chore' of *puja* as something that has a connotation of adult responsibility, in line with Wuthnow's ideas on public religion. This interpretation of *puja* as an adult responsibility is further supported in that respondents spoke of *puja* as a task they learned and began doing in their adolescence or after they get married. Most women spoke of not doing *puja* in their child, but of learning the practice when they were between ages 10 to 15 and sometimes only beginning it after getting married.

Finally, and in accordance with households in the Terai serving as public space, the *puja* conducted in these houses seems to have a performative element. *Puja* is done not merely for the individual and god(s) but also for surrounding observers. Chandni contrasts this to the Brahma Kumaris, noting that "*puja* is showing others. Baba is prayed to by heart." Similarly, Laxmi states "I have left doing *puja*. Doing *puja* is a showy thing…we don't need to do *puja* and offer flowers to god because they are only showy business... we should serve others and do meditation for *gyan* so that we can concentrate. We should assimilate ourselves to the supreme spirit." Later on in the interview, however, Laxmi admits to sometimes still doing *puja*, and notes that "I don't want my relatives to think that we have forgotten our culture." This performative element is noteworthy in that it connects puja to Wuthnow's first and second definitions of "public" – being "of the people" and being associated with openness and accessibility. Doing *puja* for an

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audience, even if the audience consists of neighbors who are not overtly watching, renders it an act that is not purely individual. In addition, because this audience understands the meaning of *puja*, and it is done with the knowledge that observers will understand it, *puja* is clearly open and accessible in its meanings. This is in contrast to practices of the Brahma Kumaris, such as wearing white clothing, which are inaccessible and subvert traditional meaning systems.

When many women spoke of the performative aspect of *puja*, they mentioned its importance as a traditional practice and their desire to pass it on to their children. Maya Devi, a 33 year old woman currently both following traditional Hindu practices and involved with the Brahma Kumaris (and who had previously explored Christianity and the Radha Swami religious movement) explained that "if all of the daughters are taught the norms of Om Shanti, I doubt, they will even forget to light the lamp or religious lights. So, I am trying to teach them by conducting worshipping…I do the old religious activities, but I remember the *Parmatma* (supreme soul) mostly…I am trying to teach only about the culture."

The Brahma Kumaris as Private

Having demonstrated how traditional Hindu *puja* in Nepal is public, according to Wuthnow's criteria for public religion, I now move to consider how the Brahma Kumaris represent a more private form of religion. In this discussion, I continue to rely on Wuthnow's claim that openness and accessibility are characteristics of public religion; I expand on this claim and contend that isolation and inaccessibility, as the reverse of these, are therefore characteristics of private religion. This is in line with Aries's assertion that privacy is found where there is a lack of sociability, or where socialization and interactions with other do not occur. In what follows, I discuss three ways in which the Brahma Kumaris can be considered a more private

form of religion, when compared with traditional Hindu puja practices of the Terai. First, I discuss the ways in which worshipping in Om Shanti centers physically isolates Brahma Kumari members from outsiders while they are engaged in worship, an isolation that is largely perceived by my respondents as beneficial. Next, I illustrate how the Brahma Kumaris are culturally isolated from mainstream Nepalis due to their practice of wearing white dress. I use the phrase culturally isolated because, as I will illustrate, this use of white dress renders the Brahma Kumaris both distinctive and relatively "illegible" (Butler 1993) in a system where people are accustomed to using clothing as a means of "reading" the marital status of women. Finally, I discuss how even within the religious movement, those involved within the Brahma Kumaris are isolated, both by the individualistic nature of worship and the limited claims of community made by the organization.

First, the Brahma Kumaris can be considered a more private form of religion than traditional *puja* in that the physical location of Om Shanti centers provides worshippers with more opportunity for solitude than does the Nepali home. When asked about the differences between religious practices at home and in Om Shanti centers, the increased privacy was consistently one of the first subjects women involved with the Brahma Kumaris mentioned. Shreya, a 40 year old woman worshipping at the Subhapur Om Shanti center, explains of meditation that "If we do it at home, we are disturbed; our concentration goes somewhere. But if we go to the centre, our meditation is concentrated. We can get the silence there but at home, the children shout." Renuka, a 29 year old from Bistanagar, notes that "Of course I don't get a suitable environment for meditation at home. I get disturbed when my family members call me for work during meditation. I feel disturbed at that moment. So, I get pleasure to be at the Ashram for meditation."

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In addition to being physically isolated from the outside world when worshipping in Om Shanti centers, members of the Brahma Kumaris are also culturally isolated from other Nepalis by virtue of the group's unconventional teachings and practices. These include the practices of vegetarianism, non-consumption of garlic and onions, and celibacy, as well as the white clothing worn by "surrendered" members who live in ashrams and have devoted their lives to the Brahma Kumaris. Although practicing a *sattvic*, or "pure," diet is common for devout Hindus in India, it is relatively uncommon for Hindus in the Terai. Bishnu Maya, who is now involved with the Brahma Kumaris, explains how this diet initially caused her to be suspicious of the group by stating "one of my friends told me to go to Om shanti religion. I didn't like it before I followed this religion. I used to say that I won't go to follow this religion where people don't eat garlic, onion and they wear white cloth." She later explains that her husband was also wary of the Brahma Kumaris "because people wear white dress and they leave eating fish, meat, garlic and onion." Similarly, Kamala a 44 year old Hindu from Subhapur, explained that although she appreciated some Brahma Kumari teachings, she was unwilling to commit to the group because of their dietary practices. Describing her past involvement, she stated that "I got one week training course from there, I like other things except the foods they prescribe. I can't avoid eating anything at home…Maybe I can leave eating meat in future. But I can't leave onions and garlic. They are also used as medicines. They make the curry tasty, don't they?" Rashmi, an 18 year old Hindu from near Gaida Chowk similarly stated "Getting up early in the morning, taking bath, are good aspects but leaving meat, fish to eat is a bad aspect… If we leave eating meat, fish, we can't get the energy as well need in our body. Some girls also go (to the Om Shanti center). I have heard that people shouldn't get married in this religion so I feel a little bit odd (about it)."

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An issue of even greater concern to Nepalis was the white dress worn by members of the Brahma Kumaris, particularly those who had "surrendered" and become full-time members of the religious order. "Surrendered" women would commonly wear white saris; while these were sometimes worn by lay women, they more commonly wore white shawls or cardigans over more typical colored *saris* or *sulwar kurtas*. This white dress violates Nepali norms in that it is customarily only worn by widows, not by unmarried women such as the Brahma Kumari 'sisters.' Anusha, a 30 year old Hindu from Subhapur, explained her surprise at seeing young women in white garb, stating "In this religion, we used to see that the women come to the center in white saris and we used to be surprised and used to think that how fast they had been widows – unknowingly, we used to guess it." Jamuna, a 38 year old Hindu and Buddhist woman from Bistanagar, when asked how she felt about the Brahma Kumaris, used their wearing of white dress to justify her dislike. When asked why she disliked the Brahma Kumaris, Jamuna explained "people wear white dress in this religion but I don't know more about it… They wear white dress even though their husbands are alive but only widows wear white dress in our culture." Similarly, Shivani, a 37 year old Hindu from Bistanagar, speculated that her husband would dislike it if she participated in the Brahma Kumaris because "he may object to the dress up. He may not like the dress, I think…Because the dress is white, you know in our culture, the white dress is worn by widows… Because of that, I think he won't like this religion, though he has not said anything on it."

As is evidenced by these quotes, the use of white dress by the Brahma Kumaris, particularly "surrendered" members, is concerning because it does not accurately reflect their marital status. Nepali women customarily wear a variety of clothing and accessories to signify their marital status. In addition to frequently wearing the color red, married women will wear

chura (bangles) on their arms, *pote* (strings of beads) around their necks, and *sindoor* (vermillion powder) in the parts of their hair. White, on the other hand, is a color typically associated with widows, as it is worn by women for a period of one year after the deaths of their husbands. Widows do not wear other signifiers of marriage such as bangles; after the deaths of their husbands, they undergo a ceremony in which their bangles are broken and other signifiers are removed. Des Chene (1998) notes that these items and their removal are not purely symbols of marriage and widowhood, but that wearing them is part of enacting the identity of a married woman and that their removal is part of the process of becoming a widow. She writes of a widowed woman that "the breaking of the bangles was, in the doing, not a 'mere' symbols of becoming a widow; it was the act itself" (Des Chene 1998: 30).

"Surrendered" female Brahma Kumaris, as well as non-surrendered married devotees who wear white clothing, have opted out of symbols that both represent and contribute to enacting marital status. In this way, they are similar to individuals with ambiguous gender expression, who Butler notes are "unintelligible," or cannot be "read" using conventional ideas about gender. Just as gender ambiguity can lead to feelings of discomfort and wariness for observers, the Brahma Kumaris precipitate these same emotions by being "unintelligible" in terms of women's marital status and sexuality. Surrendered female Brahma Kumaris are further ambiguous in that Hindu ascetics, who have withdrawn from work and family to pursue a spiritual life, are typically male (Babb 1984; Khandelwal 2001). Harlan and Courtwright (1995) write that while they can also be seen as admirable, women, particularly wives, who become celibates can also be viewed as particularly threatening. This violation of norms also aids in rendering the Brahma Kumaris private, as their practices are no longer "open and accessible" to non-members. This echoes Warner's (2002) observation that, while participating in social life

and social interaction is public, practices that remove one from typical participation in social life can be considered private.

This violation of gender and marital norms is further seen in the Brahma Kumaris' practice of celibacy, which includes unmarried people declining to marry and already married individuals living celibately, as "brother and sister." The teaching of the Brahma Kumaris that married men and women should live as celibate brothers and sisters served to further symbolically isolate the group and its members from mainstream Terai society. Apana, a 23 year old Hindu college student from near Subhapur, explained how this practice garnered disapproval, stating that "I don't like that…If you're unmarried from the beginning, that sounds good to live as brother and sister, but it doesn't suit to behave like that when you're married. It doesn't look nice to others…our society doesn't approve that for married couples." Similarly, Devaki, a 43 year old woman from Bistanagar practicing Om Shanti observed the incredulous reaction of other Nepalis to this teaching. She explained "That is also an unbelievable thing…Nobody believes that but they think this is a kind of joke…they think that nobody can live as brother and sister being a husband and wife."

In explaining why they disliked this teaching, many women noted that it violated the natural order of things within the family. While it is viewed as natural in this context for unmarried women to be celibate, the engagement of married couples in this practice was viewed as abnormal by many respondents, with potential negative ramifications for family life. Renuka, a 29 year old woman from Bistanagar practicing Om Shanti, explained why she does not follow this practice, and maintains a sexual relationship with her husband, even though they are both heavily involved with the Brahma Kumaris, stating

> Yes, we've such relation. It's natural… I don't accept what you've heard.
> Because that's not true. It's natural process. There's close relationship between

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couple and they have their own feeling, thinking and experiences. We can't blame it as wrong.

Woman both involved and not involved with the Brahma Kumaris expressed concern that celibacy between married men and women could be detrimental for both families and society in general. Regarding her concern for the family, Parvati, a 45 year old Buddhist woman from near Subhapur, stated that "if one has to live as brother and sister even after the marriage, that family can't be happy. There can't be harmony between them, so I didn't like." Even women involved with the Brahma Kumaris who accepted that marital celibacy is necessary for purity expressed concern that this practice might cause unnecessary and harmful friction in some families. Bhagwati, a 55 year old woman practicing at the Om Shanti center in Gaida Chowk explained her concern that this would occur when one family member followed the beliefs of the Brahma Kumaris but others did not. She observed that "if they maintain their family being together, it is great thing. It is not necessary to have sex. If they can compromise, it is all right. But there occurs quarrelling in the family regarding physical relationship, some people are convinced and some are not." Bhagwati went on to express concern that the practice of non-marrying and celibacy might be damaging to society as a whole, stating that "sometimes I think that if people don't get married, the world doesn't run. All the *Bahinji* (sisters) don't get married but how will it be possible to run the world when people remain bachelors."

The wearing of white dress, non-marrying, and celibacy among married men and women are all of concern to people and serve to symbolically isolate the Brahma Kumaris because they free women from this society's conventional sexual and familial trajectories.   Both 'surrendered' Brahma Kumari sisters who live in ashrams and female lay members resist the compulsory heterosexuality of their society. Rich's (1980) assessment that "if we think of heterosexuality as the 'natural' emotional and sensual inclination for women, lives such as these

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are seen as deviant, as pathological, or as emotionally and sensually deprived" (652) holds true in the rural Nepali context. Women associated with the doctrine of celibacy are seen as unnatural and potentially threatening to the social order. Further, the Brahma Kumaris are aware of the isolating nature of these practices and employ them, at least in part, for this reason. One of the women I interviewed, Bina, is a 21 year old college student who plans in the future to become a "surrendered" member of the Brahma Kumaris living in an ashram. Regarding the separating nature of these practices, she explained

> The white dress is actually used for dead bodies. It is used for the person who has left this world, separated from normal world, so it is used by the people of Om Shanti as they have been different form the people who live normal lives. It means who live in works and business. We wear white dress because we have already died; (it) means separated from normal people.

As Bina explains, white dress, along with celibacy and somewhat unusual dietary practices, all represent forms of boundary work that Nepalis involved with Om Shanti engage in. More specifically, these practices can be conceptualized as drawing symbolic boundaries, or "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 168). As symbolic boundaries, these practices serve to identify and demarcate members of the Brahma Kumaris from non-members. The Brahma Kumaris also employ this created boundary to contest other social boundaries within Nepali society, such as when they make the claim that all Brahma Kumaris are members of a "Brahmin" caste instead of the caste or ethnicity they are typically assigned to. One would also expect these symbolic boundaries to help in producing collective identity, or feelings of similarity and group membership within the group (Epstein 1992; Jenkins 1996). I explore the extent to which the Brahma Kumaris cultivate a sense of collective identity in the last section of this paper, focusing on the extent to which they do make claims of community.

The Brahma Kumaris can be considered a private religion in the Terai in that as a group, they make limited claims of community. While the isolation of Om Shanti centers and their unique clothing and sexual practices serve to isolate members from others outside the group, these limited claims of community, along with the individualized understanding of worship, serve as means of isolating members of the group from one another.

There is minimal interaction between individuals during services at Om Shanti centers. As discussed earlier, services consist of meditation and listening to a *murli*, or scriptural reading. Unlike many religious services that Americans are familiar with, there is no collective singing or interaction with fellow worshippers. The closest that services come to this sort of interaction is when attendees collectively recite the following prayer:

> To the sweetest, beloved, long-lost and now-found children, love, remembrance and good morning from the Mother, the Father, BapDada[6]. The spiritual Father says *namaste* to the spiritual children.

Because there is minimal interaction between attendees at Brahma Kumaris services, and because meditation, the focal point of the service, is done individually, there is a strong sense at Om Shanti centers that those present are all worshipping alone, despite physically being in the same room. The spiritual high point of the service is expected to occur during meditation, during which individuals have no interaction with each other, either closing their eyes or strongly concentrating on the image of *Shivababa*, the supreme soul, which is the focal point of meditation. After the service, I also observed few interactions between attendees. Thus, a sense of community is created neither during the "*murli* class" service itself, nor informally after the service.

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[6] BapDada is a term referring to both Shiva Baba, the supreme soul, and Brahma Baba, or Lekhraj Kripani, the founder of the Brahma Kumaris.

That many involved do not recognize the Brahma Kumaris as an entity that is separate from Hinduism also serves to limit the group's claims of community. As mentioned in the discussion of Hindu *puja*, many women consider the Brahma Kumaris to be part and parcel of Hinduism. For example, when asked which religion she followed, Bhagwati responded "I follow Hindu religion" and elaborated by noting "Om Shanti religion is also Hindu religion." When asked about the distinction between labels, another woman, Laxmi, explained that "it is called Hindu everywhere. It is Hindu…There is no Om Shanti religion…It is better to say it as Hindu gods and goddess' religion."

Last, when members of the Brahma Kumaris do make claims of community, they tend to be limited in nature, largely revolving around the production of spiritual "vibrations." An introductory Brahma Kumari text explains this concept, explaining that "by the recitation of a *mantram* (sic) or by merely remembering it, particular kind of waves or vibrations flow into the atmosphere to arouse in it spirituality, peace, and joy" (Chander 1977: 112). In one of the strongest statements of community and collective worship made by a Brahma Kumari respondent, Pushpita, a 45 year old woman from Bistanagar, observed that

> At home, we can't make the vibration powerful. We have been habituated to
> doing it in the centre with many friends, where Baba is there with us. At home,
> we have to take rest, so the vibration doesn't become powerful, but in the centre,
> we get the meditation very soon and the vibration becomes powerful.

The language of "vibrations" was also used to symbolically include and exclude individuals from the community. In one instance early on in my research, BK Satya *didi*, a "surrendered" woman at the Bistanagar center and the spiritual leader of Brahma Kumaris in this region of Nepal, used vibration language to include me within the community, despite my status as an oddly-dressed foreigner and a newcomer to the religion. Periodically, Dadi Gulzar, one of the leaders of the Brahma Kumaris in Mt. Abu, India, serves as a medium for messages from both Shiva Baba and

Dada Lekhraj. Because the timing of these occurrences is known in advance, they are broadcast over a secure television channel to other Om Shanti centers. In late November, I, along with several men and women from the Subhapur center, travelled to the Bistanagar ashram in order to watch this live broadcast. However, while the others from Subhapur watched this on a small television screen in an extremely packed assembly hall, I was pulled aside to watch with Satya *didi* and a number of other select sisters. Although she was very friendly and seemed fond of me, my interactions with Satya *didi* were characterized by poor communication due to limited understanding of each other's languages. While watching Dadi Gulzar serve as a medium (in Hindi), Satya *didi* pondered the issue of what I, someone who did not understand the language, would take away from the experience. She then concluded that although I did not understand Hindi and was not fully fluent in Nepali, I understood "vibration language" and could therefore understand the essence of the message. Despite my status as an uncomprehending foreigner, Satya *didi* used this notion of "vibrations" to symbolically include me in this spiritual community.

Discussion

Although they are a new religious group in a small country, the case of the Brahma Kumaris in Nepal is more broadly relevant to sociology of religion in that it cautions scholars against making a priori assumptions regarding the locations of public and private religion. This case serves to illustrate that the boundaries between public and private are situational and temporary, not enduring features of physical spaces (Zerubavel 1991, Nippert-Eng 1995). This is evident in the ability of American homes to have evolved from fulfilling functions early in American history that we typically view as public, such as serving as hospitals, houses of

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corrections, nursing homes, poor houses, locations of worship, and venues for children's education, to the bastions of the private sphere that we often conceptualize homes as today (Demos 1970). In today's American context we are seeing another breakdown of the traditional boundaries defining physical spaces as the boundary between work and home becomes increasingly fluid (Nippert-Eng 1995).

The sociology of religion can learn from the breakdown of the public/private dichotomy for describing the Brahma Kumaris in Nepal in two ways. First, the discrepancy between public homes and rural Nepal and our notion of the home as a private oasis for the family alerts us to the "monocivilizational narratives of 'Western modernity'" (Gole 2000: 91) embedded in theories of the home as private. As illustrated by Weintraub, Aries and Rybczynski, this characterization is associated with the development of European homes as private spaces in the 18th century. As sociology of religion gradually expands to include examinations of religion in non-Western contexts, it is important to recognize that theories imbued with Western developmental trajectories may be of limited utility. This then creates opportunities for theory-refining and theory-building.

Finally, an un-reification of home as private can have implications for how we understand public and private religious experiences in contemporary American society. Just as homes have evolved in the past, they continue to evolve today. Rybczynski notes of contemporary homes with open floor plans that "the space flows, but so also does sight and sound – not since the Middle Ages have homes offered as little personal privacy to their inhabitants" (222). Similarly, just as Nippert-Eng (1995) notes that the boundary between home and work is becoming increasingly fluid, boundaries between individuals' homes and congregations have also become more fluid. Campbell (2006) demonstrates that there are a

variety of ways to engage with religious communities online, from the 'privacy' of one's home, ranging from discussion forums to "cyberchurches and cybertemples" (4). Meanwhile, many forms of communal religious activity have traditionally met in people's homes, including social gatherings, meetings for prayer, scriptural study or religious education, and even holding religious services and rituals. These activities show that while homes today may becoming increasingly permeable and public, they have always been this way to a certain extent.

The intermingling of public and private in both American and international contexts creates new research opportunities in cultural sociology, work, family, gender, and social movements, as well as the sociology of religion. Scholars need to discover the new practices that arise from the shifting locations of public and private, and the new meanings that are developed as locations and actions are transformed. Because scholarship tends to attach great importance to activities that are performed in public, it is particularly important to be sure that our understandings of "public" and of associated meanings conform to those of actual actors. Attention to this matter may also serve to prevent misunderstandings of religious changes. Scholars run the risk of overestimating decline in religious practices if we are not attendant to the possibility that the practices in question may have moved to another venue. We also risk not being aware of changes, as the meaning and purpose of activities may change, even as they continue to occur in the same locations. That Nepali women moving from *puja* to participation in the Brahma Kumaris can be easily perceived as a transition from private to public, when, in fact, it is the opposite, demonstrates the need to be sure that scholarly understandings of physical spaces conform to the meanings imbued in them by actors.

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CHAPTER II
"BABA HAS COME TO CIVILIZE US":
DEVELOPMENTAL IDEALISM AND FRAMING THE STRICT DEMANDS
OF THE BRAHMA KUMARIS

Introduction

In this paper, I expand the rational choice theory of religion by looking at the nature of a

new religious movement's strict demands and its members' participation and adherence to these

requirements. I argue that framing plays a key role in determining which strict demands

movement members will accept. I use data from interviews and ethnographic observations of

women involved with the Brahma Kumaris, a neo-Hindu religious movement, in rural Nepal.

This group frames itself as consonant with modernity, or "developmental idealism," the

prevailing ideology of modern life (Thornton 2005). As described by Kurzman (2011),

modernity consists of two broad trends, "a trend toward ever-more-efficient technologies of

control and a trend toward ever-more-egalitarian ideologies of liberation" (61). I examine four

ways in which the Brahma Kumaris frame themselves as modern, how these framings are used to

facilitate acceptance of the group's strict demands, and whether the framings and related

demands were accepted or rejected by members of the group. I show that the demands that could

be successfully framed as pro-modern, such as the group's daily attendance and vegetarian diet

requirements, were accepted, while celibacy, a requirement that members did not accept as being

related to modernity or development, was rejected and largely not followed by Nepali women.

In doing this, I demonstrate that when considering why "strict churches," or strict movements in

this case, are successful, scholars must not solely consider how strict a group is, but also how strict demands have been framed, or made relevant to the daily lives of its members.

Theoretical Background

        The idea that "strict churches are strong" is one originally put forth by Kelley (1977) in his book *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, before being taken up more explicitly by Iannaccone in the 1994 article "Why Strict Churches are Strong." These scholars developed the rational choice theory of religious participation. Rational choice theory applies Mancur Olson's (1965) insights regarding social movement participation to historical data on the growth and decline of Protestant denominations. Rational choice is an alternative to religious economies theories (Finke and Stark 1992). Rational choice attributes differences in the success of Evangelical and mainline denominations to differences in the demands made of congregants and their stance toward "free riders," as opposed to religious economy's focus on the diversity of the overall religious marketplace. In his 1977 work, Kelley contends that the appeal and success of a religion is not related to its doctrinal contents, but to the seriousness of its adherents - "the demands made upon the would-be members and the commitment with which they respond" (53). Kelley characterizes the demands made upon members as the "strictness" of a religion. He notes that strictness is an asset to a religion in four ways: ensuring that members will be committed, illustrating the seriousness of the religion to others, communicating religious meaning to members (178), and rendering that system of meaning more convincing (170). Importantly, Kelley does not put any limits on the ideal amount of strictness for a religious organization, writing that "strong organizations are strict...the stricter the stronger" (1977: 95).

Iannaccone (1994) applies economic thinking to the issues of strict churches. He defines strict churches as those that "proclaim an exclusive truth...They demand adherence to a distinctive faith, morality, and lifestyle. They condemn deviance, shun dissenters, and repudiate the outside world. They frequently embrace 'eccentric traits' such as distinctive diet, dress, or speech, that invite ridicule, isolation, and persecution" (Iannaccone 1994: 1182). Iannaccone goes on to define strictness itself as "the degree to which a group limits and thereby increases the cost of nongroup activities, such as socializing with members of other churches or pursuing 'secular' pastimes" (1182). Strictness is able to benefit religious organizations, or make them "strong" by eliminating the problem of free riders, or individuals who receive the rewards or benefits of an organization or movement without expending any "costs" or personal resources (Olson 1952). By eliminating free riders, religious organizations are then able to raise their overall levels of commitment, increase average rates of participation, and enhance the net benefits of membership.

Iannccone also contends that strictness benefits religious organizations by increasing the costs of participation in alternate activities or organizations that might compete with the 'strict' organization for members. He writes that "distinctive diet, dress, grooming, and social customs constrain and often stigmatize members, making participation in alternative activities more costly. Potential members are forced to choose whether to participate fully or not at all. The seductive middle ground is eliminated, and, paradoxically, those who remain find that their welfare has been increased" (Iannaccone 1994: 1188). In other words, in addition to increasing the benefits that members receive from participating in a religious organization, strictness also increases the costs of participating in alternate activities.

Unlike Kelley, however, Iannaccone does consider the issue of whether a religious organization can employ too much strictness. He writes that "for any target population of potential members, there will therefore exist an optimal level of strictness" (Iannaccone 1994: 1202). Religious organizations that are strict in excess of this optimal member will likely unable to attract new members because of their excessive strictness. Groups that are under this optimal level, on the other hand, will lack adequate strictness for eliminating free riders. Interestingly, Iannccone contends that determining the optimal level of strictness is related to how a group responds to a changing social environment. He writes that "to remain strong, a group must maintain a certain distance or tension between itself and society. But maintaining this 'optimal gap' means walking a very fine line in adjusting to social change so as not to become too deviant, but not embracing change so fully as to lose all distinctiveness" (Iannccone 1994: 1203).

There have been a number of studies applying the theory of strict churches to particular religions or religious organizations. Stark and Iannaccone (1997) consider the ability of strictness to eliminate free riders in their analyses of the rapid growth of Jehovah's Witnesses. Echoing Iannaccone (1994), the authors contend here that "new religious movements are likely to succeed to the extent that they maintain a medium level of tension with their surrounding environment - are strict, but not too strict" (Stark and Iannccone 1997: 144). Stark and Iannaccone find that for the Jehovah's Witnesses, eliminating free riders increases the average level of commitment in congregations and minimize the number of members of the group who frequent bars and taverns. Without free riders, Jehovah's Witnesses can maintain a high level of energy, benefitting them both spiritually and in practical actions. Stark and Iannccone also consider the question of whether the Jehovah's Witnesses may be excessively strict. They find that while many of the group's teachings put them in tension with the outside world, they also

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accept many aspects of mainstream culture. In particular, they do not wear distinctive dress and

female members use make-up. The authors theorize that "consequently, it is impossible to

identify a Witness, unless he or she volunteers the information. *Visibility* may, in fact, be the

crucial factor for identifying when groups impose too much tension or strictness" (Stark and

Iannaccone 1997: 146). However, Iannaccone and Stark say little about how they arrive at this

conclusion or how one would use group visibility to determine if a group has achieved the

optimal level of strictness.

Wuthnow and Cadge (2004) also employ the "strictness hypothesis" in their examination

of Buddhism's growing influence in the United States. The authors divide the 'strictness'

perspective into three parts: first, that strict religious groups never capture the entire religious

market, leaving the uncaptured segment vulnerable to other religious groups, second, "that

religious *suppliers* that offer strict teachings will have the greatest competitive success"

(Wuthnow and Cadge 2004: 366) not because of their doctrine but because they are better able to

mobilize resources, and third, that religious suppliers must be analyzed with regard to broader

social structures and institutional environments. The authors find some degree of support for all

three perspectives and conclude by noting the necessity of incorporating culture into the rational

choice paradigm. They write "understanding the influence of religious traditions especially

requires paying attention to the institutions in which cultural production is embedded" (Wuthnow

and Cadge 2004: 367).

Smith (1998) also speaks to the need to incorporate culture into the "strict churches"

perspective. While Smith agrees that Iannacone's strictness theory successfully explains the

relative success of Evangelical denominations when compared with Mainline Protestants, he

notes that strictness alone cannot account for the greater success of Evangelicals when compared

with fundamentalism. Smith believes that that Evangelicals are successful both because their distinctive practices allow them to formulate meaningful identities and because they engage with, rather than isolate themselves from, modernity (89). The demands that Evangelicalism makes are not merely strict, they are also framed and re-framed in ways that accommodate the church's relationship to the ever-changing realities of modern life. As Smith notes, Evangelical denominations have "strategically renegotiated their collective identities by continually reformulating the ways their constructed orthodoxies engage the changing sociocultural environments they confront" (100).

As these authors indicate, culture defines which doctrinal demands will be considered strict, and which will be largely in line with prevailing social norms. Culture may also help to determine which strict demands congregants will be prepared to fulfill, and which they will be unwilling to accept. To understand how religious leaders might present their demands to their congregants in the most acceptable light, I look to the literature that describes the relationship between how ideas are presented and how they are received, the framing literature.

Framing Perspective

The notion of "framing" is one that was introduced by sociology by Goffman, in his 1972 book *Frame Analysis*. In this text, Goffman describes frames as mental devices that aid in the organization of everyday life. Frames are "mental templates of appropriate behavior for common situations, acquired through socialization and experience and fine-tuned by the individual on the basis of what worked in the past and/or what others report as useful. Thus, they are *both* individual and social" (Goffman quoted in Johnston 2005: 239). According to Goffman, frames allow us to go through life as normatively competent actors. Frames are both categorical,

in that they allow specific instances to be fit within general templates (Goffman writes that frames allow us "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" (1972: 21), and action-oriented, as they direct one to enact a particular set of behavior that is most appropriate for the situation according to social norms.

Within the field of social movements (and that of new religious movements), the perspective of framing has been most strongly taken up by Snow and Benford (1988; 1992; 2000; 2005). They define a frame as "an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action within one's present or past environment" (1988: 137). To put it more simply, frames "render… events or occurrences meaningful" (Snow et al 1986: 464). While frames often inspire their recipients or audiences to action (what social movement scholars would term "collective action frames"), they do not always necessarily lead to forming or joining a movement. Frames do not determine people's actions, but they can contribute to a cultural milieu in which action seems appropriate and desirable. Frames can depict action as efficacious, as good, and as a responsibility. Unsuccessful frames either fail to inspire or depict collective action as unnecessary, inappropriate, or improper.

In order to inspire individuals to action, and, on a more basic level, in order to be used as a means for conceptually organizing everyday life, frames must be relevant and applicable to their perspective users, corresponding with their understanding of reality. Snow and Benford term this requirement "framing resonance." Noakes and Johnston (2005) explain this concept when they note that "successful frames must not only analyze events and identify who is responsible but also ring true or *resonate*" (2). Numerous scholars of social movements have theorized as to how frames achieve resonance with their audience, all focusing on a number of

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related factors. Snow and Benford (1992) identify six factors that affect frame resonance: frame consistency, empirical credibility, the credibility of the frame's promoters, experiential commensurability, centrality, and narrative fidelity. Noakes and Johnston (2005) condense these into three factors: cultural compatibility, consistency, and relevance. In order to be resonant, frames must be compatible with the cultural themes, symbols, and" tools" of the audience. It must be articulated consistently, and it must be applicable to the audience's everyday lives and experiences. Gamson (1992) echoes this focus on cultural compatibility, observing that audiences are more likely to find frames resonant when they employ "cultural symbols" that are natural and familiar to them (135).

In addition to introducing the idea of framing resonance, Snow and Benford also articulate the concept of a "master frame," or a frame that can be flexibly applied across a variety of specific situations and demands. The preeminent example from the social movements literature is the "rights frame" developed by the civil rights movement, and since re-used to endorse women's rights, gay rights, and many other movements. The authors explain that "master frames can be construed as functioning in a manner analogous to linguistic codes in that they provide a grammar that punctuates and syntactically connects patterns or happenings in the world (Snow and Benford 1992: 138). However, I contend that for the case of Nepal, "development" serves as a master frame for both movements and individuals.

There have been several studies examining how religious organizations or religiously affiliated movements have employed framing. The most well-known of these studies include Snow's (1993) study of the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement and Rochford's study of the Hare Krishnas, which were used in developing the frame alignment perspective (Sherkat 2006). Other studies on the use of frames by religious movements include the Promise Keepers and the

spiritual framing of racism (Allen 2000), the religious pro-choice movement and the difficulty of

creating resonant frames for a multi-organization field (Evans 1997), and the Central American

solidarity movement's politicization of the religious frames of conversion and resurrection

(Nepstad 2007). More recently, research on the intersection of religion and framing has focused

on Islamic movements. This has included research on how Al-Qaeda and other jihad

organizations positively or negatively frame intellectuals based on their support of the cause

(Wiktorowicz 2004), as well as on how Islamic terrorist movements frame themselves as

nationalist and protest as a religious obligation (Snow and Byrd 2007).

Modernity and Development as a "Master Frame" in Nepal

In contemporary Nepal, modernity serves as a master frame for both social movements

and individuals in their everyday lives. In making this contention, I rely on the work of Pigg

(1996), Ahearn (2001), Liechty (2003), as well as Thornton's (2005) theory of "developmental

idealism". Pigg explains how modernity serves as a paradigm through which Nepalis experience

the world, writing that "modernity, in this sense, is quite literally a worldview: a way of

imagining both space and people through temporal idioms of progress and backwardness" (Pigg

1996: 163). Modernity also serves as an agenda for development projects, which introduce

specific notions of modernity through their particular development agendas (Adams 1995;

Escobar 1995). Through these development projects, modernity becomes the "other" through

which Nepalis define themselves and something they aspire to. As Pigg writes "Nepalis

experience modernity through a development ideology that insists that they are *not* modern,

indeed that they have a very long way to go to get there" (1996: 163). In Ahearn's study of love

letter correspondence and its relationship with social changes, she writes that development

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discourse is prevalent in Nepalis' lives, through textbooks, magazines, novels, radio programs, Hindi films, and advertisements. She notes that in addition to promoting more typical development goals, such as small families, education, or consumerism, this discourse has influenced view of romantic love and promoted new ideas regarding the self, emotion, and agency. Ahearn writes that development discourse is "constantly being reconstituted or reinforced by the (village) residence themselves" as they appropriate discourse and use it for their own aims, such as love letter writing (2001: 262).

In his study of middle class culture in Kathmandu, Liechty takes up the issue of how Nepalis attempt to produce and perform a Nepali modernity. He writes that although countless people in Kathmandu experience facets of modernity, both positive and negative, "an ideologically weighted global politics of 'development' and 'progress' places Nepal and its capital in the structural position of modernity's opposite" (Liechty 2003: xiii). Liechty explains that "this contradiction presents Nepalis with a challenge – at once emotional, intellectual, and material – to *produce themselves* as members of, and inhabitants in, a world that is both modern *and* Nepali (2003: xiii). Youth in Kathmandu must continually perform their own modern self-identity, using tools such as fashion and language. Their production of modernity is complicated because these youth are shut out from some facets of modernity, such as acquiring employment that is commensurate with their education levels.

Belief in modernity as a master frame strongly resembles what Thornton (2005) refers to as "developmental idealism" or belief in the "developmental paradigm." Thornton describes belief in the developmental paradigm as consisting of belief in four propositions: "(1) modern society is good and attainable; (2) the modern family is good and attainable; (3) the modern family is a cause as well as an effect of modern society; and (4) individuals have a right to be

free and equal, with social relationships being based on consent" (136). Thornton goes on to note that adherents of the developmental paradigm tend to associate "traditional" societies with "agricultural production, rural life, low levels of school attendance, and limited transportation and communication facilities, whereas societies considered to be modern have been associated with industrial production, urban life, high levels of education, and rapid transportation and communication systems" (137). People who believe in the developmental paradigm view its four propositions as a blueprint for transition to a more modern society and the increased economic prosperity, health, happiness, and global power that they associate with modernity. This point of view has been propagated around the world with assistance from phenomena such as industrialization and urbanization, as well as American foreign policy, global governance structures such as the United Nations, and other NGOs, particularly family-planning organizations.

I theorize that what Thornton terms developmental idealism can also be conceptualized as development or modernity serving as a "master frame." In keeping with Snow and Benford's definition, developmental idealism is a worldview through which Nepalis perceive situations, people, and objects in their everyday lives. As Ahearn and Leichty explain, Nepalis are constantly engaged in producing themselves as modern, whether this consists of rural Magars and love letter writing or youth in Kathmandu and fashion. Pearce et al (2011) demonstrate that this worldview can be extended to how Nepalis view the very environment around them.

New Religious Movements and Reactions to Modernity

The anti-modern light has in which many new religious movements have been cast has been strongly influenced by the work of Huntington (1993) and his "clash of civilizations"

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paradigm. Hunter writes that new religious movements represent a "demodernizing impulse," (1981: 7), protesting against the alienating and anomic aspects of modernity. New religions rise up to provide meaning and absolutes that are lacking in the modern social world. Hunter notes that this is the case even for movements that may seem positive in their orientation toward modernity, such as Scientology or the Unification Church, writing that these groups "can readily be seen to be at variance with the normal practice and assumptions of modern everyday life" (1981: 8). This view is echoed by others such as Johnson (1981), Tipton (1982), Wallis (1982; 1984), and Bruce (1996) and is rooted in Berger's (1990) theory that religion provides people with meaning and objective reality (Dawson 1998).

Other authors propose a dichotomy between anti-modern and modern new religious movements. Davidman (1993) explains that religions typically offer two reactions to modern society – accommodation or resistance. Accommodating groups, such as certain evangelical Protestants (Hunter 1982) and Charismatic Catholics (Neitz 1987), "adapt…certain features of the religion to make it more consonant with secular ways of life" (Davidman 1993: 32). Groups that resist modernity, on the other hand, focus on "establishing strong boundaries with the broader culture, resisting cultural encroachments as much as possible, and setting the group up as a radical alternative (Davidman 1993: 32). Wallis (1984) offers a related perspective, describing religious movements as either world-affirming or world-rejecting. Dawson (1998) complicates this somewhat, observing that "NRMS do seem to bifurcate into some kind of conservative and liberal, or traditionalist and experimentalist clusters" (147), but some movements, such as Pentecostal-Charismatics and the Moonies, are difficult to classify. Dawson concludes by musing that "perhaps we are faced with a single modernist continuum of more conservative or more liberal religions?" (147).

In this paper, I depart from the agenda of previous authors on this topic. I neither attempt to classify the focal religious group, the Brahma Kumaris, within a dichotomy of traditional or modern or to situate them on a continuum of the two. Instead, I argue that the Brahma Kumaris, a neo-Hindu new religious movement, are "modernity mediating." In deliberately framing themselves and their teachings as modern, the Brahma Kumaris provide a modern self-identity that is available to people who are typically shut out of such identities – adult women in rural Nepal. Education has only recently become widespread in Nepal and as adults, these women have few opportunities to pursue additional education that might involve them in "development." While they may live in or in proximity to urban areas, their responsibilities to their families and to their work, be it inside their households, in agriculture, or in retail, preclude them from participating in in all the "developed" activities an urban area might offer. The Brahma Kumaris 'mediate' modernity to these women by packaging it in such a way that it is available to them – as part of religion, a task they would otherwise be engaged in. Women involved in the Brahma Kumaris are given an avenue to construct modern self-identities without constraints that might be posed by their responsibilities, economic situations, or social norms.

In addition to making modernity and development accessible to Nepali women, their mediation of modernity also allows the Brahma Kumaris in Nepal to function as a strict, and successful, religious group. I argue that the "strict" demands made by the Brahma Kumaris, such as daily attendance at religious services and consuming a restrictive, vegetarian diet, are framed as modern by the group. These demands and ideologies – daily attendance at religious services, following a vegetarian diet as part of a 'Brahmin family,' and perceiving the Brahma Kumaris as a solution to modern tension and stress – are largely followed by female adherents of the group in Nepal. They are also examples of framing resonance; their framing as modern and developed

has been taken up and embraced by Nepali women. However, in the case of celibacy, one of the Brahma Kumaris' strict demands that is frequently not followed by Nepali women, its modernity and development framing is nonresonant, or has not been adopted.

The Brahma Kumaris are certainly not the only religion who have presented themselves as modern, or who have been incorporated into notions of development by a certain population. Kulick (1992) writes of the village of Gapun in Papua New Guinea, that there is a belief that to become developed, one must become a Christian. Thus, the solution to problems of not being developed is viewed as being primarily religious in nature. Other studies connecting religion and perceptions of modernity have focused on the phenomenon of "cargo cults," or the belief that religious rituals, particularly those focused on ancestors, will help a group obtain Western-style development and goods, or "cargo" (Burridge 1960; Lawrence 1964). Davidman (1993) and Smith (1998) both observes that even religion that position themselves as "traditional" or potentially modernity rejecting serve to mediate an identity to their members vis-à-vis modernity. Davidman notes that even separatists groups, such as Orthodox Jews, provide their members with an identity in relation to modernity, albeit a modernity-rejecting one. Smith notes, that groups such as American Evangelicals who are not separatists, must engage with modernity in order to reject it in a meaningful way. This not only makes available a traditional, or anti-modern, identity for their members, but allows for the contents of that identity to change over time in order to respond to changes in modern society. Only by engaging with modernity can one meaningfully rejected.

These cases illustrate that religions have the capacity to be "modernity-mediating" in several different ways, both by making modern self-identities available to their members and providing the basis for an identity based on traditionalism. While cargo cults or Christianity in

Gapun mediate modernity by positing religious conversion or rituals as the path to development, the Brahma Kumaris mediate modernity by making things that Nepali women can use to construct modern self-identities concomitant with their participation in the religious organization. Before describing this, however, I offer a brief overview of the Brahma Kumaris' development and current teachings, as well as on religion in Nepal in general.

Development of the Brahma Kumaris

The events that lead to the formation of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University began in Hyderabad in the late 1930s by a Hindu businessman named Lekhraj Kriplani (referred to by the Brahma Kumaris as "Dada Lekhraj" or "Brahma Baba"). Lekhraj began to experience what he believed to be divinely-inspired visions of the Hindu gods Vishnu, Shiva (taking the form of a column of light), the destruction of the world, and millions of souls of the dead. As a local visionary, he began to attract followers, particularly women from wealthy business families (Babb 1991: 101). In 1937, Lekhraj took the first steps to institutionalize his visions, forming a committee of his women followers and eventually endowing this group with his fortune (Babb 1991). Initially called "Om Mandli," this group marked the beginnings of the Brahma Kumaris.

As Walliss (2002) notes, the early Brahma Kumaris strong resemble a world-rejecting religious organization. Lekhraj was receiving daily messages from the Supreme Soul, Shiva Baba (God-Father Shiva), and presenting these messages to his followers as *murlis*[7]. These murlis focused on the necessity of separating from the flawed outside world, which would soon be transformed through natural and nuclear disasters that only the "spiritually pure" Brahma Kumaris would survive (Walliss 2002: 39). Members were encouraged to have a "death-in-life"

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[7] The term *murli* means "flute" in Hindi; this is a reference to the flute that the Hindu god Krishna used to summon the cow-herding girls who were his followers.

when they joined the group, dying to their worldly families and lives and being reborn as members of a "divine family" consisting of other Brahma Kumaris. Their roles in this new life then consisted of a life of *sewa*, or service, spreading the message of Dada Lekhraj and preparing for the imminent apocalypse and beginning of the Golden Age.

Perhaps due to their number of women followers, who despite their marriages were becoming *kumaris*, or virgins, the Brahma Kumaris encountered local antagonism in the years immediately following their founding. This included both an attempt to have the organization outlawed and an attempt on the life of Dada Lekhraj. Thus, as Babb (1991) notes, the doctrinal system of the Brahma Kumaris was developed during an environment of persecution.

In the 1950s, however, the Brahma Kumaris began to shift from their previous world-rejecting orientation. Due to the partitioning of India and Pakistan, the group moved to Mt. Abu, Rajasthan (referred to by Brahma Kumaris as *Madhuban* meaning "the forest of honey"). This shift coincided with a change from isolation and world rejection to active proselytization and "world service." Babb (1991) writes that "as far as I am aware, no Hindu sect has ever sought converts with the single-minded dedication of the Brahma Kumaris" (94). In particular, this period saw the development of the seven-day course for new members. They also became more active on the world stage, through the founding of centers outside of India and through their involvement with the United Nations and UNESCO, for whom they are a consultative NGO. Walliss (2002) described the Brahma Kumaris at this time as "becoming more world-accommodating or even world-affirming, still retain(ing) a strong emphasis on millenarian world-rejection" (xi). He describes this conflicting orientation as being one of "world ambivalence."

A key element of the Brahma Kumaris' belief system is their strong belief in a sort of mind-body dualism. Walliss (2002) writes that "at the core of Raja Yoga there is a strong symbolic and practical division between the body, which is seen to represent all that is false, transient, and material, and, most importantly, mortal and the soul which is seen to represent all that is true, unlimited, spiritual, and, most importantly, immortal" (53). This is explained on the first day of the seven-day course using the analogy of a car and its driver. Just as a driver resides in the car but is not part of the car, the soul resides in the body but is not part of the body. Through meditation, Brahma Kumaris can diminish their "body consciousness" and develop "soul consciousness," focusing on the fact that one is a soul. The phrase "Om Shanti," meaning "I, the soul, exist in a state of peace" (O'Donnell 2009: 6) captures this focus on the soul, as opposed to the body. Brahma Kumaris believe that at the end of this world cycle and beginning of the next, all souls will return to the soul world. From there, "descent into the material world is determined by a strict chronological order based on the quality of the soul's *sanskars*, with pure souls (soul-conscious Raja Yogis) going first and impure (body-conscious) souls going last" (Walliss 2002: 55).

While completion of the seven-day course, during which these beliefs are taught, is necessary to become a member, the Brahma Kumaris, like many other forms of Hinduism, are more concerned with orthopraxy than with orthodoxy (McClymond 2008). Key practices for the Brahma Kumaris include adhering to a *sattvic* diet, remaining celibate, and daily meditation, or practice of "Raja Yoga[8]." Some members have "surrendered" themselves, living in the Brahma

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[8] Walliss (2002) adds "good company" to this list and notes that these are referred to as the "Four Pillars of Raja Yoga" (62). I am omitting good company from my description here as none of the surrendered Brahma Kumaris and Kumars or lay devotees in Nepal mentioned this. The only time something remotely approaching "good company" came up is when, discussing a possible trip to the city of Pokhara, one of my respondents noted that it would be easier to travel with other Brahma Kumaris and eat in their homes, as they would be able to provide appropriately *sattvic* food.

Kumaris' centers and disassociating from their previous family lives. Babb notes that "surrendered women are the core personnel at all local centers. They do the teaching, conduct group sessions of yogic practice, and also do the cooking and housekeeping" (1991: 131). Lay members remain in their families but are encouraged to follow these practices and to attend daily "*murli* classes" at centers.

Religion in Nepal

Nepal historically has strong connections with both the Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions. Today, most Nepalis are Hindu, but there are also Buddhist ethnic groups (Ortner 1989) and many people practice both religions. Other religions are also gaining ground in Nepal. Dahal (2003) notes that Christianity is becoming increasingly popular, particularly after the advent of Nepali democracy. There are also a number of Muslims and followers of the Kirat religion. In addition to the Brahma Kumaris, other neo-Hindu religious movements in Nepal include followers of Sathya Sai Baba and of Osho.

Daily religious practice is often considered to be the domain of Nepali women (Bennett 1983: 45). Hindu women practice their religion by performing *puja*, or making offerings of water, flowers, fruits, lighted candles, and/or bell ringing to images of gods kept in a special box in their home. Women, as well as other family members, may also visit local temples and perform puja there. In terms of gender, the Brahma Kumaris are in keeping with Nepali norms, as the majority of members are women, both in Nepal and in other countries where the group is present (Skultans 1993; Koscianska 2008). However, the Brahma Kumaris differ from Nepali norms in that they require a number of distinctive, and strict, practices from their members. In this paper, I examine the strict demands of the Brahma Kumaris, how these demands are framed

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as related to modernity and development in four key ways, and the extent to which the framing is resonant for Nepali women. In doing this, I also explicate how the Brahma Kumaris "mediate" modernity, or offer a version of modernity to their members that can then be adopted and adapted into individual self-identities.

Methods

This analysis is based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 47 Nepali women who were attending Om Shanti centers in three towns in a Terai district of Nepal. Of these towns, "Bistanagar" is a large urban area and the juncture between two major highways, making it a transportation hub. The Om Shanti center in Bistangar, established in the early 1980s, is one of the oldest in the region. "Subhapur," located equidistant between this urban area and the jungle, is a village with a population of over 12,000 individuals living in about 2,500 households[9]. While many Subhapur residents are engaged in farming, it also has a commercial area and is located in close proximity to an agricultural college. The Om Shanti center in Subhapur is the newest in the region, as it was completed in early 2009 while this research was being conducted. Prior to the construction of the center, services were held in the home of a neighboring family. The third town, "Gaida Chowk" is located on the edge of the National Park and consists of 9,000 individuals living in about 1,700 households. Like Subhapur, Gaida Chowk has a bazaar, or main commercial area, although the Om Shanti center is located at the edge of town, away from the bazaar. In Gaida Chowk, many of the devotees did not live in the town itself, but came to the center from nearby communities, including a village of Tharu, an indigenous group native to Nepal's Terai. Many of these women would hold daily services in

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[9] All data on village populations and households come from the 1991 Nepal census.

their homes and come to the Gaida Chowk center only on Thursdays, the day when *bhog*, or sacred food, is distributed.

I recruited this sample based on the women who were attending services at these Om Shanti centers in late 2008 and early 2009. The Subhapur and Gaida Chowk centers were small enough for me to interview the population of women devotees – thirteen women in Subhapur and fourteen in Gaida Chowk. At the Bistanagar center, which frequently had over one hundred women in attendance at services, I selected interviewees using stratified random sampling with an oversample of certain ethnic minorities. After compiling a list of all women currently attending services at this center, I identified and interviewed all women who were hill Tibeto-Burmese, Madhesi, or low-caste Hindu (five women total). From the remaining women, all either high-caste Hindu or Newar, I randomly sampled five interviewees.

The interviews were semistructured and lasted on average about forty-five minutes to one hour in length. In-depth interviewing has been characterized as an effective method for exploring topics including perceptions, behavioral patterns, and cognitive justifications (Weiss 1994). I conducted the interviews in concert with an interview assistant, a nineteen year old woman from the Newar ethnic group who had experience conducting survey interviews and training in in-depth interview techniques. At the time of their interviews, most women had already met me at an Om Shanti center; those who had not met me yet had usually seen me at the center or heard of my presence in the area from a friend. In addition to this familiarity, the interview assistant, as a member of the local community, also helped build rapport. Pre-interview discussions often consisted of the interviewee and my assistant identifying mutual acquaintances or, in the case of Newars, relatives they held in common.

In addition to these interviews, I also spent five months participant-observing in Brahma Kumari activities in this area. I attended services, or murli classes, daily at one of these three centers, observing almost one hundred and fifty services in total. I completed the seven day class for new members of the Brahma Kumaris twice – once at the Subhapur center, with the class conducted in English, and once in a mixture of English and Nepali at the Bistangar center, where I was taking the course along with a Nepali friend. I also observed, with their permission, a Nepali family taking their seven day course, again at the Subhapur center. Although this was done under the auspices of "practicing my Nepali," it allowed me to verify that my experiences in the course did not vary substantially from those of Nepali participants. I observed several special events, including celebrations of Shivaratri and Christmas, the Brahma Kumaris' participation in the district's annual festival, and the ceremony opening the newly-built center in Subhapur. When I was not conducting formal interviews, much of my time was spent at the three Om Shanti centers, conversing with surrendered brothers and sisters and observing their daily routines, or at women's homes, consuming meals of tea and rice and lentils, meeting their children and viewing photos of family members abroad, and watching them go about their everyday lives.

I used the constant comparative method to analyze these interviews and fieldnotes, drawing upon the framework of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978, 1992). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) explain that "in the constant comparative method the researcher simultaneously codes and analyses data in order to develop concepts; by continually comparing specific incidents in the data, the researcher refines these concepts, identifies their properties, explores their relationships to one another, and integrates them into a coherent explanatory model" (126). Using this method, I identified three instances in which the Brahma Kumaris have

successfully framed themselves as modern: in their self-presentation as an educational institution, in their promotion of egalitarianism, and in their prescriptions for the complications of modernity. I also find one instance in which the group's framing is not successful: their attempt to frame celibacy as a form of spiritual birth control.

Results

Framing the Brahma Kumaris as an Educational Institution

One of the primary way in which the Nepali Brahma Kumaris frame them as modern, or in keeping with the ideals of developmental idealism, is through their self-presentation as an educational institution. Although in Nepal, they are commonly referred to as the Brahma Kumaris or as "*Om Shanti*" (because this is the greeting they use instead of "*Namaste*"), the organization's full name is the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University. At this "University," members attend classes, first the seven-day course for new members and then the daily *murli* classes.

This framing of the group as an educational institution is incredibly resonant among the Nepali women interviewed who were devotees of the Brahma Kumaris. One of the first women I interviewed, Gita, used this analogy when explaining the reason for her involvement with the Brahma Kumaris. Gita is a twenty-seven year old high-caste Hindu woman. She is married, although her husband is living elsewhere in Nepal for work, and has two young children. At the time of our interview, the Subhapur Om Shanti center was actually located in her in-laws house (where Gita also lived); construction on the new center next to the house was being completed and the new center was opened later during my fieldwork. Gita explained of the Brahma Kumaris that

I have been following this religion. It is a kind of knowledge study. For example, we study at school and colleges to get the degree or certificate so that we can get the job. In fact, to get the job we do the schooling. But, in this study if we do it and get the knowledge in this life, surely, we can get happiness.

Sita, a thirty-five year old high-caste Hindu woman living near the town of Gaida Chowk, echoed these remarks. When commenting on some Brahma Kumari teachings, she explained "we learn these things from *Murli*. It is our university." She later noted that "we go there regularly like going to school. The Bahinji teaches from new *Murli* books at the center" and compared the center to boarding schools for children, adding "we need to learn and have a desire to learn." Bimala, a forty-five year old high-caste Hindu woman from near Gaida Chowk, went so far as to compare to Brahma Kumaris to an educational situation where exams will be conducted. She explained that

If we study hard, we can secure a good position, otherwise failing an exam is not good. If we become first in an exam, our life will be better and we will be a good person – that's why I don't like to miss the *murli* course. If I miss the *murli* course, I get confused and miss what Baba has said on that day.

Many other women observed that the purpose of their involvement with the Brahma Kumaris was to gain knowledge, often emphasizing that this knowledge could not be gained through other forms of religious worship, such as *puja*. Durga Maya, a fifty-four year old high-caste Hindu woman living near Gaida Chowk contrasted the two, noting that "I don't pray as well as I did. I just light the candle and replace the water these days. We throw everything out immediately. Sometimes, I think it's like child's play. It's boring. But education is important. It's practical and long lasting." (Durga Maya also emphasized to me that because she had been educated up to the fifth grade, she was able to read the *murlis*). She later mentioned "I thought the prayer to idols is done by uneducated people, children, and aged people. The educated people must spread knowledge though teaching, writing and printing papers." The Brahma Kumaris provide Durga

Maya, who, while literate, many would not characterize as particularly learned, with a means of presenting herself as knowledgeable in contrast with "uneducated people." To put it in Sita's terms, the Brahma Kumaris provide women who "need to learn and have the desire to learn" with an opportunity to pursue what they understand as the pursuit of knowledge and education, even though other educational opportunities may be closed to them because of their limited educational attainment.

The Brahma Kumaris' framing of themselves as an educational institution, also extended to the white clothing that surrendered members and many lay devotees wear. When asked about white dress, Sita explained that "it is the uniform of Baba. It is like the uniform of the school going children. I think I must wear the uniform while going to center." Ganesh Kumari, a forty-five year old high-caste Hindu woman living near Gaida Chowk, echoed this statement, noting that "We are the students of god like other students who wear certain uniforms."

The Brahma Kumaris self-presentation as an educational institution is bolstered, both in Nepal and around the world, by their appropriation of science and scientific terminology. Walliss (2002) notes that "scientific theories are often brought to bear in relation to elements of Raja Yoga, such as comparing Newton's first law to karma or theories of atomic physics to the study of the soul" (67).[10] In some instances, pseudo-science is also used, although it may not be recognized as pseudo-science by the Nepali people receiving it. The most memorable incident in which science or pseudo-science was invoked during my fieldwork occurred at a special class for women that was held only a few days after I arrived in the area. This class was targeted to both members of the Brahma Kumaris and non-members; I attended with my friend Sabitha who,

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[10] Walliss also mentions "attempts to 'scientifically prove' that humanity is indeed less old than conventionally held" (67). I have omitted this mention from the main body of my text, as the issue was never raised during my fieldwork.

although acquainted with some of the Brahma Kumari leadership, is not a member. During the course of the class, we were shown a picture of one of the Brahma Kumaris' leaders, Dadi Janki. In this picture, Dadi is reclining in a clinical looking chair with electrodes on her head. The caption to this photo, which Bijaya *bhai ji*, one of the senior surrendered brothers, explained in Nepali to the audience, stated "Medical test at California for Dadi Janki, Chief of Brahmakumaris, led to declaration of MOST STABLE MIND IN THE WORLD." The use of the electric sensors, as well as the clinical atmosphere portrayed in the photo, contributed to a sense of scientific authority. Had I not researched the incident on the internet later, it would have been easy to be taken in by the claims, particularly as the photo was presented as authentic by a religious authority.[11]

The Brahma Kumaris, both in Nepal and worldwide, also actively court western scientists, augmenting their self-presentation as a university. Of the worldwide Brahma Kumaris, Walliss notes that "the University now actively courts (scientists) on the international stage as well as offering them special courses on spiritual values" (45). In this area of Nepal, the Brahma Kumaris periodically sponsor "VIP" trips for non-members to visit *Madhuban*, the international headquarters of the organization. Two friends had been invited as "VIPs" on one of these trips, likely because of their employment at a research institute in the area. In addition, one of my interviewees, the oldest female member of a family who owned a factory to make Western-style bread, had also visited *Madhuban* as a VIP. I also noted several instanced in which the Brahma Kumaris attempted to use my presence as a researcher to legitimate their

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[11] I never asked any of my respondents about this picture and video (and not all of them attended this course), but I do have indirect evidence that they believed the claims that were being made. During the same session, we were shown pictures that purported that Chinese people eat human fetuses/babies. I described these pictures in my fieldnotes as "pictures of Asian people buying jars of child brains" and "picture of man biting into barbequed baby torso." *Those* pictures, which I find to be more in-credible than the one on Dadi Janki's mind, came up a number of times during my interviews, suggesting that the audience accepted what was being presented.

claims. At several events, such as a rally following a march through Bistanagar and a car/motorcycle rally though the area on the holiday *Shivaratri,* I was introduced as "their" researcher and asked to make a speech, even though my presence and what I would say were not germane to the purpose of the event at all. I believe that my presence at these events was rather noticeable, as several women who I had not yet met but would interview later mentioned in their interviews that they had seen me on one of these occasions. Overall, the Brahma Kumaris I interviewed not only accepted the framing of their religious organization as an educational institution, they took pride in it. Their acceptance of this frame made palatable the related demands of daily attendance, reading and remembering sacred texts, and participation in special doctrinal training. Framing the Brahma Kumaris as an educational institution allowed women to be engaged in activities of development while carrying out activities and dress required by the group.

The Brahma Kumaris as Egalitarian

In addition to their self-presentation as an educational institution, the Brahma Kumaris also frame themselves as an egalitarian institution that fosters participation by all members of society. This is in keeping both with the beliefs associated with developmental idealism and the image of a new, democratic Nepal, as represented by drafts of the new constitution and the new Nepali national anthem, whose main them is presenting Nepal as a land rich in ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. This egalitarian frame, in turn, is then used as a means of justifying the restriction of the group's *sattvic* diet. As part of this diet, members eschew consuming meat, fish, eggs, garlic, and onions. These foods are thought to be activating and non-conducive to meditation and spiritual development. Particularly devout adherents do not consume food

cooked by non-members and may prefer to use cooking equipment that has not been in contact with "impure" foods. Vegetarianism and avoiding garlic and onions can be considered a strict demand in this context; while many adherents of Hinduism in India are vegetarian, Nepali Hindu religious practices tend to be somewhat heterodox compared to those in India (Bista 1991) and vegetarianism is relatively uncommon.

These demands are justified with the explanation that all Brahma Kumaris are members of a spiritual family of Brahmins, the highest-status caste within the Hindu caste system. Manderson et al (2012) explain that "although conventionally elite Hinduism insists that being a Brahmin is a birthright and cannot be acquired, the BKs make the counterclaim that being a Brahmin is a consequence of the practice of purity" (5-6). As "Brahmins," Brahma Kumaris are expected to follow the food restrictions placed on members of that caste, such as consuming a vegetarian diet and not accepting food cooked by the "impure" (in this case, non-Brahma Kumaris). While Brahmins, and the idea of caste, are typically associated with hierarchy, the Brahma Kumaris perceive themselves as having made Brahmin status, and the associated purity, available to all. One must merely join the Brahma Kumaris and follow these dietary restrictions and other practices to achieve this status. Being a Brahmin is thus disassociated from ascriptive processes, as anyone, regardless of caste status, can become a Brahma Kumari.

This framing of members of the Brahma Kumaris had been taken up by Nepali women and was reiterated several times during my interviews. Sita explained "Om Shanti means (the) Brahmin family." She goes on to specifically discuss her diet, stating "We are Brahmin. We eat those things which are allowed by Baba." More interestingly, Bhanu, a forty-seven year old Newar woman living in Bistanagar, remarked that "I think *Madhuban* is the great home for the Brahmin family like me." While it is somewhat unsurprising that Sita, who is in fact Brahmin,

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was responsive to the Brahma Kumaris' self-description as a Brahmin family, it is very interesting that this description would resonate with Bhanu, who is Newar, an group native to the Kathmandu valley.

Other interviewees elaborated further on the equality fostered within the Brahma Kumaris, going beyond the "Brahmin family" discourse. Seema, a forty-five year old high-caste Hindu woman living near Bistanagar, explained that

> I like these sentiments of Om Shanti. With these feelings, we can engage in perfect yoga or meditation. Some are white, some are black, some are Kshetris, and some are Damais. These things are politicized by modern politicians. But if we understand that we are just souls and our outward appearance is just like dress, we will see that there is nobody white and black, nobody high and low. There is no caste and creed. That's what Om Shanti says. Anybody can go there any caste any colors. There is nothing called untouchables. Om Shanti doesn't care about your physical appearance but your soul. The supreme soul gives knowledge to everybody without discrimination.

She later went on to add that "If we see others as brothers and sisters there is no caste discrimination, no Kami, no Damai, no Kshetri, and no Brahmin. All are simply playing their roles. And we all look up to Baba."

A number of respondents also noted that the Brahma Kumaris' egalitarian discourse is not just caste-related, but also extends to the role of women in society and in religion. Regarding the role of women in the Brahma Kumaris, Lal Maya explained that

> there used to (be domination of) women. Even now women are discriminated against. But Baba has given them the first place in Bramha Kumaris. I like this thing in Om Shanti. Baba has given every authority to the Dadis – they handle the religion. Therefore, as women are respected here, I like Om Shanti… Baba has handled over all the authority to women who follow Om Shanti religion. Baba has said that only women can open the gate of truth.

Many women also mentioned that the ethos of gender equality in the Brahma Kumaris encouraged them to also take this view in other aspects of live. Yogita, a fifty year-old Madheshi woman living in Bistanagar, explained that the Brahma Kumaris "gave me energy that

we women can also do (work outside the home). The program raised a curiosity in me that I, a woman, can also do work besides household work. We are not made only for household work. We can go outside and are able to do as men can do." Anju, a thirty-two year-old high-caste Hindu woman living in Bistanagar, echoed this sentiment, noting that "we learnt that we should also march forward with men. We shouldn't limit ourselves to household work and we can do outdoor activities too. Actually I like this." Khila, a forty year-old high-caste Hindu woman living in Bistanagar, took a very broad view of gender equality, stating that

> our country Nepal is male dominated (and) women are dominated by men. Not all men are like this but some women are exploited by men. Women should understand this matter themselves and they have to (advance themselves however they can). Shiva Baba has also said to promote women. I like the women's management in the Brahma Kumaris.

In my interview and observations, the egalitarian frame was adopted enthusiastically, especially by the women and lower-caste members. The egalitarian frame resonates especially well with the new civic ethos of democracy and political equality. This frame supports religious fellowship that is at odds with traditional norms of stratification and separation by caste and race. It also supports a strict diet that excludes several ingredients common in Nepali food. Bimala captures this connection between the Brahma Kumaris and an ethos of egalitarianism in her statement "Baba has come to civilize us. He hasn't come to make us priests." In traditional Hinduism, only men from the Brahmin caste are traditionally able to become priests and study religious texts. Shiva Baba and the Brahma Kumaris, on the other hand, do not restrict access to their group according to caste or gender. Instead, Baba makes religion available to all, thereby acting as an agent of development and "civilizing" the group's members.

The Brahma Kumaris as a Solution to the Tension and Stress of Modernity

Many women involved with the Brahma Kumaris reported feeling stresses associated with modern life, such as busyness, money problems, educating and disciplining children, and other issues. They reported that the Raja Yoga meditation practiced by the Brahma Kumaris helped to alleviate this stress. Regarding busyness, Jamuna, a 38 year old Newar woman who lives in Bistangar and teaches botany at a nearby college, explained that

> (my husband and I) were busy. We used to only see each other in the evening due to the business. We didn't use to take good care of our children and their studies. When we used to be unsuccessful, we used to feel a kind of depression... We didn't use to be able to make time for our children; we got a kind of mental tension. In the evening, we used to get exhaustion. Someone invited us to come to the Om Shanti center to do meditation so that we could get peace.

Jamuna went on to explain that involvement with the Brahma Kumaris helped to resolve her negative emotions, noting that "everybody was meditating there. We feel that we got complete relief there. My husband started getting relief too." Similarly, Bimala noted that the Brahma Kumaris helped her with stresses involving both time and money. She stated that

> I had many problems with mental tension, and I couldn't solve my problems, but when I followed this religion everything got solved. If I have any problems, (such as) problems of money, time, etc., I remember Baba while sleeping. Everything is solved next day...there is not any type of tension. Baba is there to do everything.

Ganesh Kumari explained how the Brahma Kumaris helped her with stress, noting that "after I joined Baba, there's no tension. I learnt that we shouldn't worry. Whatever problems are there, we need to solve them. It is our destiny. I don't worry these days as I did in the past."

The Brahma Kumaris in Nepal frame negative emotions, such as tension, stress, and anger, as products of modern life and thus, by positioning themselves as a way of dealing with these emotions, also frame themselves as a modern institution, suited to dealing with negative emotions such as busyness, fiscal problems, or jealously, that are related to modern, developed

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life. This framing is particularly advanced by Bijaya *bhai ji*, a senior brother at the Bistanagar center, who has written a book *Stress Management* that the Chitwan Brahma Kumaris have published in both Nepali and in English. In this book, Bijaya gives a brief history of humanity in which he characterizes the present day as an age of stress. He writes "20th century has been accepted by the historians as a century of stress. Imbalance between high desire, ambition, wants, and imagination and their fulfillment resulted in mental stress and tension. Unmanageable population growth and limited resources has fueled the stress" (Sigdel 2008: 7). In his discussion of causes of stress, Bijaya goes on to repeatedly indict development as a main source. Regarding environmental causes, he writes that "people living in urban areas have to live with human and machinery uproar. Noise from crowd, vehicles, factories, taverns, robs their peace and privacy. Their life is gnawed at from physical, mental, and spiritual angles. They are forced to live highly stressful lives" (Sigdel 2008: 22). In addition to the environmental changes associated with development, Bijaya also condemns societal changes. He writes that "society is changing very fast. Human relations have retained new definitions. They have turned into money-relations" (23), noting that money is at the root of most relationship-related stresses and problems. The introduction to the English edition sums up this critique, writing that "in the present day of rush, everyone has forgotten himself…Drive for material possession has compelled him to forget his real self…The ultimate result is that the outside forces weigh upon his inner power and he is bound to lead a stressful life" (Khanal 2008: 11).

After cataloging more trivial ways of dealing with stress, such as listening to music, drinking water, bathing daily, laughing, eating *sattvic* foods, and exercising regularly, Bijaya moves to a discussion of Raja Yoga meditation, which he characterizes as "the medicine of stress" (Sigdel 2008: 85). He reaffirms that Raja Yoga meditation is a modern solution by noting

that two of its components, "positive thinking and visualization have been used as therapy for fatal diseases by the modern medical science" (Sigdel 2008: 87).

In presenting stress as a symptom of modernity and Raja Yoga meditation (and by extension, involvement with the Brahma Kumaris) as its palliative, Bijaya *bhai ji* is doing a considerable amount of rhetorical work to frame the Brahma Kumaris as modern. If the Brahma Kumaris are the solution to a modern problem, then are they not also modern? The several women who mentioned tension and stress in conjunction with their involvement with the Brahma Kumaris suggest that this framing resonates with Nepali women who are Brahma Kumari devotees. These women raised the issue of stress and tension in their interviews on their own initiative, without being questioned about it, and brought up the topic much more often than their counterparts in other religions. Devaki stated that "I do meditation…Now, there isn't tension in the heart in all things. I believe in myself. I am not jealous of others' earnings so I don't feel tension as well…I am satisfied regarding that…I do not feel lacking in any field (including) food, money, and clothes." By describing the Brahma Kumaris as the solution to the modern problem of stress, particularly stress due to financial issues and conspicuous consumption, Devaki subtly frames the Brahma Kumaris as modern and relevant, indicating that Bijaya bhai ji's frame has been successfully spread among women devotees. Although my argument depends on the Brahma Kumari members' own perception of stress and stress-management as modern, it is worth noting that in his theory of modernity and identity, Giddens (1991) identifies stress as a defining emotion of modernity, and "self-therapy" as a quintessentially modern activity.

Celibacy as Birth Control: A Nonresonant Frame

As mentioned earlier, one of the most "strict" requirements of the Brahma Kumaris is their prescription that all members be celibate. This includes both never-married "surrendered" devotees who live in Om Shanti centers and married men and women living at home with their families. The Brahma Kumaris attempt to frame this requirement as modern by describing celibacy in their scriptures as a kind of birth control. For example, in a *Sakar Murli* read aloud in the Subhapur center on March 11, 2009[12], explained that birth control falls under the province of the divine Father, Shiva Baba, who is assigned this duty in the ancient Sanskrit epic and Hindu scripture the Bhagavad Gita. The *murli* states that

> You should explain this secret to someone. You should explain it to the ministers of family planning. Tell them: According to the versions of the Gita, only the one Father has the duty of family planning. Everyone believes in the Gita. The Gita is the scripture for family planning. The Father establishes the new world through the Gita. According to the drama, this is automatically fixed as His part.

According to this passage, family planning is the purview of the Father, Shiva Baba, as documented in the Bhagavad Gita. In stating this, this *murli* echoes a previous *murli* read on December 22, 2008, again while I was at the Subhapur center. This *murli* also brought up family planning and birth control as something to be provided by Shiva Baba, stating "human beings are very confused and continue to beat their heads so much. They say that there should be birth control. The Father says: I come and do this service for Bharat." Furthermore, the December 22nd *murli* went on to clarify exactly how Baba would make birth control and family planning possible. It states

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[12] In a manner similar to the Roman Catholic Church, the same *murli* is read on the same day by all Brahma Kumaris centers across the globe. I observed this *murli* being read in the Subhapur center, but it would also have been read in the Bistanagar center, the Gaida Chowk center, and all other centers.

> People say: There should be birth control. Do not give birth to any more children. This is the *tamopradhan*[13] world. Baba is now making birth control possible. All of you are *kumars* and *kumaris*, and so there is no question of vice

before going on to review other prohibitions, such as not drinking alcohol and not beating children. This segment of the murli explains how Shiva Baba is providing family planning and birth control – through members of the Brahma Kumaris being *kumars*, or male virgins, and *kumaris*, or female virgins. In short, celibacy is being framed as birth control.

Additional meaning was assigned to the term "birth control" when this was read aloud at the Subhapur center because, while the rest of the *murli* was read in Hindi, "birth control" was always mentioned using English. I use the passive voice in this instance, because although I noted the use of English in my fieldnotes at the time, I am unsure if this was a decision made by the sister reading the *murli* aloud or something that was indicated in the text. I content that by using English for the term "birth control," instead of the common Nepali phrase for family planning, *pariwar niyojan*, the *murli's* author or reader is working to further associate birth control and celibacy with modernity and development. On the use of English in Nepali texts, Ahearn writes that use of English "serves to connect the sentiments expressed…with development discourse pertaining to progress, success, and Westernization" (2001: 214). Like the letter writers in Ahearn's study, using English for "birth control" when reading the *murli* served to further connect it, and the concept of celibacy, with modernity, development, and the West.

This framing of celibacy as birth control has failed in two ways. First, many of the married Brahma Kumaris I interviewed were not practicing celibacy with their husbands. Regarding the topic of celibacy, Chandni, a thirty-six year old high caste Hindu woman living in

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[13] *Tamopradhan* is a term that the Brahma Kumaris use to indicate the greatest possible state of impurity.

Subhapur, noted that it is unfeasible. She stated that "people don't follow it. The gods are without wives but the people need them. I think like this." Bhagwati, a 55 year old high caste Hindu woman living near Gaida Chowk, observed that marriages (and thus sexual relationships) are necessary for the world to function. Bhagwati noted "sometimes I think that if people don't get married, the world won't run. All the *Bahinji* (surrendered women) don't get married, but how will it be possible to run the world when people remain bachelors? We can't force others to break their desire." Expressing a related view, Renuka, a twenty-nine year old Madheshi woman living in Bistanagar, noted of sexual relationships that "it's natural process. There's a close relationship between a couple and they have their own feelings, thinking and experiences. We can't blame it as wrong." Renuka went on to cast doubt on the idea that many married people practiced celibacy, stating that most people at Om Shanti centers are married.

Several other women agreed with Renuka that it is unlikely many married Brahma Kumaris are practicing celibacy. Laxmi, a 40 year old high caste Hindu woman living near Subhapur, warned me that people may claim to be celibate, but this is not necessarily the truth. She stated "you have asked so I have to tell the secret and real matters… It is impossible for people to do. Some who go to *Madhuban*[14] are lying. It is so hard to follow strictly…it happens while living together in the same house." Devaki, a 43 year old high caste Hindu woman living near Bistanagar, echoed these sentiments. When asked about celibacy, she stated "That is also an unbelievable thing… Nobody believes that, but they think this is a kind of joke… they think that nobody can live as brother and sister being a husband and wife."

The framing of celibacy as spiritual birth control has also failed in that when women explained this teaching, they did not discuss it in these terms. Instead, they employed a different

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[14] People who make pilgrimages to Mt. Abu are expected to have been following the vegetarian diet and been celibate for at least six months.

framing, where married couples ought to be celibate because according to the teachings of the Brahma Kumaris, they are actually brother and sisters. Seema, a 45 year old high caste Hindu woman living near Bistanagar, explained this view, stating that "well, when you consider yourselves to be the children of the supreme soul, we surely are brothers and sisters…So we address each other as brother and sister. We should not forget that." Seema went on to explain how this view of husband and wife as brother and sister supports the teaching of celibacy. She explained that

> In my opinion, if people or relatives see each other as brothers and sisters, they can remain pure. There is no misuse of sex. These days there is a lot of misuse. Fathers with daughter, brothers with sisters, people are forgetting themselves. Especially the youths today are blind. There are cases of rapes. This is all because people lack a proper view to see each other. After you get married, it is natural to do like husband and wife but… if people play the roles of brother and sister that cure the evils of the society.

In this statement, Seema explains that as husbands and wives are spiritual brothers and sisters according to the Brahma Kumaris, intercourse would be a "misuse of sex." She likens this to other instances of "misuse" such as incest between family members, including actual brothers and sisters, and rape. Gita, a 27 year old high caste Hindu woman from Subhapur, also explained celibacy in terms of brother and sister, stating "according to this course, it is better not to have sex because sex can create a lot of problems…People in the world are brother and sister so in this level, we shouldn't do the sex…" Shreya, a 40 year old Madheshi woman living near Subhapur, explained that "males can be females and females can be males. We are female now, after our death, we can be male. *Atma* (souls) get born in the form of human beings… *Atma* (souls) can be male or female so, even husband and wife may have the relationship of brother and sister." In this statement Shreya notes another concern regarding sexual activity. Not only

can souls be brothers and sisters, but as souls can be born into male bodies in one life and female bodies in the next, this raises the specter of gender trouble and homosexuality.

The failure of the "celibacy as spiritual birth control" frame to be taken up by Nepali women is an example of what social movement scholars have termed "frame nonresonance." (Snow and Brown 2005). Frame nonresonance occurs when "the rhetorical framing efforts of movement activists or leaders do not mobilize intended audiences in the direction or fashion desired" (Snow and Brown 2005: 223). In the case of the Brahma Kumaris and celibacy, the rhetorical framing efforts have failed not only to generate the desired outcome, of married people becoming celibate, but also to be rhetorically adopted by their audience. Snow and Brown write that frame nonresonance can occur as a result of four possible problems with a frame: misalignment, scope, exhaustion, and relevance. In this case, I theorize that the Brahma Kumaris' frame has failed due to a relevance problem; while birth control is a salient topic for Nepali women, framing celibacy as a type of birth control is not culturally credible in this context. This is due to the fact that family planning programs have made great strides in promoting contraception and decreasing family sizes in Nepal. Thapa and Pandey (1994) note that by 1991, 93% of married Nepali women of reproductive age were aware of at least one form of modern contraception. Tamang, Subedi, and Packer (2010) write that "Nepal's national family planning program has made significant progress in the past forty-five years…Information, education and communications campaigns have successfully increased knowledge of family planning methods, which is now nearly universal" (5).

Discussion

Members of the Brahma Kumaris in Nepal readily accepted three applications of a modernity and development framings to the group's teaching and demands – the presentation of the group as an educational institution, as egalitarian, and as a solution to the modern problems of tension and stress. The one demand that members could not accept as modern – the framing of celibacy as "spiritual birth control" – was also the only major strict doctrine that the members claimed not to practice in my interviews. I use these observations to contribute to the rational choice theory of religious participation. Incipient in Iannaccone's observations about the limits of strictness, is the idea that not only the amount, but the kind of strictness matters. For example, Iannaccone suggests that in the American context, religious clothing is a demand that few group members will be willing to accept. I build on Iannaccone's ideas by suggesting forms of strictness will be accepted or rejected depending on whether or not they have been framed in a way that is resonant with a religious group's members. In the Nepali context, white religious dress is a strict but not unacceptable demand for members of the Brahma Kumaris because it has been framed as congruent with the group's presentation as an educational institution. For the Brahma Kumaris, celibacy within marriage, however, is an unacceptable demand as it contradicts prevailing ideas about modern family planning that have been widely promulgated by non-governmental organizations.

In expanding theorizing on the limits of strictness, I also help to answer Wuthnow and Cadge's (2004) and Smith's (1998) calls to incorporate culture into the rational choice paradigm. Culture, and whether a frame is able to resonate with it, appears to influence how religious rules and teachings that have been framed in a certain way will be accepted and adhered to by members of the group. In order to be successful, strict churches must not only be strict, but also

frame their strictness in ways that resonate with the everyday experiences and commonly-held beliefs of their members. For the Brahma Kumaris, strict demands that can be successfully framed as related to modernity and development are adhered to because this frame resonates with culturally valued goals and means of developmental idealism.

This research also suggests that in addition to categorizing religious movements as either pro-traditional or pro-modern, it is also useful to consider how religions might mediate modernity, or offer a version of modernity to their members that can then be adopted and adapted. That the Brahma Kumaris, a religious movement founded in India, are able to offer a modern self-identity to Nepali women, is also illustrative of the importance one's social location plays in analyzing perceptions of modernity and development. While the Brahma Kumaris may be perceived in the West as a return to true spirituality, away from the trappings of development, in Nepal they are a path to that very modernity that Westerners seek to retreat from.

This is a case study of a relatively small and unknown religious group in a non-Western context. As a single case study, I do not expect these results to be fully generalizable to other religious movements or other contexts. However, this examination of the Brahma Kumaris in Nepal does result in transferable discoveries. I suggest that this offers a potential template for bringing culture into the study of "strict" religious groups by using the framing perspective. This approach uses in-depth case studies of other religious groups and movements in order to understand how their demands and members' receptivity to them may be related to framing. I also suggest that in addition to categorizing religious groups as either modern or traditional, scholars of religion should also consider the extent to which they "mediate modernity," or render a modern (or possibly anti-modern) identity available to their members. In Nepal, the Brahma Kumaris mediate modern self-identities to adult women, who often have little education and

whose lives are shaped by caste and gender norms, by allowing them involvement with what they perceive as an egalitarian educational institution offering modern solutions to modern stresses. By studying how modernity is mediated, we can gain a better understanding of how religious groups connect their members to or insulate them from broader societal trends and the mechanisms by which individuals position themselves in relation to modernity.

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CHAPTER III
"ENJOY THE HEAT OF A LOG, AND HEED THE ADVICE OF THE ELDERS": RELIGIOUS, EDUCATIONAL, AND NEIGHBORHOOD DETERMINANTS OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON SPOUSAL CHOICE IN NEPAL

Introduction

A Nepali proverb instructs its audience to "enjoy the heat of a log, and heed the advice of the elders." Like a mature log is a consistent source of heat when it is burning, elders are viewed as a consistent source of good advice. One venue where this has been considered to be the case in Nepal is that of marriage. In the past, the most common form of marriage in Nepal has been arranged marriage, where an individual's spouse is selected by his or her parents and/or other relatives. However, individuals are increasingly given the opportunity to participate in the selection process. They can also elope, bypassing the family selection process entirely in what is known as a "love marriage." This paper focuses on the relationship between education, religious salience, and parental or individual spousal choice – whether individuals "enjoy the heat of a log" or not.

Family scholars have demonstrated that the transition from marriage and family being based on economic considerations to marriage and family being based on companionship is a phenomenon that has occurred across many societies. Regarding Western contexts, many scholars have noted the dynamic changes that have occurred as families transitioned away from functioning as an economic production unit (Mintz and Kellogg 1988; Waite 2000). One such change is related to the emotions associated with marriage; Rothman (1984) notes that only by the 1800s did Americans expect to love their prospective spouse prior to marriage. The

transition to marriage based on some sort of affection or choice between prospective spouses has been documented in locales including Korea (Kenall 1996), Spain (Collier 1997), Egypt (Hoodfar 1997), Brazil (Jankowiak 1995; Rebhun 1999), India (Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1982; Dyson and Moore 1983), Turkey (Fox 1975), China (Xiaohe and Whyte 1990) and Nepal (Ahearn 2001; Ghimire et al 2006).

Theoretical Context: Family Mode of Social Organization

To theoretically situate the relationship between religious salience, education, and spousal choice, I use the family mode of social organization framework (Thornton and Fricke 1987, Thornton and Lin 1994, Axinn and Yabiku 2001; Beutel and Axinn 2002). As Gray and Mearns (1989) note, the family or household is a particularly useful means of understanding social change in South Asia. They write that in this context, the "householder" is an archetypal social being and a way of life for most people. The family household "is the primary place for socialization and for the constitution of a person's identity in South Asian society" (Gray and Mearns 1989: 15). Because of the primacy of the family for organizing daily life, then, a key way of understanding social change is to examine its impact on the social organization of families. Social change may shift some aspect of social life so it takes place outside the family, leading to repercussions for both people's social relationships and the structures of social interaction. As Beutel and Axinn note, "no society is expected to be completely organized inside or outside families, but the nonfamily and family modes of social organization are two ideal types that aid our understanding of social change and the family" (2002: 113). In this paper, I examine religion and education in Nepal as two phenomena that influence the degree to which an individual's life takes place inside or outside the family's locus of control. Religion in Nepal,

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which focuses greatly on the "householder's path" and the sanctity of various family forms, is expected to inspire a strong connection between individuals and their families. On the other hand, increasing levels of education, a social change that has been occurring in this context over the past several years, is a nonfamily social institution that exposes individuals to new people and ideas outside the context of their families. I use spousal choice, or the extent to which an individual choses his or her own spouse or has family members involved in the selection process, as a means of measuring these two phenomena's relative impact on the family as a locus of social life and organization in Nepal. The study of these relationships will make two contributions to sociological research on religion and family. First, I will increase understanding of religion's relationship to family outcomes and how this is played out in non-Western contexts. More broadly, I will add to our knowledge on how beliefs and ideology are related to behaviors.

Sociologists have long been aware of the interconnections of religion and family as social institutions. Families serve as a key source of religious socialization, while religions, in turn, often promote the importance of family within society and promote certain family formation behaviors. Previous research in Western contexts has shown that religion is related to a wide variety of family outcomes, including mother-child relationship closeness (Pearce and Axinn 1998), parenting and child discipline (Bartkowski and Wilcox 2000), and marital stability (Heaton 1984; Heaton and Pratt 1990; Call and Heaton 1997). Also in Western contexts, individual's religious characteristics have been shown to be of great utility in understanding their marriage behavior (Lehrer 2000; Lehrer 2004). This paper adds to this literature by considering the relationship between religious salience and a previous unexamined family outcome, spousal choice. Focusing on spousal choice will add to our understanding of how religion relates to family outcomes in non-Western contexts. In addition, because arranged marriages are

traditional while choosing one's own spouse is often perceived as 'modern' in Nepal, examining the relationship between religion and spousal choice will aid us in understanding how religion mediates between the traditional and the modern.

Spousal Choice and Religion in Nepal

In the context of Nepal, connections between religion and family are particularly strong. Until recently, Hinduism was the state religion of Nepal, and as of 2001, 81% of Nepal's population identifies themselves as Hindus. Other religious groups in Nepal include Buddhists (11%), Muslims (4%), Kirants (4%), Christians (0.5%) and Jains (0.05%) (CBS 2001). However, the religious landscape is not as straightforward as this might suggest, and many people practice multiple religions. Certain ethnic groups are traditionally Buddhist, but have become "Sanscritized" over time, adopting Hindu ideology and practices (Gurung 1998) in addition to their own Buddhist traditions. Other ethnic groups that originally practiced indigenous animist religious have also experienced this "Hinduization" process (Guneratne 2002). Nonetheless, for all the religions practiced in Nepal, there are strong reasons to expect connections with family, particularly with family formation behaviors such as spousal choice.

Of the three religious traditions discussed here, Hinduism is most explicit in its prescriptions for daily life in general and spousal selection in particular. Traditionally, it is expected that Hindu marriages will be arranged, with Cameron (1998) going so far as to state "all first marriages in Hindu society are arranged by parents (or other adults should the parents be unable or deceased) for their children" (193). Gray (1995) similarly notes that "for Brahmans and Chhetris, a proper marriage was between a man and a virgin woman of the same *jat* that had been arranged by the parents of the couple" (214). Improper marriages, such as 'love' marriages,

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cannot be validated by Brahman priests and children produced by such unions may take on a ritually impure status. This selection of a spouse by parents is considered to be a religious obligation; arranging a *kanyadan*, or "gift of a virgin" in marriage, is a virtuous act undertaken by parents (Berreman 1972; Bennett 1983; Levine 1987; Gray 1995; Maskey 1996; Stone 1997). Maskey explains that in the context of Nepal "traditionally marriage is a socially desirable act which is strongly encouraged by religion. The institution of marriage was regarded as more than a civil arrangement, which had profound religious character. The tradition-bound Nepali society regarded it as a sacrament" (1996). While arranged marriage, with a spouse selected by parents or other family members, is the predominant form of marriage in Nepal, increasingly, young adults are increasingly given opportunities to consult in the selection process or even veto the selections of their families. Some couples, however, will bypass this process entirely and elope, a process that is referred to as "love marriage."

In addition to encouraging little participation by individuals in the choice of their own spouse, Hinduism also promotes the centrality of the family in society more generally through its ideology of the "householder's path." Hindus who do not become ascetics renouncing society are expected to become householders, fulfilling their spiritual duties by marrying and raising a family (Gray 1995).

Certain ethnic groups in Nepal, such as the hill Tibeto-Burmese (ie Gurungs, Magars[15], Tamangs) and some Newars, traditionally practice Mahayana Buddhism. In contrast to Hinduism, Buddhism is both less prescriptive regarding everyday life in general and contains few specific guidelines regarding marriage (Ling 1969; Macfarlane 1976). Other ethnic groups,

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[15] Some scholars, such as Adhikary (1993), have suggested that certain Hill Tibeto-Burmese groups were never actually Buddhist, but instead migrated into Nepal before Buddhism was introduced into Tibet. In this case, the group would not have been "Hinduized" over time, but was Hindu to begin with.

the Terai Tibeto-Burmese (ie Tharu, Dharai, Bote), traditionally follow indigenous animist religions. However, research by other scholars suggests that both of these groups have become "Hinduized" over time, part of a process known as "Sanskritization." Nepal was officially a Hindu kingdom for many decades, and Hinduism became part of the civic religion, with Hindu holy days becoming national holidays. On a more individual level, Terai Tibeto-Burmese individuals frequently use (Hindu) Brahmin priests for religious rituals, such as marriages, naming ceremonies, and funeral rites. Perhaps because of this Sanskritization, ethnographic evidence suggests that both hill Tibeto-Burmese (Manzardo et al 1976; Ahearn 2001; Desjarlais 2003) and Terai Tibeto-Burmese (Guneratne 1999) groups practice arranged marriages.

Sociologists have long recognized that religion is multidimensional (Cornwall et al 1986; Pearce and Denton 2011). Three major dimensions of religion are beliefs/ideology, practices, and salience/centrality. In this paper, I focus on the relationship between religious salience and spousal choice. Because arranged marriage is a practice that is encouraged by Hindu ideology, I expect individuals with greater religious salience, or to whom religion is more important in everyday life, to participate less in the choice of their spouse as opposed to parents or relatives. Religious salience is a particularly useful measure of religion, as practices may be influenced by social pressure or the extent to which religious venues are available. Previous research in a Western context has indicated that religious salience is often strongly related to family-related attitudes and behaviors (Regnerus and Burdette 2006).

In addition to the religious centrality of individuals, I also expect the religiosity of their parents to be relevant to their spousal choice. As discussed earlier, parents with greater religious salience are likely to be interested in carrying out the practice of arranged marriage, due to the religious merit that this confers; Maskey (1996) refers to this process as "the duty as well as the

pious deed of the parents" (87). Parents are also likely to prefer an arranged marriage for other, non-religious reasons; these marriages are seen as ensuring the stability of the household because parents will have control over daughters-in-law (Cameron 1998). On the other hand, love marriages are seen as potentially destabilizing, as loyalty to a spouse may pull individuals away from the broader concerns of the household and patriline (Stone 1997).

Parents and family's religiosity is also relevant to spousal choice in that they are primary agents for the religious socialization of individuals. Previous research in Western contexts indicates that parental religious characteristics exert a strong influence on the religiosity of youth (Myers 1998). Parents may influence their children's religious characteristics through the mechanisms of modeling (Campbell 1969; Chodorow 1978; Bandura 1986) and actively socializing children (Baumrind 1978; Smith 1989; Gecas and Seff 1990). In addition, Bengston (1975) that in a more passive process, both parents and children may be affected and shaped by other factors that influence their religiosity. Based on this previous research, I hypothesize that in households with greater average religious salience, individuals are likely to display less participation in their spousal choice, in deference to parents or other family members.

Finally, the religiosity of neighborhoods is also of interest when examining the relationship between an individual's religious salience and their degree of participation in spousal choice. Sociologists have long been interested in examining the relationships between neighborhood or community-level phenomena and individual level behavior. In the Nepali context, this relationship may be particularly relevant. Neighborhoods in Nepal (known as *tols*) often share common water pumps and pasture land for grazing animals. These common areas become centers for people to meet and talk (Valente et al 1997). Neighbors' beliefs and attitudes are well known. Many family activities, including religious practices, are performed in open-air

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courtyards. Personal items, such as toothbrushes and birth control pills, are frequently stored in the thatched roofs of houses, where others can observe them (Barber 2004). In addition, previous research observes that community-level religious characteristics are associated with individual behavior in both Western and South Asian contexts (Brewster et al 1993; Maimon and Kuhl 2008; Uddin 2007; Wallace et al 2007; Welch, Tittle, and Petee 1991).

More generally, the "religious ecology" or "moral communities" hypothesis suggests religious characteristics of a neighborhood or community may be related to the behavior of individuals within that community. Lee and Bartkowski (2004) explain this thesis by noting that "communities characterized by a proreligious climate will experience fewer crime problems" (1007). Other research in this vein has focused on the relationship between community/neighborhood religious characteristics and individual behavior related to crime or deviance (Stark, Doyle, and Kent 1980, Stark, Kent, and Doyle 1982, Cochran and Akers 1989, Welch, Tittle, and Petee 1991, Woodrum and Hoban 1992, Chadwick and Top 1993, Junger and Polder 1993). One possible mechanism for this thesis suggests that the decrease in crime/deviance is due to the positive effects of congregations. Lee and Bartkowski explain that "religious institutions create a moral ecology fostering community integration and social control while discouraging deviance and criminal activity" (1003). Other explanations place a higher focus on the matter of deterrence. Warner (2000) theorizes that within the moral boundaries of groups, "it is incumbent on the individual to maintain his or her respectability" (302). I theorize that in Nepal, it is this latter mechanism that offers more fertile grounds for explaining the relationships between neighborhoods and individuals. As Nepali religions tend not to follow a congregational model, explanations that focus on the beneficial effects of congregations are of limited use in the Nepali context. However, neighborhood religious characteristics, such as

average neighborhood religious salience, may impact individual behavior through the mechanism of deterring deviance in order to maintain respectability. Ahearn (2001: 61) and McHugh (1998: 163) both note observations from their fieldwork where love marriages and elopements lead to gossip and family "dishonor." Similarly, Jones (1977) notes that in a Hill Tibeto-Burmese community, courtship institutions were "the subject of endless gossip and discussion" (288).

I expect this effect to be more pronounced in neighborhoods with higher average neighborhood salience, that is, in neighborhoods that are more pro-religious and that have a stronger moral community, than it is in neighborhoods with lower average salience of religious faith. I also anticipate that the effect of the moral community will be more strongly felt by less educated individuals than it is by more highly educated Nepalis, who will be somewhat insulated from the demands of respectability by both the increased personal and family status that comes from receiving education, as well as by the values of individuality and self-determination that they learn in school.

Education and Spousal Choice

In addition to religious salience, education is another individual-level factor that theory suggests would influence an individual's degree of participation in spousal choice. In many parts of the world, changes in education have been found to be related to changing marital processes and family dynamics. Education levels have been related to cohabitation and marriage trends in the United States (Cherlin 1981), as well as differences in ordering of life course transitions (Hogan and Astone 1986).

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Nepal is an interesting case with respect to education, as secular education was unavailable prior to the 1950s. Prior to this time, children could be educated in religious settings, such as in Hindu *pathsalas* or Buddhist monasteries (Ragsdale 1989). In the 1950s, during Nepal's interim democratic phrase, the Nepali government expended great effort to promote education as a mechanism for development (Graner 2006). Education in Nepal remained largely administered by the government until the Education Act in 1980, which led to a moderate increase in the number of private schools in the early and mid-1990s. These private schools were largely concentrated in Kathmandu and in major urban areas in the Terai, including in Chitwan district. Despite the involvement of government in education, however, Nepal is one of the few nations which has not introduced compulsory primary education. The first school in Chitwan, the district of Nepal that is focused on in this paper, was built in 1954. By 1995, there were 123 schools serving 43,785 students in Chitwan district (Beutel and Axinn 2002). The education system in Nepal is modeled off of the British system. Students attend school for 11 years, at which point they must take a national examination in order to receive "School Leaving Certificate," equivalent to a high school diploma.

Improvements in educational infrastructure in Nepal have not necessarily resulted in increased educational attainment; Shrestha (1989) observes "the big gap between national aspirations and actual reality" (82) with respect to this matter. Graner (1998) notes that many students begin class 1 but do not proceed to higher grade levels. There are extremely high drop-out rates throughout the primary school levels (grades 1-5) and extremely low rates of transition from primary education to secondary education. In 1996, according to Graner, the national average was 2.25 years of schooling for boys and 1.13 years of education for girls.

Education is likely to impact participation in spousal choice as it changes the balance of how life is lived inside and outside the family. Prior to the availability of educational institutions, children would spend most of their time at home with the family, helping with household tasks. Ensconced within the family, they were unlikely to encounter new people or ideas that did not meet with familial approval. With the advent of schools, however, children spend long periods of time outside their families' supervision. This allows youth to form new social relationships and encounter new ideas, the sources of which are not their families. Carney and Madsen (2009) write that for Nepali youth, schools "provide resources with which to craft new identities able to negotiate those bequeathed to them by history and circumstance" (171). In addition, education opens up new occupational possibilities and possible status mobility routes (Beutel and Axinn 2002). Macfarlane (1994) notes that employment physically removes individuals from the family by requiring them to eat meals away from home or live outside the family home, separate from other members. Separation from family at both school and work affords individuals more opportunities to meet new people that are unknown to their other family members, including potential spouses. In addition, the income that comes with employment gives individuals a sense of independence, where a family head may no longer be able to exert effective control over them. Similarly, Ahearn (2001) writes that education not only increases the possibility of love marriages by allowing individuals to communicate privately via love letters, it also gives the literate an increase sense of agency, or their ability to act to control their own destiny, albeit within cultural constraints.

The Religion/Education Connection

Research in the American context suggests that education and the various dimensions of religiosity, including salience, are closely interrelated. This previous research suggests that a moderating relationship between religious salience and education may also be present in the Nepali context. In general, in the American context, religion has been positively associated with educational attainment, with the exception of adherents of Conservative Protestantism (Beyerlein 2004; Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Fitzgerald and Glass 2008; Glass and Jacobs 2005; Lehrer 2004; Massengill 2008; Muller and Ellison 2001). In addition, some research has noted an association between higher education and diminishing religious involvement and salience (Albrecht and Heaton 1984; Lee 2002; Mayrl and Oeur 2009). However, higher education does not lead to apostasy for most American college students and some denominations, such as the Latter Day Saints, may be particularly protective against irreligion (Uecker et al 2007; Mayrl and Oeur 2009; Albrecht and Heaton 1984).

Outside the American context, there is comparatively little research on the religion-education relationship. In China, Zhai and Woodberry (2011) find that religious affiliation is a strong predictor of respondent's educational aspirations. In a multi-country study, Norton and Tomal (2009) find that the proportion of a country's residents who practice Hinduism, Islam, or "ethnoreligions" is negatively associated with female educational attainment. Previous research on religion and education in the Nepali context also suggests a connection between the two. Sibbons (1999) observes that Nepal contains

> cultural and religious diversity from Buddhist to Hindu with many variations and other religions making up the rich tapestry of difference; and numerous ethnic groups, associated with location and religious-cultural systems. It is this rich and varied mix that influences perceptions toward education and, consequently, educational outcomes (189).

I expect that the effect of religious salience on spousal choice will differ from less educated and more educated individuals. Additionally, I expect that the effect of education on spousal choice will depend on the level of religious salience, so that education will have a different effect for low salience and high salience individuals and in low salience and high salience households and neighborhoods. The hypothesis of moderation at the neighborhood level, through either or both of the processes described, is consistent with the moral communities theory I discussed previously.

The Nepali Context: Chitwan Valley

In order to examine these questions, this paper utilizes survey data collected in the Chitwan Valley of Nepal. Chitwan is one of Nepal's administrative districts and is located in the country's south central region, approximately 90 miles from Nepal's capitol, Kathmandu. Chitwan is a particularly suitable setting for examining social change, as prior to the 1950s, the Valley consisted of dense jungle, inhabited only be the indigenous Tharu ethnic group, who are believed to be resistant to malaria. In the 1950s, the Nepali government, aided by the US government, implemented a program of malaria eradication, deforestation, and resettlement. People came from all over Nepal to seek land in this area, and the Valley is now home to a variety of ethno-religious groups. Schools, health centers, markets, roads, electricity, and communication infrastructure are spreading throughout the region, radiating from Narayangarh, an urban area in the north end of the district. Because of its central location within Nepal, Narayangarh has also become something of a national transportation hub, with roads extending to other Nepali cities and to India. On the other end of the Valley, however, lies the Chitwan National Park. This protected area remains jungle, and nearby residents continue traditional

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practices, such as entering the park to gathering thatching materials with which to repair their homes.

Social life in Chitwan is organized into neighborhoods, referred to in Nepali as *tols*. These neighborhoods usually consist of 5-15 households, which, as mentioned earlier, have daily face-to-face contact and may share a water source or grazing land. Several neighborhoods then combine to form larger administrative entities, known as Village Development Committees (VDCs). Towns in Chitwan, such as Narayangarh, Bharatpur, or Rampur, often consist of several VDCs. Each town will have a bazaar located in a central area, usually along the main road. The bazaars give nearby residents access to services including shops, restaurants, bus service, and other places of business.

Data and Methods

In these analyses, I employ data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS). The CVFS is a neighborhood-based study situated in a western portion of Nepal's Chitwan district.. In order to collect this data, a systematic probability sample of 171 neighborhoods was selected in 1996; these neighborhoods were identified in the field and consist of cluster of between 5 to 15 households. Individuals living in those neighborhoods between 15 and 59 years of age were interviewed, as well as any spouses living elsewhere (Barber et al 1997). The CVFS includes data from 5,271 individuals and has a response rate of 97 percent. These interviews were conducted in Nepali, so interview questions presented here are English translations. In 2008, respondents who were unmarried in 1996 were surveyed again on the topic of marriage. My dependent variable comes from this 2008 data, while the independent variables are from the 1996 dataset. My sample includes 625 respondents who were not married in 1996 but had

married for the first time by 2008. In 1996, these respondents' ranged from 15 to 34, with the average respondent being 18.096 years old (S.D.=2.97). In 2008, these respondents had aged to be between 27 and 46, with a mean age of 30.098 (S.D.=2.97).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in these analyses is an ordinal variable related to spousal choice. Respondents were asked "in your case, who selected your (first) spouse? Your parents/relatives, yourself, or both?" If both the individual and parents/relatives were involved in spouse selection, respondents were asked a follow-up question as to who had more influence. These questions have been coded to form an ordinal variable with five categories: parents/relatives only select spouse, both parents/relatives and respondent select spouse – mostly parents/relatives, both parents/relatives and respondent select spouse equally, both parents/relatives and respondent select spouse – mostly respondent, and respondent only selects spouse.

Religious Salience Variables

I include three measures of religious salience in these models – individual religious salience, average household religious salience, and average neighborhood religious salience. Respondents were asked "how much do you believe in *dharma* (religion)? Would you say it is very much, somewhat, or not at all?" I constructed measures of average household religious salience by averaging the responses to this question for all household members age 15 and older who participated in the CVFS study. I similarly obtained measures of average neighborhood religious salience, including all neighborhood residents age 15 in older who participated in the study. In both of these averaged measures, the respondents' own religious salience was deleted

from the calculation, making each the average of *the other members* of the respondent's household and neighborhood, respectively.

Education Variable

Respondents were asked about the highest grade in school or year of college they had completed. In Nepal, students must complete 11 years of education in order to receive their School Leaving Certificate, or SLC.

Control Variables

I control for several phenomena that are known to be related to education, religious salience and spousal choice. Individual controls include respondent gender, ethno-religious group, age at marriage, and they type of agricultural land that may be owned by the household. Research indicates that gender is related to both education and religious salience, in Nepal and elsewhere (Beutel and Axinn 2002). South Asian families may be reluctant to invest in a daughter's education, as she will move to her husband's household after marriage and any benefits of education will not go to her natal family (Ashby 1985).

Race and ethnicity must also be considered with respect to education and religious salience. In Nepal, it is most useful to think of the various ethnic groups in Nepal as parts of five broader ethno-religious categories. These include high-caste Hindus (Brahmins and Chhetris) and low-caste Hindus (such as Damais, Sarkis, Kamis, etc) who typically practice Hinduism, hill Tibeto-Burmese (such as Gurungs, Magars, Tamangs, etc), who are traditionally Buddhist but may have adopted Hindu beliefs and practices, Terai Tibeto-Burmese, who traditionally practice

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indigenous animist religions but may also have become Hinduized, and Newars (an ethnic group from the Kathmandu Valley), who may practice Hinduism, Buddhism, or a mixture of the two. With respect to education, certain ethnic groups, such as high-caste Hindus and Newars (an ethnic group from the Kathmandu Valley), have often had more opportunities and higher economic status compared to other groups and are more likely to be enrolled in school and to reach higher levels of education (Ashby 1985).

Age at marriage tends to be related to spousal choice, as people whose marriages are arranged tend to marry at early ages, while those who select their own spouse tend to marry later. Marrying later also gives individuals more opportunities to meet prospective spouses and to reach higher levels of education (Ghimire et al 2006). Alternatively, older unmarried individuals may be more likely to accept the counsel of their parents and other relatives if they have been unsuccessful in locating a spouse for themselves.

While ethno-religious group can be an indicator of economic status, I also control for socioeconomic status more explicitly by examining what type of agricultural land, if any, is owned by the household. A member of each household was asked about two types of land: *bariland* (land that cannot be used to grow rice), and *khet* (land on which rice can be grown). For each type of land, respondents were asked "does your household own the land, is it sharecropped, is it mortgaged, is it on contract to you, are you the tenant of the land or are there some other arrangements?" I have operationalized this as two dichotomous variables, where households either own bariland or do not, and either own khet or do not. This is a more meaningful measure of socioeconomic status than income, as most people in the sample are engaged in farming and do not have bank accounts. Previous research in other South Asian context also indicates that measures of ownership are useful measures of socio-economic status,

as they are relevant measures of social status for people living in this region (Malhotra and Tsui 1996). This is the only household-level control I employ in my analyses. The descriptive statistics for all variables are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Spousal choice	2.981	1.633	1	5
Female	0.418	0.493	0	1
Own bari land	0.642	0.480	0	1
Own khet land	0.662	0.473	0	1
High caste Hindu	0.541	0.499	0	1
Low caste Hindu	0.079	0.270	0	1
Hill Tibeto-Burmese	0.118	0.322	0	1
Newar	0.077	0.267	0	1
Terai Tibeto-Burmese	0.185	0.389	0	1
Age at Marriage	22.549	3.869	15	36
Years of Education	7.174	3.154	0	14
Individual rel. salience	2.392	0.544	1	3
Avg. Household rel. salience	2.588	0.389	1	3
Avg. Neighborhood rel. salience	2.553	0.151	2.143	2.933

Analytic Strategy

As my dependent variable is ordinal, I use ordered logistic regressions in these analyses. This type of analysis allows me to determine what effect a change in an independent variable has on the odds of being in a higher category of the dependent variable. A description of the ordered logistic regression models, and how they will progress can be found in Table 2. In the first model, I consider the control variables, gender, ethno-religious group, land ownership, and age at marriage, as well as the education variable, highest level of education completed. The second model includes all variables from the first model and also examines individual religious salience. The third model considers the control variables, years of education, and average household religious salience. In the fourth model, I consider the relationship between the dependent

variable and the control variables, years of education, and average neighborhood religious

salience. Model five includes the control variables, years of education, and measures of religious

salience at all three levels – individual, household, and neighborhood. The sixth model includes

the control variables, years of education, all three measures of salience, and an interaction

between individual religious salience and years of education. The seventh model considers the

control variables, years of education, individual, household, and neighborhood salience, and

interactions between average household religious salience and years of education. My final

model includes the control variables, years of education, all three levels of religious salience, and

an interaction between average neighborhood salience and years of education.

Because the CVFS contains data from individuals, neighborhoods, and households, I

account for the non-independence of observations at the neighborhood level by using the cluster

option in Stata. By accounting for non-independence, I avoid underestimating standard errors

and thus avoid overestimating the significance of my coefficients.

Results

First, I present the results for the ordered logistic regression model including control

variables. Control variables that increase the likelihood of greater individual involvement in

spousal choice include being female or being a member of the Hill Tibeto-Burmese or Terai

Tibeto-Burmese ethnic groups. Women are 4.71 times as likely as men to have a greater degree

of involvement in their spousal choice. Hill Tibeto-Burmese and Terai Tibeto-Burmese are 2.78

and 3.18 times as likely as High Caste Hindus to have a greater degree of involvement,

respectively. These results, and the results of all subsequent models, are reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2: ORDERED LOGISTIC REGRESSION RESULTS

Variable	Control Model (N=620)	Individual Salience Model (N=620)	Household Salience Model (N=620)	Neighborhood Salience Model (N=620)	Full Salience Model (N=620)
Female	4.712***	0.4.755***	4.830***	4.792***	4.816***
	(0.817)	(0.818)	(0.842)	(0.840)	(0.847)
Low caste Hindu	0.873	0.867	0.845	0.835	0.836
	(0.266)	(0.265)	(0.264)	(0.264)	(0.265)
Hill Tibeto-Burmese	2.780***	2.798***	2.745***	2.758***	2.763***
	(0.715)	(0.711)	(0.701)	(0.711)	(0.703)
Newar	1.554	1.606	1.549	1.556	1.596
	(0.410)	(0.436)	(0.413)	(0.414)	(0.438)
Terai Tibeto-Burmese	3.180***	3.265***	3.193***	3.324***	3.311***
	(0.670)	(0.697)	(0.660)	(0.020)	(0.687)
Own bari land	1.108	1.101	1.102	1.101	1.096
	(0.170)	(0.171)	(0.168)	(0.166)	(0.168)
Own khet land	0.754	0.751	0.767	0.763	0.764
	(0.125)	(0.125)	(0.127)	(0.128)	(0.128)
Age at Marriage	0.962	0.958*	0.958*	0.960	0.956*
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Years of Education	0.983	0.981	0.978	0.981	0.977
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Individual rel. salience	-	0.799	-	-	0.823
		(0.116)			(0.121)
Avg. Household rel. salience	-	-	0.768	-	0.830
			(0.149)		(0.192)
Avg. Neighborhood rel. salience	-	-	-	0.586	0.830
				(0.313)	(0.531)
Years of Ed * Ind. rel. salience	-	-	-	-	-
Years of Ed. * HH rel. salience	-	-	-	-	-
Years of ed * Nbhd rel salience	-	-	-	-	-
-2 Log Likelihood	1754.930	1752.331	1753.146	1753.866	1751.049

Next, I examine the relationship between individual religious salience and the degree of individual involvement in spousal choice. Similar to the control model, being female, Hill Tibeto-Burmese, or Terai Tibeto-Burmese are associated with an increase in the likelihood of greater individual involvement in spousal choice. A new control variable, the respondent's age at the time of marriage, becomes statistically significant in this model. An individual who is a year older is about 0.96 times as likely to participate in their spousal choice as someone who is a year younger. Individuals' religious salience, the variable of interest in this model, does not have

a statistically significant effect on degree of individual involvement in spousal choice. The third

model considers the effect of average household religious salience on respondent spousal choice.

In this model, the control variables for female, Hill Tibeto-Burmese, and Terai Tibeto-Burmese

continue to be significant in the same manner as in the control models. Respondent age at

marriage also continues to be significant. Household religious salience, however, does not

appear to be significantly related to an individual's degree of participation in spousal choice.

TABLE 2: ORDERED LOGISTIC REGRESSION RESULTS (CONTINUED)

Variable	Ind. Salience & Years of Ed. Interaction Model (N=620)	HH Salience & Years of Ed. Interaction Model (N=620)	Neigh. Salience& Years of Ed. Interaction Model (N=620)
Female	4.858***	4.800***	4.670***
	(0.842)	(0.839)	(0.824)
Low caste Hindu	0.836	0.836	0.809
	(0.265)	(0.268)	(0.262)
Hill Tibeto-Burmese	2.763***	2.738***	2.666***
	(0.703)	(0.697)	(0.679)
Newar	1.560	1.592	1.573
	(0.438)	(0.433)	(0.434)
Terai Tibeto-Burmese	3.311***	3.344***	3.458**
	(0.689)	(0.689)	(0.696)
Own bari land	1.096	1.099	1.074
	(0.168)	(0.170)	(0.167)
Own khet land	0.764	0.754	0.760
	(0.128)	(0.121)	(0.126)
Age at Marriage	0.956*	0.956*	0.960*
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Years of Education	0.981	0.841	0.424*
	(0.094)	(0.151)	(0.164)
Individual rel. salience	0.832	0.824	0.821
	(0.268)	(0.121)	(0.120)
Avg. Household rel. salience	0.830	0.539	0.830
	(0.192)	(0.300)	(0.194)
Avg. Neighborhood rel. salience	0.831	0.823	0.072*
	(0.530)	(0.525)	(0.096)
Years of Ed * Ind. rel. salience	0.999	-	-
	(0.039)		
Years of Ed. * HH rel. salience	-	1.060	-
		(0.073)	
Years of Ed. * Nbhd rel salience	-	-	1.385*
			(0.207)
-2 Log Likelihood	1751.048	1750.237	1747.125

The fourth model examines the effect of average neighborhood religious salience on spousal choice. As in the previous models, the indicator variables for female, Hill Tibeto-Burmese, and Terai Tibeto-Burmese are statistically significant. Age at marriage, however, is not significant. Average neighborhood religious salience, the variable of interest in this model, is not shown to have a statistically significant relationship with participation in spousal choice.

In the fifth model, which includes individual religious salience, average household religious salience, and average neighborhood religious salience, the previously significant control variables continue to be statistically significant. These include female, Hill Tibeto-Burmese, Terai Tibeto-Burmese, and respondent age at marriage. None of the measures of religious salience had a statistically significant relationship with participation in spousal choice in this model.

In order to better understand the interplay between education and religious salience, I specified models with interaction terms for education and each level of religious salience, individual, household, and neighborhood. These models were otherwise similar to the fifth model in that they contained all control variables and all levels of religious salience. In order to better understand the results of these models, I calculated predicted probabilities, using the "margins" command in Stata.

I do not report predicted probabilities for models focused on the interactions between individual religious salience and years of education or average household religious salience and respondent's years of education, as these interactions are not related to participation in spousal choice in a statistically significant manner. However, in a regression model examining the interaction between average neighborhood religious salience and respondent's years of education, the interaction term is statistically significant. In this model, the control variables for

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female, Hill Tibeto-Burmese, Terai Tibeto-Burmese, and respondent age at marriage were also statistically significant, in the same direction they have been in all previous models. To understand the model with respect to the average neighborhood religious salience and respondent years of education interaction, I turn to predicted probabilities.
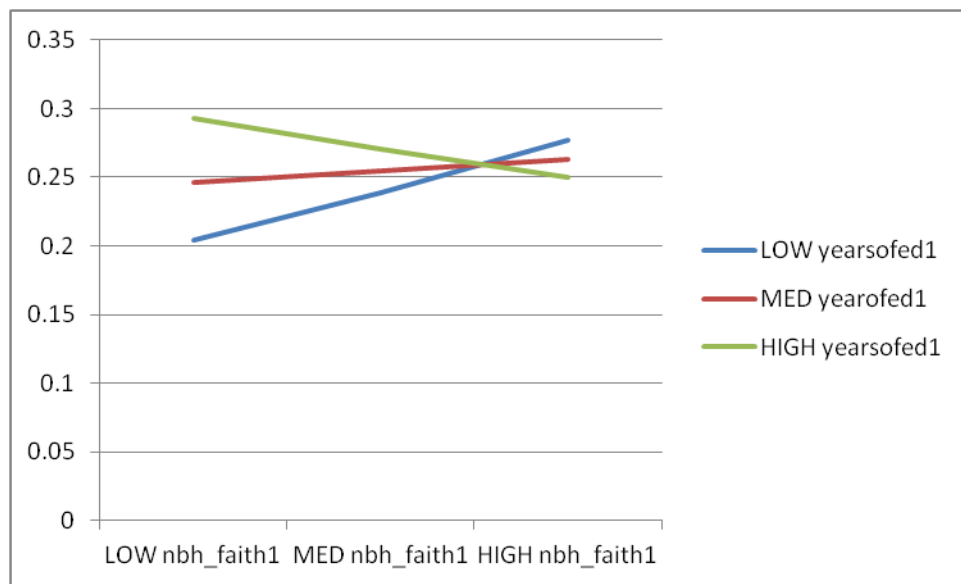
FIGURE 1: PREDICTED PROBABILITIES

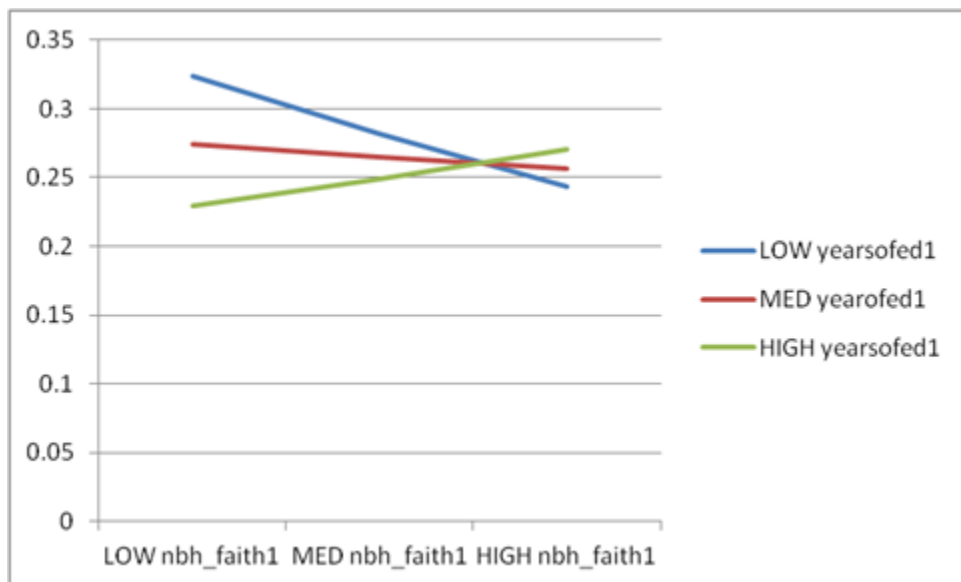Figure 1.A: Predicted Probability of Arranged Marriage

Figure 1.B: Predicted Probability of Love Marriage

Figure 1 shows the predicted probabilities of having an arranged marriage or a love marriage for people with different values of education living in neighborhoods with different average levels of religious salience. To calculate the predicted probabilities, I assigned medium, low, and high values to years of education and average neighborhood religious salience, corresponding to the mean value, one standard deviation below the mean, and one standard deviation above, respectively. The value of the interaction term is always the product of the other two assigned values. All other variables were set to their mean values for these calculations. Figure 1.A displays the predicted probability of having a fully arranged marriage. Figure 1.B displays the probability of having a "love" marriage. In both Figure 1.A and Figure 1.B, one can see that both the magnitude and even the direction of the effect of each variable depend on the value of the other.

The effect of the average religious salience of the other residents of the respondent's neighborhood on the respondent's own spousal choice depends heavily on the respondent's level of education. As can be seen in Figure 1.A, for individuals with comparatively less education the effect of increasing neighborhood salience is to make an arranged marriage more likely. For a respondent with comparatively low education, the predicted probability of an arranged marriage increases from 20.46% in lower salience neighborhoods to 27.74% in neighborhoods with comparatively higher levels of average salience of religious faith. Likewise, in Figure 1.B, we see that for a respondent with comparatively less education, the effect of increasing neighborhood salience is to make a love marriage less likely. For respondents with comparatively low education, the predicted probability of a love marriage declines from 32.41% in neighborhoods with comparatively low average religious salience to 24.32% in higher salience neighborhoods.

The magnitude of the effect of other neighborhood residents' average religious salience also differs based on the respondent's level of education. For comparatively less educated respondents, the move from a comparatively low salience neighborhood to a neighborhood with comparatively higher salience of faith corresponds to a 7.28% increase in the predicted probability of an arranged marriage, and an 8.09% decline in the probability of a love marriage. For respondents with relatively more education, this move corresponds to a 4.13% change in the probability of an arranged marriage, and to a 4.36% change in the probability of a love marriage.

The effect of the respondent's education on spousal choice is also dependent on the average religious salience of respondent's neighborhood's other inhabitants. In neighborhoods with comparatively low salience of faith, relatively less educated respondents are more likely to have a love marriage than are respondents with comparatively higher education. In neighborhoods with comparatively high average religious salience, this trend is reversed, and the effect of increasing education is to make a love marriage more likely. In neighborhoods with relatively high average salience of faith, respondents with comparatively low education are more likely to have an arranged marriage than respondents with relatively more education are.

Overall, these models illustrate that gender, ethno-religious group, and age are consistently strong predictors of a respondent's participation in spousal choice. Being female and being from either a Hill Tibeto-Burmese or a Terai Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group all increase a respondent's likelihood of having a "love" marriage, or having more participation in the selection of their spouse. Being older at the time of marriage, on the other hand, increases a respondent's likelihood of having an arranged marriage, or having parents or other relatives play a more influential role in their spousal selection process. Years of education and average

neighborhood religious salience are also related to an individual's level of participation in his or her spousal choice, but the effect of each is moderated by the other.

Discussion

The results of these analyses indicate that factors that have long been influential in Nepali society continue to be influential in the spousal selection process for individual's living in the Chitwan Valley between 1996 and 2008. Nepali society has long been stratified on the basis of gender, ethno-religious group, and age, and these results indicate that these factors continue to be important in determining the amount of participation an individual will have in selecting his or her spouse. This is consistent with previous analyses of Hill Tibeto-Burmese and Terai Tibeto-Burmese groups, who have not always traditionally practiced Hinduism and may not be as strongly tied to its prescriptions regarding marriage, such as selection of an individual's spouse by his or her parents. The finding regarding gender is similarly not unexpected. As Nepal is traditionally patrilocal, meaning that a heterosexual couple will live with the man's family after marriage, men may want more participation by parents or relatives in their choice of spouse in order to ensure a comfortable living situation after marriage.

With respect to the family mode of social organization, these analyses indicate that the family, another phenomenon that has historically been important for organizing and shaping Nepali lives, continues to be relevant with respect for spousal choice. Of the individuals who married in Chitwan between 1996 and 2008, about a third married a spouse selected entirely by other relatives, about a third's spousal selection involved both the individual and parents/relatives, and about a third entered "love" marriages where spousal selection did not involve parents or other relatives. The lack of results with respect to household religious

salience is also not reason to dismiss the importance of the family/household in this context. Instead, these results suggest that households can influence spousal choice by influencing religious salience at the neighborhood levels. Families select the neighborhoods in which they will live, thus helping to determine the religious milieu that family members will be exposed to. However, independent of those influences, household religious salience seems to have no effect.

The interaction between respondent years of education and average neighborhood salience indicates that the effect of average neighborhood salience operates differently for respondents with comparatively lower versus comparatively higher levels of education. For individuals with comparatively lower levels of education, average neighborhood religious salience operates in a manner that the religious ecology/moral communities thesis would suggest. Individuals with comparatively fewer years of education living in neighborhoods with comparatively lower levels of average religious salience are more likely to exert individual choice in selecting a spouse, or have a "love" marriage. However, individuals with comparatively fewer years of education living in neighborhoods with higher levels of average religious salience are more likely to have their spouse chosen by parents or other relatives, or have an "arranged" marriage. The magnitude of this effect is a roughly 10% change in the predicted probability of having a particular type of marriage for respondents with comparatively lower levels of education living in lower salience neighborhoods versus those living in neighborhoods with comparatively higher average religious salience. The moral communities thesis, taken in concert with observations about gossip made by other Nepal researchers, suggests a possible mechanism for this. In neighborhoods with high levels of average religious salience, individuals may need to exert more effort to maintain respectability, thus adhering to tradition by having marriages that are largely arranged by parents or other relatives. In

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neighborhoods with lower levels of average religious salience, individuals may need to do less to free themselves from neighborhood gossip, and are thus able to exert more agency in selecting a marriage partner.

For respondents who have achieved comparatively higher levels of education, on the other hand, the magnitude of the effect of neighborhood salience is considerably reduced. The effect of average neighborhood religious salience on the spousal choices of comparatively higher educated individuals is about half that of the effect on comparatively less educated respondents. This is consistent with the expected effects that increasing years of education will have on Nepali individuals. Previous research has noted that education serves to move Nepalis outside the sphere of their families, providing them with both tangible benefits such as increased career paths, earning potential, and opportunities to meet new people, and more abstract imports such as new ideas, the ability to craft new identities, and an increased sense of agency. These results indicate that in addition to impacting the family mode of social organization in Nepal, education may also have ramifications for the neighborhood mode of social organization. I theorize that increasing years of education may lead to Nepalis becoming less concerned with maintaining respectability according to the religious "moral communities" in which they live. The new ideas and sense of agency that pull individuals outside the sphere of their families may also lead them away from their neighbors' influence. In addition, in Nepal, increasing amounts of education leads to increasing levels of status. Individuals can achieve higher status simply by having attended school, but also through the potential employment, earnings, and connections that they may attain as a result. As Nepalis develop higher status through education, this may inoculate them somewhat from the threat of being perceived as "unrespectable" by having a love marriage.

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With respect to years of education and religious salience (at all levels) these results suggest the need to consider factors that are typically viewed as either "modern" or "traditional" in a more sophisticated and complex manner. These elements of life do not simply pull individuals towards the traditional or the modern but influence social lives in a complex and intertwined way. This is in keeping with Malhotra and Tsui's (1996) observations that "social change is not a linear shift from traditional to modern but a complex interaction…in many Asian societies, traditional as well as modern ideas and motivations for marriage processes tend to coexist" (477).

CHAPTER 3 REFERENCES

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CONCLUSION

This dissertation consists of three substantive chapters focusing on religion in Chitwan, Nepal, a context experiencing rapid social change. The first two chapters use the Brahma Kumaris new religious movement as an extended case study and employ data collected over 5 months of ethnographic observation and in-depth interviewing. In the first chapter I address the paradox that in Nepal, religion appears to be shifting from individual to communal worship, in contrast to the belief of many scholars that modernity has a privatizing and individualizing effect on religion. In the second chapter, I address how the Brahma Kumaris frame their movement as related to value-laden ideas about modernity and development and how this framing influences acceptance of their "strict" demands. My third chapter employs data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study, a longitudinal study of family and reproductive behaviors collected in the same site where I conducted my fieldwork. I examine the relationship between education, religious salience, and the practice of arranged marriage.

Regarding the first chapter, applying Wuthnow's definition of public religion to the case of Brahma Kumaris in Nepal allows us to understand that, while they involve a transition from puja practiced individually in the home to meditation in a congregational setting with others, this does not necessarily represent a movement from private to public religion. Unique features of Nepali homes, the role of puja in rural Nepali society, and how the Brahma Kumaris present themselves and are viewed lead to a case where puja in the home is public and congregational meditation is private. Puja is accessible to the public, both because of the semi-permeable nature

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of rural Nepali homes and because it is implicitly performed for an audience who comprehends its meaning. The Brahma Kumaris, however, are attractive to Nepali women because they provide a physical space in which, albeit in the presence of others, they can worship undisturbed. The Brahma Kumaris also symbolically isolate themselves from mainstream Nepali society through their unusual religious practices, such as wearing white clothing. The public nature of puja and the private nature of the Brahma Kumaris cautions scholars against making a priori assumptions regarding the locations of public and private religion. This case serves to illustrate that the boundaries between public and private are situational and temporary, not enduring features of physical spaces. Bearing this in mind will enhance scholarship in sociology of religion as it both seeks to expand its reach with additional cases that do not follow Western developmental narratives and as it seeks to further refine our understanding of the role(s) public religion and private religion both play in the modern world. This insight is also potentially transposable to future research within the sociology of culture, which has often concerned itself with transformations in the prevailing definitions of publicity and privacy and with the meanings that people attach to the physical places they inhabit in daily life.

In the second substantive chapter, I take a different approach to clarifying the relationship between religion and modernity. While the first chapter considers the roles of public religion and private religion in the modern world, this chapter considers how developmental idealism, or positively value-laden ideas about Western-style modernization and development, may relate to Nepali women's religious practices. I find that Nepali women involved with the Brahma Kumaris tend to accept and follow the group's strict demands when those demands have been framed as modern and that framing is resonant with the prevailing definitions of modernity offered by Western development agencies. When the modern framing is not resonant, as with

the case of framing celibacy as "spiritual birth control," the strict demand is not followed and the frame itself is rejected in favor of the practice being defined in different terms. Based on the strict demands that were followed and not followed by the Brahma Kumaris in Nepal, I extend and complicate the theory that "strict churches are strong" by suggesting that there are limits to the kinds of strictness that groups can employ. I suggest that forms of strictness will be accepted or rejected depending on whether or not they have been framed in a way that is resonant with a religious group's members. In order to be successful, strict religious groups must not only be strict, but also frame their strictness in ways that resonate with the everyday experiences and commonly-held beliefs of their members. I also note that by framing themselves as modern, the Brahma Kumaris allowed their members to perceive themselves as engaging in modern activities and to develop modern self-identities. I suggest that in addition to classifying religious group as either traditional or modern, scholarship on this topic will be enhanced by examining how these groups mediate modern (or traditional) identities to their members. I am interested in exploring other cases, both domestic and internationally, where religious movements have had varying degrees of success in framing their teachings. I am particularly interested in American Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, both as Kelley and Iannaccone's original cases, and as groups that do not always follow the strict teachings of their religions.

In the third chapter, I move from modern framings and identity constructions to a practice that is frequently rhetorically associated with modernity – agency in spousal choice in a society where arranged marriage is a common tradition. In this paper I use regression models to examine the relationship between individual or parental/familial spousal choice and education, the respondent's personal religious salience, the respondent's family's religious salience, and the respondent's neighborhood's religious salience. I use interaction terms to examine how religious

salience may moderate the relationship between spousal choice and education. The significant interaction between respondent years of education and average neighborhood salience indicates that the effect of average neighborhood salience operates differently for respondents with comparatively lower versus comparatively higher levels of education. This suggests that for respondents with lower levels of education, the "moral communities thesis," developed to explain the relationship between a community's religious characteristics and crime/delinquency, may be relevant. In neighborhoods with high levels of average religious salience, individuals may need to exert more effort to maintain respectability, thus adhering to tradition by having marriages that are largely arranged by parents or other relatives. In neighborhoods with lower levels of average religious salience, on the other hand, the weaker demands being made by the "moral community" render individuals more free to choose their own spouses. For respondents who have achieved comparatively higher levels of education, on the other hand, the magnitude of the effect of neighborhood salience is considerably reduced. This suggests that as Nepalis become educated, they not only move out of the sphere of influence of their families, as has been discussed in previous research, but also away from being influenced by their neighborhoods. Similarly, as higher education provides its recipients with higher levels of status, this status may protect educated individuals from having their reputations damaged by having a love marriage.

Taken in concert, these three papers reveal the multifaceted and multilevel nature of the relationship between religion and modernity. Although scholars initially expected modernity to transform the location and meaning of religious practice, changes in the location of religion outside Western contexts may have unanticipated meanings. At the individual level, value-laden ideas about Western-style modernization and development may have the capacity to influence religious practices, as well as those related to family. Religions may frame their own practices in

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relation to prevailing ideas about modernization and individual practitioners may accept or reject these practices on the basis of their consonance with modernity. In framing religious practices in this way, religious organizations serve to mediate modernity, or facilitate the development of a modern self-identity for their members. At the individual level, we see that involvement with modern institutions, such as education, can impact behavioral choices, although this relationship again may not be as straightforward as we might initially anticipate. Religion can serve to moderate the relationship that education has on spousal choice within the context of the moral community of the neighborhood.

Future research on these topics could reasonably go in several different directions. With respect to the second chapter, I see the next step in this research to be going back to the original religious groups that Kelley and Iannaccone looked at when they developed the theory of strict churches, such as American Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. I am interested in using the framing perspective to examine other religious groups with strict demands that may or may not be followed, eventually culminating in a theory based on multiple case comparisons. American Evangelicals and Roman Catholics will likely serve to be useful cases as, like the Brahma Kumaris, they make strict demands regarding sexual behavior that are not always followed by their members. As for the relationship between religious salience and spousal choice, I think that further research is needed to understand how education confers status in the Nepali context. A better understanding of status would allow us to understand how higher educational attainment might serve to free individuals from the demands that their "moral communities" place on them.

APPENDIX A: EXTENDED METHODOLOGICAL NARRATIVE

I initially became interested in the Brahma Kumaris in the spring of 2008 when I first visited the Terai region of Nepal with my advisor, Dr. Lisa Pearce. Lisa and I were in Nepal to meet traditional healers for possible future research; I also planned to visit religious sites in order to develop a research topic for my dissertation. While in Nepal, I met Lisa's friend Deepa, a woman from Bistanagar involved with the Brahma Kumaris. With Deepa, we visited two Brahma Kumari centers – the center in Bistanagar and the "Peace Park" center in another town nearby. At the Bistanagar center, we met Bikram *bhai ji*, who served as a key gatekeeper for my access to the Brahma Kumaris. As Bikram *bhai ji* explained the teachings of the Brahma Kumaris, I was struck by the contrast between their use of traditional Hindu ideas combined with very modern-seeming terminology and references. At our initial meeting, Bikram *bhai ji* described the point of light worshipped by the Brahma Kumaris as a "quantum" light. He also quoted Shakespeare and mentioned Newton's Third Law. The use of this scientific terminology, unusual in a religious setting, combined with the many women I saw wearing white saris to spark my interest in the Brahma Kumaris.

When I returned to Nepal in the fall of 2008, I also returned to the Bistanagar Om Shanti center and initially began to attend *murli* classes there. After a few days of classes at the Bistanagar center, I began to attend *murli* classes at the Subhapur center, which is closer to where I was staying. I developed a routine where I would attend *murli* classes in Subhapur, followed by seven-day initiation classes, which in Subhapur I took from Ghale Sir, a professor of environmental science at a nearby agricultural college. These classes were conducted in English (Ghale Sir conducted the classes instead of one of the "surrendered" sisters at the center because he spoke English). In the afternoons, I would go to the Bistanagar center to attend more seven-

day classes, these taught by Bikram *bhai ji*. I took these classes with my friend Sabitha Ghimire, whose husband had travelled to Mt. Abu and who was also interested in going, but needed to complete the seven-day class first. Because of the extra details he went into, Bikram *bhai ji*'s classes lasted for ten days.

For my first two months in Nepal, I attended *murli* classes in the morning and spent time in Brahma Kumari centers, "hanging out" with surrendered brothers and sisters, in the afternoons. I also visited the homes of many BK devotees, particularly in Subhapur, where the smaller size of both the center and town made it easier for me to interact with people and visit their homes. This time spent in the field before interviewing allowed me to develop both my interview guide and means of selecting interviewees. I selected three BK centers for my research that were both practical and feasible, but also allowed me to reach diverse types of people, in diverse areas of the district, and to visit centers of varying ages and sizes. I refined my interview guide to more accurately reflect the reality of Nepal and the beliefs and practices of the Brahma Kumaris. I was also able to solicit advice on the interview guide from staff at the Institute for Social and Environmental Research (ISER) and to pilot test the guide in order to identify unclear questions. I also received invaluable advice from other American scholars visiting ISER. Finally, spending this time in the field allowed me to be part of a wide range of experiences with the Brahma Kumaris, from watching Dadi Gulzar serve as a spiritual medium for Brahma Baba, the group's deceased founder and original medium, on a video feed in the Bistanagar center to marching in a parade with Brahma Kumaris from all over the district.

Throughout my research, the Brahma Kumaris attempted both to convert me and to rhetorically appropriate me as one of their own for various audiences. The issue of conversion

was somewhat complicated by the Brahma Kumaris' focus on practice rather than belief and that as an unmarried woman, following a vegetarian diet, and attending *murli* classes daily, I seemed to be doing everything required of a good Brahma Kumari. When I attended a women's empowerment training at a center near Bistanagar, the sister in charge introduced me by explaining I had a deep relationship to the Brahma Kumaris in a past birth, and that although I had "taken this birth in America," this past had led me to come to Nepal.

As suggested by their eagerness to incorporate me into their spiritual family, I had very little difficulty gaining entre among the Brahma Kumaris. In fact, they were often eager to have a foreign researcher in their midst. This became apparent to me at my first day at the Bistanagar Om Shanti center in November 2008. I attended a *murli* class in the morning, then waited for my friend Krishna to come meet me at the center. While I was waiting, Bikram *bhai ji* came to chat with me. He explained that he would like to conduct his own research on the Brahma Kumaris, but did not know how. He thanked god that I was there to do research on this group. He reiterated this sentiment when Krishna, a previous acquaintance of his, came to meet me, saying "how can I thank you" for sending me there.

The Brahma Kumaris' eagerness to be researched also manifested itself in other ways. When I began to conduct interviews, one of the surrendered sisters at the Bistanagar center suggested that she could recommend lay members to me who could give me correct and accurate information about the Brahma Kumaris. When I requested the Bistanagar center's membership roster from which to sample interviewees, the sisters showed no hesitation in providing it to me, even suggesting that helping me decipher names was part of their *sewa*, or godly service. Lay members also seemed eager to assist with my research, although it is impossible to know if this eagerness was genuine or precipitated by the surrendered leadership in some way that was

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unintelligible to me. Lay members of both genders displayed great eagerness to be interviewed; when I did not interview someone, either because they were part of the Chitwan Valley Family Study dataset or they did not fall into my sample, many asked when I was coming to do their interview or why I was not coming. When I accompanied people from the Subhapur center on a bus tour of other Om Shanti centers in the region, women at a large center in a neighboring district asked when I would be coming to interview them. In addition, men at all three centers, but particularly at the Subhapur center where I spent the most time, wondered when it would be their turn to be interviewed.

While I believe the Brahma Kumaris always genuinely intended to help with this research, not all of their efforts were as straightforwardly helpful as they might have hoped. My attempt at managing this was to ignore suggestions and politely but firmly continue with my research plan without directly rejecting advice and potentially creating conflict. Although a Bistanagar sister suggested interviewing only certain women, I went ahead with my plan to select my own interview sample. I did not mention this to anyone else, although at a later time when Bikram *bhai ji* spoke with me about my interviews, he encouraged me to interview all sorts of members, including former members, in order to know both the good and the bad.

Some situations required more overt action on my part to manage. An example of this occurred in Gaida Chowk, the last Om Shanti center at which I observed and conducted interviews. Because I had been in the area for several months prior to arriving at their center, word had reached them of my project and that I would eventually be coming and conducting interviews there. The day before I planned to begin my observations, I spoke with one of the surrendered sisters on the phone, to let her know I would be coming. When I arrived at the center the next day, I found that not only were they ready for my arrival, but that all the women had

assembled at the center, ready to be interviewed. I had to try to explain as politely as possible

that I would prefer to interview them in their homes, and that I would be visiting them over the

coming days.

As this incident illustrates, there were almost certainly times when the Brahma Kumaris,

either lay or surrendered members, discussed me and my research without having me present. I

have no way of knowing what might have been said at these meetings. Trying to follow what

was said about me and my research in my presence strained the limits of my Nepali language

skills, and I was not always successful at this, particularly when unfamiliar words were used.

Obviously, this is a common problem faced by qualitative researchers, whose respondents

interact not only with the researcher but with each other. While in the field, the primary strategy

I used to take this into account was to conduct interviews as quickly as possible once I began

interviewing women at a center. I tried to conduct three interviews each day, with the hopes of

completing most of them before interviewees had a chance to speak with those yet to be

interviewed about the experience. Interviewing neighborhoods at the same time also likely

helped with this, as neighbors, who we might expect to chat with each other, were typically

interviewed on the same day.

The Brahma Kumaris also displayed their pleasure at having a foreign researcher in other

ways. When large gatherings occurred, I was frequently at the center of attention or put on

display in some way. The most egregious of these incidents occurred on Shivaratri, a holiday

focused on the god Shiva. For Shivaratri, the Brahma Kumaris organized a procession through

the streets of Bistanagar to a nearby hotel owned by one of their members. The procession

included children dressed up as Hindu gods, goddesses, and angels, a SUV with a *lingam* and

loudspeakers mounted on it, and surrendered and lay members all wearing white and marching

through the streets of Bistanagar. I travelled to this march with members of the Subhapur center, where I was observing at the time, and planned on marching with them, observing their experiences. However, when we began to assemble for the march in front of the Bistanagar center, some sisters moved me out of my position in the middle of the group, and to the front of the parade, where I was asked to hold a banner. I later rejoined the people from Subhapur. After the procession, the Brahma Kumaris held a program in the hotel courtyard, including dancing, music, and speeches from "chief guests." I was a chief guest at this program, as I was at various other special events I attended. As a chief guest, I did not watch these programs from the audience, but was seated on stage and eventually required to make a speech. Before my speech, Bikram *bhai ji* or another surrendered brother or sister would introduce me, explaining that I was a visiting PhD student from an American university and there to conduct research. Bikram *bhai ji* sometimes elaborated on this introduction; at the Shivaratri program at the hotel, he noted in his remarks that because of my research, I was very familiar with the Hindu traditions the Brahma Kumaris are based on and chastised the audience that a foreigner would be more familiar with their own traditions then they were. My tactic when making "chief guest" speeches was to keep these as brief as possible; I would introduce myself, explain where I was from, that I was there doing research, and profusely thank the crowd. I would also sometimes extend this by making a pun of my first name, Emily, and the Nepali words *amilo* (sour) and *imli* (tamarind). I felt that there was little to be gained by clarifying, and possibly seeming to contradict, surrendered brothers and sisters in front of a large audience. When I visited women in their homes to conduct interviews, however, I would try to clarify misunderstandings about me or my presence in the area. I was frequently asked by interviewees which religion I practiced, which I attempted to answer by dodging the exact question and explaining that I respected all religions. I

also sometimes needed to clarify that I was unaffiliated with the Brahma Kumaris, not a surrendered sister visiting from another country to check that people believed what they were supposed to. I speculate that this arose because, particularly at the Naraynagarh center, Brahma Kumaris periodically watch videos of activities at other centers around the world. At Christmas, I joined the Bistanagar center in watching a video of a Christmas program held at the Brahma Kumari headquarters in Mt. Abu, Rajasthan, which featured many white brothers and sisters with light-colored hair. I do resemble these "foreign" Brahma Kumaris in some respects and it is understandable how this misunderstanding might arise.

Ultimately, the greatest difficult I encountered while conducting this fieldwork was that, in many respects, I was following all the practices necessary to be a Brahma Kumari and was therefore, in the eyes of some of my interviewees, a Brahma Kumari. While the Brahma Kumari seven-day classes focus on beliefs and teachings, I found the organization as a whole and on a day-to-day basis to be much more focused on orthopraxy than on orthodoxy. As I have discussed elsewhere, key practices included celibacy, following a vegetarian diet and not eating garlic or onions, and attending *murli* classes daily. While conducting my fieldwork, I was an unmarried (and thus ostensibly celibate) woman who happened to be a vegetarian and who attended *murli* classes daily, albeit for research purposes. It is understandable that people would see me as a Brahma Kumari, as I was doing everything that was necessary to be a Brahma Kumari. In dealing with this misconception, it was important to me to clarify that I was not a Brahma Kumari, and certainly not a surrendered member, without seeming to reject the group, which might risk losing access. I attempted to resolve this by again reframing the discussion in terms of respect for religion. While I would emphatically confirm that I was not a surrendered Brahma Kumari, I would follow this with the observation that I respected the Brahma Kumaris

and respected all religions. I also strove to indicate my distance from the Brahma Kumaris using my appearance. When I visited Om Shanti centers, I wore light colors, so as to be respectful, but did not wear white (a strategy that I am indebted to Deepa Adhikari for suggesting to me). When the Bistanagar center gifted me with a white cardigan at Christmas, I wore this with Western-style clothing, such as jeans; ordinarily, the white dress of Brahma Kumaris always includes white saris for women and never Western clothing. Similarly, when the Brahma Kumaris gifted me with a white *sulwar kurta* for their Shivaratri program, I wore this with a light blue shawl, in order to visually differentiate myself and clarify my non-Brahma Kumari status.

The main insight that other researchers may be able to glean from my experience with the Brahma Kumaris is that as scholars of religion begin to explore more non-Western religious settings, differing religious worldviews will present different methodological difficulties. Although the attention and affection that some new religious movements give to prospective or new members is well documented, the focus the Brahma Kumaris place on practices, rather than beliefs, presents a relatively new dilemma. Because of the focus on practice, it was difficult to participant observe while maintaining my status as a researcher and not a member of the group. In order to clarify my status, I chose to not wear white clothing, a practice that the Brahma Kumaris encourage but to which they do not attach a great deal of moral significance. Wearing muted colors and occasional white items, such as a sweater, showed my empathy and respect for the Brahma Kumaris, while not wearing a white shawl or white sari prevented me from looking too similar to women who were actually members of the group. In general, other researchers facing similar dilemmas may be able to use a religious group's distinctive practices to clarify their status vis-à-vis the group. While clothing may not always be the best choice, depending on the particular practices of different groups, violating a practice that is important to the group's

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identity but not of great moral significance could be a useful way to clarify ones role as a respectful observer.

Oral Consent Script

Namaste! My name is Emily, and I am from the University of North Carolina in the United States. I am conducting research on how religion and Om Shanti are thought of and practiced in this district. I would like to interview you as part of this research. The questions will be about religious beliefs and practices and family life. The interview should take about 45 minutes. All the information I receive from you, including your name and any other identifying information, will be strictly confidential and will be kept under lock and key. I will not identify you or use any information that would make it possible for anyone else to identify you. Results from this research will be used to teach people about religion in (the district).

This interview is completely voluntary, but your cooperation is very important to make the study a success. If we come to a question that you don't want to answer, just let me know and we will go to the next question.

The only risk to you might be if your identity were ever revealed. But I will never write your name on the recording or transcript, so this cannot occur. There are no other expected risks to you for helping me with this study. There are no expected benefits for you either.

Thank you for your help!

If you have any questions concerning your participation in this study, please contact:

Emily McKendry-Smith
Institute for Social and Environmental Research
Phone: 56-581054
email: smithee@email.unc.edu

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, Indra Chaudhary, who will serve as a liaison to the Institutional Review Board in the United States. You can contact Ms. Chaudhary by phone at 56-581054 or by email at iser@wlink.com.np. You can also contact her at the following address:

Indra Chaudhary, Study Manager
Institute for Social and Environmental Research

Do I have your permission to begin asking you questions?
Do I have your permission to record the interview?
Do I have your permission keep this information and use it for future studies of religion in Nepal?

Interview Guide for women practicing Om Shanti:

First, I would like to know some basic information about you:

How old/about how old are you?

What is your father's caste?

Have you always lived in _____?
→ Where else have you lived?
→ When did you move and why?

What sort of work do you do during the day? Do you work in your household or somewhere else?
→ Has your work always been this way?
→ When did it change and why?
→ Did you receive any special education or training to do this work? (IF APPLICABLE)

Now I will ask you some questions about religion:

What kind of religion(s) do you practice?

During a typical day, what things do you do for religion?
→ Where are these done? Home, temples, or somewhere else?
→ Do you do these with other people or by yourself?

Can you tell me the story of how you started doing Om Shanti?
→ How did you find out about Om Shanti?

How have your religious practices changed since you started doing Om Shanti?
→ How so?
→ Can you tell me something about this?

Are there any things that you once did for religion but no longer do?

What do you like about coming to Om Shanti?

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How long have you been coming to this Om Shanti center?

Have you gone or do you go to any other Om Shanti centers?

During a typical week, how often do you go to the Om Shanti center and for what reasons?

Have you taken an Om Shanti seven-day class?
→ When and where?
→ What did you think of the course?

Have you taken a Women's Empowerment Training (Bistanagar center only)?
→ When and where?
→ What did you think of the training?

Do you do *raj yoga*/meditation at home, or just at the Om Shanti center?
→ Is doing meditation at the Om Shanti center different from doing meditation at home? How?
→ Is doing meditation at the Om Shanti center different from doing puja (if R is Hindu)/going to a gumba (if R is Buddhist)? How?

Do you wear white clothing when you go to the Om Shanti center?
→ What does it mean to you to wear white clothing?
→ Do you wear white clothing at other times besides when you are doing Om Shanti? Why?

Have you gone on any trips for Om Shanti, such as to India?
→ What was your experience like/what did you think of the trip?

Are there any foods that you don't eat because of religion?
→ Why?
→ Have you always not eaten these foods? When did you stop eating them?

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Now can you tell me about your family – if you are married and if you have any children?
→ Who else lives in your household?

IF MARRIED:

Can you tell me a bit about the history of your relationship with your spouse – how you met, how long you have known each other, and how long you have been married?

What kind of marriage ceremony did you have?

What is your relationship with your husband like?
→ Has it always been this way? When did it change?

Are you sexually active with your spouse?
→ Has your relationship always been this way? When did it change?

I've heard from some people that Om Shanti teaches that men and women should not marry, or should live as brother and sister instead of husband and wife.
→ Have you heard of those teachings? If so, how did you hear about them?
→ What do you think that those teachings mean?
→ Why do you think that Om Shanti teaches these things?
→ Have you ever considered following these teachings?
→ Why or why not?

Are you planning to have children/have any more children?
→ Has this always been your plan?

Do your husband or children also do Om Shanti?
→ Did he/they start doing Om Shanti at the same time as you, or did one of you start first?

What religious things does your spouse do during a typical day?
→ Where are these done?
→ Does he/she do these alone or with other people – who?

Do you think that you and your spouse are similar in terms of your beliefs about religion?
→ How do you think your beliefs are similar and different?

Do you ever talk with your spouse about religion?
→ What do you talk about?

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IF UNMARRIED:

When do you think that you would like to get married?
→ Have you always thought about marriage this way?
→ Would you like for your future spouse to do Om Shanti? Why or why not?

What do you think about having children in the future?
→ Have your goals/plans for having children always been like this

I've heard from some people that Om Shanti teaches that men and women should not marry, or should live as brother and sister instead of husband and wife.
→ Have you heard of those teachings? If so, how did you hear about them?
→ What do you think that those teachings mean?
→ Why do you think that Om Shanti teaches these things?
→ Do you think you will ever follow these teachings?
→ Why or why not?

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Do any of your other family members do Om Shanti?
→ Did they start doing Om Shanti at the same time as you, or did one of you start first?
What are your relationships with different members of your family/household like?
→ Have they always been like this?

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Do you have any friends who also do Om Shanti?

Did you meet them through Om Shanti or somewhere else?

Do you ever meet people that you met doing Om Shanti outside of the Om Shanti center?
→ How/why?

Is there anything you dislike about Om Shanti?

Do you think you will keep doing Om Shanti for the rest of your life?

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PILE SORT
(The interviewee will be given five index cards with the terms Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Om Shanti written on them in Nepali. In case the interviewee does not read Nepali, the cards will also show symbols indicating the religions. These symbols will include an image of Ganesh (Hinduism), Buddha (Buddhism), boy with a round hat (Islam), cross (Christianity), and point with rays (Om Shanti).

These cards represent some common religions in Nepal and around the world. The religions are Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Om Shanti. Can you put these in order in a way that makes sense to you?
→ Can you explain why you put the cards in this order? (GO THROUGH EACH CARD WITH INTERVIEWEE AND GET EXPLANATION FOR PLACE IN ORDER).

Interview Guide for women not practicing Om Shanti:

First, I would like to know some basic information about you:

How old/about how old are you?

What is your father's caste?

Have you always lived in _____?
→ Where else have you lived?
→ When did you move and why?

What sort of work do you do during the day? Do you work in your household or somewhere else?
→ Has your work always been this way?
→ When did it change and why?
→ Did you receive any special education or training to do this work? (IF APPLICABLE).

Now, I would like to ask you some questions about religion:

What kind of religion(s) do you practice?

During a typical day, what things do you do for religion?
→ Where are these done? Home, temples, or somewhere else?
→ Do you do these with other people or by yourself?

Have you always done these things for religion?
→ When did you start doing these things?
→ Why did you start doing these things?
→ Are there any things that you once did for religion that you no longer do?
→ Can you explain why you no longer do these things?

What do you like about doing these things for religion?

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How is doing religious things in your home (puja/lighting butter lamps) different from doing religious things outside your home, such as puja at a mandir or visiting a gumba?

Have you ever gone on any trips for religion?
→ Where did you go and when?
→ What was your experience like/what did you think about the trip?

Are there any foods that you don't eat because of religion?
→ Why?
→ Have you always not eaten these foods? When did you stop eating them?

*****

Now can you tell me about your family – if you are married and if you have any children?
→ Who else lives in your household?

IF WOMAN IS MARRIED

Can you tell me a bit about the history of your relationship with your spouse – how you met, how long you have known each other, and how long you have been married?

What kind of marriage ceremony did you have?

What is your relationship with your husband like?
→ Has it always been this way? When did it change?

Are you sexually active with your spouse?
→ Has your relationship always been this way? When did it change?

Are you planning to have children/have any more children?
→ Has this always been your plan?

What religious things does your spouse do during a typical day?
→ Where are these done?
→ Does he/she do these alone or with other people – who?

Do you think that you and your spouse are similar in terms of your beliefs about religion?
→ How do you think your beliefs are similar and different?

Do you ever talk with your spouse about religion?
→ What do you talk about?

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IF WOMAN IS NOT MARRIED

When do you think that you would like to get married?
→ Have you always thought about marriage this way?

What do you think about having children in the future?
→ Have your goals/plans for having children always been like this

What are your relationships with different members of your family/household like?
→ Have they always been like this?

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I've heard that some people in this district are practicing a religion called Om Shanti. Have you heard of this?

→ How did you hear about Om Shanti?

→ What is your opinion of Om Shanti? Do you think it is a good thing for people to be doing? Why or why not?

→ Do you know any people who are doing or have done Om Shanti?

→ Have you ever considered doing Om Shanti? Would you consider doing Om Shanti at any point in the future?

I've heard that some married couples who are doing Om Shanti live as brother and sister instead of as husband and wife. Have you heard of this?

→ Do you think this is a good thing for married couples to do? Why or why not?

→ If woman is married: would you ever do this? Why or why not?

Is there anything you dislike about the things you do for religion?

Do you think you will keep doing these things for the rest of your life?

*****

PILE SORT

(The interviewee will be given five index cards with the terms Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Om Shanti written on them in Nepali. In case the interviewee does not read Nepali, the cards will also show symbols indicating the religions. These symbols will include an image of Ganesh (Hinduism), Buddha (Buddhism), boy with a round hat (Islam), cross (Christianity), and point with rays (Om Shanti).

These cards represent some common religions in Nepal and around the world. The religions are Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Om Shanti. Can you put these in order in a way that makes sense to you?

→ Can you explain why you put the cards in this order? (GO THROUGH EACH CARD WITH INTERVIEWEE AND GET EXPLANATION FOR PLACE IN ORDER).