Focus
This News in Review story examines the practice of arranged marriage, the role it plays in Canadian society today, and the role it will play in Canada in the future. There is a growing trend of second- and third-generation immigrants from a variety of countries where arranged marriages are an established tradition who are bucking tradition and entering into “love marriages.”

Since the era of multiculturalism was introduced by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, Canada has prided itself on the building of a rich international tapestry referred to as the cultural mosaic. People from all over the world have chosen Canada as their new home. In turn, these new Canadians have brought the traditions of their homeland with them. This has provided immigrants with the opportunity to both celebrate their heritage and celebrate being Canadian. It is this blending of cultural heritage with established Canadian social and institutional values that makes Canada the envy of the world.

People often forget that Canada is a unique nation. It is a country where people who might otherwise consider each other enemies, live as neighbours—embracing each other’s differences.

However, every once in a while something comes along to challenge the balance in the multicultural equation. One such challenge comes from the cultural practice of arranged marriage. For most Canadians, there is a saying that goes, “First comes love, then comes marriage.” But for some Canadians, it is marriage that comes first, then love. Take the case of some members of the Pakistani-Canadian community. Most Pakistanis are Muslim. Their religious and cultural traditions forbid the common Canadian cultural practice of dating. So, if a Pakistani wants to meet someone, enter into a courtship, and then marry, how is this done without dating? The answer lies in the ancient practice of arranged marriage. By some estimates, half of all marriages in the Pakistani community are arranged.

There are three types of arranged-marriage scenarios. The first is the planned type. In this case, the parents of an individual seek out a suitable candidate to marry their child. The process is parent-driven, with the goal being to arrange a union that brings two families, and not necessarily two individuals, together. In this scenario, the betrothed may not meet each other until the actual day they are married. The second kind of arranged marriage is called the delegation type. In this case, a son who is looking to get married lets his parents know the qualities he would like to see in his wife. The parents, acting as his delegate, take these qualities into consideration when they pursue a bride for their son. This option is available to sons only and not daughters. The third kind of arranged marriage is called the joint-venture type. In this case, the children and their parents work together to find a suitable match. This is the most open of the three options.*

Three things should be remembered when attempting to come to terms with arranged marriages. First, the interests and needs of the people getting married are often considered secondary to the bond that will be established between the two families. In a sense, the couple serve first and foremost as representatives of their respective families and, in time, will stand as a united partnership. As a result of this perspective on marriage, the people who are subject to an arranged marriage must trust their family’s point of view in the spouse-selection process. Second, the key word in the arranged marriage situation is honour. A marriage should bring...
Did you know . . .
Nations where arranged marriages are most common include Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia.

honour to both families. The worst-case scenario would be to hastily pursue a match that brings dishonour and shame to a person or their family. Third, the son and daughter are not excluded from the decision-making process. They have the final say regarding who they will marry since, under Muslim law, no one can be forced into a marriage.

Many second- and third-generation immigrant Canadians are beginning to challenge the practice of arranged marriage in its more traditional form. An interesting blend of the old and the new is beginning to emerge. Let’s pursue the idea of a Muslim Pakistani-Canadian whose parents were also born and raised in Canada. Some of these Canadians are pursuing a “love marriage,” where they meet their partner and get to know them before making the decision to get married. Since Muslim law forbids dating, they meet and interact in a social setting. If they feel they have met a partner they would like to marry, they seek approval from their parents. If the parents agree to investigate the marriage opportunity, they will meet with the family of the potential spouse and see if a match can be made. In a perfect world, the families will agree that there is enough in common on a cultural, social, and spiritual level, and the union will be approved. Thus, a new approach to marriage has emerged in Canada where both the culture of heritage and Canadian culture are represented.

Canada is starting to see the emergence of yet another unique blend of Old World tradition and New World customs. Muslim Canadians who come from a tradition of arranged marriages are seeking ways to re-invent the practice—looking for ways that both respect their cultural roots and honour their individual rights and needs. What is happening is an evolving process that is reshaping the concept of arranged marriage in a Canadian context.


Questions
1. What is an arranged marriage?
2. What are the three types of arranged marriage?
3. What three things should be emphasized when trying to develop an understanding of arranged marriages?
4. Describe the new approach to arranged marriages that is currently evolving in Canada.
5. Describe your initial reaction to the idea of an arranged marriage.
KEEPING FAITH: YOUNG MUSLIMS AND LOVE

Video Review

1. How are the actions of the couple shown at the beginning of the documentary different from what is considered a traditional Pakistani approach to dating and marriage?

2. What is a matchmaker or aunty?

3. Why did the couple keep their courtship a secret at first?

4. Why is it difficult for some women to find a man to date and marry in some traditional Muslim cultures?

5. Why does Amna want to have the final say when it comes to a husband? Describe her position.

6. Why was it out of the question for Aliya to choose to get married as opposed to an arranged marriage? Why did she change her mind regarding arranged marriages?

7. What advice does Muslim scholar and marriage counselor Zoya Bachas give to parents regarding the desire of their children to choose their partner?

8. How have some Muslims pushed the boundaries of dating customs? What have people done to create a safe environment for Muslims to meet one another?
9. Does Islam allow dating?

10. What is twomuslims.com? Do you think the online matchmaking service will work?

11. What are the women in the documentary not willing to compromise when it comes to choosing a husband?
Canada has become home to many members of the religious tradition known as Islam. As of the 2001 census, almost 600,000 people identified themselves as Muslims, with the bulk of those people living in Southern Ontario. Most Muslim immigrants come from countries like Pakistan, India, and various countries in the Middle East. Islam is considered by many to be the fastest-growing mainstream religion in the world, boasting a global population of over a billion people and a growth rate of about six per cent per year. There is not much question that Islam will play a major role in Canadian society in the 21st century as generations of Muslims seek to make their mark on the Canadian social, political, and economic landscape. In turn, Canada’s identity will begin to reflect some of the values of the Muslim faith.

Islam

But what is the religion of Islam? The word Islam means “to submit,” while the word Muslim refers to a person who practises the religion of Islam. When the two are interpreted from a religious perspective, Islam is seen as the religion that embraces submission to the will of God; Muslims are people who are willing to honour this commitment. It is one of the three great monotheistic faith traditions (Judaism and Christianity are the others). Islam proposes a belief in one God that Muslims refer to by the personal name Allah. The importance of Allah is reflected in a phrase that precedes many Muslim prayers: “In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.” Therefore, for the person seeking to understand Islam for the first time, the supremacy and spiritual reign of Allah is of paramount importance. This is captured in the Shahadah, a central statement of belief known to all Muslims: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”

Monotheism and the Prophets

Monotheism is the belief in one God. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the world’s three main monotheistic faith traditions. All three religions believe in one all-powerful, all-compassionate God. Many people do not realize that many of the historical figures embraced by Jews and Christians are also embraced by Muslims. For example, Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad was preceded by thousands of other prophets. All of these prophets delivered essential messages to their people and to the world. Some of these prophets include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. These men also play a significant role in Judaism and Christianity. Muhammad is seen as the final prophet, representing the completion of a long line of messengers who delivered God’s truth to humanity. This is why he is known as the “Seal of the Prophets.”

The Prophet Muhammad

Islam appeared as a world religion in the seventh century with the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims believe that God sent a series of revelations to humanity through Muhammad. A revelation is a profound spiritual insight. Muslims believe that the revelations are God’s words, not Muhammad’s. They are recorded in the sacred text of Islam known as the...
Qu’ran (sometimes spelled Koran). Muhammad is a remarkable historic figure. Born into a community that believed in many gods, Muhammad became the vehicle by which the majority of the population of the Arabian Peninsula abandoned their polytheistic beliefs and adopted a belief in the one God, Allah. For Islam to flourish in this setting is nothing short of remarkable. Muhammad sought to unite people under one God in an area that was opposed to this spiritual understanding. The persuasive nature of Muhammad’s message was mesmerizing, and there are many stories of people converting to Islam immediately after hearing him recite the revelations delivered by God through him.

Common Misunderstandings
It seems that Islam has been perpetually misunderstood in the West. This sense of misunderstanding was compounded by the events of September 11, 2001, when terrorists attacked targets in the United States, killing many innocent civilians in the process. The terrorists were identified by the media as Muslims from the Middle East. As a result of this, and other similar situations, Islam has had to fight to defend its integrity—an integrity that has been undermined, more often than not, by misinformation and misunderstanding. Here are the most common misunderstandings about Islam.

Holy Wars
The belief that Muslims are aggressive, religious warriors stems from a mistranslation of the word jihad. The Western media have defined the word as “holy war,” which invites images of war-loving Muslims who attack others in the name of Islam. The word actually means “striving” and, in the case of faithful Muslims, striving to know and follow the will of God. Islam explicitly condemns violence and promotes peace in the same way that the other world faith traditions do.

Some people claim that Islam is inherently prone to making war because Muhammad himself was a military leader. Actually, Muhammad was a spiritual leader who led his followers in Medina in three battles against the invading armies of Mecca. They were battles of self-defence where Muhammad sought to defend Islam in the face of his stronger adversaries from polytheistic Mecca. In the end, Muhammad and Islam won and, within a few years, the people of Mecca abandoned their gods and adopted Islam without a fight.

The Status of Women
Many people see Muslim women wearing a head covering known as a hijab and wonder why they wear this garment. The Qu’ran calls on Muslim women to dress modestly. As a matter of custom, not religious command, many women have chosen to wear the hijab. On the other hand, many Canadian Muslim women do not wear the hijab. They make this choice because they feel that they can maintain their modesty in ways other than following customs that are more prevalent in their country of ancestry. Still, misguided people use the hijab as a symbol of the oppression of women in Islam. This is not to say that Muslim women do not experience oppression. However, oppression is a cultural norm that has developed historically and is not propagated by the Muslim faith. Certainly, Judaism and Christianity have endured similar charges relating to the oppression of women and would be hesitant to blame religion for the oppression. The
true practice of Islam acknowledges the equality of men and women before God.

**Islam and Marriage**

From a Muslim perspective, marriage is the union of two people for the purposes of companionship and the creation of strong Muslim families. The union is a contract between two people and, more importantly, two families. In some cases, marriages are arranged by two families. The practice of arranged marriage ensures that the interests of the families of the betrothed are honoured. However, the bride and groom do have the choice whether or not to marry the person selected for them by their family. It is against Muslim law to compel a person to marry against their will.

While arranged marriages often spark debate in Canada, the idea of polygamy arouses even more intense emotion. In the Muslim tradition, men are permitted to marry up to four wives. The practice of polygamy has been around for thousands of years. Even Muhammad had many wives, but this is often taken out of context. Muhammad was married for 25 years to one woman. Her name was Khadijah. After her death, Muhammad married a number of other women, many of whom were widows and a few of whom were the daughters of friends. Thus, Muhammad’s marriages were either to provide for women in need or to honour social and political commitments. This was part of the custom back in the days of Muhammad. Today, while Muslim men are permitted to marry up to four wives, the vast majority have one wife whom they strive to love and honour. In Canada, it is illegal to have more than one wife, and Muslim Canadians have respected Canada’s marriage laws.

**Activity**

As a class, discuss the view that you and your community have of Islam. Record these views in the organizer below and answer the following questions:

a. Are the views of most Canadians regarding Islam accurate?

b. If the views are not accurate, why do you suppose the views are so far off the mark?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Views of Islam</th>
<th>Accurate?</th>
<th>Inaccurate?</th>
<th>Why?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My Community</td>
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KEEPING FAITH: YOUNG MUSLIMS AND LOVE

Asim Bukhari Gets Married

In September 2003, the Toronto Star ran a nine-part series describing the process through which Asim Bukhari got married. The series describing the arranged marriage was written by journalist Catherine Porter, who documented the process from the decision to arrange the marriage to the arrival of Asim’s bride in Canada. Here is a summary of Asim’s story.

After Asim Bukhari turned 30, his older brother, Farheem, told him that it was time to get married. Farheem had become the family patriarch after his parents died. Following his move to Canada in 1988, he began sponsoring family members to emigrate from Pakistan and join him in the city of Pickering just outside of Toronto. Asim made the move in 1998. After living and working in Canada for five years, it was his turn to do what Farheem had done 10 years earlier: return to Karachi, Pakistan, work with his sisters to find a wife, get married, and return to Canada.

There was one problem: Asim had met and fallen in love with a woman in Canada. Her name was Farah. In fact, the two had been secretly corresponding and deepening their affections for one another. The decision to pursue an arranged marriage in Karachi would tear Asim away from the woman he considered his true love. Asim mustered up the courage to tell his older brother that he knew who he wanted to marry and that she lived right here in Canada. Farheem listened intently and agreed to extend a second proposal, and it was rejected by Farah’s family. Pakistani families conduct a thorough examination of the potential groom before accepting a marriage proposal. Asim just did not meet the expectations of Farah’s family. Despite his deep love for her, he had no choice but to abandon the idea of a love marriage to her and pursue an arranged marriage in Pakistan. He would do what every member of his family had done; his grandparents, his parents, six of his sisters and two of his brothers had all participated in arranged marriages. To betray this tradition after his proposals to Farah’s family had been rejected would be to violate the most sacred institution in Pakistani culture: the family itself.

Asim flew to Karachi and met with five prospective brides his sisters had lined up for him. Most of the interviews went poorly. Asim’s sisters complained that he was too picky. Eventually, Asim selected Nida Shakir, a young woman who came from a good family and who had a good education. The family worked hard to prepare a formal marriage proposal, and initial contact with the Shakir family suggested that they were open to the prospect of a marriage involving the Bhukaris. Since marriages in Pakistani culture are primarily between families and not individuals, great care must be taken to ensure that family honour is being taken into consideration. Asim’s family knew that Nida’s family were quite serious about whom they would enter into a relationship with. Up to that point, they had rejected over 20 marriage proposals.
On the night that the proposal was formally extended, Asim arrived with his family. This was the first time he laid eyes on his future bride other than seeing her image in a photograph. Asim and Nida did not say anything to one another. All the negotiations occurred between the heads of the two families. The mood remained tense until the announcement was finally made. The proposal had been accepted and, in just under three weeks, Asim and Nida would be married.

In the meantime, Asim asked if he could speak with Nida. He wanted to get to know her. The two spoke on the telephone three times before they were married. By the time the wedding day arrived, both Asim and Nida had participated in numerous family celebrations but they still had not spent any time alone with one another. Nida had a difficult time in the days leading up to the wedding. She was happy that she was going to be married to Asim but she was about to leave her family for the first time in her life. She would live with Asim’s sisters until arrangements could be made for her to immigrate to Canada to live with Asim. Couple this with the fact that Nida had never had a conversation with a man other than a member of her family (and she was about to live with a man who was essentially a stranger to her) and it is easy to understand how the changes in her life were bringing her some distress. There were many tears before and after the wedding from Nida and her family. However, they knew that a good match had been made and that life in Canada would offer Nida many opportunities that she would not have in Pakistan.

Asim returned to Canada ahead of his bride and made preparations for her to join him. It took almost a year for Asim to work out the immigration details and to arrange for Nida to fly to Canada. The delay is not unusual for couples going through this type of process. Nida and Asim started to get to know each other and, in time, grew to love one another. Within a year of Nida’s arrival in Canada, she was happy to report that she was pregnant. The Bukhari family was together and growing. In their case, first came marriage, then came love. Will it be the same experience for their children when it is time for them to get married?

Source: The series on which this summary is based was written by Catherine Porter in the *Toronto Star*, September 6-14, 2003, with follow-up stories on December 30, 2003, and December 26, 2004.

**For Reflection**

Make a point-form list of your reaction to events in Asim and Nida’s story. What events stand out? Did anything concern you? What did you admire in the story? What are your feelings with regard to arranged marriages?
Statistics Canada researchers have worked to provide a snapshot of what married life looks like in Canada. Here is a summary of some data compiled between 2000 and 2003.

**Marriage**
- 14 million Canadians are in couple unions—either married or living in common law.
- Over 450,000 marriages involve a mixed union, where one partner is a member of a visible minority and the other is not, or both partners are from different visible minority groups (mixed unions have increased by 35 per cent between 1981 and 2001).
- 84 per cent of Canadian families are headed by married couples.
- Average age for first marriage: women – 31 years; men – 34 years (up from 25 for women and 28 for men in 1980)

**Divorce**
- Divorce rate: 38 per cent; the divorce rate is the proportion of marriages that end in divorce within 30 years.
- About 60 per cent of divorces involve couples who have not reached their 15th anniversary.
- 16 per cent of husbands and wives who get divorced have at least one previous divorce.
Source: www.cbc.ca/news/background/marriage/family.html

**The Family**
- 86 per cent of Canadians live in private households with relatives.
- 10 per cent of Canadians live alone.
- 12 per cent of people living in Quebec live alone (the highest rate in the country).
- One million senior citizens live alone; 77 per cent are female.
- There are 3.1 people in the average Canadian family, down from 3.71 in 1971.
- 51 per cent of men and 48 per cent of women can expect to marry before they turn 50 (down from 65 per cent for both sexes in 1981).
- 55 per cent of people in Newfoundland are legally married (the highest rate in the country). In Quebec and the territories, 40 per cent are legally married (the lowest rate in the country).
- 27 per cent of Canadians are single.
- 70,000 same-sex couples are living in common-law relationships.
- The average age of a first-time mother is 28 years (up from 24 in the early 70s).
- 84 per cent of families with children have two or more people employed either full-time or part-time.
- Six out of 10 people aged 20 to 24 live with their parents.
- More than 16 per cent of full-time working mothers provide an additional 60 hours of housework and child care each week.
- Three out of 10 babies are born to mothers who are not legally married.
- 10 per cent of children live in poverty.
- 51 per cent of families in Toronto consist of legally married couples with children (the highest rate in the country).
- 14.2 per cent of common-law couples living in Sherbrooke and Trois-Rivières have children (the highest rate in the country).

For Reflection
Do these statistics fit your impressions/experience of marriage in Canada today? Explain.
KEEPING FAITH: YOUNG MUSLIMS AND LOVE

Activity: Finding a Partner

The focus of this News in Review story has been on the cultural practice of arranged marriage. Now it is time for you to weigh in on the issue. Your goal will be to answer the question: What is the best way to find a partner? To help you answer this question, a number of options will be proposed and you will have to determine the one that you think is best.

Definitions

Love Marriage — the process where two people meet, get to know each other, fall in love, and choose to get married

Planned Marriage — a type of arranged marriage where the parents seek out a suitable partner for their children. This process is parent-driven, with the goal being to bring two families together.

Delegation Marriage — a type of arranged marriage where the son delegates to his parents responsibility for finding a spouse; the parents base their decision on a list of criteria provided by their son. Both the son’s wishes and family’s interests are taken into account in this option.

Joint-Venture Marriage — the combined efforts of the child and his/her parents are used to find a suitable partner. The decision is made jointly, and this option allows for a courtship period so that the intended can get to know each other prior to marriage. Both the child’s wishes and the family’s interests are taken into account in this option.

Part One: Evaluate the Options

Complete the following chart.

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<tr>
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<th>Love</th>
<th>Planned</th>
<th>Delegation</th>
<th>Joint-Venture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What role do parents play?</td>
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<td>What role does family play?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What role do the potential marriage partners play?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What role does courtship or dating play?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advantages to this approach to marriage</td>
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<td>Disadvantages to this approach to marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td>How does mainstream Canadian society view this approach to marriage?</td>
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Part Two: Pick a Winner
Which option do you think is best? Why does the option you selected stand out above the rest?

Length of answer: 100 words

Part Three: A View from the Other Side
The Vanier Institute of the Family has determined the key considerations made by people choosing a partner. Review the two lists below and answer the following question: Can all four options be used to meet the criteria indicated in the two lists? For example, can a planned approach determine whether a potential spouse is honest, kind, moral, and ready to commit?

Length of answer: 100-150 words

Top Characteristics People Want in a Partner
1. Honesty
2. Kindness
3. Respect
4. Compatibility
5. Humour

Top Reasons Why People Marry
1. Marriage signifies commitment
2. Moral values
3. Children should have married parents
4. The natural thing to do
5. Financial security

SOURCE: Vanier Institute of the Family as found at www.cbc.ca/news/background/marriage/index.htm

Notes: