Gender Relations Among Indian Couples in the UK and India: Ideals of Equality and Realities of Inequality

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Abstract

This paper explores young heterosexual Indian Gujaratis' ideals and experiences of intimate relationships in the UK and India, focusing particularly on gender relations. Men and women in both contexts had similar aspirations of intimacy, but women were likely to be more in favour of egalitarian values. What this meant was interpreted differently in India and the UK. In neither setting, however, was gender equality fully realised in the lives of the participants due to both structural and normative constraints. Despite this gap between ideals and experiences, participants portrayed their relationships as broadly equal and conjugal. It appears that the heavy emphasis on love and intimacy is making it difficult for women to negotiate a more egalitarian relationship with their partner, since any 'flaw' in the relationship potentially brings into question its loving foundations. In this way, women tend to ignore or justify the gendered roles and inequalities apparent in their relationships and paint a picture of blissful marital equality despite evidence to the contrary.

Keywords: *Intimacy; Gender Relations; India; South Asians; Second Generation; Equality; Love*

Introduction

1.1 Among Indians in the UK and India, an increasing body of work shows that young, mostly middle class, heterosexual men and women are forming 'companionate marriages' based on affection, rather than kinship obligations (Donner 2002, Fuller and Narasimhan 2008, Parry 2001, Twamley Forthcoming). It is not that love is 'new', but rather that the place and meaning of love within marriage has shifted. Young people are placing more emphasis than did their parents on love as a *basis* for marital relationships: couple conjugality is taking a stronger role in the selection of a spouse, and the intimate nature of the relationship is given more emphasis (Parry 2001). In short, couples are using love 'as an ideal for which to strive and as the means through which they constitute their families' (Padilla et al. 2007, p. xv). This also means that young people are playing a larger part in selecting their own spouses.

1.2 As has been shown in other contexts, ideals of intimacy are often linked with those of gender equality (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006, Jamieson 1998). Much research amongst Indians has concentrated on the changing meanings of marriage for courting couples; less has focused on whether and how the emerging importance of love in relationships has altered gender relations between heterosexual couples. Through examining the narratives of young Gujarati Indians in the UK and India, I explore, first, whether participants link ideals of conjugality with equality, and, if so, whether and how this shapes the gender relations they describe with their partners.

Love, Intimacy and Equality

1.3 Whether and how love and intimacy can enhance or hinder equality between partners has long been debated. In the 1970s, second-wave feminists argued that love subjugated women by trapping them into exploitative heterosexual relationships (Comer 1974, De Beauvoir 1972, Firestone 1972). Lee Comer, for example, wrote:

'Any glance around society reveals that the sexes are placed on opposite poles, with an enormous chasm of oppression, degradation and misunderstanding generated to keep them apart. Out of this, marriage plucks one woman and one man, ties them together with 'love' and asserts that they shall, for the rest of their lives, bridge that chasm with a mixture of betrayal, sex, affection, deceit and illusion.' (Comer 1974, p. 227)

1.4 As Jackson (1993) argues, Firestone and Comer's analyses of love suggests that women need merely to 'see through' the illusion of love in order to attain more equal relations with men. Such an argument does little to reveal why love is such a powerful force in women's lives, or why women are willing to 'enslave' themselves for it. Nor does it take account of the material conditions of women's lives which contribute to their reliance on their partners.

1.5 In studies on sexuality, research has centred on the gendered cultural scripts which men and women draw on when entering intimate relationships (Banaji 2006, Gagnon 1990, Holland et al. 1998, Holland et al. 1992). Janet Holland (1993), for example, concluded that there was a basic 'male oriented definition' of heterosexual sex, resulting in the subordinate position of women within sexual encounters and relationships. This model is thought to be particularly prevalent in South Asian cultures (Abraham 2001, Santhya et al. 2008, Banaji 2006, Holland 1993), where women's virginity before marriage is still highly prized.

1.6 For some scholars, gender inequality is inherent in all heterosexual relationships due to the manifest inequality of men and women, for example in penetrative sex (see Thompson 1993). Thompson herself suggests that women create lesbian relationships to escape such inevitable inequalities (Thompson 1993). Drawing on early feminist critiques of romantic love and psychoanalytical theories of emotion, Wendy Langford (1999) presents findings from a study of 15 heterosexual women discussing love and relationships. She concludes that *love* in itself is unequal, and that the ideal of 'democratic love' (such as proposed by Giddens) exacerbates women's delusions, giving them false hope of a transformation through intimacy. Johnson (2005) however, argues that Langford overlooks the importance of sexuality, which works together with love to 'authorise and naturalise the configuration of *heterosexuality*' (Johnson 2005, p. 3), exerting a normative effect which in turn (re)produces gendered roles. Both Langford and Johnson are ultimately pessimistic about the possibility of love as a means to achieve greater gender equality.

1.7 More optimistically, Anthony Giddens (1991, 1992) argues that intimacy between couples can act as a force for equality. He tracks the emergence of the 'pure relationship' in modern society within which equality is achieved through the development of trust and respect between partners after they reveal their innermost thoughts and selves to one another. The 'pure relationship' is fuelled by a society in which there is less reliance on 'rules' and traditions, loosening conventions of gendered behaviour.

1.8 Likewise, Jeffrey Weeks (1995) argues that an increased emphasis on intimacy is related to greater gender equality, since 'commitment implies the involvement of consenting, more or less equal individuals' (Weeks 1995, p. 37). He proposes that attempts to realise the ideal of love could provide the basis for a society 'which respects diversity and the maximisation of individual choice while affirming at the same time the importance of the human bond' (1995, p. 42). However, he also suggests that equality in couple relationships is more easily achievable in same sex relationships (Weeks 2007, Weeks et al. 2001).

1.9 Jane Collier, however, critiques the idea that 'modern' societies entail more freedom for individuals. Based on research on family and intimate relationships in rural Spain between the 1960s and 1980s, Collier (1997) argues that a discourse of social convention is simply being replaced by one of choice, but the underlying choices available to people remain largely the same. While, before, individuals could draw on social convention to explain their behaviour, they now must show how they have chosen and desire to act in specific ways (Collier 1997). This, she argues, may hinder gender equality, since women, who do the bulk of 'emotion work', take on gendered caring roles to demonstrate their affection for their husband or partner.

1.10 Similarly, Lynn Jamieson argues that there is little evidence that Giddens's ideal of 'disclosing intimacy' is an organizing principle in people's lives (Jamieson 1998, p. 2) and cites the lack of empirical evidence supporting the idea of an equal relationship of intimates. More recently, Jamieson has argued that 'practices of intimacy can be transposable' (Jamieson 2002, p. 2.7) so that some women may temporarily accept loving acts in place of egalitarian relations as sufficient demonstrations of a 'good relationship' – for example around the birth of a child.

1.11 In India, there is some debate about the relevance of Giddens's 'pure relationship' thesis to contemporary Indian society. Jonathan Parry (2001), for example, draws on Giddens in explaining the transformations in marriage he observes between a Dalit illiterate man and that of his educated middle class daughter in Chatisgarh, India. Parry (2001) describes how the father, now with his fourth wife, speaks 'indifferently' about how he came to lose his previous wives – the first he disliked, the second ran away and the third was a 'witch'. Parry observes that, for the father, marriage is 'an institutional arrangement for the bearing and raising of children' (2001, p. 815). In contrast, for his well-educated daughter marriage should arise from conjugal bonding. Parry concludes:

'Not just in Islington, but the wide world over, personal life is undergoing a revolutionary transformation in the direction of a new ideological stress on intimacy, on the quality and equality of the relationship between the couple, and hence on the possibility of de-coupling when that relationship is no longer fulfilling (cf. Giddens 1992).' (Parry 2001, p. 784)

1.12 Osella and Osella critique Giddens's and Parry's associations of 'love' with more freedom and equality, saying they are rooted in 'contemporary neoliberal visions of person and society' (Osella and Osella 2006:3). They suggest that instead the increasing emphasis on affection within marriage in South Asian contexts has led to *increased* 'gendering', since there is more emphasis on the heteronormative nuclear family ideal with the male breadwinner at its head. In turn, homosocial bonds, which can provide an alternative and less gendered social space for men and women, have become less important and fragile (Osella and Osella 2006).

1.13 Yet popular discourses do link equality with conjugality (Jamieson 1998, Langford 1999) and not just in 'western' settings (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006, Ahearn 2001). So how do couples reconcile such discourses with unequal relations? Or are women using love as a means to negotiate for more equal relations with their partners? These are the questions I explore in this paper.

1.14 In understanding the gender relations amongst my participants, I draw on Connell's framework (Connell 1987) of cathexis, labour, and power. Elsewhere I have written extensively on 'cathexis' amongst my participants (Twamley Forthcoming); women and men had largely similar emotional expectations of one another, though in terms of physical affection there were discrepancies between appropriate behaviour for a man, and for a woman. In this paper then, I focus particularly on power and labour, examining how couples strive to create relationships of intimacy and equality (if they do) and to explore whether 'modern intimacy' really entails any change in women's autonomy and power.

Methods

2.1 The findings reported here emerge from a broader ethnographic study comparing understandings of love, intimacy, and marriage amongst heterosexual men and women of Indian Gujarati origin brought up

and living in the UK, with a similar group brought up and living in India (Twamley 2011). The research set out to explore how those who see themselves as 'Gujarati' or 'Indian' in two very different contexts understand and negotiate relationships and marriage. The aim was to explore how transnational connections as well as the socio-economic and geographical context shape understandings of marriage and intimacy. The study showed that ideologies of romantic love and companionate marriage are pervasive in both the UK and India, but that these global forms take on particular hybrid versions as they intersect with local understandings of emotional life.

2.2 The principal method of data collection was repeat in-depth interviews with 18 main participants in Baroda (India) in 2007, and 12 in London (England) in 2008. The original design was a 'matched' study, with cousins brought up in the two contexts invited to participate. Eight of the participants in Baroda and London are 'cousins' (loosely interpreted – some are friends of the family), and the remainder were recruited independently, though are similar in age, religion, caste and socio-economic background. The participants were recruited through a range of sources, including the local university, a dance class, chance meetings, snow-balling and key informants.

2.3 Due to the focus on pre and early marriage, I recruited participants aged between 20 and 30 years of age, and who were in various stages of relationships; around a third were single, a third in a relationship and a third married. All participants were of a middle class background, and predominantly Hindu. Only one couple had a child – Aditya and Geet in India. The UK participants had all grown up in England, mostly greater London or Leicester, and at the time of the interviews were all living in London. The India participants had been brought up in Gujarat, though not necessarily Baroda, and some had also spent time living in different states or abroad.^[1] Interviews were primarily conducted in English – issues around the use of interpreters and translations are discussed in more detail elsewhere (Twamley Forthcoming).

2.4 I conducted a minimum of three interviews with each main participant. These interviews followed a flexible semi-structured topic guide; the first two interviews addressed family background, upbringing, parents' marriage, friendships, and relationship experiences. The third interview addressed issues around sexuality and physical intimacy. Participating couples were interviewed together in the first interview and separately in subsequent interviews. The initial interview with both partners allowed me to see how the couple together constructed the story of their relationship, while later separate interviews gave them a chance to voice issues they may not have felt comfortable speaking about in front of one another and to narrate their individual stories. The interviews conducted together also gave a glimpse into how the couple act around one another, allowing an examination of both 'narratives of practice and practices of narrative' (Einarsdottir and Heaphy 2000). This was particularly interesting in considering gender roles in relationships. For example, the couple interviews gave insight into power relations between spouses as they enacted story telling together.

2.5 In designing this research, I consulted ethical guidelines from the British Sociological Association and the American Anthropological Association and obtained ethical approval from my university ethics board. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to each participant – pseudonyms are used throughout this paper – and informed consent was sought before commencing each interview. I recorded the interviews using a digital recorder and then transcribed them in full. Interview excerpts include dots to indicate a beat pause, or contain the pause length in square brackets.

2.6 In addition to interviews with 'main participants', I conducted participant and non-participant observation at various different events, including matchmaking events, a marriage course (in India), University Asian themed nights (in London), speed-dating events and other social occasions. Over the course of observations, I met and spoke with several other young Gujaratis, and these discussions also informed the findings. The analysis broadly followed the methods of constructivist grounded theory, as outlined by Charmaz (2006) and was conducted using the NVivo computer program, version eight (QSR International 2008). In examining gender relations, I have drawn on Connell's framework, as explained above.

Findings

Intimacy and Equality

3.1 In seeking to explore notions of 'good relationships' and marriage ideals, I asked all the participants what were the important attributes of a 'successful marriage', and what would an 'ideal spouse' be like. In both groups there was a strong emphasis on love, respect, and equality. In particular, participants told me they aspired to a relationship with gender roles and relationships different from those of their parents. But men and women's ideas on how these ideals of equality might be realised were not the same.

3.2 For women a 'successful marriage' would have shared decision-making and an equal division of household duties, as the two women below describe:

A: How do you think, when you say you wanted to be treated equally [by your husband] in what ways do you want to be treated equally?

Rekha: Treated equally in matter of freedom, education, in matter of .. in every way you know there is now... it's become like men and women go together, not according to olden Indian custom where women were just living into the house into four walls and men go outside and explore and now it has become even women go out and do work.

Rekha (F), Single, India

A: And what did you mean by broadminded?

Rama: Someone who'll accept me for who I am and not try to change me into what they perceive as the perfect woman and someone who'll, yeah who'll want to be my equal and not just say 'well you've got to do what I want, you've got to take my surname' etc. etc.

Rama (F), Single, UK

3.3 Women in Baroda emphasised their hopes of working outside the home and contributing to the finances of the house, as their partner would contribute to the household work. Those women in India most vociferous about their desire for equality and respect tended to be unmarried; they were determined to find a partner who would treat them as an equal. Equality was generally understood in terms of the right to work outside the home, and a man's participation in housework. As I shall expand on further below, women on the whole were not seeking a redefinition of roles, but rather the ability to work outside the home with some 'help' from men inside the home.

3.4 Women in the UK also expressed their desire to be treated equally by their partners and future husbands, and felt that this was not an unrealistic desire. Women in relationships referred to their careers and contributions to the finances of the house in demonstrating the equity of their relationship. In particular, women were concerned that there was no hierarchy between a husband and wife and that decisions would be made together, as Ameera here describes:

A: You said you see 'respect'? What, can you give me an example of how you see respect in your relationship?

Ameera: In our relationship? Decisions that we make . we generally consult one another . and .. even though you know one might be the primary person who's done the work or done the driving behind it . just valuing an opinion and not assuming that you're correct.

Ameera (F), Married, UK

3.5 In both contexts being treated with respect and 'as an equal' were associated with a 'modern' and 'broadminded' outlook. In the UK women were confident that they would find 'broadminded' men who shared their values, while single women in India were a little more circumspect. There were two facets to 'equality' as expressed by women (see Table 1): One was in terms of what Connell (1987) refers to as 'labour'; women, particularly in India, were concerned about sharing household work with their husband or partner. The other was in terms of mutual respect and shared decision-making, emphasised primarily amongst UK participants – what Connell refers to as 'power'. The emphasis on labour in India is not surprising, as middle-class women only recently started working outside the home, but many are expected to give up work upon marriage.

Table 1. Women's and men's positions on equality

	UK		India	
	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Ideals of equality	Shared decision-making; 'respect'	Marry 'peer'; prefer 'family oriented' women	Right to work outside home; men's 'help' in housework	More equal than parents but wife must prioritise home
Labour (work roles)	Woman = carer, man = provider <i>after birth of children</i>		Woman = carer, man = provider	
Power (Decision-making and resources)	Women consider power equal divided; men consider themselves 'head of household'		Man acknowledged as 'head of household'	

3.6 Men's views on equality and gender roles were more ambivalent than women's. They spoke enthusiastically about the importance of a 'modern' outlook and disparagingly of 'backward' sexist men. But in general men described their ideal wife as a woman who was both 'broadminded' and 'traditional'. In terms of working outside the home, men in Baroda told me they would prefer to marry a working woman who has 'knowledge' of the world beyond the home, but her priority should be the family and the house. Here Durish answers my question about whether he wishes to marry a 'working woman' or not:

She can work part time, I will work full time that's obvious. She can work for part time and then again for the house... I am not even telling that she should work. But she should be . well graduated. Well graduated with good marks and she should be at least a graduate person, if in the future there is need to work, then she can work.

Durish (M), In relationship, India

3.7 Durish is hesitant to define exactly whether his wife should work or not. It seems from this and other comments he made that he prefers a woman who *could* work and who has other interests and knowledge beyond the house, but who will prioritise the house and only work in order to contribute to the house if necessary. Similar sentiments were expressed by other men; the ultimate priority of a woman should be the family.

3.8 Like their counterparts in India, men in the UK looked for women who were '*family oriented*' or '*both traditional and modern*' and '*a good mix of east and west*'. This, they explained, referred to women who had 'Indian family values' and who, like them, would be willing to make sacrifices for their future children. In particular many of my male participants in the UK told me that they felt it was unsustainable to have a two-parent working household and were looking for women who felt the same. Some men told me that they themselves would be willing to take on the primary care role, but they felt that women generally

prefer to look after children.

3.9 In sum, UK men emphasised the importance of having a 'partnership' with an equal peer while respecting the *different* roles that men and women bring to a relationship, as Mahendra here describes:

Mahendra: So I need someone like Ameera [wife] who's my peer, who challenges me intellectually ... and and, and emotionally too in that it's not all .. she doesn't just .. do whatever I want to do or do whatever I say or .. look to satisfy my, all my needs, all my wants. She has things that she wants and needs too and I .. get a kick out of being able to give those things to her.

Mahendra (M), Married, UK

3.10 UK men disparaged men who sought to marry someone subordinate or passive. Pretak, for example, told me about a friend who married a woman from India. He surmised rather disdainfully that his friend was looking for a more submissive woman. Likewise Nihal told me he would not marry a woman from India because she was more likely to be dependent on him and he preferred to marry a woman who was 'equal' and autonomous.

3.11 Having explored 'ideals' of relationships, which for women in particular, but also to a certain extent for men, included equal 'modern' relationships, below I explore to what degree this bore out in the narratives of the couples' relationships, focusing particularly on labour and power.

From Ideals to Experience: Labour

3.12 According to Connell (1987), 'labour' refers to who does what kinds of work and whether there are expectations that men should properly do one kind of work and women another. Such expectations were definitely prevalent amongst the India participants. As discussed above, while some women, particularly those that were unmarried, described their desire to have a career and work outside the home, the men were looking to marry 'traditional' women who were ready to prioritise family and housework.

3.13 For example, Swati, who has been married to Hiren for one year, works full time but explained that she must prioritise the care of her in-laws and husband above her work. Unlike her husband, who also works full-time but has no role in the housework or care of his parents, she is constantly 'on call' to look after the family. As Swati explains, no one 'forces' her to take care of the house – the pressure is more subtle than that:

It's not compulsory also but if you do [come home early from work to look after parents-in-law] they would appreciate also, they will only like that 'okay fine she is taking care of us'.

Swati (F), Married, India

3.14 Swati knows that in order for her in-laws to have a good opinion of her she needs to take on the role of the dutiful daughter-in-law. Her position in a new family is weak. She must ensure that her new parents 'like her' and get on with her, and so she makes it clear to them that her priority is to take care of the house and family. But equally her position as a working woman could 'hurt' Hiren's ego:

Swati: When the stage comes when either of us have to be at home then of course it would be me.

A: Why do you say of course? Because in India?

S: Yes maybe India only and maybe if guy sits at home than he will feel that his ego is being hurt and his wife is going out and working. Male ego comes in between which I think spoils family life and everything. So it's better if one understands.

This issue of men's ego was repeated by other women who told me that they would 'hide' their true salary from their husband if it were larger than his.

3.15 From the Baroda men's point of view, women doing paid work represented a cultural move towards over-individualisation and a loss of family connectedness. For example, Aditya complained to me that women are no longer willing to make the sacrifices that his mother did and sorrowfully tells me there is '*no holding back women*' in India. He feels this reflects a more selfish age; women are less concerned about their families and more concerned with their own development – as reflected in women's career aspirations. Likewise, Durish told me that the demise of the family in western and westernised countries was due to women's career aspirations. He cited Japan as a worst-case-scenario where women were not even having children anymore because they thought their careers were more important. This creates pressure on women to 'prove' their 'Indian' values by making the home their priority.

3.16 I have explained the pressures on women to take on a 'traditional' and family/ home oriented role, but it is also true that there is pressure on men to fulfil the 'provider' role. Many women, for example, told me they would only marry a man with a sufficiently good education and salary. He must have a better education than 'BCom' (a bachelor's degree in Commerce), which was deemed of low value for future earning. As seen above, men equally see their role as one of the 'breadwinner'. Arguably with increased emphasis on economic wealth as a means to gain status, there is more pressure on men to earn a good salary. Since it is considered shameful for a man to profit from his wife's salary (Jeffery and Jeffery 2006), the family income rests primarily on his shoulders. Thus there are normative gender expectations to do with labour for and from both men and women.

3.17 In the UK there is more ambiguity. At the time of the interviews both members of all the couples were working full-time and living separately from parents. Most couples felt that the division of household work was broadly equal. The exception was Pretak and Darsha who described a rather painful process of negotiation which they had gone through as a couple to establish greater equality in household work. This process had been instigated by Darsha who felt that Pretak did not do sufficient household chores. They trialled various different strategies to reconcile their differences, including rotas of housework and 'specific tasks' for Pretak to do each day. They were also rigid in making equal financial contributions to the house, and explained their rather complicated methods of ensuring that both contributed equally to meals out, bills and so on.

3.18 Broadly, though, UK participants were satisfied that there was equal participation from both in housework, and 'explained' this division in relation to the equal number of work hours put in outside the house. Yet all participants also subscribed to the idea of the woman as carer and the man as

'breadwinner'. While such a division was not present at the time of the interviews, it was expected that, after having children, the roles of husband and wife would become more 'traditional'. This was also the case with single participants talking about potential future relationships. In particular, couples were planning for the woman to either give up outside work entirely or to start working part-time once there were children. In part this related to ideals of 'the Indian family', such as those described in Baroda. Participants told me that a stay-at-home parent was crucial to establish the close bonds between parents and children for which they felt Indian families were well-known. When probed, all of my married participants said that the man *could* stay at home and some told me they had seriously considered it, but that ultimately they expected the woman to prefer to stay at home with the children or that she was a 'naturally' better carer.

3.19 Whether UK-based women really preferred to stay at home was not clear. They seemed to change opinions over the course of the interviews. Largely I felt that a man staying at home as a full-time carer was deemed too unrealistic by women. Ameera, for example, laughs at the idea of her husband Mahendra staying at home looking after the children, telling me he is the '*provider*' in their relationship (although she currently earns more). But as I probe a bit further, she seems more ambivalent:

A: In what regard is that his role because, I'm just wondering why you think it's kind of funny the idea that he might stay at home with the kids?

Ameera: I think he [Laughs] I found it funny because he thinks it's staying at home playing with the kids. That's his idea. ... I don't, I mean if he wanted to do that I ... I'd be fine with it but I'm ... I want to spend time with the kids too. ... If, actually what would be amazing is if we could both do it, so that you know for a certain period of ... our lives I'm at home with the kids and he goes out to work and for another period if it is possible at all, I got to work and he looks after the kids. [...] I don't think that can be done.

Ameera (F), Married, UK

3.20 Ameera felt that her husband was unlikely to stay at home, or that both sharing the care of children equally was too difficult in terms of following two careers. She then went on to say that mutual respect for the different roles and each other's '*strengths and weaknesses*' was more important than necessarily sharing childcare. Such views on gendered roles were common amongst my participants and seemed to rely on the idea of the woman as carer and the man the provider. This was even the case for two women who were earning more than their male partners – Ameera and Lona – neither of whom appeared to see the contradiction this posed over their characterisation of men as 'providers'.

From Ideals to Experience: Power

3.21 Connell (1987) also suggested examining 'power'; who makes decisions and who has control of the financial resources. Among my India participants, the balance of power rested with the man. A case in point is a man's position on whether his wife will work outside the home or not. While men boasted about their liberal attitude towards women in comparison to their fathers, their language betrayed a paternalistic attitude and their superior power in making decisions. For example, here I ask Gunjan, a single man, if the relationship he expected with his future wife would be similar to his parents' relationship:

Yeah, I think it will be similar. Maybe a small difference, cause of the generation gap. Like my father doesn't let my mother drink alcohol but I will let my wife drink, though not in front of the family! I will let my wife work, part time or she can work in the [family] shop also if she wants to. That's no problem.

Gunjan (M), Single, India

3.22 Such language as 'letting' or 'allowing' a wife to work were common and rather took away from the self-labelled 'modern egalitarian' self-image of my male participants. I am conscious that men may have felt the need to position themselves as a powerful man while being interviewed by a woman. But two aspects of the data convince me that men truly have the power to decide whether their wife works. First, often the wife was present when her husband was talking about 'allowing' her to work, and women themselves told me how lucky they felt that she should be 'allowed' to work part-time. Second, more often than not men wanted to show me how 'broadminded' they were. In fact, many of them were proud of their liberal attitude in 'letting' their wife work. Thus it seems counter-intuitive that they were exaggerating their paternalistic attitude.

3.23 Men also considered themselves or their fathers as the 'head of the house' who is expected to make the chief household decisions around, for example, any large amounts of spending or investment. Men explained that women were consulted, but ultimately there must be one final decision-maker and that should be the husband (or father-in-law). However, some men also told me that if their father died, their mother would become the head of the house, underlining the changing status of women over the life course.

3.24 In the UK, men and women differed in their interpretations of the balance of power in their relationships. Most men I met saw themselves as the (future) 'head of the household' and thus the ultimate or primary decision-maker. The term 'head of the household' emerged spontaneously in interviews (as it did in India) after I asked about decision-making between the couple. Here Nihal and Mahendra describe what this means to them:

Nihal: I see it as a similar sort of level of a patriarchy whereby I would see myself taking on more of the head of household overall similar to what my dad has done and [girlfriend] doesn't seem to want to or care but she would certainly run it like and look after everything.

A: Okay. What do you mean by head of the household thing? So that -

N: Like the bread, winning bread, and maybe how I see it is making some of the bigger decisions as well.

Nihal (M), In relationship, UK

A: And also you mentioned ... that you saw yourself as the head of the household. What exactly, what is the head of household, what does the head of the household do or what do you mean by that?

Mahendra: [7 second pause] I.e. basically the buck stops with me ... on a ... whether it's [8 second pause] whether it's the emotional ... aspect, whether it's the financial aspect you know ... but I need to have, I need to have responsibility for where we're going and what we're doing and how we're going to get there. ... I think that's my role as head of the

household.
Mahendra (M), Married, UK

3.25 Of course, just because these men say they are the 'head of the household' does not mean they are, but it does raise questions about their earlier pronouncements on wanting an 'equal' relationship with a 'peer'. Such an attitude was not expressed by all of the men I interviewed, however. Naveen, for example, was very clear that he did not see himself or his future wife as a 'head' of the house, but rather envisioned a more collaborative approach to decision-making. But with most men there was a sense that there should be one final decision-maker and that men tended to be more suited to that – either because the woman expressed no interest in making 'larger decisions', such as suggested by Nihal, or because women tended to think more 'short term'.

3.26 But, even as most men see themselves as 'head of the house', women in the UK felt that they made decisions equally with their partners, which was an important demonstration of the aforementioned 'respect' which they valued in their relationships. Examples of financial decision-making were most often cited to establish the ethos of shared decision-making:

The joint money has to be consulted upon and it's joint decisions on sharing it.
Darsha (F), Engaged, UK

We very much do see the money as our money whether I bring it in or he brings it in, even though it's in his account and my account respectively.
Ameera (F), Married, UK

3.27 As mentioned before, all the women I interviewed were earning their own money, some more than their partner or husband. Citing this, they explained to me that 'control' of resources was not an issue, as they contributed more or less the same amount as their partners to an account for common expenses. Women foresaw this continuing even after they gave up work, with money being considered belonging to the couple rather than any individual. Thus in terms of 'power' women in the UK emphasized the importance of shared decision-making and men tended to portray themselves as the ultimate decision-maker.

Love is Enough?

3.28 Above I described women's aspirations for relationships of intimacy, equality and respect. I cited participants who told me they wanted to split housework '50-50' with their husbands and to have 'respect' from their partners. Yet using Connell's framework, we can see that there are continued gendered divisions of labour and power. Nonetheless, women portrayed themselves as happy and content with their relationships, often lauding the egalitarian natures of their husbands. While there is the possibility that some women are happy to take on a more traditional role, and are perhaps relieved to be free of the burden of paid work, this is unlikely to be the situation for all women. Yet women, particularly in India, elaborated on how 'broadminded' their husbands were and how they were 'free' to do as they pleased.

3.29 A case in point is Aditya and Geet in Baroda. Aditya said he told his wife Geet that she is not to work for the first four years of their marriage and then she can work part-time, which he repeats for me here:

You can do your work, you can go out in Baroda if something is there if you need to go okay fine, you can go but then there are some time frame, in the morning we carry our tiffin^[2] and we go 8.30-9.00 so before ten everything needs to be ready, my dad leaves at around 10.30 – 11.00 so he brings the tiffin with him so I said that you just see to it that you don't take up anything before 10.30 and after 6-6.30, between this you arrange your things.

Aditya (M), Married, India

3.30 It appears that Aditya has dictated to Geet the exact terms of her work-home balance. He makes it clear to her that her priority must be the house. No such restrictions were put on his work, and nor does he make any attempt to prepare the tiffin for his father. While Geet was not present when Aditya told me the above, she was present when he previously told me that he would 'allow' her to work part-time after their child was older. Geet, on the other hand, told me in her second interview that she was 'free' to do as she pleases:

A: And do you think your married life is the way you thought it would be like or different?
Geet: Yeah 100% like [...] First point that I can tell you is that Aditya is very open minded, very adjustable, he never interferes in my things, I can do whatever I want to do, so this all points are like easier for live with Aditya. And normal expectation is good husband, good family, I will have all the freedom to do whatever I want to do.
Geet (F), Married, India

3.31 She told me that Aditya was very supportive of her work and her career aspirations and she looked forward to her allotted part-time work when their son was older. Such apparent contradictions were common amongst married participants in Baroda.

3.32 Meanwhile, women in the UK told me they were considerably better off than their mothers. They reported feeling respected and appreciated by their partners and husbands even as, as in India, there was evidence of gendered expectations around labour, and a feeling on the part of men that they were appropriately the primary decision-maker. At the time of the interviews, when both members of all UK couples were working full-time and none of the participants had children, there was perhaps less cause for concern. But men were already justifying their position as 'head of the household' based on their assumed future primary breadwinning role. Only one couple reported arguing about household chores – Darsha and Pretak – and this was the couple that ultimately seemed to have the most egalitarian gender roles. Pretak told me he was 'proud' of their deliberations, which he described as 'aggressive', but which showed him that he was truly marrying a 'peer'.

Discussion

4.1 The study as a whole explored how geographical context shaped the relationship ideals and experiences of participants in the UK and India. While there were some similarities between the two samples, the relationship trajectories were quite dissimilar shaped by differing understandings of filial

duty, love, and local definitions of endogamy. The data drawn on in this paper, however, demonstrate more commonality than difference. Aspirations for equality were strikingly similar amongst participants in the two cities, even if there were some differences around what equality meant, or what form it might take in a relationship. In part, this may reflect a global ideal of love which is associated with equality. Or, as Hirsch argues, that gender 'equality' has become a marker of development with which non-Western couples strategically align themselves in order to distance themselves from discourses of the 'backwardness' of their non-Western culture (Hirsch 2003, Hirsch and Wardlow 2006).

4.2 On the other hand, women's participation in the paid labour force and young people's independence from family (both financial and geographic) are substantially greater in the UK than in India. But, there seems to be tacit acquiescence to unequal gender relations (according to Connell's framework) in both contexts. For example, women in India appeared to have little power over whether they could work or not – being reliant on a husband 'allowing' them to work. These findings are echoed by Percot's research amongst female nurses in South India; the nurses told her they were hoping that their husbands would permit them to continue to nurse after marriage (Percot 2006, p. 47). In the UK many of the men I interviewed defined themselves as 'head of the household' and both women and men subscribed to gendered divisions of labour and parenting roles. These similarities recall Holland's words:

'Sexual cultures can change without any concomitant transformation of other layers/levels of heterosexuality. While the language, expectation and appearance of relationships may change, the underlying patterns of heterosexual relationships are striking in their resilience.'
(Holland et al. 1998, p. 193)

While the discourses around relationships have changed, the actual day-to-day gendered practices are more resistant to 'transformation'.

4.3 Despite this apparent contradiction between aspiration and reality, women in India and the UK portrayed themselves as happy and content with their relationships, even extolling the egalitarian nature of their relationships. How do we explain these disparities between ideals and practices? Connell proposed that 'emphasized femininity', can be 'defined around compliance with... subordination [to men]' (1987, p. 183). 'Emphasized femininity' exists in tandem with 'hegemonic masculinity', which are practices that perpetuate male domination over women. These two concepts help explain the power imbalance that exists between men and women (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Connell 1987) which is inherent in the male breadwinner/female carer family models (Connell 1983, Kessler et al. 1982) but not women's apparent complicity with it.

4.4 Agarwal argues that an 'overt appearance of compliance' is a 'survival strategy' (Agarwal 1997:24) for women who lack economic power (such as an independent income) and social capital (such as kin networks after marriage migration) (in Jeffery and Jeffery 2006, see also Raheja and Gold 1994). This would seem particularly pertinent for women in India, who simply do not have the resources to change their situations. While single women may have some bargaining power, negotiating their desire to work outside the home after marriage, for example, this is limited since it is well known that men want a 'traditional' woman (Radhakrishnan 2009), and women's reputation is more fragile – if she gets too many refusals from suitors she may compromise her ability to select a suitable spouse.

4.5 Furthermore, women, and particularly men, expressed an idealisation of the 'traditional Indian family' which propagates women's role as within the home. In this context, some men associate 'women's rights' with the decay of Indian values. This concurs with research by Donner (2008) in Calcutta, India. She argues that contemporary ideals of the Indian family and motherhood mean that middle class women's lives are becoming increasingly 'defined as service to the husband and their children' (Donner 2008, p. 37) in opposition to previous more collective forms of parenting and 'doing' families (see also Osella and Osella 2006). It seems, then, that modern and traditional ideals coexist in India, working to create a feminine self that is neither too much of one nor the other (Das 1994, Kielmann 2002). Das argues that inequalities within the family make it difficult for women to assume modern identities and so they stick to the ones which they can hold on to (the traditional ones) while still investing themselves in the stories of modern heroines portrayed in films and on television^[3] (Das 1994). So while women may hold in their imagination more egalitarian relationships, they are unable to realise them.

4.6 Although the women in the UK in my sample have economic power and social capital, they also seem unable to negotiate less gendered roles. Women in the UK explained gendered labour roles both in terms of men's likely preference to work and by wider structures which make it difficult for both members of a couple to pursue a career *and* share childcare responsibilities. A broader shift in these roles then would require changes in wider structures which could allow more flexible working conditions and paid paternity leave, so that both partners could potentially take time out from work without disrupting their careers.

4.7 But in the UK, even as women put forward the idea that it was inevitable that they took on the principal caring role, they defended this division of labour by emphasising the idea of 'equal but different'. That is, women told me that although they may not be earning in the future, their caring role was just as important as their husband's earning role, and that husband and wife would therefore make an equal albeit different contribution to the house. Similar findings have been observed in research with white English couples; Cheal for example has argued that men and women use the idea of 'complementary gifts' to overlook the inequalities within their relationship – that is that the man shows his care for the household through his pay packet and she through her domestic duties (Cheal 1988 in Jamieson 1999). Such findings are disturbing since it is not clear that women are able to opt out of the carer role (or men from the provider role) which is expected if not assumed by their partners. Furthermore, men's assessment of themselves as 'head of the household' is linked to their perception of the man as breadwinner.

4.8 In trying to understand women's apparent complicity in the face of unequal relations I draw on Hochschild's concept of 'feeling rules'. Hochschild (1983) describes feeling rules as people's attempts to gauge and manage emotions for particular social situations. She makes a distinction between 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'; surface acting is when a person displays the relevant emotion to the situation, such as a hostess smiling when greeting her guests. 'Deep acting' involves a person pushing herself to actually *experience* the appropriate emotions at the appropriate time, such as invoking sadness at a funeral. I suspect that the women who I interviewed were unwilling to put a critical lens on their relationship, and instead took on the deep 'feeling rules' of a modern loving relationship, which, as Jamieson has pointed out, assume the importance of equality for conjugal relations (Jamieson 1998).

4.9 It is not that my participants were lying; rather they were invested in the story of a modern loving

companionate marriage. Since most of the couples I met were newly-weds or engaged to be married, in what they called the '*honeymoon period*', this possibly exacerbated women's investment in an uncomplicated story of conjugal relations and left little room for a critique of their situation or relationship with their partner. As Lewontin notes:

'People do not tell themselves the truth about their own lives. The need to create a satisfying narrative out of an inconsistent and often irrational and disappointing jumble of feelings and events leads each of us to write and re-write our autobiographies... these stories... become the basis for further conscious manipulation and manufacture when we have exchange with other human beings.' (Lewontin 1995, p. 44)

It appears that most couples were taking on the 'happy ever after' narrative of romantic love.

4.10 Those, such as Giddens and others (e.g. Parry 2001, Fuller and Narasimhan 2008), who have argued that a transformation of intimacy has resulted in more 'companionate marriages', are only partially correct. While there is a strong preference for more intimacy between a couple in both the UK and India, marriage as a lifelong commitment remains a strong discourse in both contexts (Twamley Forthcoming) and the evidence for equality between the sexes is weak. In fact, the data here suggest the increased emphasis on intimacy may be contributing to women's *inability* to negotiate a more equal relationship. While before household labour was taken as a matter of duty and obligation, it could now be construed as a means to show love and affection, creating further pressure on women to fulfil traditional female roles and decreasing their ability to bargain for more equal relationships. This concurs with Grover's research among low-caste couples in New Delhi slums; she found that women who have a self-selected love marriage are more reticent about revealing marital problems than women in arranged marriages (Grover 2006). In part this is due to the severed relationship with parents which a love marriage can provoke, but Grover also argues that the 'ideological emphasis on the emotional quality of the conjugal relationship has paradoxically enforced marital stability and thus women's dependence on husbands' (2006, p. 207). Thus in Grover's research, as in mine, there is some evidence that love promotes more adjustment and acceptance on the part of women unwilling to admit defeat in the face of love. In a relationship where love was less idealized, a woman might have less reason to portray her relationship and position within it as 'equal' and happy.

4.11 Yet a word of caution should be added; these findings were captured in early marriage when women have the least 'bargaining' power (Jeffery and Jeffery 2006) and some women were only beginning to develop a more intimate relationship with their husband. Women may be building ties of affection now which later can be used to negotiate a more egalitarian relationship with their husband. Furthermore, it is clear that men and women are debating more and more the boundaries of gendered behaviour. Such findings suggest that there is a growing expectation of equality, at least before there are children (in the UK). Whether and how having children changes their relationships remains to be seen; life course research shows that in the UK generally, women's (and not men's) domestic labour increases sharply after giving birth and does not decrease until after children have left home. This is thought to also contribute to the gender pay gap which increases strongly at the point when children are born (Kan et al. 2001).

4.12 My data from India and the UK then are in accord with Jamieson's review of intimacy studies in the UK where she concludes: 'Men and women routinely both invoke gender stereotypes or turn a convenient blind eye to gendering processes when making sense of themselves as lovers' (Jamieson 1999, p. 491). The exception was the UK couple Darsha and Pretak who were the only couple that reported friction over gendered labour roles. Their experiences imply that changes in gendered behaviour are more likely to arise through 'aggression' than intimate 'mutual disclosing'.

Conclusion

5.1 Giddens (1992) proposed that 'modern intimate' relationships will necessarily entail greater equality between the sexes, since 'disclosing intimacy' suggests a greater knowledge of and respect for the partner. While intimacy and respect were highly prized amongst my participants, using Connell's framework for gender relations I found discrepancies between the desire for more equality and the reality of relationships. Thus it seems that increased intimacy or the increased emphasis on affect between a couple does not necessarily lead to increased equality, and I hypothesise that in fact it may contribute to continued traditional caring roles for women. It appears that newly married couples are unwilling to put a critical lens on their relationship. Women's and men's stories suggest that the discourses of love and modernity offer sufficient positive attractions, without clashing with established norms of gender, the family and what it means to be 'Indian.' Or put simply: love is enough.

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Notes

¹For further details on the demographics of the two groups, a long with a lengthier discussion on commonality and difference, please see (Twamley Forthcoming).

²Lunchbox

³See for example Puri's study (1997) on Harlequin and Mills & Boon readers in India. Puri argues that these books show alternative models of behaviour for young Indian women – heroines in working independent positions – to which her participants aspired. But many were depressed by the discrepancy between the lives of the books' protagonists and what they saw as their inability to live a similar life.

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