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ENDOGAMY, HOMOPHILY, AND FAMILIAL INFLUENCE IN PARTNER SELECTION: A CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS IN BRITISH PAKISTANI CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The research paper explores the intergenerational partner choice among British Pakistanis in the United Kingdom. Using the homophily theory, the social exchange theory, and the push factor of third-party influence, the paper addresses the idea of how matrimonial preferences are maintained and changed in a diasporic environment. The study employs reflexive thematic analysis of qualitative information, which uncovers that first-generation parents still value endogamy, religious orientation and honour. Conversely, second-generation descendants mention education, compatibility of the lifestyle and personal preference more and more as valid criteria in choosing the partner. Gender mediates such negotiations: women are more controlled and placed as the holders of the culture, sons are more free. The paper develops an integrative theoretical hypothesis, which holds that the process of diasporic homophily develops into a process mediated by class and filtered by gender, as in the case of diasporic homophily, the redefinition of similarity in relation to kinship and the regulation of agency permissibility in families respectively. The paper therefore adds to the sociological study of migration and marriage by showing that partner selection in the diasporic community is not about the straightforward change of tradition to individual choice, but is rather a composite process due to the interplay of the influence of class, gender and exposure to transnationalism.

Keywords: *Endogamy, homophily, partner selection, Pakistani marriage norms, social exchange Theory, third-party influence, cultural continuity.*

Introduction

The Muslim community in Britain has increased significantly within the past few decades where Islam has become the biggest non-Christian religion. The census of 2021 showed that Muslims in England and Wales increased by 3.87 million (6.53 per cent) since 2011 and hence, the Muslim population in England and Wales has almost one-third of all population growth (Muslim Council of Britain [MCB], 2022; Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2023). The demographics of British Muslims are younger and rising up to be UK born, with a median age of 27 years as compared to the general population of 40 (MCB, 2024). Pakistanis are among the most established and largest diaspora groups in this wider Muslim community mostly located in major urban centres like Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, and London (Peach, 2006; ONS, 2023).

Pakistani migration started in 1950s when post-war Britain started to promote labour migrations by its former colonies (Charsley and Bolognani, 2017). The initial group of migrants was mostly men who had Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)

and Punjab origin; most of them originally planned to spend short durations of time there but ended up permanently settling in the United Kingdom in family reunified programs in the 1970s and 1980s (Ballard, 2008). In the years that followed, Pakistani people in Britain built strong ethnic enclaves and at the same time they negotiated their integration through employment, education, and politics (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). A defining feature of such community has been the continuation of arranged, endogamous marriage, and especially cousin marriages, which in the past have been used to sustain kinship ties and strengthen transnational connection to Pakistan (Shaw, 2001; Pande, 2014). These practices are however in an evolution state. A longitudinal study, born in Bradford project, reports a significant drop in consanguinity unions among British Pakistanis that dropped by 62 per cent and 46 per cent in the 2007,2010 and 2016,2019 respectively (Small et al., 2024). The second British born generations are more focused on the values of independence, education, and emotional compatibility in choosing a partner, yet the parental and community norms influence the situation considerably (Charsley and Bolognani, 2020). Among the influencing factors there is also gender: daughters are even more controlled, they are more commonly accused of necessity to take care of the honour of the family, sons are rather often granted independence (Mohammad, 2015; Van Zantvliet, 2014).

The paper examines the intergenerational and gender variation in choice of partners among the British Pakistanis. In particular, it explores (a) the ambitions of first generation parents in getting their children married (b) the choices and bargains of second generation offspring, and (c) the degree to which gender mediates these relationships.

The paper adds to the existing research on migration, ethnicity and family by redefining the concept of partner selection among British Pakistanis as a mixed marriage regime that is the result of intergenerational bargaining. It shows that classical models, which are homophily, social exchange, and third-party influence, are still applicable but reformulated in the diasporic setting in the fusion of gender and class. Basing its conclusions on intergenerational, gender-equal qualitative information, the study offers subtle details of the process of compatibility, education, and lifestyle preferences negotiation and the presence of long-term family expectations. The results show that British Pakistani marriage tradition is a hybrid model, which entails continuity with cultural assimilation, which depicts that agency and cultural continuity exist in a state of mutual coexistence and the changes in partner selection in a gradual, non-linear and gendered process.

The existing study builds on the literature of migration, ethnicity and family by reintroducing the concept of partner choice by British Pakistanis as a hybrid marriage regime that transpires by intergenerational bargain. It proves that classic frameworks, homophily, social exchange and third party influence still can play their role, yet it is redefined in the diasporic conditions with references to gender and class. According to the qualitative intergenerational and gender-balanced data, the research gives the specifics of the compatibility process, the level of education, and the choice of the lifestyle under the influence of long-term family norms. The findings indicate that the marriage practices of British Pakistani are a perfect compromise between cultural persistence and adaptive change indicating that the partner choice is a non-linear transition to the state of agency and cultural perpetuation is a long and nonlinear and gendered transition.

Literature Review

The trends of marriage between the South Asian Muslim communities in Britain have traditionally been dictated by endogamy, consanguinity and transnational marriages. In the 1950s and 1960s, the early Pakistani immigrants were mainly male labourers that were mostly rural born people of AJK and Punjab, relied on arranged marriages to their home region partners (Charsley and Bolognani, 2017; Ballard, 2008). These family structures strengthened kinship ties, village-based networks, and allowed migration of members of the extended family (Shaw, 2001). As a result, social groups imposed unofficial norms of entry

into the marriage market, which were based on compatibility based on the family heritage, religious beliefs, and cultural compatibility (Friedman, 2003).

As the policy on migration switched to the family reunification mode in the 1970s and 1980s, transnational marriages became a strategic tool in maintaining ties with Pakistan. Muttarak (2009) describes these kinds of unions as unions where one of the spouses is born or migrated to the UK before 16 years of age where the other partner migrated to the country after the age thus maintaining continuity of cultures and kinship abroad. Parental control was also strong and empirical studies have shown that so-called individualistic marital choices are often contextualized in the group norms about compatibility (Ballard, 1977; Barber, 2000).

Recent statistics, however, show that the number of consanguineous and cousin marriage among the British Pakistanis has gone down. A report by *The Born in Bradford* study revealed that consanguinity unions of 62 per cent between 2007 2010 had gone down to 46 per cent between 2016 and 2019 (Small et al., 2024). Similar country-level trends support the same tendency, which means that the young generations are significantly less likely to approve of cousin marriages (Vice, 2019). Beginning with increased education levels, exposures to liberalism, and changes in gender relations are seen as attributions to academic discourse (Charsley and Bolognani, 2020; Muttarak and Heath, 2010). However, cousin and transnational marriages survive and are often accompanied by keeping kinship capital intact, maintaining cultural tradition and easing migration (Charsley & Bolognani, 2013; Bisin and Verdier, 2011). Intermarriage rates remain low, reflecting the salience of religion and ethnicity as boundary markers.

Lucassen and Laarman (2009) note that migrant groups that adhere to minority religious beliefs which include Islam have some of the lowest levels of intermarriage in the European environment. The estimates of Pakistanis in the United Kingdom (early twenty-first century) of inter-ethnic marriage were between approximately 7 and 10 % and only slightly increasing trends (Muttarak and Heath, 2010). The theory that applies in this situation is the Segmented Assimilation Theory (Portes and Zhou, 1993): the British Pakistanis are very specific in acculturation, preserving their strong culture but gradually including parts of the British society. The discussion on multiculturalism by Modood (2007) further promotes cultural pluralism, in that families of Pakistani descent make it possible to maintain the transnational matrimonial traditions, at the same time becoming a part of the British civic society.

In the second generation, the marriage decisions are an amalgamation of cultural patterns inherited and self-grown ambitions. Empirical studies show that British-born Pakistanis are becoming more direct in terms of their education, career fit, and personal matching during the choice of partners despite the fact that they still face the pressure of having to meet the demands of their parents, which prefers the endogamy (Kalmijn, 2012; Schwartz, 2013). According to Shaw (2006), most young adults defended the idea of co-ethnic marriages by referring to the religious and cultural homogeneity since such marriages would protect the Islamic and family values. On the other hand, other people did not obey their parents, and instead promoted independence and emotional satisfaction (Charsley and Bolognani, 2020).

Women face more stringent constraints on marriage decision-making, which is usually considered a continuation of cultural integrity, than men, who have greater freedom in selecting a partner (Van Zantvliet, 2014; Mohammad, 2015). Gendered differences are supported by empirical research: Muttarak (2009) reported that among British-born female Pakistanis and Bangladeshi women, about two-thirds were married to co-ethnic partners from their country of origin. The signs of change are evident in recent literature, which suggests that younger generations are negotiating marriage with consent, agency, and deliberative frameworks (Sandhu & Barrett, 2020). Such a changing gendered subjectivity represents a subtle shift in the traditional marriage paradigm. The literature suggests that the practice of arranged and endogamous marriages is stable,

but is simultaneously experiencing generational change. Principles of first-generation continuity often conflict with second-generation aims of independence, as is the case among women, whose decisions remain comparatively limited.

Objective of the Study

The focus of this study is on the determinants of partner choices among British Pakistani Muslims in Britain. This study will explore how the partner choices of second-generation British Pakistanis are influenced by British culture and, at the same time, the extent to which they consider their parents' culture and values in spouse selection.

Theoretical Framework

Partner selection among British Pakistanis can be understood through the combined lens of Homophily Theory, Third-Party Influence Framework, and Economic and Social Exchange Theories. These frameworks provide complementary explanations for the persistence of endogamous marriage patterns within migrant communities.

Homophily Mechanism

The theory homophily (the tendency to associate with and form relationships with similar people) has been widely studied across disciplines such as sociology, economics, and political science (McPherson et al., 2001; Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Benhabib et al., 2010). Recent studies confirm that theory of homophily can be applied in marital decisions, especially in ethnically diverse cultures (Small et al., 2024). Homophily explains the causes of the popular intermarriage (marrying someone within the same ethnic and religious background) among British Pakistanis. Couples who have similar cultural norms, language, and religious beliefs are more compatible and accepted in society (Carol, 2016; Kretschmer et al., 2024). Culturally, similarity in spouse preferences is conditioned by internalized norms and values, and structurally by the chances of in-group interaction due to residential clustering, ethnic networks, and neighbourhood institutions (Kalmijn, 2012; Holland, 2015). Recent data indicate that endogamous marriages are more common among migrants who are part of dense ethnic networks, which strengthens cultural cohesion (Kretschmer et al., 2024).

Third-Party Influence: Family and Relatives.

The British Pakistanis expect parents and extended family to act as gatekeepers to the marriage decision-making process. Carol (2016) argues involvement of parents is a third-party mechanism that influence partner choice through normative pressures and arranged marriage. Women are especially susceptible to this effect, which is related to anxieties about cultural inheritance and family prestige (González-Ferrer, 2006; Small et al., 2024). Empirical research indicates that British Pakistani parents prefer intragroup marriages as a means of preserving cultural and religious purity (Carol, 2016; Kretschmer et al., 2024).

Economic and Social Exchange Views.

In addition to these sociological processes, Becker (1991) suggests an Economic Demographic Model as well as the Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1961) where marriage is a rational exchange of utilities and resources intended to maximize gain. People will not only look at their potential partner through the eyes of love but also try to see what this relationship will have to offer them. They do so for the sake of security, emotional support and a possible gain in a sense of mutual respect or social standing. According to Small et al. (2024), intermarriage between members of same ethnic/kinship groups in British Pakistani communities contributes more than just emotional and cultural harmony of the members of the group. It is also a useful form of social capital that strengthens family support networks and provides access to older, established networks of the community.

Gendered Dynamics

Marriage patterns are influenced by gender. The evidence suggests that marriage of women outside ethnic, cultural or religious groups is commonly interpreted not to be a marital affair but an assault on cultural continuity because the woman is perceived as the transmitter of family values to the

next generation (Kalmijn, 2006; Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2006). As a result, daughters are likely to experience more parental control and more pressure to marry within their ethnicity than sons do. Such differences aim to affirm gendered norms and guarantee trends towards endogamous marriage (Carol, 2016; Kretschmer et al., 2024). This study enhances current views of endogamy through the addition of Homophily Theory, Third-Party Influence, and Social Exchange Theory which presents a useful explanation of partner selection among British Pakistanis. It shows that homophily is not just the reproduction of ethnicity but a class-mediated, gender-fenced evaluative process in which cultural similarity is redefined through the lenses of education, occupation, lifestyle mobility and respectability. This kind of logic will structure the direction of preference (homophily), the goals of choice through parental gatekeeping and honour regimes (third-party influence) and the strategic negotiation of compatibility (exchange). Through time, mechanisms don't operate in order, they are simultaneous. The resulting model is hybrid. Instead of concentrating on autonomy or class mobility or emotional compatibility in, say, a physiotherapist, these are all acknowledged and sought simultaneously. However, crucially they are sought within the limits of what is legitimate and recognised as culturally appropriate. British-Pakistani marriages do not just typify a straightforward transition away from tradition towards individualism. Rather they involve a multi-layered process in which class, gender, and transnational exposure jointly shape how agency and cultural continuity go together.

Methodology

Study Design

This research adopted an interpretivist and constructivist approach because the interpretive paradigm views social reality through the lens of the constructive power of the cultural norms, family expectations, and agency (Creswell, 2014). I have explained in this research paper that, how second-generation British Pakistanis choose their partners, and what are the variations in (first generation) parental and (second generation) own choices in terms of partner selection. The theoretical approaches include those of homophily, social exchange, and third-party influence, and all these approaches help in asking the question to show how cultural and structural forces guide marriage practices within generations.

Locale and Population

The study was carried out with the population of British Pakistanis in the largest urban centres of the United Kingdom, namely, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, Leeds and Greater London. These cities have a high number of Pakistani-origin population where the traditional values collide with the social background of the Britons. Both first-generation immigrants and their second-generation descendants were also included in the study, which offered the opportunity to compare the changing marital norms and generational changes.

Sample

Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who could offer rich insights into partner selection practices (Robinson, 2014). The inclusion criteria encompassed:

First-generation immigrants (mothers and fathers) who migrated from Pakistan and were married within or outside their ethnic group.

Second-generation British Pakistanis who are of marriageable age or married and possess firsthand experience with parental involvement in marriage decisions.

A total of 15 participants took part in the study: seven first-generation parents (four mothers and three fathers) and eight second-generation individuals (four sons and four daughters). This balanced sample enabled the examination of intergenerational and gender differences in expectations for marital relationships.

A brief profile of the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: A Brief Profile of the Participants

Participant	Generation	Gender	Marital Status	Education	Current Status	Age (Years)	Notes
P1	1st	Male	Married	High School	Migrated from Mirpur (AJK), settled in Bradford	65	Advocates of cousin marriages, father of 4
P2	1st	Female	Married	BA	Homemaker, migrated in the 1980s	58	Strong emphasis on family honour
P3	1st	Male	Married	Intermediate	Taxi driver, London	60	Supports arranged transnational marriage
P4	1st	Female	Married	MSc	Teacher, Birmingham	55	Encourages cultural continuity through endogamy
P5	1st	Female	Married	BA	Migrated from Punjab	62	Strong religious orientation; opposes exogamy
P6	1st	Male	Married	BA	Shop owner, Manchester	59	Values the economic and kinship benefits of cousin marriage
P7	1st	Female	Married	MA	Homemaker, Leeds	57	Advocates intra-ethnic marriage for daughters
P8	2nd	Male	Married	MSc	Engineer, London	34	Married a co-ethnic British-born woman
P9	2nd	Female	Single	MA	University student, Manchester	27	Facing parental pressure for transnational marriage

Participant	Generation	Gender	Marital Status	Education	Current Status	Age (Years)	Notes
P10	2nd	Female	Married	BSc	Teacher, Birmingham	30	Married a cousin from Pakistan
P11	2nd	Male	Married	PhD	Lecturer, London	33	Married a White British partner
P12	2nd	Female	Engaged	MBA	Works in finance, Leeds	29	Engaged to a British-born co-ethnic partner
P13	2nd	Male	Single	BA	Call Centre employee, Bradford	25	Prefers partner of own choice; resisting pressure
P14	2nd	Male	Married	LLB	Lawyer, Birmingham	31	Married within the kin group in Pakistan
P15	2nd	Female	Married	MSc	Doctor, Manchester	32	Married a British-born co-ethnic; negotiated autonomy

Source: In-depth interviews with participants

The sample represented a broad spectrum of opinions that was influenced by the generation, gender, education, and marital experience. To the first-generation parents marriage used to be somehow related to keeping of cultural identity and performance of religious duty. They considered it as a shared duty that guaranteed the survival of family traditions and social decency. The second generation, nevertheless, was more individualistic in their approach to marriage, they wanted to find an emotional bond, shared values, and mutual education. Nonetheless, despite demonstrating the need to be independent, majority recognised the value of family honour and parental consent in their decision making. The difference in genders was notable. Daughters in my sample narrated that their families/parents put restrictions on them to adhere to maintain modesty, reputation, and culture. Sons, in their turn, reported having more space to bargain their choices, and in many cases, they find a compromise between the family requirements and own interests. These differences emphasized the contact between cultural continuity, independence, and gender roles to create the dynamics of cross-generational partner selection.

Data Collection

Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted between 2024 and 2025 to collect data. Demographic information (age, education, marital status, and migration background) was first gathered using the interview guide. Then I investigated focal themes, such as parental dreams, kinship pressure, independence and bargaining of cultural demands. The selection of the participants was based on community organisations, personal network, and snowball referrals. The interviews were done in either English, Urdu or Punjabi, depending on the choice of the participant. All sessions were tape-recorded with permission and were complemented by field notes which represented the context and non-verbal communication. The interviews were conducted in comfortable and convenient locations like homes, community centers and online platforms.

In this research, I am hybrid in positionality. Being a South Asian Muslim scholar who is aware of cultural codes concerning honour, kinship, and gendered expectations, I hold an insider status that gives me a chance to interpret cultural codes and be understanding of the situation. Nevertheless, I still am a foreigner to these particular family networks, kinship structures, histories of migration, and generational stages of the British Pakistani community under study. This dual stance gives me cultural proximity and analytic distance so that I able to interpret critically without losing themselves into lineage. The reflexive position of this paper thus admits the fact that the process of meanings making is co-constitutive and that the combination of partial insider knowledge together with structural outsider location inform my sociological interpretation of these stories.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was used to analyse data based on the six-step method of Braun and Clarke (2006). Transcripts were read over and over again, coded and synthesised into larger thematic categories. The first codes parental pressure, family honour, compatibility, religiosity, cousin marriage, and love marriage were sorted into general themes of cultural continuity, autonomy, exchange and gendered constraints.

Theoretical knowledge used in the interpretation was the Homophily Theory (McPherson et al., 2001) that describes the tendency towards similarity in culture, language, and religion in order to provide social acceptance and stability. Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1961; Becker, 1991) is the depiction of the balancing of emotional compatibility with financial and social capital by the participants.

Third-Party Influence Framework (Carol, 2016) which highlights the inclusion of parents and kin in the decision-making process and the importance of izzat (family honour) in decisions.

Gender was a cross-cutting analytic category: daughters said that they were regularly monitored and their morality closely controlled, whereas sons said they had more agency to go against the parental authority. These stories were also placed in larger power, kinship and cultural reproduction structures through the discourse analysis by Foucault. The triangulation between generations and genders showed a diversion of continuation and change in the sense that the first-generation parents saw endogamy as the protection of identity and religion, whereas the second generation wanted to be more autonomous within the negotiable limits of family honour.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted according to the current ethics (Hammersley, 2015). All the participants gave informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and their right to withdraw. To keep the privacy, pseudonyms were employed, and recognizable information was taken out. There was the understanding of the participants as co-constructors of meaning and interviews were carried out with cultural sensitivity particularly when bringing issues of marriage, honour and gender. To maintain the cultural integrity, cross-checks on translations were done by bilingual experts.

Cross-comparisons of the sources and theoretical triangulation using the frameworks of Homophily, Third-Party Influence, and Social Exchange

Theory ensured the credibility (Creswell, 2014; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), combined with Foucault's discourse analysis, was used to interpret participants' narratives. This approach enabled me to capture how individual accounts of partner selection were embedded in broader cultural discourses of kinship, religion, and honour. Four major themes emerged: (1) Parental aspirations for cultural continuity, (2) Negotiating autonomy and personal preference, (3) Marriage as exchange and security, and (4) Gendered constraints in partner selection.

Theme 1: Parental Aspirations for Cultural Continuity

First-generation parents placed great emphasis on maintaining cultural traditions and family honour through their marital choices. Their stories underscored how marriage was not merely about two individuals but also about upholding kinship ties, religious identity, and community cohesion. Two sub-themes arose: endogamy as a means of cultural preservation and religion as a boundary marker.

Table 2: Thematic Analysis of Theme 1 – Parental Aspirations for Cultural Continuity

Theme	Sub-theme	Illustrative Quotes	Theoretical / Empirical Link
Parental Aspirations for Cultural Continuity	**A. Endogamy as cultural preservation**	*"In our community, cousin marriage is not just tradition, it is a responsibility. When children marry outside, families drift apart, and our values get lost."* (P1, First-Generation Father, Bradford)	Endogamous unions preserve kinship ties and strengthen cultural continuity within diasporic communities (Shaw, 2001; Carol, 2016).
	B. Religion as boundary marker	*"Even if my daughter is educated, she must marry a Muslim. Otherwise, our whole identity is questioned."* (P5, First-Generation Mother, Manchester)	Religiosity is a strong predictor of low intermarriage and a central boundary for group identity (Lucassen & Laarman, 2009).

Thematic Explanation and participant's reflection

The table demonstrates that first-generation parents perceive marriage as a collective responsibility, essential for preserving both kinship structures and religious values. Sub-theme A emphasizes cousin and intra-ethnic marriage as a mechanism for keeping families connected and preventing cultural dilution. Sub-theme B shows that religion functions as a non-negotiable boundary, reinforcing the notion that marrying outside the faith threatens collective identity. Together, these sub-themes illustrate how homophily Theory (McPherson et al., 2001) operates in practice: parents prefer culturally and religiously similar spouses for their children, framing it as both a moral duty and a cultural survival strategy. Parental aspirations for cultural continuity reveal how the first generation exerts normative control over marriage to ensure the transmission of cultural and religious values. These expectations set the stage for intergenerational tensions, as second-generation participants increasingly seek autonomy in partner selection.

Theme 2: Negotiating Autonomy and Personal Preference

For many second-generation participants, partner selection was not solely a matter of parental decision-making but a negotiation between personal desires and cultural obligations. While they recognized the importance of family honour, their narratives highlighted a shift toward individual agency and compatibility. Two sub-

themes emerged: autonomy versus obligation and compatibility through education and lifestyle.

Table 3: Thematic Analysis of Theme 2

Negotiating Autonomy and Personal Preference

Theme	Sub-theme	Illustrative Quotes	Theoretical / Empirical Link
Negotiating Autonomy and Personal Preference	**A. Autonomy versus obligation**	*"I wanted to marry someone I met at university, but my parents insisted I look at proposals from Pakistan."* (P9, Second-Generation Daughter, Manchester)	Younger generations increasingly emphasize personal agency, but remain bound by parental authority (Charsley & Bolognani, 2020).
	B. Compatibility through education and lifestyle	*"For me, love and education matter more than background. I wanted someone with similar career goals."* (P13, Second-Generation Son, Bradford)	Education and professional alignment are modern criteria in partner selection, complementing traditional family-based considerations (Kalmijn, 2012).

Explanation of Table 3

Theme 2 illustrates the bargaining of second-generation people regarding the choice of the independent partner, thus, reconciling the agency with the parental desires. This may be compared with the Theory of structuration suggested by Giddens (1984), according to which the agents not only act in the social world but also challenge structures and, in this regard, is similar to Bhabha (1994), who believes that a partner choice is a synthesis between cultural continuity and agency. Nowadays, as per the research, youths are now tactical in selecting their partners, and compatibility, in particular, educational and lifestyle compatibility, are one of them in a bid to win the consent of their parents (Wiik, 2025; Mood, 2025). All these results suggest that compatibility criteria mediate between personal preferences and social standards. Class and education are viewed as socially valid pointers of suitability, which enable second-generation actors to pick self-selected partners as both modern and culturally suitable (Hirschl, 2024; Uunk, 2024). This two-sided position is made possible to create an identity that will satisfy the progressive desires as well as the traditional needs. Nevertheless, negotiations are gendered: women are more likely to have more restrictions and thus have to precondition their choices by education and respectability to explain them, whereas men tend to use fewer arguments to explain their personal preferences (Qvist, 2023; UPDATE: Ahmadi, 2022). Gender and social expectations intersect with each other as differences in the relative weight of these criteria may indicate. Partner selection negotiations are also influenced by migration policies since spousal visa policies and enforcement regimes restrict the opportunities and motivations to seek legally safe unions (Bloemraad, 2021; Charsley and Benson, 2022). These policy systems are exogenous variables that influence the strategic calculus of the potential partners. The case of ethnographic work relating to women of a mixed Afghani-Canadian origin reveals that young people directly mention education and shared life plans as a diplomatic tool in between autonomy and cultural responsibility (Ahmadi, 2022). It is through these narratives that the performative nature of partner choice is brought out as an activity of cultural capital mobilization in the bargaining process. On the one hand, all these findings confirm the conclusion that there is no absolute tradition of partnering choice, and there is no absolute individualism; on the other hand, it is a hybrid practice, based on the class, gender, and migration policy.

Theme 3: Marriage as Exchange and Security

Marriage was not only narrated as a union between two individuals but also as an exchange of resources and support that strengthened kinship networks and ensured long-term stability. For many participants, particularly first-generation parents, marriage represented both economic advantage and symbolic reassurance within the community. Two sub-themes emerged: economic and social capital and emotional and symbolic security.

Table 4: Thematic Analysis of Theme 3

Marriage as Exchange and Security

Theme	Sub-theme	Illustrative Quotes	Theoretical / Empirical Link
Marriage as Exchange and Security	**A. Economic and social capital**	*"If my son marries a cousin from Pakistan, both families will help each other. That support is not guaranteed if he marries outside."* (P6, First-Generation Father, Manchester)	Marriage functions as an exchange of economic and social resources, consistent with the economic-demographic framework (Becker, 1991).
	B. Emotional and symbolic security	*"When I married within my family, it was easier. Everyone supported us, and I felt secure."* (P10, Second-Generation Daughter, Birmingham)	Marriage provides symbolic legitimacy and reinforces family solidarity, maintaining cohesion in diasporic contexts (Bisin & Verdier, 2011).

Thematic Explanation and Participants' Reflection

The results have revealed that the respondents looked at marriage as an arrangement and symbolism at the same time. Sub-theme A is a precursor of elements of transaction in marriage where economic commodities, kinship, and social capital are traded to provide stability and sustenance through time. This finding is consistent with social exchange Theory that is said to be a process in which people consider costs and benefits in order to attain favorable results (Homans, 1961; Becker, 1991). Sub-theme B emphasizes the symbolic dimension and demonstrates that marriages with family support offer emotional stability, legitimacy, and social recognition, which reduce the conflict and enhance the unity in the family. The recent studies have identified that, concerning migration and transnationalism, the institution of marriage is deeply embedded within the family and is frequently sold as a communal way of attaining wellbeing and status (Charsley & Benson, 2022; Wiik, 2025).

The third theme thus explains that marriage is a complex institution that is multi-layered and can meet the economic, social, and emotional issues. The symbolism and exchange elements have been losing their significance in relation to the younger participants who tend to think more about love, compatibility, and personal choice but nonetheless, they remain very important, at least to the first-generation parents who consider marriage as a family measure and as a means to maintain the kinship. They are in line with the larger literature, indicating that, even though the marriage choice is changing towards individualization, marriage is a postmodern institution in which tradition and modernity overlap (Kalmijn, 2023; Mood, 2025).

Theme 4: Gendered Constraints in Partner Selection

Gender emerged as a cross-cutting dimension that shaped how marriage negotiations unfolded across generations. While both sons and daughters faced parental expectations, daughters were subject to stricter surveillance, reduced autonomy, and heightened responsibility for family honour. By contrast, sons described greater flexibility and negotiation space. Two sub-themes were evident:

daughters as cultural custodians and differential freedom for sons.

Table 5: Thematic Analysis of Theme 4 – Gendered Constraints in Partner Selection

Theme	Sub-theme	Illustrative Quotes	Theoretical / Empirical Link
Gendered Constraints in Partner Selection	**A. Daughters as cultural custodians**	*"My brother can refuse a proposal, but I cannot. If I say no, my parents say I am bringing shame."* (P12, Second-Generation Daughter, Leeds)	South Asian women are disproportionately burdened with preserving cultural norms and family honour (Van Zantvliet, 2014; Mohammad, 2015).
	B. Differential freedom for sons	*"My parents wanted me to marry from Pakistan, but when I insisted, they accepted my British-born partner."* (P11, Second-Generation Son, London)	Male children are often granted more autonomy in marital choices, reflecting entrenched gendered double standards (Carol, 2016; González-Ferrer, 2006).

Explanation of Table 5

Gender is a pervasive factor in the way generations tend to define marriage agreements. However, even though both sons and daughters are exposed to parental pressures, the daughters have less autonomy, fewer expectations and greater control on family honour (izzat). Sons, in their turn, enjoy more freedom and a larger scope of negotiation, which reflects gender imbalances on a regular basis.

The role of transitioning cultural continuity always falls on daughters who are expected to uphold family honour by epitomizing the parents. This influence can be seen as the concept of Foucault (1977) of disciplinary power where structures of power like surveillance and social expectations are internalized and, through this process, the agency within women is developed. The new study confirms the fact that the daughters of diasporic South Asians continue to experience a strong pressure to respect cultural and moral boundaries, and the protest is characterized as dishonourable (Sharma and Singh, 2022; Zavos, 2023). Nonetheless, research also shows that not every one of them is equally restrictive; the parental education and the exposure to classes determine the extent of control. The example of Daraz et al. (2023) demonstrates that more educated families in Pakistan had daughters who rated the stronger influence in the partner-choice, yet final decisions were still frequently subject to control. For example, Daraz et al. (2023) show that better-educated families in Pakistan had daughters who reported greater influence in partner selection, but final decisions still often fell under parental scrutiny. Similarly, Jan and Azeem (2024) found that in rural settings, families with lower social status (due to honor issues) exert harsher control over daughters' education and marriage than wealthier or better-educated families (who have greater freedom). It highlights the role of class and parental education as a censor whereby the expectations of patriarchy are either enforced or somewhat diluted. Sons note that they have greater flexibility in choosing partners, and that parents are more willing to compromise when sons demand what they want. Such a two-sided act of discrimination is an example of how transnational families are institutionalized in a gendered hierarchy (Carlo, 2016;González-Ferreira, 2006). Notably, the literature suggests that it is also a privilege, with parental exposure categorized and influenced. According to Charsley and Benson (2022), the policies and pressures of migration tend to reinforce the gendered burden on daughters, while more mobile sons can claim greater choice. Similar observations are made by Wiik (2025): parental exposure to education and norms of the host country occasionally softens these hierarchies but hardly ever eradicates them.

As further demonstrated by Lund (2024), even the most educated daughters of immigrants in Norway still had to face cultural and family norms about the role of a wife, and parents exploited their education and family position to seek independence. In this way, the larger social structure, alongside the importance of class and education, maintains the comparative advantage of sons.

Theme 4 reveals that gender is still an important factor in the negotiation of marriage, where daughters have more restrictions and sons have more bargaining room. Still, these asymmetries are stratified by class, parental education, and exposure: daughters of highly educated (or middle-class) parents tend to negotiate more freedom than daughters of less educated (or working-class) parents, but their freedom is again constrained in terms of honor (Daraz et al.,2023; Jan & Azeem, 2024; Lund, 2024). This implies that patriarchal authority is not absolute but prismed through social class and cultural capital. In line with current feminist research, these results explain how gendered dominance is directly imposed through parental directives and indirectly through unequal exchanges of freedom, which generate asymmetry despite the proliferation of discourses of love, compatibility, and choice at the personal level (Kalmijn, 2023; Mood, 2025).

Discussion

The discussion takes a composite analytical framework in which the Homophily, Third-Party Influence, and Social Exchange theories are integrated to help in the interpretation of the empirical evidence. On the one hand, these models help to explain the stability and generation change of endogamous preferences and the aftermath of parental gate-keeping and the rationale of marriage choices as a rational estimate of social capital and emotional satisfaction.

According to the empirical evidence, the contemporary community of British Pakistani still resides in the logics of kinship, religion, and honour that have existed long before. However, these structures are increasingly challenged and transformed in one generation after another. As much as marriage has remained a traditional reproduction method in family, it has also been an arranged stage whereby individual agent, repositioning of classes and transnational exposure produce new modes of choice and compatibility.

One prominent theme of this study is the continuity of homophily through endogamy. First-generation parents viewed endogamous and religiously restrictive marriages as necessary tools to preserve cultural identity and community cohesion, which is also consistent with homophily Theory (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001; Carol, 2016). Past research has documented that migration to Europe by Pakistanis and Bangladeshis has one of the highest rates of intra-ethnic marriages (Voas & Fleischmann, 2019; Cebolla, Gonzalo, and Ferrer, 2022). Nevertheless, this paper narrows these generalizations by showing that homophily is becoming more stratified by class and educational background: families integrated into British institutions tend to emphasize education and lifestyle as additional aspects of similarity. The observation supports the recent claims that education is becoming a new basis of homogamy, sometimes even replacing kinship as the most common criterion (Kalmijn & van Tubergen, 2020).

Marriage is also understood as an exchange in which kinship duties are bundled and some security is provided, thus capturing rationalist understandings in social exchange Theory (Becker, 1991; Homans, 1961). However, these logics are not consistent as demonstrated in other works regarding transnational families (Charsley, Benson, and van Hear, 2022; Gallo, 2023). In families where transactional advantages are emphasised, younger interviewees increasingly emphasise emotional reassurance and personal fit. This duality suggests the emergence of hybrid forms in which affective values coexist with transactional rationalities.

Asymmetries in the negotiation process were also identified due to the gender dynamics. Daughters were often placed in the role of defenders of the culture and had very little ability to challenge their parents, whereas sons had more options. This observation is consistent with third-party influence

models, which emphasize the gatekeeping authority of parents and kin (Carol, 2016; Ghalambor Dezfouli & Shaw, 2021). In line with feminist scholarship (Mohammad, 2015; Bolognani, 2021), women are disproportionately assigned the task of protecting cultural boundaries. Nevertheless, variation is also observed in the study: girls in middle-class, educated families can negotiate greater freedom, whereas girls in less educated, working-class families are more likely to be controlled (Daraz et al., 2023;Lund, 2024). This evidence demonstrates that patriarchal regulation is not unitary but is moderated by class and transnational policy (Charsley & Benson, 2022).

The evidence suggests a hybrid mode of marriage among British Pakistanis, one that is intertwined with new forms of individualism. Homophily, exchange, and third-party influence are also central, but are now joined by the ideas of compatibility based on education, lifestyle, and emotional compatibility. Though intergenerational change suggests a slow transformation, gendered differences continue to bind women's agency. These trends echo Foucault's (1977) idea of disciplinary practices, in which authority functions not just to coerce people outwardly, but also to internalize its effects through internalized duties of honour, especially in the case of daughters.

These results directly answer the study's main research questions: how British Pakistani families negotiate partner selection across generations, and what roles gender, class, and transnational exposure play in these negotiations. As discussed, even though first-generation parents still prioritize the triad of kinship, religion, and honour, younger generations are increasingly focused on compatibility, education, and lifestyle. The existence of gendered imbalances also highlights that women's agency is limited by patriarchal norms, even though it is formulated in different ways according to social classes. These remarks affirm that the choice of partners in the diaspora is not a straightforward story of tradition giving way to individualism, but rather one of hybridization in which conflicting logics coexist and interrelate.

These findings also intersect with the UK's debates on multicultural integration. As scholars such as Modood (2007) and Phillips & Dustin (2004) argue, marriage migration and family practices among British Muslims are crucial arenas where state policy and cultural autonomy meet. The persistence of arranged or endogamous unions thus reflects negotiation rather than resistance within the multicultural framework.

Conclusion

In this paper, the issue of matrimonial negotiations in the British Pakistani community has been explored as a complex issue, where all the traditional values are preserved and restructured with the help of the intergenerational discourse, education development and socio-economic mobility. The results affirm that marriage is an institution that is still primarily about kinship, religion, and honour although it is now being informed by new values of compatibility, lifestyle, and educational attainment. As an endogamy, it still functions as an effective homophily force which replicates social unity based on common language, religion, and community. Nevertheless, similarity has been re-defined by the power of the British institutions and class mobility, where education and job status have become new references to cultural and marital similarity.

Simultaneously, the approach to marriage as a hybrid is a manifestation of collective obligation and personal agency coexistence. Although, first-generation parents still regard marriage as the way of maintaining the capital of kinship and transnational connections, young generations tactically redefine it as a sphere of emotional satisfaction and bargaining freedom. Endemic gender inequalities are still present because daughters still carry the symbolic weight of honour, and their freedom is limited by their class and the education levels of their parents, but sons have more of it. It is an uneven agency that reflects the reassertion of patriarchal norms instead of their deconstruction, which are adjusting to new social and transnational circumstances.

In general, the work questions the linear narratives of modernization which presuppose that tradition is being eroded by the burden of individualism.

Rather, it is a manifestation of new hybrid forms which combine exchange and affection, kinship duty and individual desire. This adds to theoretical insights about family change in the diasporic setting by demonstrating how homophily, third-personal influence, exchange rationalities intertwine with class, gender and transnational exposure to create a dynamic, layered approach to selecting their partners amongst British Pakistanis. Ideally, this research enhances the current theories of endogamy through the establishment of the mediation of class and gender in endogamy in diasporic contexts. Empirically, it adds to the few qualitative data on British Pakistani partner selection with the emphasis on hybridization as a specific type of cultural negotiation. In conceptual terms, it develops a combined model between the persistence of culture and the social adaptation in transnational conditions.

The article has more generalized implications on integration and multiculturalism debates. It points at the fact that it is possible to have adaptation and continuity (in order to imply that integration cannot be perceived as the culture assimilation) and is the negotiated process inherent in all the day-to-day family practices. Further studies are needed to understand these negotiations within other diasporic and religious groups with increased attention to the interaction of class mobility and gender relations with state policy to redefine the moral economies of marriage and belonging in the modern Europe.

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