

2020

Intermarried Couples: Transnationalism, and Racialized Experiences in Denmark and Canada

Rashmi Singla

Roskilde University & University of Toronto Mississauga

Hema Ganapathy-Coleman

*Roskilde University & University of Toronto Mississauga*Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/iaccp_papersPart of the [Psychology Commons](#)

ScholarWorks Citation

Singla, R., & Ganapathy-Coleman, H. (2020). Intermarried couples: Transnationalism, and racial dynamics in Denmark & Canada. In S. Safdar, C. Kwantes, & W. Friedlmeier (Eds.), *Wiser world with multiculturalism: Proceedings from the 24th Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.4087/PJXCX8077>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the IACCP at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Papers from the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology Conferences by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Abstract

Despite an increase in interracial or mixed marriages (intermarriages) globally, the experiences of couples in such marriages are generally under-researched, particularly within psychology. Using a cultural psychological framework and qualitative methods, this paper studies the psychosocial experiences of couples in intermarriages. It focuses on four South Asians in ethnically intermarriages in two settings: two Indian-origin men married to native Danish women in Denmark, and two Indian-origin women married to Euro-American men in Canada. Data from in-depth interviews were subjected to a thematic analysis yielding an array of themes, of which this paper presents the two most dominant themes across the two contexts: 'transnationalism' and 'racialized experiences in social situations'. The results demonstrate that the participants lived transnational lives to varying degrees depending on their gender, socio-economic status and age, which in turn intersected with variables such as the nature of the transnational relationships they were attempting to sustain, and their own motivations and agency in maintaining these ties. While in some cases participants maintained a high level of contact with India through visits and digital technology, others kept up limited ongoing contact with the country of origin. Furthermore, varying racialized experiences emerged from the narratives, with differences in how these experiences were interpreted. While some participants recognized them as racial discrimination, others chose to rationalize these experiences in various ways. After offering an account of these results, the paper reflects briefly on the implications of these findings.

Keywords: intermarriages, Indian, race, transnationalism, Denmark, Canada

Intermarried Couples: Transnationalism, and Racialized Experiences in Denmark and Canada

Introduction and Literature Review

This paper focuses on the contextualized experiences and perspectives of four spouses in mixed-race or inter-ethnic marriages ('intermarriages'), who encounter racial discrimination as they live transnational lives that straddle both the country of origin and the host country. An emerging trend in global demography is that the world's multiracial population is one of the fastest growing of all ethnic groups. Increased migration, technologies that enable transport and communication, processes such as transnationalism (Vertovec, 2010), and globalization (Appadurai, 1990) have made it possible for individuals to meet and marry across the lines of religion, race, nationality, and class, thus leading to what has been called the "internationalization of intimacy" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2014; Castells, 1996). As a result, mixed couples, individuals with mixed backgrounds and "world families" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014) have increased worldwide (Rodríguez-García, 2015).

In the United States, of its population of over 337 million (United States Census Bureau, 2018), 14.5% consist of immigrants, making it the country with the largest immigrant population in absolute numbers. In 2013, in the United States, 12%, or one in eight of newly-weds married someone from a different race, not including inter-ethnic marriages between Hispanics and non-Hispanics (Parker et al., 2015). The picture is different in Canada, a country with a population of about 38 million (World Population Review, 2020), where about 22% are immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2017). In Toronto, the most populous city in Canada, ethnic diversity is high; 50% of the population consists of East Asians, South Asians, Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, Southeast Asians, Latin Americans, and others who were born outside Canada. Despite this diversity in pockets like Toronto, inter-ethnic unions account for only 4.6% of couples in Canada, which is about half the rate of the United States and Britain, with significant geographical variations (Statistics Canada, 2017). South Asians and Chinese, the two largest visible minority populations in Canada, had the smallest proportions of couples in mixed marriages, at 13.0% and 19.4% respectively. The overall rate of such unions in Canada is expanding much more slowly than in the United States, by about one percentage point a decade, even as the proportion of visible minorities expands through immigration. Hou, Wu and Schimmele (cited in Todd, 2017) report that intermarriage rates among members of an ethnic group tend to decline in regions that house a large cohort of that group, thus offering more options for partnering with individuals from one's own ethnic group. Both, the United States and Canada acknowledge that immigrants make up a notable portion of their population and hence, claim to be multicultural societies. But Denmark, a Scandinavian country, is different.

Of Denmark's population of 5.8 million, only about 12% are immigrants and their descendants, with almost 7% from non-western countries (Statistics Denmark 2019). In Denmark, specially analyzed statistics point to a relative increase in the number of mixed marriages in the past two decades (4% in 1990, 6.1% in 2012). Still, ethnically mixed couples and their children are almost invisible as a statistical category (Bang Appel & Singla, 2017).

In fact, Denmark characterizes itself as a homogeneous country with a high degree of egalitarianism, despite polarization in society along ethnic lines (Øverland et al., 2014). There is no formal acceptance of multiculturalism. From a political standpoint, mixed marriages, especially transnational marriages involving one partner across national borders, have been regulated, particularly since 2001 by some of the strictest spouse reunification laws in the European Union that make the entry of a spouse from a non-European country difficult. Danish laws require that in cases of spouse reunification, the criteria connecting Denmark and the country of origin of the potential immigrant be weighed. If the potential immigrant is deemed to have strong connections with the country of origin, immigration or residency are denied. In fact, in 2019, the European Court of Justice had to rule that Danish restriction laws preventing a legally resident Turkish national from bringing his wife to Denmark were unjustified.

Canada differs from Denmark in that it has a formal policy of multiculturalism. Canadian laws around family reunification have also been critiqued for being quite narrow; only spouses, and children below the age of 22 are supported by these laws and a limited number of parents and grandparents are allowed to apply. However, in comparison to Denmark, Canada's laws are more lenient; strong ties to the country of origin are not seen as problematic when immigrants apply for legal resident status in Canada.

In spite of changes and developments worldwide resulting in increased rates of immigration and intermarriages, we know little about the social implications of intermarriage (Rodríguez-García, 2015). How do they contribute to social transformation? How do the individuals who inhabit such marriages experience them? What are the internal dynamics between couples in such marriages? Intermarriages also provide a lens through which we can view lives that are lived, embedded in more than one country and culture. Furthermore, the different meanings that such pairings might have in different national contexts is worth studying in our current climate of rapid globalization and unprecedented crossing of national boundaries. The more stratified the context in social, ethnic, racial, or religious terms, the more significant mixed partnerings between individuals who represent polarized groups socially will be (Rodríguez-García & Freedman, 2006). Despite this and in spite of increases in the multiracial population through intimate partnerships and marriages across racial/ethnic borders, the couples themselves and their narratives about their experiences are under-researched. Qualitative studies that provide insights into the experiences of such couples are even fewer. However, many such mixed couples suggest that their very existence (and their children's) is a step toward interrogating the concept of race and breaking down racial boundaries and that a mixed-race population is becoming increasingly normalized, despite existing concerns about racism and racial bias within and beyond various communities in countries such as the United Kingdom (Song, 2017). This transformation in boundaries and the growing commonality of mixed people and families coexists with racial pathologization and scrutiny in the various settings that such individuals and families participate in. Torngren, Irastorza and Song (2016) emphasize that such unions are often romanticized as a sign of integration. At the same time, they challenge people's ideas of us/them and purity/impurity, and so, intermarriages, in fact, remain controversial, and even taboo in many societies (Mahtani, 2015; Skinner & Hudac, 2017). Hence, the racial aspects of intermarriages deserve careful study.

In the Danish context, one of the few studies by Poulsen (2012) delineated the interpersonal dynamics between couples but did not focus on the transnational aspects of such marriages. Similarly, although Killian (2013) emphasizes the significance of race and racial discrimination among intermarried couples in the US, transnationalism—patterns of interconnections between and embeddedness in both the country of origin, and the country of residence—is hardly included. Moreover, transnationalism is barely academically researched within psychology, especially in countries such as Denmark (Poulsen, 2012; Refsing, 1998) and Canada.

In this paper, we use qualitative methods to examine the experiences of individuals who are in intermarriages. As there are multiple ways to delimit groups—by nationality, race, ethnicity, ancestry, country of origin, religion, class, and other criteria—there are many ways to conceptualize intermarriages. Here, we conceptualize intermarriage as a constellation of intimate relationships between an ethnic-minority and a majority person, constituting *visible ethnically mixed couples* (Phoenix, 2011), regarding it as a prism through which in/exclusion processes at various levels can be studied. This article focuses empirically on both the transnational patterns of living and being and the socially-based racialized experiences of spouses in mixed couple relationships. It analyzes their narratives about their lived experiences, thus contributing to a better understanding of intermarriages in two diverse contexts. The experiences of these couples challenge some of the dominant discourses about homogeneity and the ideology of colorblindness that discount skin color and phenotypes (Torngren, 2011). The objective in this paper is to invoke the perspectives of intermarried couples in an overlooked field. After offering a summary of the methods for the two qualitative studies that this paper is based on, one that was conducted in Denmark and another in Canada, major findings related to the racialized experiences and the transnational lives of couples in mixed marriages are presented.

Theoretical Framework

The cultural psychological approach (Shweder, 1991; Valsiner, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978) forms the background for both studies, evoking the broad context of Danish and Canadian society. Also, part of the framework are the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora, in which diaspora is defined as people who are displaced from an original center or ‘homeland’ (Safran, 1991). Such dispersal implies distance from place of origin due to which diasporic communities often attach significance to maintaining connections with the homeland and its culture (Safran, 1991). Reducing, or at least dealing with, that distance becomes an important goal (Dufoix, 2008). We also understand the term diaspora as having multiple meanings: as a specific form of transnational community or social organization, as a way to synthesize hybrid identities or specific forms of cultural consciousness, and as the production of transnational social and cultural phenomena (Tölölyan, 1999; Vertovec, 1997, 2000). As a social form, diaspora is concerned with relationships, networks, and economic strategies across the borders while as a form of consciousness it is based on multi-locality, both here and there, interconnecting with others, sharing “roots” and “routes” (Hall, 2003; Gilroy, 2003). Lastly, as a mode of cultural production diaspora is seen as a transnational phenomenon, with

flow of media images and messages that serve as connectors (Appadurai, 1990). Kalra et al. (2005) argue that the concept of diaspora shifts attention away from viewing migration as a simple one-way process and facilitates an understanding of the complex transnational identities that are formed and sustained. They conceptualize diaspora as both a *positive embracing* of transnational affiliation in context of the South Asian postcolonial history, and defensive posture by communities in the face of a hostile host telling them *they do not belong*. Diaspora is about the individuals who are part of ongoing political, socio-economic, psychological and cultural ties, about ambivalences and exclusions, and about emotional constructs based on memory and loss. Transnationalism encompasses diaspora and includes day-to-day links between two or more countries. Transnationalism occurs when diasporic people and communities manage to remain connected to and involved in their countries of origin and simultaneously embedded in other national contexts. We examine transnationalism as practiced among intermarried couples keeping in mind that there are large variations between individuals in their practice of transnational relationships and engagements. Moreover, through the study of the experiences of mixed couples, we attempt to contribute to our understanding of mental health, particularly risk factors such as exclusion and racial discrimination.

We also take an intersectional approach (Phoenix, 2007, 2011). Hence, we focus on participants' multiple categories of belonging, and on how they *do* the social categories as well as the ways in which families and personal relationships are implicated in intersecting systems of empowerment and oppression, both as aspects of the problem and as sites of resistance and transformation (Chaudhary, 2007). We take for granted that gender, race, and class are major categories that account for fundamental inequalities in multiple contexts. At the same time, we are aware that participants might foreground inequalities in other domains such as religion, sexuality, stage in the life cycle, and age although the very concept of "visibly ethnically different" couples is informed by the theory of race as constructed through the perception of visible differences (Killian, 2013).

Despite color-blind reasoning—the idea that 'skin color doesn't matter'—the role of visible difference is highlighted in the Scandinavian context according to a study of attitudes to intermarriage in Sweden by Torngren (2011). In the United States, there is a long and fraught history of negative attitudes towards intermarriage. Up until the 1960's, laws forbade mixed marriages across racial borders due to fears of miscegenation. Since the Supreme Court of the United States overturned miscegenation laws in 1967 (*Loving v Virginia*, 1967), there has been increasing acceptance of interracial romantic relationships (Livingston & Brown, 2017). Only 11% of the U.S. population explicitly rejects them (Wang, 2012). However, as there is a stigma attached to the open expression of racial prejudice (França & Monteiro, 2013), there is, what researchers have called a "repressive tolerance" (Mahtani, 2015), and so it is not a stretch to say that the rates of disapproval are probably underestimated. Although Canada, unlike the U.S., did not explicitly and legally ban interracial marriages, there are historical accounts of the stigma attached to such marriages. In current times, political correctness may forbid people from articulating disapproval but such silences are problematic too. We maintain that mixed marriages provide a glimpse into the complex interconnections

between ethnocultural, racial, economic, interpersonal and emotional realms of experience in a society (Padilla et al, 2007).

Methods

This article is based on the narratives and experiences of four individuals who were part of two studies described below. Although both studies were independently undertaken and at different times, during discussions at the IACCP Congress in 2018, the high degree of overlap in the objectives, theoretical underpinnings, methods, and the continuity across times and spaces in the experiences of the participants in the two studies became clear.

Participants

For the first study (Singla, 2015), in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 adults in intermarried relationships in the Copenhagen area in 2010. The participants were recruited through key persons in relevant networks, who functioned as gatekeepers (Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). Participants were 21-61 years of age, and had been married between a few months to 27 years at the time of the interview. The sample involved couples where one spouse was of South Asian (Indian or Pakistani) origin and the other a native Dane. All participants belonged to middle to upper middle socio-economic group.

In the second study (Ganapathy-Coleman, ongoing), in-depth interviews were conducted in 2015-16 with five middle- and upper middle-class first-generation immigrant women of Indian origin, married to white men residing in Canada. The objective was to obtain a nuanced understanding of the experiences of these women with regard to various dimensions of their intermarriages, including parenting and work life, through repeated in-depth interviews. The women were between 30 and 50 years of age and had been married for 5 to 20 years. Participants were identified through informal contacts and snowballing.

Our rationale for focusing on two men of Indian origin living in Denmark from the first study, and two women, also of Indian origin, living in Canada from the second study was to ensure comparability in their ethnocultural backgrounds (as there were participants from Pakistan too, in the first study). This allowed us to highlight their shared connection to their country of origin, India, as well as their experiences of being the racial “other” in the western contexts of Denmark and Canada. In addition, this sub-sample offered the possibility of gaining insights into gendered differences in the experiences of intermarried couples. Small samples of this type enable us to understand contextually based processes that tend to become invisible in quantitative studies.

Procedure

The interviews for the first study (by Singla, 2015) were conducted at their residences by a project researcher (Dunger, 2010) who herself was in a Swedish-Danish mixed marriage. The interviews were conducted primarily in Danish and English, depending on the participants' linguistic choice. Ethical rules, such as anonymization of participants, were followed. The tape-recorded interviews formed the basis for post-hoc categorizing and a thematic analysis. Six

themes emerged from the analysis: Getting Together, Managing Everyday Life, 'Mixed' Parenting Ideals and Practices, Local Lives in a Transnational Context, Living 'Private Life in the Public Gaze', and Implications for Strengthening Mixed Partnering and Parenting. This paper focuses primarily on the experiences of two male spouse, two Indian men in Indian-Danish marriage – Rajiv and Sam, who present very diverse strategies for transnationalism through their life trajectories. Both Rajiv and his wife Katja were interviewed directly, while Sam's experiences are analysed on the basis of his wife Cecilia's interview. We concentrate on the themes, 'Local lives in a Transnational Context' and 'Living Private life in the Public Gaze'.

In-depth interviews for the second study were conducted in the homes of the participants or in mutually agreed upon public spaces by the co-first author (Ganapathy-Coleman), who is in an intermarriage. The similarity in the backgrounds of the researcher and the study participants contributed to a rapport between them and provided the opportunity to offer an emic perspective on the experiences of the participants. The interviews were conducted in English with some code-switching into Hindi. The open-ended interview questions covered a variety of topics ranging from the circumstances around the decision to immigrate, the immigration journey, experiences of the first few days, months, and years post relocation, supports available, the process of choosing their marital partner including negotiations of divergent values stemming from cultural and individual differences, efforts at integrating cultures and lifestyles, and experiences of being in a mixed marriage. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Open, axial, and focused coding were used to arrive at the themes and subthemes that characterized the narratives of the participants. Frequency counts were used to identify the most commonly occurring themes. Four themes emerged from an analysis of the interviews: Give and Take as Even More Crucial in Mixed Marriages, Blended Ideals and Practices, Living Transnational Lives, and Management of Public and Familial Perceptions and Biases towards Mixed Couples. We focus here on the last two themes: 'Living Transnational Lives' and 'Perceptions and Biases towards Mixed Couples', which correspond with the themes 'Local Lives in a Transnational Context' and 'Living Private Life in the Public Gaze' in the first study. We combine them into 'Transnational Lives' and 'Racialized Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion.' We focus here on the narratives of two women whose identities we protect behind the pseudonyms Padmini and Shoma. We also scramble some biographical details for ethical reasons.

Results and Discussion

The Intermarried Couples

This section offers a short biography of the participants foregrounded in this paper. The first, Rajiv, 35, introduced himself, "I am from India. Indian." He grew up in an upper middle-class family in an Indian metropolis and has one older sister and a large extended family. As the holder of a master's degree, he has worked in the advertising sector. Currently, he is self-employed part-time in the health sector. His first, short-lived, marriage was to an Indian. His current wife of three years, Katja, 32, whom he met in a metropolis in India, introduced herself

as “Danish, with Danish parents.” They have an infant daughter. Both considered their ethnic identity as well as their professional identity to be important.

The second participant is Sam, 36. His Danish wife Cecilia, 37, introduced him as a “Danish citizen and Indian guy.” He was born and raised in Denmark by Indian parents, who moved to Denmark four decades ago. He lost his father many years ago, and has a younger sibling and a large extended family in India and other countries. Sam has a business degree and a highly paid job in the private sector. He and his wife met at their workplace in Denmark and have been married for four years. They are parents to two daughters, three years and four months old respectively. Their ethnic belonging and work identity were moderately important to them.

Padmini, 47, who participated in the second study describes herself as “Very much Indian. Secular Hindu.” Born and raised in urban India with her sister in an upper middle- class family, she moved to the United States over 20 years ago for higher education where she met her husband, Peter. Following several years of living in the U.S. and raising their daughter, who is now in her late teens, they moved to Canada, where they live and work as faculty members in a university. Both of them openly declared that their work is their vocation. Ethnic belonging was especially important for Padmini, but both spoke about their deliberate and sometimes poignant attempts at finding spaces where their identity as a mixed couple would be fully accepted, and where their daughter could also belong.

The situation was a little different in Shoma’s case. Shoma, who is 46, was raised in India in a middle-class family. She moved to Europe for higher education and met Ben when she was in the United States for work. Married to Ben, who was raised in a secular Jewish household, Shoma does not emphasize her ethnic identity or belonging as much as Padmini although, unlike Padmini, she is frequently dressed in ethnic attire. Like Padmini and Peter, she and Ben are also academics. They have one daughter who is nine years old.

Transnational Lives

Rajiv demonstrates intensive transnational practices and connections (Charsley, 2012). He maintains frequent contact with India, his country of origin, both through travel and internet technologies such as Skype. He communicates not only with his family in India, but also family in other countries, although he says,

With the aunts [in the USA & UK] I am the black sheep in the family. I am very bad at keeping contact with everybody ... but sometimes I call, I hate SMSing, so I call most of the time by Skype.

Rajiv travels once or twice a year to India but considers this to be infrequent as his expectation at the time of marriage was that he would make more frequent visits. Life events (Levy et al., 2005), such as the birth of a child, are major factors for explaining this frequency:

Our original plan, what I was told when we moved to Denmark was that, “Oh darling you can go back to India whenever you feel like. You can go every three months if you want.” Of course, it does not work like that. In the

beginning I think that every six months we were going, but now, it is once a year. This last time I did a trip on my own because Sonia [daughter] was too small to travel...

His narrative then illustrates the diverse objectives of his trips to his country of origin, such as to give concrete financial advice to his father, to further develop his professional competences, or to relax:

...we have to figure out the situation ... take all that over, because they [parents] are getting old and want to simplify their life ... they have a big house, which they are taking care of all the time... so I took a one-month trip and I was in [City name] for a few days ... then I went up into ... a beautiful township and studied yoga ... stayed there in an ashram.

He has no financial responsibility towards his family in India. On the contrary, his parents have been contributing economically for their granddaughter. Although Rajiv has a noticeably limited Indian network in Denmark, he has close emotional ties with his extended family in India, the UK, and the US where some of his relatives live, through the internet and Skype: "... one of them has been living in the UK all her life. She is ... a psychiatrist ... now retired... another one has been in the US all her life."

Rajiv has interconnections with India but at the same time he expresses attachment to his country of residence, Denmark, thus demonstrating his transnationalism (Vertovec, 2010). After moving to Denmark, gradually, he felt included and developed a sense of belonging, and stated after a hectic trip to India that his home was Denmark and India was now a place he visited. Possibly, Rajiv has found a 'hiding place', a place to 'relax' in Denmark, associated with wellbeing and satisfaction with new beginnings:

We had not really had any quiet time [during India visit] and ... that was the first time I really felt that 'oh now we are going home – (ohm). And that really, like, wow, did I really say that. Yes, we are going home and this is home. India is the place where I visit family and friends.

Rajiv's trajectory bears similarities to Padmini's. In their initial excitement of being an intermarried couple, she and Peter dreamt together of going to India every year. He offered to move to India and continues to encourage her to keep her connections with India alive. For Padmini, visiting India annually seemed like the perfect way to balance their practical and emotional needs. They attempt to maintain an egalitarian relationship in terms of division of labor. Peter actively participates in domestic chores but concedes that Padmini shoulders the greater burden more frequently than him. Both agree that living in the west allows them to more freely negotiate these dimensions of their relationship creatively; things may have been more complicated had they lived in India with its more rigid gender norms. In any case, many of her extended family members were already living in North America although her parents have remained in India. But over the years, between the commitments of their dual careers, their daughter's academic obligations, and financial constraints after purchasing a home, their

visits have happened only every two-three years. Padmini expressed relief over her aging parents' good health and financial independence. This took the edge off her guilt over not visiting them frequently; her moral guilt remains. She also regretted the infrequent visits for her own sake saying,

.... the visits to India are important for my emotional and spiritual well-being. Living in the U.S. and Canada ... you are marked, visible because of your skin color. India is... where I can be comfortable in my own skin. When I am in India, nobody asks me, "Where are you from?" ... they do ... in the U.S. and in Canada, even though I am a U.S. citizen.

Unlike the other participants, Sam's experiences in Denmark reveal that he has almost no memories of travelling to his country of origin, India, as his first-generation immigrant Indian parents chose not to maintain links with India especially through visits. He and Cecilia have, however, visited extended family members in the UK and Canada. For Cecilia, this is the positive, "fun aspect" of her mixed marriage because both of them are fond of travelling. She referred to the process of finding similarities, in spite of differences, and noted the possibility of travelling to different countries, where various family members reside. This implies transnational ties in other countries than India:

I guess that the fun is that you find out that it is actually not that different and, in any family, the base is love... We have a large family and we can travel around the world and see his family, and I find that a gift as well.

Cecilia noted that a traumatic lifecycle event, the sudden demise of Sam's father leading to an early widowhood for her mother – in –law, and the resulting responsibility of raising two young sons as a single parent, may have affected the socioeconomic basis for maintaining the transnational ties with the country of origin. She had experienced her own mother's widowhood. She explained:

But Sam has a very strong mother and she means the world to him and his brother, and she became a widow quite early as well, as my mom. But she did everything for her boys and she still does....

Though Cecilia has not visited India, she has ongoing contact with her sister-in-law in Canada, the wife of Sam's Indian cousin.

The desire to maintain transnational connections, the reasons for and frequency of such links, their depth and other aspects show variations depending on the individual's unique position and characteristics. In contrast to Padmini's desire for greater frequency of contact with India that demonstrates her emotional commitment to her former homeland (Safran, 1991), Shoma remains in close contact with India, visiting at least once a year with Ben and their daughter, but says that it is primarily for work and only secondarily for family or cultural reasons:

I don't feel much of a pull ... or nostalgia for India or things that are Indian. Maybe it is because I keep going there? Maybe ... because we live in City where there are so many Indian grocery stores and restaurants. But we also travel a lot worldwide and have ... fun whether we are in India or Canada or Hong Kong or Italy.

For Shoma, ideas of ethnic belonging take a cosmopolitan and transnational form that is not anchored in either her own heritage or Ben's (Schroedter et al., 2015). She spoke fondly of her late father, who had insisted that she should travel to any part of the world to access the best education possible. She remarked that she had done that, fulfilling her father's dream of an ivy league education for her. But "...he has passed since" she said quietly. Her mother lives in India with her brother, and Shoma does visit her. Her visits are brief; typically, she heads to some other part of India to fulfill work-related responsibilities, which she admits are self-chosen. She noted that her father, her biggest cheerleader, is no longer there. Although Shoma remembers her childhood and young adulthood in India fondly and travels there, her narratives did not have the kind of poignancy or nostalgia that Padmini's did.

Racialized Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion

All four participants spoke about their racialized experiences with society and sometimes with family. Padmini discussed her experiences of being married to "a white man." She had encountered covertly discriminatory, non-accepting reactions from Peter's family early on in their relationship, and the exclusion continues occasionally even now, after two decades of marriage, although she conceded that they are mostly loving towards her. Additionally, for her, in many social interactions, racial bias complicates the gender bias:

Sometimes, people just don't see me when we are together ... they will look only him, address only him ... like I am not there...invisible. Or they try to ring us up separately at the grocery store. I understand they may not want to presume but when a couple comes up to the cashier chatting, with one cart, one grocery list, and a child, is it so hard to interpret the situation? Peter tells me to ignore them and I did, for a long time, but I find it hurtful and exhausting

Even living in the ethnoculturally diverse city of City in multicultural Canada does not always protect one from experiences of racialized exclusion (Torngren et al., 2016). What Padmini has likely gauged is the negative affective response stemming from the implicit bias of strangers towards her (Skinner & Hudac, 2016), a bias that Peter likely did not comprehend for many years because of the tacit privilege he enjoys as a white man. Since becoming more attuned to the ways in which Padmini is excluded from particular spaces, Peter has participated with her in identifying and selecting spaces that are inclusive and accepting of them.

While Padmini was critical of the restrictive and laborious requirements of migration laws in the USA and in Canada, Rajiv described the whole migration procedure in the Danish

context almost without any critical comment, implying an indifferent attitude to the procedure despite its being characterized by restrictions and control especially after 'reform' in 2001 and 2011.

Interviewer: So, now you have a Danish citizenship?

Rajiv: No, you can't have that. You get in and you can have a resident permit. And basically, the first two years you get a visa on your passport, that let you stay here and work here and get all the facilities that a Dane would get except that you can't vote and you don't have any rights to a pension and stuff like that. But, then after two years they renew it.

He seems unbothered by the discouraging family reunification policies and points to the "spaciousness" of Danish society, perhaps because he considers himself fortunate to have gained entrance into a restrictive but prosperous country, or perhaps because he is aware of Denmark's emphasis on homogeneity and egalitarianism (Øverland et al., 2014). He expresses his appreciation of the relative economic equality in Denmark and criticizes the corruption in India, his country of origin:

But I love the fact that the systems work and have a basic sense of respect for each other. The space ... is good. Nobody is hungry, nobody here have ever experienced hunger in their entire life. The homeless people are not even hungry. So that is a big, big thing. Denmark is the least corrupt country in the world. Did you know that? Number one. India is number 83...

When questioned about the *racializing gaze*, that is, being looked at as a visibly ethnically mixed couple, Rajiv downplayed the phenomenon and characterized it as a pleasant experience. This is different to some extent from his wife Katja's narrative described later. His rationale is that his indeterminate physical appearance (Aspinall & Song, 2013) means he is not pigeonholed into a stigmatized Indian identity; rather, he is misrecognized as a Jamaican. He explained that a Jamaican can be perceived from two different angles: in a positive way as someone who loves Bob Marley, or negatively as someone who smokes marijuana 24 hours a day. Rajiv's more ambiguous physical appearance and dreadlocks may be the reason for him being subjected to a different, perhaps non-stigmatizing gaze that raises fresh questions about both, the origins and the experience and perception of discrimination.

Interviewer: What about when you walk around as a mixed couple on the street? Do you feel that you are being watched?

Rajiv: No, not really. In a nice way, sometimes, in a nice way. There is no one like 'oh weirdo'. Most of them think that I am from Jamaica or something, because of my hair [dreadlocks]. They don't think that I am from India or something like that. I'm not being stared at or anything like that.

However, when questioned about the reaction of others to their mixed marriage, Rajiv's wife Katja points to her experiences of being subject to the "gaze" in public space, both in India

and Denmark, thus questioning Denmark's claims of being colorblind (Torngren, 2011). Although she attempts to rationalize being 'noticed' as non-judgmental and related to people's curiosity, it can be interpreted as a relatively negative experience for visibly different intermarried couples. Perhaps as a couple Rajiv, with his claim of his supposedly ambiguous appearance as non-stigmatizing and Katja, with her view of people's gaze as originating in their curiosity, have devised this particular strategy to rationalize their experiences of being othered through "gazes" in the public domain.

Similarly, Cecilia's answer to the question about the experiences of "gaze" as an ethnically visibly mixed couple is relevant (Singla & Holm, 2012). She defends herself and Sam from this broad discourse by emphasizing that the harsh negative stereotypes apply to other ethnic minority groups, not Indians. She is aware of her husband's "otherness" but much like Katja and Rajiv, she too downplays it, "I think that sometimes people look at us. But I guess that the fact that he is Indian makes it a little bit easier actually. I think it would have been difficult if he was from Iraq or Iran with another background." While speaking of the racism she experiences, Padmini pointed out that ironically, within the South Asian community, anti-black racism is common. The belief, she said, is, "We are brown, not black. We are educated, we are better" and commented on the absurdity and ethical hollowness of such claims (Prashad, 2000). Shoma, in the US context, too expressed awareness of the "othering gaze", especially of whites in public spaces, but she chose to be dismissive of it, opting for the moral high ground and relegating it to ignorance:

They are ignorant, you know. They have known only people just like themselves. They have stayed in their comfort zone. So yes, sometimes they stare at us but it is because they just don't know, they don't understand. I don't pay any attention to it anymore. It is better to ignore it anyway.

Both her, and Cecilia's interpretations and responses may be forms of rationalization, a defense mechanism used to cope with a difficult and anxiety-provoking situation. Cecilia mentions that these discriminatory, systemic, and macro-cultural influences do not affect her everyday life, yet she reflects on them, demonstrating her racial literacy (Twine, 2010):

In general, I think that, if I should be quite frank, that the Danish people should be ashamed of the politics we have in Denmark in regard to foreign people. I think that relations between especially Muslims and other cultures have been quite dramatic in the last 4-5 years, and, and I think it is a shame that one party in Denmark has that kind of power.

Although she distances herself from her personal experiences of discrimination, Cecilia is aware of the exclusion she faces and that is implied also for Sam. In addition, both Sam and Cecilia's anxiety about racial discrimination can be seen, as she expresses her concerns about raising mixed children in a country where ethnic minorities face discrimination. When questioned about the children's future, she says:

I think that the biggest concern is for the girls, I mean if it continues to go down this road, it could be difficult for them. Hmm... (pause) and maybe if they find a future husband from a different country. Respect for other human beings until you know that person. That is something that I miss in society today.

Cecilia is worried about raising her children in an environment that excludes certain groups in the population. The historical experiences of exclusion and stigmatization of the *other* (Andreassen & Henningsen, 2011) directly affect these understandings to some extent. Contemplating the future, she references potential spouses for her daughters and their possible mixed marriages in a context of limited acceptance of visibly different persons. In some ways, Cecilia's situation, as the intimate partner of Sam, a person of Indian origin, a visible minority, and mother of mixed children can be characterised as "insider-outsider." These types of concerns were voiced by Padmini, but not by Shoma, who saw herself as raising her daughter to be a global citizen. Twine (2010) offers the concept of racial literacy in a British context and expands on parental strategies of countering racism through which mixed race children can develop knowledge and understanding about the processes of racism. Some of these strategies are relevant in the Danish and in the Canadian setting. The phenomenon of racial stereotyping and stigmatising are reminiscent of Cecilia's mother's fear of her Indian son-in-law, Sam, running away with her grandchildren in the early phase of her daughter's mixed marriage.

Despite negative experiences of othering, these participants still see the west as "home." Padmini stays in fairly close contact with her aging parents through Skype and WhatsApp. She keeps in occasional touch with a handful of members of her extended family too, who are in India but is not in touch with kin in North America, citing "family politics." Her ties with old neighbors and friends in India remain strong. Padmini is also aware of how irrevocably she has been changed by two seminal landmarks in her life: her relocation to the west, and her marriage to Peter:

By the time we spend one or two months in India, relax with my parents, meet...extended family, shop, travel, etc. I am usually ready to be home. I love India and have fond memories about life there but I like having my own space ... when in India, I miss the culturally eclectic personal life we lead.

In sum, we cannot generalize about the nature of transnational contacts on the basis of structural categories such as stage in the life course, or religion, or subjective dimensions such as the nature of relationships. The agency of the persons involved, the choices they make, and the interpretations they offer are far too important. There is intense and frequent transnational contact between Rajiv, who is a marriage migrant, and his extended family. His case demonstrates the intersection of ethnicity, class (upper middle), access to resources, life stage, position of the family members, and strength of extended family relationships across national borders. The baggage of power and privilege that Rajiv as an Indian man belonging to such a social position brings is infused with more egalitarian gender norms due to his marital relationship with a Danish spouse, whose status as a Danish citizen has opened doors

to him that would otherwise stay shut. This more egalitarian perspective, in turn, brings about greater awareness in him about practices around his family duties that then apply outside his marital relationship to his family, transnationally.

Padmini is also privileged in terms of her socio-economic status and access to resources. However, she immigrated for education; she is not a marriage migrant (Williams, 2010) and was not dependent upon Peter for her legal status. She has also been financially independent. Having carved a life for herself on her own terms, with Peter joining her a bit later as a partner in her journey, she has succeeded in offsetting the injustices of racial discrimination with an egalitarian marital relationship in which both search together for more inclusive spaces for their family, and by underscoring her legal and financial independence.

Rajiv uses Internet-based communications technologies to stay in touch with his immediate and extended family members, thus demonstrating his commitment to strengthening his relationships with significant people in his country of origin. His sustained ties with his parents mean that he is involved in their welfare and in family decision making processes. His priorities, commitments and efforts illustrate intersections between many variables: between his gender and life span position as the only son of elderly parents, his filial dutifulness stemming at least partially from his religious piety as a Hindu, his socioeconomic belonging as an upper middle-class person with no economic responsibility towards parents, except for emotional and moral duties. His transnational ties and travels to India have contributed to his sense of belonging to Denmark as well.

Padmini too uses technology to keep her ties with her parents intact. Due to her high level of education, and experiences of life, work and parenting in two cultural worlds, her parents, and more so her old friends and neighbors, involve her while making important decisions. The simultaneous connections and feeling of belonging to both countries that both, Rajiv and Padmini display, are representative of transnationalism (Betelsen et al., Kalra et al. 2005; Ozer et al., Raghuram & Sahoo, 2008; Singla & Schwartz, 2017; Vertovec 1997, 2000). However, Sam's limited transnational practices in relation to his country of origin illustrate different intersections in his parents' life trajectory between their socioeconomic situation, family position, and their choices. But his interconnections with extended family members in other countries is another form of transnationalism (Singla & Varma, 2019). In yet another form, Shoma's transnationalism extends beyond her country of origin and country of residence to embedded interconnections with many other countries that she visits frequently, and works in, for extended periods of time.

The dynamics of gender and race play out in the relationships of mixed couples in unique ways and may be articulated to a greater or lesser extent depending on the couple. Thus, while Padmini and Peter spoke about gendered dimensions of household work, and Padmini about racial discrimination, Shoma only noted in passing the distribution of household work at her home as being equitable. She did not highlight racialized experiences as much, referring to them fleetingly and occasionally, interpreting it all simply as stemming from ignorance, and choosing instead to underscore her and Ben's exciting transnational life together, similar to Rajiv in the Danish context.

Implications

One point that emerged is that the policies and laws of particular countries can either ease or complicate the lives of intermarried couples. Canada's official policy of multiculturalism offers more support for intermarriages and likely more space and freedom to speak openly about experiences of discrimination. But Denmark's insistence on both, homogeneity and egalitarianism means perhaps that those who migrate there probably cannot air their grievances around racism as much. A second point that emerges is that the well-being of intermarried couples is influenced by their ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status, as well as by other categories such as stage in the life course and career categories. Although there were overlaps in the narratives of these four participants, there were points of divergence too, deriving from differences in how experiences and situations were understood and interpreted. Lived experiences of gender roles, incidents of othering, interpretations of such experiences, stage in the life course, choices and quality of transnational experiences, and the availability of financial resources emerged as important variables.

From a methodological standpoint, studies such as this inform us that only through qualitative methods do we have a hope of understanding the specifics of the contextualized and subjective experiences of individuals, who live complicated and fascinating transnational lives both as members of diaspora groups and as individuals who have dared to cross racial boundaries in choosing their partners in life. This study suggests that the study of mixedness provides insights into psycho-sociocultural adaptation through cultural literacy and fluency, the dynamics of conflict and negotiation, and the understudied and unpredictable consequences that the arbitrary divisions of political borders and policies can impose upon human beings. It informs us about aspects of integration that are traditionally overlooked in psychology, such as ways of life, ways of thinking and life satisfaction. It suggests that mixedness offers us hope for cultural integration. At the same time, it is clear that disappointing practices such as cultural and racial prejudice and exclusion persist. Systematic hostility directed at particular individuals, couples, families, and groups can cause them profound psychological and social harm in the form of chronic stress and uncertainty. Eventually, hostility and its consequences dishearten human beings and hinder social cohesion. Insights gained from such studies can help health practitioners, counselors, policymakers, and researchers to understand the unique concerns that govern the lives of couples in mixed marriages. Such studies provide guidance on how the mental health and psychosocial well-being of couples in mixed marriages can be optimized.

References

- Andreassen, R. & Henningsen, A. F. (2011) *Menneske udstilling: Fremvisninger af eksotiske mennesker i zoologiske have og Tivoli* [Human Exhibition: Exhibitions of Exotic People in the Zoo and Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen]. Tiderne Skifter.
- Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjunction and difference in the global cultural economy. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7, 295-310. <http://doi.org/10.1177/026327690007002017>

- Aspinall, P., & Song, M. (2013). *Mixed race identities*. Palgrave Macmillan. <http://doi.org/10.1057/9781137318893>
- Bang Appel, H., & Singla, R. (2016). Mixed parentage: Negotiating identity in Denmark. In M-L. Seeberg, & E. M. Goździak (Eds.), *Contested childhoods: Growing up in migrancy: Migration, governance, identities* (pp. 139-157). Springer. IMISCOE Research Series. http://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-44610-3_8
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2014). *Distant love: Personal life in the global age*. Polity Press.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society*. Blackwell.
- Chaudhary, N. (2007). The family: Negotiating cultural values. In J. Valsiner & A. Rosa (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology* (pp. 524-539). Cambridge University Press. <http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611162.028>
- Charsley, K. (Ed.). (2012). *Transnational marriage: New perspectives from Europe and beyond*. Routledge. <http://doi.org/10.4324/9780203111772>
- De França, D. X., & Monteiro, M. B. (2013). Social norms and the expression of prejudice: The development of aversive racism in childhood. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 43, 263–271. <http://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.1965>
- Dufoix, S. (2008). *Diasporas*. University of California Press. <http://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520253599.001.0001>
- Dunger, F. (2010). *Making sense of intermarried identities*. International Development Studies, Roskilde University.
- Gilroy, P. (2003). The Black Atlantic as a counterculture of modernity. In J. E. Braziel & A. Mannur (Eds.), *Theorizing diaspora* (pp. 49-80). Blackwell Publishing.
- Hall, S. (2003). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J.E. Braziel & A. Mannur (Eds.), *Theorizing diaspora* (pp. 233-246). Blackwell Publishing.
- Kalra, V., Kaur, R., & Hutnyk, J. (2005). *Diaspora and hybridity*. Sage.
- Killian, K. (2013). *Interracial couples, intimacy & therapy: Crossing racial borders*. Columbia University Press.
- Levy, R., Ghisletta, P., Le Goff, J., Spini, D., & Widmer, E. (Eds.). (2005) *Towards an interdisciplinary perspective on the life course*. Elsevier.
- Livingston, G., & Brown, A. (2017, May 18). *Public views on intermarriage*. Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/05/18/2-public-views-on-intermarriage/>
- Loving v. Virginia* (1967), US 388 1.
- Mahtani, M. (2015). *Mixed race amnesia: Resisting the romanticization of multiraciality in Canada*. University of British Columbia Press.
- Øverland, G., Gurbiye, E., & Lie, B. (2014). *Nordic work with traumatised refugees: Do we really care?* Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Padilla, M.B., Hirsch, J.S., Munoz-Laboy, M., Sember, R., & Parker, R.G. (Eds.). (2007). *Love and globalization: Transformations of intimacy in the contemporary world*. Vanderbilt University Press.
- Parker, K., Horowitz, J.M., Morin, R., & Lopez, M.H. (2015, June 11). *Race and socialconnections- Friends, family and neighborhoods*. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/06/11/chapter-5-race-and-social-connections-friends-family-and-neighborhoods/#race-marriage-and-intermarriage>

- Phoenix, A. (2007). Claiming livable lives: Adult subjectification and narratives of "non-normative" childhood experiences. In J. Kofoed and D. Staunaes (Eds.), *Magtballader (Adjusting Reality)* (pp. 178-193). Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitetsforlag.
- Phoenix, A. (2011). Psychosocial intersections: Contextualizing the accounts of adults who grew up in visibly ethnically different households. In H. Lutz, M.T. Herrera Vivar, & L. Supik (Eds.), *Framing intersectionality: Debates on a multi-faceted concept in gender studies* (pp. 137-152). Ashgate.
- Poulsen, P. (2012). *På tværs og på trods: om ægteskabsmigration i Danmark* (On the contrary and despite: About marriage migration in Denmark). Frydenlund.
- Prashad, V. (2000). *The karma of brown folk*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Raghuram, P. & Sahoo, A. (2008). Thinking 'Indian diaspora' of our times. In P. Raghuram, A. Sahoo, B. Maharaj & D. Sanghna (Eds.), *Tracing an Indian diaspora* (pp. 1-28). Sage. <http://doi.org/10.4135/9788132100393.n1>
- Refsing, K. (1998). Gender identity and gender role patterns in cross-cultural marriages: The Japanese-Danish case. In R. Breger & R. Hill (Eds.), *Cross-cultural marriage: Identity and choice* (pp 193-208). Berg.
- Rodríguez-García, D., and Freedman, J. (2006). *Exploring the meaning of intermarriage. Love across cultures.* SIETAR Europa Magazine. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dan_Rodriguez-Garcia/publication/262972391_Exploring_the_Meaning_of_Intermarriage/links/0f31753975d5a3710d000000/Exploring-the-Meaning-of-Intermarriage.pdf.
- Rodríguez-García, D. (2015). Intermarriage and integration revisited: International experiences and cross-disciplinary approaches. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 662(1), 8-36. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0002716215601397>
- Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern society. Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1(1), 83-99. <http://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1991.0004>
- Sanghera, G. S., & Thapar-Björkert, S. (2008). Methodological issues: Gatekeepers and positionality in Bradford, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31(3), 543-562. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701491952>
- Schroedter, J.A., Rössel, J., & Datler, G. (2015). European identity in Switzerland: The role of intermarriage, and transnational social relations and experiences. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 662(1), 148-168. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0002716215595394>
- Shweder, R. (1991). *Thinking through cultures*. Harvard University Press.
- Singla, R. & Varma, A. (2019). Changing demographics and intimate relation patterns among Indian diaspora in Denmark. In S. Irudaya Rajan (Ed.), *India migration report - Diaspora in Europe* (pp. 279-243). Routledge.
- Singla, R. (2015). *Intermarriage and mixed parenting: Promoting mental health and wellbeing*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Singla, R. & Holm, D. (2012). Intermarried couples, mental health and psychosocial well-being: Negotiating mixedness in the Danish context of 'homogeneity.' *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*, 25(2), 151-165. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2012.674687>
- Skinner, A.L., & Hudac, C.M. (2017). "Yuck, you disgust me!" Affective bias against interracial couples. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 68, 68-77, <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2016.05.008>
- Song, M. (2017). *Multiracial parents: Mixed families, generational change, and the future of race*. New York University Press.
- Statistics Canada. (2017). <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm?MM=1>
- Statistics Denmark. (2019). <https://www.dst.dk/en>
- Todd, D. (2017, August 12). *Mixed unions: The ideal or brownwashing*. Vancouver Sun. <https://vancouver.sun.com/news/staff-blogs/mixed-unions-the-ideal-or-brownwashing>
- Tölölyan, K. (1999). The nation state and its others. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1(1), 3-8, <http://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1991.0008>
- Torngren, S. O. (2011): *Love ain't got no color?: Attitude toward interracial marriage in Sweden* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from Malmö University Pubs.
- Torngren, S. O., Irastorza, N. & Song, M. (2016). Toward building a conceptual framework on intermarriage. *Ethnicities*, 16(4), 497-520, <http://doi.org/10.1177/1468796816638402>
- Twine, F. W. (2010). *A white side of black Britain: Interracial intimacy and racial literacy*. Duke University Press.
- United States Census Bureau. (2018). <https://www.census.gov/topics/population.html>
- Valsiner, J. (2008). The social and cultural: Where do they meet? In Sugiman, T., Gergen, K.J., Wagner, T., & Yamada, Y. (Eds.), *Meaning in action: Constructions, narratives, and representations* (pp. 273-287). Springer
- Vertovec, S. (2010). *Transnationalism*. Routledge.
- Vertovec, S. (2000). *The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns*. Routledge.
- Vertovec, S. (1997). Three meanings of 'Diaspora': Exemplified among South Asian religions. *Diaspora*, 6 (3), 277- 299, <http://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1997.0010>
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press.
- Wang, W. (2012). *The rise of intermarriage*. Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/02/16/the-rise-of-intermarriage/>
- Williams, L. (2010). *Global marriage: Cross-border marriage migration in global context*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- World Population Review. (2020). <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/canada-population/>