

The lived experience of second-generation, Indian, Hindu women in a cross-cultural romantic relationship: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

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Abstract

Given the importance of cultural continuity within the Indian culture, numerous studies have highlighted the challenges second-generation, Indian women endure, particularly in relation to decisions around romantic relationships. These challenges can have a psychological impact on the women, including an impact on their romantic relationship and with their families. The current study aimed to explore the lived experience of second-generation, Indian, Hindu (IH) women, living in the United Kingdom, who are in a heterosexual, cross-cultural, romantic (CCRR) relationship. Seven participants aged between 24 and 40 years were recruited. The participants were interviewed, and the data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). From the data, three superordinate themes were identified: (1) "Predetermined Identity," (2) "The Two Worlds don't Meet," (3) "Enduring Challenges." Implications of the findings for clinical practice are discussed.

Introduction

Romantic relationships have been a topic of interest among theorists for centuries due to the agreed understanding that relationships are a central feature of human experience and can provide a great source of psychological support (Worell & Goodheart, 2006). Romantic relationships are a significant aspect of one's life, particularly during adolescence and early adulthood, when romantic relationships typically begin to be explored (Meier et al. 2009). However, within literature, romantic relationships have been conceptualised in a myriad of ways due to differences in perspectives, culture and experiences. Furman et al. (1999) suggested romantic relationships cannot be constrained to one specific definition however, they do encompass unique features which differ from friendships.

Whilst some researchers have considered "dating" inclusive within the definition of a romantic relationship, Furman et al. (2009) described dating as a romantic "experience." Consistent with this idea, Rose and Zand (2002) suggested "dating" is associated with little commitment and provides an opportunity for individuals to get to know one another- to explore the potential for a committed relationship. For the purpose of this study, romantic relationships have been defined as mutually acknowledged, ongoing, voluntary interactions, commonly marked by expressions of affection and current or anticipated sexual behaviour (Collins et al., 2009). It is also suggested fundamental to romantic relationships is commitment (Surra & Hughes, 1997).

To understand how CCRRs are experienced, the concept of culture must be understood. Culture comprises shared values and beliefs that manifest in particular ways of thinking and behaving (Ladhari et al., 2015). Within the context of romantic relationships, cross-cultural relationships encompass individuals from diverse contexts, inclusive of, but not limited to, ethnicity, educational background, religion, socio-economic status and language (Silva et al., 2012).

Cultural values are significant in understanding how one defines themselves and relates to others. Throughout history and culture, beliefs, values and traditions held vary broadly, and individualism and collectivism are two systems which separate the Eastern and Western cultures (Dion & Dion, 1993). The difference in these value systems have been emphasised particularly in the extant

literature on cross-cultural relationships.

Western societies such as the United States, Britain, Australia and Canada, (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001) are considered individualistic societies. In such countries, autonomy is encouraged, and the needs and desires of the individual are prioritised (Dion & Dion, 1993). Accordingly, mate selection is a process of greater self-expression and independence where individuals typically engage in dating experiences and romantic relationships to select a marital partner (Dion & Dion, 1993). The initiation of romantic relationships and marriage tend to be formed on the intrinsic desire of love and interpersonal attraction (Levine et al., 1995). In contrast, Asian, Latin-American and African cultures are considered collectivistic in nature (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001) and incorporate a hierarchical structure whereby individuals align themselves with gender role expectations and obligations stemming from familial desires, religion and upholding community values (Madathil & Benschhoff, 2008). In such cultures, dating experiences are typically considered a taboo (Manohar, 2008) and romantic relationships rarely exist due to parental fears of sexual activities and cross-cultural marriages (Dugsin, 2001). Although selecting one's marital partner may be desirable, familial and societal obligations tend to override the interests of the individual (Goodwin & Cramer, 2000).

India is considered to be one of the most collectivistic cultures worldwide (Buss et al., 1990) and comprises 28 states which incorporate a variety of languages, customs, traditions and religions (Medora, 2007). Although there are commonalities amongst Indian states with regards to collectivism, the caste system, marriage and Sexual and Relationship Therapy 3 gender roles, these have derived from, and are engrained within, the traditional values of Hinduism (Dasgupta, 1998). Across India, religion is an influential aspect of an individual's life, and is seen to guide daily behaviour (Medora, 2003). The most prevalent of these religions being Hinduism which is practiced by 80% of India's population (Medora, 2007).

Preserving cultural lineage is essential within Indian Hindu tradition and is executed through marriage which is considered a union between two families (Madathil & Benschhoff, 2008). Marriage is perceived as a religious duty and obligation and is commonly arranged by family and community members (Medora, 2003). Arranged marriages make-up around 90% of marriages in India and serve to protect family reputation (Gautam, 2002). Though parents play a key role in the process of finding a suitable spouse, over the years there appears to be more consultation between more educated parents and their children whereby there is an opportunity to decline potential suitors, however this appears more prominent for sons (Medora, 2003). Allowing more of a choice in selecting a potential partner can be seen to reflect the growing importance placed on one's individual criterion of what they desire in a spouse (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008). Arranged marriages are also common practice in the UK within the South Asian community (Pande, 2015). A study in the UK found that Indian women tend to negotiate "varying degrees of choice" in a partner whilst maintaining criteria such as social status (Bhopal, 2011).

Adhering with the Hindu tradition of "Dharma", socialisation between sons and daughters differ and are clearly defined and reinforced by family members and the community (Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002). Although religion is used to guide gender norms, a paradox appears in the religious and societal representation of women in India. Whilst Hinduism promotes femininity as women are considered to complete their male counterparts and Hindus worship goddesses who are represented as powerful leaders, paradoxically within society, women face significant discrimination compared to males (Dasgupta, 1998). Although there have been some developments to the status of women in Indian society in terms of education and employment, typically women do not possess the same rights and privileges as men, particularly in relation to decision making processes (Medora, 2007).

From a young age, daughters are indoctrinated with the virtues of marriage and are expected to prepare for their role as a wife, mother and daughter-in law. Therefore, they are raised with greater restrictions, to be obedient and chaste and are responsible for transferring traditional values and

religious practices to their offspring (Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002). Sons, on the other hand, are typically raised to acquire an education, be autonomous, and contribute to the family income (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000) thus receiving a greater degree of freedom.

Contrastingly, in western cultures gender roles are more fluid and since the feminist movement equal opportunities in society and women's rights are of significant value (Beechey, 1979; Bhopal, 1999; Ahmad et al., 2003). Subsequently, after migration to a new country ethnic and religious identities become more salient for immigrants, (Kurien, 2005) who typically attempt to enforce cultural values on their children, particularly daughters. Research has acknowledged the gender bias in socialisation within the Indian community in western cultures whereby daughters still experience greater restrictions compared to sons, particularly during situations involving dating, romantic relationships and marriage (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Dasgupta, 1998).

It seems paramount to consider identity in this literature review for various reasons. Firstly, the study aims to explore the experiences of second-generation, IH women, who are defined for the purposes of this study as women born in the UK, and whose parent/s were born in India (Ballard, 2003). The second-generation have received increased attention in the literature of identity due to the two culturally diverse social value systems in which they live and have internalised; these being within the family system and in the mainstream culture through socialisation with peers (Dasgupta, 1998). Additionally, the cultural pressures IH women face in relation to gender role socialisation may impact how one shapes their identity. Given the multiple aspects of one's identity that can influence behaviour, it is important to comprehend how these women manage their identities in order to understand how CCRRs are experienced.

In psychological literature, identity is primarily explored in relation to belonging and the importance connections to a specific group are to the overall sense of self (Cameron, 2004). Berry (2005, 2001) suggests the second-generation and their parents have to negotiate between how much of their heritage culture they wish to maintain and the degree to which they wish to acquire the values and practices of the dominant culture. This process is known as acculturation, which is characterised by an adaptive process of change that occurs on a cultural and psychological level due to the interaction between different cultures (Berry, 2005; Hunt et al., 2004). Although a number of acculturation models have been developed, unidimensional models are considered too simplistic as they assume acculturation occurs in one exclusive direction, whereby heritage values are replaced with the mainstream cultural values (Phinney, 2003). However, this does not account for individuals such as the second-generation who are considered bicultural (Berry, 2005).

Alternatively, Berry's (2001) bidirectional model encompasses four processes of acculturation. These being: assimilation; whereby individuals adopt the values and beliefs of the mainstream culture entirely, separation; whereby individuals reject the mainstream culture and identify with the heritage culture, integration; which is the process of selectively combining aspects of both cultures, and lastly marginalisation which is the rejection of both cultures (Berry, 2001). The integration approach is commonly allied with increased psychological wellbeing and reduced acculturative stress (Berry et al., 2006; Berry, 2005) due the ability to be able to successfully navigate between two cultures. Literature has indicated that within the Indian community acculturation differs between the second-generation and their parents, with the second-generation primarily preferring integration whilst their parents tend to favour separation, even after years spent in the host country (Segal, 1991; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). It has been suggested that since socialisation occurred in India for immigrant parents, Indian values are internalised, and they may feel some reluctance to adapt to values from the mainstream culture. However, for the second-generation, the pressure to fit into both cultures may be greater (Varghese, 2007).

A theoretical framework considered the grounding for the developments in cross-cultural research was developed by Markus and Kitayama (1991, 1994). The way one negotiates

interpersonally and intrapersonally between their differing cultural selves can in some way be understood through the self-construal theory. The self-construal theory outlined two distinct self-construal orientations; independent and interdependent self-construal to explain these relationships.

The independent self-construal is defined by autonomy and pursuing one's desires. Individuals often from western cultures are seen to construe and construct the self as separate from their social context (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Alternatively, the interdependent self-construal, suggests that individuals primarily from eastern cultures tend to adopt a self-construal that is connected to their social context whereby their actions thoughts and feelings are often viewed in the context of their relationships with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These individuals often prioritise maintaining harmony and seek acceptance from their in-group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). Research (Lam, 2006; Tawa & Suyemoto, 2010) has indicated, to various extents bicultural individuals hold both independent and interdependent self-construal's and may develop these by engaging in cultural situations that reflect being both independent and interdependent. Individuals behave in a way that is deemed appropriate for certain situations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Yum, 2004). However, although this may work in some cultural contexts, the impact this may have particularly in situations where there may be tension between one's self-construals may have significant consequences on individuals.

Existing literature has reported the second-generation may experience a culture value clash due to simultaneous socialisation within two cultures that hold opposing values (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Kwak, 2003; Rahim, 2014). However, it is important to note this may not be the case for all aspects of an individual's life and many individuals are able to successfully develop a bicultural identity, whereby they are comfortable and proficient in both their heritage and mainstream culture (LaFromboise et al., 1993). As cultural identity is driven by context, it is argued that the second-generation engage in a process of cultural frame switching; a theory suggesting individuals shift mind-sets depending on what is considered socially appropriate at the time (Hong et al., 2000). Consistent with this idea, research among the South Asian population has demonstrated that the second-generation behave accordingly to the values promoted within their home environment where ethnic and religious identities are more apparent and adapt their behaviour when in public where British identities are more salient, to avoid familial conflict (Giguere et al., 2010).

Although switching between identities may work in some situations, in contexts such as dating and exerting autonomy in mate selection, particularly when this process is considered a community affair, the fulfilment of one identity is often at the expense of the other (Giguere et al., 2010). This bicultural value conflict has predominantly been reported among second-generation women due to gender differences in socialisation manifested in the pressure to maintain gendered patriarchal behaviours, (Dion & Dion, 2001; Inman et al., 2001), and who are often discouraged from developing autonomous identities, independent from their family (Inman et al., 2001). Not only do these women experience greater restrictions compared to males, but also to their British female counterparts (Shams and Williams, 1995). These restrictions placed on South Asian women in the UK face due to gender specific roles have increased vulnerability to self-harm and suicide (Raleigh, 1996; Bhugra, 2003). They are also more likely to resist traditional values and employ various strategies to exert autonomy particularly in contexts such as dating activities and romantic relationships which can lead to intergenerational cultural conflict (Manohar, 2008; Dion & Dion, 2001; Dasgupta, 1998).

The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) can be employed to help further understand perhaps why bicultural individuals may experience a cultural conflict. The theory posits that an individual's sense of self is manifested through knowledge and understanding in relation to their membership and affiliation to a specific group. According to this theoretical framework, one's identity is reflective of an internalisation of a social group into one's self (Abrams & Hogg, 1999). An individual's sense of identity is therefore perceived to be constructed through their sense of belonging to a group,

which as a result is influential in one's self-esteem and self-concept (Kawakami & Dion, 1993). Turner (1999) further suggested that the view of the self is context-dependent and therefore the nature of the individual's identity as part of a social group is dependent on aspects of the social context. Research has demonstrated that belonging to several cultural groups may negatively impact on one's psychological well-being and feelings of belonging particularly when these social identities are experienced as conflicting (Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011).

Identity development is fraught with complexity. Thus, second-generation women have learnt to employ strategies to manage two opposing cultures in which they live. However, in dating experiences and romantic relationships this may be challenging, as they attempt to manage their own desires whilst negotiating traditional cultural and religious obligations. Cultural expectations of women within the Indian community is influential in the development of their identity, which may determine how relationships are experienced. Literature has highlighted the identity conflict and tension that can occur among second-generation women particularly in the area of romantic relationships. However, there is currently no research in the UK exploring the lived experience of the second-generation in romantic relationships such as CCRRs given the conflicting values in this area.

Cross-cultural dating and relationships

There is greater acceptance of CCRRs in the UK, and an increase in these relationships over the past decade particularly among individuals aged 16–49 (ONS, 2011). Research however among the immigrant population has acknowledged cross-cultural dating and relationships to be an emotionally heightened and complex area, particularly for second-generation women. This is due to the reported conflict these relationships can cause among relatives, the community and friends as well as between the couple (Dasgupta, 1998; Inman et al., 2011). With the second-generation having greater opportunities to integrate into the western culture, primarily within the education system and place of employment, greater opportunities exist to date and engage in romantic and marital relationships outside of one's cultural heritage.

Across cultures, attitudes towards cross-cultural dating and relationships are influenced by various factors and differ across generations. Quantitative research has indicated that those who identified more with the mainstream culture expressed greater willingness towards engaging in cross-cultural dating experiences (Mok, 1999; Uskul et al., 2007) and more openness in attitudes was expressed by the younger compared to the older generation (Wang, 2012).

Nesteruk and Gramescu (2012) extended research in this area through qualitative analysis and explored mate preferences and dating experiences among second-generation men and women from diverse cultures. In line with previous research, the findings indicated that immigrant parents hold endogamous expectations for their children (Dugsin, 2001), and the majority of the second-generation shared this preference due to a strong affiliation with their ethnic identity. The authors also highlighted the influence of religion on attitudes towards a preferred partner and, similar to existing research (Inman et al., 2007), acknowledged restrictions on women's dating experiences. Although this study emphasised aspects of culture which influence preferences for a potential partner, a limitation of this study is the inclusion criteria, in that the researchers included participants who were child immigrants as well as those born in the mainstream culture whose parents are immigrants. This limits generalisability and comparisons to other studies of second-generation mate preference and dating experiences and may also explain some participants' preference for an exogamous relationship. Prominent in some individuals' cultural practice, values and beliefs is religion (van Tubergen & Maas, 2007), which literature has portrayed can influence the decision to engage in cross-cultural dating or relationships. Studies have illustrated that greater religious affiliation and family connectedness leads to reduced openness in attitudes towards engaging in cross-cultural marriages or dating experiences

(Brown et al., 2003; Cila & Lalonde, 2014).

The aforementioned studies provide an insight into the factors which contribute to engaging in CRRs, although studies have primarily focused on the attitudes towards inter-faith marriages within Islamic, Christian and Jewish faiths in Canada, America and Australia. This may be due to the prominence of these religions in these countries, however, given the cultural diversity of the participants, the findings are not generalisable to all cultures. Furthermore, the focus on participants' "attitudes" lack a sense of realism. These studies have primarily employed a quantitative method of analysis and as a result, the data is restricted to predefined variables and lacks in-depth exploration or knowledge in this area. The existing qualitative studies have aimed to capture social processes among a broad cultural population and consequently, employed a heterogeneous sample such as "South Asian" participants. Although there are similarities among South Asian communities, there are also marked differences (Bhopal, 1997).

Inman et al. (2011) acknowledged the increase in Asian, Indian/white marriages in America and addressed the gap in literature by exploring the lived experiences of these couples. Corresponding with existing research, participants reported experiencing opposition from immediate family members towards their decision to marry cross-culturally, owing to fears about their families' social status and transmission of cultural values to their children. One participant described the initial reaction from her parents learning of her interest to marry cross-culturally as "world war three, four, five and six"; highlighting the complexity associated with the nature of these relationships within the Indian culture. Additionally, the participants also reported receiving negative reactions from within their communities, whereby greater disapproval of the couple was evident in conservative communities. Inman et al. (2011) study was essential in providing an understanding of the tensions that can arise towards Asian Indian/white marital couples in America. These tensions were reportedly more salient for the Asian women in the study due to familial pressures to maintain Indian values. Where Inman et al. (2011) focused on the Indian-white couple's experiences of being in a cross-cultural marriage, the findings are difficult to generalise to Indian couples in other cross-cultural relationships. However, existing research has complemented Inman et al. (2011) study.

Thiagarajan's (2007) qualitative study complements Inman et al. (2011) research as she explored the lived experiences of Indian women in America in cross-cultural marriages. The results support Inman et al. (2011) findings and highlight the challenges Indian women experience when pursuing the decision to marry cross-culturally, the difficulty in managing dating and relationships due to the reactions of their family and community and the importance of social support. Although Thiagarajan's (2007) study focused on marriages across cultures, her study touched on women's experiences of dating Indian men. Many of her participants discussed feeling "restrained or disempowered" due to the pressure of having to uphold the role of Indian women. Conversely, these women reported having a more positive cross-cultural dating experience, as they felt a sense of excitement and freedom away from the expectations of Indian women. These findings support existing literature in illustrating the oppression and difficulties women appear to face due to the gender role expectations of them within their heritage culture.

Prevalent in both studies among Indian women was the negative reactions received from the community and both sides of their family. These experiences evoked feelings of distress, hurt and disappointment due to these reactions and the lack of support received (Thiagarajan, 2007). The support and approval received from spouses, family and friends was extremely valued among participants who reported having someone to share their experiences with (Thiagarajan, 2007).

Both studies have contributed to an understanding of how Indian women experience engaging in a cross-cultural marriage in America and highlight the psychological distress evoked. However, the participants recruited for both studies were a mix of first and second-generation participants whose experiences will be different to those of second-generation participants in non-marital relationships

in the UK. Furthermore, although both studies employed participants the majority of whom were affiliated as Hindu, making generalisations among all participants reduces one's experiences and limits the understanding from one culture.

A recent study (Mehan, 2017) in the UK investigated the lived experience of second-generation Indian Hindu women in secret romantic relationships. In line with existing literature (Manohar, 2008) the findings highlighted that a way in which the women managed their contrasting cultures was to keep their romantic relationship from their parents. This was due to the fear of feeling pressured to marry their partner or romantic relationships being perceived as a defiance of traditions of the Indian culture. The researcher illustrated the psychological distress induced given cultural differences in values between the participants and their parents (Mehan, 2017).

Due to the methodological nature of Mehan's (2017) study, the findings can be understood to be relevant to a particularly unique and restricted population. The participants within the study were all at university and aged between 20 and 22 years, which considers the experiences of these women within a specific context and timeframe in their life. For the participants, university was influential in their experience of initiating and maintaining their relationship and also in acquiring some autonomy (Mehan, 2017). Therefore, findings cannot be generalised to Indian Hindu women who are not at university and those older than 23 years who may experience romantic relationships differently due to their age and social context. The researcher also recruited women only in secret relationships and therefore the experiences of Indian Hindu women who may find engaging in a romantic relationship challenging but may not be in a secret romantic relationship are not understood.

The participants discussed selecting partners they felt would be accepted by their parents - those from the same cultural background. The researcher explained this decision as the participants attempt to maintain ties with their heritage culture to minimise intergenerational conflict (Mehan, 2017). Consequently, a gap in the literature exists within this population as there appears to be little knowledge of the experiences of women who make decisions that steer away from their heritage culture, such as those engaging in CCRRs. These findings combined would allow for a greater understanding of the factors which contribute to second-generation Indian Hindu women's decision to engage in particular relationships. Taking this into consideration, the current research project can therefore be considered an extension of Mehan's (2017) research, as it aims to explore an alternative phenomenon such as those engaging in a CCRR.

Method

Methodology

Given the limited qualitative research conducted amongst this population, a qualitative approach was employed to explore the meaning and lived experience of CCRR amongst this population. Specifically, IPA (Smith et al., 2009) was selected as the most appropriate methodology. The exploratory nature of the study aims to support existing quantitative research and the limited qualitative literature in this area of research. This idiographic approach allowed the researchers to understand the individual differences in addition to convergent themes across participants. Central to IPA is the concept of "double hermeneutic" (Smith et al., 2009) which is the process in which the researcher makes sense of the participants' sense making. The double hermeneutic process is significant to this research given the first author's personal interest in the research. This methodology allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth and unique understanding of second-generation Indian, Hindu women's meaning making of their experience of engaging in a CCRR.

Participants

The central premise of IPA is the focus placed on the lived experience of a particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). In line with this, a small and homogeneous sample size is recommended in order to achieve a balance between identifying shared experiences with the idiographic nature of one's experience (Smith et al., 2009). Purposive sampling was utilised to ensure homogeneity of participants for whom the research question had personal and significant relevance (Smith et al., 2009). Participants were required to identify as second-generation, IH women living in the UK, and who were currently in a CCRR for a minimum of three months at the time of the interview. Seven women participated in the study (see Table 1) and were aged between 24 and 40 years old. At the time of the interview, the length of the participants' CCRR ranged between 6months and 2 years 8months. Participants were recruited through various Facebook groups, shared posts on Facebook and a distribution of the posters.

Table 1. Summary of participants' demographics.

Participant	Age(years)	Background	Partners background	Length of relationship
Anisha	25–34	North Indian Hindu	European	6–8 months
Isha	35–44	North Indian Hindu	European	Over 2 years
Meera	35–40	North Indian Hindu	South American Christian	Over 2 years
Priya	18–24	North Indian Hindu	South Indian	6–8 years
Sonal	18–24	North Indian Hindu	South Indian	Over 2 years
Nalini	25–34	North Indian Hindu	European	6–8 months
Avni	25–34	North Indian Hindu	Caribbean	6–8 months

Data collection

Data was collected using individual face to face semi-structured interviews which lasted approximately between 50 to 90 minutes. The interviews took place over a period of eight months at the London Metropolitan University library and a library in central London. Semi-structured interviews are primarily recommended as the optimum method of data collection in IPA research (Willig, 2007). Open-ended questions utilised in semi-structured interviews enables the opportunity for in-depth responses and discussions between the participant and researcher. It also allows the participants to elaborate upon areas most meaningful for them. The interview schedule was developed to answer the research question and meet the proposed aims of the study. The questions explored the participants' experiences of engaging in a CCRR in the UK and were based on existing theoretical knowledge and relevant literature (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The interview schedule was used as a guide during each interview and prompts and follow-up questions were used occasionally to encourage participants to elaborate on and explore their experiences further (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Six broad questions were developed, which explored the women's understanding of CCRR's and their experiences of engaging in a CCRR as a second-generation, IH woman. These questions were as follows: (1) What does a CCRR mean to you? (2) Could you tell me a little about how your CCRR started and has developed? (3) How would you describe your experience of being in a CCRR? (4) Can you describe the sources of support you have drawn on if any during this experience which you may have found helpful? (5) What advice would you give someone else going through a similar experience? (6) Is there anything you would like to add that you feel is relevant that we haven't touched on in relation to your experiences?

Data analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded, and the data was transcribed and analysed in line with Smith et al. (2009) recommended guidelines for IPA. Each interview was transcribed individually verbatim, and each transcript was read and re-read each, whilst listening to the audio recording simultaneously to familiarise themselves with the data (Smith et al., 2009). Comprehensive notes consisting of any initial exploratory thoughts, reflections, emotions and observations that arose were documented. The researcher paid attention to the linguistics used such as repetition, humour, tone, pauses and metaphor. Whilst listening to the audio-recordings, the researcher reflected on the interview process and recorded observations of any non-verbal communication from the participant (Smith et al., 2009).

Using the initial exploratory notes and the transcripts, emergent themes were developed based on the perceptions of what the researcher felt the participants were communicating for each individual transcript (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher looked for connections and patterns between the emergent themes based on shared meanings which were used to create clusters of themes. These were then checked against the original transcript to ensure accurate reflection of the data (Smith et al., 2009). This analysis involved a reduction in the level of detail, employing more concise and psychological terminology which aimed to capture the overarching essence of the data, whilst remaining close to the data and continuing in-depth reflection (Smith et al., 2009). The developing themes, known as the sub-ordinate themes were clustered together based on their similarity and an overarching theme known as a super-ordinate theme which was developed to capture the essence of the sub-ordinate themes. A table the super-ordinate themes and their corresponding sub-ordinate themes were then developed (Smith et al., 2009).

After completing the first four stages for the first transcript, this process was repeated for the remaining six transcripts. Smith et al. (2009) highlighted it was important to treat each transcript as a separate entity. In accordance with the idiographic commitment to IPA each transcript was reviewed completely before analysing subsequent transcripts. Additionally, Smith and Eatough (2007) suggested the researcher is required to bracket emerging themes in previously analysed data to encapsulate the unique nature of subsequent transcripts. The researcher then looked for similarities and differences across participants in relation to the phenomenon being explored (Smith et al., 2009). A final table of themes which aimed to reflect the participant's experiences across cases were developed and used when writing up the final analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Research quality

Care was taken to ensure that the methodology met the criteria for rigour and validity according to Yardley's (2008) proposed criteria; sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence and impact and importance.

Validity of research

Yardley (2000) suggested a guideline of four principles to assess the quality of qualitative research. These being; sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence and impact and importance

Sensitivity to context

Shinebourne (2011) postulated that sensitivity to context is essential throughout the research process. Consequently, I immersed myself with relevant existing literature to ensure sensitivity to the context

of research. Whilst this may influence one's interpretation (Yardley, 2000) I was mindful of bracketing any assumptions and prior knowledge to ensure findings were grounded in the data. I was also aware of my own characteristics as a second-generation, Indian woman may have influenced the interview process.

Commitment and rigour

Yardley (2000) emphasised the importance of systematic and thorough data collection, analysis and reporting. I achieved this by recruiting a sample size within the recommended range to attain a rich level of data (Smith et al., 2009). As suggested by Smith and Eatough (2007) the data was analysed using a systematic approach. Research supervision was utilised to make sense of the data by further analysing and discussing my interpretations and allowing for new interpretations to arise. The excerpts provided in chapter four demonstrate how the findings were grounded in the data.

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Impact and importance

One way Yardley (2000) suggested impact and importance can be achieved is through the contribution the research makes to the relevant field. As evidenced in the literature review, there is currently limited research on the topic of enquiry and therefore it is hoped this research will fill a gap in the literature of CRRs, facilitate a greater understanding of the experiences of this population and inform clinical intervention of counselling psychologists and therefore better meet client needs.

Ethical considerations

The research was conducted as part of the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. Ethical approval for this research was obtained by London Metropolitan University Research Ethics Review Panel prior to participant recruitment. In line with the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018) and the Code of Human Research Ethics (2014) ethical implications were carefully considered prior to, during and after the interviews. Participants were informed that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained and themselves and their partners would be assigned a pseudonym in the write-up. Prior to the interview all participants were provided with the informed consent form which reiterated the limits of confidentiality and were informed of the right to withdraw at any stage during the interview. Participants were informed the data being collected was part of a doctoral thesis and further publication. All participants consented to their data being published. Participants were informed that should they no longer wish for their data to be used in the study, they were able to withdraw 4weeks post interview. Participants were given an opportunity to ask any question or discuss any concerns they may have had.

Researchers

The primary researcher (PDS) is a counselling psychologist with a personal interest in the experiences of second-generation women in CCRRs.. A fundamental component of engaging in IPA analysis is that it allows the researcher to bracket any preconceptions and assumptions they may have in relation to the research process (Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, the researcher therefore kept a reflexive journal to create a space where they would be able to capture their own processes not only in the role of the researcher and a trainee counselling psychologist, but also as an individual with a personal interest in this area of research.. Research supervision was utilised from a chartered counselling psychologist (AIL) who has extensive research and clinical experience. This supervision was used to support the research process which helped to challenge and develop the particular areas of the research.

Results

Three inter-related super-ordinate themes each with three associated subordinate themes were drawn from the analysis (see Table 2). The themes seemed to reflect a sequential order of processes that capture the women’s experience of being in a CCRR. The first theme “Predetermined Identity,” explores how the women experience their identity and is the basis of the challenges encountered with their CCRR, “The two worlds don’t meet,” explores the thoughts, feelings and emotions associated with being in a cross-cultural, romantic relationship, particularly in relation to their families and “Enduring challenges,” explores how the women negotiate the challenges they face and the subsequent impact on their relationship and personally. Excerpts from the participant’s narratives are provided to illustrate the themes.

Table 2. List of superordinate themes and subordinate themes.

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes
Predetermined Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations of the Indian girl • “They (mothers) don’t see us as separate beings” • “I’m not what he expects and he’s not what I expect”
“The two Worlds don’t Meet”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning decisions • Introduction to the family • The wait for acceptance
Enduring Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lying, Hiding and Secrecy • Impact on the relationship • Feeling isolated

Theme one-predetermined identity

The participants, upon reflecting on their bicultural identity expressed feeling like their identity is an ongoing process of negotiation between their desires, and the expectations from their families to maintain cultural tradition. Accordingly, this theme aims to encapsulate how the participants experience the predetermined expectations of them as IH women.

Expectations of the Indian girl

The women’s sense of self has been greatly influenced through their experiences in the UK. However, the western cultural values they have internalised differs significantly from the gender role expectations from the IH culture; to get married within their culture and become a housewife. Sonal elaborates on how she perceives these expectations of her:

“...We want girls to study and become the best and become doctors and become all of this only so that we can get married and become housewives in the end... it just doesn't make sense...like why would you want me to waste all my money all my time dedicating myself to my education developing myself for me to only become a housewife in the end and not work and look after the baby and clean the house ... my potential is so much bigger thanwhat they're boxing it in to be...”. (Sonal)

Sonal's words convey a strong sense of frustration as she seems to find the role of a housewife as somewhat limited and perhaps constraining and desires more for herself than residing to a domestic role. Sonal may feel these prescribed gender role expectations are incongruent with her identity and perhaps fears a loss of her sense of agency and the identity she has invested in “developing.” The women shared this sense of frustration particularly during beliefs around mate selection. One participant's frustration was exacerbated as she compared the differences experienced in gender around mate selection:

“...there's a big difference in the way that boys are perceived, and girls are perceived in Asian families, so my mum must have probably always thought that I would meet sort of a handsome Indian doctor... and marry him and he would meet my family before he even gets to know me...” (Anisha)

For Anisha, the “big difference” she expressed in the way boys and girls are “perceived” seemed to indicate that as a girl, Anisha was expected to follow cultural tradition and marry someone from within her cultural community. It seems as a girl, Anisha may have limited input in the process of selecting a partner, which highlights the collectivist nature of the IH culture whereby family involvement in the process of mate selection is paramount and the decisions of the family typically precede the needs of the individual.

“They (mothers) don't see us as separate beings”

Many of the women described feeling like their mothers want for them what they had for themselves in a marriage- someone from within their culture that takes care of them. Contrastingly, all the women expressed that the attributes they hold important in a partner is someone who is “emotionally supportive.” Nalini described feeling like her mother had little understanding of her bicultural identity as she expressed:

...who she wants for me is someone that she would choose ... potentially for herself someone whose religious someone whose...you know Indian someone whose very involved in our culture and I'm not like that”. (Nalini)

The specific criteria for a husband that Nalini's mother desires for her is based on her mother's traditional cultural values. However, this criteria contrasts with the characteristics Nalini is perhaps looking for in a husband as she asserts, “I'm not like that”. Her declaration here suggests that she may not associate as strongly with the IH as her mother and may feel that there is more to engaging in a relationship than just similarity in culture. This may be a value Nalini appreciates from the western culture. The lack of understanding the women feel their families have of their individuality seems to evoke feelings of frustration, and this was particularly apparent within Meera's excerpt:

“She said you know even if you say now I’ll find someone for you...I feel angry... because I feel quite you know I feel my... my individuality isn’t being respected... my... my desires and my wishes”. (Meera)

Meera’s mother does not seem to acknowledge her individualistic decisions which veer away from the traditions of the IH culture, particularly her CCRR. The cultural discord between Meera and her mother is explicit within her narrative and is highlighted by Meera’s repetition and the stress she places on the word “my.” This dissonance seems to generate a profound sense of anger towards her mother as perhaps she feels an imposition of cultural expectations are prioritised over her “individuality”.

I’m not what he expects and he’s not what I expect

The participants discussed their reasoning behind selecting a partner who is not the IH man their parents desired for them. Three of the women expressed making a conscious decision to avoid engaging in a relationship with someone from within their culture; their decisions appear influenced by factors such as bicultural identity and their previous experience of dating or being married to IH men. Anisha describes how her first-hand experience of dating men within her culture influenced her future decisions:

...when I dated people from completely different cultures I enjoyed myself more there wasn’t a uniform personality to compare myself to. ‘coz if I was dating a brown guy I would compare myself to a typical brown girl...”. (Anisha)

For Anisha, it seemed that dating a “brown guy” would mean she would compare herself to the “uniform personality” of the “typical brown girl”. This may imply that she would feel a pressure to conform to a certain way of being, contradictory to how she may perceive her sense of self. Contrastingly, Anisha’s experience of dating men “from completely different cultures” meant she “enjoyed” herself more”, implying a more positive experience. It may be that one-way Anisha felt she could be herself is through engaging in a CCRR, as this may have provided a platform whereby, she can navigate her relationship with her partner away from cultural expectations and values not congruent with her own. Equally, Isha explains her contrasting experience when in a relationship with someone within and outside of her cultural community:

“It’s quite liberating there’s none of that expectation (laugh)(...). erm I find... that I’m not sort of...I’m not tied to all these rules and regulations”. (Isha)

Isha seems to feel empowered in her current relationship which is a stark contrast to having felt “tied to all these rules and regulations” in her past marriage. Her description of being “tied” portrays a sense of helplessness and subjugation, and consequently is perhaps a world she would not want to re-enter. Isha’s comparison of her two relationships depicts an image of being freed from a world and identity where she was perhaps bound by the expectations of the IH culture.

Theme 2: “the two worlds don’t meet”

As a result of their bicultural identity the women express feeling like they live in two contrasting worlds; their world at home; defined by traditional IH values and their personal, social world; defined

by western values. Engaging in a CCRR seems to heighten this sense of duality in their lives as they have to navigate and manage the contrasting cultural values of their two worlds.

Questioning decisions

Entering a romantic relationship is typically a positive experience however, for many of the women their experience appeared to be consumed with feelings of doubt and worry:

"I was thinking shall I actually get into this relationship? ... and actually a part of me was thinking maybe I shouldn't just to save... I suppose the heartbreak in the long term ..." (Sonal)

Like many of the women experienced, it seemed that the "part" of Sonal that felt resistant to enter her CCRR may have been the IH part of her identity encapsulated by the traditional expectations of her to find a partner within her heritage culture. Sonal's initial reservations seemed to emerge from concerns about the longevity of her relationship given its cross-cultural nature. For another participant, this reservation was enduring:

"I was anxious and I was...worried about what they would think and that was constantly going through my head and it impacts your relationship because you're constantly second-guessing it...." (Nalini)

The psychological impact associated with the decision the women made to engage in their relationship was prevalent amongst the women, and it seems how the women perceive their relationship will be received by their families appears to play a significant role in this worry. For Nalini, this uncertainty also seemed to impact on her relationship with her partner.

Telling the family

All the participants were either thinking about telling their parents about their relationship or had told them, however, both situations evoked feelings of anxiety for the women as they were integrating two opposing worlds which they felt crossed a cultural boundary they had not crossed before. For the women who had told their families about their relationship, these conversations had proved difficult and an uncomfortable experience for them:

"...it was it was it was really scary kind of when I it felt a bit out of body it. it was kind of like words were coming out but I wasn't really erm there". (Nalini)

Nalini's experience seems encapsulated by an emotional and physical disconnection seemingly due to the apprehension and fear of her mother's reaction. She depicts a dissociation between her mind and body and is possibly parallel to the dissociation she perhaps experiences between her two incongruent worlds in which she lives. Equally difficult for some participants was being unable to open up to their families:

"...like I'm not doing it maliciously it's not a mal..I'm not doing it to be malicious towards my parents I'm not doing it to erm hurt anybody it's just me it's just a case of being able to handle it. erm carefully it's being able to know and figure out how to do this in such a way that it doesn't erm. it doesn't. it doesn't have a massive impact or blow up in your face". (Avni)

Avni expressed a sense of fear around the consequences of telling her family about her relationship. In describing having to "handle it... carefully", highlights the sensitive nature around this

situation. This is further exemplified in her description that the situation could “blow up” which evokes a powerful image of destruction and illustrates Avni’s perception of this being a risky situation with a potentially catastrophic outcome.

The wait for acceptance

Within the Indian culture, familial approval of a partner is vital for a relationship to progress, and for many of the women the uncertainty of whether their CCRR will be accepted was an experience which infiltrated through the participants narrative. For the majority of the women whose families were aware of their relationship, a message of rejection to various degrees were conveyed from their families:

“my advice to you would be to keep it as a friendship and not anything more.erm she said you know you might call me closed minded but.err the more similarities you have the. the greater the likelihood of something working out”. (Nalini)

“...even recently she said there wouldn’t have been any shortage of guys for you...”. (Meera)

Conversely, the women who had not yet disclosed their relationship to their parents described the psychological and emotional impact evoked from the anticipated wait for acceptance:

“. it’s amazing but it’s a concern it’s still a worry until I get that approval almost it’s kind of like I’m on edge almost because it’s kind of like I’m treading the water almost you know like I’m in this relationship I’m really happy with him but I’ve still got a barrier up because what happens if my parents don’t accept you?...”.(Sonal)

Sonal’s narrative is paramount in highlighting the contention between her two worlds. Her words seem to depict a paradoxical relationship whereby she experiences elements of short-lived happiness when with her partner which is “amazing”, which is overridden by the uncertainty of acceptance which lies in the hands of her family. The psychological impact of waiting for “approval” from her family is clearly evident in Sonal’s narrative as she seems unable to move past the anticipation and inherent uncertainty about her future. Avni similarly elaborated on what a rejection of her relationship would mean for her:

“To not be accepted it would hurt me... I think it would mean that I would not be accepted if that makes sense ...like a part of me not being accepted”. (Avni)

Avni’s “hurt” appears to stem from the possibility that the decision she has made to engage in her CCRR may be rejected. Avni’s narrative highlights the detrimental and painful experience one may endure in the event of their CCRR being rejected.

Theme 3: Enduring challenges

Given the difficulties encountered around acceptance of their CCRR from their families, the women describe how they consequently navigate maintaining their relationship with their families and their partner, and the associated impact this has on themselves and their relationship.

Lying, hiding and secrecy

The participants described various degrees of lying, hiding and secrecy of their relationship from their families, in order to minimise any potential intergenerational and cultural conflict. The participant's narratives depict an image of a tug-of-war between the relationships with their families and their partner:

...It's such a conflicting feeling because on the one hand it feels so good to be with my partner and spend time with him ...and on the other hand I feel so guilty because it's kind of like I don't want to lie to my parents". (Sonal)

There appears to be a paradox between what the women desire for themselves and what is acceptable within their familial unit. For many of the participants, a desire to integrate their two worlds and be honest with her parents does not feel possible and consequently the only way to navigate and maintain both relationships is to lie which feels uncomfortable. Another participant similarly describes:

"...When I'm going out to see him I'm still having to lie because... I'm finding it difficult to ... I don't know... I think I'm finding it difficult to ...say I'm going to see him because mum said my advice to you would be to stay friends".(Nalini)

Impact on the relationship

Given the participants families have not entirely accepted their CCRR, the women's accounts extend our understanding of how the measures they employ enable them to maintain relationships in both their worlds impacts on their CCRR. Sonal describes this how her partner experiences the precautions she maintains:

"...He gets so wound up about it and like ... and I get it... like in the. like one time I remember he said it's just so annoying that we can't even do something as simple as holding hands in London...".(Sonal)

Sonal seems caught between her partner's feelings and the fear of being seen being affectionate with him. "Holding hands" represents intimacy and something she cannot be seen doing for the fear of being caught, and it seems the only way to negotiate spending time with her partner in public is to behave as if they were friends. This facade limits the couple from "simple" and seemingly normal forms of behaviours employed when in a romantic relationship. Although for her partner "holding hands" is "simple" suggesting something minimal and normal, it seems to hold a greater and more hazardous meaning for Sonal. Sonal acknowledges her partners annoyance and feelings of being "so wound up" by the restrictions on their relationship, and her words "I get it" suggests she may share these feelings as she may want to reciprocate this affection with her partner. Another participants wonders about the impact:

"...is... is the other person gonna stick around ...())... like I... I always think to myself how would I feel in his shoes I've not done anything wrong I've given nothing but respect and I've... I've not even got a chance to get to know these people because they just don't want to get to know me". (Priya)

Priya's narrative seems encapsulated by a sense of uncertainty of her relationship due to the way her relationship and her partner has been received by her parents. Priya tries to put how her partner would feel into perspective, given that he has "not done anything wrong". There seems to be a cultural boundary her parents seem to maintain to distance themselves from her CCRR and it seems like Priya

is caught between her parents' attitude towards her partner and the worry about how long her partner will continue to endure this treatment.

Feeling isolated

Feeling isolated appeared to be a common pattern within the women's narratives. Although the women are part of a cultural community that advocate the importance of family unity and closeness, the participants feel they are unable to communicate and receive the support they desire from their families. One participant describes the consequences of not receiving this support:

"If I had a fight with Nishil I wouldn't be able to tell them ... so you're dealing with stuff like that on your own which is really hard especially without support..." (Priya)

The support Priya yearns for from her family is emotional support and validation during challenging times with her partner. As Priya initially stated that her partner was the biggest support, arguing with him and not having the support of her mother feels like she is "dealing with stuff like that on your own which is really hard". Priya highlights the impact and strain of not having her mother's support, in times where she felt she may have benefited from sharing these problems. Some of the women also experienced a sense of isolation from their social groups:

"I do feel a bit isolated in who I can talk to". (Meera)

"They don't understand any of the family drama ... none of my friends are Indian". (Anisha)

The women express feeling limited with who they can share her experiences with as none of their friends are IH and consequently "they don't understand". This highlights the importance of having someone they can talk to who has some understanding of their culture as they may be better able to "understand" the dynamics of the IH society, and perhaps normalise and help the women to make sense of her experiences.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the experiences of second-generation, IH women who are in a cross-cultural romantic relationship. A qualitative methodology was employed to enable the participants to discuss and explore relevant aspects of their experience. A strength of the research could be the methodology which allowed for an in-depth understanding of the experience of the participant's sense of being bicultural, and their experience of engaging in a CCRR and associated psychological impact. Consequently, the gaps in existing quantitative and qualitative research were addressed in this study.

The first key finding was the challenges the participants faced due to their bi-cultural identity, given the expectations of them from their heritage culture, particularly in terms of gender role expectations. This finding has been well documented in research (Manohar, 2008), and were particularly evident in processes around mate selection, where men were experienced to have greater autonomy. How the participants experienced their two cultures, seemed to influence their decision to steer away from endogamous relationships. Consequently, the participants within the study seemed to experience the nature of their collectivist identity and the expectations of them in intracultural relationships as constricting. Therefore, engaging in a CCRR allowed them to feel empowered and provided them with an opportunity to exercise their own identity away from the traditional expectations of the IH culture.

Within literature on the second-generation and their parents, dating practices have been identified as one of the biggest sources of conflict (Wakil et al., 1981) given the differences in cultural norms. However, little attention has been paid to the processes that occur as a result of this conflict. Unique to this study were the processes and the psychological impact associated with thoughts about whether they have made the right decision to engage in their relationship and “telling the family” about their relationship. These feelings of anxiety were further exacerbated due to the worry around “acceptance” of the participants’ partner. Typically, acceptance of a partner from one’s family is desirable by all individuals, however within collectivist cultures the approval of one’s partner is a necessary factor in thinking about the viability of one’s relationship (Inman et al., 2001). Although the women made the autonomous decision in line with their own desires to engage in a CCRR, they still desired acceptance from their family.

Acceptance can be attributed to a sense of belonging which is essential for one’s wellbeing and as identified by Maslow, (Maslow, 1954) is a basic human need. The participants’ sense making of non-acceptance of their relationship, meant they would not be accepted. It is therefore understandable that many of the participants experienced a sense of anxiety in relation to the acceptance of their relationship, as rejection may be perceived as a loss of support from their IH culture and family which provides a sense of belonging.

For the women who had not yet disclosed their relationship, the anticipated fear of not receiving acceptance of their CCRR led to strategies employed to minimise the risk of getting hurt. For example, Sonal described maintaining a “barrier” to protect herself, whilst Avni described withholding telling her parents about her relationship. These findings draw resemblance to some degree with the dependency regulation model (Murray et al., 2000) which highlights that individuals balance their desire of closeness with their partners while acknowledging that this intimacy may leave them vulnerable to getting hurt.

The notion that the second-generation feel “torn” between their two worlds has been a common term used within the literature exploring second-generation immigrants (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos’s, 2005). This is due to the challenges the women face in reconciling the values and traditions from their heritage culture with the differing values from the western society. Within existing literature, the second-generation have typically kept their romantic relationship secret from their parents’ due concerns around pre-marital relations (Manohar, 2008; Mehan, 2017) however are strategies employed to enable the second-generation to maintain aspects of their lives their families may not agree with and to avoid familial conflict.

Contrastingly, within the present study, secrecy and hiding techniques were employed due to not having received the acceptance of their CCRR they desired or fearing the prospect of telling their parents about their CCRR due to the potential repercussions. Unique to this study is the fluid nature of “secrecy” experienced by the women. The extent to which the participants kept their relationship a secret from their families differed with each participant, however all reasons stem from the fear of disapproval. For example, this ranged from Priya’s parents who were aware of her CCRR, but hid times she would see her partner to Avni whose relationship was entirely secret from her parents. Although the women can be seen to be exercising some autonomy in their decision to engage in CCRR, this autonomy is somewhat compromised by having to keep aspects of their relationship from their parents. This portrays the conflicting nature of the women’s British and Indian cultures and supports existing literature which highlights how one’s individuality and desires are often suppressed due to the expectations and needs of others.

A prevalent theme within the research was access to social support. Existing studies have indicated that a sense of isolation stemming from a lack of social support is characteristic of bicultural individual’s experiences. The women explained the challenges of not receiving the support they desired from people who understood their difficulties, thus feeling alone in their experience. This is

understandable as receiving social support can act as a buffer to stressful situations (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In line with the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), as social groups are perceived to be incorporated as an aspect of one's identity and is significant in the individual's psychological well-being as they provide a sense of belonging. Feeling somewhat isolated from their heritage cultural group may impact on one's wellbeing. One participant for example explained that if she was unable to confide in her sisters, she would feel "unbelievably trapped," and questioned how long she would be able to continue in her relationship. This infers the significance of receiving social support for their experiences and was highlighted in existing literature as being useful, particularly in the absence of parental support (Mehan, 2017). The participants explained they felt they would have liked someone from the same cultural background, or their partners background who would be able to understand the challenges they face. This is understandable given the basic needs of humans to feel like they belong (Maslow, 1943) to a group, particularly one that holds a shared understanding (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Evaluation and future directions

The purposive sampling employed within the study, could be deemed a limitation of the study. Although recommended by Smith et al. (2009) for IPA research, the homogenous nature of the participant's means that generalisation of the findings is limited. However, it could be argued that, it was not the aim of the research for the findings to be generalisable like quantitative studies, but to give this under-researched population a voice and to create an awareness of the challenges these women may experience. It should be noted that although two of the participants partners were Indian descendants, these participants' families originated from north India, whilst their partners families originated from states within south India. There are distinguishable social, and cultural differences and values held between north and south India (Medora, 2007) which can evoke challenges in terms of inter-state romantic relationships. This difference can also be considered a different cultural perspective to dating an individual from a different country and race altogether.

All participants were in a CCRR at the time of the interview, meaning their experiences and feelings were current. Therefore, retrospective accounts of experiences were minimal, supporting the accuracy and reliability of the women's experiences. As all the participants in the study contacted the researcher and were under no obligation to partake in the research, it perhaps highlighted that they felt they had experiences that they wanted to voice and help and support others going through similar experiences. Although each narrative and experience are unique, there were many similarities that were drawn from the research. However, the similarities found within this research may not be representative to all second-generation, IH women who are in a CCRR that did not take part in the research.

Overall, a wealth of quantitative literature investigated the attitudes towards cross-cultural dating experiences; however, these studies have not provided one clear conceptualisation of what dating entails, such as negotiating levels of commitment. Therefore, leaving this to the participants' interpretation poses problematic for generalisability and comparisons between studies. Extant research has also highlighted the attitudes towards and experiences of cross-cultural marriages. The studies which have employed the term "romantic relationships" have included participants who are co-habiting or married which involve different experiences to those who are not married or cohabiting. It therefore seems vital to fill the gap in the literature, particularly in the UK, as most research has been conducted in America. Furthermore, existing qualitative studies have predominantly focused on married couples, whose experiences will be different to those engaging in romantic relationships. By limiting these qualitative studies to the experiences of individuals in cross-

cultural marriages, romantic relationships are overlooked.

This study has opened up the opportunity for future research in this area. It would be useful to build on the current research findings with a follow up study, to further understand the “on-going” process of the women’s experience and any changes in how they experience being in their CCRR. Furthermore, although many of the women discussed how they perceived their partners felt being in a CCRR, research could benefit from gaining an in-depth understanding of both individuals in their CCRR. The results from which could further inform systemic couples’ therapy when working with this population.

Implications for clinical practice

Although the interviews did not offer any therapeutic intervention, many of the women expressed having a greater understanding of their difficulties, a sense of relief and felt empowered post interview. For many participants, this was the first time they had discussed their CCRR in detail. Considering this, person-centred therapy may be an appropriate option for many women as this non-directive approach offers a space in which clients can engage in leading discussions towards the discovery of their own solutions (Casemore, 2011). This may provide a sense of empowerment particularly in situations where an internal conflict arises, and individuals are faced with conflicting emotions. Furthermore, there seemed to be a perceived lack of acceptance in that the women felt they were not seen for who they are: bicultural. This may be understood as a lack of unconditional positive regard from their families. Working with the humanistic underpinnings of CP (Willig, 2013) providing unconditional positive regard through modelling acceptance to the client may provide them with feelings of acceptance and value they may feel they have not received from significant others (McLeod, 2011). This may enable a basis for them to work through their difficulties and allow them to reach self-actualisation (Rogers, 1959). Central to many of the women’s narrative was the uncertainty around the future of their CCRR. Cognitive-behavioural interventions associated with tolerating uncertainty may be effective in helping the women to manage the symptoms of anxiety they expressed from their experience.

The findings from this research are essential when thinking about the couple in counselling. The nature of romantic relationships are inherently complex however, added to this complexity may be the merging of distinct cultures, which shape a couple’s relationship in a way different to endogamous romantic relationships. The participants’ CCRRs seemed to be defined and limited by the expectations of them from the IH culture. The women described the impact on their CCRR due to their experiences with their families and the limited understanding their partners had of their culture and why they employed certain behaviours. In line with the social constructionist stance adopted in this study, it could be suggested practitioners could draw on a postmodern approach to therapeutic intervention. As such, narrative therapy may be useful when working with this population as it is an effective approach employed when working with intercultural couples (White, 2007; Silva et al., 2012). This approach adopts a respectful and non-blaming therapeutic stance, which will enable the couple to externalise their difficulties and recreate their life story through encouraging new perspectives to emerge. This new perspective enables the couple to consider their presenting problem as separate from their identity (White, 2007). Through techniques employed from narrative therapy, the couple will develop cultural awareness within their relationship through understanding how each individual experiences each other’s, and their own, culture. Working within the framework of narrative therapy, the practitioner is encouraged to take a collaborative and curious approach and be mindful of validating both individuals’ positions as correct given their cultural context.

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