

# **British Bangladeshi Muslim Women's In-Law Relationships: A Narrative Analysis**

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## ABSTRACT

Despite being a major feature of everyday life, research on in-law relationships has received relatively scant attention in comparison to other close relationships. In-law relationships have mostly been portrayed negatively in popular culture, influencing and reflecting the pervading negative attitudes held by wider society. This has provided a narrow and restrictive view of affinal relationships. In-law relationships are found across the globe, and literature suggests that culture and its underlying values play a major role in shaping the nature and dynamics of such relationships. However, the majority of research has been dominated by the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law dyad, with little attention to the wider context.

Using a post-colonial feminist framework and narrative analysis, the current research documents the stories of 10 British Bangladeshi Muslim women and their subjective experiences of in-law relationships. The research highlights the subtle and nuanced way they navigate in-law relationships and exercise their agency. It also demonstrates how intersecting markers of difference impact experiences of agency and the shaping of their identity.

The research highlights four major themes from the analysis: (1) “It’s a family marriage” (2) Rising tensions (3) Tug of war – the role of husband and (4) Developing a survivor’s identity. A description of these themes and related subthemes are discussed.

The findings of the present study challenge Eurocentric models of feminism and demonstrate the diversity of women’s experiences and identities. They also reveal how gender intersects with other markers of identity that shape the participants’ social realities. They also point to the urgency of highlighting the role of the wider family in the perpetration of abuse against women. The research discusses further implications of findings for academics, clinicians, policy, and the wider community, and recommends suggestions for future research.

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## **Use of Terminologies**

### ***South Asian***

The term 'South Asian' can be problematic as a label and pose challenges for international readers when they are carrying out literature searches and generalising findings. For example, the term Asian in the United States refers to those of South-East Asian heritage, individuals originating (or descendants of those who originated) from countries such as Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia and the Philippines, whereas in the UK South Asians are identified as those having cultural origins in the Indian subcontinent, in countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal and Bhutan (Bhopal, 2007; Office for National Statistics, 2016). In addition, a collective term implies homogeneity and ignores the high demographic variability due to migration histories, languages and religions (Anand and Cochrane, 2005). The 'catch-all' term may, in fact, be used to perpetuate racial stereotyping and limit understanding of issues affecting the different communities. The current research will draw upon studies conducted on South Asians, whilst acknowledging that considerable heterogeneity exists among and within minority groups which include many distinct subgroups such as Pakistani-Mirpur, Indian-Gujrati, Indian-Punjabi, etc. (Anand & Cochrane, 2005). The term 'South Asian' will be utilised, with caution, as the preferred terminology for this thesis, with the exception of those studies where all participants belong to the same subgroup, at which point the sub-group will be named.

### ***Western and Non-Western***

It is recognised that the use of dichotomies (Western/non-Western, East/West, first world/third world, developed/developing, Global North/Global South) is arbitrary and that there are potential pitfalls in applying this terminology in research, such as the risk associated with essentialising different communities. However, in the absence of a lack of agreed terms, to mark different nations I utilise the terms 'Western' and 'non-Western' to remain consistent with the conceptual frameworks to which I refer in the current research. The term 'Western' will be used to refer to privileged members of affluent nations in Western Europe and North America, and the term 'non-Western' will be used to reference people who are located in, have migratory roots in, or are descendants of those who have migrated from Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia.

## REFLEXIVE PREFACE

*‘The scientist does not randomly choose a specific discipline or specialty but is drawn to a particular field by a complex of subjective experiences and encounters, many of which unfold far from the laboratory and rarefied atmosphere’ (Abram, 1996, p.30).*

The current research adopts a qualitative, social constructionist and phenomenologically aligned approach (Moustakas, 1990, p.9). Heuristic inquiry, derived from the Greek word, *heuriskein*, meaning ‘to discover or to find’, seeks to illuminate the personal experience and insights of the researcher through investigating a particular phenomenon and the experience of others who also experience the same phenomenon.

Although later developed as a method of research, Douglass and Moustakas (1985) initially suggested that heuristic inquiry offers an attitude to approaching the research but does not prescribe a methodology, and it is this attitude that underpins the tone of the research, preserving narrative as the main method of investigating the topic in question. Hiles (2002) saw that both heuristic and narrative inquiry were particularly relevant in researching authentic accounts of human experience, and summarised the research phases within a heuristic inquiry framework (Hiles, 2001). This study will adopt this model and outline how the heuristic approach was used to inform the research (see Appendix 1, p257).

The guiding assumptions of the heuristic inquiry framework are that:

- the researcher is present throughout the process to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, growing in self-awareness and self-knowledge;
- the researcher has personal experience and intense interest in the phenomenon under study;
- understanding of the phenomenon is a result of the combination of experiences; this includes the use of self of the researcher, and participants are like co-researchers;
- what emerges from the inquiry is a process of discovery of an ‘*inner knowing*’ (Moustakas, 1990) and what Polanyi (1966, 1983) called ‘*tacit knowing*’, tapping into those aspects of knowledge, like intuition, gut instinct and hunches that are difficult to convey in language.

One of the first tasks of heuristic inquiry is to make transparent the researcher’s position in relation to the research process. Reflexivity is also considered a hallmark of feminist research

and requires reflection of a researcher's positioning and perspectives that inform their study (Clarke & Braun, 2019). In setting the scene for the current research, I would like to declare my own situatedness. I am motivated by my professional and personal experiences, and it is here that I disclose my personal interests, values and goals for the research topic under investigation, as these inevitably shape the research. I recognise that the research may have been conducted differently by a different researcher. A feature of good research practice is for researchers to consider their own positioning within the research process through regular structured and critical reflection (Fahie, 2014). I aim to adopt this stance by providing a reflexive commentary throughout the thesis.

I grew up in East London with a hybrid cultural identity; I was born and raised in Britain, in a Bangladeshi family. I have a vested interest in the Bangladeshi community. A major feature of my career roles as a mental health practitioner and community development worker has involved raising awareness of mental health difficulties and trying to improve access to psychological therapies for the Bangladeshi community. Building trust in relationships in therapeutic settings and encouraging and engaging in dialogue around mental health with the Bangladeshi community are an integral part of my being, both in the personal and professional domain.

My personal interest in the Bangladeshi family structure pre-dates my role as a trainee counselling psychologist. I have previously conducted research on Bangladeshi families as part of my undergraduate psychology degree. For some time I thought this was the moment when my interest in families, and the Bangladeshi culture, in particular, was born. I remember being asked, as a young child in primary school, to draw a picture of my family. My drawing was notable because, whilst my peers' drawings consisted of their parents and siblings, my drawing consisted of family members with whom I didn't necessarily live but with whom I grew up; it included my grandparents, uncles, aunts, and their spouses.

My earliest memory of being exposed to in-law relations and dynamics was witnessing the marriage of a relative as a young child. I remember the tears and loss experienced by her, my family and me on her wedding day as she left our family to move into another. I didn't question this move; it was part of the experience I was exposed to when I attended Bangladeshi weddings. What I didn't understand was how the relationship changed and how she changed. I was both confused and curious about her new identity, the cultural customs surrounding her duties within her new family, and her calling her new parents-in-law '*amma*' (mum) and '*abba*'

(dad), just as she called her biological parents. I remember finding it difficult hearing from others about some of her difficult experiences with her in-laws and, looking back, I find it interesting that she was unable to articulate these experiences herself.

While there were moments when I felt rebellious and angered by some of the customs, I felt there was little point in interrogating or challenging these norms. I accepted them as part of a Bangladeshi woman's life. A common Sylheti (the most commonly spoken dialect of Bengali in London) phrase I used to hear amongst groups of women following the ending of a marriage or a woman having to move out of her in-laws' house was '*Beti khaito farse na*', loosely translated as 'she was not able to handle it' (i.e., living with her in-laws). For a long time, I came to believe that a Bangladeshi woman's worth was measured by her ability to maintain and survive living with in-laws, and in not doing so, she became the target of blame, regardless of her personal circumstances.

As I grew up, questions and comments about Bangladeshi culture came from my white British colleagues and peers – 'why do the women look down and so sad on their wedding day?', 'why do women in your culture cry so much on their wedding day, as though it's someone's funeral?' I felt inadequate to answer them, especially as I felt I could not move beyond saying, 'it's just part of my culture'. Over time, I felt a compelling need to answer these questions explicitly, and curiosity grew in me with regard to a Bangladeshi woman's identity. I was challenged when talking about my research topic with my white British colleagues. Their questions implied that the focus of my inquiry was not even worthy of further exploration – 'but doesn't everyone have problems with in-laws?' and 'if people have problems they can always move out'. Their responses suggested that in-law relations are generally problematic, and that this was a universal issue. But the idea of moving out sat uncomfortably with me. The initial defensive feelings only impelled me further to deconstruct what I felt was taken-for-granted-knowledge, and it was these very conversations that informed my research interests. I felt both stuck and also determined to explore these cultural differences in ideas, beliefs and attitudes to common relationships. The main demarcation, I noticed, between White British and Bangladeshi culture in the current zeitgeist was that it was culturally normal to live away from in-laws for the former, whereas for the latter, it was customary and expected for women to move into their husband's family home after marriage.

My interest relating to in-law relationships extended to my professional work settings too. Since 2008, I have worked in several psychological services, including two Improving Access

to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) sites, namely, Tower Hamlets and Camden, the two boroughs with the largest Bangladeshi communities. Part of my role was to ‘improve access’ for these communities to psychological services through outreach work and promotion. It was thought that language barriers, stigma and taboo around mental health and lack of awareness of services contributed as barriers to the uptake of psychological therapy. By running mental health awareness sessions in Sylheti, the intention was that access could be improved for the Bangladeshi community to mental health services. In addition, I was trained to offer evidence-based interventions in line with current NHS expectations, namely a CBT approach for people experiencing mild to moderate common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

The challenges and dilemmas I faced in the therapeutic setting with my Bangladeshi clients were how to help them within the evidence-based framework in which I was trained. Reflecting on one particular incident in my early experience in a clinical setting, I remember a newly wed and newly arrived Bangladeshi female client who presented with low mood symptoms and feeling isolated. She explained that she did not have any friends or relatives and was unable to use public transport or go to the shops, as she did not speak any English. Following guidance from my personal supervisor and in line with the evidence-based treatment protocol, it was suggested that I support my client through a behavioural activation intervention to engage in activities to elevate her mood. I signposted her to English classes and a local women’s group for a few hours a week. My client seemed open to the suggestion and wanted me to share this information with her husband to help her locate the classes and groups. In a subsequent session, I met with her husband, who expressed anger in response to my suggestions. He felt I was not mindful of the fact that there would be no one to look after his mum if his wife ‘goes off gallivanting for her personal leisure’. He asked me, ‘what are you teaching my wife? And who will look after my mum?’ It was clear that my intervention had repercussions, and from his perspective, I had not accommodated his needs, i.e., his expectations of his wife. I sensed that I was perceived as someone negatively influencing his wife and impeding his efforts to manage his family. I also sensed his anger with me personally, that he expected me to be more understanding since we shared the same cultural background, and that perhaps I should have known better. It was not surprising, then, that the client dropped out of treatment.

My efforts to make therapy accessible to a hard-to-reach group were more challenging than I had originally envisaged, and this continued to be a dilemma throughout my clinical experience as a trainee. Difficulties with in-law relations were a common presenting problem among

clients from the Bangladeshi community. I found it difficult to apply Western-informed evidence-based interventions to help these clients manage their distress. I recognised the tension of the 'Procrustean dilemma' (Kuyken et al., 2009), adhering to protocol-defined therapy which cut off or distorted clients' experience in order to fit the theory. A further difficulty I experienced was an over-emphasis on rigidly following treatment protocols; it assumes that because the client has the problem, if clients don't complete the protocol, the problem is with the client rather than with the protocol. Even if the patient's view is important, can they change the protocols that have been established with the backing of strong evidence? In contrast with my early experiences of working in IAPT before the doctoral training, I noticed how power relationships come into play, and I became uncomfortable with taking an 'expert position'.

As Western models are based on research using Western participants, the Eurocentric perspective encompassing individualistic sentiments makes it difficult to deal with cultural issues in a therapy setting when working with multicultural communities. I was left uncomfortable with the lack of engagement and high drop-out rates whilst working with the Bangladeshi community, where the take-up of psychological services was particularly low. Looking back, I can see how a lack of cultural sensitivity has therapeutical implications. Lack of understanding of cultural factors and the absence of exploration in supervision can lead to a rupture in the therapeutic encounter. I came to understand that if psychological therapies are to be truly accessible, a holistic understanding of the client's story, with an appreciation of the client's cultural and social context, is paramount for any effective therapeutic work.

In my clinical work, I spoke Sylheti which was advantageous for those with limited English-speaking skills or those who preferred speaking in their mother tongue. However, despite our shared culture and language, there was an air of mistrust between my clients and me, and I became increasingly aware of several other key issues that presented a barrier for clients to access and engage in therapy. Clients often enquired about my background and where I lived; I assumed that this was a way of checking whether I was connected to someone they knew. There were fears and worries about whether their personal information would be shared with others in the Bangladeshi community. With respect to in-law relationships, I noticed that there were differences among the women who accessed and engaged in therapy. Women who lived away from their in-laws were more likely to engage in therapy when referred by a GP, and more likely to self-refer to therapy, than women who resided with their in-laws. I found that it was harder to engage the latter group of women, who very occasionally attended the initial

assessment session following a GP referral. Often, they were accompanied by their husbands or a member of their in-law family, and it was common for them to drop out after the initial session. It became apparent how stigmatising it was to talk about in-law relationships. From my perspective, however, I wished that the clients knew that they were not the only ones in isolation with these relationship difficulties, as my clinical experience only highlighted what a common and growing theme it was. The profile of my sample who volunteered to participate in the current research seems to resemble the type of clients who engaged in therapy. Although not intentional, only two of the 10 participants in the current study were living with their in-laws at the time of the interview.

My interest in in-law relations grew as I watched my friends and relatives get married and live with in-laws, and it further intensified when I got married in 2012. The point of interest here is that there were so many elements of my experience that were obvious to me, but they were not easy to articulate and not easily grasped by those around me. What was apparent was that some of our knowledge and experience may seem so obvious to us that it is taken for granted, and thus averts any further dialogue or inquiry. The sum of my experiences highlighted that culture was a key defining feature that shaped my understanding of people and my outlook on the world. It was an integral factor that made my experiences unique and distinct from those of the White British colleagues and friends with whom I grew up. Consequently, this motivated me to explore Bangladeshi women's experiences and their relationships with their in-laws in order to understand the nuances of such relationships.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### ***1.1 The Bangladeshi Muslim Community in the UK***

In comparison to other major ethnic groups in the UK, the Bangladeshi diaspora is one of the fastest-growing immigrant populations (Sunder & Uddin, 2007). The report of the analysis of data from the 2011 census revealed that almost half a million Bangladeshis reside in England and Wales, accounting for 0.7% of the total population (ONS, 2015). 95% of this Bangladeshi population originate from one particular region in north-eastern Bangladesh, namely Sylhet, and identify with the Muslim faith (Kershen, 2005).

Abbas (2000) Haque, (2000), and Garbin, (2005) argued that despite the growing numbers in the Bangladeshi community has tended to underachieve academically, have disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poorer socio-economic conditions, and consequently have often been victims of gendered, racial, religious and cultural discrimination. Li (2018) found that 5% of Bangladeshis have higher degrees in comparison to 9% of the white majority group. Li (2018) argues that Bangladeshis would be more likely to have higher education if they had similar parental class backgrounds to their white counterparts. One study found that some Bangladeshi men are also less likely to have access to advanced occupational positions in comparison to white men (Heath & McMahon, 2005); even those with degrees face marked disadvantages and are less likely to have salaried jobs (Li, 2018).

In contrast, some studies found that many Bangladeshi women are increasingly well-represented in higher education in the UK (Ghaffar & Stevenson, 2018; Malik, 2018; Muslim Council of Britain, 2015; Cheung, 2014). However, despite considerable improvement in qualification and educational attainment amongst Bangladeshi women, rates of economic participation for many women remain low (Ali, 2015; Social Mobility Commission, 2017), and Bangladeshi women have been identified as one of the ethnic minority groups to face the most disadvantage, largely attributed to personal and family circumstances (Li, 2018). Whilst the author does not make explicit the specific constraints faced unique to the Bangladeshi community, long-term illness, heavy household duties including caring responsibilities have been cited as factors that place ethnic minority women at a disadvantage. Similar findings have also been reported by the Muslim Council of Britain, (2015) who found that 18% of Muslim women in the UK aged 16-74 years reported household obligations as a factor in being economically inactive, compared to 6% of the overall population. Low academic and



workforce participation amongst many older Bangladeshi women (Li, 2018) have been attributed by one author as owing to a lack of English language skills (Dale, 2002). Although the government has acknowledged tackling disengagement as a key priority, there is little evidence of significant improvement (Murray, 2017).

Factors that drive persistent disengagement among Bangladeshi women are diverse (Davidson-Knight et al., 2017) and include a complex interplay of cultural conservatism, structural factors, and persistent discrimination (Griffith & Malik, 2018). Griffiths and Malik (2018) reported that expectations of family members, such as husbands and mothers-in-law, can act as barriers to engaging in work, as well as discrimination against Muslim women by employers. One of the participants in the study, for example, reported that employers did not make an effort to learn about their beliefs. This may suggest that a better understanding of cultural background and structural factors may encourage employers to develop sensitivity towards Muslim women which in turn, may aid in making reasonable adjustments at work to help them better engage in work. Additionally, Griffith and Malik (2018) found that Bangladeshi women were also being let down by mainstream services, including mental health support. This suggests that tackling factors that persistently affect women's engagement in education, employment and health care services is critical to reducing ethnic disparities. Service providers need to be aware of the complex and reinforcing barriers faced by a particular community so that services can be designed and delivered in ways that tackle these barriers to engaging with services. The lack of personalisation has been shown to increasingly hamper engagement in mainstream services for the Bangladeshi community (Griffith & Malik, 2018), suggesting that understanding these cultural needs and barriers could help to promote greater engagement. They cite, for example, that understanding culturally conservative attitudes such as a preference for women-only English classes may help to better engage Bangladeshi women.

## ***1.2 Barriers to Accessing Services***

Ethnic inequalities are prevalent in health outcomes, experiences of healthcare and employment in the NHS (Chouhan & Nazroo, 2020; Memon et al., 2016). Epidemiological studies in the UK have shown that within South Asian communities, treatment of depression is low, and rates of suicide are high (Burr, 2002); Hussain et al. (2006) found that South Asian women were at a higher risk of self-harm and attempting and committing suicide. Various factors have an impact on accessing services, such as a lack of awareness and language barriers,

and there is a relatively low uptake of mental health services within the South Asian community (Bhardwaj, 2001; Gilbert et al., 2004). The low uptake reflects the stigma commonly associated with mental health problems and it being a subject of taboo and considered a sign of weakness (Chaudhury, 2016). People from South Asian backgrounds fear being judged by their family and the wider community for having mental health problems (Uddin, 2017).

In contrast to the Western perspective that emphasises the medical model and biological explanations for mental health difficulties, some communities may attribute psychological difficulties to supernatural causes (Amri & Bemak, 2013; Callan, 2012; Dein et al., 2008; McClelland et al., 2014). Moreover, the perception of someone with mental health problems as ‘crazy’, or that they have lost their faith in God (Amri & Bemak, 2013), compounded by the cultural mistrust of the conventional Western mental health system, results in many living with untreated mental health problems (Amri & Bemak, 2013). British Muslims are less likely to experience improvement in their mental health following treatment with psychological therapy (Baker, 2018). Most of these factors were echoed by the Bangladeshi community in Camden, UK (Bisby et al., 2003).

As well as previously mentioned barriers, the low uptake of mental health services by Muslims may be due to the lack of consideration of religious and spiritual dimensions in the conceptualisation and treatment of mental health problems (Aloud & Rathur, 2009; Sarfraz & Castle, 2002). Muslims have been reported to approach imams (Muslim faith leaders) as their first point of contact when dealing with mental health concerns (Gill, 2019). However, imams may feel ill-equipped to provide such support (Inspired Minds, 2017). This suggests that it may be beneficial for mental health service providers and faith leaders to liaise with each other to develop accessible and culturally appropriate mental health service provisions.

A quantitative study by McClelland et al. (2014) compared beliefs about depression among 374 British Bangladeshi and White British participants and found that older Bangladeshis had a negative attitude towards depression and felt that it brought a sense of shame and loss of dignity to the individual and their family. Gilbert et al. (2004) also found that fear of shame and, additionally, fear of professional failure to maintain confidentiality were obstacles to accessing services. This suggests that a lack of awareness of a client’s cultural background may prevent them from accessing therapy and hinder the potential positive outcomes they could receive (Shariff, 2009). In particular, understanding how shame is conceptualised in different cultures may aid in reducing the barriers to accessing services.

### ***1.3 South Asian Culture and Izzat***

Whilst stigma associated with mental health difficulties is not unique to any one community, it is one of the main barriers faced by South Asian communities when accessing services (Gilbert et al., 2004). Research has shown that cultural and social context is important to consider in the onset of mental health problems (Bhugra et al., 1999). Qualitative studies have found a myriad of factors that contribute to psychological problems (Anand & Cochrane, 2005) including rigid gender roles, intergenerational conflict and upholding of family honour (Bhardwaj, 2001; Bhugra et al., 1999; Hussain & Cochrane, 2004).

Gilbert et al.'s (2004) focus group study on South Asian women found that shame, subordination and entrapment played a powerful role in psychopathology. They found that *izzat*, meaning honour, self-respect and prestige (Takhar, 2016), and perceived failure to uphold family honour was linked to personal shame, leading people to be trapped in difficult relationships. Beliefs around family honour and shame may prevent individuals from accessing psychological therapies in order to minimise judgment from the wider community and preserve family reputation (Time to change, 2010; Ahmad et al., 2009).

The notion of *izzat* provides South-Asian communities with the framework of cultural laws and behavioural codes of conduct that is perceived to preserve family honour (Chhina, 2017). Departing from these cultural ideals may bring disrepute to the wider family and community (Chhina, 2017). South Asian women are particularly impacted by the concept of *izzat* (Chew-Graham et al., 2002; Gilbert et al., 2004); Gunasinghe et al. (2018) defined *izzat* as 'perceived (personal and familial) honour, dignity, and respect within the self and as judged by others'. *Izzat* and its antonym, '*sharam*', or shame, are cited as forces of control that perpetuate sexism, discrimination and oppression within South Asian culture (Sangar & Howe, 2021).

Upholding *izzat* can be seen in various ways, such as in replicating cultural values and avoiding other values (Meetoo & Mirza, 2007). South Asian communities desire to hold firmly to their cultural tradition and values (Mafura & Charura, 2021). There is an insistence on preserving cultural and religious values by immigrant parents, who often feel anxious about children adopting the values of the host culture and becoming 'Westernised' (Dasgupta, 2000; Wakil et al., 1981; Mafura & Charura, 2021) which they perceive will bring shame on the family. Gill (2004) argues that victim-blaming and shame are intimately linked whereby perceived deviation from societal and cultural norms can shape an individual's experience of shame. This

can be understood through cognitive attributional theories which frame shame as a result of an individual's cognitive perception of a problem arising from their failure to meet their own standards or those of a particular group (Lewis, 1993). Victim-blaming and shaming is a method used by cultures to maintain social control (Kaufman, 1985) and Dillon (1997) argues that within the context of gender inequality and discrimination, particular groups can be devalued and become the targets of shame.

Gill (2008) found that South Asians are discouraged from adopting values, customs or behaviours that may be considered Western or British, due to fear that this may dilute their South Asian values (Meetoo & Mirza, 2007); this ensures that the concept of *izzat* is maintained (Brandon & Hafez, 2008).

Idealised notions of femininity within South Asian communities describe women who are chaste, controlled and obedient (Dutt, 2018; Tonsing & Tonsing, 2019). *Izzat* can be compromised without close monitoring of South Asian women's behaviour, particularly through controlling their attire (Dwyer, 2000). A woman's behaviour and appearance are intimately tied to the idea of *izzat* (Hamilton, 2018; Ragavan et al., 2018; Sabri et al., 2018). Dwyer (1999/2000), for example, found that South Asian women wearing 'Western' garments instead of South Asian attire, particularly in the public sphere where others could easily observe them, were perceived to be unchaste. Behaviours such as going against family to marry a partner of one's choice and challenging authority (Mafura & Charura, 2021) are also considered to violate codes of *izzat*. As such, it has been argued that enforcement of such cultural expectations limits women's freedom (Hamilton, 2018; Lu et al., 2020), and has been deemed to cause stress (Gunasinghe, 2015; Hamilton, 2018).

In India, appropriate conduct in public is considered a demonstration of a family's *izzat* (Dutt, 2018). Accordingly, when women do not subscribe to social expectations and socially determined gender roles, or are perceived to have acted shamefully, the dishonour is shared by the whole family, including the extended family (Aujla & Gill, 2014). In the Indian context, Singh (2021) uses the concept of '*Sati Savitri*', embodying values of modesty, marriageability and silence, as a symbol of the ideal Indian woman. Through mythological stories, family and popular culture, women are socialised into and expected to adopt these virtues. In her interview with 10 middle-class Indian female journalists exploring the concept of the ideal Indian woman, their responses illustrated these ideas (Singh, 2021). Modesty is equated with 'covering up' to ward off unwanted male attention which could impact her family's *izzat*.

Women are perceived to embody the family and nation's honour, and so their sexuality is actively controlled to prevent bringing shame to men, the family and the entire nation. Marriage is also related to the idea of a good Indian woman and considered her ultimate destiny; thus she is expected to be domesticated, produce children and prioritise family over career. Additionally, a silent woman is considered respectable and desirable and indicates a 'woman's submission to patriarchal authority' (hooks, 1989, p.7); in contrast, talking implies that a woman is sexually available and hence considered immoral and immodest. Thus, women who do not conform to silence and talk too much are considered deviant and unsuitable for marriage. The research thus explains how women's subordination and subjugation are maintained through this symbol, where women are expected to conform to behaviours that meet idealised notions of Indian womanhood and preserve the *izzat* of the family and community.

Similarly, in her fieldwork in urban Nepal, Homan (2017) also found the adoption of silence in order to preserve honour. She uses the identity of 'daughter-in-law' and 'feminist' as an analytical binary to illustrate the tensions that women experience between tradition and modernity. In the Nepali context, being outspoken and 'talking back' is equated to being modern (feminist) and contrary to being a 'good woman' (daughter-in-law), and hence women fear losing *izzat* (locally known as '*ijjat*') and acceptance from family and society (Homan, 2017). 'Becoming modern' is perceived to jeopardise tradition, that is, longstanding norms associated with women prioritising family life. This can cause considerable stress for women, especially as, due to the traditional expectations of Nepalese customs, modern behaviours are deemed dishonourable; choosing to adopt roles or behaviours perceived as modern is interpreted as losing honour.

Multiple studies have demonstrated South Asian women's experiences of gender-role pressures to stay in marriages, and the fear of shaming from the community if they 'failed' to uphold cultural expectations (Aujla, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2004; Sabri et al., 2018; Tonsing, 2014; Tonsing & Barn, 2017). Values pertaining to *izzat* can become deeply internalised by women as they are socialised from a young age to be good daughters, wives and mothers (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Homan, 2017). Great attention is paid to preserving *izzat* throughout their childhood to prepare them for marriage, and the onus lies on women to keep a marriage together and preserve family harmony (Bhandari, 2020). Sociocultural factors such as marriage, marital disputes and in-law conflict have been shown to generate high levels of distress in South Asian women. Gilbert et al. (2004) suggested that the hierarchical nature of South Asian families creates power dynamics between the husband, wife and in-laws, whereby the husband and his

family have more control over the wife/daughter-in-law. Gilbert et al. argue (2004) that these power differences often lead to mental health problems, including low self-esteem, self-harm and suicidal ideation. Furthermore, abuse by in-laws has also been identified in South Asian families, but the responsibility to preserve family harmony and honour prevents women from seeking help (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016). The notion of *izzat* influences what is considered appropriate conduct and the expectation of women to adopt particular social roles to preserve not only their own dignity but also that of their family members (Homan, 2017).

Values that promote traditional gender relations in South Asian cultures inherently privilege men (Ammar et al., 2013). The concept of *izzat* places a significant demand on women to maintain family honour and avoid shame (Gunasinghe, 2015). Consequently, they may have roles considered inferior to men, often making them susceptible to being shamed if *izzat* is not upheld (Takhar, 2016; Triandis, 1989). As such, *izzat* can be regarded as a form of patriarchal control which puts immense pressure on young girls and women to submit to inflexible gender roles and the stipulations of honourable conduct (Marshall & Yazdani, 1999).

To summarise, there are elements of South Asian culture that have an impact on South Asian women's psychological well-being. There appears to be significant demand placed on them to uphold the values of *izzat* to avoid scrutiny from family and the wider community. Dwyer (2000) argues that these expectations place significant pressure on South Asian women, suggesting that it is crucial to study this group further. Additionally, whilst the family domain has been recognised as having an impact on the psychological well-being of South Asian women, further research is needed on affinal relationships, which have also been identified as impacting their mental health.

#### ***1.4 Department of Health Initiatives and Culturally Sensitive Services***

Stereotyping, racism and discrimination have plagued health care delivery across services (Chouhan & Nazroo, 2020). The *Delivering Race Equality* (DRE) five-year initiative was a national policy drawn up specifically to make mental health services non-discriminatory and appropriate to the needs of BME communities (Department of Health, 2005). However, it was criticised for failing to address the underlying factors relating to racism (Chouhan & Nazroo, 2020), despite minority communities continuing to be disproportionately affected by mental health problems (Department of Health and Social Care, 2017). Moreover, there are marked

inequalities in type and grade of employment, despite ethnic minorities being over-represented in the NHS workforce (Chouhan & Nazroo, 2020).

The murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement have reinvigorated anti-racism (Chouhan & Nazroo, 2020; Younis, 2021). Various initiatives have been drawn up to promote racial equality in mental health services. The *Equality Act* (2010) was intended to protect against discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, faith and nationality. The *Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* and the *NHS Long-Term Plan* highlight the importance of addressing and prioritising mental health inequalities (Advancing Mental Health Equalities Strategy, 2020). The *Mental Health Review Act* (2018), for example, addresses the need to improve services for ethnic minority groups. The recommendations include introducing advocates who are skilled in responding to people's cultural needs and utilising a systematic approach to improving how mental health services respond to their local population's ethnic and cultural background.

Following the *Mental Health Review Act* (2018), the *Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework* (PCREF) was introduced to eliminate racial disparity in the access, experience, and outcomes (AEO) of ethnic minority communities. For example, at the South London and Maudsley Trust (SLAM) the PCREF has been applied to improve the experiences of Black communities in mental health services. The NHS in the northwest of England introduced the North-West Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Strategy Advisory Group to tackle inequalities and dismantle structures that make it difficult for ethnic minority communities to access services, enter the NHS workforce and progress. Additionally, the BME Leadership Network was formed to strengthen the voice of NHS BME leaders and support the NHS to improve its understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion, in order to meet the needs of all communities. Similarly, the NHS Equality and Diversity Council was set up to improve services for all patients and communities and support the NHS in becoming a more inclusive employer.

As part of the implementation arm of the government mental health strategy, *No Health without Mental Health* (Department of Health, 2011), the Joint Commissioning Panel for Mental Health (JCP-MH) provided practical guidance in developing a framework for mental health commissioning. One of their key messages for commissioners is to ensure that '*Every mental health service should be culturally capable and able to address the diverse needs of a multicultural population through effective forms of assessment and interventions*' (JCP-MH,

2014). The aforementioned studies on South Asian women's mental health highlight the need for culturally competent services with an understanding of gender roles, and the social and cultural factors that affect mental health, to enable services to be more accessible.

### ***1.5 Researching Sensitive Topics and Including Hard-to-Reach Groups***

Including and engaging 'seldom heard groups' in health and social care research, such as those from ethnic minorities, are increasingly seen as important on scientific, policy and ethical grounds (Prinjha et al., 2020). In the UK, the South Asian community comprises those with migratory roots in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan (Office for National Statistics, 2016). Despite forming the largest non-white minority ethnic group, they are proportionately under-represented in health and social research (Sheikh et al., 2009; Smart & Harrison, 2017, Prinjha et al., 2020). This is a historic issue and does not appear to have changed over time (Bruton et al., 2020). This may be due to unwillingness to participate in research, which may contribute to under-representation (Wendler et al., 2006).

However, it has been argued that the exclusion, or limited inclusion, of minority experiences, arise as a result of the foundations of the research process, a process predicated upon racialised and imperialistic frameworks (Jensen & Lauritsen, 2005; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). For example, minority and marginalised communities are problematised by the research process in which their experiences are often misrepresented, 'othered', sensationalised, or pathologised (McAreavey & Das, 2013; Agyeman, 2008; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Moreover, the experiences of minority ethnic women are either absent or presented stereotypically (Mirza, 1997). Sanson et al. (2000) assert that research can be used to marginalise and negatively impact minority communities. For example, Burr (2002) found that mental health professionals in the UK perceived South Asian culture as inferior, more repressive and more patriarchal, and depicted the women from these communities as immobile and passive, implying that they lack agency. However, research has illustrated the complex and nuanced ways in which South Asian women exercise agency in their lives (Mirza, 2017; Pande, 2015), that are not commonly reported in the literature. This may lead to misunderstanding, stereotyping and misrepresentation of these women. Collectively, these factors may serve as barriers to participating in research, and the lack of inclusion of minority experiences has the potential to further reinforce stereotypes (Mitra, 1998).



The current research, therefore, enables Bangladeshi women to become subjects of research by articulating their own experiences, rather than objects of research (hooks, 1989). There is an increasing need for social researchers to provide evidence of informing policy and practice that is sensitive to the UK's diverse and multi-ethnic population (Salway et al., 2009). If services and interventions are to be impactful and meet the mental health needs of diverse populations, it is paramount to include, engage and conduct research with diverse populations (Prinjha et al., 2020).

Rugkåsa and Calvin (2011) argue that inequality in service provision and the power structures that lead to marginalisation will continue without the involvement of specific groups; therefore, inclusion is a matter of social justice. The lack of inclusion of BME communities, who are notoriously under-represented in research, compromises our understanding of health, well-being and issues pertaining to those communities, which in turn impedes the development of appropriate services (Gill et al., 2013). This calls for an accessible and flexible approach to researching groups such as Bangladeshi women to understand the barriers to participation in research on a topic that could be called 'sensitive'. Lee and Renzetti (1990) define sensitive research as that which *'potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or researched the collection, holding and/or the dissemination of research data'* (p.512).

Qualitative approaches are particularly suited for research into sensitive topics (Connolly & Reilly, 2007; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). This approach is particularly advantageous for groups who may be marginalised, 'hard to reach' or remain silenced, as the method is flexible and allows the researcher to better understand the meaning, interpretations, and subjective experiences of such groups (Hutchinson et al., 2000).

### ***1.6 Research Objectives and Aims***

The main objective of this research is to expand knowledge of in-law relationships and begin to address gaps in the literature, which has not addressed the experiences of British Bangladeshi women in the UK. The aim is to begin to explore and understand Bangladeshi women's experiences of in-laws. By exploring the unique, subjective worlds of Bangladeshi women, the aims of the research coincide with the values of counselling psychology and seek to contribute to the field by furthering knowledge about this particular community group and promoting better practice in working cross-culturally (Eleftheriadou, 2010a).

### ***1.7 Relevance to Counselling Psychology***

The result of globalisation is that populations are more diverse (Brooks & Manias, 2019; Leung et al., 2014). This can create more challenges for healthcare providers to ensure that services are adequate for the needs of diverse populations (Rathod & Kingdon, 2014). Lack of awareness and understanding of cultural diversity may lead to increased disparities in services for minority cultures, resulting in poor uptake of available services, poor adherence to treatment, poorer health outcomes, and increasing cost to society (Betancourt et al., 2014; Kirmayer, 2012; Paternotte et al., 2016).

It is assumed that clinicians are educationally prepared and have the skills and knowledge to work in culturally sensitive ways (Betancourt et al., 2014; Williamson & Harrison, 2010), yet research suggests that clinicians are not adept at adopting culturally sensitive practice and rarely receive training that equips them to work with diversity (Edge & Lemetyinen, 2019).

The absence of culturally sensitive practice may adversely impact patient and family satisfaction (Williamson & Harrison, 2010). Yasmin-Qureshi & Ledwith (2020) explored the experiences of 10 South Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) women in accessing and receiving psychological therapy in primary care in the UK. Using thematic analysis, their qualitative study revealed that the women experienced a good therapeutic relationship with their therapist, who used Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and CBT-based interventions to treat and reduce symptoms of mental distress. However, the lack of consideration of cultural and religious needs negatively impacted therapy, specifically for those whose cultural context or religion impacted their presenting difficulties. The researchers recommended that better integration of religion and culture within services for this group may help to keep clients engaged in therapy.

Multicultural competencies and sensitivity are also critical for effective supervisory practices, especially as this is one of the main ways in which psychologists transmit information to prepare trainees as part of their professional development (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Clinical supervision has been identified as one of the top five activities in which psychologists engage (Falendar et al., 2013). As students from diverse backgrounds are increasingly being accepted onto psychology training programmes (Eklund et al., 2014; Lee, 2018; McKinley, 2019) it is more likely that trainees will be supervised by practitioners who are of a culture other than their own (Nilsson & Duan, 2007). Whilst racial matching may not be necessary for

an effective supervisor-trainee relationship or trainee satisfaction with their supervisor (Gatmon et al., 2001; Chang et al., 2003), multicultural training deficiencies may inadvertently impact supervisees and clients of colour. Supervisees may feel ill-equipped to adequately address cultural issues in therapy if they are not provided with training in multicultural competencies or have culturally insensitive supervisors (Eklund et al., 2014; Burkard et al., 2006). Burkard et al. (2006) found that the cultural responsiveness of supervisors (i.e., the extent to which supervisors acknowledged the cultural differences between themselves and supervisees) can have a direct impact on how supervisees engage with clients; supervisees who had more culturally sensitive supervisors were more sensitive with clients who presented with difficulties relating to cultural issues. In contrast, supervisees who had unresponsive supervisors reported having difficulty in meeting the needs of their clients in therapy, as they reported feeling unable to validate their client's experiences of cultural and racial issues. This suggests that multicultural competency is critical for contemporary practice and supervision. Further information and knowledge of clients from diverse backgrounds may aid in helping to generate greater cultural awareness, enhance supervisor-trainee relationships and, in turn, improve client satisfaction in therapy (Eklund et al., 2014).

Research exploring ethnic inequalities in mental health services has been dominated by epidemiological studies with little understanding of the views and experiences of service users (Prajapathi & Leibling, 2021). Furthermore, an in-depth understanding of service users has been a neglected area in qualitative research (Prajapathi & Leibling, 2021). Pakes & Roy-Chowdhury (2007) argue that qualitative methods provide a way of improving culturally sensitive therapeutic practice, as it is primarily concerned with the subjective dimension of human experience, understanding people's experiences and the meaning they apply to their experiences (Willig, 2019). Culturally sensitive practice requires clinicians to not only be cognisant of their own beliefs and values, but also have awareness of how the client's cultural background may influence their presenting difficulties (Crawley et al., 2002). In-depth views generated by qualitative research can aid in helping clinicians increase their knowledge and understanding of diverse cultures, beliefs and attitudes which, in turn, may make them more likely to provide care that is culturally sensitive (Bellamy & Gott 2013). Moreover, adopting culturally sensitive practices increases the likelihood that clients will experience more positive therapeutic relationships with clinicians, which can lead to better health outcomes (Brooks & Manias, 2019).

There is increasing wide recognition of the need to improve the cultural competence of services so that all individuals can benefit from health care provisions (Memon et al., 2016; Rathod et al., 2018). A focal point in training, especially in applied psychology programmes such as Counselling Psychology, is multicultural competence (Koch et al., 2018). Eleftheradiou (2010b) has argued for further understanding of cultural factors by calling for more cross-cultural research to be conducted in Counselling Psychology. Furthermore, listening to and engaging with diverse communities plays a central role in improving accessibility and making services appropriate (British Psychological Society, 2018).

The values of Counselling Psychology place the discipline in a unique position to understand the diversity of experiences that shape people's lives. Given the paucity of research on the Bangladeshi community, researching Bangladeshi women's experience of in-law relationships may provide a useful and original contribution to Counselling Psychology. It may also aid in helping other mental health professionals to develop more accessible and culturally appropriate services and promote better supervisory practices.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 The In-Law Relationship Across Cultures – A Global Perspective***

Research on in-law relationships has been relatively scarce in the social sciences, including psychology (Lopata, 1999). Despite being a major feature of everyday life, affinal relations merit very little attention in journals (Walker, 2000) and research appears to be dominated by a focus on nuclear family relationships (Allendorf, 2017). In comparison to other close relationships, it remains a relatively understudied area of research (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006; Goetting, 1990; Willson et al., 2003). Duvall's foundational research on mothers-in-law in the 1950s called for more research into in-law relationships; however, research remained scant until the 1980s. Books and journal articles that review and cite literature on in-law relationships also illustrate its limited scope and the wide gaps in the timing of published research. However, there is evidence that in-law relationships are receiving increased attention from researchers across the globe (Allendorf, 2017; Chan, 2017; Derdar, 2018; Kung, 2019; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2015; Nganese & Basson, 2017; Olutola, 2012; Rabho, 2015; Shih & Pyke, 2015; Woolley & Greif, 2018; Young & Degroot, 2021; Zhang, 2016; Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020). Given the paucity of literature available, the following review will include relevant research spanning the last six decades, including both contemporary and older research, which may provide useful insights into in-law relationships across cultures.

### ***2.2 The Challenges of In-Law Relationships Across Cultures – In-Laws or Out-Laws?***

The architecture of in-law relations is such that they are simultaneously both kin and strangers to one another (Allendorf, 2017; Merrill 2007) bound by a child marrying their spouse, yet unrelated biologically. One explanation offered for the challenges of interacting with in-laws has been attributed both to the triadic and the non-voluntary nature of the relationship (Morr Serewicz, 2006, 2008). The non-voluntary structure of in-law relationships may create ambiguity, as the members in the relationship usually do not choose each other from the outset but may be expected to treat each other like family members despite the lack of emotional bond and relational history (Fischer, 1986; Merrill, 2007). Additionally, these relationships may be difficult to ignore or avoid as they are inextricably linked via the linchpin, i.e., the son/daughter, who binds the relationship between spouse and parents. Ruptures in these relations, or choosing

to end them, may negatively impact and involve serious costs to everyone involved (Anderson, 2016; Morr, 2002; Morr Serewicz, 2008, 2013; Morr Serewicz & Canary, 2008). As a result, within the triadic relationship, the in-law dyad may carry higher stakes than most dyadic relationships as the in-laws try to form and negotiate relationships with one another, where they may compete for the linchpin who binds the triad together (Morr Serewicz & Hosmer, 2010 cited in Cupach and Spitzberg, 2011).

An alternative explanation offered by Merrill (2007) attributes the difficulties inherent within in-law relationships to the lack of clearly defined roles, giving rise to ambiguity and contradictions as they negotiate their association with one another. Jorgenson's 1994 study, for example, illustrated the ambiguity and competing loyalties experienced by 20 American couples in using address terms with their in-laws. The lack of a clear mandate for address terms for parents-in-law led some participants to feel anxious about addressing their in-laws as Mum or Dad, as this is an exclusive right that their spouse and his or her siblings have in relation to their parents, or because those terms are exclusively for use with their own parents. Whilst Jorgenson (1994) reported that the sample used was diverse, no further information is provided about the participants' ethnic backgrounds. More contemporary research also has found that children-in-law felt uncertain about whether they should address their parents-in-law as Mum or Dad (Mikucki et al., 2015).

Whilst the studies thus far present cultural views and experiences from American and European studies, research conducted in other parts of the globe has demonstrated the role of culture and how it shapes distinctly different family structures, in-law relationships and interactions (Morr Serewicz & Hosmer, 2011). Consistent with findings in Western in-law relationships, Allendorf (2017) also says that daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law are both strangers and family members to one another. However, rather than ambiguity, Allendorf (2017) argues that it is a contradiction that characterises Indian families. In Western affinal relations, the concept of ambiguity describes the confusion over whether in-laws are considered family to one another, but the joint family system sees no ambiguity; they are part of the same family. But Allendorf (2017) argues that contradiction is a more accurate concept, as mothers-in-law-and daughters-in-law occupy positions in which they are considered both an insider and an outsider simultaneously.

Joint and extended living arrangements are the norm for many cultures (Doss et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2020; Khanum, 2001). Whilst in many cultures individuals may marry the partner

of their choice (see, for example, Pande, 2015), in-law alliances are not necessarily non-voluntary as proposed in Morr-Serewicz's (2008) triadic model. This is the case in arranged marriage customs in which parents select spouses for their children, and may include endogamous marriages within a kinship system (Ismailbekova, 2019; Al-Ghanim, 2020; Fatima & Leghari, 2020). Furthermore, patrilocal marriages may also influence in-law family dynamics. In Chinese society, for example, daughters are considered *shibun* (goods of lost value) (Ikels, 1985). Daughters traditionally leave their natal home after marriage, with the requisite transfer of obligation and allegiance to their spouses and families (Sun & Lin, 2015). A similar concept exists in India where women are considered *paraya dhan* (property belonging to someone else) (Jeffery et al., 1989), indicating that women are temporary members of their parents' home, and their permanent abode is the home she resides in after marriage with her husband and his family (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). There is thus no expectation as such for a daughter to care for her parents in their old age (Hareven, 2000), as that is the responsibility of the daughter-in-law.

Western research on in-law relationships implies that it is ambiguity around in-law relationships that leads to conflict. However, clear roles and expectations do not necessarily result in conflict-free relationships. Thukral's 2013 research interviews of Indian daughters-in-law found that the expectation of their role to adhere to family rules and complete house chores were clear. The women reported not having much flexibility in these expectations and lacking fulfilment in their relationship with their mother-in-law. Similar results have also been reported in South Korea (Lee, 2002; Kim, 2001), where the clear mandate to care for parents-in-law negatively impacted on daughters-in-law's life satisfaction (Lee, 2002) and physical and emotional health (Kim, 2001). This suggests that in situations where role expectations are clear, they can still be the site of struggle for family members. It also suggests not having clear roles and expectations may allow family members to exercise choice in how they want to navigate their relationships. Importantly, it highlights the need to consider the role of culture and how it shapes affinal kinship.

### ***2.3 Popular Culture and In-Law Stereotypes***

Popular culture has often presented a pessimistic view of in-law relationships (Morr Serewicz & Hosmer, 2010 as cited in Cupach & Spitzberg, 2011), with their tempestuous nature drawing the attention of researchers (Duvall, 1954; Fischer, 1983; Merrill, 2007). These issues are not

confined to one particular culture (Cong & Silverstein, 2008; Gangoli & Rew, 2011). The relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law has often been vilified in books, (*Toxic In-Laws: Loving Strategies for Protecting your Relationships*, Forward 2002), articles (Rodrigues, 2015, Tied in knots: The problem with mothers-in-law in India, *Hindustan Times*), movies (*Monster-in-law*), Indian Soaps (e.g., *Kyun ki Saas kabhi bahu ti* ('because a mother-in-law was once a daughter-in-law')) and internet blogs (Crazy Mother-In-Law Stories to Put your Life in Perspective, 2021, [Crazy Mother-In-Law Stories To Put Your Life In Perspective - Mabel + Moxie \(mabelandmoxie.com\)](http://mabelandmoxie.com)). Given the highly stereotyped nature of in-law relationships, Rittenour and Kellas (2015) highlight the possibility of confirmation bias; that is, people may enter the in-law relationship expecting discord, and the negative perceptions may then perpetuate negative interactions, which in turn confirm the original beliefs.

However, research across various cultural contexts has provided counter-narratives to these stereotypical images. Shared values and respect within the relationship may mitigate ill feelings (Duvall, 1954; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987). Goodwin's research (2003) on 247 African American and European American women and Jackson & Bergcross's 1988 study on 75 Black American women illustrated that where togetherness and strong ties can be established in the affinal relationship they promoted increased marital satisfaction based on positive exchanges, which also contributed to stronger support for the family as a whole.

The presence of a shared identity within the affinal relationship has also been shown to be an important factor, related to feelings of being accepted, and affects the degree of satisfaction felt by the child-in-law in the relationship (Golish, 2000; Morr Serewicz et al., 2008; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Shelton, 2019). Research in other cultural contexts also counters the argument that in-law relations are inherently problematic. Sun and Lin (2015) utilised a 20-item *Mother-in-law Relationship* (RML) scale survey to compare the mother-/daughter-in-law relationship of 509 Taiwanese daughters-in-law and 266 Vietnamese daughters-in-law. The results indicated that Vietnamese daughters-in-law evaluated their experiences as positive. They attributed this to the support and companionship they received from their mothers-in-law. Additionally, Allendorf (2012) found that an appreciation that the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law come from different backgrounds was also a way of developing sympathetic tolerance and helping them to adjust and adapt to each other. Furthermore, Bhopal's (1998) fieldwork in East London examined the influence of extended family and the effect it had on South Asian women's experience of motherhood. They found that paternal grandmothers and other female paternal kin, such as sisters-in-law, provided significant childcare support. The study makes no



reference to fathers or other men, reflecting perhaps the expected gender roles in South Asian culture. However, the absence of men appears to be common in in-law relationships research; the role of men and male in-law relationships is scant, and emerging research on in-law relationships continues to be predominantly focused on women (Greif & Woolley, 2018; Lewis Lemmons & Woolley, 2021). Consequently, there is a restricted view of the overall dynamics of in-law relationships.

## ***2.4 Linchpin Theory***

The presentation of in-law relationships in literature may not be too dissimilar to the portrayal of negative stereotypes found in popular culture. Duvall's 1954 seminal study on in-laws and Landis and Landis's 1963 study revealed that husbands and wives perceived the mother-in-law to be the most problematic, and since then, the conflicting nature of this dyad has been cited frequently in the literature (Limary, 2002; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Merrill, 2007; Turner et al., 2006). Schramm et al. (2005) looked at adjustments and stressors by surveying 1,001 newlyweds in the first few months of marriage and found in-laws to rank among the top five stressors for couples. Some 60% of women reported feeling unhappy and stressed in the long term because of the relationship with female in-laws, suggesting that difficulties among in-law relations can have a lasting impact on marital quality and satisfaction well beyond the early years of marriage (Apter, 2010). Researchers have argued that one of the reasons for the tumultuous nature of in-law relationships could be that they have internalised negative in-law stereotypes from popular culture (Woolley & Greif, 2018).

One of the ways in which in-law relationships have been conceptualised is in the Linchpin Theory (Morr Serewicz, 2008). The triad comprises the linchpin, his or her spouse and the relative. The triangular theory rests on four basic assumptions. Firstly, in-law relationships are characterised by their triadic (linchpin, spouse, and relative) and non-voluntary nature (little choice about the formation of relationships with each other). This means that the relationship with the linchpin is considered more important than that between spouse and relative. Secondly, the marital and familial sides of the triad are stronger than the in-law relationship side. Thirdly, major lifespan transitions, as well as short-term fluctuations in interactions, mean that the in-law relationships are continually changing. Finally, the nature of the relationship and communication between members on one side of the triangle is likely to have implications for everyone involved. Morr Serewicz (2008) utilised the linchpin theory to examine the nature of

98 in-law relationship triads (husband, wife, and one of the parents) and found that the in-law relationship is the weakest bond in the triad due to the non-voluntary nature of the relationship, whereas the other dyads in the triangle were much stronger.

The triadic nature of the relationship means that difficulties in the in-law dyad could affect the interaction and quality of the parental or marital dyad (Bryant et al., 2001; Morr Serewicz, 2008) in the triangle. Over time, there is the possibility that the son/husband's role as linchpin will reduce, especially if the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law establish a bond that exists apart from the marriage. The studies that follow highlight how the linchpin theory can be used to understand the difficulties which affect parental, marital, and in-law relations; however, the strength of one of the dyads can favourably, as well as unfavourably, affect another dyad.

## ***2.5 Conflict and Conflict Management.***

There appears to be some empirical evidence for the negative and conflicting nature of in-law relationships that are portrayed in popular culture (Fischer, 1983; Lopata, 1999). Duvall's 1954 study observed that participants found parents-in-law to be interfering and domineering and were perceived as old-fashioned and resistant to change. She asserted that young couples require autonomy to develop an independent family unit and found that the marriage was more cohesive when married adult children were given greater autonomy. Marotz-Baden and Cowan (1987), however, found that in-law conflict and proximity were unrelated to stress and marital satisfaction. Rather, their research showed differences in goals and values, and a lack of communication skills were the basis of frequent problems. Fischer (1986) found that the cause of tension and conflict in in-law relationships is due to people coming from different family cultures.

Research on in-laws has highlighted a variety of ways in which conflict is managed. Interference from family members can threaten the autonomy of the marital relationship, and failure to address intrusions and establish boundaries with in-laws may negatively impact the couple's marriage (Silverstein, 1990). One way of dealing with strained relationships is to put boundary management techniques in place. Management strategies employed in conflicts often involve avoidance, and Young and Degroot (2021) found that topic avoidance (choosing not to discuss an issue) served as a way of controlling privacy boundaries with mothers-in-law. They argue that, rather than viewing topic avoidance as uniformly negative, it can serve as a protective boundary to balance self-disclosure and relationship quality in the daughter-in-

law/mother-in-law relationship and allow for daughters-in-law to maintain independence and privacy from their mothers-in-law. Other research has found that, often, the spouse is recruited as a conduit to mediate conflict (Anderson, 2016; Merrill, 2007). Norwood and Webb (2006) suggested that the more intrusive the mother is, the more likely their son is to establish appropriate boundaries between the mother and the married couple. Goldstein's 2015 study explored this by surveying 241 married women and their perceptions of their mother-in-law's behaviours and boundary setting by their husbands. The results showed that the boundaries set by husbands for their mothers mitigate the effect that interference can have on marital satisfaction. Goldstein concluded that, whilst conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-laws is important in determining the experience of marital satisfaction, boundary-setting by the husband rather than interference from the mother-in-law was a better predictor of marital satisfaction. A limitation of this study is that it only explored the views of daughters-in-law and the boundaries set by their husbands and did not explore the role of mothers-in-law and whether they placed any boundaries. This would illuminate whether boundaries set by the husband's mother affect the marital dyad. Also, the majority of the participants in the study were white and it is unclear whether participants from other cultures would have shaped the outcomes of the study differently.

Another way that conflict has been managed is through avoiding self-disclosure or avoiding certain topics, which can serve several functions, including protecting one's identity or relationships (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Caughlin & Afifi, 2004) or avoiding conflict and protecting oneself in certain situations (Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Strategically navigating conversations may be particularly useful and necessary in complex relationships such as in-law relations, so that individuals can protect themselves from judgement and criticism, prevent conflicts in their relationships, and 'keep the peace' (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a, 1995b). Whilst the reasons for topic avoidance or avoiding self-disclosure may be benevolent, in other cases, those in particularly fraught in-law relationships may utilise this strategy to maintain relational distance (Mikucki-Enyart & Caughlin, 2018), especially if they feel that they have no choice but to maintain the status quo of the relationship with the in-law.

## ***2.6 Ambiguity and Uncertainty***

Ambiguity and uncertainty can affect the perceptions in-laws have of one another within the triadic relationship. As mentioned previously, the complex nature of in-law relationships may

also lie in the fact that the relationship is a non-voluntary one, as individuals do not choose this relationship but, rather, are linked via the linchpin (Morr Serewicz, 2008; Santos & Levitt, 2007). Without the linchpin, individuals would not need to interact or maintain the relationship (Woolley & Greif, 2018). The non-voluntary nature of the relationship means that it is surrounded by ambiguity about what to expect, as there is little guidance as to how these relationships should be and how to communicate with one another (Prentice, 2008; Turner et al., 2006). Ambiguity and uncertainty can obfuscate the communication between in-laws (Fischer, 1983; Mikucki-Enyart, 2011; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2006) and they may feel confused about how to think, feel, and behave towards each other (Mikucki-Enyart (2011) and how to communicate with each other. This can have a significant impact on the quality of in-law relationships.

Mikucki-Enyart (2011) explored relational uncertainty in in-law relationships and found that 49 of the mothers-in-law were uncertain about how they felt about their daughters-in-law and their position in the family. They also reported feeling unclear on how to communicate or the number of contacts and visits the daughters-in-law wanted from them. This ambiguity challenges the stereotype that mothers-in-law are inherently intrusive and suggests that mothers-in-law also consider the perception that their daughters-in-law have of them, which influences their behaviour. Although not specified, it may also suggest that some mothers-in-law may not want to live up to the stereotype that is often portrayed in popular culture.

Disclosure may increase the sense of being included in a family, reduce relational uncertainty in in-law relationships and increase closeness amongst in-laws (Mikucki-Enyart, 2011). The effect of disclosure appears to produce mixed results in its implications for relational satisfaction. Disclosure of acceptance from parents-in-law may promote a positive relational quality in in-law relationships (Morr Serewicz, 2008), whereas low levels of disclosure in family-relevant topics may lead to low satisfaction for some participants. Being trusted with family secrets may indicate acceptance and accommodation of children-in-law by parents-in-law; however, hearing slanderous comments from in-laws in relation to other family members can backfire and reduce satisfaction among new sons and daughters-in-law, even though they were expressed on the basis that the children-in-law were liked (Morr Serewicz & Canary, 2008). This example also shows that parents-in-law's satisfaction with their child-in-law is weakly related to the satisfaction levels felt by a child-in-law.

Whilst the research thus far has illuminated some ideas about the conflicting and ambiguous nature of affinal relationships, there are several limitations in these studies. Much of the research has relied on survey data. Mikucki et al. (2015) designed their measures and conceptualised constructs based on participants' responses. The first segment of their two-part study involved participants responding to an open-ended questionnaire, listing and describing issues related to uncertainty with regard to their in-laws. This was then used to construct scales of children-in-law's uncertainty for the second part of their study. However, cross-sectional studies have several limitations; their construct of uncertainty may only be applied to their study, and caution will need to be taken if compared to other research on uncertainty. This is mainly due to the lack of consensus about definitions of constructs. For example, in family and marriage research, researchers often disagree on constructs such as marital quality, dyadic adjustment, and marital satisfaction. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably without specifying their unique definitions and conceptualisations (Goldstein, 2015).

Arguably, constructs do not capture the complex nature of in-law relationships. People do not simply accommodate or not accommodate; nor is it accurate to define relationships as either satisfactory or not satisfactory. The use of these binaries fails to recognise the nuanced and complex features of in-law relationships. Furthermore, conclusions about the causality and direction of causality cannot be made. For example, in Mikucki et al.'s 2015 study on children-in-laws' relational uncertainty with in-laws, it is difficult to ascertain whether uncertainty causes satisfaction/dissatisfaction or whether the perceived level of satisfaction causes uncertainty. Secondly, cross-sectional studies are further limited in that they present the findings at a particular point in time and fail to provide a longitudinal perspective. This is a narrow view of in-law relationships and does not consider their complexity and how they may change or evolve. Widmer (2013) utilised a relational dialectic perspective to illustrate that in-law relationships are not static and may fluctuate through their lives, at times integrating more, and drifting apart at others. Some of these changes may be due to various turning points in the relationship (Anderson, 2016). This suggests that more research is needed, using methods that can capture more nuanced features of affinal relationships which may help to illuminate their complexities.

The literature thus far has illustrated how the linchpin theory and triadic research can be useful in understanding the nature and structure of in-law relationships (Morr Serewicz and Hosmer, 2010). In-law research is dominated by studies carried out in American and European settings, mainly interpreted from a Western perspective. However, in-law relationships are not unique

to Western society. Non-Western contexts feature diverse family structures and living arrangements. In-law relationships and interactions in these contexts can highlight different ways in which cultural factors, patriarchal norms, and beliefs influence family structure and the various roles in which family members are positioned or undertake.

There is little understanding about the son's/husband's role, even though it has a crucial impact on the in-law dyad. In fact, men do not feature as frequently as women in the literature on in-law relationships. Most research on in-law relationships has demonstrated that they are fraught with tension and can be conflictual, particularly between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, highlighting the power struggle within this dyad. Feminists would argue that research on in-law relationships has provided an avenue to give voice to women (e.g., Cotterill, 1994; Pini, 2007) who have formerly been marginalised and treated peripherally in scholarly literature. Further examination of in-law relationships and the role of power in different cultural contexts can make a useful contribution to furthering the understanding of the dynamics of these relationships.

Despite the notable tension and difficulties between women in affinal relationships, this area has thus far received little attention from feminist research (Ward & Linn, 2020). Cotterill (1994) suggests that there is a dearth of research on many features of family relationships due to the idea that family relationships are natural. Early studies by Pini (2007) and Cotterill (1994) study which applied a feminist lens on female affinal kinship, argue that discourses about mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have operated in gendered ways to shape women's position and actions within the family. Pini (2007) adds these discourses are not passively accepted and women do contest these discourses, thereby emphasising their agency. This suggests that a feminist perspective can provide a useful framework to better understand the roles and positions of affinal kin members.

## ***2.7 Conceptual Framework: A Post-colonial Feminist Framework***

### ***2.7.1 Overview***

The central feature of feminist theory lies in recognising the general power imbalance between men and women and promoting gender equality in both the domestic and public spheres. Porter & Judd (1999) note that the practice of feminism was developed and refined even before the term was first coined by French philosopher, Charles Fourier, in 1837. It operates on the

premise that an understanding of gender is essential to deal with the issues underlying the consistent and persistent oppression of women by men. Broadly speaking, feminism is a movement concerned with achieving equal political and social rights for women and working towards the elimination of discrimination and sexism.

Feminism, as a concept or a practice, can take different forms. Therefore, definitions of feminism depend on the political, cultural and philosophical standpoint of the person defining the term. Various strands of feminism have developed over time with decidedly different political aims, models for gender identities and outlooks on how to change society and challenge existing power relations (Bartels et al., 2019). Some of the main feminist philosophical standpoints include radical feminism, cultural feminism, liberal feminism and Marxist feminism. Radical feminism was born out of the civil rights movements in the 1960s. It focuses on the male oppression of females and claims that the central issue is the subordination of women by men. It rejects the patriarchal ideal of women that focuses on childrearing, marriage, and the maintenance of the household (Doude & Tapp, 2014). Cultural feminism, on the other hand, emphasises essential differences between men and women. Whilst there are different views within cultural feminism about whether these differences are biological or cultural, women's qualities are valued as superior to those of men. They aim to revalidate undervalued female attributes socially, politically and legally (Alcoff, 1988). As one of the earliest forms of feminism, liberal feminism emerges from the idea that women are viewed as secondary in status to men in society. This is based on unequal opportunities and segregation from men, so they aim to create change in people's attitudes and views towards women whilst working within existing social structures (Wolff, 2007). Finally, Marxist feminists believe that empowerment and equality for women cannot be achieved within the framework of capitalism (Stefano, 2014). Marxist feminism differentiates itself from other modes of feminist thought by not affording women a separate and special status without regard to class, and by its commitment to the defeat of capitalism by supporting working-class and impoverished women.

The different notions of feminism have evolved over time and in different locations, to reflect the emerging and dominant issues affecting women in a given period. Narratives of feminism employ the concept of 'waves', as they have provided a useful framework to chronicle the evolution of the feminism movement (Baumgardner, 2011). The metaphor was initially used to refer to the emerging Western women's liberation movements that followed the early organised suffrage movements (Gamble, 2006). However, critics of the use of this concept have argued

that the history of feminism is not as linear as the word 'waves' suggests. Notions of feminism have evolved variously, but the concept may serve to create a false illusion that each wave is completely distinct from the next and that organised feminist movements did not exist before the first wave (Springer, 2002).

Evans and Chamberlain (2015) suggest that, rather than rejecting the use of the metaphor altogether, it is important instead to incorporate into it more reflexivity and fluidity. They argue that discussions should consider the underlying continuity of the feminist movement between waves, question those which are included and excluded from the discourse and recognise that multiple waves of feminism coexist. As such, a summary of the main waves is offered with further discussion of continuity, inclusivity and multiplicity. Whilst there is a lack of consensus on the number of different movements, and the boundaries and characteristics of each wave, feminist literature broadly distinguishes four waves (Shiva & Karazmi, 2019; Wrye, 2009) and an emerging fifth wave (Hijab, 2019).

### *2.7.2 First and Second waves of Feminism*

The first wave of feminism occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries, highlighting the struggle over women's basic legal and political rights in society. It focused particularly on suffrage and was concerned with equal social and constitutional rights for women. This included the right to vote, divorce, education and property (Sharlach, 2009). A notable criticism of first-wave feminism, in the US, at least, was its focus on the rights of white women, rather than of all women. For example, white women were given the right to vote in the US in 1920. Women (and men) of colour, did not have the same right until 45 years later, following the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s sought to promote gender equality in the workplace and reduce other social barriers. Both waves were concerned with eliminating inequality stemming from capitalism and patriarchy (Hunnicut, 2009) and giving voice to women to assert their rights in various domains of life such as equal pay, reproductive rights and female sexuality.

Early waves of feminism, however, were criticised for assuming that the voices of white, middle-class women spoke for *all* women. By prioritising a particular race and class, early



waves of feminism were criticised for being too homogenous and Anglocentric (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; hooks, 1989), leading Black feminists to ask, ‘whose feminism’ is being written about and ‘whose voices’ are included within this collective ‘sisterhood’?

### *2.7.3 Third Wave Feminism – Black Feminist Theory and Intersectionality*

Dissatisfied with the silence of Black women’s voices and their multi-layered experience of oppression, Black Feminist theory challenged the notion that the subjugation of women can be understood from a view through a single-faceted lens that privileges gender as the sole cause of women’s experiences (hooks, 1989). A defining feature of the Black Feminist perspective is the idea of intersectionality, which is used to challenge the exclusive, hegemonic, and hierarchical features of early feminist thought (Nash, 2008). Coined by legal scholar and critical race theorist, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), the term is defined as ‘the multi-dimensionality of marginalised subjects’ lived experiences’. Intersectionality has been viewed as the ‘most important contribution to women’s studies’ (McCall, 2005) and is thought to have brought ‘the most significant transformation in feminist theory over the last three decades’ (Singh, 2015).

Black Feminists draw on narratives and reflexivity as important features of their work (Skinner et al., 2005). Through narratives of oppression, hooks (1989) demonstrates Black women’s agency through psychological strength and survival abilities, particularly significant in considering how ‘oppressed’ women are perceived and written about. Moreover, the oppression signifies a crucial marker of identity formation, which may be more empowering than the way ‘third-world women’ are presented. Craib’s (1998) research on identity exemplifies this well: ‘...loss, frustration, pain, and conflict are necessary for growth and development... We do not grow through having our needs satisfied; we grow, develop and change through having them frustrated, denied, or redirected...’ (p.216). There has been some resistance to the use of the term within the field of psychology, due to the challenges it creates with dominant psychological norms about scientific progress, which is aligned with positivist epistemology and generalisable, universal, and quantitative study designs (Settles et al., 2020). However, psychologists have become increasingly concerned with the effects of different categories of identity on outcomes such as health and well-being (Cole, 2009), and it has been most readily endorsed by psychologists from marginalised groups (Settles et al., 2020).

Black Feminist scholarship is to be commended for addressing the theoretical shortcomings of Western feminism and challenging the hegemonic and Eurocentric discourses in women's studies (Brah, 1996; Mirza, 1997). However, Ahmed (2003) has criticised Black Feminist theory for failing to acknowledge the voices of Muslim women, by allowing them to remain silent or reinforcing stereotypical constructions, so that the voices of Muslim women are ignored and situated outside of normative discourses; or the theory contributes to the 'othering' process by locating them within pathologised, oppressed, and victimised discourses (Ahmed, 2003). Consequently, this may result in an ideological hegemony of researchers conducting studies on particular groups, reinforcing stereotypical representations of those groups and perpetuating these ideologies in their writings (Becker & Richards, 1986). The influence of Western hegemonic discourse is not limited to white and Black Feminist theory but extends to and influences third-world women when they write about their communities and also represent women within fixed and essentialised constructions (Lazreg, 1988; Mohanty, 1988).

In-law research has also illustrated how some communities may have internalised Western 'orientalist' tendencies to evaluate their families in totalising ways. Shih and Pyke (2015) examined ideological assumptions of women's mothers-in-law and compared the responses of 36 Taiwanese, Taiwanese Americans, and Mexican-American daughters-in-law. They found that Taiwanese and Taiwanese American participants engaged in racialised assumptions about their mothers-in-law. These were indicated by references to mothers-in-law as 'typical' or 'traditional'. Furthermore, open, affectionate, and loving attributes were perceived as being characteristic of Western mothers-in-law. In doing this, the respondents projected polarised views of Asian cultures as being rigid and old-fashioned, positioning the West as progressive and modern (Said, 1978).

#### *2.7.4 Fourth Wave and Emerging Fifth Wave*

The fourth wave has been defined as newly emerging, over the last decade, and therefore has been difficult to define. It continues in the present day and, in terms of activism, has been characterised by the role of the internet and social media. It focuses on empowering women and has seen the emergence of the #MeToo movement, where accountability has been sought for acts of sexual violence against women. The internet and social media helped women to speak up and share experiences of abuse. Internet activism is a key feature of the fourth wave

(Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). The role of power in abuse continues to be at the forefront of understanding violence against women. It also emphasises intersectionality and advocates for marginalised groups, including trans women. It aims to continue to deconstruct gender norms and systems of power. Feminists are beginning to confront the systems which allow inequality, abuse and discrimination to occur.

There are some who argue that whilst the fourth wave movement continues, there is also an emerging fifth wave. The fifth wave encompasses learning from previous waves about women's rights issues relating to politics, economics, culture and media and is described as multi-dimensional. Whilst the previous four waves have sought to work within current structures and systems to bring about change, the emerging fifth wave seeks to dismantle and destroy existing systems and build new systems prioritising the needs of all marginalised people (Ahmed, 2017).

### ***2.7.5 Feminism and Religion***

Feminism and religion are unsettled categories and whilst there is an abundance of personal interpretations of spirituality, institutional religions maintain significant power within contemporary societies (Zwissler, 2012). Braidotti (2008) observes that the most dominant streams of European feminism are mostly secular. According to radical feminist Simone de Beauvoir, religion oppresses women and is used by men to oppress women (Beauvoir, 1953). The implicit assumption of feminism is that religion participates in the subordination and subjugation of women and is therefore incompatible with the philosophy of the women's movement. A large body of research demonstrates associations between religious beliefs and patriarchal attitudes which maintain power imbalances between men and women (Walby, 1990). The differences in traits/functions assigned to men and women in society can be found to be deeply ingrained in the practices of many religions (Perales & Bouma, 2019). For example, many major world religions refer to God as male (including the use of masculine pronouns) and have an overwhelmingly disproportionate presence of men in high-ranking religious leadership roles (Storkey, 2015). Woodhead (2007) argued that the exclusion of women from the Catholic priesthood is an example of patriarchy and highlights the church's lack of ease with women's freedom.

Liberal feminism focuses on legal equality and justice for all in both the familial and global arenas. Justice is defined as an agreement in which coercively enforced gender hierarchy or traditionally gendered roles are absent (Baehr, 2017), both within the basic structures of society as well as within the family, which is seen as the inner workings of society. Therefore, justice within the family, according to liberal feminists, would be expressed through equal distribution of domestic labour, care and income (Baehr, 2017). Liberal feminists argue that religions such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism are oppressive, as they not only endorse gendered roles for women, but emphasise core values in the preservation of marriage and the family in a coercive manner (Fortune & Enger, 2005). It has been argued that such religious texts and their applications maintain male control and dominance within a patriarchal system. As such, it is said religion is viewed as serving patriarchy rather than serving to challenge dominant social norms that have perpetuated inequality and abuse against women (Fortune & Enger, 2005).

Whilst male violence against women had been documented in US and UK history for centuries, notable movements to end violence against women started to emerge during the second wave. Domestic violence was no longer considered something for which a woman was responsible, and women were no longer to be partly blamed for rape/sexual assault crimes (Amir, 1971). It was acknowledged that male violence against women could take multiple forms apart from physical violence, including psychological, sexual and/or financial. Feminists aimed to redefine violence as an issue of power, caused or perpetuated by gender inequalities (McMillan, 2007). Radical feminists contributed the greatest share of work on violence against women and promoted the idea that patriarchy could explain male violence against women (Brownmiller, 1975). Similar to the first wave, many of these goals were achieved through a focus on legislative change. Although the second wave started to address racial inequalities, both class and race (if considered at all) remained secondary to gender. Inequalities between women of colour and white women and men remained largely the same.

Liberal feminism has however been criticised for its failure to address issues relating to diversity and acknowledge the various cultural perceptions of what equality and justice necessitate (Enslin & Tjiattas, 2004). Westerners associate secularism with being modern and consequently can regard religion and religious values, along with societies that uphold them, as old-fashioned and backward (Hawthorne, 2014). It has been argued that liberal feminists must first separate modernity from secularism, and deconstruct colonial perceptions of religion, in order to work towards trans-national feminism (Hawthorne, 2014).

The topic of feminism and religion has been a contentious one and it has been argued that North American discourse often scapegoats religion for justifying misogyny and violence against women (Hitchins, 2007). Many scholars contend that religions were not patriarchal in the early stages of their organisation and argue that it is not the religions themselves that are patriarchal, but the application of them within a patriarchal society (Mahmood, 2016). Texts and scriptures can be misinterpreted and used as a tool of control and abuse in opposition to the values of religion (Alkhateeb, 1999). As Mernissi (1991) suggested, “Depending on how it is used, the sacred text can be a threshold of escape or an insurmountable barrier” (p. 62).

#### 2.7.6 Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminists, as a movement, resist oppressive ideologies by identifying the way the *Qur'an* (Islamic Holy Book), *Hadith* and *Sunnah* (sayings, practices and traditions of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *madhabs* (Islamic schools of law/thought) provide answers to women's issues and affirm their rights (Abdugafurova et al., 2017).

Islamic feminism gained popularity in the 1990s (Mir-Hosseini, 2011), and since the events of 9/11 in America and 7/7 in the UK, Islam and Muslim women have received even more attention. Debates on the veil and media portrayals of Islam as a ‘backward’ religion instrumental in the oppression of women have led to further marginalisation of female Muslims (Zempi, 2016). This misrepresentation is a reflection of hegemonic discourses which help to maintain the dominant position of the West (Said, 1978), and has become a rhetoric to discredit Islam and prove its inferiority. Despite the negative attention, especially regarding Muslim women's identity and their position in the family, research has shown that women view their faith as a key to their empowerment and a source of agency that increases their confidence and access to rights (Bolognani & Mellor, 2012) and offers stability and security (Rozario, 2012).

Islamic feminism recognises that the relationship between religion and feminism can be complex (Mir-Hosseini, 2011), especially since the implicit assumption of feminism is that religion participates in the subordination and subjugation of women and is therefore incompatible with the philosophy of the women's movement. Muslims struggle to identify with feminists' emphasis on equal rights, as it is at odds with Islam's notion of complementarity between the sexes, and they argue that the *Qur'an* has already provided significant rights for

women, which are far more wide-reaching than the rights of women in secular legal systems (Ahmed, 2003; Hashim 1999; Tucker, 2008).

Islamic feminism utilises Islamic texts and jurisprudence to challenge cultural practices that are not supported by Islamic law, practices such as preventing women from acquiring education or obliging them to look after their husband's parents (Abdugafurova et al., 2017). This highlights a significant and poignant argument that is pertinent to understanding the experience of Muslim women, who may have to negotiate culture and religion within their communities and families, and who may have different beliefs and ideas about culture and faith.

The idea of invisible labour is shared by Western and Islamic feminism. Western feminism introduced the concept of invisible labour to illustrate how a woman's role at home and at work often goes unacknowledged. Women's care work is unpaid and considered obligatory. Similarly, Islamic feminism also highlights how religious elites distort religious law in favour of cultural norms that favour patriarchy (Abdugafurova et al., 2017). The gendered nature of power, embedded in religious and cultural practices, favours male translations of holy texts, which benefit men and regulate women to adopt a particular culture of thinking (Purewal, 2003; Thomas & Brah, 2011). Abdugafurova et al. (2017) found that although Islamic law advocates female autonomy and argues against a daughter-in-law's religious obligation to care for her husband's parents, Muslim jurists justify a wife's elder care by her husband's duty to care for his parents. By directing attention to the importance of pleasing the husband, jurists fail to protect women from the cultural obligation to serve in-laws and demote the role of elder care to volunteer work to please her husband, making her servitude invisible. Hussain, (2012) argues that one way of tackling this is to develop women's religious knowledge to help them distinguish between Islamic law and cultural discourse. This suggests that the interplay of culture and religion may significantly influence the shaping of experiences.

Culture is defined as a 'system of signs, rules, symbols and practices that, on the one hand, structure the human realm of action; structures that are, on the other hand, constantly being (re)constructed and transformed by human action and praxis' (Belzen, 2010, p.37). This definition, endorsed by Belzen (2010), is particularly useful to the current study, as it recognises that culture is fluid, constantly changing, dynamic, and hybrid in nature. I draw upon a general definition of religion as a 'personal set or institutionalised system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Pertinent to this study is understanding participants' own subjective experiences of religion and culture rather than assuming that these constructs

are universally the same (Dueck et al., 2017). Individuals may have to negotiate culture and religion within their communities and families, who may have different beliefs and ideas about culture and faith.

### *2.7.7 A Post-colonial Feminist Perspective*

The post-colonial feminist perspective offers a critical approach to addressing inequalities associated with hegemonic power relationships (Al-wazedi, 2020). As well as considering patriarchy as the basis for oppression, it also considers the political, historical and cultural context shaping social inequalities (Quayson, 2000). In particular, it interrogates how women in the non-Western world are represented, and calls on Western feminists to speak on their behalf (Al-wazedi, 2020). Furthermore, it challenges ideas about women's liberation and agency. A crucial litmus test of feminist agency in North America and Europe is their ability to speak out in public, orally and in writing (Parpart & Parashar, 2019, Madhok & Rai, 2012). In contrast, women's silence is associated with disempowerment (Jackson, 2012) and may be evaluated as lacking agency. Western scholarship's perspective of this binary limits the understanding of voice and agency. Therefore, a more nuanced and grounded approach, may provide important insights into women's agency (Parpart & Parashar, 2019).

Classic feminism implies that the emancipation of women lies in denying structures that position them in subordinate positions and reinforce unequal power imbalances. This framework would suggest that one would have to turn one's back on extant cultural and religious norms to achieve empowerment. From this perspective, feminists are often criticised for propagating anti-marriage, anti-men, and zero-sum ideologies to achieve female empowerment. This is particularly problematic for women whose values are centred around family and kinships where they feel a sense of connectedness and belonging.

However, this is not to say that women passively submit to cultural expectations. The process is far more complex, and their notions of empowerment may not be reflective of normative assumptions of freedom and choice as proposed by the dictates of liberal, Marxist, and radical feminism. Instead, women may modify cultural norms and negotiate power relations in ways that are 'fit for purpose' (Pande, 2015). In this regard, a post-colonial feminist framework recognises that the experiences of women are better understood by addressing how they navigate within their cultural parameters, within a largely patriarchal setting, which shapes

their worldviews and goals in relationships. Phillips (2010) recognises that, whilst women may face various pressures in their lives, they should still be respected for the choices they make without assuming that they have been imposed on them by oppressive and patriarchal cultures.

A classic feminist framework tends to adopt a view of agency as outward expressions and actions of resistance. However, this provides a very restrictive view of women's agency and fails to acknowledge everyday enactments of negotiation whereby women use alternative tactics and strategies to manage their daily struggles (Das & Di Fruscia, 2010). Women may communicate resistance in less perceptible ways, not easily observable by spectators. Active agency, then, may present itself in less obvious ways, where women negotiate dialectic tensions quietly in the private spheres of their minds, to inform the course of action they wish to take to contest the forces of patriarchy. These contestations may inform choices to negotiate, creatively and subtly, with others to meet their needs, or they may choose not to take action outwardly in some situations.

Deciding not to take action is not to be confused with a lack of agency or having no agency. On the contrary, not taking action may be part of women's active agency to manoeuvre around challenges in a way that maximises the potential for them to meet their goals. This is echoed by Phillips (2010), in that the choices women make should not be ignored, and their agency should be recognised even under oppressive conditions. A patriarchal family setting and intersectional differences may compound and restrict women's ability to exercise agency, but there may be instances where it motivates individuals to exercise agency in the limited spaces available between wider familial, cultural, and social forces. However, Phillips (2010) also adds a cautionary note that, although everyone has agency, some may have more options than others. Focusing solely on cultural influences overlooks possible structural inequalities. Women may not be aware, or may take for granted the way in which structural factors and cultural processes are deeply ingrained in shaping their thinking and regulating their behaviours. Consequently, Phillips (2010) argues that overemphasis on choice may lead to women perceiving that they have more choice than they do in reality.

Bhabha's (1990, 1996) concept of third space is particularly useful, as it helps to explore agency in a nuanced way, paying attention to the spaces in-between the parts of cultures they preserve and the parts they negotiate to create a new 'third space'. Mirza (2015) distinguishes 'compliant' and 'resistant' agency and suggests that there is a continuum between these two spaces, demonstrating the diverse ways in which women deal with in-law relationships. She



refers to compliant agency as strategies used to ameliorate challenging situations and manage and minimise abuse. She frames ‘resistant’ agency as a strategy that features a lower profile than more outward forms of resistance. Therefore, women’s agency can be recognised as lying somewhere on the continuum. This is also aligned well with post-colonial feminism as it recognises the diversity of people’s experiences.

## ***2.8 Patriarchy and Male Power***

Within a patriarchal society, the concept of hegemonic masculinity may be particularly useful for understanding gender relations. Early understanding of hegemonic masculinity illustrated the culturally idealised form of manhood (Donaldson, 1993). This is characterised by stereotypical notions of masculinity that shape the socialisation of young men. These include adopting and internalising behaviours characterised by competitiveness, aggression and emotional restraint. Later understandings of hegemonic masculinity were reformulated to acknowledge the hierarchical nature and varieties of masculinity. Connell (2005) for example argues that rather than a fixed view of masculinity, multiple masculinities vary across time and culture. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity not only legitimises men’s domination over women but justifies the subordination of other marginalised ways of being a “man.” That is men who deviate from normative notions of masculinity run the risk of being marginalised, thus demonstrating how men can also be victims of patriarchy.

Patriarchal societies can also influence relationships between women and position them as victims of patriarchy. Within feminist psychology, some would understand the conflict between women being born in a male-dominated society, internalising the male perspectives, and adopting them as their own to undermine other women (Shpancer, 2014). Some subscribe to the idea that the problems produced by patriarchy that put women in subordinate positions, may be shared experiences among women. However, women may fail to recognise their shared experiences and instead work against each other. This “false consciousness”, as Marxist feminists would posit, skews their perception in thinking the real threat to their identity is other women, when maybe it is the male establishment that sets them to work against each other (Shpancer, 2014). Through sharing common experiences in consciousness-raising, they may be able to see how the patriarchal structure produces such problems, and their personal problems therefore become political (Snyder, 2008). Some radical and Marxist feminists would

argue that marriage is an arena that perpetuates patriarchy and therefore needs to be overturned for the emancipation of women.

Some participants in Merrill's (2007) research found that the women in her study believed that men in the family often did not want to get involved in the women's relationships. Silence may reflect the patriarchal nature of relationships, putting women in difficult positions as kin keepers and putting the onus on them to maintain relations. From this, it may be assumed that, in avoiding the role of kin-keeping, men benefit from not being as absorbed in conflicts and from women taking the pressure to ensure familial relational ties are kept intact. Failure and the breakdown of the relationship are then directed at women. However, women in Western contexts tend to have more power. Western literature on in-law relationships has shown that the involuntary nature of in-law relations makes relationships between affinal kin ambiguous, resulting in unclear roles and expectations in these relationships. There is no mandate from the in-laws to live together or serve each other. From this perspective, it can be difficult to conceptualise within a feminist framework, for Western research at least, how women are subordinated, and how men benefit within the affinal relations.

A contrasting view is provided by Collier (cited in Rosaldo, Lamphere & Bamberger, 1974), who criticises the assumption that discord between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is caused by passively acting out scripts set by patriarchal structures, but rather views the confrontations as deliberate tactics that serve a purpose. Vlahoutsikous (1997) believes that her observations of conflict between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law have empowering aspects, where they are active participants in negotiations of the cultural order. As the women battle between the preservation of tradition and forces of change and modernity, she argues that these conflicts position women in a positive light as agentic beings, expressing their discord with rationality and intent. This is also exemplified in research that argues that the daughter-in-law holds the most power (Cotterill, 1994; Limary; 2002; Rittenour, 2012). As the daughter-in-law is the perceived gatekeeper, Nuner (2004) argues that she holds the ultimate power over the contact between the mother-in-law and her biological son and any grandchildren.

Foucault (1980) argues that power is never fixed or stable but something that is negotiated. He also emphasises the relational elements of power rather than reducing the term to being simply imposed and repressive. Yakali-Çamoğlu's (2007) study on the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in Turkey found that although the interviewees (as daughters-in-law) felt that their freedom was restricted because of their dominating mothers-in-law, they

were unaware of their own “power”. These manifested themselves on the micro-level in ordinary activities of everyday life where in-laws experienced feelings of competitiveness and jealousy towards interviewees.

## ***2.9 Bargaining with Patriarchy***

Women are largely expected to conform to gender norms, such as being responsible for looking after the home, in-laws, and children. However, in the review of the literature that follows, there may be tensions around the role of daughters-in-law and the power dynamics within the in-law family. For women, in exchange for being a subservient daughter-in-law to her parents-in-law in her youth, they may have the opportunity to gain power over the labour of her daughter-in-law when she becomes a mother-in-law herself. This ideology was termed as “patriarchal bargain” and involves a woman internalising patriarchal values thoroughly whilst she anticipates inheriting the authority as a senior woman in later life and will reap the coinciding benefits (Kandiyoti, 1988). Das Gupta’s (1991) commentary on popular Indian cinema proclaims that the last high status of position as a mother-in-law means she can avenge society for the loss of her youth by displacing her resentment on her daughter-in-law by alienating her son from his newly acquired wife.

The “patriarchal bargain” is dependent upon the loyalty of the sons to ensure they reside in their family home and guarantee their spouses do not attempt to break the family system at any cost. As a result, older women may have a vested interest in suppressing the romantic love between youngsters (Jeffrey, Jeffery & Lyon, 1989) to ensure the conjugal bond is secondary and therefore claim the son’s primary allegiance.

The hope of having a subservient daughter-in-law may be a motivator to endure the oppressive situation they may find themselves in. However, should there be a breakdown of the patriarchal bargain, this may have serious consequences for women; it may be perceived as a genuine tragedy for women who invested in the system of an earlier patriarchal bargain and are not able to benefit from having a daughter-in-law under her authority. Furthermore, women who escape the control of their mother-in-law and head their own households at a young age may also lose the opportunity to look forward to a future surrounded by subservient daughters-in-law (Kandiyoti, 1988). In a system where women find themselves under the control of men, women may feel that subservience from a future daughter-in-law is the only opportunity to acquire some authority and control, through the position of an elevated status of a mother-in-law.

Whilst women may be enticed by inhabiting a senior position in the hierarchy, it is questionable how much of a benefit this may be for women. From the outset, women's subordinated status itself is what forces them to engage in the bargain in the first place. Their participation in the bargaining process pits mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law against one another and reinforces patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988). From this perspective, the breakdown of the patriarchal bargain or a renegotiation of the process may provide an avenue for women to escape their subordinated status. In Gram et al.,'s (2018) study they found Nepalese couples being subjected to exploitation and financial insecurity whilst living under the authority of seniors. Nepalese daughters-in-law, women expressed emancipation and empowerment as they moved from the position of a daughter-in-law in the joint household to being a wife in a nuclear household. However, the researchers argue that household separation may not fundamentally change patriarchal norms. It doesn't appear to alter the expectations of daughters-in-law being subservient to their mothers-in-law and neither does it alter their subordination to men in the household hierarchy (Gram et al. 2018). Moreover, whilst daughters-in-law may feel empowered by leaving the joint household, this may be at the expense of the mother-in-law losing her son and in turn their access to financial protection (Vera-Sanso, 2005). Simultaneously, the daughter-in-law's subordinate position in the nuclear household may find that their husband potentially abuses financial privileges (Chowbey, 2017; Singh & Bandhari, 2012)

Kandiyoti (1988) notes that within the bargaining process, women may contest, redefine, and renegotiate their positionings, which means that women in non-Western contexts should not be evaluated using a reductionist approach to whether they exercise agency or not. Madhok, Phillips and Wilson (2013) argued that it is unhelpful to view women's agency in binary or oppositional terms, but rather agency can be conceptualised when forces of agency and oppression are brought together upon a "common conceptual canvas" (Madhok, 2013). Instead of assuming lack of agency, focus should be directed to recognising agentive acts in the context of women's subordination and oppression that create conditions for its enactments (Mahmood, 2001). Kandiyoti (1988) also suggested that the bargaining strategies involve women contesting, redefining, and negotiating their positionings, as women are generally found to be the gender responsible for cultivating and maintaining kin relationships. The bargain of patriarchy comes under threat given that a daughter-in-law's position as kin keeper allows her to exert power and control as she can choose to facilitate or obstruct her husband's relations with his family. For example, some women may adopt more resistant techniques as part of their

agency if they observe that their compliant agency strategies serve them no long-term benefits; what Chaudhuri et al. (2014) identified as “breaking with patriarchy.”

Kabeer (2001) conceptualised agency as women’s ability to exercise power by making choices and gaining agency over time. This may be more helpful than terms such as “autonomy”, which is sometimes used interchangeably with agency. However, autonomy does not take into account the temporal nature of agency, which can change over time (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005). Furthermore, autonomy implies the notion of acting alone, which does not explain situations where women’s agency is based on the context of their interdependence on family and their personal preference to make choices with others (Kabeer, 2001; White, 1992).

### ***2.10 Abuse Towards Daughters-in-Law***

Interpersonal violence, domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) are terms used interchangeably by scholars studying violence. It is a prevalent global public health issue and of significant public health concern in the UK (Chandan et al., 2020). Whilst both men and women are victims of abuse, women are disproportionately so (Office for National Statistics, 2020a). The Crime Survey for England and Wales found that 1.6 million of the victims were women, and 757,000 were men (Office for National Statistics, 2020b). The consequences of abuse are wide-ranging and have a long-lasting physical and psychological impact on the individual (Rodriguez et al., 2009). National guidance mandates clinicians to identify clients experiencing abuse and guide them to access support (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2016).

In the UK, the *Domestic Abuse Act* defines domestic abuse as abusive behaviour by one individual to another to whom they are personally connected. Behaviours defined as abusive include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and economic, and include both violent and threatening behaviour, and controlling and coercive behaviour (Domestic Abuse Act, 2021). Intimate partners or people who are personally connected include those in an intimate personal relationship and those who are or have previously been married or in a civil partnership. But personally connected individuals can also be those who share regular contact and who are familiar with and have knowledge of each other’s lives.

Fernandez (1997) has argued that feminist research on domestic violence in the West predominantly focuses on men’s violence against women in nuclear family arrangements. This

stands in contrast to research in non-Western contexts, which acknowledges the role of the wider family in the perpetration of abuse. Abuse towards daughters-in-law from affinal kin has garnered a significant amount of attention in research in non-Western contexts (Chan et al., 2009; Chaudhuri et al., 2014; Choi et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2010; Fernandez, 1997; Gangoli & Rew, 2011; Naved & Persson, 2005; Olutola, 2012; Pollen, 2002; Raj et al., 2006; Rew et al., 2013; Rianon & Shelton, 2003; Roomani et al., 2016; Wasim, 2014) and has continued to proliferate in in-law research in recent years (Ali et al., 2021; Berkland & Jain, as cited in Dunn & Manning, 2018; Jordan & Bhandari, 2016; Childress, 2017; Derdar, 2018; Jewkes et al., 2019; Jeyaseelan et al., 2015; Mirza, 2017; Park, 2018; Pun et al., 2016; Rabho, 2015; Ragavan & Iyengar, 2017; Tonsing & Tonsing, 2019; Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020). Much of this research also highlights a strong association between difficult in-law relationships and intimate partner violence (IPV).

Gender-based frameworks emphasise inequality of power distribution between men and women, stressing in particular that women do not possess as much power in relation to their partner and within the family as a whole. Resistance from women to challenging male authority can be interpreted as a significant offence against men, whereby their core identity is threatened (Di Napoli et al., 2019).

Social perspectives of violence against women suggest that it is largely influenced by norms, stereotypes and traditional gender roles (McCauley et al., 2013; Reyes et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2012). Women's adoption of traditional gender roles may make them vulnerable to tolerating abuse (Esmailzadeh et al., 2005), while men are socialised into ideas of masculinity expressed in power, strength and control. Men may experience a threat to their identity if their internalised gender ideals are threatened. Di Napoli et al., (2019) suggest that recognising how patriarchal culture shapes the disparity between men's and women's rights and raising awareness of this, can be used to deconstruct gender-stereotypical models and reframe their roles.

Feminist perspectives see violence against women as a result of a patriarchal culture. This viewpoint assumes that men are automatically entitled to a position of power and domination (Misso et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2002; Dutton & Goodman, 2005) and their superior position is culturally and socially acquired through their childhood experiences, their family's upbringing practices and social attitudes (Bell & Naugle, 2008). In the context of abuse, men perpetrate violence against women in order to maintain control over them (Troisi, 2018; Felson & Messner, 2000; Umberson et al., 1998); this control may be used as a mechanism or

motivation for violence (Castro et al., 2017). Some feminists have explained violence against women from a social-psychological perspective, ascribing the behaviour to a controlling motive (Dobash & Dobash, 1977; Fagan & Brown, 1994; Koss et al., 1994), using violence as a tool to influence women's present and/or future behaviour (Johnson, 1995). It is used to control women to produce general compliance in an interpersonal relationship or to prevent the victim from repeating a specific behaviour (Felson and Messner, 2000). Having been socialised into believing that men occupy a superior position to women in the family, men justify their abuse to establish and maintain dominance in the relationship. Additionally, women's compliance in adhering to gender norms may explain their high tolerance of the abuse perpetrated against them (Esmailzadeh et al., 2005). Dillon's (2007) theory of inequality and discrimination, demonstrates that women are particularly vulnerable to being made to feel inferior, degraded and abused.

Cognitive behavioural approaches to abuse would view abusive behaviours as emanating from gender stereotypes, misogyny and sexist attitudes. These components are typical of patriarchal culture and have particular implications for an individual's thoughts and behaviour. From this perspective, men are socialised to uphold specific and rigid beliefs and behaviours, which results in a deficit in managing conflicts and in their ability to control anger (Stuart et al., 2007). Imbued with gender stigma, perpetrators develop hostile attitudes and beliefs and a distorted understanding of relationships (Gould et al., 2012). Cognitive behavioural interventions would focus on challenging long-held and rigid core beliefs about gender norms and roles and re-educate them to increase their awareness of abuse (Hilder et al., 2016).

A family systems framework sheds light on how power dynamics influence relationships and individuals in a family (Schmidt, 2008). Two fundamental dimensions of the family systems theory are cohesion and power (Minuchin, 1985). This framework argues that problems relating to the hierarchy, boundary or alignment of the family structure result in impairing the resources for coping with and adapting effectively to stressful situations (van As & Janssens, 2002). Consequently, family problems are conceptualised by understanding how power is distributed amongst family members, how boundaries are managed, and how conflicts are resolved (Minuchin, 1974).

In their description of the hollow *bahu* (Indian daughter-in-law), Berkland and Jain (as cited in Dunn & Manning, 2018) found that their participants' experiences of conflict with in-laws went beyond the traditional mother-in-law/daughter-in-law conflict and described how there is a web

of influence on the disempowerment and subordination of women. Participants in their study discussed that their parents-in-law, husband, other family members, their own parents, and to some extent themselves, were predominant actors who held levels of power and had extensive influence over their freedom and interactions. Gangoli and Rew (2011) argue how the Indian legal system dilutes the nature of in-law abuse. By conceptualising it as “intra-relational conflict” rather than gender-based violence, the cultural dimension of mothers-in-law, acting as “proxy” men (Kandiyoti, 1988), gets largely ignored while perpetuating violence and control over their daughters-in-law.

Mirza’s (2017) research highlights how domestic abuse is influenced largely by culturally informed kinship structures and relationships. Her research comprised 11 in-depth interviews with UK-born Pakistani and Pakistani-born Muslim women, highlighting South Asian women’s experiences of family abuse instigated and perpetrated by mothers-in-law. Results revealed that daughters-in-law faced both indirect (domestic despotism, limiting time spent with a husband, constant ear-filling whereby mothers-in-law make complaints to their son about daughters-in-law) and direct forms of abuse (physical abuse, verbal abuse characterised by belittling daughters-in-law’s appearance and enduring regular taunts about their natal family, isolation) from their mothers-in-law. Similarly, Raj et al.’s (2006) research on South Asian women in America found that women were not able to call their native family or go out without their husbands, or do anything by themselves. One participant reported that, despite not living with her in-laws, she would need to seek permission from her husband who would, in turn, ask permission from his parents to seek their approval. Some women were denied or delayed access to food. They described not being able to join family meals or waiting until the family had completed their meal before being allowed to eat.

Derdar’s (2018) study showed how daughters-in-law are put in vulnerable positions, which perpetuates the domination and authority mothers-in-law have over daughters-in-law. A considerable amount of control over the daughter-in-law was evident, such as disapproval of employment and visiting natal family. Daughters-in-law reported their mothers-in-law lying to their husbands about their not doing house chores, purposely adding salt to food made for guests, and generally talking ill about daughters-in-law to their sons, which would instigate violence from husbands to wives. If wives complained about their mothers-in-law, this would also lead to husbands beating them. Experiences of psychological and verbal abuse using degradation and name-calling have also been reported by other studies, (Gill, 2004; Hyman & Mason, 2006; Mason et al., 2008). Gill’s (2004) study demonstrated how financial control can



be used as a means to maintain participants' dependence on perpetrators. Perpetrators of abuse have been shown to adopt strategies that deflect the perpetrator's responsibility for abuse (Cavanagh, 2003). Punitive treatment is justified by placing blame on women for their 'inadequacies' or 'failures' in domestic tasks or failing to meet expectations (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

In some cultures, patriarchal ideologies promote rigid hierarchy, female submission and servitude to the husband and family (Raj et al., 2006) and an emphasis to prioritise the family's interests above their own (Gill & Harvey, 2017). Daughter-in-laws may be subjected to abuse as they are perceived to occupy the lowest rank in the hierarchy of the household (Husain, 2019; Gill, 2004). Gill's (2004) study found that mothers-in-law usually provoked violence and were frequently referenced as the main perpetrators of abuse. This may be due to the female hierarchy whereby the mother-in-law occupies a senior position based on generation and being the mother of a son, thus providing her with more power and entitlement over the daughter-in-law (Raj et al., 2006). Consequently, daughters-in-law may accept the abuse as they are expected to preserve the harmony of the household (Husain, 2019).

Furthermore, women may experience shame in abusive situations. The conceptualisation of shame from a biopsychosocial perspective suggests that it can be both external (fear of judgement from others) and internal (negative self-evaluation) (Gilbert, 2002b). Additionally, whilst this view sees shame as a universal human emotion, it also acknowledges that people's experiences of shame will vary according to cultural and historical contexts (Gilbert, 2002b). The type of shame the participants have experienced may reflect values that prioritise the group and group harmony over the individual.

The biopsychosocial perspective suggests that shame provides evolutionary advantages and is beneficial to group cohesion and coincides with theories that view shame as a factor that enhances group cohesion and avoids collective exclusion (Keltner & Buswell, 1996; Keltner & Harker, 1998).

Cross-cultural literature, particularly in South Asian cultures, has suggested that negative self-evaluation associated with shame is not universally harmful to psychological well-being (Menon & Shweder, 1994; Wong & Tsai, 2007). Instead, it may be positively valued and perceived as an appropriate response to failure in some situations (Bhawuk, 2017; Lindquist, 2004). It may also lead to constructive behaviours such as building relationships with others

(Bagozzi et al., 2003; Wong & Tsai, 2007) and enhance one's ability to perform one's duties (Wong & Tsai, 2007).

Shame can be framed as a social emotion that involves the protection of the self from others Gruenwald et al. (2004). This is connected to an external experience of shame which involves the fear of being judged by others. In the context of preserving izzat, women may fear women may engage in behaviours to deflect any scrutiny from others which would result in bringing dishonour to the family. However, shame could also be framed within an internal experience of shame. These experiences could be understood through cognitive theories that describe shame as a self-conscious emotion that threatens positive self-image (M. Lewis, 1993; Tangney, 1999; Tangney & Fischer, 1995). From this perspective, internal feelings of shame may trigger a fear of negative judgement and the threat of being exposed to others, leading them to engage in strategies to preserve a positive self-image (de Hooze et al., 2010, 2011, 2018).

Shame features frequently in literature as a barrier to seeking help for those experiencing abuse (Thaggard & Montayre, 2019). Women may hide abuse due to a fear that exposing it could bring shame upon themselves (Anitha et al., 2009). From a feminist perspective, this may be explained by power related to patriarchal beliefs, preserved by men, and victim-blaming (Wilson, 2006). Alternatively, women may want to avoid the stigma of being a victim. This, in turn, influences their decision to conceal abuse. Towns and Adams (2000) discuss internalised beliefs about a woman's carer role that may influence their decision to stay in a difficult relationship. They found that women remained in relationships out of love and care for their husbands and wanting to help them. Women may feel the pressure to preserve relationships and deny abuse if they perceive this as a personal 'failure' of not adequately fulfilling the carer role.

The fear of shame and pressure to preserve family honour may deter women from disclosing abuse (Aujla, 2013; Gill; Sabri et al., 2018; Tonsing & Barn, 2017). (Aujla, 2013; Gill; Sabri et al., 2018; Tonsing & Barn, 2017). For example, Sabri et al.'s (2018) study found that in some South Asian communities, abuse is perceived as a private matter. Women may be penalised for sharing information with others as this would be considered as dishonouring the family. Consequently, concealing abuse prevents the risk of bringing shame on themselves and bringing the family and community into disrepute.

Tonsing and Barn (2017) explored the role of shame in IPV within the South Asian community and argued that "to understand shame is to understand denial, silence and secrecy (p.632). They found that the concept of shame in the South Asian culture, is not tied to just the individual,

but is intimately connected to the wider familial, social and communal context. Hence, shame may play a role in hindering the disclosure of abuse as women risk not just shaming themselves but their families and communities as well. Similarly, a study in Tanzania identified shame as a significant socio-cultural factor in preventing women from seeking help for abuse (McLeary-Sills et al., 2016). This study also highlighted the social imperative to keep family matters private which limited women's agency in seeking help for abuse.

The fear of bringing shame is not confined to the affinal kin but also extends to the natal family. Previous research has also indicated that South Asian women resisted divorce or separation because of the pressure to avoid disgracing their families (Hyman & Mason, 2006; Tonsing, 2014). This indicates that women may experience pressure to remain married, even under abusive conditions, to maintain family honour.

In cultures where women are expected to adopt an unobtrusive disposition, outward resistance may lead to women being blamed for the abuse inflicted on them (Hyman et al., 2011). From this perspective, women may feel unable to display overt resistance especially if they consider this to be incongruent with gender-appropriate behaviour prescribed by cultural norms. Collectively, these studies illustrate the pressure to preserve honour may serve as a barrier to disclose abuse; that is victims of abuse may experience difficulties in sharing their experiences due to a fear of personal shame and bringing dishonour to their family (McLeary-Sill et al.; 2016),

In another study, Thaggard and Montayre (2019) conducted semi-structured interviews and explored shame in the narratives of 15 Maori women who were affected by IPV. Their findings revealed key points of why women may choose to keep their experiences of abuse hidden. Women in their study held the belief that they were primarily responsible for maintaining domestic harmony and making family relationships work; ideals which gave them a positive sense of self and identity. When relationships did not meet these ideals, women attributed the abusive situations as an indication of their personal failure. The power of the women's own internalised sense of shame and worthlessness prevented women from seeking help; keeping the abuse hidden meant that they prevented the risk of their perceived deficiencies from being exposed. This study demonstrates that oppressive experiences may impact women's agency and confidence. The participants in the study experienced a loss of agency and powerlessness which negatively impacted their sense of self-worth.

The sensitive nature of discussing abuse and shame means that it is a topic that is also avoided in therapy (Dearing & Tangney, 2011; Gilbert, 2011; Teyber et al., 2011). Gilbert (1998) argues that it is crucial in clinical practice to raise awareness of shame and find strategies to enable clients to discuss sensitive matters. Singh and Hays (2008) found that Feminist Group Counselling was helpful for South Asian victims of abuse. These group interventions also considered the role of culture in shaping experiences and intersectional feminism. The groups allowed space for women to understand systemic factors that lead to shame, thus allowing them to externalise feelings of guilt and shame.

Control over daughters-in-law and isolating them may also serve as a barrier to seeking help. In Rabho's (2015) study, 200 Palestinian daughters-in-law reported extreme forms of control by their mothers-in-law, such as not being able to go out or visit parents or choose who they speak to, and wearing modest clothing. They too reported abuse from their partners as a result of their mother-in-law's interference and claimed that the breakdown of their marriage was as a result of co-residing with their jealous and meddling mother-in-law. Daughters-in-law in Rabho's (2015) study felt that this stemmed from mothers-in-law being unable to accept that their son could love another woman, and attempts would be made to suppress this bond from strengthening. Palestinian daughters-in-law also reported being verbally, emotionally, and physically abused by their mothers-in-law. Control of women can be understood from a feminist perspective of abuse (Straka & Montminy, 2006). Patriarchal beliefs about the position and role of women, and the pressure to preserve family honour may be used to justify the control of women (Raj & Silverman, 2002) and underscore their unequal and inferior position in the social hierarchy (Dillon, 1997).

Zhussipbek and Nagayeva (2020) argue that local traditions and unauthentic religious interpretations not only discriminate against women and obstruct the advancement of women's rights but dehumanise men who also participate in the oppression. This is based on ideologies around complete reverence for mothers over wives and positions men to subjugate their wives to oppression. Derdar's (2018) study found that religious and cultural beliefs shaped the behaviour and actions of the sons/husbands, where men are expected to prioritise and venerate mothers and conform to societal expectations of being *mashkhut mu* (mother obedient) even when the mother may be wrong; a quality that is revered and positively acclaimed in the community. In doing so, men can prevent the stigma of being labelled as *mardi mu* (mother disobedient), a label that implies that men prioritised wives over mothers – considered a sin within the culture. Derdar's (2018) research stands in contrast to Norwood and Webb's (2006)

research. Whilst the latter study suggests that son's are able to establish boundaries with their mother, Derdar's (2018) suggests that pressure mothers are placed in a position of power to set boundaries, resulting in men possibly finding it difficult to challenge such boundaries.

Women may not always remain silent and may deflect the blame on to partners for abusing them (Hyman et al., 2011). However, women in severely subordinated contexts may find it difficult to challenge cultural norms of gender inequality. They accept their low status in society and may not be aware of their rights or have any alternative recourse (Childress, 2017; Mirza, 2017; Rabho, 2015; Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020). Furthermore, they may have been socialised to conform to role adherence and engage in specific "impression management" to avoid being labelled as "incompetent" or "bad" (Goel, 2005; Rivas, Kelly & Feder, 2013). Women's strength may be measured by their ability to endure and tolerate distress (Childress, 2017; Haarr, 2007). Men and women may tolerate hardship if they believe challenging subordination is considered a sinful practice from a religious perspective (Rabho, 2015; Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020), or they may want to protect their abusers, as exposing problems would mean this would negatively impact on their natal family, relatives, and children (Childress, 2017). Consequently, this may reinforce the normalisation of violence, and women, in particular, may work against being blamed for the failure of the marriage.

Although research may suggest that women remain passive in the face of abuse, Abraham (2002) found that South Asian women used varying strategies to deal with abuse, including silence, avoidance, answering back, and seeking support. Women may look to religion as their coping mechanism (Chaudhuri et al., 2014; Rabho, 2015; Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020). Being aware of their rights can also help women to exercise agency. For example, learning about contemporary perspectives of Islam that argue against the subjugation of women helped Muslim women leave abusive in-law relationships and marriages (Rabho, 2015; Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020).

The relative absence of men in the literature has also been highlighted across the literature, even though it has shown that husbands and sons play a major role in mediating the experiences of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Whilst the feminist literature has discussed women's inferior position and unequal status as a symptom of patriarchy, it does not adequately explain the often-conflicting relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and is yet to offer concrete and enduring explanations of the woman's role in the perpetuation of oppression of other women (Olutola, 2012). Furthermore, research in non-Western contexts has shown

that, despite patriarchal ideologies, mothers-in-law have appeared to have more power than their sons and act as “proxy” men. Furthermore, in some contexts, men also appear to be powerless; for example, research in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa has shown how men are expected to revere their mothers according to their religious understanding of Islam and by not doing, they may have to face considerable backlash from the community around them as they are violating religious values that consider it a sin to disobey mothers (Derdar, 2018; Rabho, 2015; Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020).

### ***2.11 Industrialisation, Modernisation and the Changing Landscape of In-Law Families***

One of the most prevalent themes in research regarding in-law relationships across cultures is how industrialisation, modernisation and social movement are changing the dynamics of affinal relations. Rashid (2013) explored the experiences of women in rural locations in Bangladesh whose husbands emigrated for work purposes. In the absence of men, senior members of the family may assume authority, or wives may have some authority, temporarily until the son/husband returns. Findings show that whilst decision-making in household matters may be viewed as a reflection of empowerment, many women in her study did not appear to appreciate this responsibility. Rashid (2013) argues that concepts of ‘freedom’ and autonomy must take into account the cultural context of rural Bangladesh. For many women in her study, power in their lives persists in everyday practices of being a ‘good’ wife/daughter-in-law/working woman. These idealised notions of femininity create aspirations for women that may not denote ‘autonomy’ from the perspective of Western feminists, but nonetheless functions as socioeconomic security, which is paramount for rural women. This suggests that it is important to explore and understand what empowerment may mean for women in their individual contexts.

Longitudinal research is particularly useful in looking at the impact of modernisation and industrialisation on changes in family structure and values. Two studies explored relationship quality and marital satisfaction in China and Korea. Cao et al. (2019) examined 265 Chinese couples’ experiences of the early years of marriage. Using three annual waves of data, they explored adult children’s perception of parental attitude towards their adult children’s marriage, in-law relationship quality, and the impact this had on adult children’s marital satisfaction. They found there was a positive association between perceived relationship quality with in-laws and children’s marital satisfaction. Choi et al. (2019) also explored marital satisfaction in Korea.

They examined the relationship contact with parents and parents-in-law and how these contact patterns were associated with marital satisfaction. These factors were measured at two points, 10 years apart. They found that modernity has had a significant role in shaping contemporary Korean families. Rather than the emphasis on sons and daughters-in-law having the most contact with the husband's family, consistent with the patrilineal Confucian principles, results showed that there was increasing contact with one's parents as well as with parents-in-law. Additionally, their results suggested that men and women who were, overall, most satisfied with their marriages sought to satisfy equally the parents on both sides. Their studies conclude that Korean society is transitioning towards more egalitarian and bilateral kinship relations, and the happiest married men and women are those who find a way to adapt to changing kinship norms and attend to the needs of inter-generational solidarity for both parents and parents-in-law.

However, Choi et al.'s 2019 study focused on non-co-residing parents and in-laws and did not look at those who may still be living within traditional family settings. Gu's 2018 life history interviews with 16 Taiwanese women in middle-class families explored their experiences with co-residing in-laws. They found that prevalent cultural beliefs, consistent with Confucian ethics of filial piety, in-law hierarchy, and age-based seniority placed considerable stress on women's experiences. In-law inequality also existed for those couples in egalitarian marriages. Most of the women in the study spoke of feeling aware of being stressed and powerless, and they felt helpless as they were expected to conform to norms as filial daughters-in-law. An emphasis on relational harmony meant that women would resort to suppressing their anger and other negative emotions (conduct surface acting) and would show obedience, filial affection, and appreciation (deep acting). For the women in this study, it may appear futile to challenge the status quo given that the women's husbands, mothers, and other immigrant women encouraged tolerating distress and not disagreeing with in-laws. By silencing their private feelings and converting them to gratitude, Confucian in-law patriarchy is reinforced even with modernity. This study shows that, despite modernisation, canonical cultural and patriarchal ideologies may be hard for some women to challenge, especially immigrant women.

Similarly, Kung (2019) found that, despite the daughters-in-law having more education and income, there is resistance to egalitarian relationships between Taiwanese mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, and mothers-in-law maintained their superior position. Kung showed that, despite changes brought by industrialisation and post-industrialisation in Taiwan, filial piety continues to be a dominant mechanism in maintaining the Confucian principle. Consistent with

Choi et al.'s 2019 study, the husband's filial duty (*xiao*) to his mother and the daughter-in-law's concern for her own mother's reputation maintain patriarchal guidelines and intergenerational relations. In both cases, the daughter-in-law's cultural capital (education and employment) is nullified, and this secures the mother-in-law's superior status.

Filial obligation also continues to play a significant role in contemporary China (Zhang, 2016). In a narrative study with 34 young mothers, Zhang explored family practices and 'displaying family' in northern China. Although the display of filial obligation is self-determined, it is relational and controlled by others. Central to this is that failing to display filial duty may mean losing face (*mianzi*). This meant being present, so that their display of duty could be seen. When the women could not be present, they had to find a way to substitute for their absence through money or getting someone to step in as a provider for in-laws. Shih and Pyke's 2010 study also found that American Chinese daughters-in-law complied with filial obligations to present themselves as 'good'. However, Chinese daughters-in-law also engaged in covert resistance in the mother-in-law's absence. In this way, they avoided open conflict and were able to fulfil norms of filial piety without giving up power over their households.

## **2.12 Autobiographical Memory and Performing Identities**

*"How individuals recount their histories – what they emphasise and omit, their stance as protagonists or victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience – all shape what individuals can claim of their own lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned."*

*(Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 1)*

Post-colonial feminists have emphasised the need to embrace the diversity of women's experiences and identities (Mohanty et al., 1991; Spivak, 1988), as this directly challenges the Eurocentric models of feminism and female homogeneity. Social experiences and expressing one's identity, however, is not a straightforward endeavour, as women grapple with selecting what to share and what not to share. Expressing who we are and who we are not is part of everyday discourse, and these questions of identity are linked to the narratives of experience and memory (Craib, 1998). People are what they remember (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000), and the stories we tell ourselves represent who we are (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 2001). This also involves a careful curation of how people position themselves in the story and how



they position others to support their storyline (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999); a point that is elaborated further in the methodology chapter. The role of autobiographical memory is particularly useful in understanding how identity is narrated and constructed in the process of storytelling. A related point that will be considered is how communicating identity is a performance of social roles (Goffman, 1959).

### *2.12.1 Autobiographical Memories*

Autobiographical memory is a particular type of memory that is characterised as specific and long-lasting and usually bears significance for one's sense of self (Nelson, 1993). Fivush (2011) defines autobiographical memories as a uniquely human memory form where individuals include the memory of the self as the 'experiencer' of past events. Autobiographical memory serves several functions; past experiences can be used to problem-solve and guide future behaviour, create a continuous sense of self and maintain a coherent self-identity over time, and can help to cope with negative emotions, experiences and build resilience (Bluck and Alea, 2002; Fivush, 2011; Williams, Conway & Cohen, 2008). A life narrative is built as individuals relate to self through the past, present, and future, and form a personal history with these links (McAdams, 2001). Through this process, individuals integrate different perspectives and make interpretations and evaluations across self, other, and time.

Embedded in this is the interplay of memory, self, and culture, so when stories are shared, the narratives are culturally shaped, which in turn shapes the remembering of events culturally. Autobiographical memories are therefore developed within specific social and cultural contexts (Fivush, 2011; Nelson & Fivush, 2004), which are related to the multiple layers of one's identity (Fivush, Habermas, Waters & Zaman, 2011). Of particular relevance here is Fivush's (2010) ideas on autobiographical memory from a feminist perspective. She draws particular attention to power, place, voice, and silence, and argues that one's place in the world partially determines the type of experience one might have. Dominant or culturally canonical narratives define what is culturally appropriate and have the power to validate or silence certain narratives over others. This means that being an individual of a particular, race, gender, class, or religion may influence experiences they share or do not share, and some may be afforded the right to speak or to be heard more than others. Marginalised groups, who may have been silenced for deviating from the status quo, may challenge parts, the whole, or specific interpretations of

dominant narratives (Fivush, 2004) and develop resistant narratives. When silence is imposed, it can signify loss of voice, loss of power leading to a loss of memory, and loss of identity or sense of self. This can occur when certain experiences deviate from canonical cultural narratives. Sometimes, individuals may participate in silencing themselves if they believe their experiences may be too difficult for others to hear or if they believe others will not understand or care. Importantly, Fivush (2010) highlights that talk does not necessarily imply voice, but being given the opportunity to speak and to be heard promotes psychological well-being (Pennebaker, 1997).

Self-defining memories of specific events may differ from the original experience as they get retold, processed, reinterpreted multiple times, and integrated into the life story (Singer & Blagov, 2004). Wilson and Ross (2003) argue that there is a bidirectional link between memory and identity, and people's constructions of themselves through time function to create and preserve a favourable view of their present selves. In the current study, Bangladeshi women's view of their current selves may be influenced by beliefs, goals, recollections, and appraisals of their former selves. As a result, identity construction can be perceived as a performative act, as individuals attempt to try and provide a coherent, consistent, and particular presentation of themselves.

### *2.12.2 Performing Identities*

Goffman's (1959, 1963) ideas of "stigma", "impression management" and theatrical metaphor of "frontstage" and "backstage" performance have a particular significance to the current study. When stories are shared, actors inevitably tailor their story for a particular audience. This means that storytelling is a relational act and is conveyed with the audience in mind. I recognise that participants too will also tailor their stories to convey particular impressions (Goffman, 1959; Riessman, 1993). Their narrative performance may reveal aspects of themselves and is likely to reflect how they are most likely to behave in accordance with their religious and cultural norms, codes, and practices in order to be validated and accepted and to avoid stigma by deviating from social and cultural practices. This may involve silencing certain experiences as part of impression management (frontstage performance). Alternatively, their narratives may also reveal backstage performances where the actor has the freedom to "violate expected behaviours" (Goffman, 1959, pp. 112–113). The concept of performance or role of an actor is

not used to suggest that the participants are “faking” or are “inauthentic” but that the interview context is a particular social context, and their stories may be edited for another context and another listener. Narrative storytelling and narrating identity may involve sharing of experiences that may often be contradictory, as participants try and make sense of their experiences. With this in mind, I will evaluate the storytelling “performance” as authentic, and that it may also reveal contradictory beliefs, ideas, and experiences.

Brah (1996) analyses the relationship between ethnicity and culture and argues that maintaining culture is a process that can be achieved through “reiterative performance”. In this light, women actively negotiate, contest, and perform cultural and ethnic traditions as part of their expression of individual agency. In subscribing to the perspective that performing identities is a relational act, power can then be viewed as operating and shifting in different ways by all actors involved within a given situation. Allen (2011) argues that power can be accessed by both men and women and is available for them to use and exercise at their disposal. This may be manifested in everyday interactions that involve acts such as domination, coercion, negation, manipulation, and persuasion.

The relational element of power, and the wider social and cultural process, is integral to understanding how women perform identities and exercise agency in their relationship with in-laws. It is within this framework that I explore the ways in which the participants’ gender intersects with other multiple markers of their identity that produce their social realities (Butler, 1990).

### ***2.13 Concluding Remarks***

Empirical research has demonstrated that the typically fraught relationship between mother and daughter-in-law is not just a pop-cultural cliché; however, it has also illustrated that the nature of in-law relations is far more complex than the evil mother-in-law and victim-daughter-in-law representations in popular culture. The literature review on in-law relations suggests that the dynamics of these relationships are complex and sharing many themes where they are similar also highlights nuances within different contexts. For example, the conflicting nature of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law can be seen across societies, but the nature and power dynamics of such relations may differ. Whilst daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law may be conflicted over the loyalty of their husband/son, in non-Western contexts these power dynamics may stem from mothers-in-law claiming the only chance of power they may get in their lifetime

in exchange for their subordinated position as daughters-in-law themselves. Furthermore, research has reported that mothers-in-law in non-Western contexts actively suppress the bonding of husbands and wives. This may also be the reason why most research on marital quality and satisfaction is conducted in Western families, as marital quality may be a less salient concept in non-Western contexts where a daughter-in-law's primary role is to be at the servitude of the wider family.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of in-law relationship research is how agency and empowerment are rarely the focus of Western research, yet are proliferate in non-Western research. The assumption here, of course, may be that Western women have agency and need not prove or justify their position, whereas non-Western women do. This may be because daughters-in-law in the Western context have considerably more power than their mothers-in-law as they are the gatekeeper in accessing their husbands and children. In contrast to non-Western contexts, there is also no obligation for daughters-in-law to be at the servitude of her husband's family. Daughters-in-law in non-Western contexts, on the other hand, are expected to prioritise affinal kin over their natal family and have to navigate and negotiate relationships.

The literature thus far, has illustrated that in non-Western contexts, a woman's primary allegiance after marriage is towards her husband's family to her husband. This stands in contrast to the Western contexts in which there is less emphasis on women prioritising their husband's parents (Komarovsky, 1962; Young & Willmott, 2013). The differences in in-law relationships in non-Western and Western contexts may be due to the different value systems, with the former group being shaped by more collective values and the latter being shaped by individualist values. This may explain the nature of Western families mainly being characterised by nuclear families and non-Western families being characterised by joint/extended living. Wong et al. (2018) have cautioned the use of collectivism and individualism in research as there is a lack of consensus in meanings, which may result in greater stereotyping of culturally diverse groups. They argue that labelling societies and groups with these terminologies should be discontinued, and researchers and practitioners should endorse more narrow constructs in their descriptions, such as "independence from others" or "preference for group harmony", for example. However, recent research still implies that endorsing a collectivist-individualist paradigm may be a relevant useful framework for understanding the in-law relationship (e.g. Cao et al., 2019), whilst also recognising that there may be within-culture variations. Research on in-law relations has shown that culture and

religion are internally contested, hybrid, characterised by shifting porous borders, and with identities ever-changing (Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020). This means that even making claims about “Indian characteristics” or “Islamic values” lacks the complex texture of these identities, which may differ across contexts. Being Muslim in the West and being Muslim in Central Asia may differ considerably; therefore, it is necessary to recognise the fluidity of cultures and address values in the context of each cultural tradition across different contexts.

### ***2.14 The Need to Examine Cultural Specificities***

Evaluating findings from in-law research can be problematic due to the nature of samples and how they are categorised and named. For example, some Western research on in-laws that have utilised online surveys, have attracted mostly Caucasian participants but also include “Asians” in their study. Due to the design of the study, researchers do not probe further analysis of individual differences that may account for their findings. Furthermore, the “term” Asian is also problematic, as it implies that individuals from Asia are a homogenous category. It becomes further complicated, as the term is used differently in different contexts; for example, in the US, the term Asian commonly refers to those from China, Korea, the Philippines, and Japan, whereas in the UK it is used to describe individuals from the Indian subcontinent such as India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (Bhopal, 2007).

Research that also pools together “South Asian Women” is also critiqued by post-colonial feminists, as homogeneity of women ignores differences, variety, and diversity of women’s experiences. South Asian women are differentiated by language, caste, class, and cultural and religious beliefs. Such groupings in research become problematic for readers to effectively evaluate findings and may lead to generalising all Asian women as having the same experience. This points to two things: the need to use clear and specific terminologies for subgroups and to recognise the diversity, not just between group and subgroup experiences, but within-group experiences also. This points to the need to examine the cultural specificities of a group for a more nuanced understanding of experiences of in-law relationships. The women in the current study are all British, Bangladeshi and Muslim. The next segment will focus on the structure and features of Bangladeshi families and some coinciding values that are central to the socialisation of Bangladeshi women.

### ***2.15 The Bangladeshi Family***

In contrast to the nuclear family arrangements, Bangladeshi families are characterised by the extended/joint family system. This living arrangement reflects the cultural norms of Bangladeshi society underpinned by values that reflect the priority of group harmony over the individual (Edlund & Rahman, 2005). The Bangladeshi family structure is based on patrilineal kinship systems (*gusthi*) where a network of people is descended from a common male ancestor. Bangladeshi households undergo a typical “domestic cycle” (Bonamy, 1973). In Bangladesh, the *ghar* (household) consists of a male head of the family, his wife, and their children. When the sons marry, they bring their wives to live in the same *ghar* as their fathers and form their own families. At this stage, these families may decide to live with their parents or form their own households, in which case they become heads of their own households (Edlund & Rahman, 2005). Daughters, once married, are no longer the responsibility of their parents but of their affinal kin (Pollen, 2002).

A typical woman’s life in Bangladesh is characterised by a succession of dependencies: first from her father, then her husband after marriage, and then her son (Dil, 1985). Within the Bangladeshi domestic cycle, if the male head dies before his wife, the wife can become household head, although she may not possess as much power, as some decisions are taken by adult sons (Gardener, 2002). In Bangladesh, later stages of life are usually associated with increased power and status. There is a preference to produce sons, as they provide insurance for security in old age, and have a direct influence on women gaining recognition and status (Dil, 1985).

Pollen’s (2002) ethnographic research on the Bangladeshi Family in Bethnal Green, UK, suggested that the break-up of a joint household may arise after the marriage of the eldest son, and at this stage, there may be an overbearing expression of hierarchy and pressure on sons to remain under their purview. Pollen notes, however, that there is no typical development cycle of the Bengali domestic group in the UK among the three generations of Bengali people she observed. With respect to in-law relations, she reported that relationships with mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are not always as difficult as traditionally expected.

### 2.15.1 Gender Ideologies, Izzat And Purdah

Within the Bangladeshi community, gender ideologies are strongly influenced by religion, which is generally Islamic in nature, and patriarchal cultural norms (Baluja, 2003). These ideologies form the basis of gender roles, where women are predominantly confined to the domestic sphere while men control the public domain (Mandelbaum, 1988).

Unmarried daughters are kept within the limits of cultural orthodoxy by parents until they marry (Pollen, 2002). The notion of *izzat* (honour), and *purdah* (veiling/seclusion) are pertinent in understanding how Bangladeshi gender ideologies guide the behaviour of men and women and explain the rigid gender segregation and linkages between the importance of family honour and female chastity (Baluja, 2003; Mandelbaum, 1988). *Izzat* and *purdah* are major themes of Bangladeshi culture and according to Kabeer (1988), “the honour of the family is believed to lie in the virtue of women, and men are charged with the role of the guardian”. Prestige and honour are dominant forces in men’s behaviour which is guarded by how a woman conducts herself. By implication, the social roles and behaviour of women are partly shaped by a consideration of men’s status.

*Purdah* represents the seclusion of women and is considered a sign of female modesty and preservation of chastity, as sexual behaviour before marriage is a threat to family honour (Loshak, 2003). Women are encouraged to physically cover themselves in front of men who are not their husbands, fathers, or brothers. *Purdah* also includes spatial enclosure where movements outside the household are restricted as a sign of the respectful demeanour at home (Mandelbaum, 1988). Consistent with prevailing gender stereotypes, caring for the family, cooking and cleaning are intimately tied to the role of “good wives and mothers” (Robinson & Milkie, 1988).

Ellickson’s (1972) documentation of perception and practice in a village in Bangladesh notes how rural women are rarely seen without *purdah* and do not do their own shopping, even if for themselves. Feldman and McCarthy’s (1983) research showed that, contrary to popular belief that *purdah* epitomises the social exclusion and oppression of women, the *burqa* increases the mobility and social participation in society, as families struggle to depend on the wage of male breadwinners and demand for female wage labour increases.

Pollen’s (2002) description of Bangladeshi women in the UK, however, implied diversity within the culture with respect to dress code; whilst mothers wore mainly *saris*, daughters adopted an Islamic dress code or Western fashion sense. One participant’s case in her research

expressed growing displeasure of a young woman's experience of her change in dresswear from trousers and denim to *sari* and *burqa* after marriage, which she found uncomfortable. Additionally, the participant did not warm to the expected duties of a daughter-in-law, which was in relative contrast to the autonomy she experienced in her fatherless household before marriage. This implies gender role expectations, and the way women conduct themselves in dresswear, may be undergoing significant changes due to the impact of Westernisation. Rather than conforming to religious and cultural norms, women in the UK may be exercising agency over their behaviour and appearance.

Despite these changes, however, Bangladeshi women, like women from other patriarchal societies, are continuously encouraged to conform to normal structures of hierarchical patrilineal solidarity. Upholding a marriage, even under difficult circumstances, preserves *izzat*, and initiating divorce proceedings goes against a family's *izzat*. Even if a marriage fails through no fault of her own, nothing much can be done to remedy her from the social opprobrium that inevitably follows (Pollen, 2002).

## **2.16 Research Question**

The main objective of this research is to begin to expand knowledge of in-law relationships and begin to fill gaps in the literature that have not addressed the experiences of British Bangladeshi women in the UK. Narrative approaches are considered a valuable means to understand experiences and meaning-making, and examine how identities are constructed in a person's individual context. Narrative approaches also value temporal perspectives and acknowledge that experiences are ephemeral; therefore, storytelling is influenced by how people make sense of their experiences over time.

To my knowledge, there have been no studies to date that have specifically examined in-law relationships in the Bangladeshi community in the UK; thus, the aim is to begin to make an original contribution to research and to attempt to expand on the limited literature available on in-law relationships. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the research question is broad: *What are the experiences of in-law relationships of British Bangladeshi Muslim Women living in the UK?* I seek to understand the participants' subjective experiences in their individual contexts and consider the impact of these meanings on their behaviours and identity over time. Furthermore, intersectionality will be considered, as it provides a useful heuristic tool to



understand how interlocking markers of difference impact experiences of agency and the shaping of identity. It is important to note that two of the ten participants were living with their in-laws at the time of conducting the research, and this was taken into consideration in the writing-up of the research.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### ***3.1 Introduction***

In line with the research aims and questions, this chapter will provide the methodological landscape of the research and specify the processes involved in generating the data. It will provide an overview of the common research paradigms used in Counselling Psychology research, and a rationale for choosing the qualitative research design that informed the study. The epistemological and ontological position, and the philosophical assumptions that underpin this position, are explained. Details of the post-colonial feminist lens that shapes the study are presented, along with Positioning Theory which is also relevant to the research. After an overview of using the narrative approach to inform the research, the methods used to collect and analyse the data are explained, and relevant ethical considerations of the study highlighted.

### ***3.2 Paradigms and Conceptual Frameworks***

Mertens (2010) defines the term paradigm as a ‘way of looking at the world’ comprising ‘certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking’ (p.7). The complexity of organising these assumptions into neat categories is illustrated by different authors and texts incorporating different paradigmatic schemas. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be referring to Ponteretto’s (2005) adaptation of Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) paradigmatic categories which comprise four frameworks: positivism, post-positivism, constructivism-interpretivism and critical ideological. History has seen different philosophical epochs, with each period being dominated by a particular worldview. The Modernist and Enlightenment period challenged pre-modern thought. The undisputed word of God was increasingly replaced by a positivist worldview, where rationality and logic were to inform thinking.

#### ***3.2.1 A Positivist View***

Those who adopt the positivist perspective in the social sciences hold a naive-realist ontological position, that there is a single, objective external reality that exists and can be accessed through a scientific approach. That is, the perception we have of the world is a direct and accurate representation of the world (Sullivan, 2010). Positivists are inspired by experimental methods

and fundamentally believe that social science research should be conducted in the same way as in the natural sciences. The aim is to produce objective knowledge and confirm pre-existing theories through testing hypotheses and verification (Willig, 2008). Controlling of variables allows for cause-and-effect relationships to be established, and the prediction of phenomena.

### ***3.2.2 A Post-Positivist view***

Post-positivism developed as a reaction to the positivist induction method and, as a consequence, challenged naive-realist ontology. Its foundations are very similar to those of the positivists, but the demarcation criterion offered by Karl Popper (1968) was that of falsification; that is, there is no certainty that what has been observed to date will not be disconfirmed by a future observation. This paradigm takes a critical-realist perspective which agrees with positivists, that there is an objective reality, but that this can be only imperfectly known (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In essence, from Popper's perspective, we cannot make universal generalisations and fully confirm a theory with certainty, but we can be certain that some generalisations can be proven false. Popper (1959) dissociated himself from the positivist orthodoxy by arguing that science is an 'extension of the trial-and-error mode of learning' (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997).

### ***3.2.3 A Constructivist-Interpretivist Paradigm***

The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is in stark contrast to the two aforementioned paradigms. It situates itself within a social constructionist epistemology and relativist ontology, in which grand theories of the world are rejected in favour of understanding the subjective experiences of individuals in their social and historical context. In doing so, it rejects the notion of an objective, single reality that is there to be discovered. By suspending claims and beliefs about the truthfulness and applicability of any theory, it firmly advocates the idea of multiple equally valid realities; one cannot extract an objective reality, as people are constructing their realities whilst simultaneously experiencing and processing that very reality. The goal of the paradigm is, then, to explicate these constructions. It challenges the reductionist view of the world which aims to categorise phenomena and takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr, 2015). Some social constructionists rely heavily on the use of language as providing a window to reality; discourses may represent macro-social

constructions which focus discourses at a societal level, mirroring dominant/grand/master narratives, or represent micro-social constructions (discursive psychology).

### ***3.2.4 A Critical-Ideological View***

The critical-ideological perspective is constructed within a social and historical context like constructionism but adopts a critical-realist ontology. This posits that real structures exist independently of people and the actual patterns of events (Bhaskar, 1975). It argues that reality is shaped by ethnic, culture, gender and social and political views, and the goal of the paradigm is to emancipate oppressed groups. Some authors have labelled this paradigm as ‘transformative’, given its objective to challenge the status quo.

The axiology and rhetorical structure of each paradigm described above share both similarities and differences (Ponteretto, 2005). Positivist and post-positivist axiology hold a detached, objective, neutral and value-free stance, where the production of data is uncontaminated and is nomothetic, i.e., universal laws and generalisations are drawn from the data. In contrast, the axiology of social constructionist and critical ideological paradigms is value-laden, where the dynamic interaction of the researcher and the participant is transactional and subjective, and where meaning is jointly created and co-constructed. Data produced from this type of research is idiographic, i.e., each individual’s experience is subjective and unique.

Borrowing Kenneth Pike’s (1954) etic and emic distinction, the positivist/post-positivist paradigm falls broadly in the etic category (scientist-oriented). In this category, an ‘outsider perspective’ is generated and the data produced is objective, scientific and free of any value biases. Polanyi (1966) believed, however, that at the root of all claims to objective scientific knowledge, there is always a reliance on personal knowledge. Quantitative research methodologies are often based on these values. The scientist’s voice and interpretation dominate in this type of research, as it asserts that research participants are often too involved in their experience to offer impartial interpretations. In contrast, the social constructionist and critical ideological paradigm is emic in nature, offering an ‘insider perspective’. From this perspective, the data that are produced are subjective and value-laden and often fall within the bracket of qualitative research designs.

### ***3.3 Methodology: Rationale for a Qualitative Approach***

The scientific method has often been viewed as the dominant paradigm in the social sciences (Burr, 2015), and the majority of Counselling Psychology research falls within the positivist/post-positivist paradigm (Pontoretto, 2005). In a culture where quantitative research is dominant, in 2005 the American Psychological Association (APA) stated that this approach should no longer be the ‘gold standard’, and qualitative methods should be used in addition. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) also argues that traditional evidence-based research only provides a narrow view of scientific evidence, and the British Psychological Society (BPS) acknowledges the wide recognition of qualitative research as an important aspect of scientific work (BPS, 2018).

Konstantinou (2014) asserts that Counselling Psychology has the benefit of the freedom to engage in diverse research designs in line with the discipline’s postmodern and pluralistic philosophical underpinnings, where no particular school of thought dominates. Increasingly, counselling psychologists have paved the way to increase the credibility of qualitative research methods (Morrow, 2007), by recognising their relevance to the values and philosophy that characterise the field, such as subjectivity, intersubjectivity, pluralism and the practice of reflexivity (Kasket, 2012), in exploring the depth and complexity of human experience. Strawbridge (2006) adds that the pluralistic philosophy of Counselling Psychology allows engagement in various methodologies and a focus on research that validates subjective experiences.

As the research is concerned with the narratives of Bangladeshi women’s experience of living with in-laws, a qualitative methodological approach has been chosen to gain in-depth, rich and detailed accounts of these experiences. Given the exploratory nature of the research, my aim is to elicit narratives of Bangladeshi women’s experiences, to generate a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973, p.310). A quantitative approach would not be able to capture the complex and unique accounts of the richness that qualitative methods can offer. The traditional positivist paradigm also suffers from not having a basis to evaluate cultural practices, as they believe there is no basis for value judgements in a science embedded in the value of objectivity. Furthermore, the focus of the research is not generalisability or a mission to find some kind of objective truth. The emphasis lies more on the idiographic nature of the experiences that a qualitative method can capture. Given the paucity of research available on in-law relations, a qualitative method seemed suitable as it is also useful for exploring under-researched topics.

### ***3.4 Epistemological and Ontological Position***

Carter and Little (2007) emphasise the importance of epistemology as the foundation of research, since individual methodologies are linked to specific epistemic positions. By implication, the epistemic position, methodology and method are intricately linked.

Under the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm, I have aligned myself with a social constructionist epistemic position. In line with the framework, social constructionism is not concerned with the search for an objective truth, nor does it view knowledge as a fixed entity; rather, it recognises that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others and is continually evolving (Burr, 2015). It considers that knowledge constructions are historically grounded, culturally distinct, socially negotiated and individually applied (Carbaugh, 1990). As a result, multiple perspectives can, potentially, be generated given that the way in which people understand their experiences and the world is dependent upon the available meanings within a given social context and the relationships they engage in. However, I depart from the idea of total relativism that treats narratives as works of fiction, but do not accept the position that narratives can be taken at face value and are an accurate representation of reality. Lieblich et al. (1998) argue that taking a middle course acknowledges the constructed nature of storytelling around a core of facts or life events, where individuals creatively select, add, and interpret their narrations around these remembered facts. This perspective acknowledges that the stories shared by the participants carry their narrative truth. For the current research, I too adopt a middle position, a critical-realist ontological position.

Critical realism is a branch of philosophy which argues that real structures exist and operate independently of our awareness, knowledge, and the actual patterns of events (Bhaskar, 1975). It is concerned with the nature of causation, agency, structure and relationships with which we operate explicitly or implicitly in the social world. It situates itself as an alternative to both positivism and its quest for law-like forms, and to postmodernism and strong interpretivism, rejecting explanation in favour of interpretation, and emphasising hermeneutics and descriptions at the cost of causation. This approach does not set out to wholly reject the values of positivism and interpretivism, but rather combines interpretation with explanation to enquire into what affects human action and interaction. When making claims about reality, it takes a critical approach to causation and views the social world and our experiences in it as complex and layered; critical realists maintain that events and experiences are relatively justified, whilst still being historical, contingent and changing. It argues that knowledge is historically, socially

and culturally situated which results in it being articulated from various perspectives, mediated by various influences and transformed by human activity. As a result, our knowledge of the world and our experiences are more or less historically transient descriptions.

### *3.4.1 A Post-Colonial Feminist Lens*

Adopting a post-colonial feminism perspective in the current study provides an opportunity to represent British Bangladeshi Muslim women's experiences in a way that challenges essentialised and stereotypical ideologies and portrayals of passive and oppressed third-world women. It also helps me to approach literature and analysis from a more global perspective to avoid potential stereotyping of different communities across the world with regard to in-law relations. Furthermore, this perspective expands and interrogates debates in feminism in relation to patriarchy and notions of power, agency, and empowerment.

The term 'post-colonial' is also used here to refer to Black, Asian, and Islamic perspectives that consider the intersections and multiple markers of differences in ethnicity, race, class, and religion. These perspectives also discourage stereotypical, essentialised, and racialised discourses, and provide me with a framework to approach the research and understand British Bangladeshi Muslim women's experiences through a fluid and flexible lens, honouring the hybridity of their multifaceted identity (Bhabha, 1990, 1996; Rose, 1995). In particular, I adopt the notion of third spaces (Bhabha, 1990), where women synthesise their personal values as British women, as Bangladeshi women, and as Muslims. With these intersecting parts of their identities, I recognise that women may draw upon values they have learned from their parents, culture, religion, and their life in Britain to create a third space. In particular, I am drawn to the in-between spaces of cultures and their hybrid identity. Bhabha's (1990, 1996) concept of third space is particularly useful, as it helps to explore agency in a nuanced way, paying attention to the spaces between the parts of cultures they preserve and the parts they negotiate to create a new third space.

I am also drawn towards a post-colonial perspective for the way that Black feminism shares some sentiments with Islamic feminism, where men are not viewed simply as opponents of women's equality but rather it makes room for them, as they have a major role to play in the feminist movement (hooks et al., 1993). Post-colonial feminism recognises that both men and women can be victims of their cultures and can equally work together to challenge and change powerful structures of patriarchy that may adversely affect both genders. Finally, pertinent to

this study is understanding participants' own subjective experiences of religion and culture, rather than assuming that these constructs are universally the same (Dueck et al., 2017).

### *3.4.2 The Narrative Approach, Heuristic Inquiry and Relevance to Counselling Psychology*

Human beings are natural storytellers (Bamberg, 2011) and narratives are a means by which individuals make sense of themselves and the world around them (Squire, 2008). Freeman and Brockmeier (2001) emphasise that it is difficult to speak of life and what it means in the absence of narratives.

The narrative approach was chosen as a suitable method to investigate Bangladeshi women's experiences of life with in-laws as it is commonly used to explore significant life events (Riessmann, 1993). The narrative approach is also considered the most appropriate way to explore meaning and experience (Clandanin & Connelly, 2000; Smiths & Sparks, 2009).

The flexibility of narrative analysis means that both the linguistic and discursive structures of human experience can be taken into account whilst acknowledging the subjective experience of the individual (Crossley 2000). With the research questions in mind, the narrative approach offers the versatility to explore storytelling as central to making sense of experiences (Murray, 2003; Polkinghorne 1988) and provides an avenue for linking experiences over time and a sense of order and coherence (Bruner, 1990; Ricoeur, 1984; Sarbin, 1986). Freeman and Brockmeier (2001) have argued that narrative and identity construction are synonymous, and that it is in the very act of storytelling, to ourselves and others, that our identity is shaped (Ricoeur, 1988).

The narrative approach also acknowledges that stories are formed by local social conventions (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1999) and the wider cultural sphere. Since the role of culture is also pertinent to understanding the narratives in the current research, this method is useful as it considers how the cultural context has shaped the participant's story.

The narrative method is also well aligned with my epistemological stance and ontological position. Bruner (1986, 1990, 1991) proposed two types of knowledge that are important in making sense of the world – paradigmatic and narrative knowing. The former is more aligned with the positivist stance, based on logical principles and verifiable procedures to arrive at some sort of empirical truth. The latter rests on the idea that human experiences are organised in a storied form, and Bruner (1991) asserts that an individual's knowledge of themselves and



their social and cultural world relies on narrative knowing, especially as these facets cannot be organised by logical principles.

The constructed element of knowledge acquisition is well recognised by the narrative approach, acknowledging that it is recipient-designed; that is, stories are not factual representations of events (Riessman, 1993) but are ‘constructed, creatively authored...’ (p.5). This was echoed by Bartlett’s (1932) early work on memory research and his theory of reconstructive memory, which argued that our memories do not faithfully play back our experiences like a tape recorder, but, instead, we reconstruct them imaginatively. Whilst Bartlett’s ideas did not receive much attention in his time, these ideas are very relevant today; narrative theories recognise that ‘narrators interpret the past in stories, rather than reproduce the past as it was’ (Riessman, 2008 p.341). This reformation also extends to our identity and sense of self which shifts over time. Riessman (2003) suggested that ‘individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives’ (p.2). The meanings we ascribe to events and ourselves cannot be neatly organised into categories or typologies. ‘Narrative identity is not a stable and seamless identity’ (Ricoeur, 1988 p.241) but is shaped by social context and is both constructed and performed (Wells, 2011). Our sense of self is constructed through ‘selective remembering to adjust the past to the demands of the present and the anticipated future’ (Bruner, 2003 p.213).

The narrative approach encompasses a diverse set of methods where the focus can be on spoken, written or visual texts (Riessman, 2008). The current thesis will focus specifically on first-person, oral accounts of the participant’s experiences. The research is exploratory and hopes to not only contribute to the knowledge base of Counselling Psychology literature, but also inform clinical practice and supervisory practices and enable better ways of working cross-culturally with the Bangladeshi community. The research approach (heuristic inquiry) and chosen methodology (narrative) are interwoven with the core philosophy of Counselling Psychology. Hiles (2001) argues that heuristic inquiry resonates with the practices of counselling and psychotherapy. Sultan (2015) provides characterisations of heuristic inquiry that complement the narrative method that I employ in the research, as well as some of the ethos and values of Counselling Psychology. Firstly, it assumes that reality is relative, constructed and subjective based on the individual’s context, and adopts a first-person, personalised approach to presenting the findings, whilst acknowledging the researcher’s personal positioning in the research. This is consistent with the Counselling Psychology values of the uniqueness of individuals, subjectivity and intersubjectivity (Cooper, 2009) as well as

engaging with personal meaning, interpretation and co-construction to help better understand clients (Woolfe et al., 2003). Secondly, heuristic inquiry is grounded in humanistic values, and underscores how people come to know and make sense of their world, instilling culturally embedded and emancipatory values with consideration. The methodology mirrors the humanistic and empowering approach of Counselling Psychology, whilst recognising the individual as a socially embedded being (Cooper, 2009; Kasket, 2012).

Finally, the methodological approach is relational and values the dynamic interaction between the researcher and researched, which is non-linear, fluid and flexible. This relational stance is also adopted by Counselling Psychology and fits well with the research aims, as it hopes to highlight the relational dimensions of Bangladeshi women's experiences.

### **3.5 Methods**

#### *3.5.1 Selection Criteria*

As in-law relations have been a relatively understudied topic, as is the Bangladeshi community in general, the inclusion criteria for the research broadly focused on recruiting female participants of Bangladeshi origin aged 18 or over who had at least two years' experience of living with in-laws. There was no theoretical basis on which to specify the duration that the participant had to have lived with in-laws, but it was thought that at least two years' experience would yield significant material for the research. The criteria were also broad, as I was interested in the topic of women's experience in general and avoided making assumptions about their experiences of in-law relationships in any particular way. As I am able to speak both English and Sylheti fluently, I interviewed women in whichever language they feel most comfortable. As this is considered a hard-to-reach group, the criterion was also flexible, including participants with a history of living with in-laws, now or in the past. For this reason, the research was open to single, married, separated, divorced or widowed participants who had had some experience of physically living with in-laws.

#### *3.5.2 Recruitment Strategy*

I adopted a purposive sampling strategy for the research and recruited the participants in various ways. Bengali women who were known to me and who met the inclusion criteria were

approached. 'Snowballing' was also used as a strategy, asking interested participants if they knew of anyone else who would be interested in participating. People I knew forwarded my research topic by word of mouth, text messages and Facebook, asking interested parties to contact me via email.

Researchers have identified gatekeepers as important mediators to sensitively recruit participants from ethnic minority groups for research (Eide & Allen, 2005). I was introduced to a woman's group in a community centre where I spoke about my research as part of the recruitment drive. The leader of the group, who appeared to have a longstanding, trusting relationship with the members, helped to generate interest in the research.

Given previous clinical and community experience and the nature of the topic being researched, I anticipated that there may be difficulty in recruiting for this study. Bangladeshis are a minority ethnic group in the UK, and reducing the focus to women only and then finding women who have had the experience of living with in-laws meant that access and recruitment for this particular group were going to be a challenge from the outset. Often, speaking about personal experiences is stigmatised and even discouraged in the Bangladeshi community. Talking openly and comfortably may also be made difficult by our shared ethnicity and fear of confidentiality being compromised, or their perceived fear of bringing shame onto themselves and their family. For this reason, it was important to keep the inclusion criteria flexible. In this way, recruiting participants was perhaps relatively easier than if the criteria were restricted to only those currently living with in-laws.

The Bangladeshi women needed to self-identify as having had some experience of living with in-laws. I spoke by phone to all the participants who expressed an interest in the research. Whilst all those with whom I spoke were interested in the research topic, on the whole, I was surprised that around nineteen women registered an interest to participate.

In the early stages of the recruitment phase, arranging time for interviews with interested parties was also one of the biggest obstacles. I realised that we were all leading similar lifestyles, with multiple duties and responsibilities. Many of the women found it hard to spare time for the interview. Leading similar parallel lives generated empathy around juggling multiple priorities.

Despite multiple attempts to arrange an interview, I had not heard back from five participants who had originally shown interest. Interviews were booked with three other participants but cancelled on multiple occasions due to various obstacles – time, illness, unforeseen circumstances and other demanding priorities on both sides. Unable to find a mutually agreed

time for the interviews after multiple attempts, we jointly decided it may be difficult to pursue further. I thanked the participants for their interest and time.

In total, I interviewed 11 participants. One participant later withdrew from the research.

### *3.5.3 Participants*

My intention was to recruit around 10 participants, a typical number for narrative research (Riessman, 2008). In total, 11 Bangladeshi women were recruited for the study, all of whom were from the UK. One participant dropped out after sharing the transcript and provisional analysis (pilot interview). The participant felt that she was too identifiable from the analysis and did not want information about her family revealed.

Preserving anonymity was a central concern for the participants, who did not want to be identified in any way. For this reason, limited demographic details of their background and where they reside in the UK are provided. Pseudonyms were used, with some chosen by the participants themselves to replace their actual names. The ages of the participants ranged from the early 30s to mid-40s. The participants' living arrangements also varied. Although not intentional, the study attracted the attention mainly of those not currently living with in-laws. Perhaps, having some physical distance from in-laws meant that it was easier to talk about these experiences, and accounted for why the majority of the participants were not actually living with their husband's family at the time. Of the 10 participants interviewed, only two were still living with their in-laws and one participant, at the time of the interview, was in the process of moving out of her in-laws' house. This is perhaps one of the weaknesses in the study which would benefit from further exploration in the future and may bring to light more personal nuanced experiences and the nature of family dynamics and personal relationships.

The two participants who were still living with their in-laws (Asma and Tina, see Table 1) had been living with them considerably longer than the rest of the participants. In their stories, they shared the triumph of overcoming their difficulties with living with their in-laws. I wondered whether the length of time in processing experiences and their narratives may have made it easier to talk about their experiences. So, whether the participants were living with their in-laws or not, it appears that either the separate physical spaces or length of time, paved the way to reflect on their experiences, allowing them to share their narratives perhaps more easily.

The table below summarises information about the participants; the length of marriage, how long they stayed with their in-laws, and how long ago they moved out of the in-laws' house.

*Table 1. Participants marital status and length of stay with in-laws*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Length of Marriage</b>	<b>Length of stay at in-laws</b>	<b>How long ago participant moved out of in-laws</b>
Asma	30s	11 years	Participant living with in-laws at the time of interview	
Halima	40s	23 years	7 months	23 years
Hamida	30s	7 years (divorced)	Got married in Bangladesh and occasionally stayed with in-laws when she visited. Her mother-in-law stayed with her on some occasions (for a few months) when she came to visit the UK. Her brother-in-law also stayed with her for a short duration.	
Hasina	30s	6 years	6/7 months	Approximately 5.5 years
Khadija	30s	9 years	2 years	7 years
Nasima	30s	Participant mentioned that she was separated from her ex-partner (unclear when marriage dissolved)	Approximately 8 years	11 years
Rina	30s	7 years	Participant was in the process of moving out of her in-laws' house at the time of the interview	
Selina	30s	8 years	4 years	4 years
Shuma	30s	6	5 years	1 year
Tina	40s	10	Participant living with in-laws at time of the interview	

### *3.5.4 Data collection*

Semi-structured interviews were utilised to generate rich and in-depth accounts of the participants' experiences. With the literature review in mind, and with the help of a supervisor, an interview schedule was developed to elicit the narratives. The interview consisted of open-

ended questions to guide the narrative and allowed flexibility to include prompts and probes to enable the participant to clarify and elaborate on their story where necessary.

### *3.5.5 Interview schedule*

Following a discussion with my supervisor about the sensitive nature of the research, a peer was asked to conduct the interview with the interviewer to evaluate the interview schedule. This allowed me to consider how the participants may feel when being asked the question and also consider the tone used to ask such questions. This process also helped to establish whether the questions were clear. Through this experience, it was apparent that there were too many questions on the schedule and the flow of questions could have been better. After the exercise and through discussion with my supervisor, adjustments were made to the interview schedule (see Appendix 3 p.286).

Once the first participant was recruited, a pilot study was carried out to further test the coherence and flow of the interview schedule to refine it, if required. When the participant was asked the introductory question, ('Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?') she struggled to answer. I had found it rather easy to answer this question when conducting the exercise with my peer and had assumed that others would find it easy. It was clear that I found it easier to answer this question as my peer and I knew each other and I was more comfortable, whereas I was a stranger to the participant in the pilot interview. I received the impression that she was unsure about what to share about herself. For this reason, the introductory question was edited (see Appendix 4 p.287); it was much easier for the participant to open her narrative and answer about how her marriage was arranged and organised, thus providing a context to describe herself as a person before and after her marriage took place. The FAST board was also not needed as the interview schedule was enough to generate narratives.

## ***3.6 Data Analysis – Analytical Steps***

Unlike other qualitative methodologies, narrative research offers no specific detail or clarity on how to carry it out or how to analyse data as that found in interpretative phenomenological analysis and grounded theory (Squire, 2008). In an attempt to provide some structure to effectively read, analyse and interpret stories, Lieblich et al. (1998) proposed four models for dealing with narrative data. In exploring narratives, Lieblich et al. (1998) propose two

intersecting dimensions of approaches to narrative analysis; the first dimension is concerned with the unit of analysis and the second is concerned with the focus of analysis. In deciding upon the unit of analysis, researchers can take a categorical approach or a holistic approach. The categorical approach dissects the original narrative in the same manner as traditional content analysis and collects sections or single words belonging to a defined category. The holistic approach on the other hand takes the narrative as a whole and sections of the text are analysed and interpreted in relation to the other parts of the narrative. When deciding upon the focus of analysis, researchers have the choice of analysing the content (including the surface and latent content) or focusing on the way the narrative is structured (i.e., its form). The two intersecting dimensions then produce four possible combinations in which to analyse and interpret narrative material, either more quantitatively or more qualitatively: holistic content, holistic form, categorical content, and categorical form.

A unique feature of content analysis is that it can utilise both a quantitative methodology (Krippendorff, 2018) and a qualitative methodology (Lune & Berg, 2001). Quantitative content analysis usually involves reporting the frequency of key categories and summarising details from a data set and seeks to answer questions about *how many* (Krippendorff, 2018). In contrast, qualitative content analysis is concerned with words and themes and their relative salience to the overall data, making it possible to interpret the results. Like quantitative analysis, it allows the opportunity to describe what the participants say by analysing the manifest content, and additionally, it allows researchers to analyse latent content, extending the analysis to an interpretive level, making inferences about the underlying meaning of the data (Lune & Berg, 2001).

Since categorical approaches to analysis are quantitative, this was not suitable for the current research. Analysing the form or structure of narratives also did not seem fitting to adequately answer the research question. It was personally important for me that the data was analysed in such a way that the participant's story is honoured and remains intact, whilst also organising the information in a meaningful way for readers. Holistic content analysis was thus deemed most suitable to analyse and interpret the narratives, given that it takes a qualitative approach. The holistic element allows for a focus on the person as a whole concerning a phenomenon in the context of her own life, and the content element allows for a focus on the implicit and explicit content of the narrative to explore what happened, who was involved, the meaning behind the story for the narrator and her motives and intentions. This approach also seemed appropriate to explore how identity is constructed in the telling of narratives.

Holistic content analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998) was thus used to read and analyse the content of the stories and analyse the meaning that emerged from the narratives within the context in which they were told. As the focus of the investigation was not only *what* was told but also *how* and *why* it was told, the analysis had two main strands. Lieblich et al.'s (1998) analytical steps were adapted to explore the individual narratives. The first four steps are similar to those proposed by the authors. The final step (e) was included to report the commonality of themes across all the stories as a point of discussion to answer the research questions. The focus on the global impressions of the participants meant that there was room to honour each individual story. I also considered Riessman's (2003) questions to explore the performative aspects of the stories.

The following broad analytical steps were taken to explore the research questions:

### **1. *Holistic Content Analysis***

- a) The data was actively listened to and read several times until a pattern emerged.
- b) The initial and global impression of each participant was put into writing. This included noting exceptions to the general impression as well as unusual features of the story such as contradictions or unfinished descriptions.
- c) Using different colours, the various themes in the narrative were highlighted, reading separately and repeatedly for each one.
- d) The context in which a theme appears and its relative salience in the text was noted.
- e) Similar themes across all stories were combined and categories were formed.

### **2. *Performative analysis***

- Why was the tale told in that way?
- In what kinds of stories did the narrator place herself?
- How does the participant locate herself in relation to the audience, and vice versa?
- How does the participant strategically make identity claims through her narrative performance? What other identities are performed or suggested?
- What was the response of the audience and how did they influence the development of the narrative and interpretation of it?

After transcribing the interviews, it was useful to read and re-read the transcript to acquire familiarity with the text. Annotations were also made on the transcripts. The holistic content



allowed the study of the participant's narrative as a whole whilst observing how she developed her story in relation to her current position, focusing on the explicit (what happened, the characters involved) and implicit (the meaning of the narrations, the intentions, motives, traits).

By drawing on Lieblich et al. and Riessman's analytic steps, it was possible to analyse the interrelated and interpenetrating features of the participants' stories (Hiles & Cermak, 2008) by looking closely into 'what' was being told and 'how' it was being told. Considerable overlap was found between the two analyses as they were carried out simultaneously.

During analysis, I adopted an approach where I intuitively used my analytical skills, relying on my wisdom and integrity, as recommended by Lieblich et al. (1998). As trustworthiness is usually a criterion for evaluation in qualitative approaches and narrative research generally, I continually referred back to the transcripts and audio interviews to justify my thoughts, observations and intuitions. Utilising a reflexive journal, I was able to take a more critical approach to analysing the data, questioning what meanings it held for the participants, what emotions it evoked in them and myself and what it was telling me about my own world. Although narrative research recognises that a story is co-constructed between the narrator and listener, I kept the importance of representation in mind and represented the participant's world. Furthermore, the themes were discussed with my peers and supervisors.

Using the two frameworks, general impressions and broad observations were noted beside salient sections of the transcript. After repeated reading, I focused on the thematic content of each narrative, on what was said, who was involved in the story, exploring any reoccurring themes, identifying contradictions and turning points. Particular attention was also paid to the tone of how the story was being told, which can also reflect significant aspects of a participant's world (Langdridge, 2007).

The process of identifying themes was similar to the content analysis as proposed by Riessman (1993). After becoming familiar with each narrative, I highlighted poignant themes and meaningful phrases with different colours and created a table of these quotations. I noted the page number and line number of the selected quotes for ease of referring back to the text. Whilst keeping my research question in mind, I made notes in the margins. I did this for each participant and then created categories that illustrated the shared themes across all the participants' narratives. As I went back and forth, reading the transcripts and the corresponding notes, I refined the organisation of the data by overlapping some themes to form them into distinct categories and divided some into subthemes.

Whilst reading transcripts I took a critical approach to analysing the narratives. Since identities are constructed through the stories we tell, I attended to the social and psychological functions of the narratives. Whilst considering the questions in performance analysis, I was able to tune in to the preferred identities in which the narrator placed herself. Tuning in to the tone and function of the narrative allowed me to observe how the participant positioned herself and others in the story, the differing power dynamics, motives and intentions of the participant, and the extent to which she and others in the story had agency. I remained curious and sensitive to the rhetorical functions of the narratives, seeking to explore how and why the participants related their stories in the way that they did. This involved observing whether they delivered their story in an optimistic or pessimistic way, analysing their possible intention and motivation, aspects of what they expressed, changes in their tone and any contradictions.

Narratives are told in context, and in the analysis, it was important for me to understand the meaning of narratives in relation to the wider context of other discourses (Langdridge, 2007). For this reason, I paid attention to the broad social and cultural influences that may have shaped the stories in a particular way. I tried to attend to the meanings of what was being said, since we use and relay narratives that are readily available in our culture in social interaction (Murray, 1999).

As I analysed the data, I found myself making notes on the structural aspects of the story, noting how coherent each narrative was and the direction the story took in the telling. Although I was interested in the holistic content approach, I found myself tuning in to the holistic form whilst engaging in the analysis. Lieblich et al. (1998) argued that content and form are not easily separated as they influence each other and are embedded in the text. The audit trail (Appendix 6 p. 291) illustrates the process of the narrative analysis and how the themes arose.

The data was discussed with my supervisor. Whilst Lieblich et al. (1998) suggest that discussions could be highly productive, obtaining inter-judge reliability should not be expected, as the nature of the analysis is interpretive. Unlike quantitative approaches, narrative approaches, generally, do not require replicability as a criterion for evaluation (Lieblich et. al., 1998). When considering validity in qualitative research, it is important to consider whose reality is being represented in the research. By continuously referring to the text and audio interview, I ensured that the interpretations were grounded in the data. I also considered the role of power in research. As researchers hold power over how participants' narratives are analysed and interpreted, the power imbalance may result in the respondents having little or no

voice. One way of resolving this is by reporting back the findings to the participants (Bhopal, 2010). By viewing participants rather than the researchers as holding authority over their lives (Morrow, 2005), fairness or plausibility can be achieved to enhance the validity of qualitative research. For this reason, I shared the global impressions with the participants and the provisional analysis. From a feminist perspective, participant validation not only adds strength to the findings of qualitative research but can also be empowering for participants to physically see their contribution to research (Caretta, 2016). It also promotes inclusivity, and provides opportunities for discussion and shared learning leading to collective reflexivity (Caretta, 2016). Two of the 10 participants did not provide feedback on the data and provisional analysis, but the remaining eight participants expressed gratitude that we shared the information with them. The lack of detailed feedback from the participants and the lack of contesting what was written may be attributed to several factors. Time constraints due to the demands of work and family commitment may not have allowed them to make time to reflect and give more feedback. My identity as a doctoral researcher may also have hindered their ability to contest the written content if they perceived my position as one of authority.

### ***3.7 Positioning Theory***

Following on from the idea that narratives also have a performative dimension and help to construct identity, incorporating Positioning Theory appears particularly relevant here. In contrast to the static concept of Role Theory, Positioning Theory offers a dynamic alternative to understanding a person's position. It is also in line with the epistemic position of the research, as it is a social constructionist approach (Slocum & Van Langenhove, 2003).

Harré and van Langenhove (1999) suggested that all conversations involve some sort of positioning, and these dialogues allow people to dynamically produce and explain their behaviour. These positions are further shaped by the social context of everyday life and will be influenced by the history of the interaction and the dynamics of that interaction. There is room for negotiation in how this is received; it offers the opportunity to accept the position, contest it, or subvert it. There is recognition that the positioning will be tacit in nature, as the people involved may not be positioning themselves or others intentionally or consciously.

The positions people occupy cannot be seen in isolation from their culture. Positioning practices are culturally embedded and cultural differences may reveal the local or 'emic'

features of positioning styles within a culture (Moghaddam et al., 1993). The narrator can position themselves and others by incorporating and conforming to a cultural stereotype.

In sharing their stories, participants may position themselves, their partner and their in-laws in particular ways. The participants may present themselves and others differently depending on the position they adopt. As Mishler (1999) noted, as we continually re-story our past in our narratives, we are '*repositioning ourselves and others in our network of relationships*'.

Positioning theory can be particularly useful in understanding identity. It recognises that a person has a personal and a social/public identity, with the former residing behind the latter, which is recognisable by one's community. As a result, one person owns many personas, with one being more dominant than others in a particular context. This suggests that positions are ephemeral rather than fixed. In storytelling, people tend to perform their 'preferred identities' (Langellier, 2001) and the performance of a desirable self is enacted to preserve 'face' in situations of difficulty where their identity could be 'spoiled' (Goffman, 1963). Experiencing contradictory positions can feel problematic, resulting in feeling the need to reconcile, remedy, transcend or ignore the situation. With the multiple and fluid nature of positions that people inhabit, people may use different aspects of their personas to cope with situations in which they find themselves. Narrators may oscillate between positioning themselves as agentic beings, feeling in control of events and actions, to feeling passive in others. These differing positions within a personal narrative signify the creation of identity (Riessman, 2008).

This theory feels particularly useful in understanding the experiences of the Bangladeshi women in the research and how they position themselves and others in their narrative, particularly in relation to how culture plays a role in their various positionings, the relational dynamics that come to play with their in-laws and how they deal or cope with different situations in which they find themselves.

The research interview context is also a unique situation in which the participants are positioning themselves against me and consequently, the context becomes a part of their identity construction as they justify their position to make identity claims about themselves and others. For example, they may position themselves as powerless and lacking agency whilst positioning others in their narrative as powerful and domineering.

### ***3.8 Ethical Considerations***

Clandanin and Connelly (2000) assert that ethical matters are not something to be considered only before embarking on the research but need to be reviewed throughout the entire research process. In line with the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009), I took a number of steps to ensure the well-being of the participants and my role as a researcher. To ensure that I met ethical requirements, I obtained ethical approval from the School of Psychology (see Appendix 2 p. 260). As a guide, I referred to Thompson and Chamber's guide (as cited in Harper & Thompson, 2012) as a framework for meeting ethical requirements and being mindful of my moral responsibility as a researcher.

#### ***3.8.1 Informed consent and self-determination***

I had an initial telephone conversation with all participants during the recruitment stage to introduce myself and give them a general overview of my research interests. Once participants showed some interest, I provided an information sheet (see Appendix B, p 279) that outlined the aims of the research as well as what their involvement would entail. I reminded participants that they have the right to withdraw their participation at any time and emphasised this point if they became particularly distressed. I adhered to the importance of obtaining processual/ongoing consent (see Appendix C p.282) to keep in focus the participant's well-being, reminding them that they were under no obligation to continue at any point of the study and did not have to provide me with a reason if they wished to withdraw.

#### ***3.8.2 Confidentiality***

Andre and Thompson (as cited in Harper & Thompson, 2012) distinguished confidentiality (protection of private information) and privacy (the wish to keep private some areas). In order to reassure participants of confidentiality, I informed them that the information they provide will remain confidential and all recordings and transcripts will be saved in a password-protected laptop to which only I have access. In line with the Data Protection Act (1998) I also said that any transcripts or hardcopy notes would be kept in a locked cabinet. To assure them of anonymity, I explained that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identity. Since identity can be revealed through stories due to specific details that are provided, even with pseudonyms, I asked participants to inform me if they wished to retract any information they

shared. I also explained my responsibility as a researcher and the limitations of confidentiality that I detail below.

### *3.8.3 Avoiding Harm*

I anticipated that in the sharing of the stories, participants could well experience distress. Lieblich (1996, as cited in Elliot, 2005) documented how her research, collecting life stories in the kibbutz, was like opening Pandora's box, leaving the participants with the pain. Holloway and Jefferson (cited in Elliot, 2005) assert that experiencing distress may not necessarily be harmful to participants, but it may, in fact, be therapeutic and reassuring to have a space to talk about and share their experiences. Due to the potential distress that could arise, I explained to the participants that I am duty-bound to prioritise their well-being by discussing any risk they disclose with the research supervisor. I was mindful that my skills in therapeutic settings may help to facilitate sensitive situations with empathy and active listening. At the same time, I remained boundaried so as not to treat the interview as a therapy session. In my role as a researcher, I was aware that the debrief would include details of counselling and therapy services for further support if participants required it.

### *3.8.4 Dual Role and Over-Involvement*

I was mindful that my personal and professional background could affect the research process in various ways. For the participants, our shared ethnic backgrounds could likely make them curious about my own life and experiences. They may have felt that in exchange for the information they share that I would do the same. I ensured that boundaries and the aims of the research were made clear from the outset to manage their expectations, and it was put politely to the participants that the objective was to listen to other people's stories. I also explained that whilst I am a counselling psychologist in training, the research interview is not about providing therapy, but that there would be space to ask questions with regard to the study at the end of the interview.

### *3.8.5 Politics and power*

As a researcher, I am aware that there are obvious imbalances in power within the researcher-researched relationship, especially since I am in control of the questions and receiving information, knowing that this is not entirely reciprocated. Andre and Thompson advise that, particularly in narrative research, rapport building helps to reduce these power imbalances and I paid particular attention to this.

Similar to my role in therapy, I was aware that I may come into contact with the participants in other settings; I shared that I intend to maintain confidentiality and that I am open to negotiation about how these situations are handled, whilst assuring them that the onus remains on them as to whether they wish to share with others or disclose their participation in the research.

Clandanin and Connelly (2000) ask us to consider these themes of politics and power during and beyond the active research interview with regard to who owns the data. What is public and what is private in different parts of the research process? I saw it as an ongoing reflection to consider how the research might be used in the future and the implications for the wider community.

## **3.9 Assessing for ‘quality’ in qualitative and narrative research**

The guiding principles that seek to find objective truth through objective measures of reliability and validity (Polkinghorne, 2007; Willig, 2008) are at odds with the evaluation of qualitative studies which hold a different notion of truth. This is because the former rests on a positivist epistemology that seeks facts or truth. With the exception of some narrative scholars who hold a realist position, (e.g., Bertaux, 1995) they argue that objectivity can be achieved through the verification of a large array of factual data in a given life story. Riessmann (2008) argues that narrative research is not concerned with objectivity or ‘the truth’, but rather it favours positionality, subjectivity and ‘truths’. For this reason, credibility checks through triangulation and sharing data for independent reviews were not undertaken, as this would be more in line with positivist traditions for verifying data in pursuit of an objective truth. For narrative research in particular, what is constructed as ‘truth’ can only be ‘true’ for a particular time, place and perhaps individual (Burr, 2015). From a narrative perspective, what is important is that the experience holds personally true for the participant (Hiles, 2001). For Riessman (2008),

‘trustworthiness’ of data in qualitative research is far more important. Utilising Riessman’s (1993, 2008) and Yardley’s (2000) criteria for ensuring good measures in qualitative and narrative research, I illustrate how I ensured the ‘validity’ of the research.

### *3.9.1 Commitment*

Yardley (2000) proposes that displaying commitment to research by being attentive to participants and engaging reflexively demonstrates a commitment to research. This is also a feature of heuristic inquiry that requires the researcher to remain intensely committed to the research (Moustakas, 1990).

### *3.9.2 Sensitivity to Context*

Sensitivity to context refers to the extent to which the research is rooted in sound and relevant empirical literature, whilst also respecting the participants’ narratives in the context in which they were told. Whilst there was a paucity of research with regard to in-law relations found while carrying out the literature review, I did my best to develop theoretical knowledge in the subject area. Given my background in therapy and the relational dimension of the doctoral training programme, I was able to utilise my skills to demonstrate empathy, sensitivity, curiosity and genuine interest in what the participants shared. This proved to be particularly useful in instances when participants felt emotional when conveying a particular experience, while ensuring I maintained boundaries in my role as a researcher, and not a therapist, in the interview context. Keeping the participant’s well-being at the forefront (see the section on ‘Ethical considerations’), I was able to redress a potential power imbalance.

### *3.9.3 Transparency and Coherence*

Yardley (2000) pointed out that transparency in the research context is the extent to which the data collection and analytical steps are clear, as well as their influence on the data produced. Within this thesis, I have attempted to be clear about how I carried out the research and generated the data. Sultan (2015) argues that the primary task of a heuristic researcher is to be transparent about their role as a researcher and disclose personal interests, biases, values and goals. I have dedicated a significant portion of the thesis, both at the beginning and at the end, to declaring why the topic of research is of interest to me, and I have also provided a ‘reflexivity



chapter’, detailing how my positioning may have impacted the research process. I kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process (Willig, 2008; Langdridge, 2007) and have also presented the findings at my placements, sharing them with peers, which provided a useful way to revise and refine the interpretation of the data. Coherence was ensured by ensuring there was consistency between the research question, epistemic position and methodology.

#### *3.9.4 Persuasiveness*

This criterion refers to the extent to which the analysis of the data and the interpretation can be deemed ‘reasonable and plausible’ (Riessman, 1993) and ‘well-grounded and supportable’ (Polkinghorne, 1988), thus making it credible. I have attempted to be faithful to this by ensuring that the interpretations are grounded firmly in the interview data, and by substantiating the interpretations with relevant quotations from the participants’ narratives (Willig, 2008) to give the data ‘rigour’. As heuristic inquiry is the basis of the current research, this rigour comes from systematic observation and dialogues with self and others, including in-depth interviewing of participants. Simultaneously, I acknowledge that this is only one of many possible interpretations and is open to a different interpretation from readers.

#### *3.9.5 Impact and importance*

The quality of the research can also be determined by whether the research becomes a basis for others’ work (Riessmann, 2008), thereby having a pragmatic use (Yardley, 2000). I would hope that the current thesis will open up new dialogues in the academic and public domains. It would be interesting to open the dialogue and generate feedback from the community with these questions as a useful way of validating the findings.

### ***3.10 Methodological Reflexivity***

The recruitment phase of the research was very interesting, especially in how I interpreted people’s interests and how women interpreted my research topic. Many women expressed interest, which encouraged my hopes that they were considering participating, but it did not necessarily mean that they wanted to participate. Like most people who have come to know about the research, their interest in it appears to relate to finding out what my research revealed. Some people displayed hesitancy and reluctance. This may be due to the shame and stigma

associated with talking about the topic, as suggested by some of the participants in the research. I remember one potential participant telling me that she would have considered participating, but that she did not think that she would be suitable for the research, because she did not identify with having ‘problems’ with her in-laws. Her response then and some years later revealed two things for me – one is that my mentioning the research may have led people to assume that I was looking for stories of ‘problems’; and some years later she revealed to me that it was more her siblings-in-law that she found problematic than her parents-in-law, indicating that perhaps other people may have also defined my research in the same way. It became apparent that participants may have interpreted my research as focusing only on their relationship with their husbands’ parents, when my intention was to include the whole in-law family. This led me to make changes in how I presented the research when talking to potentially interested parties and clarifying the misconceptions the research title might hold.

As part of the recruitment drive, I visited a community centre attended by a large number of Muslim women, who took part in classes related to religion, spirituality and the application of these in their personal lives. The interviews with individuals from the group were interesting; I met them in a context where religion was important, and I wondered whether in the interview it was important to hold on to a religious identity that was personally important for them, clouding perhaps other parts of their identity that may not seem congruent with their religious persona. At times I felt a participant was preaching at me during the interview, and with one, I remember asking about the relevance of her talking about a religious story and to ‘get to the point’, instead of continuing with her lengthy account.

On one occasion, while interviewing a participant in her home, we were interrupted by a family member who was suspicious about my presence in their home and questioned my purpose. The participant looked nervous and anxious. This instance was an ethical and moral dilemma. I explained to the family member that I was researching Bangladeshi culture. Though not satisfied with my response, the family member eventually left, and the participant later told me that she had not told her family about my intention for the visit and interview. Keeping in mind ethical considerations for research (BPS 2018), I prioritised the participant’s well-being. I asked if she was comfortable continuing and reassured her about confidentiality. This situation highlighted the fact that ethical decisions and practices may not always be covered by universal rules (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Shaw, 2008), such as standardised procedures of ethics applications that the researcher completes before conducting studies. At times, ethics application procedures may not prepare researchers for an unexpected ethical dilemma, and they may have to exercise

phronesis (critical judgement and practical wisdom) as a tool to resolve issues. For minority groups, in particular, ethical concerns and dilemmas may differ from those in the majority population. Being aware of the mistrust of research and mental health professions by ethnic minorities, I was conscious that I did not want to contribute to this further.

For some of the participants, the research interview was a useful opportunity to share their stories. In some instances, it felt like it was the first time she had spoken about her experience and had been heard. Reinharz and Chase (2003) shared how the interview moment can give rise to an epiphany where a woman may ‘discover her thoughts, learn who she is and find her voice’, creating a relatively new social situation upon being asked about her experiences. They argue that this is particularly apparent for women whose culture, religion, community, family, etc., requires their silence in one way or another. This highlights the empowering dimension of research in which they feel valued for being allowed to speak for themselves (Vernon, 1997).

Confidentiality appeared to be a very important theme for most of the participants in the research, and one to which I could relate. The relatives to whom they referred were still living, and even if their names and exact ages were not revealed, details of the story could reveal their identity. This has often been my experience when working with the Bangladeshi Community in Camden and Tower Hamlets – the worry and stigma related to the rest of the Bangladeshi community finding out about their story, and the possible malicious spreading of their personal accounts.

It was also interesting that many of the women had more to say after the audio record function was stopped, as though there was something they felt would be too exposing if recorded. It also further highlighted that the data is only reflective of accounts generated from within a particular context, the interview context. If I had conducted several interviews with the same participants, perhaps that would have enabled them to feel that they could be more expressive than in a one-off interview.

One of the criticisms levelled against qualitative methods is the small sample sizes that characterise this type of research. Riessman (2008) openly argues that the narrative approach is not suitable for large studies. As highlighted in the current thesis, the aims were not aligned to the strength of numbers but rather the attention to nuances and subtleties of speech, the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and a consideration of the social and historical contexts (Riessman, 2008).

## **CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF DATA**

This chapter aims to provide a detailed narrative account of 10 British Bangladeshi Muslim women's experiences of their in-law relationships. The data are presented using an adapted version of narrative analysis known as 'holistic content analysis', as described by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998), providing an overview of the global impressions of each individual, represented in the main themes within this chapter. These themes are drawn from verbatim accounts by the 10 participants detailing their experiences within their social and cultural context. Although narrative analysis can be solely descriptive (Riessman, 2008), this analysis also provides an interpretive layer to understand how participants construct their story and narrative from their own subjective experiences.

Due to the large volume of data generated, the data were edited for relevance and clarity. These edits are denoted using dotted lines (...), representing gaps in the narrative and the removal of minor hesitations by the participants.

The data are presented in two parts. The first segment comprises the 'global impression' of each participant, honouring her unique story. This involved reading her transcript several times and documenting initial thoughts and any patterns or themes from her story, including any contradictions. The second segment documents the common major themes from the narratives.

The main objective of this research was to expand knowledge of in-law relationships, and fill a gap in the literature which has not addressed the experiences of British Bangladeshi Muslim women in the UK. Thus, this research aims to answer the following question: *What are the experiences of in-law relationships of British Bangladeshi Muslim women living in the UK?* The research aim is to understand the participants' subjective experiences in their individual contexts and consider the impact of these meanings on their behaviours and identity over time.

Within this chapter, the participants' narratives did not reflect a chronological sequence, with the clear sequential order usually expected in narrative-based research (Elliot, 2005; Riessman, 1993). This may be due to the interview schedule not necessarily asking about experiences in chronological order. The chosen arrangement of the themes and subthemes is intended to reflect participants' experiences over time.

Whilst trying to generate categorical and distinctive themes, one of the challenges in analysing the data was solidifying and grouping the accounts, especially as the themes often overlapped and interlinked in various ways. It is recognised that alternative themes may have been generated if another researcher had examined the data. Nevertheless, every effort was made to explicate themes to reflect the participants' subjective experiences, given the complexity and dynamic nature of interpreting narratives.

The table below illustrates the four main themes and related subthemes that were generated:

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>
<b>'It's a Family Marriage'</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Naivety and Shock</li> <li>- Adjusting to Changes</li> <li>- Pressure to be 'Perfect'</li> <li>- Support</li> </ul>
<b>Rising Tensions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationship Tensions</li> <li>- Control</li> <li>- Visiting Parents</li> <li>- Difficulties moving out</li> </ul>
<b>'Tug of War' – The Role of the Husband</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keep the Family Happy</li> <li>- Suppressing Emotions</li> <li>- Support vs Lack of Support</li> <li>- Powerlessness</li> </ul>
<b>Development of a Survivor's Identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facing Abuse</li> <li>- Reactions and Coping Strategies</li> <li>- Perspectives and Identity Over Time</li> </ul>

*Table 2. Main Themes and Sub Themes*

#### ***4.1 Part 1: Analysis of Global Impressions***

##### **Asma**

Asma is in her 30s and had an arranged marriage 11 years ago. At the time of the interview, Asma was living with her mother-in-law, her husband and their two young children, and was a full-time housewife. She expressed that she did not think about life with in-laws before

marriage, and had thought, ‘if he’s (her spouse) OK, everything will be OK’. The interview was conducted in her home. Her son came in occasionally and her mother-in-law was in a different room in the house. Asma appeared comfortable being interviewed at home.

### *Global Impression*

Asma’s narrative account was dominated by her journey to become more ‘domesticated’ and ‘responsible’ after marriage, an attribute she felt was expected post-marriage. Asma’s experiences changed from being the youngest in her birth family, and having no obligation or responsibility in her parental home, to being ‘thrown in at the deep end’ in servitude to her husband’s family and relatives. She created an image portraying the role of ‘carer’.

Asma delivered her story in a stable, calm and reflective tone and volume. She adopted the position of a ‘good Samaritan’ with a need to see the positive as a means of finding resolve and overcoming difficulties. Whilst Asma’s storytelling was strictly non-chronological, the way in which she presented her story changed during the interview. The initial segment of Asma’s narrative positively portrayed her in-laws as supportive and helpful. This then gravitated towards the subtle challenges she experienced from passing comments and ‘Bengali banter’ that made her feel sad and depressed at times. Asma’s desire to remain positive was mirrored in her overall storytelling; her initial painting of the idealised supportive in-laws was eventually diluted by the difficulty in her journey to remain positive in challenging times. She ended her narrative with a clear message, advocating for women to have a positive attitude to manage in-law relations.

Asma’s positioning and strategy of coping also seemed to be strongly influenced by her religious belief in future reward and gratification in the afterlife (*akhirah*) following struggles. Her narrative related that her initial struggle to adjust was overcome, recognising the positive impact that her in-law relatives had on her, and over time, how her presence also had an impact on her in-law relatives and how she was treated by them.

### **Halima**

Halima is currently in her 40s. She had been married for 23 years at the time of the interview and had lived with her in-laws for about seven months before moving out. Halima’s marriage was arranged by family members when she was 18 years old. She shared that she did not have

an opportunity to get to know her husband very well and felt she was marrying a ‘stranger’. She moved in with her husband’s family, which comprised her sister-in-law (her husband’s older sister whom she felt was more like a mother-in-law due to the age gap), her sister-in-law’s husband and their children. At the time of the interview, Halima was living with her husband, two of their children, and a daughter-in-law. Halima explained that her son had recently married, and her daughter-in-law had moved in with them. The interview took place in her family home. Whilst no one was present where the interview was taking place, the interview was briefly interrupted a few times by other family members coming in and out of the room.

### *Global Impression*

Halima’s narrative illustrated living the life of a ‘princess’ prior to marriage and becoming a ‘slave’ after. Although Halima’s narrative was not told chronologically, she shared significant experiences post-marriage and compared them with her life before marriage. Her story highlighted her struggle to live up to the demands and expectations of her in-laws, which was in contrast to her experiences before marriage with her own family. She described feeling protected, ‘cocooned’, living in a ‘bubble’ and not being expected to cook or to dress in any particular way.

Halima’s narrative positioned her as a ‘slave’ whilst married, where she felt it was difficult to exercise agency to challenge the demands imposed upon her. She described living with her in-laws as ‘traumatic’, and both Halima and her husband experienced a strong sense of powerlessness. Halima’s account leaves readers to consider how implicit cultural rules and a sense of obligation towards in-laws limit the extent to which one can assert agency.

Halima told her story in an excited and reflective tone, which at times became cautious, and reduced in volume. She demonstrated a reflective stance on aspects of the story that she had not shared before, suggesting an active process of meaning-making within the interview; she expressed gratitude for the space. Having had some distance from her in-laws over time, her narrative reflected some freedom and peace from her earlier struggles with her in-laws, with whom she still has contact. Halima explained that the intense anxiety she experienced in the past with her in-laws had subsided over time. Having become a mother-in-law herself, she expressed her determination to not repeat history by imposing expectations and demands on

her daughter-in-law. She expressed her desire for a cultural shift to take place in the Bangladeshi community with respect to relationships with in-laws.

## **Hamida**

Hamida is in her 30s and had an arranged marriage when she was around 18 years of age. At the time of the interview, Hamida was living in her own accommodation, and she explained that she had been married for seven years before getting a divorce. During the course of the interview, it transpired that Hamida had little contact with her in-laws; she had only occasionally stayed with them during occasional visits to Bangladesh, and some in-law relatives stayed with her during their visits to the UK.

Whilst talking about how her marriage was arranged, she explained that during her travels in Bangladesh, a distant relative persisted in asking for her hand in marriage. Hamida later made sense of this urgency in her story, communicating that her now ex-husband and his family wanted the marriage to take place so that he could eventually get an indefinite stay to remain in the UK. She alluded to her husband's changed behaviour after receiving his visa to stay, and the domestic violence she experienced. Hamida reported that though she envisaged living with her in-laws permanently after her marriage, she was disappointed at the way she was treated by them. The interview took place in Hamida's home where she lived with her son.

## *Global Impression*

Hamida delivered her story in an anxious and angry tone, often expressing resentment for the ordeal she experienced with domestic violence and lack of support from her in-laws. Growing up, Hamida had expressed acceptance of her circumstances, as she was told by her parents that she would be married young. The need for her to marry increased when her mother died when she was 16 years of age and her father started worrying about who would care for his daughters when he passed on.

In the relatively little exposure she had to her in-laws, Hamida said she felt used by her ex-husband and in-laws despite her efforts to accommodate them. Her negative experiences with her in-laws were in stark contrast to the positive relationships she witnessed between her own mother, sister and their in-laws.



After the interview ended, it was apparent that Hamida's story was fuelled by the injustice she had experienced. It was unclear whether Hamida understood the aims of the research, and further questioning during the interview was offered to explore her in-law experiences. As Hamida was aware of my background in therapy, she asked if I would be able to help someone she knew who was going through a 'difficult time'. I wondered if her participation in the interview meant, in her mind, that she would be able to receive some help in return, but I was unsure. On reflection, I wonder whether I interrupted the natural storytelling process, over which, ultimately, I do not have full control with regard to its course and direction, shape, and content.

## **Hasina**

Hasina is in her 30s and had experience living with in-laws through two marriages. She was married to the partner of her choice on both occasions. Her family was not happy with her choosing her own spouse, so she left her parental home. She had a daughter from her first marriage, and this was a challenge that she and her second partner had to address with his family before they agreed to their marriage. After getting married, she moved in with her mother-in-law, father-in-law and brother-in-law. She also had sisters-in-law, but they lived elsewhere. Whilst she had been married to her husband for six years at the time of the interview, she only lived with her in-laws for approximately six to seven months.

### *Global Impression*

Hasina had viewed marriage as a 'fairy tale' in which 'your Prince Charming will come and take you away'. She was also influenced by Indian films, which shaped her ideas of being the 'best daughter-in-law'. Hasina embraced the traditional daughter-in-law duties, but her in-law family criticised her as she did not wear the Islamic headscarf or pray. Her in-laws were not happy that she was independent and had 'a mind of her own'. Hasina said that despite trying to fulfil her duties to cook, clean and serve the family, they were not happy with her dress, her not praying, and her daughter from the first marriage living with them and going out whenever she liked. Hasina began to feel that she was attacked over trivial matters. Relationships became strained over time and Hasina stopped doing her duties as she felt 'there was no appreciation'.

She felt her character was being tainted by her in-laws, with their verbal abuse and gossip. Hasina also felt that her 'good' qualities became an object of insecurity for her in-laws.

Hasina's life took a turn following the death of the family member of a friend. She changed her life, becoming more devout by committing to prayer and wearing the headscarf. She explained that embracing Islamic values pushed her to mend issues with her in-law family and seek forgiveness. She found that her in-laws were more accepting of her once she embraced these changes.

Hasina's telling of the story gave the impression that she was very opinionated, and her tone changed as the theme of the story changed, from having an angry and defensive tone to a more reflective tone, with a renewed understanding that marriage is a 'process' that requires members of the family to give each other time to adjust. At times her narrative was strongly influenced by her religious beliefs, which mirrors her passion for finding her faith. This appears to be the lens that she uses to review all aspects of her life.

### **Khadija**

Khadija is in her 30s and was married in her early 20s. She met her husband online and the marriage ceremony was soon arranged. After marriage, she moved in with her mother- and father-in-law. Her sister-in-law also moved in later. Khadija explained that much of the content of her story happened recently, and she struggled to offer a chronological order of events. Her narrative illustrated the loving and supportive relationship she had with her in-laws in the initial stages; they eroded over time and ended up having no contact at all with them. At the time of the interview, she was living with her husband and their two young boys, separate from his family. The interview took place in a café in a busy shopping centre, with her baby son present.

### *Global Impressions*

Khadija suggested that her narrative was unique from many perspectives. Her husband gave her the option of moving in with him and his parents, while his personal preference was that they live separately. Khadija felt that, culturally, it made sense for her husband, the only son, to stay with his parents and fulfil his duties towards them, which informed her decision to move in and live with them. Khadija's initial impression of her in-laws was different to her

expectations. They spoke English and she was not expected to perform many of the traditional duties, such as cooking and cleaning, unlike the other participants in the study. Whilst her in-laws gave the impression that they were non-traditional, Khadija's narrative was dominated by how much of her experience contradicted the open-minded image her in-laws initially gave – they disowned their son because he stayed at his mother-in-law's residence during a trip to Bangladesh, which was against cultural norms. She also felt that her sister-in-law's presence played a major role in affecting her relationship with her in-laws. Ultimately, she felt that her husband and children had been rejected by his family, and that she was grieving the 'death of a relationship'. She presented some of her narrative with anger and at times she seemed perplexed, which seems to mirror her experiences with her in-laws.

### **Nasima**

Nasima is in her 30s. She married a partner of her choice in the mid-1990s when she was 18 years old. At the time of the interview, Nasima was separated from her husband but it was unclear when her marriage was dissolved. She moved out from her in-laws' home 11 years prior to the interview, and she said she had lived with them for eight years before moving out. Despite being an able student before marriage, education was not encouraged in her family. She gave up her paid job with the idea that her husband would help her find a better one after their marriage took place. Nasima moved into her husband's home to live with her mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother and sister-in-law. Other siblings-in-law lived locally and were regular visitors. She described her experience after moving in as the 'biggest shock of her life'. She reported experiencing domestic violence and her marriage eventually ended. The interview took place in Nasima's home where she lived with her children.

### *Global Impression*

Nasima's narrative account is reminiscent of a 'Cinderella' who did not really have a 'happily ever after'. Nasima's narrative implied that she was naïve about marriage, not questioning the new traditions and rules around dress and the duties of her in-laws' household. She likened her experiences with her in-laws' as regressive, as though 'they're living in the village in Bangladesh', expecting a daughter-in-law to respond to their every need and desire with little flexibility. Nasima appeared to work tirelessly to meet these expectations at the expense of her

own self-care. She expressed that putting others first was paramount. An example was that Nasima was told when to eat, usually after everyone else had finished eating, and ate only what was given to her.

Nasima seemed to be happy to present her story in the hope that it may help others and demystify the idea that daughters-in-law are not open enough to adapt to living with in-laws. In the telling of her story, it was clear that Nasima did not want to be blamed by society or her husband for not doing enough for her in-laws. Nasima agreed with the idea that it is ‘morally correct’ to respect the head of the household, and she wanted to fit into the role of the daughter-in-law as presented in soap operas and films. Whilst Nasima seemed passionate about advocating for daughters-in-law to not be mistreated, her narrative was expressed ambiguously; a flat tone, reduced eye contact when recounting difficulties, and simultaneously maintaining a hesitant, painful smile. There appeared to be sadness and deep-seated anger at the ‘bullying’ she experienced, and her identity in the story seemed different from the ‘passionate’, ‘strong-minded’ person she described herself as before marriage. Despite her negative experiences, Nasima still felt that, as a daughter-in-law, one must preserve cultural values and persevere to make the relationships work.

## **Rina**

Rina is in her 30s and was married in her early 20s to a partner of her choice. She described various hurdles that had had to be crossed to marry her husband. When married, she moved in with her husband’s family, which comprised her mother-in-law, two sisters-in-law, and three brothers-in-law. The young child of one of her sisters-in-law was also in the home. At the time of the interview, Rina had been married for seven years and had just moved out of her in-laws’ home into her own home to live with her husband and young son. The interview took place in the presence of her aunt, who had introduced me to Rina, and whom Rina was happy to have present as she was aware of her story.

## *Global Impression*

Rina’s narrative comprises her struggle to adapt to her husband’s family and their relational dynamics, which she considered ‘alien’ in comparison to her own upbringing. The mission to become the ideal daughter-in-law was threefold – to remove the stigma of it being found out

that she and her husband had had a romantic relationship before marriage; to win over her mother-in-law and family for the sake of her husband to compensate for the demands made by her father in order for the marriage to take place; and her intention to fulfil preconceived ideas of how a daughter-in-law should be, influenced by her own mother whom she perceived as the ‘perfect’ and ‘doting’ daughter-in-law. Her ideas and desired role were challenged by the unconventional roles and perceived power dynamics at her in-laws’, which were contrary to Rina’s expectations. She presented her mother-in-law as cautious not to upset Rina, due to fears that she may leave like the other daughters-in-law.

As the story developed, Rina expressed finding some resolution in her in-law relations over time. Rina presented her story as a ‘mission accomplished’, in that she won the respect of her in-laws, though not to everyone’s liking. The narrative tone of Rina’s story moved from one of mixed frustration and helplessness to one that was reflective, hopeful and positive. She reflected on adjusting her rigid expectations to resolve difficulties that she experienced and presented herself as being the mediating factor in taking her in-laws from a fragmented to a cohesive family structure.

## **Selina**

Selina is in her 30s and was married approximately six years ago. She met her husband through two mutual friends. Selina found that her husband shared similarities with her previous partner (whom she lost to an accident) and saw qualities that she desired in a husband. Having come from a big family herself and watching her sister-in-law developing as a dutiful daughter-in-law in her parents’ home, she did not feel overwhelmed at the idea of moving in with her in-laws, who were also a large family. Selina lived with her in-laws for three years before moving out to live in a separate home with her husband and two young children. The interview took place whilst she was alone at home.

### *Global Impression*

Selina felt she was very naïve about her ability to manage life within a large in-law family unit, especially as she came from a large family herself. Often Selina felt the family was solely reliant on her to manage the domestic duties in the house, with her mother-in-law often resorting to complaining to Selina’s husband and others when expectations were not met. Selina

recognised that she may have played a part in setting such high expectations, as she presented herself as invincible in managing multiple roles and being at the constant service of her in-laws. She recalled losing friends over time as she found it hard to keep up with daily chores and family needs.

She later found it exhausting to be a wife, daughter-in-law, daughter and sister, and juggle these roles and duties. Selina narrated that whilst she did her best in her multiple roles, she started to experience difficulties over time with her in-laws when she did not meet their expectations of being a subservient and dutiful daughter-in-law. Desperate for respite, her only haven appeared to be visiting or staying at her parents, which also proved to be problematic. Whilst her husband was aware of these difficulties, Selina talked about the pivotal role her mother-in-law played in complaining to her sons about the daughters-in-law in the house, which also at times compromised the relationship between her and her brother-in-law and husband.

## **Shuma**

Shuma is in her 30s and married her husband six years ago. At the time of the interview, she was living in her own home with her husband and two children. She was in a previous relationship, but when that did not culminate in marriage, she married her husband whom she met through colleagues. Shuma moved in to live with her husband's older brother, his wife, and their four children, where she stayed for five years. Whilst this was meant to be a temporary arrangement, Shuma lived with her in-laws for five years and described her experience as being 'doomed from the bloody beginning'. The interview was conducted in her home, where she was alone at the time of the interview.

### *Global Impression*

Much of Shuma's narrative at the beginning was dominated by her reflections on whether she made the right choice in marrying her husband, as she was in a relationship previously. She described her marriage as the best way to move on from the previous relationship, but she wondered whether a curse had been cast on her marriage and experience with her in-laws for the pain she had caused her ex-partner.

Shuma thought she was going to be a 'responsible female in the house', help where necessary and 'tend to everyone's needs'. She wanted to 'appear perfect' and avoid difficult situations through 'damage limitation'. She felt her desire to move was hindered by interference from various family members.

Shuma's narrative highlights how much of her experience was shaped by her husband, who she felt at times was not supportive towards her about the negative experiences she had with her controlling sister-in-law, who, in her mind, felt more like a mother-in-law. She felt that she had missed out on the quality time that newlyweds need at the beginning of a marriage due to the restrictions placed on her. Her resentment was further intensified when her husband's, married sisters would visit, communicating their compassion about the hardship she faced in having to tolerate the demands of residing with her in-laws. Shuma also shared her anxiety in seeking permission to visit her own family, recognising that she would have to assess her sister-in-law's mood before asking. Shuma went back and forth on where to place the blame; sometimes blaming her husband and sometimes recognising that he was probably helpless to support her.

Shuma became increasingly emotional and tearful during the course of the interview as she reflected on her past relationship. She recalled difficulties she had experienced and questioned her position in her marriage. She also questioned why the issues still seemed to bother her.

## **Tina**

Tina is in her 40s and her narrative was in relation to her second marriage, where she moved in with her in-laws with her daughter from her first marriage. She described her marriage as being semi-arranged. She described herself as naïve for not questioning or thinking about what it would be like to live with in-laws, as she was deeply in love with her husband and was looking forward to living a life with him. After marriage, she moved in to live with her husband's family, which comprised his parents, two brothers and his sister, who also had a son. The interview took place at Tina's workplace, and at the time of the interview, she was still living with her in-laws.

## *Global Impression*

Tina was living with her in-laws at the time of the interview. Her narrative covered 10 years of experience living with her in-laws. Being the only British-born Bangladeshi daughter-in-law, who spoke English and was in paid employment, she classed herself as the 'black sheep'. This was a challenge that Tina faced with her in-laws, as the other daughters-in-law were from Bangladesh and did not work outside the home. Tina also explained that the idea of her working was very new for her husband's family who would have preferred her to be a stay-at-home daughter-in-law. Tina expressed that she faced a lot of pressure to simultaneously serve her husband's family and manage work.

Tina presented her narrative in a very positive tone and positioned herself as an advocate for positive change. She presented examples of overcoming obstacles and challenges to building family relationships and breaking down any potential insecurities and perceived competition between herself and the other daughters-in-law. Tina saw her experience as a 'project' to manage and said this became her way of coping. She gave the impression that she wanted to be a good role model for the family. As she felt empowered, she also wanted to empower the rest of the family. Over time, Tina has managed to earn respect from the extended family.

This section has provided an overall introduction to the participants and their global impressions. The following section will summarise the main themes, using their narratives.



## 4.2 Part 2: Summary of Main Themes

### 4.2.1 Theme 1: 'It's a Family Marriage'

The term 'marriage', in the context of the participants' narratives, is not confined to the simple union of a bride and groom. The participant's life after marriage includes and extends to being in union with their husband's family. Every participant had some experience of living with their in-laws after marriage. Two participants were still living with their in-laws at the time of the interview, and the other eight varied in the amount of time they had lived with their in-laws. Post-marital experience not only involved adjusting to life with their husbands but also adjusting to extended family living arrangements and relationships. This theme highlights the participants' experiences within the context of being in a 'family marriage', the adjustments or changes they experienced, the expectations of their role after marriage and the support available to them. This is evidenced by the following subthemes:

- Naivety and Shock
- Adjusting to Changes
- Pressure to be 'Perfect'
- Support

NAIVETY AND SHOCK	<i>"I was living by myself... Then I made that big transition of moving in with in-laws. It was quite a big shock" Tina</i>
	<i>"I was a naïve, innocent person... you know, I didn't have any life experience then" Halima</i>
	<i>"I was quite young, quite naïve I think; I didn't really question, like he had a big family" Asma</i>
	<i>"I didn't really think it will be hard... I think that's where my naivety lied" Selina</i>
	<i>"It was the biggest shock of my life. It wasn't a shock...It was the biggest change" Nasima</i>
	<i>"I just thought another big family you go into, isn't it?" Shuma</i>
	<i>"I was very naïve. What could be difficult?" Khadija</i>

Table 3. Subtheme: Naivety and Shock

#### 4.2.1.1 Naivety and Shock

This subtheme captures a common reaction in the participants' in-law experiences. Seven of the 10 participants expressed feeling naïve about married life and shocked at their experiences following marriage. Their reactions reflected the changes as they transitioned from pre-married life to adapting to their husband's family, and not feeling prepared for the relatively novel set of experiences. This included trying to explore their place and role in the family and the associated expectations as a newcomer in the in-law family setting.

Three participants expressed that they did not give in-laws much thought before deciding to get married. Tina expressed her excitement about getting married and being with her husband. She also saw it as an opportunity to remove the stigma of being a divorcee, a status perceived as *'quite negative compared to someone who's married'* in the Bangladeshi community. After finding a suitable partner, she explained how her mind was more attuned to being married to him, and described herself as *'naïve'* in that she *'wasn't thinking about in-laws or anything'*. Despite her friends calling her *'mad'* to give up her own home to move in with a big family, this did not seem to impact Tina's decision; *'...I think it's because I was so looking forward to being with him. That didn't matter'*. Tina's narrative indicates that she may have viewed marriage as a union with her husband and in the excitement of marrying her husband, she did not consider what life after the marriage with the wider family would entail. Her friends' reaction suggests that they may have held negative views about living with in-laws and could not comprehend Tina sacrificing her independence to live with affinal kin. Her narrative indicated that the *'shock'* may have stemmed from not reflecting on moving in with in-laws:

*"I was living by myself, with my daughter in my own place. Then I made that big transition of moving in with in-laws. It was quite a big shock..." (Tina, 16-18)*

Similarly, Asma and Halima implied that they did not give much thought to what life would be like living with in-laws, which may have shaped their experiences after marriage. Halima's marriage was arranged, and she did not have the opportunity to get to know her husband before marriage as Tina had. Like Tina, Halima was aware she would be moving in with her in-laws, but whilst Tina chose her partner and fantasised about married life with him, Halima talked about her general fantasy of married life. Her narrative implied that she knew of others who had lived with in-laws but assumed that this would not be relevant to her. After reflecting on

her story, Halima recognised that being ‘naïve’ and lacking ‘experience’ may have helped to make sense of her earlier ideas about married life. Even though Halima had been married for more than two decades, she struggled to build a coherent narrative when delivering her story. The pace, structure and tone of her storytelling suggest that she may not have spoken about her experiences before nor processed them. Describing her experience as confusing, she attributes this to the contrast between her expectations and fantasies about marriage and her reality:

*“I don’t think it made any sense to me at the time... it’s just a big blur, like a confusion thing. (111-114) ...I thought I’d be like the queen of my palace, you know I’d marry somebody, it’d be lovely, we would have our own house, you know you have these silly girl dreams and things that, it’s all gonna be like this, it’s gonna be like a fairy tale it’s gonna be brilliant. Not once did I think it was gonna be like that... (303-307) I didn’t, I mean, I, er, obviously, I got sister-in-laws, cousin sister-in-laws and they live with them, but... it was nothing to do with me, you know that’s not relevant to me... (427-429) I was a naïve, innocent person... you know, I didn’t have any life experience then (Halima, 925-928)*

Like Halima and Tina, Asma also shared not giving much thought to the wider in-law family. She implied that this may have been due to her age, describing herself as ‘young’ and ‘naïve’. She suggested that this may not have allowed her to reflect adequately on post-married life; by assuming that everything would be ‘OK’ if her husband was ‘OK’, she did not question or enquire what it might be like to adjust to the rest of the family and the changes that would come from transitioning from a small family to her husband’s bigger family. Her narrative indicates that she was unprepared for the transition; being ‘thrown in at the deep end’ suggests that maybe someone should have helped her prepare for married life:

*“... I was quite young, quite naïve I think; I didn’t really question, like he had a big family. It didn’t even occur to me like, ‘would I be able to adjust or ...’, I was just like, ‘ok, he needs to be like this, like that’ ...it didn’t really occur to me like I need to find out what his family is like, what his mum is like, what his sisters are like; I just thought, ‘if he’s okay, everything will be okay’. (Asma, 50-55) “...at the*

*beginning, it was quite hard for me because I felt as though I was kind of thrown into the deep end and coming from such a small family...” (Asma 583-584)*

Khadija, Shuma, and Selina also described themselves as naïve. Their reactions appear to imply that they did not expect to experience difficulties after marriage. Shuma and Selina drew upon their personal experiences of being raised in a big family, assuming this would help with their transition into married life. Selina spoke about living with her married sister-in-law in her own parental home. Her experiences of being in a big family and watching her sister-in-law manage things ‘effortlessly’ led her to not be worried about moving into a big family. She realised that, although she may have felt it was an advantage having grown up in a big family herself, she was only able to reflect on things from a particular position; having observed the way her sister-in-law conducted herself, she assumed this would prepare her for the transition to her in-laws. However, she later realised that she only had experience from the perspective of a sibling-in-law, and did not reflect on the position as a daughter-in-law/sister-in-law and how this may be different. Selina’s narrative demonstrates how one’s position changes with experience. She was confident rather than anxious about moving to her in-laws and didn’t realise how a different family dynamic may impact her, which is what made her conclude that she may have been naïve.

*“I think I was a little bit naïve. I remember (husband’s name) telling me, you do know I have a very big family... I said yeah, yeah, yeah, I’m from a big family (107-110) ... I just saw being in a big family as from a sibling point of view and that was a challenge when I got in. It was very hard and quite difficult to adjust to... (119-121) I didn’t really think it will be hard (154) ... I think that’s where my naivety lied, because I think I should have been nervous, so when I went there, it was too much. (Selina, 170-171)*

Nasima married her partner of choice. Her narrative implied that she was aware that there would be changes after marriage and recognised that there were differences between her own family and her husband’s family. The description of shock she described suggests that knowing that things will be different was not sufficient to prepare her for her experiences after marriage;

it was only through direct lived experience that she was able to gauge ‘the full extent’ of how ‘different’ her in-laws are:

*“(laughs) It was the biggest shock of my life. It wasn’t a shock...It was the biggest change...(81-82) I knew his family was very opposite to my family, very orthodox were very strict in their own fashion... (83-84)... Opposite of my family, total opposite (89-90)... It was just totally different, although I knew it I didn’t know the full extent (92-93) ... I was in a big shock. I couldn't sleep (115) I think on the second week I just burst into tears. It all hit me. I was like, "Oh my God what's happened to my life?" (128-129).*

ADJUSTING TO CHANGES	<i>“...so many roles. I think that was very challenging.” Selina</i>
	<i>“I wasn’t really clued up about in-laws.... It all came to me after I got married...” Asma</i>
	<i>“...and that was expected that I would cook and clean and do this and work...” Halima</i>
	<i>“...the real traditional food... even to this day I don't know some of them. But I kind of cheat my way” Tina</i>
	<i>“I didn't have no breathing space... religiously...I can't walk around without a headscarf” Shuma</i>
	<i>“But in their house, everyone had very separate lives. It was very different” Rina</i>
	<i>“...they're trying to change me change certain habits that I have... like the covering, the head covering” Hasina</i>
	<i>“It was so different to the way I grew up” Hamida</i>
	<i>“When I got married, I didn’t hardly knew anything...my mother-in-law taught me how to cook.” Khadija</i>

Table 4: Subtheme: Adjusting to Changes

#### 4.2.1.2 Adjusting to Changes

In this subtheme, the narratives shared by nine of the participants suggested that adapting to their new relationships required a significant period of adjustment. This entailed participants navigating their way through working out expectations of roles and adjusting to different family dynamics, situations and routines.

Selina's narrative suggested that she did not anticipate having to adjust and balance different aspects of her identity. The excerpt below describes her personal challenge after marriage; she not only accommodated new parts of her identity but also assimilated these with aspects of her identity before marriage. She made a differentiation between these various roles, suggesting that they are independent of one another and required her to modify and adjust from one role to the next; it is perhaps the switching of identities and roles that took a toll on her mind and body, leading her to feel overwhelmed:

*"I didn't know how difficult it was and how overwhelming it was and how physically challenging it was and mentally challenging. And you're almost like living two lives. Like you're doing the daughter-in-law stuff and in the bedroom you're the wife and on the phone you're the daughter to your mum and on the text you're the sister to your siblings so almost yeah, just so many roles. I think that was very challenging." (Selina, 157-161)*

Selina added that the changes and demands of her multiple roles meant that she had perhaps to sacrifice and give up aspects of her identity as a friend. She implied that prioritising family meant losing a part of her identity and make changes to what was once considered 'social' in her life. Her use of the word 'dead' also implied that after marriage she did not experience much social pleasure with those around her:

*One thing I recognise the most is I lost a lot of friends for a good few years... I could not have the time to keep in touch with them...I just couldn't get round to returning those text messages or voicemails to friends" (489-496) ... Socially I was like dead. My social life consisted of my in-laws and my family." (Selina 529-530)*

Asma also shared her challenges of not being aware of what to expect from living with her in-laws. Her statement implied that moving into the in-law home came with changes in roles and

responsibilities. It also suggests that understanding these roles and what they entail is a learning process after marriage:

*“...so I wasn’t really clued up about in-laws and the roles and what you have to do and what it will be like living with in-laws, having sister-in-laws. It all came to me after I got married...” (Asma, 73-75)*

Five participants shared their difficulties in acquiring cooking skills after marriage. Asma, Khadija, and Hamida accounted for their difficulties by their not having been expected to cook before marriage. Tina and Halima also implied limited experience but talked more about the struggle to adjust to the duties of working and carrying out domestic chores after marriage. In particular, they shared their cooking knowledge and skills in ‘western’ cuisine before marriage, and the lack of experience in cooking traditional Bangladeshi dishes, a skill that appears to be crucial to meet the expectations of Bangladeshi affinal kin. Hamida expressed her familiarity with ‘western cuisine’ and her limited experience with Bengali cooking:

*“...I was an expert on Shepherd’s Pie, all the English foods ...Bengali cooking I helped my mum, I knew, I knew how to peel an onion like I could do all that kinda stuff ... But don’t ask me about Bengali fish, I could eat it, but don’t ask me to dissect one... and that was expected that I would cook and clean and do this and work...” (Hamida, 150-162)*

Similarly, Tina added that the adjustment she made after marriage was in direct contrast to her pre-married life.

*“...there was this expectation of me that, okay, although I work but you know the cooking and the cleaning and looking after the family also needs to take place...” (94-96)... So where I stayed in my penthouse life with having small dishes and beans on toast and I really enjoy my beans on toast, to massive handis (pans) and cooking for people...” (Tina, 137-139)*

She explained that although she did not know how to cook Bangladeshi cuisine, she drew upon different aspects of her experience and identity in adjusting to her in-law family home. She showed her cultural awareness of the expectations to have knowledge of cooking traditional

Bangladeshi cuisine, but recognised she was limited in her experience. She found resolution in negotiating different aspects of cultural knowledge and produced her own unique dishes. This appears to be reflective of her own hybrid identity as British ('western') and Bangladeshi:

*"I wanted to make it like this, like themes kind of the western influences that you'd get from work and all that I did take it home...(141-142)" "...when we were growing up it was 50% Bangladeshi and 50% western culture... just thinking about being Bangladeshi because even cuisines, the real traditional food that you're expected to make, even to this day I don't know some of them. But I kind of cheat my way because I put other things on that's like...I put chicken in skewers and peppers and stuff and it looks pretty." (Tina, 157-164)*

Two participants spoke about the adjustment difficulties and dilemmas of living with male affinal kin. Islamic principles dictate that women are required to observe the Islamic dress code in the presence of a male who is not their husband and with whom they do not share a close blood relationship. This can pose particular challenges when living with extended family members of affinal kin. Whilst Shuma was used to living with men, Asma did not grow up with them and then lived with her in-laws, which included her brother-in-law. She shared that it was a new experience for her as she 'didn't really know a lot about men'. Both Shuma and Asma alluded to not being able to feel relaxed in their affinal home due to having to observe modesty in line with Islamic codes in the presence of male affinal kin. Additionally, for Asma, her experience suggests that early transitions and adjusting to her in-laws' home can be stressful; learning cooking skills and adjusting to her brother-in-law meant she felt unable to relax:

*"I didn't have no breathing space because it's like, religiously...I can't walk around without a headscarf, covering my bosoms. I couldn't even in the summer I have to be dressed in a respectful way." (Shuma, 275-278)*

*... what I found hard was, when I had to cook and stuff...That was quite difficult for me... and it used to be really hot and then you know... that freedom in the house just to walk around with your hair out. Before I came out of the room, I had to have my hijab (headscarf) on and my jilbab (loose long dress) on. The only time where I could relax was in my room. Because you know having him in the house, I felt like*



*it kind of restricted me a little bit, my freedom and when you move somewhere new, it takes time to adjust.” (Asma, 105-113)*

In contrast, Hasina did not observe the Islamic dress code. Her narrative implied that her in-laws were more religiously observant than she was. She shared her difficulties in adjusting to this and observing other Islamic duties after marriage. Hasina seemed resistant to her in-laws wanting to change her to be more Islamically inclined. She engaged in subtle resistance, with her outward actions appearing to show that she was conforming to their expectations but, covertly, she was not engaging in prayer. Part of her behaviour may have been due to having forgotten how to perform religious rituals. She recognised that, although she engaged in pretence, her in-laws were probably aware she was not praying. However, because her behaviour was covert, she was exempt from being challenged and was able to appear to conform to her in-laws’ expectations. In this way, Hasina was able to ward off any judgement or shame for not fulfilling religious rituals.

*“...they're trying to change me change certain habits that I have... like the covering, the head covering, I don't pray so I've got to pray... to tell you the truth I had forgotten because I was living on my own and I've been on my own for so long and I wasn't doing these practices. I'd be me going in the room locking myself up and just sitting... I did the pretend acting but I think deep down they still knew that maybe she's not doing or whatever...” (Hasina, 287-298)*

Three participants spoke about finding it difficult to adjust to routines in their in-law households. Shuma, Selina, and Rina implied that a lack of structure was a contributing factor in making adjusting to the family home challenging. Shuma and Selina communicated how their in-laws would cook or eat late. Rina also shared her struggle with her in-laws’ routine. She shared how her mother-in-law would cook throughout the night and wake up late, a routine that differed from what she was used to in her parental home:

*“...in my house that's half the day gone... It was at a very different timetable and so I couldn't stop my habits into their household and their lifestyle...” (Rina, 173-175)*

Rina added that she found it difficult to adjust to relational dynamics at her in-laws', which were different from her parental home. She suggested that her family were cohesive and drew a comparison with her in-laws who lived relatively separate lives. This seemed to challenge her personal notion of what it means to be a 'family' and she described her early experience as 'alien':

*"No one ate together. When they did sit together, everything was just about watching tv. No one spoke to each other, except for when they were gossiping about each other. There was no togetherness. My husband spent a lot of time in his room and I wasn't used to that. In my mum and dad's house even though we lived in a flat, the living room was a living room, we lived in the living room. But in their house, everyone had very separate lives. It was very different (Rina, 153-158).*

Asma's and Hamida's narratives suggest feeling 'different' from their in-law relatives. Differences in their upbringing may have impacted how they communicated which, in turn, may have made them feel like an 'outsider' amongst their in-law relatives. Despite the shared Bangladeshi ethnicity and language, they both expressed not understanding jokes. This appeared to not only be a barrier to communicating effectively with affinal kin, but may also have impacted the extent to which they felt included in the family:

*"It was so different to the way I grew up (249) ... just stupid jokes. Dhulabhais (brother-in-laws) used to come around and say stupid jokes and everyone's laughing haa haa haa haa haa and I'm just looking at them thinking, is that really a joke? It's like they used to look at me thinking I'm shida (stupid) I don't know nothing. I'm not laughing with them (254-257)... But I can't be like them because I had a different up bringing to what they had (Hamida, 261)*

Asma also shared this and added that her lack of Bengali language skills made it hard to understand and engage with in-law relatives:

*"...certain jokes, you know, like the elder, the older sisters-in-laws, they have that Bengali joking, you know; at first I didn't used to get it. My bangla wasn't that good as well..." (Asma, 423-425)*

PRESSURE TO BE “PERFECT”	<i>“I thought if I’m going to get married, I’m going to be the best bow, the best wife, so I went in there with that mind” Nasima</i>
	<i>“I really genuinely wanted to have the best experience my in-laws” Khadija</i>
	<i>“I thought I’m going to go in and I’m going to be that best daughter-in-law. I’m going to wear sari, I’m going to dress get up in the morning, tidy the house, do the cooking, the cleaning, to please everyone” Hasina</i>
	<i>“I say village mentality...daughter-in-law should wake up, make tea, make breakfast for everybody...basically slave” Halima</i>
	<i>“...often you’d hear comments from the mother-in-law... She is trying to say that there is a role, that you have in this house and this is how it’s done. I did like this and you should do it like that too.” Selina</i>
	<i>“They expected me to do everything like the cooking, the cleaning. I did, I’m not going to say I didn’t.” Hamida</i>
	<i>“I was brought up, you know with the kind of mentality Zibone khew khoitana maa hikaisoin na (no one should comment that the mother did not teach the daughter)” Rina</i>
	<i>“...I wasn’t that good at the housework and things like that, she used to think, ‘oh, you should have learnt this’, you know. She never said it but you could get that impression...” Asma</i>
	<i>“I couldn’t go into something and then for it to fail again...I wanted to make it work.” Tina</i>

Table 5. Subtheme: Pressure to be ‘perfect’

#### 4.2.1.3 Subtheme Pressure to be “Perfect”

This subtheme encapsulates the pressures the participants felt to meet perceived expectations about being the ‘perfect’ daughter-in-law. Nine of the 10 participants in the study described the pressure they placed on themselves or pressure they received from their in-laws to conform to the role of a good, dutiful and subservient daughter-in-law/wife/sister-in-law. Participants shared how these pressures are consistent with traditional cultural norms and practices. The narratives illustrate how expectations are rarely expressed explicitly or directly. Rather the assumption is that there is an implicit and shared understanding of what it means to present oneself as ‘good’ and ‘perfect’, and there is pressure to maintain this image.

Participants’ desire or pressure to be ‘good’ daughters-in-law may have been influenced by cultural norms, traditions, and their upbringing. Hasina, Hamida, Rina, Nasima, Tina and Khadija all shared a desire to have good relationships with their in-laws. This may have placed some pressure on them to ensure that they worked towards and maintained good relationships by adhering to what is culturally expected in being ‘perfect’. After the breakdown of her first marriage, Hasina was living alone with her daughter and desired to be part of a family unit. She viewed her second marriage as an opportunity to be a dutiful daughter-in-law again:

*“...being alone isn't nice, I was quite happy and I thought yes I'll be like again like you know Allah (God) has given me that opportunity to be like a daughter-in-law could do fulfil my duties...” (Hasina, 167-168)*

Nasima echoed similar intentions and desires:

*“I always got married thinking that for me I'm one of those people whatever I do has to be in excellence. So, I thought if I'm going to get married, I'm going to be the best bow (daughter-in-law), the best wife, so I went in there with that mind” (Nasima, 94-96)*

This desire appears to motivate Nasima and Hasina to fulfil expected gender roles and complete domestic duties at their in-laws’ home. This may be a reflection of how they were socialised into their gender roles; that is, they may have learnt that to be accepted or to gain approval from

others meant fulfilling domestic duties to a high standard, thus presenting characteristics of the ‘good’ daughter-in-law.

Khadija was given the choice before marriage to live with her parents-in-law. From an Islamic perspective, although she recognised that she had no obligation to serve her in-laws, her narrative implied that she may have felt indirectly pressured and made to feel responsible for ensuring her husband, being the only son, still fulfilled his duties towards his parents. She felt that this may have influenced her decision to live with her in-laws. Her reasoning implies that to be dutiful means having to physically live with in-laws. Nonetheless, her wish to have a good relationship with her in-laws also seemed to be a desire shared with the other participants in the research:

*“...he’s the only son and he has a lot of responsibility on his parent as well and it’s... in our religion. We’re not obliged to live with parents and look after them in that sense, but, but we do have lot of responsibility towards our parents... That also, influenced my position to stay with my, my in-laws (172-177) I really genuinely wanted to have the best experience my in-laws” (Khadija, 198-199)*

The notion of the ‘good’ or ‘perfect’ daughter-in-law was shaped by the participants’ upbringing. Some participants drew upon their own experiences of watching family members. Nasima, Rina, and Selina stated that observing others shaped their knowledge. Rina shared that her mother was a motivating factor:

*“A lot of my conceptions came from how my mum was... I always viewed my mum as someone who was very much the perfect daughter-in-law... Very dotting. Running to everyone’s needs... everyone used to come to our house when we were younger, mum used to do big boro handi di cooking (cooking in big pans) ... (226-234) And when I am seeing everyone praise my mum and then I’ve seen the way my mum is, that is how I set up myself to be” (Rina, 246-248)*

Selina added that her sister-in-law shaped the way she conducted herself. Her observations also included being aware of what comprises the image of a ‘good’ daughter-in-law, such as not waking up at unreasonable times. Daughters-in-law may have to be extra vigilant about household rules and ensuring that they are not violated:

*"I did see things like when you're in the household if someone's coming you gotta dress in a certain way ...It's a traditional type of daughter-in-law...erm she'd be up a certain time, she won't make breakfast for all of us but it wasn't an unreasonable time like she wouldn't stroll out of bed at 2, 3 o'clock. She just knew that wasn't right. I took a lot from her actually, erm when guests came, she was very lovely and giving, erm, so, yeah, she influenced me a lot actually in terms of how to carry yourself around the house after you're married. (Selina, 144-152)*

Films were referenced by two participants as a source of influence for what it means to be a dutiful daughter-in-law. Hasina and Nasima shared the idea that fitting into the image of the subservient daughter-in-law came from films:

*"I used to watch movies, Indian movies. You had the good movie and the bad movie and I always chose the daughter-in-law. That was the nice daughter-in-law... I thought I'm going to go in and I'm going to be that best daughter-in-law. I'm going to wear sari, I'm going to dress get up in the morning, tidy the house, do the cooking, the cleaning, to please everyone so they were happy and my husband's happy with me..." (858-864) "...even though it was my dream, but I wanted to make it a reality.... my thought was, I do my bit for my reality to happen (Hasina, 909-910)*

The same image was evaluated as 'backward' and regressive by two participants. Halima, for example, described her mother-in-law's expectation of what it meant to be a traditional daughter-in-law:

*"I think it was just she was more traditional than anything else... Like you know their idea of a daughter-in-law and how she should behave... I say village mentality...daughter-in-law should wake up, make tea, and make breakfast for everybody... basically slave... That was her expectation... I went above and beyond" (Hamida, 352-364)*

Nasima appeared to be conflicted in her response. She described herself as a ‘cultural girl’ who believed in ‘following the culture’ and shared a desire to fit a particular image, feeling it was ‘morally good’ to be subservient. Yet she contradicted herself when evaluating her in-laws’ expectations, depicting them as something from the ‘black and white movies’, suggesting that their ideologies were old-fashioned and not in keeping with current times:

*“...they wanted a daughter-in-law who they see in the Indian movies, back in the black and white times and whatever they've heard of back home. But their mind was sort of like...they're living in Bangladesh, in the village but they're in a real...they're not in that world though. You're in the modern times now, if you know what I mean? They wanted a bow who wakes up first thing in the morning wearing sari salaams(greets) the father-in-law, touches their feet, breakfast is ready before they even come down, cooks a meal...” (Nasima, 106-112)*

The pressure to be dutiful, subservient, and perfect was often measured by a commitment to domestic servitude. In-laws may impose this pressure, especially if they were socialised into this belief themselves. This was communicated explicitly by Hamida and Selina. Selina shared how her mother-in-law’s own experiences shaped what she expected from Selina:

*“...often you’d hear comments from the mother-in-law about how she lived her life and how she’d get up at the crack of dawn to make the house up and have it ready. (231-233) ... She is trying to say that there is a role, that you have in this house and this is how it’s done. I did like this and you should do it like that too. (Selina, 238-239)*

Like Selina, Tina and Hamida also shared the pressure to perform domestic duties. In Hamida’s experience, this pressure also required tolerance of distress to maintain the image of the perfect daughter-in-law:

*“They expected me to do everything like the cooking, the cleaning. I did, I'm not going to say I didn't. For myself to go into a kitchen where it's not even like up-to-dated and serve them. I still went in there. I still bit my tongue and I thought,*

*let me just do my bit for them and I used to go in and I used to cook...It was hot really hot and I remember just sweating and I used to just say well this is life. I have to get on with it..." (Hamida, 231-236)*

There appeared to be an expectation of being seen to be dutiful. Selina spoke about performing domestic duties with 'all gut and mind'. She shared that she was not 'forced' or 'pressured' to do things but there was 'a very subtle expectation' that domestic chores were to be completed by her. Additionally, Selina shared how, even after moving out of her in-laws' home, her husband expected her to fulfil her duty to remain in contact with her parents-in-law. Selina also felt obligated to help with domestic duties on her visits. This may have been partially influenced by her mother-in-law's comments about the eldest daughter-in-law:

*"...There would be comments, Oh, she's gone now, she doesn't even care about us anymore... she thinks she's got her own house so she could do what she pleases, doesn't care about the mother-in-law. She's got you know, responsibility, she's not fulfilling that (199-203)..."*

The participants' narratives indicate how gendered roles in the domestic sphere are maintained by women. Lack of experience in the domestic sphere before marriage made it difficult for three participants in the study to fulfil cooking duties; a skill that is almost always expected to be mastered in preparation for marriage. Not possessing these skills may invite frustration from in-laws for not fulfilling these expectations, resulting in pressure to learn and conform to the gendered norms. Four participants shared how a lack of domestic skills could reflect negatively on them and their family. Whilst Rina did possess domestic skills, Asma, Halima and Hamida talked about not having much experience in cooking. Asma described herself as '*spoilt*' and like Hamida was not expected to cook before marriage in her parental home.

In Rina's case, her mother would often check if she was being dutiful towards her in-laws. Rina's own commitment and subservience to her in-laws may have been largely influenced by this idea of protecting herself and her mother from judgement and criticism:



*“I was brought up, you know with the kind of mentality Zibone khew khoitana maa hikaisoin na (no one should comment that the mother did not teach the daughter) Do you know what I mean? So in my head, I already had this preconceived idea of how I would be as a daughter-in-law. (Rina, 148-150)*

Hamida's narrative suggests that her mother-in-law was initially sympathetic towards her, especially with their shared experience of losing their mother at a young age, but she later rebuked Hamida and told her that she should have learnt domestic skills from her mother as she had before becoming a daughter-in-law herself. It appeared that there was a lack of compassion and empathy for Hamida's loss, and Hamida may have expected her mother-in-law to be more considerate about the loss of her mother and the impact on her upbringing; that losing her mother meant she was unable to develop particular skills. Asma also experienced a similar pressure even though her mother tried to protect her from being called out by in-laws for not possessing cooking skills. Asma's mother informed Asma's mother-in-law that Asma did not know how to cook. This may have been an 'insurance policy' to thwart any potential criticism from in-laws towards Asma. Although her mother-in-law agreed to fulfil a request made by Asma's mother to teach her, Asma sensed her mother-in-law's discontentment:

*“...I wasn't that good at the housework and things like that, she used to think, 'oh, you should have learnt this', you know. She never said it but you could get that impression.... (Asma, 408-410)*

Preserving and protecting identity appeared to be particularly important for Tina and Rina. In the early stages of her marriage, Tina implied that she acquiesced to the expectations of her in-laws, largely because they accepted her, despite her being divorced and bringing in her daughter from her previous marriage. This acceptance may have influenced her to show gratitude and to do as was expected. The pressure to please her in-laws was also motivated by wanting to protect her husband's reputation, who had presented her in a positive light before the marriage. Her narrative suggests that he had been stigmatised as his previous marriage had also ended. However, Tina suggested that because she had a daughter from her previous marriage, she was perhaps more stigmatised. In a bid to protect her marriage from failing again and being further stigmatised, she expressed her determination to make it work:

*"I think he had painted me in a very positive light... Because he's from a failed marriage as well, which didn't last long... she was very westernized which didn't match with how they think... I think I was westernised I'm kind of middle. But I think my biggest barrier to... or... because I had my daughter. I couldn't go into something and then for it to fail again...I wanted to make it work. And I enjoyed doing things because it would make him happy and it was just nice because you could see he was happy about it and everyone was happy... (Tina, 106-116)*

Her narrative expresses that her husband's ex-wife's 'westernised' disposition was the cause of marriage failure; by describing herself as taking a 'middle' road, she implied that she was able to meet some of the cultural expectations to fit into the image her in-laws expected. The initial pressure to please, however, subsided overtime, especially with the expectation to cook Bangladeshi food. Realising that she could not do everything and meet all expectations, she provided solutions for her mother-in-law to manage the situation:

*"I can't make the hutki (fermented dried fish) properly and the lota (traditional Bangladeshi vegetable dish) and that kind of stuff... I'm like, "Well that's okay, you have another three daughter-in-laws they can do it really nicely, let them make it for you..." (164-167) ... she didn't like it (mother-in-law) ... I said well they have a responsibility towards you... if this is their house then they can make stuff for you." (Tina, 174-176)*

Rina's narrative also bears some resemblance to Tina's stigmatised identity story. Rina was caught dating her husband before marriage, an act that is discouraged culturally and is forbidden in Islam. Whilst Tina was trying to manage the stigma of being previously married, Rina talked about having the stigma of being the 'girlfriend'. This stigma also affected her husband. This seemed to be a driving factor in trying to be the perfect daughter-in-law and, like Tina, she also appeared to want to protect her husband. She narrated a situation where she felt embarrassed that her brother-in-law served guests instead of her, which goes against traditional gender norms. She shared her anxiety about how she may have been judged for that by relatives:

*"...if she now goes and talks to another relative...there's nothing stopping her from saying bow e to boya gof khorsoin (the daughter-in-law just sat there talking). You*

*needed to understand that I've come into this family...I've got the stigma, I'm the girlfriend and all these stuff. I'm really trying my best to be... to get away from that whole stigma and label and everything (Rina, 411-415)*

Over time, Rina talked about how aspects of the pressure to be 'perfect' led to some resentment towards one of her sisters-in-law. Like Tina, it appears that she did not want to be taken advantage of:

*"Even with my sister-in-laws, I think I built up the resentment for myself...I didn't know how to say no to her because I wanted to impress them. I never wanted them to feel that I I'm not doing what they need, and not helping and not being supportive but it got to the point where she... I didn't know how to say no and she just took. She just took advantage but because I let her." (Rina, 615 623)*

SUPPORT	<i>"They did have another daughter-in-law... She'd come and do bits and pieces around the house which helped me immensely." Selina</i>
	<i>"...if I had to go to a course or whatever, I'll be like, 'oh, can I leave my kids', and they are more than happy to have them." Asma</i>
	<i>"I remember even throughout my entire pregnancy thinking, she's looking after me more than my mum..." Rina</i>
	<i>"He'd (father-in-law) take me to university... transferred fees to my account... They were very supportive of education..." Khadija</i>
	<i>"...they (nephews) did a lot of the mediating without things escalating...They'd make it their problem, so to try and get me out the picture" Shuma</i>
	<i>"...my father-in-law was a nice man" Hamida</i>
	<i>"...he (father-in-law) was fantastic because he worked. He knows how it is to come home and to cook. Sometimes he used to help me in the kitchen." Tina</i>

Table 6. Subtheme: Support

#### 4.2.1.4 Subtheme: Support

Within the context of the in-law family, seven participants shared positive and supportive aspects of their relationship with their in-laws. This subtheme captures aspects of in-law experiences where there was a reciprocation of support. Participants felt they were supported with domestic duties and childcare, with developing their skills and receiving financial and emotional support. In summary, this subtheme indicates that, within the context of family marriage, it is potentially a space where relationships can survive and thrive through support and acceptance; whilst it can be challenging to transition and adjust to in-law relationships, there are also opportunities for positive experiences.

Being the only living-in daughter-in-law, Selina expressed her appreciation for the support she received with domestic duties. It appears that both Selina and the eldest daughter-in-law occupied the same position in the family – the elder daughter-in-law did not appear to demonstrate power over and above Selina. Possessing the status of daughters-in-law implies a similar level of power; they had a shared experience of what was expected of them, and this shared identity allowed them to have empathy and support for one another:

*They did have another daughter-in-law, the older brother's wife. She'd moved out so she paid her visits. I feel sorry for her actually. She did come every other day to cook the curries. Oh, just to show her, kind of to be approved. (192-194) She'd come and do bits and pieces around the house which helped me immensely. (Selina, 204)*

Rina and Asma talked about the advantages of having supportive sisters-in-law, especially regarding childcare. Asma felt she was able to pursue her interests due to the support of her sisters-in-law:

*"...if I had to go to a course or whatever, I'll be like, 'oh, can I leave my kids', and they are more than happy to have them." (Asma, 727-728)*

Like Asma, Khadija received support to pursue her ambition of furthering her education:

*“He’d (father-in-law) take me to university (233), transferred fees to my account (238) They were very supportive of education...(Khadija, 240)”*

Khadija and Asma spoke about the support and benefit of learning domestic skills from their mother-in-law. Whilst women are expected to have acquired domestic skills before marriage, Khadija commented on her mother-in-law’s patience with her lack of experience:

*“She was very, very patient. I didn’t know how to use a washing machine. I even put my father-in-law’s trousers in a washing machine with £20 notes in. Not that they ever asked me to wash anything for them... She taught me a lot. Cooking, not cleaning, washing that kind of thing. (Khadija, 306-309)*

Although Asma initially recounted her difficulties in transitioning from a small to a big family, over time her narrative indicated her appreciation for feeling part of a family unit. Her experiences signify positive elements of the relationship where care and appreciation are reciprocated; she talked about her siblings-in-law cooking for her and making her feel ‘special’, and of receiving praise for her cooking over time. Her experience contests the idea of negative in-law stereotypes, instead indicating that their support by helping with household tasks and duties made transitioning and adjusting to the family easier:

*So, I think they’ve been really supportive. Especially, my sisters-in-law, you know when you hear about sister-in-law coming in and just sitting down and demanding things, my sisters-in-law are not like that... I think, if I hadn’t had that support, then it would have been really hard for me. (Asma, 152-156)*

Four participants in the research suggested reciprocal emotional support within the relationships. Selina spoke about her siblings-in-law approaching her for emotional support. Rina and Khadija talked about receiving emotional support when faced with losses in their lives. Khadija shared her memory of her in-laws’ support after her father’s passing:

*“They really went out of their way to make sure that, they were there for my family and my mum similarly, never forgets that, they’ll never forget what they did...” (Khadija, 228-229)*

After experiencing a miscarriage, Rina indicated that this may have been a turning point in improving the relationship with her mother-in-law. She expressed surprise at her mother-in-law's disclosure of her own experiences of miscarriage, and her story suggests that this shared experience of loss may have helped to develop a trusting relationship:

*"Oh my God what's she saying?" She's sharing stuff with me and I felt so privileged. I felt so privileged thinking, you know what, she doesn't say these things to people, you know what maybe she's starting to trust me a little bit. Okay, maybe she likes me... I remember even throughout my entire pregnancy thinking, she's looking after me more than my mum... (Rina, 502-508)*

Shuma shared her experience of receiving support from her husband's nephews to manage conflict between her and her sister-in-law:

*"...his nephews... they really did have a corner in a lot of the things.... They're go shops, anything, "Do you need anything sassi maa (auntie)?" and they made sure their mum didn't get to me as much. They did things in the background. Now, when I think about it, "Oh, my God, they did a lot of the mediating without things escalating... They'd make it their problem, so to try and get me out the picture (538-546)*

Both Tina and Hamida shared having positive relationships with their fathers-in-law. Tina's narrative suggests that, unlike her experience with her mother-in-law, her father-in-law empathised with her working and managing domestic duties and supported her. Tina used this situation to avenge her mother-in-law; unable to directly retaliate, she used indirect and manipulative tactics to annoy her mother-in-law:

*"...he was fantastic because he worked. He knows how it is to come home and to cook. Sometimes he used to help me in the kitchen. My mother-in-law hated it. I was like "Come on Abba amra ekhloge khori you know let's do this together." (550-552)... my mother-in-law used to hate it I think [laughs]. And I used to do it more!*

*And that was my devilish side because I thought I can't say anything to you. I can't do anything to you. I might as well make you feel crap so I can feel proud!" (Tina, 567-569)*

Tina's narrative also shared a feeling of acceptance by her father-in-law and acceptance of her daughter:

*"And the funny thing is he's got so many grandchildren and my daughter isn't his blood grandchild but out of all the children, the one toy that he bought in his whole life was for my daughter. So for me, that's really significant of acceptance and it stuck" (Tina, 571-575)*

## 4.2.2 THEME 2: 'RISING TENSIONS'

RELATIONSHIP TENSIONS	<i>"I did find it difficult because the other daughter-in-laws, they all lived quite locally, would come in as just guests...and just sit...I would have to see to them..." Tina</i>
	<i>"They did very little erm, because from what I saw, they always had a sister-in-law in the house to do it, the housework, they never needed to do anything" Selina</i>
	<i>"I wouldn't think leave that cup dirty there for my sister-in-law to pick it up after and go and wash it. That's petty, and I've seen all of that now with my in-laws and I think, "Oh my God, things like this actually happens." Shuma</i>
	<i>"...there was this hint of jealousy, like, almost thought they were in competition with me for some reason" Halima</i>
	<i>"...she'd (mother-in-law) cook specifically for me which is nice. This also created a lot of resentment with my zaals' (other daughters-in-law) and stuff because I was seen to get special treatment." Rina</i>
	<i>"...She (sister-in-law) lived with us and that time was a bit difficult because, you know, having two women in the house .... and then I felt as though I was doing all the work." Asma</i>
	<i>"She was allowed to wear trousers and go to work, she's allowed to wear kameez in the house but double standards...I saw everything was unfair." Nasima</i>
	<i>"I think I've realized that when my sister-in-law moved in, things changed a lot. I think when there's a few women in the house... I think things can be very difficult" Khadija</i>

Table 7. Subtheme: Relationship Tensions

### 4.2.2.1 Subtheme: Relationship Tensions

In this subtheme, eight participants shared the tensions they experienced with affinal kin. In particular, participants alluded to women living together as a cause of struggle and conflict within in-law relationships. Whilst Hasina, Khadija, Halima, and Asma expressed it explicitly, the experiences of other participants also allude to this. This subtheme captures the various



ways in which conflict can arise within in-law relationships, including making assumptions about others' intentions, lack of support, and different treatment among daughters-in-law. The tensions within relationships unveil the fact that there are rules, often unspoken, that are expected to be adhered to; these rules also create power differences among affinal kin, placing daughters-in-law in subordinate positions to their in-laws. In-laws are often in control of establishing the rules to uphold the boundaries within the household, but at times participants experienced unfairness and double standards. Whilst some participants shared the supportive aspects of relationships among affinal kin in the previous theme, five participants reported a lack of support from female affinal kin. For instance, Tina and Nasima spoke of having to serve their sisters-in-law and not experiencing reciprocal support. The expectation to serve others appears to create a power imbalance and a hierarchy whereby daughters-in-law have less power than the other family members. In both Tina and Nasima's cases, the subordinate position was further amplified as they were the live-in daughters-in-law; this means that they were mandated to serve others who visited, including other daughters-in-law and married siblings-in-law. Tina also mentioned that, despite other siblings-in-law living locally, the responsibility of looking after her mother-in-law was not shared. Tina communicated her struggle:

*"I did find it difficult because the other daughter-in-laws, they all lived quite locally, would come in as just guests...and just sit...I would have to see to them..."*  
(Tina 96-98)

Nasima also echoed this experience. Her quote is reflective of her subordinate position in the in-law family system. By emphasising that she was 'just a housewife' suggests that her position in the family did not hold much value:

*"He has sisters and brothers all local, like the married ones. They used to come around every day more or less with their kids and them. I was just a housewife really."* (Nasima 76-78)

Nasima shared how one of her sisters-in-law would imply that it was solely her role to perform domestic duties, without additional help or support. She narrated a particular experience where her sister-in-law commented to her mother-in-law:

*“...sometimes even if her mum would let certain things she would make a negative comment. She’d instill that in her. Should would be like, tumi ekhon kita, tumi ekhon khene abaar gelai gi kitcheno? Tumi khatya dewa lage ni igu? (why have you gone to the kitchen?) Do you now have to help cut this? (374-376)... “They’ll be like ohhh, tumar lakhan khew faiba ni horin, aso khali bowaintore araam dewaat”(Do you think they (daughters-in-law) can find any other mother-in-law like you who is constantly helping and making things easy for daughters-in-law?) and all that. Sometimes you know what if I used to show I don’t understand if I didn’t hear it’s better...” (Nasima, 378-380)*

Selina and Shuma also talked about the lack of support in managing domestic duties in the house. Their struggles seemed to stem from their experience of helping their own sisters-in-law in their parental home and treating them like a member of the family. Their own experiences after marriage implied that if they had been considered a member of the family, they would have received support too:

*“We just saw one another like family members, you just do things without thinking. I wouldn’t think of leaving that cup dirty there for my sister-in-law to pick it up after and go and wash it. That’s petty, and I’ve seen all of that now with my in-laws and I think, “Oh my God, things like this actually happens.” (Shuma, 116-119)*

Similarly, Selina echoed Shuma’s experiences and suggested that the lack of support was due to her in-laws always having a sister/daughter-in-law. Unlike Nasima, who felt unable to say anything in retaliation, Selina was able to be assertive with her in-laws:

*“I did say, if you’ve eaten, go take it in the kitchen and wash it up and they took to it...But, I did refuse to take it and I’d say to my mother-in-law erm they are very grown, they’re very capable (268-274)... A few months into it, I put my foot down, because I wasn’t going to be a slave to nobody (282-283)...They did very little erm, because from what I saw, they always had a sister-in-law in the house to do it, the housework, they never needed to do anything” (Selina, 476-477)*

Khadija’s story also suggests that she expected to be treated like a family member and receive support from her mother-in-law following difficult births. Like Selina and Shuma, she was

disappointed by the lack of support. Her experience also suggests that she expected her mother-in-law to fulfil that role rather than her own mother:

*"I had to go and stay at my mum's in (place in UK) for a couple of months to recover from an emergency C-section... I've had horrible births. I've never had that looking after your type of support from my mother-in-law. Never. Her thing was, 'I know you'd feel a lot better getting that support from your mum... I hate myself for it, because I feel as though I expect too much. I expected her to be there for me, and my son and my new baby. I thought she was going to be there...' (Khadija, 530-539)*

Four participants recounted issues of competition and jealousy within their experience of in-law relationships. Halima struggled to articulate her experience of her relationships with her husband's nieces, who were of a similar age to her. Halima's experience suggests that living with in-laws fuels competition among women and thus creates tensions, jealousy and animosity between them. She recalled the 'horrible' feelings but found it difficult to cite details to elaborate on the issues of jealousy. She refers to the nieces being able to do 'whatever they want', suggesting that they were relatively free from judgement on their actions, and had the power to be critical of Halima:

*"...the girls were the worst, they would be so critical, they'd do whatever they want, but, they, I just don't know they just, I don't know whether they were jealous of me or what it was ... just like everything that I did or just this, this kind of feeling that you'd get that you know, the catty comments... (238-243) there was this hint of jealousy, like, almost thought they were in competition with me for some reason, I don't know like... I think it's a really bad idea to live in a house with so many women all the same age, because that's a recipe for disaster (Halima, 511-514).*

Hasina also implied that, although it was not verbalised, her sisters-in-law may have been jealous of her, though, in contrast to Halima, she was able to see that perhaps her independent nature, dress sense, fulfilling all her domestic chores, and being praised for this may have triggered jealousy amongst her female in-laws.

Rina shared her experience of the other daughters-in-law resenting her for being treated differently. Her narrative demonstrates that acceptance from mothers-in-law can enhance the affinal relationship. She spoke of working hard and persevering, which led to her earning ‘special treatment’ and rewards from her mother-in-law. She emphasises the need for daughters-in-law to put effort into the relationship, which can result in forming a good connection. Rina’s narrative suggests that she would be rewarded for her hard work and perseverance and those who can endure the difficulties can reap the benefits of having better relationships with in-laws:

*“...she’d cook specifically for me which is nice. This also created a lot of resentment with my zaals’ (other daughters-in-law) and stuff because I was seen to get special treatment. My perspective is that I have worked hard to get this bloody special treatment. You lot gave up. You would have had another chance. You still have another chance, try with her. If you try, the circumstances are very different. You might get to that point in your relationship.” (Rina, 984-990)*

In contrast, Tina acknowledged that relationships between sisters-in-law can be competitive in nature and strove to prevent this from happening by supporting her sisters-in-law. Whilst she felt in control of ensuring she supported them equally, she felt that she was treated differently from the other daughters-in-law by her mother-in-law. She implied that this has largely to do with her position of having been married before and entering her second marriage with a daughter which is viewed negatively. It appears that she may have felt powerless due to having ‘baggage’, and resorted to compromising behaviour and building tolerance as a way of managing distress and difficulties with her mother-in-law:

*“...she could be understanding because when it came to other daughter-in-laws she was. But I think for them it was like, "Okay she's come with a child, she's taken my best son... (199-201) I think those situations had it been my first marriage and I didn't have the baggage maybe it would have been a different way... maybe I'm being more tolerant because of that. I do think that now, at the time I didn't think that. (Tina, 205-210)*

Similarly, Hasina also felt that she was treated differently because her in-laws *'didn't want to acknowledge that their son married a woman with a child'* (273-274).

Three participants shared further experiences of being treated differently by their in-laws. For instance, Asma shared the difficulties she experienced after her brother-in-law married and a new daughter-in-law came in. Her narrative indicates her tension as she expected her new sister-in-law to take responsibility and share the workload. She appears to express her compassion for the need to adjust, but also her dissatisfaction with the other's excuses and being taken advantage of:

*"...She lived with us and that time was a bit difficult because, you know, having two women in the house .... and then I felt as though I was doing all the work. She was kind of taking a back seat. Everybody in the family noticed as well. They were like, 'how come you're doing everything, she's not doing anything...' (217-226) ... she would just stay in her room. At first, we were like, 'okay, okay, she's new, so let her get used to it'. But then it was kind of like going on and on and on. Whenever there was cooking to do, she'd find excuses..." (Asma, 240-242)*

Asma felt that she was more appreciated by her in-laws after this experience. Her in-laws' comments about the new daughter-in-law, as well as her own expectations, illustrate how these expectations can divide some relationships whilst strengthening others. Her narrative illustrates her early experiences of complying with her in-laws' expectations, meaning that she gained their respect over time, although it is hard to know whether this would have happened if they had not experienced the new daughter-in-law's resistance to performing domestic duties. Asma's tension appears to be connected to the imbalance in performing domestic duties, and how much to allow the new daughter-in-law to adjust to helping in the household. It is unclear why the new daughter-in-law stayed in her room, and it does not appear that anyone enquired about the reason for this and just expected her to participate in household tasks. Furthermore, Asma's early compliance led to her being unable to fully empathise with the new daughter-in-law, who struggled to adjust to her in-laws as Asma had. Asma's experience over time may have impacted her response, and she may have internalised her in-laws' expectations of daughters-in-law.

Similarly, Nasima's narrative illustrated the arrival of a daughter-in-law who did not want to conform to her in-laws, and she displayed more outwardly resistant behaviour. However, unlike Asma, Nasima was unable to reap the benefits of her early compliance with her in-laws, and instead witnessed them agreeing to compromise and allow flexibility to the new daughter-in-law. Nasima's narrative emphasises the unfairness and dissatisfaction she felt with the 'double standard' in the household:

*"She was allowed to wear trousers and go to work, she's allowed to wear kameez in the house but double standards...I saw everything was unfair. I had two children by now. I used to drop them off to school. Come and then come in with my baby and I'm putting the cooking on and she's going to work... She's told to come back after work and eat what I cooked." (Nasima, 432-437)*

Shuma also expressed her frustration at how her sister-in-law treated her daughter-in-law after her son was married. Whilst the new daughter in-law faced similar issues to Shuma, such as staying in her room for too long or going out with her husband, she seemed to suggest that her sister-in-law's behaviour may have become more lenient over time towards her own daughter-in-law, allowing her to visit her parents anytime and not restricting her like Shuma.

*"I couldn't sit in my room for as long as I wanted to. "Go downstairs, because what is people going to think?" Now their daughter-in-law comes home whenever she flipping well wants (440-442). I couldn't go and stay at my parents' house like their daughter-in-law does (Shuma, 492).*

CONTROL	<p><i>“... they would expect me to wear shalwar kameez and go to work and then change (into uniform) and I felt sod it, I'm not doing that everyday...” Halima</i></p>
	<p><i>“...I wanted to do something with my life as well, just didn't want to be cooking and cleaning... That failed sadly because she made him make me cut it off. I didn't do anything after...” Hamida</i></p>
	<p><i>“...his family is very strict and I knew his dad wasn't going to take me and my dad was very old-fashioned they wouldn't have said, "Oh my daughter is still going to work." My parents wouldn't even allow me. They wouldn't expect a daughter-in-law to do that. It wasn't the norm then...” Nasima</i></p>
	<p><i>“You couldn't eat comfortably. You always felt like someone is watching you...” Shuma</i></p>
	<p><i>“She had a major problem saying, “You can't cook like that. That's not how you're supposed to cook it.” Khadija</i></p>
	<p><i>I respected that they had their own way, but... I'm a grown woman, I know how to cook... let me get on with it... Hasina</i></p>

Table 8. Subtheme: Control

#### 4.2.2.2 Subtheme: Control

Six participants recognised specific ways in which they felt controlled by their in-laws, including appearance, diet and behaviour.

Nasima, Halima, and Hasina expressed feeling controlled over their dress. As mentioned earlier, both Nasima and Halima were required to wear saris within the affinal home. Halima recalled her sister-in-law having ‘traditional’ expectations about how she carried herself outside of the home. Halima said she was also expected to wear Asian attire to work. The excerpt below

highlights how her sister-in-law may have been worried about how she would be perceived if they saw her in a uniform (i.e., western clothing) that was not consistent with the image of a new bride/daughter-in-law. Whilst she agreed to wear a sari in the house and for work, Halima refused to acquiesce to her in-laws' expectations:

*"...they would make me wear shalwar kameez and go to work and then change and I felt sod it, I'm not doing that every day. So I'd wear my uniform to work, and my sister-in-law would say, "but people... you can't go out" and I'm like "Why?" I'm dressed, you know..." (Halima, 171-174)*

Nasima recounted that before marriage she dressed in a 'dignified' way and had no restrictions about clothes in her parental home. She also related a similar experience to that of Hamida about having to present herself in a manner that was consistent with her in-law's ideology of how a daughter-in-law should be:

*"... like sari, for me I never wore sari and I wore sari 24/7. like if I went to bed, took my sari off and put my pyjama on, 'oh Nasima nise aaw tumar howr re dakhra' ('Oh Nasima,...come down your father-in-law is calling for you) Again I had to put the whole garment back on and go down... Because my father-in-law and mother-in-law that's the image of a bow (daughter-in-law) and I got married to please them..." (Nasima, 200-206)*

Nasima compared her own family and her in-law family as being 'totally opposite', with the latter being very 'orthodox', and the husband's sisters 'were not allowed to wear anything other than shalwar kameez' (typical South Asian dress comprising a long tunic/dress and trousers) and a headscarf. Additionally, they were not allowed to wear makeup, listen to music or watch television. She shared that when her sisters-in-law did not adhere to rules, her mother-in-law would recruit the sons to beat them. Her narrative demonstrates how women are controlled through physical abuse so that cultural rules are not violated. She felt that this was in stark contrast to her home life where, although she was restricted by not being allowed to go out, she



had her 'liberty days' where she was allowed to wear t-shirts and have her hair uncovered. She also could not relate to the 'formal relationship' her in-law family members had with one another: '*Ji, Ji-oy-ji-na khoilai na khene?*' ('Why did not you say yes or no in a respectful manner?'). It is perhaps due to witnessing these abusive events that Nasima felt unable to challenge her in-laws.

*"Like the daughters were not allowed to wear anything other than shalwar kameez. They had to wear the headscarf and salaam their dad first thing in the morning, they were not allowed to wear lipstick. The mum would get the brother to beat them up if she found them curling their hair, can't listen to music, can't watch TV. Opposite of my family, total opposite. I had my hair out, I use to wear t-shirt in front of my dad, hold his hand. Whereas with them it's a very formal relationship. Ji, Ji-oy-ji-na khoilai na khene? This, that. "Why is your chest showing? Why is the scarf here?" It was just totally different..." (Nasima, 86-92)*

Two participants highlighted how controlling behaviour can be extended to pursuing employment and other goals. Hamida referred to wanting to pursue aspirations in the way that her husband's sister was able to. However, her mother-in-law obstructed these opportunities. Her experience also implies inequalities in relationships; while her mother-in-law may have prevented Hamida from pursuing her aspirations, it is not something that she would do to her own daughter. This preferential treatment may be reflective of a daughter-in-law's subordinate position in the family and the expectation on them to prioritise the family and home above personal needs. Additionally, Hamida's position as a daughter-in-law means the onus is on her to manage domestic duties. This may also contribute to daughters-in-law not feeling like a family member to their in-laws:

*"...her daughter was doing level 2 level 3 and I wanted to do something with my life as well, just didn't want to be cooking and cleaning...That failed sadly because she made him make me cut it off. I didn't do anything after..." (Hamida 493-498)*

Similarly, Nasima was also unable to work after marriage. Her narrative illustrates how cultural parameters, with regard to what is acceptable and what is not, can vary from family to family. Romantic relationships before marriage appear to be frowned upon in Bangladeshi culture. Hasina was disowned for choosing her first husband. However, Nasima's family happily agreed for her to marry the partner of her choice but did not encourage the idea of working after marriage, and neither did her in-laws. Her narrative suggested that what is deemed culturally acceptable can change with time, but also that what is acceptable may be dictated by senior members of the family and adjusted when they decide. Her narrative also suggests that both parental and affinal kin can be complicit in behaviour control:

*"...his family is very strict and I knew his dad wasn't going to take me and my dad was very old-fashioned they wouldn't have said, "Oh my daughter is still going to work." My parents wouldn't even allow me. They wouldn't expect a daughter-in-law to do that. It wasn't the norm then..." (Nasima, 47-50)*

Control of cooking and how to prepare food also appeared to be a source of tension for three of the participants, but their reactions to these tensions differed. Khadija discussed the 'strain' of cooking when her pregnant sister-in-law (husband's sister) moved in. She shared one occasion where her mother-in-law 'lashed out' at her for not preparing food in a particular way. Khadija assumed that things were prepared in a similar way to how her mother had done it, and responded to the argument by apologising to her mother-in-law for upsetting her:

*"She had a major problem saying, "You can't cook like that. That's not how you're supposed to cook it. Why didn't you cut it? Why didn't you cut it?" I said, "I didn't realize. I thought you'd cut it and I didn't know you had to cut it. Sorry, I didn't realize". She went into a real strop and I was so upset, because she'd never argued like that and I'd never argued like that with her" (Khadija, 330-334)*

Nasima also found that the way rice is cooked was different at her in-laws' compared to her parental home. She was instructed by her sister-in-law on how to manage the cooking. Nasima's response suggests that she was dissatisfied with being shown how her husband likes his bread, and whilst she had the option to retaliate, she avoided this. Her response may have

been influenced by her assumption that part of being a ‘good’ daughter-in-law is to stay quiet. She asserted her wish for her husband to accept the way she cooks but chose to avoid confrontation. She implied that being 18, she could have questioned or challenged her sister-in-law’s way of life, but instead, she chose to accept their way of living:

*“We cook our rice differently. My mum’s house I was taught to cook rice in a way that we never chucked the water...we never drained the water. But when I got there I saw that’s how they did it and I never ever told them that, “We don’t cook rice like that.” I had to be told how to...I was shown by his sister how he eats his bread, the day after I got married. I could have said I don’t wanna know, he needs to eat how I make it, I never did that... I was only 18, I still accepted that, that’s their way.” (Nasima, 191-197)*

In contrast, Hasina challenged control over cooking, and her reaction may have differed to Nasima’s and Khadija’s in having had substantial cooking experience herself prior to marriage. She suggested that there was a difference between a woman who went straight to her in-laws from their parental home compared to herself who moved into her in-laws’ home having lived alone. She implied that by living alone she probably had more experience in cooking than other women who lived with their mothers before marriage. She argued that as long as food was served, the method of cooking should not matter.

*“I think as a girl, you go from your mum’s house, whereas I didn’t clearly go from my mum’s house. I had my own life and I went from my own life to the in-laws.... I respected that they had their own way, but... I’m a grown woman, I know how to cook... let me get on with it... In my way kind of thing. As long as at the end of the day you’ve got the curry and you’ve got the food served, and you’re eating, that’s the main thing. It doesn’t matter whether I cooked it your way, or my way.” (Hasina, 577-585)*

Nasima clarified that she knew that there would be changes after marriage and that there would be things that her in-laws would have control over, having watched her older sister get married, but she felt that her experiences were unique. Again, her narrative implied that rules and

expectations may differ from family to family, with some positioning women more subordinately than others:

*"...my sister was married five years before I was married... she had in-laws yet and I knew that it's expected...she had to wear sari, she has to cook, she has to ask for permission before she comes (visits natal family). I knew all that and I thought, "Yes, that's normal." But my experience was slightly different. She still had flexibility that she can eat whenever she wants. She didn't have to wear sari anymore... certain things that I wasn't ready for. Like you can't eat until you've been told to eat and you have to eat what's given in your plate...(146-156) to be told what you eat, when you can eat it. Everybody's ate, the guests have ate, you have cooked for 15 hours but you are not going to eat because your father-in-law... he hasn't come from the mosque until he is and your mother-in-law hasn't come down and sat down you can't sit down. For me that is something that nobody goes through."* (Nasima, 231-237)

Similarly, Shuma also experienced control of when she ate, which was usually after the men had eaten. She shared her experience of finding it difficult to eat late, in contrast to eating at set times in her parental home. Additionally, she describes monitoring by her sister-in-law of what she ate:

*You couldn't eat comfortably. You always felt like someone is watching you...Sometimes if I'd eaten something, she would look when I'm going to get... a piece of meat. Or chicken or fish out...What piece I'm getting? It's so so petty. I never thought people actually took notice of things like that."* (Shuma, 424-426)

VISITING PARENTS	<i>If I went to my mum's house, even my mum would say “khoya aisoth ni?”; (Did you ask and come?) “tor hori zanoin ni aisoth.?” (Does your mother-in-law know you’re here?) Rina</i>
	<i>“so when I got married every now and then had to come and see like my mum just for a little while and I think the other sisters-in-law...they probably didn't like the fact that I was very independent” Hasina</i>
	<i>“...my mum would have to phone her up and ask for permission....And she’d have to send my brother over to come and get me... just put me in a bludee train or whatever and I’d be down” Halima</i>
	<i>“...he got a lot of slack from his mum. So, every time I said I wanna go, he would say go and don’t come back” Selina</i>
	<i>“...if his sisters are coming, I make sure that when they come, I’m here for them as well, so if its two weeks holiday, they come the first week and I’ll be like, okay, we’ll go to my mum the second week.” Asma</i>
	<i>“I understood that... I would have to ask his mum permission if I want to go to my mum’s” Nasima</i>
	<i>“I couldn’t go and stay at my parents' house like their daughter-in-law does... When I did, I was restricted to how many days.” Shuma</i>

Table 9. Subtheme: Visiting Parents

#### 4.2.2.3 Subtheme: Visiting Parents

This subtheme highlights some of the issues that seven of the participants experienced in visiting their parental family. The subthemes illustrate how visiting parents was not something participants could decide alone, requiring negotiation with, and permission from, their in-laws. It was expected that their in-laws’ permission needed to be sought, as was the case for Nasima and Rina. The upholding of this cultural ruling was further reinforced by Rina’s mother’s probing to check if Rina was adhering to the rules:

*“If I went to my mum's house, even my mum would say “khoya aisoth ni?”; (Did you ask and come?) “tor hori zano in ni aisoth.?” (Does your mother-in-law know you're here?) Or she'd phone me and I'm like I'm here, “tor hori ye zano in ni?” (Does your mother-in-law know?) (Rina, 294-295)*

Not following these norms strained relationships as in Hasina's case; she said that she would visit her family when she wished, which her sisters-in-law *‘probably didn't like...’*. She seemed unaffected by their disapproval, possibly due to it being her second marriage, having raised a child, feeling more in control and having an established sense of self. She indicates that she is able to assert herself due to her life experiences; *‘They wanted to mould me into something that they couldn't mould me into because I was already moulded’* (Hasina, 250-251).

Halima spoke about her frustration with the process of also being expected to be collected by her brother and taken to her parents. Her statement suggests that her in-laws perhaps expected her parents to follow a particular protocol in order to allow Halima to visit them. This may have included ensuring that Halima does not travel alone and is always accompanied by a male relative, to preserve honour and avoid the shame of being judged by others for travelling alone:

*“...my mum would have to phone her up and ask for permission....And she'd have to send my brother over to come and get me... just put me in a bludee train or whatever and I'd be down”* (Halima, 196-200)

Both Shuma and Selina felt restricted as to when, how often and how long they were allowed to visit or stay at their parents' home. Selina spoke of how she would manage this issue with her sister-in-law: *‘...I remember we would have to take shifts like “I'm going this weekend, do you wanna go the following weekend?”...’* She felt her mother-in-law and husband did not understand that she needed this *‘purely for respite’* and would engage in *‘emotional blackmailing’* for her being away. Being away at the parental home appeared to impact the family, particularly both sons in the home, which led to frustration and abuse towards Selina and her sisters-in-law:

*“...he got a lot of slack from his mum. So, every time I said I wanna go, he would say go and don’t come back” (Selina, 552-553)*

*“...you lot shouldn’t be going to your mums so often...When you lot go, she keeps going on about how you lot go and she’s gotta do everything on her own and mum shouldn’t be. He kinda blew up and it became a bit nasty...I stood up to it, I said who the hell are you? Shut your mouth I’ve got no reason to answer to you just be quiet ok? (649-655) ... My father-in-law was very protective over this son...” (Selina, 659)*

For both Shuma and Selina, being married meant that their priority primarily lay with their in-laws. Selina explained that the problem was: *‘the maid was gone, is what it came down to’* (558-559).

In contrast, Asma found her mother-in-law to be supportive of her visiting her family, as they lived far away, but she understood that this was to be balanced out by keeping in mind her duty towards her in-laws:

*“...if his sisters are coming, I make sure that when they come, I’m here for them as well, so if its two weeks’ holiday, they come the first week and I’ll be like, okay, we’ll go to my mum the second week.” (Asma, 189-191)*

Control of the rules also appears to be held by the in-laws who are often in a position of power to adjust them; at times, participants experience this as double standards. As can be seen in the experience of the interviewees, rules about visiting family appear to be directed at them, while siblings-in-law appear to freely visit their parental family home without being penalised (e.g., Nasima, Tina). Additionally, Khadija also felt that her parents-in-law appeared to have ‘double standards’ when they disowned her and her husband for staying with her parental family during a trip to Bangladesh. Her narrative illustrates the power in-laws hold to enforce their rules, induce guilt, and make direct threats:

*“They were upset about the fact that we haven’t given into their demands, going to Bangladesh and staying with my mum, that was the primary demand. I suppose, it all ends there... I think, a lot of it also has to do with finances... In fact, though my husband was earning and I was earning they would never say, “You need to give me this money, because I’ve sent you to a private school.” I don’t think... I can’t see them saying that. They’ve never said that...” (684-690)... when it comes down to it, they’re very, very backwards. Very backwards, and it’s very double standards... They were fine to live with their son-in-law for four, five years. Their son, to stay, at my mums, at his mother-in-laws for two weeks, he goes... We will disown you from everything... (Khadija, 986-997)*

Khadija’s narrative is similar to those of Halima and Shuma, where senior in-law family members may make interviewees and their spouses feel indebted to them for the support they gave their spouses and their upbringing. It could be queried whether Khadija’s in-laws’ early generosity in paying for their son’s education may have been a way for them to control her and her husband? In Halima’s case, her husband was perhaps made to feel indebted to his older sister for housing him and giving him and Halima space. These quotations demonstrate how power imbalances are experienced not just by the daughters-in-law, but also by the sons.



DIFFICULTIES MOVING OUT	<i>"I think the realization that we are going to be moving out and everything that was going on was just hitting her..." Khadija</i>
	<i>"she (mother-in-law) saw the state I was living...no family... she saw what her daughter was doing...she said to my husband, "why don't you move...be near your mother-in-law?" Halima</i>
	<i>"tumar kyal kita, beti re loya okhon o zaitaigi ni?" (What are your intentions, that you want to move out now with your wife?) Like that's something bad." Shuma</i>
	<i>" Why are they getting their own their own house, "Are they going to leave you?" Nasima</i>
	<i>"...it happened that they moved out and then we had to stay... it was made clear that they move out. We would have to stay here. We can't both leave her (mother-in-law)." Asma</i>
	<i>"...culture does not let you move out, do you see. But Islam says you should... Everyone should have their independence. Everyone should have their privacy..." Hasina</i>
	<i>"It's not the daughter-in-law's responsibility to erm look after the in-laws... It's the son's responsibility to look after his own mum and dad." Selina</i>

Table 10. Subtheme: Difficulties Moving Out

#### 4.2.2.4 Subtheme: Difficulties Moving Out

Typically, in a Bengali marriage, there is an expectation that the in-laws' home is a permanent abode for women, or at least until the family expands through having children. Moving out of the in-laws' home from personal choice is often frowned upon, usually resulting in strained relationships with affinal kin. Of the 10 participants, seven were living in their own homes either due to choosing to move out with their husband and children, or due to the ending of their marital relationship. Two participants were still living with in-laws, and one was in the process of moving out when arranging the interview, which eventually took place in her new home.

Rina gave no reasons for moving out, although she spoke of having a good relationship with her in-laws and seemed to have experienced a smooth and positive transition when moving.

She felt that her experiences were informed by witnessing how her own brothers and their wives left her parents, which motivated her to leave her in-laws in a relatively amicable manner:

*“...I don't want to be like them. I don't wanna be the one that bezaar khorya gesoin (caused upset (to in-laws) and left).” (Rina, 758)*

Khadija shared how the ‘non-traditional’ and ‘modern’ persona that her mother-in-law initially presented herself to be ‘was a lie’. She was initially given the impression that it was her and her husband’s choice if they did not want to live with her in-laws, and they would not ‘restrict’ or ‘think negatively’ of them. After the first argument with her mother-in-law, Khadija sensed that things may have changed. She recalled this as one of the reasons why she once had a good relationship with her in-laws which was now strained:

*“I think the realization that we are going to be moving out and everything that was going on was just hitting her...” (Khadija, 343-344)*

Halima’s difficult experiences with her in-laws led her to plead with her husband to move out. Due to her husband’s financial difficulties and visa status, they were unable to move out straight away. Whilst her husband could not challenge his family over their mistreatment of him and Halima, he worked on trying to resolve the situation by finding a place for him and Halima. However, even after moving out, Halima said that her in-laws were still very much present in their lives. Her narrative highlights the tension of moving out; in the excerpt below, she demonstrates how it is the woman in a relationship who is judged and blamed for wishing to move out, suggesting why women may not be able to express openly their desire for their own place:

*“...dekhrai ni beti zaitogi, you know why do they wanna go. One of my sisters’ sister-in-law said... why do women want to go and live by themselves with their husbands, is it because they want to walk around naked. That’s the only reason why they want to go and live by themselves” (Halima, 810-813)*

Shuma recollected how, initially, her husband did not want to live with his family, but ‘meddling from the elders’ meant that they would start their married life living there, and she was reassured by her brother-in-law that it was only temporary as, apparently, living together helps build a loving bond between family members. As time progressed, and she fell pregnant with her second child, she felt that it would be a good opportunity to move out. However, her brother-in-law decided to offer her and her husband a bigger room in the house. Shuma tried to be diplomatic towards her brother-in-law and accepted the room. She could not directly tell her in-laws her desire to move and described the vast lengths to which her in-laws went to keep her and her husband there. Shuma felt ‘trapped’ and was arguing with her husband. When he told his brother that Shuma was unhappy, Shuma’s husband was questioned by his older brother. Her story illustrates how moving out of the in-laws’ home is discouraged:

*“tumar kyal kita, beti re loya okhon o zaitaigi ni?” (What are your intentions, that you want to move out now with your wife?) Like that’s something bad.” (Shuma, 236-237)*

Her brother-in-law tried to convince her to consider staying, as moving out brings its own challenges; for example, it would not be easy to do the chores when living alone with young children. Like Halima, Shuma also returned to stay with her parental family due to difficulties moving out.

Like Shuma, Nasima also felt that her in-laws interfered with her chance to move out. She recounted a conversation between her sister-in-law and parents-in-law:

*“Why are they getting their own their own house, “Are they going to leave you?” (Nasima, 250-251)*

Initially, she was not allowed to move out. After eight years of living with them, she eventually did move out but felt rejected by her in-laws:

*"I used to visit but they didn't want to know me then because their point was you left now technically..." (Nasima, 413-414)*

Her efforts to maintain relationships and continue helping with domestic chores were to no avail:

*"Like if I salaamed (greeted) her and she pretended she didn't hear me and she'd go to my sons, Okhon aiso ni? (Oh have you just arrived?) Like she's trying to dodge greeting me. Then she used to ... and then they started treating me like I was a guest...she didn't want me to cook... (534-535) 'tumi ekhon aya dekhai tai ni manchore, tumi ze bala bow' (you now want to come and show the world you're such a good daughter-in-law) ... but I wanted to. I left because it's not convenient, it's time I moved on. But I still want to be ... I want to be part of your lives... (537-539) for them the point is if you're not gonna live under my control, what's this? ...point is you left, you left, why are you gonna come and cook." (Nasima, 540-545)*

Nasima's mother-in-law expressed her anger and rejection towards her by ignoring her, denying her the role of cooking, and making her feel like an outsider. Her mother-in-law appears to want to control how much she can be involved in the household. Her treatment of Nasima appears to reflect anger and resentment for losing control of Nasima by her leaving.

Nasima recognised that she could not be 'moulded' and 'be happy'. Like Shuma, over time, she claimed her rights and challenged the negative attitudes of her in-laws with regard to moving out: *'I'm not going to justify it. Nothing wrong with me having my own space'*.

Asma's narrative highlights the cultural expectation of not leaving parents alone and the fact that someone has to be physically present to look after them. She shared how she and her husband were intending to move out, but after her brother-in-law married, his wife communicated to Asma that she would be 'stuck' with the in-laws. Asma's tone suggested that there was resentment that her sister-in-law had the opportunity to move out, dashing her hopes of having her own home:

*“...it happened that they moved out and then we had to stay... it was made clear that they move out. We would have to stay here. We can't both leave her(mother-in-law).” (Asma, 314-318)*

Hasina decided to leave her in-laws six months into her marriage due to conflicts arising. She blamed the culture for the stigma associated with moving out, and acknowledged her rights to independence and privacy:

*“culture does not let you move out, do you see. But Islam says you should... Everyone should have their independence. Everyone should have their privacy...” (Hasina, 1122-1123)*

Halima and Selina echoed Hasina's ideas, emphasising the need to understand the difference between culture and religion and clarify misconceptions for the sake of better relationships:

*“...I wished people realised that people need their own privacy, and that by moving out you would have a better relationship... in the Bengali culture it's expected that the daughter-in-law would look after the mother-in-law, that's a given. No, it's your son's responsibility, Islamically... don't put it in your daughter-in-law...they blame the daughter-in-laws for everything.” (Halima 820-828)*

*“As the years have gone, I just think such shitty expectations shouldn't be like that... It's not the daughter-in-law's responsibility to erm look after the in-laws... It's the son's responsibility to look after his own mum and dad. And I think as I've got older, I've looked, Islam has told me that this is just a cultural thing. Islamically we have no responsibility over our husband's mum and dad, only out of care and love you can do these things if you wish to but there is no obligation for us to do those things.” (Selina, 336-342)*

These extracts show how angry Selina and Halima feel that blame and responsibility are directed at daughters-in-law. They indicate their growing awareness of how cultural and religious views are conflated. They learn that whilst society may have beliefs about daughters-in-law being responsible for their in-laws, there is no mandate from a religious perspective to fulfil such obligations.

#### **4.2.3 THEME 3: ‘TUG OF WAR’ – ROLE OF THE HUSBAND**

##### *4.2.3.1 Subtheme: Keep the Family Happy*

Four participants, Shuma, Selina, Tina, and Nasima shared that many of their experiences with their in-laws were shaped by their husband’s expectations of keeping his family happy. Shuma felt that her husband was happy with her on condition that she kept his family happy.

*“I just felt like my husband as well, he wants me to keep his family happy. I could just tell from his mannerisms then he's happy with me... he doesn't have to say it.”*  
(Shuma, 159-162)

As well as finding her in-laws’ expectations difficult to live up to, she also felt that her husband was ‘*difficult as well*’ and felt ‘*he would never understand*’. She recounts difficult experiences of coming back from hospital with stitches after giving birth, and having to continue to serve him and his family:

*“Waking up every two hours he still expected me to give him his breakfast give him his curry, cook for his sister...the baby was six weeks old I had to cook for that 30-40 of their guests...he would never understand (Nasima, 338-346)*

*“I have never had, I was never allowed to say anything back... Because my ex-wouldn't want to hear it. He would just say, you're just a bitch... He wanted more even more... I don't know. He just wanted me to make his family happy and if they say things to me whatever, I shouldn't be coming in telling him or anybody... I won't*

*tell anybody but then obviously I'm human so if I'm always quiet because there's no one to talk to because nobody talks to me. (Nasima, 381-395)*

Both Shuma and Tina felt they could have been warned by their husbands so that they could manage their expectations. Tina felt that she was left on her own to work out how to behave around her in-laws. She also felt that her husband imposed an excessive number of rules about how she should present herself around his family, for example, not taking calls in front of her in-laws. Tina felt that she had to work out these rules over the years, as expectations are not always directly communicated. Over time, she understood that adhering to the rules was a way of protecting her from any disapproval from the in-laws.

*"...he wanted to protect me from that, he just said I don't want you to do that. But I think, I even speak to him now, like look if he had just said, "Look, if you do that, that's how they'd look at it." or, "If you do that, that's how they, it's negative for them, they don't like it." I would have understood. I just felt he always put too many do's and don'ts yes, too many rules. So he was trying to protect me but he could have done it quite easily by just saying it..." (Tina, 255-259)*

*"...he wanted to protect me from that, he just said I don't want you to do that. But I think, I even speak to him now, like look if he had just said, "Look, if you do that, that's how they'd look at it." or, "If you do that, that's how they, it's negative for them, they don't like it." I would have understood. I just felt he always put too many do's and don'ts yes, too many rules. So he was trying to protect me but he could have done it quite easily by just saying it..." (Tina, 255-259)*

Both Nasima's and Shuma's narratives indicate that they were not expecting their husbands to choose between them and their in-laws, but rather that their husbands be aware of their responsibilities towards both. Nasima, for example, wanted her husband to '*...maintain a marriage where a husband understood his wife and his family, mature enough to meet both needs and be just...*' (Nasima 624-625).

Shuma also echoes this:

*“...I wish he had some kind of help before he got married back and he really understood marriage, what it’s gonna entail, his responsibilities towards his wife. How he feels responsible towards his family members, their value...values and how...I wish he would understand from a husband's point of view...” (Shuma, 616-620)*

After moving out of her in-laws’ home, Selina shares how her husband expected her to continue to be dutiful towards her in-laws. Her narrative suggests that she perhaps felt pressure to compensate for not living there, perhaps also reflecting her husband’s feelings. Selina’s experience indicates that moving out of the in-laws’ home may not lead to relinquishing the duties expected of a daughter-in-law, but that there is some continuity to avoid blame, judgement and shame from both the in-laws and the husband:

*“So, the expectation has now shifted from them to my husband now. He expects me to visit his parents, look after them to call them and to find out how they are and do those kinds of things... (401-403) ... When I go there, there is an expectation, not necessarily from them, more from... I feel obligated to help out with the kitchen, cook the curry if need be...I mean mainly I just go and talk to them and see how they are and things like that.... I felt I needed to do something like ‘cause I’m not there I felt like I should help out a bit more in the kitchen maybe. (Selina, 409-414)*

#### *4.2.3.2 Subtheme: Suppressing Emotions*

A related subtheme to keeping the family happy is connected to the participants’ experience of how their husbands adopted certain personas towards them in the presence of the wider family. This usually entailed husbands suppressing their emotions and not showing affection, which affected the quality of their marital relationship. Two participants’ experiences indicate that there is perhaps a need for men to ensure that their loyalty to their wives does not supersede loyalty to the family. The stories illustrate that outward affection is discouraged and may invite judgement and criticism.

Shuma saw her husband change immediately after marriage:



*"First night and then I'm thinking, "What the heck, this is doomed from the bloody beginning." I saw him in a different light immediately, it didn't feel like he was my husband. He felt more like my husband before I married him because I wasn't living with the family... (72-75)... "...seeing him how he was moulded into this family mind... that very moment I walked into the house he got very distant towards me, that closeness, I might as well have not even shared a bed with him... (Shuma, 78-82)*

Shuma adds that her experience was particularly difficult when she felt her husband exert his power over her in front of his family, yet he was unable to exert power and assert himself to his family to support Shuma and their marriage. The quote below indicates how much influence Shuma's in-laws have over his thoughts and actions:

*"He would say, "I could take you out but you'd have to hear the shit from the kitchen from the women...He wanted to save me but then I feel, "You're a man when it suits you. You should have made that extra effort. You shouldn't use people as an excuse because you let them feed shit to you sometimes and it got to you." (Shuma, 366-371)*

Halima's narratives were similar, with disapproval from the family of any outward display of affection by the husband to his wife. Halima shared an example of her husband helping her at home, demonstrating empathy and compassion for his wife:

*"...it was pouring with rain, and I was cooking in the kitchen or trying to help, and my sister-in-law said go and get the clothes, my husband runs out and brought the clothes in, and so they were like, "Oh he goes and gets the clothes... help his wife...they didn't approve of that..." (Halima, 443-448)*

Halima provides two further instances of how her husband *'really tried, but he was almost torn...'* between her and his sister and nieces. Halima reflects on a situation where her husband displayed affection, and the *'outrage'* this caused. The quotation indicates that outward displays of affection are not encouraged and could invite hostility from in-laws:

*"... Valentine's Day he had a bunch of roses and some chocolates delivered... he really tried but he was almost torn, he didn't know what to say to me, he didn't know what to say to his sister.... (450-454) ...I always felt they were in comp, like, I remember my husband my husband brought me a lipstick and they were like "Huh" they were just...outraged... They'd say it straight away, "Oh my God mama (uncle) brought this for mami (aunty)" you know "can't believe it" and they were like oh they would, but I didn't care, that was my thing, I loved nice things, I was so into makeup and perfume and all of that, (Halima, 516-522)*

Consequently, Halima and Shuma did not feel that they had the time to build their relationship as a husband and wife in the early stages of their marriage. Their responses illustrate the lack of privacy afforded to husbands and wives for their relationship to grow. This continued to be an issue for Halima even after moving out from her in-laws:

*"...my husband worked at a restaurant at the time so, on his day off he'd be expected to take them out and go out with them, you know, it wasn't anything, we never had any privacy, we never could go anywhere." (Halima, 192-194)*

#### *4.2.3.3 Subtheme: Support vs Lack of Support*

This subtheme looks at five participants' experiences of support or lack of support from their husbands and the impact of this on their experiences with their in-laws. The theme indicates that support from husbands can foster positive experiences, whereas lack of support can have adverse consequences for the participants.

Shuma made several references to feeling that if she had her husband's support a lot of things could be 'avoided emotionally' and that she '...could afford to make mistakes' and be reassured, '...in terms of, don't worry about it. They'll say these things, but they don't mean it'.

*...you should have stood up for me as well when it was necessary and I didn't get that.... (372-373) ...when we do have our arguments, sometimes I do say, "You know what, living there wasn't the problem. It wasn't so much your sister-in-law and your brother, it was you as well. It was a triangle issue. There's a trio. You did add to it. You let them be like that towards me when maybe you could have broken that." And I don't want to blame him. It's not fair on him or me... (Shuma, 463-467)*

Nasima gave the impression that she felt let down and not supported enough by her husband who promised that he would speak to his father and the rest of the family about her working and being able to wear salwar kameez at home instead of a sari, but it became 'something that was left'. She also felt that she could not turn to him for support during difficult encounters with her in-laws, especially when she realised that a new daughter-in-law was given the flexibility around clothing and work that she was not allowed to have:

*"I was upset but I wasn't able to express that. Not even to my husband. He's the last person I was going to talk about it. That's because he doesn't want to know. He doesn't want to know me as a person... (Nasima, 471-473)*

When it came to raising issues and discussing them within the family, Tina found it difficult to speak to her husband. She felt that one of the reasons for this was that it was the first time there was a daughter-in-law in the house who was in employment. She also found that she often hesitated to talk openly about issues because she felt her husband was helpless. On one occasion when Tina did complain about his mother, his reaction was unwelcome:

*"...he was very negative about it and he was like going on all night about it. I thought that's it I have to change my approach... he was just like, "Oh how do you*

*think of my mum like this? The reason why I've married...you know, you could be here, you could be supportive and everything... ”” (Tina, 237-241)*

The quote above indicates the possible power that mothers-in-law have over a married couple. In this regard, the husband is also forced to navigate and manage tensions between his mother and his wife. In Tina's case, the responsibility is put on her to resolve the situation, as her husband may not have felt he could challenge his mother's senior status and authority.

Asma's case highlights the benefit of having a husband's support. She reported feeling depressed after giving birth to her baby and felt undermined by her in-laws in her decision to breastfeed her baby. *'He supported me. He said, No, that's fine, if you wanna do that, you do that'*. This suggests that having her husband's support empowered her to stick to her decision.

Tina shared that her husband's position in the family meant that if she wanted to do certain things or make changes in the family then she would be able to do so. This indicates that the different members of the family hold different levels of power, and women can be more agentic by asserting their needs by proxy through their spouse:

*“...my husband is actually one of the important brothers in the family. Although second, everyone came to him for things, he kind of supported everyone with everything, you know there's always one in the family that people go to, so I happen to be his wife, I don't know if it's good or bad. But in terms of making changes, it was good, because I would send the idea to him and he liked it... We both tried to change certain things and change it to which suits us and we're teaching them, everybody else and our kids to do things differently. (Tina, 149-156)*

In contrast to Shuma, who did not feel supported by her husband, Halima felt more helpless for her husband and felt that she was fortunate that he was *'really understanding'*, *'...I think anybody else, would have said forget it, you know, you know, you do as my sisters says, get in the kitchen...'* (Halima, 440-441). She appeared to appreciate that he was aware of the mistreatment by her in-laws and did not want to experience further pressure.

Selina also expressed feeling *'thankful'* to her husband for understanding her mother-in-law's intention to try to cause *'friction'* between her and her husband.

#### 4.2.3.4 Subtheme: Powerlessness

This theme illustrates the experience of three participants who spoke about their husbands feeling powerless which may, in turn, have added to their own experience of feeling the same. Shuma often expressed hurt, anger and frustration at not feeling supported by her husband. She acknowledges his position of perhaps feeling powerless under the authority of his older brother and sister-in-law. Consequently, he felt unable to show his support towards Shuma. She felt that her husband was being financially abused and made to feel that he is indebted to his brother and sister-in-law:

*“... I know he couldn't because he couldn't even stand up for himself yet alone me... (373-374) I don't know what it was. It's just twisted. It's all control and they thought, "Well, you know, he's an easy target to keep" as long as they can. To make money out of him and he's not going to complain.” (Shuma, 507-509)*

Like Shuma, Halima and her husband also initially lived under the authority of a much older sibling whom he ‘*couldn't say anything to*’ because ‘*that would be like the height of disrespectfulness to say anything to them...*’ and because ‘*that's the culture that they've been brought up in...You know respect...your elders and whatever and they've done this for you, they've done that for you*’ (Halima, 255-260).

This means that speaking up to or against family is perceived as disrespect and, as a result, senior in-laws maintain their position of power and authority. She also felt that her husband was ‘*powerless*’ and treated like a ‘*dog*’ as he had to tend to his family's demands as a matter of priority. She explains:

*“So it was almost... you're living in our house..., you're at our beck and call... (266-267) My husband was in such a bad position, that, he couldn't say anything to them, and he couldn't say anything to me, he couldn't...give me any reassurance...he didn't know what to do...” (Halima, 286-292)*

Rina's story also resonates with the dilemmas of other narratives, with her husband not knowing what to do in a family conflict. She reflects that over time, it may have been in their favour that her husband did not get involved in family disputes, as this prevented Rina from being blamed; if he had done so, it may have affected her chances of having a good relationship with her in-laws that she has now:

*"It was better off, for him not to be involved. I used to feel... like why doesn't he do something about it? But even myself I did not know what he was supposed to do..."*  
(Rina, 749-751) *"In hindsight, when I think that it is better that (husband) didn't react.... because then they would have thought that I was saying things..."* (Rina, 775-777)

#### 4.2.4 THEME 4: DEVELOPMENT OF A SURVIVOR'S IDENTITY

ABUSE	<i>"I thought, maybe it's not important; maybe it's just, you know, just how it is and I'm just too sensitive. I just thought that maybe I'm just too sensitive." Asma</i>
	<i>"...when I had my baby, I was expected after a couple of days just to go down to the kitchen They should have let me heal." Tina</i>
	<i>"...emotional abuse, that's what it is more than anything... "...they'd phone Bangladesh up and say to my mother-in-law, she can't cut fish, she can't do this she can't do that, so, they'd tell her, "she was fat." Halima</i>
	<i>"I just felt that his family bullied me, he bullied me." Nasima</i>
	<i>"Then my father-in-law said as well, "She's like you know when you pick someone up from the gutter they're never going to be purified, they'll always have that stench of gutter." Hasiina</i>
	<i>"It was constant indirect taunts. When I was helping her, those times I got taken for granted. When I wasn't doing it, I'd get picked up on it" Shuma</i>
	<i>"I think I just couldn't cope with the constant cooking, eugh, I couldn't deal with serving like serving...I just couldn't deal with that." Selina</i>
	<i>"It's those little comments that used to make me feel scared because he made me so small mentally thinking if he leaves me, I won't be able to even change the light bulb. That's how small he made me." Hamida</i>
	<i>"I really I didn't say nothing until I had a blow-up once... when I heard her back stab me to a relative in my in-laws' side." Shuma</i>

**Table 11. Subtheme: Abuse**

#### 4.2.4.1 Facing abuse

Nine of the ten participants' narratives indicated the different ways in which they were abused. Asma felt that her 'quiet' and 'timid' disposition may have led her in-laws to believe they '*could say things and get away with it*' (570-71). During the early stages of her marriage, she described feeling 'worthless' due to being judged for not possessing domestic skills. Asma minimised the impact of what her in-laws said and questioned her own reactions to these experiences; she reflected on whether the issue lay with her being 'sensitive'. It seems that if she attributed the problem to being within her, she was able to remove the blame from her in-laws and take responsibility to manage her feelings:

*I thought, maybe it's not important; maybe it's just, you know, just how it is and I'm just too sensitive. I just thought that maybe I'm just too sensitive."* (Asma, 476-477)

She related an incident when her sister-in-law called her 'strange':

*"I think my younger sister-in-law, she's the type that, even now, she's like that with everybody, it wasn't just me. She's do it even with her own siblings. She just says it, whatever comes, she says it and she might not realize what she has said was quite hurtful. Once, she said something about, she said I was quite strange, 'you're quite strange...' And I just thought, okay, that wasn't appropriate but I didn't say anything... If it was now, I would actually say, 'actually, that wasn't a nice thing to say... I didn't want a confrontation. I just left it'"* (Asma, 483-495)

This extract may indicate that, although Asma was aware that her sister-in-law had mistreated others, she was still affected by her behaviour. It may also be that her sister-in-law was able to make critical remarks as Asma was considered a member of the family, so she was treating Asma as she treated her own siblings. Over time, she made sense of some of her difficult experiences and suggested that people may hurt others because they are not personally affected, or the action was normalised if they had '*heard it from their in-laws*' (Asma, 753). Crucially, her reflections indicate that although she would previously avoid confrontation, now she would not accept any mistreatment and would express herself.



Seven of the 10 participants experienced abuse in relation to domestic servitude. Selina, Tina, Nasima, Hamida, and Halima were all subjected to a continuous demand to serve their in-laws, with little regard for their own feelings. This expectation seemed to be driven by patriarchal rules, which require women to adopt normative gender roles. Tina cited her in-laws' lack of common sense and consideration of her health, both when she fell pregnant and after giving birth:

*"It got to a stage when I was pregnant with my second child...I found them to be quite inconsiderate. I've come from work it's 6:30-7 o'clock... (116-117) I was working late and the expectation was that sometimes if guests came really late you would be expected to cook for them, nobody thought, "ok, she's pregnant, she needs to go to sleep, she's going to work the next day", you know those kinds of things. And I found it difficult speaking to him about that because I think he found it difficult relaying that message to them because no one had worked before...maybe they didn't know how to be, but surely, they should have used their common sense thinking that okay she's worked whole, she's really tired, she's pregnant as well, she's about to pop, she needs to rest, that kind of thing. (Tina, 122-129)*

*"...when I had my baby, I was expected after a couple of days just to go down to the kitchen and I managed it... I didn't do massive things but that's beside the point. That expectation shouldn't have been there. They should have let me heal." (Tina, 356-360)*

Only two participants, Halima and Nasima, were able to recognise their experiences as abusive. Halima described the various ways in which she was criticised by her sister-in-law and her nieces:

*"...emotional abuse, that's what it is more than anything... (316) "...they'd phone Bangladesh up and say to my mother-in-law, she can't cut fish, she can't do this she can't do that, so, they'd tell her, "she was fat." (499-501)*

Not getting something ‘right’ would also invite ‘the cold shoulder’ or ‘cutting comments’ from her in-laws. Halima identified these experiences as traumatic, as she was unable to remember details but could remember the feeling of being criticised. Hamida talked about being too scared of her sister-in-law to respond and felt that this had a lasting effect. She shares her experience of being affected physically if she heard the news of her sister-in-law visiting:

*“...after we moved to if he said to me, “Oh my sisters coming, I’d, I’d have a nervous, I, I, I honestly, no lie, I’d be on the toilet, ‘cause I’d get diarrhoea straight away... Yeah, like, now I know what it is, and now I can deal with it, erm but at the time, even after years of being married, she’d have that impact on me that it would make that physical reaction, that I’d need to go to the toilet, just thinking about her coming over, never felt comfortable with it. (Halima, 371-379)*

Nasima echoed that she found her experience abusive. She described her sisters-in-law as ‘very conniving, bitching, bullying’ (351), and added that the whole family was complicit in the abuse. Nasima described a scenario where she received passive-aggressive abuse from one of her sisters-in-law:

*“...say I was so busy trying to finish the six curries by the time my father-in-law comes from the mosque and I was busy and I forgot to ask her whether she wanted tea. She’d come in and putting the kettle on and she’ll be like, “Khaitai ni amma saa?” (mum would you like tea?) just to her mum “aar khew khaita ni?” (Does anyone else want tea?) (358-361)... The fact that she came and I didn’t give her tea upstairs. She has to make her own tea. And now she feels obliged she has to ask to make one for me... but see the thing is not her role... (Nasima, 368-370)*

In this extract, it is suggested that Nasima’s role at her in-laws’ was to be continuously mindful of her duties to the family, no matter how busy she was. Her narrative implies a lack of empathy and consideration from her sister-in-law about the pressure Nasima was managing in trying to please and fulfil her duties to her in-laws. Nasima received hostile and sarcastic treatment from her sister-in-law when she reminded her of her forgetfulness; it was implied that Nasima was to blame for her having to make her own tea when the tea should have been served by Nasima.

Like Halima, Nasima also implied that her experience of abuse had a lasting psychological impact on her, leading people to not understand her. As she narrated further, she realised the pressure to please was something she also felt prior to marriage:

*“... psychologically, sometimes that's affected me in life because I think sometimes I've had my reactions in some way and people find it a bit abrupt. It's because it was always about pleasing other people. Sometimes I think of people as being unfair and expecting them. Again, I feel some of that I react in aggressive ways because they don't understand where that's stemming from. I'm quite fed up, I just I'm fed up of trying to make everybody happy now because they don't understand where I've come from...(207-212)... I've always had that, oh my goodness, from childhood. I was 18. I never got to be who I wanted to be. I was meaning to be somebody and then I tried to please everybody but I never made anybody happy. I just made myself more miserable.” (Nasima, 219-221)*

Halima, Shuma, Nasima, Hasina, and Hamida all experienced the indirect abuse of complaints being made about them to others. Hasina said that her ‘independence’ was disliked by her in-laws. They would report and give feedback to her sister about her conduct. It appears that whilst Hasina was able to fulfil all her household chores, her in-laws lacked full control over her. She described a gradual build-up of issues, which caused tension between her and her in-laws.

*“slowly, slowly it would be, they are not happy with me going out. You hear the little comments and little remarks because I already got married with a child now she was an issue. If someone comes, she can't come out or they just call me. I thought and she can feel it, she can sense it, she would get quite upset.” (Hasina, 271-276)*

She shared an incident that took place after she visited one of her sisters-in-law, which triggered her father-in-law's verbal abuse towards her, as he was dissatisfied at being unable to control Hasina's movements. Hasina described direct verbal abuse from her father-in-law. This experience also places Hasina in a subordinate position within the affinal family. The quotation

below indicates the stigma of bringing a child from her previous marriage and the ending of that marriage, which led to her being seen as someone who will never be 'purified'.

*Oh this girl, she's just too much we can't live with her she's got mind of her own. She doesn't follow instructions. The way she was at the beginning she's not like that anymore." Then my father-in-law said as well, "She's like you know when you pick someone up from the gutter they're never going to be purified, they'll always have that stench of gutter. Then they said to my husband, "She left her husband for you then clearly, she's going to leave you and go." (Hasina, 334-339)*

She clarifies what her in-laws' difficulties stemmed from:

*"...I think with my case it was difficult because one thing is I had a child with me from another man. It was hard for them to accept that because day in day out they had to see the both of us. (Hasina, 366-368)*

Indirect abuse was also experienced by Shuma and Khadija. Khadija would often hear her mother-in-law referring to her not having children. Shuma recalled how her sister-in-law would tell others about her not performing her domestic duties:

*It was constant indirect taunts. If I'm doing something in the house like helping her do their domestic chores, cleaning, tidying cooking... When I was helping her, those times I got taken for granted. When I wasn't doing it, I'd get picked up on it and she'll be telling the next lady on the phone, "Oh khorse na, rice cooker on khorse naa" (she did not switch the rice cooker on) or "ufre boy takhse" (she's just sitting in her room) (Shuma, 261-266)*

Shuma and Hamida shared similar narratives, in that their stories implied that their in-laws abused them financially. Hamida felt abused by her husband and in-laws and realised 'their

*main intention was to send their son over to the UK, which they achieved' (70).* She recalls emotional abuse perpetrated by her husband which impacted her self-esteem and made her feel worthless:

*"It's those little comments that used to make me feel scared because he made me so small mentally thinking if he leaves me, I won't be able to even change the light bulb. That's how small he made me. (Hamida, 334-336)*

After securing the visa, she was both psychologically and physically abused by him, and her mother-in-law stopped providing her with emotional support.

REACTIONS AND COPING STRATEGIES	<i>"I never really made a big deal out of it because I knew so it wasn't going to go anywhere.... It's just gonna cause problems" Nasima</i>
	<i>"Yeah, just bottling it up and not saying anything back to them and then afterwards, I was like, I was thinking to myself, you know actually I need to speak up." Asma</i>
	<i>"I thought to myself, "I want to be the better person, I'm going to mend things." I was the first one to call my in-laws and say, "Sorry, I'm sorry for what I did." Hasina</i>
	<i>"...betinhor khofaal that, that means like it's our destiny, it's our, it's our fate to put up with stuff." Halima</i>
	<i>"I can't actually come out of this because what is the community going to say, what is everyone going to say. Oh, she's a divorcee" Hamida</i>
	<i>"...I didn't go to my family for support. When I did, it was at breaking point." Shuma</i>
	<i>"Majorly, I feel also, people would look at me and be like, "How did you eventually cock up that?" Khadija</i>
	<i>"Come on get a grip of things manage this. I was looking at it like that, as a project because that was my way of coping..." Tina</i>
	<i>"At first, I was like wow, what era am I living in, shit. Erm, but I eventually got used to it and accustomed to it, it was kind of the norm. Things like the salt, he wouldn't get up to get it, you'd be expected to give it to him." Selina</i>

Table 12. Subtheme: Reactions and Coping Strategies

#### 4.2.4.2 Subtheme: Reactions and Coping Strategies

This subtheme highlights various reactions to challenging situations and the strategies that nine of the participants deployed to cope. The theme suggests that the reactions and coping strategies differed according to each participant's context. It appears that, during the early stages of marriage, they may have found it particularly hard to challenge difficult situations and relationships. Nonetheless, their reactions and coping strategies served particular functions. The theme also highlights how participants adopted different strategies at different points in the course of their marriage.

The participants often resorted to silence, both as a reaction and a coping strategy to manage challenging situations. Nasima felt that speaking out about her difficulties would be less beneficial in the long run, so not speaking limited further damage to herself and her experiences with her in-laws. For example, she felt she couldn't turn to her husband for help when experiencing problems with her siblings-in-law, as it would only lead to abuse from her husband. Additionally, she realised that it may have been futile to request flexibility around dresswear at home, as this would *'cause problems'*:

*"I never really made a big deal out of it because I knew so it wasn't going to go anywhere. If we do with this we can't... His dad was a very strict man. It's just gonna cause problems" (Nasima, 283-285)*

Asma recognised that she 'bottled-up' her feelings, as she did not know how to express herself. Over time, she demonstrated some self-compassion for her initial reactions and used that as a way to problem-solve and implement a more effective coping strategy. Asma shared that attending a marriage course and engaging in role-plays helped her to become more confident. She was able to understand that bottling up her feelings may have been an unhelpful strategy in the long run, as it contributed to feeling depressed. Consequently, over time, she was able to better defend herself:

*"...if someone has said something hurtful to me, I'll just keep it inside and I'll be like, 'oh, that's really hurtful'" (422-423) ... though that was a very difficult time for*

*me, looking back actually. At the time, I probably didn't even realize it... (520-521)*  
*Yeah, just bottling it up and not saying anything back to them and then afterwards,*  
*I was like, I was thinking to myself, you know actually I need to speak up. (525-526)*  
*... It gave me a bit more confidence as well... attending class, gaining more*  
*knowledge (Asma, 604-607)*

Asma also felt that focusing on the positive and seeing the good in others helped her to develop better relationships with her in-laws. Additionally, she implied that making excuses for others can also help to promote better relationships:

*Everybody has a reason for how they are as well. If someone's really horrible and betinevil, maybe they went through something in the past that, you know, that's making them behave like that. So, I think, I always do try to find the positive" (56-562)* She adds, *"I think behavior breeds behavior; if you're nice to someone even if they're horrible, over time, they will see, you know, how..., it'll be hard for them to continue to be horrible to you. (Asma, 766-768)*

Four participants used a religious perspective as a coping strategy to deal with their difficulties; Asma, Rina, and Hasina talked about forgiving others as a strategy. In Hasina's case, becoming more religiously inclined meant that she had a shared identity with her in-laws, who were more religiously observant than her when she was first married. After learning more about kinship ties through Islamic courses, she said that it helped to mend a fraught relationship with her in-laws:

*I thought to myself, "I want to be the better person, I'm going to mend things." I was the first one to call my in-laws and say, "Sorry, I'm sorry for what I did. I was young, I was naive, I was quite ignorant, and please forgive me. I know you guys said a few things, which is fine, you're older, but as a young girl, and as a daughter, I shouldn't have been disrespectful." I said, "Please find in your heart to forgive me. Honestly I do mean it." (545-550) ... Obviously, clearly, they loved it, because*



*I was praying and I was practicing. And I'm seeking the deen (religion), and the fact that I apologized, I think that just melted their heart. (Hasina, 554-556)*

Describing herself as 'young', Hasina implied that she did not reflect on her actions. Although she re-evaluated the situation, she made no mention of being mistreated by her in-laws but instead focused on their once-conflicted relationship. Her narrative indicated that her aims, goals and motivations in life changed after becoming more religiously observant, and that this also influenced her change in attitude towards dealing with conflicts:

*"...But life has changed for me a lot and this stuff now I'm very quiet now. If you argue with me, I'm like, "You know what, it's fine. My fault my fault"...because I just want the reward from Allah (God) now. (713-715) ... now my aim is to reconcile the family... Because if they break the kinship, it's a major sin in Islam. It's a very major sin. If you break kinship and if... forget entering Jannah (paradise), you can't even smell the fragrance of Jannah." (809-812) Once upon a time I was innocent, ignorant, I didn't know nothing. I just went with the norm. How the society is living, how the general world is living. Speak your mind, argue until you're proven right or proven guilty, that kind of mindset. But with Islam, there's so many reward. Even not for arguing, not even for proving your point. (Hasina, 816-819)*

Strategies deployed by the participants did not always involve direct contact with in-laws, although they still displayed their resistance by seeking support from their husband. Shuma and Hamida, for example, used avoidant coping strategies; they both asked their husbands if they could move out of their in-laws' home. In Halima's case, her in-laws may have abused their power by mistreating her and her husband, as they were aware of the financial constraints they faced and of Halima's husband's visa status.

Eight participants appeared to tolerate distress as a part of their coping strategy. For example, Halima talked about her upbringing and hearing her mother referring to 'betinthor khofaal':

*"...that, that means like it's our destiny, it's our, it's our fate to put up with stuff.  
(Halima, 708-709)*

She added that this belief may have made it difficult for her to assert herself. It was further complicated by Halima also referring to the influences of being raised in Britain, and how the two ideologies are conflicted:

*"...I wasn't used to that, I wasn't used to holding my tongue or whatever, I was free I was happy, I was bubbly... and it was like enough constantly watching what you're saying constantly (Halima, 673-676)*

For Nasima, the reason for tolerating distress seemed to be motivated by her unrelenting need to prove that daughters-in-law can 'adapt'. Despite her sisters-in-law in her parental home being aware of Nasima being abused by her in-laws and encouraging her to leave, she resisted. Her narrative implied her determination to challenge society's assumptions that daughters-in-law are responsible for the breakdown of in-law relationships. Her narrative also implied that she felt that tolerating distress is part of preserving the image of the 'good' daughter-in-law.

*I always had it, "No, I'm going to make it work" because one of the reasons why I do want to actually share my stories because I know some people think, "But if daughter-in-laws are not open or they don't sacrifice or they don't adapt or they don't welcome and embrace their in-laws, how is it going to work?" It's always the daughter-in-laws but actually I feel very passionate that that's not because I can tell you 100% my experience. I went in there, ready adapted, I embraced it. There were certain things that were so painful but I never shared it with anybody. I just kept going, kept going. (Nasima, 176-182).*

Similarly, Hamida suggested that she was informed by cultural and societal pressure to tolerate distress. The pressure for women to stay in a marriage may have influenced her decision to tolerate abuse from her husband and in-laws:

*"...in our culture it does say that if your married, you have to stick to this guy and blah blah. That's how I've been brought up culturally. At that time, I didn't have no Islam in me, I didn't know nothing about the way of life or anything and I thought "Okay, I've got to stand with him. I can't actually come out of this because what is the community going to say, what is everyone going to say. Oh, she's a divorcee" blah blah blah. That was a big thing for me back in the days." (Hamida, 55-61)*

The narrative above suggests that not being religiously inclined ('no Islam in me') may have skewed her perception to make better decisions in her life. However, when her father and sister provided Islamic evidence, this did not sway her decision:

*"...they begged me. My sister even begged me, "Come out of this marriage. This marriage isn't for you. It's not working. It does say in the Quran and hadiths if a husband does beat you or is abusive, in any way you're allowed to come out and I used to think na na na... (Hamida, 429-432)*

Like Nasima, Khadija and Halima's narratives also suggest an implicit awareness that they may be subject to blame for a conflicted relationship with in-laws. Their narratives suggested shame associated with speaking to others about their difficulties. Again, tolerating distress and not expressing oneself may function to thwart any potential experience of blame and shame:

*"It is a shame but it is also embarrassing. It is embarrassing, because it wasn't meant to be like this, but he is the only son. Majorly, I feel also, people would look at me and be like, "How did you eventually cock up that?" (Khadija, 857-860)*

Halima echoed:

*"I have never sat down and, I mean at the time with friends and things with Bengali friends you talk about in-laws... husbands and things... But...er I didn't want to talk*

*too much about it because I didn't want to think that, they, like it was, I don't know, it almost felt like a failure on my part... Like, I didn't want to criticise them too much, like in criticising them it was, I was doing, myself a disservice or it was my fault" (Halima, 883-895)*

Being unable to share experiences or seek support from others may also have been influenced by how their marriages were organised. Shuma, Selina, and Rina all spoke about the difficulty of convincing their family to let them marry the partner of their choice and following through with their decision despite reservations from their parents. This may act as a barrier for them to seek help from their parental family if they experience difficulties in their marriages and in-law relationships. As Shuma highlighted:

*"...I didn't go to my family for support. When I did, it was at breaking point. When they saw how stressed physically...Because I thought they were going... I thought, "It's going to be an I told you so, scenario", isn't it? But it wasn't like that..." (317-322)*

Nasima did receive her family's support to marry the partner of her choice, but she did not feel supported by them when she encountered problems. Her narrative implies that her family minimised and normalised the idea of in-laws being problematic and indicated how the parental family may also be complicit in the experience of abuse. Interestingly, difficulties with her in-laws were not taken seriously, but her husband's infidelity did lead them to take Nasima more seriously. This suggests that had her family asked her to leave based on having problems with her in-laws, she and her family may have been subject to blame or ostracised by the community. However, by citing Nasima's husband's infidelity, they were protected from blame from the wider community:

*"...my family first, didn't want to support me first few years because they thought I was just being again I want to do what I want to do in life. So, I wanted to get married to whoever I wanted to... so just like again, I'm not persevering more or*

*I'm just being too selfish. So, they weren't very supportive. And they just thought in-laws are just in-laws but until later years went by and they what my ex was doing and they used to see him out with a girl. They used to try to make me understand to leave him" (Nasima, 476-481)*

#### *4.2.4.3 Subtheme: Shifting Perspectives and Identity Over Time*

All 10 narratives in the current study indicate that the participants' experiences of in-law relationships were based on how they have made sense of their experiences over time and the impact this has had on their identity. Their narratives illustrate the various challenges they have faced and how they negotiate their relationships and circumstances. The women appeared to be victims of abusive experiences. However, all the participants demonstrate heroic qualities that qualify them for the role of experienced survivor, as they navigated their relationships, often under very difficult circumstances.

Tina, for example, recognised that her identity of having been divorced and having a child posed significant challenges for her, but by drawing on her personal strengths, she was able to overcome some of the challenges she originally faced. Having been told that she would not be able to cope in her second marriage, she demonstrated how she managed to survive 10 years; she communicates her sense of achievement in that she was able to establish value and respect from her in-laws. Although Tina recognised that she did not have support to adjust to her in-laws, she applied her experience to encourage the other daughters-in-law in the family. While she acknowledged that the other daughters-in-law had considerably more opportunities to exercise freedom in their own lives, Tina's desire to be accepted in the family appeared to overcome this. In particular, she recognised the benefit of her children being part of a family unit:

*"...my children have...they have their grandparents. That's a blessing. My children can see that you look after your elders. That's something that will happen to us in the future so without teaching them it's being ingrained in them. That you care for people. Right from an early age, they see that you have to be responsible. You have to be nice and respectful to your elders.... Or they know that when a special event happens that we all come together. My children know this... They know when this*

*comes together it's nice because living by yourself isn't so nice. You have the freedom and independence to do what you like but you don't feel complete..." (Tina, 687-695)*

Asma's narrative also highlights a triumph in her experience over time. Viewing herself as her mother-in-law's assistant at the beginning suggests that there was a power imbalance. Over time, mastering domestic skills not only provided her with confidence, but power differentiations also appear to have levelled. Her early compliance gained value with her in-laws and she was more appreciated, especially after the new daughter-in-law left:

*"At the beginning, I was just kind of being like assistant, learning things from her, just like cooking and things like that because I didn't know anything. I was like, okay, just learn how she does things and I can do like her.... one of my sister-in-law... she's very clean. She's very good at making different dishes, so I'll just kind of watch her, I watch how she works round the house, I watch how she cleans and things like that. And I've picked up a lot of tips from her. So then I will come back and I'll be like, mother, let me cook like this; She'll be like, 'are you sure'. I'm like, 'yeah, let me do it'. ...And then when people came over, they'll taste it, they'll be like, 'oh, that's really nice'. And I used to get a lot of compliments. That made my confidence grow... You know my in-laws, they noticed how I've changed from how I was at the beginning; now how I've developed as well, especially in terms of cooking and housework and things like that. (Asma, 358-376)*

Asma was the only other participant in the study to still be living with her in-laws at the time of the interview. She found that, although her desire to have her own home did not materialise, the situation gave her considerable strength to make her in-laws' family home her home. It could be suggested that she may have felt freer at her in-laws' home after her brother-in-law left, as she wasn't required to observe the Islamic dress code as much. His moving out also made her feel in control, able to take charge, and gained her the respect from her in-laws that she needed. Her mother-in-law did not appear to obstruct Asma from taking the lead:

*“...my plan was kind of turned upside down and then I had to adjust to not moving out and staying... I just kind of had to deal with it... you can either just sit back and feel sorry for yourself or kind of move forward.... when I realized this is gonna be my home, I thought, ‘I’ll make it my home...’ my brother-in-law... when he moved out, I was like, ‘you’ve moved out now, it’s my house so I can decorate’. it felt more homely after I had put in my input; And now I just consider this as my home.”*  
(Asma, 338-345)

Additionally, over time, Asma also found that she may have had an impact and influence on her in-law relatives. For example, having previously shared her struggle over the lack of support for breastfeeding, over time her mother-in-law came to advocate for this with others. She also talked about her in-laws becoming more Islamically observant. Again, this suggests power imbalances levelling, especially as she saw changes in her sister-in-law, whose comments she previously felt hurt by:

*“...even my younger sister-in-law, the one who made those comments, as I said, quite blunt, she wasn’t that practicing. She didn’t really know about the deen much and then, you know, recently, quite a few years back, she started going to circle and I can see an improvement in her. Even now, she is more careful with what she says to everyone, I think. She is more careful about what she says...”*  
(Asma, 534-538)

Whilst Rina desired to be the ‘perfect’ daughter-in-law, she reflected that she set her own expectations and observed herself through a rigid lens, which wasn’t always helpful:

*“I had this impression that their family is different but I don’t see them as being different, really. I took my own conventions about what family is and I went into the family and I expected them to fit into that mould and when they didn’t I didn’t like it and that’s why I had a lot of problems.”* (Rina 1058-1061)

Having relaxed her approach and come to understand her in-law relatives over time, she saw a marked improvement in the quality of her relationships. She previously had power struggles with her eldest sister-in-law but came to understand that in the absence of a male figure, her eldest sister-in-law adopted the position of the breadwinner. She enjoyed the dependence and reliance her mother-in-law had on her and gave a further example of feeling included as one of the family when her sisters-in-law renamed a group chat ‘sisters’, confirming acceptance of Rina as a family member.

What is apparent from Tina, Asma and Rina’s stories is that their goals were very much aligned with having a positive relationship with their in-laws and feeling accepted within these relationships. Their stories suggested that their initial struggles and challenges were overcome through a consistent effort to maintain their relationships with their in-laws.

Applying faith also helped participants in gaining strength from understanding their experiences and finding a resolution. Hamida, Selina, and Hasina talked about how Islamic rulings protect women. After leaving an abusive relationship, Hamida found going on pilgrimage integral to the healing process. Whilst Hasina explained how Islam encourages women to have separate accommodation from their in-laws, both Hamida and Selina learned over time that the onus was not on women to look after their in-laws but was the son’s duty.

Selina reflected further on her brother’s wife whom she called ‘superwoman’ and who had everything in order. She wondered whether her sister-in-law was unhappy. After living with her in-laws, she rhetorically answered her wandering thoughts:

*“... wouldn’t you be a bit peed off, annoyed.... They should be shared like everybody in the household, not ...it’s not...it’s not something that’s should be imposed on.” (Selina, 303-305).*

Selina also shared how her own restrictions on visiting her parents may have shifted her parents’ perspective on how they treat their daughter-in-law. This may suggest that sharing experiences with the parental family also had a benefit, as they could use their new insight to empathise and improve relationships.



The narratives of Khadija, Hasina, Nasima, Hamida and Halima suggest that it may be difficult to not take feedback personally when experiencing difficulties with in-laws, and that those problems may be inherent within them. However, through the passage of time and changes in situations, they can have more informed evaluations of their experiences. Khadija was able to make sense of her experience by suggesting that her in-laws had ‘double standards’, and the rule they imposed on her husband to not stay at her family’s home in Bangladesh is a rule that can be challenged and broken. Nasima was able to see that her experience was unique to the particular family she moved in with. She recognised that her experiences may have been different if she were in another family. She also found out that her husband was forced into marriage; whilst this may partly explain why he was not committed to the relationship, being forced to marry at a young age indicates that he had no choice and was powerless also.

Whilst Hamida described herself as ‘thick-skinned’, she recognised that within the context of marriage she may have experienced a loss of her former identity. She also recognised that she was young, and lack of experience may have contributed to her difficulties. Halima also referred to a loss of her identity, being raised in Britain and not being used to holding her tongue. She recognised that, like Hamida, she too was young and lacked experience:

*“Now I can see, I feel like I can see, how, what a damaged a person she was and how malicious and vindictive and I was scared to say that ‘cause people might say, “well you must have done something for her to be like that...” (917-919) my story was that I was a naïve, innocent person you know, I didn’t have any life experience...” (Halima, 925-928)*

Hasina also recognised that she too may have made assumptions that relational difficulties with her in-laws stemmed from the stigma of her having been previously married and having a child, implying that her in-laws saw her as the problem. After finding that another daughter-in-law was also having problems with her in-laws, she was able to see that perhaps the relational difficulties were largely attributable to her in-laws’ beliefs and expectations of daughters-in-law. She added that perhaps her mother-in-law had not given her enough of a chance to get to know her. She stated that her mother-in-law cried every time she left:

*“She cries thinking she didn't understand me. You see, it was a lack of understanding. If she gave me time and she understood, she would be happy with me, because I'm quite a chilled person. I'm quite understanding person. I am quite traditional as well. Even though I had a very westernized mind, I'm very cultural and I'm very traditional as well. I know everything about my culture and my tradition as well, because that's my origin” (Hasina, 952-956)*

For participants like Shuma, Nasima and Hamida, it appears that moving away from challenging in-law relationships was particularly beneficial and provided them with the opportunity to make sense of their experiences, reengage with themselves and develop their own sense of identity. Shuma said that she discovered her *‘need to go back and find herself’*. She found returning to work allowed her *‘emotions to be channelled’* and felt more in control by being financially independent.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

The current research examined narratives by British Bangladeshi Muslim women relating their experiences of in-law relationships. All ten narratives are unique subjective presentations of the Bangladeshi women's experiences. There were similarities as well as differences in content, and the 'global impression' of each participant revealed diversity in the presentation of their narratives. Stories varied in their structure, pace, and tone, often reflecting the various intentions and emotions of conveying particular experiences.

The main objective of this research is to begin to expand knowledge of in-law relationships and fill gaps in the literature that have not addressed the experiences of British Bangladeshi women in the UK. Narrative approaches are considered a valuable means to understand experiences and meaning-making and examine how identities are constructed in a person's individual context. Narrative approaches also value temporal perspectives and acknowledge that experiences are ephemeral; therefore, storytelling is largely influenced by how people make sense of their experiences over time.

To my knowledge, there have been no studies to date that have specifically examined in-law relationships in the Bangladeshi community in the UK; thus, the aim is to make an original contribution to research and to attempt to expand on the limited literature available on in-law relationships. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, my research question is broad: *What are the experiences of in-law relationships of British Bangladeshi Muslim women living in the UK?* I seek to understand the participants' subjective experiences in their individual contexts and consider the impact of these meanings on their behaviours and identity over time. Furthermore, intersectionality will be considered, as it provides a useful heuristic tool to understand how interlocking markers of difference impact experiences of agency and the shaping of identity. It is important to note that two of the ten participants were living with their in-laws at the time of the research, and this was taken into consideration in the writing-up.

Analysis of the data revealed four main themes. The current chapter will discuss the findings against the background of previous theory and research in the available literature. Implications, as well as recommendations for policy and practice, will also be discussed here. To conclude the chapter, the limitations of the research will be discussed alongside ideas and suggestions for future research.

## 5.1 DISCUSSION OF THE MAIN THEMES

### 5.1.1 THEME 1: *'It's a Family Marriage'*

The first theme set the context for the subsequent themes. Specifically, it illustrated how the meaning and experience of marriage goes beyond the simple union of wife and husband and is largely contextualised and influenced by relationships with the husband's family. The narratives highlight the various experiences women have in transitioning and adjusting to in-law relationships. Participants presented their initial feelings and reactions post-marriage and the pressures they felt in seeking to meet expectations set by themselves and affinal kin. It also revealed supportive features of in-law experiences.

Consistent with the literature, the findings highlight how Bangladeshi in-law family roles and dynamics are shaped by patriarchal ideologies and values (Bonamy, 1975; Edlund & Rahman, 2005; Pollen, 2002). The term marriage, in the context of the participants' narratives, is not confined to the simple union of a bride and groom but is the union of two families. Consequently, this meant that as well as adjusting to life with a husband, participants were also expected to adjust and adapt to life with in-laws.

Some research that has examined the impact of modernisation and industrialisation in societies governed by traditional patriarchal family structures has found that there is a positive correlation between the quality of relationships with in-laws and marital satisfaction (Cao et al., 2019). Additionally, Choi et al. (2019) found that there is a transition towards more egalitarian and bilateral kinship relations, where men and women adapt kinship norms to attend to the needs of both parents and parents-in-law. However, findings from the current research emphasise the priority of in-laws over and above the wife's own parents. This finding is consistent with studies that illustrate that despite modernisation, it may be hard to navigate and challenge canonical cultural and patriarchal ideologies that influence family structures (Gu, 2018; Kung, 2019)

The early stages of marriage are shown to be a particularly difficult time for some of the participants in the current study as they try to adjust to affinal kin; this is consistent with findings by Schramm et al. (2005), who find in-laws to rank among the top five stressors for newlyweds in the first few months of marriage. This is illustrated by some of the 'shock' that was expressed by the participants.

The participants' early experiences of their in-laws imply that they may feel a great deal of ambiguity and uncertainty in their relationships. This is also apparent even when women appear to be acutely aware of their roles and what is expected of them. The feelings of shock expressed by participants in the study and the impact this has on their experiences are reflective of previous research which has demonstrated how ambiguity and uncertainty can obfuscate communication with in-laws (Fischer, 1983; Mikucki-Enyart, 2011; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2006). Many of the participants spoke about their struggles in adjusting to in-law relationships which impacted their thinking and behaviour, a finding consistent with previous research which illustrates feeling confused about how to think, feel, and behave toward in-laws (Mikucki-Enyart, 2011).

Research has suggested that difficult interaction in the in-law relationship may be due to confirmation bias; that is, people may be influenced by negative portrayals of in-law relationships in popular culture which then negatively influence their expectations of in-law relationships (Rittenour and Kellas, 2015; Woolley & Greif, 2018). However, the responses from the current study do not indicate that participants entered in-law relationships with negative perceptions or expectations. Nasima, Hasina, Rina, Khadija and Hamida, for example, talk about wanting to have a good relationship with in-laws. Selina and Shuma also appear not to envisage any difficulties. Although Asma, Halima and Tina were aware of others having difficult relationships with in-laws, their narratives suggest that they did not appear to give much thought about what life would be like with their in-laws.

Consistent with Rashid's (2013) study, some of the participants desired to be a 'good' wife/daughter-in-law by engaging in domestic chores (e.g., Asma). These idealised notions of femininity enabled them to exercise power in their day-to-day lives. Whilst this may challenge the notions of empowerment of liberal feminists, it asks us to reconsider the meaning of empowerment for women and respect their goals for relationships.

The pressure to be perfect may be part of 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959), to present a favourable view of themselves (Wilson & Ross, 2003). This may also have influenced the telling of the participant's story. The desire and pressure to be a 'good' wife and daughter-in-law may stem from being socialised to role adherence and engaging in specific 'impression management' to avoid being labelled 'incompetent' or 'bad' (Goel, 2005; Rivas et al., 2013). Additionally, women's strength may be measured by their ability to endure and tolerate distress (Childress, 2017; Haarr, 2007).

As stories are a relational act, conveyed with the audience in mind, participants may have also felt the pressure to engage in impression management (Goffman, 1959; Riessman, 1990), omitting some experiences to present a particular view of themselves in the interview context. For example, my identity as a British Bangladeshi Muslim woman may lead them to worry that I may judge them for not being a ‘good’ or ‘perfect’ daughter-in-law, thus shaping how they shared their story.

Some of the participants in the research described their in-laws as ‘traditional’. This mirrors the findings of Shih and Pyke’s (2015) study where participants engaged in racialised assumptions about their mothers-in-law and positioned them as rigid and old-fashioned. The research suggests that the participants may have internalised western ‘orientalist’ tendencies which position the West as superior, progressive and modern (Said, 1978). Their experiences could indicate generational differences and the various influences on which they draw to evaluate their experiences. For example, Tina and Hasina make references to being influenced by both western and traditional values.

Some of the findings of the current study provide a counternarrative to the stereotypical portrayals of in-law relationships in popular culture. Research has shown that support from in-laws can foster positive relationships (Sun & Lin, 2015). Khadija and Asma received much support from their in-laws in domestic duties in the household. Additionally, Khadija reported receiving financial support from her parents-in-law towards her wish to study. Other findings are also consistent with previous research which highlights shared identity and acceptance into the in-law family, influencing the satisfaction felt by children-in-law (Golish, 2000; Morr et al., 2008; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Shelton, 2019). Rina, for example, talks about feeling accepted by her sisters-in-law over time when they referred to each other as ‘sisters’. Tina also shares feeling accepted by her father-in-law; despite her daughter not being a biological grandchild, she was the only grandchild in the family to receive a gift from Tina’s father-in-law. Additionally, Asma and Rina appreciated the childcare support they received from their female in-laws, which is consistent with the findings of Bhopal’s (1998) study that also demonstrated the positive effects of having social support from female affinal kin.

One of the turning points in Rina’s relationship with her mother-in-law was when she experienced a miscarriage. She shared her surprise at her mother-in-law’s disclosure of having had the same experience, which Rina appeared to value. This is an example of how disclosure

may increase the sense of being accepted and included in a family and increase closeness amongst in-laws (Mikucki-Enyart, 2011; Morr Serewicz, 2008).

### **5.1.2 THEME 2: *Rising Tensions***

This theme revealed the tensions that women experienced with affinal kin members, particularly female in-laws. It illustrated women's experiences of control by in-laws and issues relating to visiting parents and moving out of the affinal kin's home.

The findings of this study demonstrate the various ways in which Bangladeshi women were controlled by their in-laws, which sits with the feminist perspective of abuse (Straka & Montminy, 2006).

Patriarchal beliefs about the position and role of women may have influenced participants' experience of control by their in-laws. Raj and Silverman (2002) suggest that control of women in South Asian cultures is used to preserve family honour and defer any reflected shame. In the context of sexist societies that devalue women, abuse may be used as a tool to control women, underscoring their unequal and inferior position in the social hierarchy (Dillon, 1997). Two participants hinted at financial control by in-laws. This is consistent with Gill's (2004) suggestion that financial control can be used as a means to maintain participants' dependence on perpetrators.

Some participants alluded to affinal kin being competitive or jealous of them (Hasina and Halima). Whilst their experiences suggested that they may have felt restricted by their in-laws, this may not necessarily be indicative of their in-laws' power over them. As Foucault (1980) suggested, power is relational, and the participants may be unaware of their own power that may have triggered the jealous or competitive reactions from in-laws; a finding that is consistent with Yakali-Çamoğlu's (2007) study.

The findings of the current study support existing literature that suggests that conflict or ruptures within in-law relationships can impact everyone involved (Anderson, 2016; Morr, 2002; Morr Serewicz, 2008, 2013; Morr Serewicz & Canary, 2008). For example, in Selina's case, her mother-in-law communicated her discontent to Selina's husband and brothers-in-law about Selina visiting her family. This situation negatively impacted Selina's marital relationship and also led to conflict and verbal abuse towards Selina from her brother-in-law. These results are also consistent with previous research which suggests that conflicts between

in-laws may be due to differences in family cultures. This suggests that an appreciation and acknowledgement of different backgrounds may be a beneficial way to help in-laws to adjust and adapt to one another (Allendorf, 2012).

In exploring in-law relationships, it becomes clear that moving out of the in-law home can be difficult for British Bangladeshi Muslim women. In Asma's case, staying with her mother-in-law may not have been in line with her goals, but her decision to stay can be understood against the backdrop of a culture where elder in-laws are not left to live without children at home. Therefore, women's decisions should not be indicative of a lack of agency but understood against the backdrop of factors by which they may feel constrained.

The difficulties related to moving may lead to using indirect strategies to manage the issue. Avoidance appeared to be a strategy adopted by the participants' spouses as a way to protect them. It appeared that Shuma's husband was unable to directly ask his brother to move out of the in-law home. Whilst Shuma was angry with her husband for not initiating this, she speaks of her husband doing things in his own way to protect her from being blamed. Challenging senior members of the family may not fit well with cultural scripts that require respect and subservience to elders. Hence these indirect strategies to manage difficult situations, albeit ones that may entail a lengthy process to find a resolution.

Whilst women may desire autonomy by moving out of in-laws, this is not to be seen as a desire to cut or end ties with affinal kin. Consistent with findings from Galam's study (2017) women desired autonomy by having their own living space but also wanted to maintain relations. Nasima's decision to move out of her in-laws' home was not well received by her in-laws, who may have interpreted her actions as breaking patriarchal rules.

Control over visiting parents has also been cited by previous studies (Derdar, 2018; Mirza, 2017; Rabho, 2015; Raj et al., 2005). Findings from this study have shown that visiting parents is not something they could decide alone. This is consistent with the findings of Raj et al.'s study (2005) that South Asian women had to seek permission from in-laws before doing anything. Hasina's narrative demonstrates the impact of not seeking permission; her decision to go out and visit family members triggered conflict between her and her in-laws. Mirza (2017) would argue that control over visiting parents is abuse, intended to isolate daughters-in-law.

Many of the participants' narratives report the expectation to demonstrate constant servitude towards in-laws and having to be present to show that they are fulfilling duties. In Selina's narrative, for example, she talks about problems associated with her visiting her parents. She



talks about her in-laws having issues with this because ‘the maid was gone’. Not showing servitude invited punitive remarks and shaming by her mother-in-law, shown in her complaint to Selina about the older daughter-in-law if she was not present to serve. When Selina moved out of the home, she was expected by her husband and felt obligated to go and demonstrate servitude to her in-laws. She shares the need also to compensate for not being there and to protect herself from being criticised or shamed. Shuma also talked about not being able to sit in her room without causing problems, and Nasima spoke of having to always be present in her in-law’s home despite having her own separate home nearby. Narratives such as these are similar to the findings of Zhang’s (2016) study that emphasised the importance of ‘displaying family’ i.e., being present so that their display of duty could be seen, substituting for their absence to prevent losing face (*mianzi*).

Nasima’s and Shuma’s experiences also reflect findings of previous research which show women being controlled by in-laws over how and when to eat (Raj et al., 2005; Schlesinger, 1961).

The current study also shows how the issue of moving out can be a source of conflict and risks breaking the rules of patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988), consistent with contemporary research which challenges the classic patriarchy theory, and highlights how some Bangladeshi women negotiate their side of the bargain; rather than passively acquiescing to in-laws’ demands, they exercised their agency to challenge authority over their life decisions (Chaudhuri et al., 2014; Lin, 2005; Sandel, 2004). Like participants in Rabho’s (2015) research, some Bangladeshi women in the current study recognised their Islamic right to separate living, implying that religion supersedes the cultural norms of the mandate to co-reside with in-laws. However, like participants in Galam’s research, moving out of the in-laws’ residence did not necessarily mean that the women wanted to cut ties with their in-laws. On the contrary, consistent with Rabho’s (2015) findings, some of the women in the current study desired relational autonomy, as they wanted to maintain contact with their in-laws. This is well demonstrated by Nasima’s narrative; she wanted to be part of her in-laws’ lives but was rejected.

### ***5.1.3 THEME 3: Tug of War – The Role of the Husband***

This theme highlighted the role of the husband and how they mediated women’s experiences with in-laws. It illustrates how the spouse’s relative position in the wider family and their behaviour affected both the participant’s experiences of in-laws and their marital relationship.

There is some evidence from the current research that is in line with previous research which suggests that togetherness and strong ties between affinal kin promote marital satisfaction (Goodwin, 2003; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988). The current study has additionally found that discord between affinal relatives can negatively impact the marital relationship. Tina, for example, talks about not feeling supported by her husband when having difficulties with her mother-in-law, and describes this as having a toll on her relationship with her husband. Similarly, Halima, Shuma and Nasima also talk about how discord with in-laws affected their marital relationships.

The findings of the current study illustrate how couples are prevented from bonding. The suppression of couples' bonding has been shown by Jeffrey et al.'s 1989 study and Rabho's 2015 study, which demonstrated how older women use this tactic to prevent the conjugal bond from strengthening and claiming the son's primary allegiance.

Consistent with previous studies, participants often relied on and recruited their spouse to manage conflicts (Anderson, 2016; Merrill, 2007). The current study highlights the role of husbands as a central means of adjusting to living with in-laws. It appears that without support, the transition and living with in-laws can prove to be difficult and affect marital relations. For some participants, their husbands being pleased with them was dependent upon their ability to keep the in-laws happy, although for some, despite the strenuous effort, their husbands were not pleased. Whilst some found a way of overcoming these difficulties, for others, relationships continued to feel strained. An important contribution of the research is that, generally, participants were sympathetic to husbands who felt powerless and torn between themselves and their families. Others were frustrated and felt that they wanted their husband to be more assertive and not have a greater sense of obligation towards their family than to their well-being. Outward support or affection from husbands was often penalised. The findings of this study are consistent with literature suggesting that intimate ties between husband and wife are discouraged, and the importance of husbands retaining an aloof stance in the presence of others (Mandelbaum, 1970). Studies have demonstrated the role of husbands in establishing appropriate boundaries between the mother and the married couple and mediating the effects that interference can have on the couple (Goldstein, 2015; Norwood & Webb, 2006). The findings of the current study indicate that in some situations, participants felt that their husbands held a lower position of authority than elder in-laws and were relatively powerless to establish boundaries (Shuma, Nasima and Halima).

Interestingly, in this study, husbands who had some level of power and authority in the family also appeared to not get directly involved to mediate conflict and put boundary management measures in place, a finding that is consistent with Merrill's (2007) research where women stated that men did not want to get involved in women's conflicts. However, there may be various reasons behind the lack of involvement. The narratives in the current research suggest that cultural scripts shape the beliefs and behaviour of sons/husbands, leading them to conduct themselves in such a way that they are not stigmatised for prioritising their wives over their own family, even when their family may have instigated conflicts (Derdar, 2018). For example, Tina implied not feeling supported by her husband when she complained to him about difficulties with her mother-in-law, despite her husband being considered to have some authority in his position in the family. The lack of support led to her changing the way she deals with conflicts and difficulties.

Tina's narrative exemplifies the pressure on women as daughters-in-law to uphold ties of kinship and avoid being blamed for conflicts. This is in stark contrast to research conducted in the West which indicates that women may not interact or feel the need to maintain relationships with in-laws (Woolley & Greif, 2018). Pressure to uphold ties may place women in a lower position of power, as affinal kin appear not to be made to feel responsible for conflicts or breakdown of relationships or feel pressure to resolve conflict. In contrast, western research suggests that daughters-in-law hold the most power within in-law relationships (Cotterill, 1994; Limary, 2002; Nuner, 2004; Rittenour, 2012). However, this is not to suggest that power levels cannot be changed; in Tina's situation, by changing her strategy to manage difficulties with affinal kin, she appeared to have garnered significant power over time, generating respect from in-laws and marked improvements in her relationship with them.

In contrast, Halima's husband did not challenge his family's negative treatment of him and Halima. His immigration status and lack of financial stability, coupled with cultural expectations of not challenging elders, placed him in a relatively powerless position. However, he also strove to find separate accommodation for himself and Halima. These findings show how husbands may also navigate between compliant and resistant strategies; they appear to side with their family as part of their 'frontstage performance' by not challenging abusive behaviour, but also engage in 'backstage performance' by converting resistance to manage challenges and conflicts. The research indicates that husbands play a major role in mediating the experiences of in-law relationships for the participants in the study. The study challenges ideas of patriarchy which assume male authority and power over women and illustrates how

men can also be placed in subordinate and powerless positions due to systemic injustice and structural oppression created and legitimised by traditional norms and practices (Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020). Men may feel unable to show explicit support to wives if cultural norms stigmatise them from prioritising their wives over and above their families.

The linchpin theory may not be directly applicable to some of the experiences shared by participants in the current study. For example, one of the assumptions it makes is that the marital and familial sides of the triangle are stronger than the in-law relatives' side (Morr Serewicz, 2008). It places an emphasis on the role of son/husband as the linchpin and suggests that this role may reduce over time if the in-law dyad establishes a bond that exists apart from the marriage. The assumption here is that the role of the son/husband is more involved at the beginning of the marriage. However, this does not quite capture the relationship experiences described by some of the participants in this study. For example, Shuma and Nasima's narratives do not indicate that their marital relationship was strong from the outset. Shuma describes her husband as being distant from the beginning of their marriage. Nasima relied on her husband to facilitate changes. She had hoped that the support of her husband would help improve her situation. Realising that her father-in-law is strict and that her husband does not have much influence over his parents led Nasima to accept that she may not be able to work or wear salwar kameez in the affinal home as she would have preferred. Nasima's narrative also suggests that her husband is more concerned that Nasima keeps his family happy.

Previous research has shown that difficulties in the in-law dyad could have an impact on the interaction and quality of the parental dyad in the triangle (Bryant et al., 2001; Morr Serewicz, 2008). With the exception of Khadija, the majority of the narratives did not seem to indicate that the interaction and quality of the parental dyad were affected by difficulties in the in-law dyad. This may be due to the cultural expectation of men to prioritise their parents over their marital relationship.

Some participants in the study shared experiences of in-laws being interfering and domineering, a finding also of Duvall's 1954 study. Duvall (1954) suggested that young couples require autonomy to develop an independent family, and meddling from family members can threaten this autonomy (Silverstein, 1990). Shuma's narrative highlights how her in-laws meddled with the opportunity for her and her husband to establish their separate home to spend time alone to develop their relationship as a couple. Similarly, Halima spoke about the lack of privacy at her in-laws. Her narrative suggests that her in-laws expected Halima's

husband to prioritise them over the marriage. However, in Halima's case, moving out of the in-law home did not reduce interference from her in-laws. So, although there was an opportunity to develop autonomy after moving out, it was difficult to establish due to her in-laws' interference; this finding is in contrast with those of Marotz-Baden and Cowan (1987), who found that in-law conflict and proximity were unrelated to stress and marital satisfaction.

#### ***5.1.4 THEME 4: Development of a Survivor Identity***

The final theme looks at the various abusive experiences that some of the participants endured with their in-laws. In highlighting some of the difficult experiences, this theme illustrates how women may not have recognised or named these experiences as 'abusive'. The theme also presents the various reactions and coping strategies the participants employed in dealing with these difficult experiences. Additionally, it documented how they made sense of their in-law experiences over time and how they shaped their identity.

The findings of the current study demonstrate that Bangladeshi women's experiences of abuse include criticism and emotional abuse. Additionally, their experiences also demonstrate the role of in-laws in influencing abuse by husbands.

In some cases, participants displayed a reduction of agency, where there is control by husbands and in-laws. This study expands on the current literature on IPV by demonstrating the role of in-laws in the experience of abuse by Bangladeshi daughters-in-law.

This study found that some participants experienced criticism from their in-laws as a form of abuse to humiliate and shame them. The findings of the current study support other studies that have also demonstrated experience of abuse by in-laws (Hyman et al., 2011). Experiences of degradation and name-calling have also been reported by other studies, (Gill, 2004; Hyman & Mason, 2006; Mason et al., 2008).

Punitive treatment for a woman's perceived 'failings' is a common strategy adopted by perpetrators of abuse (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Blaming women for their 'inadequacies', their 'failures' in domestic tasks, their 'bad' habits, and for failing to meet expectations, deflects the perpetrator's responsibility for the abuse (Cavanagh, 2003).

Some participants' experiences suggested an internalisation of psychological abuse from in-laws as self-blame; a finding that is also supported by Gill's (2004) study. The self-blame

experienced by Bangladeshi women may partly be explained by cognitive attributional theories, whereby people may experience shame when their cognitive perception of a problem arises from their failure to meet their own standards or those of a particular group (Lewis, 1992). Consequently, the perceived failure to be a ‘good wife’ or a ‘good daughter-in-law’ may arise from women experiencing shame about violating internalised patriarchal beliefs about women.

The findings of the current study showed that women may have experienced pressure to stay in a marriage and with in-laws, despite abuse, due to the fear of being judged or blamed by the wider community. This is supported by previous studies which have also demonstrated South Asian women’s experiences of gender-role pressures to stay in marriages, and the fear of shaming from the community if they ‘failed’ to uphold cultural expectations (Aujla, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2004; Sabri et al., 2018; Tonsing, 2014; Tonsing & Barn, 2017).

Shame is used as a tool to uphold social control (Kaufman, 1985). When family members induce shame in women, they are suggesting that the victim has ‘failed’ to meet a particular set of standards and norms. From this perspective, victim-blaming and shaming are methods used by cultures to maintain social control (Kaufman, 1985). Bangladeshi women’s experiences of abuse can also be explained by Dillon’s (1997) theory, that within the context of gender inequality and discrimination, particular groups can be devalued and become the targets of shame.

Participants’ experiences highlight how abuse is a tool of subordination, and their experiences cannot be separated from the intersectionality of context. Their negative experiences are shaped by their gender, class and race, that is, they are intimately linked to wider culture and society. However, it should be noted that ‘culture’ should not be understood to be the sole factor in abusive experiences.

The findings of the current study are similar to the findings of a study in Australia, which highlighted the experience of a loss of agency and of powerlessness which negatively impacted their sense of self-worth (Thaggard & Montayre, 2019). Oppressive experiences may have negatively impacted their agency and confidence.

Preserving honour may have prevented women from disclosing abuse. This is similar to the findings of McLeary-Sill et al.’s study (2016), which found that South Asian victims of abuse found it difficult to disclose abuse due to fear both of personal shame and of shaming their family.

Hyman et al. (2011) found that where cultural norms expect women to adopt an unobtrusive disposition, outward resistance often leads to blaming women for the abuse inflicted on them. From this perspective, some participants in the current study may have felt unable to display outward resistance, as this may be considered gender-inappropriate behaviour and result in the blame being diverted to them for violating cultural norms.

Gruenwald et al. (2004) make reference to shame being considered a social emotion which involves the protection of the self from others. This makes sense in the context of protecting honour or *izzat*, which is related to an external experience of shame; that is, the fear of being judged by others and bringing dishonour to the family. However, preserving *izzat* could also be related to more internal experiences of shame; participants may actively try to hide personal experiences to preserve a positive self-image. These experiences could be understood through cognitive theories that describe shame as a self-conscious emotion that threatens positive self-image (Lewis, 1993; Tangey, 1999; Tangney & Fischer, 1995). Participants' internal feelings of shame may trigger a fear of negative judgement and the threat of being exposed to others, leading them to engage in strategies to preserve a positive self-image (de Hooze et al., 2010, 2011, 2018). Thus, attempting to conceal abuse could be seen as an impression management technique to restore a positive self-image (Goffman).

Participants may also hide abuse from family and the wider community to uphold family honour. This finding is consistent with previous literature that has illustrated how fear of shame can silence women and prevent disclosure of abuse (Aujla, 2013; Gill; Sabri et al., 2018; Tonsing & Barn, 2017). Sabri et al.'s (2018) study found that in some South Asian communities, abuse is perceived as a private matter. Consequently, women may be penalised for sharing information with others, as this would be interpreted as dishonouring the family. Collectively, the pressure to preserve *izzat* not only obliges women to conceal abuse but functions to avoid stigmatisation. By hiding abuse, women avoid the risk of bringing shame on themselves and bringing the family and community into disrepute.

The fear of bringing shame is not confined to the affinal kin but also extends to the natal family. The findings of the current study showed that women also hide separation from the natal family. Previous research has also indicated that South Asian women resisted divorce or separation because of the pressure to avoid disgracing their families (Hyman & Mason, 2006; Tonsing, 2014). This coincides with Gilbert et al.'s (2004) understanding of how violating sociocultural rules brings shame on the family. Remaining married is integral to maintaining family honour.

Two women talked about abuse by their husbands and explicitly blamed their husbands for it. This is similar to Hyman et al.'s (2011) study, where participants also blamed their husbands for abusing them. However some women blamed themselves for being abused and condoned abusive situations.

Women may also conceal abuse because exposing it could bring shame to themselves (Anitha et al., 2009). From a feminist understanding, this may be explained by power related to patriarchal beliefs, preserved by men, and victim-blaming (Wilson, 2006). Alternatively, women may want to avoid the stigma of being a victim; this then shapes their decision to conceal abuse. Towns and Adams (2000) discuss internalised beliefs about a woman's carer role that may influence their decision to stay in a difficult relationship. They found that women remained in relationships out of love and care for their husbands and wanting to help them. The findings of the current study may also align with this explanation. Additionally, women may have felt pressure to preserve relationships and deny abuse from in-laws due to fear of the perceived 'failure' of not adequately fulfilling the carer role.

Through the narratives, participants often positioned themselves in the archetypal role of 'survivor'. This is reflected in their efforts to negotiate and manage tensions in in-law relationships. In line with Berkland and Jain's research (as cited in Dunn & Manning, 2018) on the lived experience of Indian daughters-in-law, the current research also demonstrates how the wider in-law family is invested in the daughter-in-law meeting traditional expectations and maintaining the position of a subordinate women. However, in contradiction to this finding, some of the participants fully intended to take up domestic duties without them being imposed on them.

Individual experiences of abuse varied among participants. Only two of the participants identified aspects of their experiences as abusive. Their narrative shows the temporal and constructive nature of narratives where participants may not have identified experiences as abuse at the time, but later come to define it as such as they gain knowledge and make sense of their experiences. Difficulty in identifying abuse may be because the experience is evaluated as 'intra-relational conflict' (Gangoli & Rew, 2001), and its disguise as cultural dimensions of gendered behaviour may mean that the abuse is further masked. The lack of mention of male affinal kin and the frequent mention of difficult relationships with mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law may indicate how women operate as 'proxy' men (Kandiyoti, 1988), perpetuating the subordination of women.



By seeing themselves in the role of survivor, the participants were able to claim a place within the in-law family system where they can adopt the role of victim or the good person, and position others as 'villains', 'abusers' or 'bad people'. A few participants expressed shame and stigma at talking about their experiences due to fear of being judged or blamed. Sharing their narratives may be a way to save face, performing as their ideal or desirable self (Goffman, 1959; Langallier, 2001). These identities are created collectively as they interact with others, informed by their social and cultural context. As they perform their roles and what is expected of them, they have a stake in claiming their identity as a victim/survivor of their experiences. This is consistent with 'Positioning Theory' (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), which asserts that positions are relational and shaped by the social and cultural context (Moghaddam et al., 1993), and Mishler's (1999) observation of how we continually reposition ourselves and others in our personal narratives.

Stress experienced with in-laws in the early stages of marriage can have a lasting impact beyond the early years of marriage. Halima spoke about the anxiety she would feel if she heard that her sister-in-law was visiting, even after years of being married. Similarly, Nasima spoke about how people do not understand her 'abrupt' reactions when she speaks sometimes because they are not aware of how her difficult experiences with in-laws in the past have affected her.

However, findings of the current study also illustrate that in-law relationships are not static and may fluctuate, at times more integrated, drifting apart at others (Widmer, 2013). Anderson (2016) suggested that some of these changes may be due to turning points in the relationship. Hasina's narrative also illustrates the complexity of in-law relationships; her experience of abuse and being ostracised by her in-laws for being married previously and bringing in a child from the previous marriage is overturned when she starts becoming more religious. Hasina referenced how turning to faith motivated her to seek forgiveness and make amends with her in-laws. This, in turn, also improved her relationship with her mother-in-law. This stands in contrast to her early experiences with her in-laws where she faced conflict for not being as religiously inclined as her in-laws. It may also be that her turning towards faith was congruent with her in-laws' family culture (Fischer, 1983) which helped to foster better relations.

The findings of the current research demonstrate how British Bangladeshi Muslim women draw upon a variety of strategies to cope with challenging and abusive experiences faced within in-law relationships. These agentic acts may not always be an outward expression of resistance but may range from compliant agency to overt resistant agency (Mirza, 2015). Some

of the resistant tactics ranged from talking back, and not completing domestic duties to leaving. The current study illustrates how the participants also used avoidance as a strategy to manage difficult situations and abuse, and to protect themselves and their identity (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Golish & Caughlin, 2002). This strategy also functioned to protect them from judgement and criticism, prevent conflicts in their relationships and maintain peace (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a, 1995b). Whilst avoidance may not provide any long-term gains for women or alter the power imbalances in their relationship, it can be a useful protective strategy to maintain some relational distance, especially if they feel they have no choice but to maintain the status quo of their relationship with the in-law (Mikucki-Enyart & Caughlin, 2018). Nasima's experience reflects findings by Berkland and Jain (as cited in Dunn & Manning, 2018) which showed that there is a web of influence for the disempowerment and subordination of women. In Nasima's narrative, she highlights how her in-laws, her parental family and she, herself, shaped her experiences.

Some participants drew on religion to navigate in-law relationships. Coping mechanisms such as patience can be viewed as agentive (Mahmood, 2001). For the participants in the current study, enduring distress may be part of their strategy to preserve their image as a good daughter-in-law and to maximise the chances of maintaining a good relationship with their in-laws. Asma and Hasina speak about forgiveness as a way of forging a good relationship with in-laws. This was not an indication of them accepting mistreatment from their in-laws, but rather it facilitated their goal of maintaining good relationships with their in-law family members. Hasina's embracing of faith by wearing the headscarf and praying ameliorated some of the difficult experiences she had with her in-laws. Although her marriage ended, Hamida talks about how faith helped her to overcome her difficult experiences with her marriage and her in-laws.

Tina draws upon her previous struggles to overcome hardship as a source of strength to manage her situation. She talked about how being divorced and having her daughter strengthened her to overcome challenges. She further cites her employment experiences to indicate her ability to manage multiple situations, and how she is able to deal with her in-law relationships.

Some of the positive changes in in-law relationships expressed by the participants provide some support for the linchpin theory. For example, it acknowledges that the in-law relationship is subject to change with the effects of major lifespan transitions as well as short-term fluctuations in interactions.

The above themes have demonstrated that some experiences of in-law relationships expressed by the participants in the study appear to reflect the negative and pessimistic features of such relationships found in popular culture (Fischer, 1983; Lopata, 1999; Morr Serewicz & Hosmer, as cited in Cupach & Spitzberg, 2011). Whilst research and popular culture have often emphasised problematic and stressful relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (Duvall, 1954; Landis & Landis, 1963; Limary, 2002; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Merrill, 2007; Turner et al., 2006), the current research showed how difficulties are not confined to this dyad but also extend to other members of the family, including difficulties between the participants and their father-in-law, siblings-in-law and other in-law relatives.

The narratives of in-law relationship experiences in the current study may partly be explained by the very nature and design of such relationships where they are, simultaneously, both kin and strangers (Allendorf, 2017; Fischer, 1986). This may create ambiguity in relationships as there may be an expectation and pressure to treat each other as family despite the lack of emotional and relational history (Merrill, 2007).

The linchpin theory (Morr Serewicz, 2008) suggests that in-law relationships are difficult to ignore as those involved are inextricably linked via the linchpin, i.e., the son/daughter, who binds the relationship between spouse and parents. Whilst this idea may be relevant for both western and non-western families, findings of the current study show that in some contexts, these relationships are perhaps more difficult to ignore or avoid, especially when affinal kin live together in one household. Furthermore, the theory is limited in that it does not take into consideration the role of the wider family. As illustrated in the current research, participants' narratives included experiences with several members of affinal kin.

## **5.2 Agency**

As the themes have shown, women use a variety of strategies to exercise agency with their in-laws. Some women used religion as a way of demonstrating their agency. The participants' responses imply that a lack of religious understanding may account for the difficult experiences faced in in-law relationships. This view challenges classic liberal feminist discourse which views religion as impeding gender equality. On the contrary, the views expressed by the participants were consistent with Islamic feminism, demonstrating the role of religion in promoting women's rights. For example, some of the participants draw upon the Islamic faith as a way of showing that women are under no obligation to serve in-laws or live with them.

Hamida and Selina, for example, assert this and argue that the duty is with the son to look after his own family. However, although religion can pave the way to promote the rights of women, women still feel bound to negotiate cultural and religious constraints. For example, Selina and Khadija both recognise that they have no duty towards their in-laws, yet they recognise they have a duty to keep their husbands happy. Hamida was aware that Islam forbids abuse yet was constrained by the community and its cultural constraints. This indicates that being aware of Islamic rights alone may not provide a straightforward way to deal with difficult in-law relationships, but women also have to consider the cultural and structural factors that also impact their experience.

In this light, agency can be understood as being socially, culturally and religiously mediated within each of the participant's individual contexts. That is, social structures such as the traditions of the in-law family kinship system effectively shape the choices available to women and limit their agency. Unlike the idea of free choice advocated by classic liberal feminists, individuals tied to certain social structures may not be able to make choices from the array of possibilities available (Phillips, 2010). In abusive contexts, open resistance may result in further abuse, as in the case of Nasima who felt unable to express her difficulties whilst she was married, as complaining to her husband may have invited verbal abuse. Women may engage in covert forms of resistance, including ignoring, avoidance or silence, to avoid abuse. This shows how women actively negotiate structural and cultural constraints to manage abuse. Far from passive acceptance, this may reflect a decision to evaluate their options and choose a survival strategy to prevent further abuse. Using the patriarchal bargaining framework, women actively ignore or remain silent in the face of abuse in exchange for not being further abused. Endurance of difficulties in these instances requires much agency; to sit with difficult emotions and hold back from expressing discontent is indicative of agency to ward off potential abuse.

It is also important to emphasise that women's actions may not fit into mainstream perspectives of agency which may expect a more overt, action-orientated strategy. This may be reflected by women's goals which may involve wanting to preserve in-law relationships rather than ending them. These goals, and strategies used to meet them, may be seen as reinforcing patriarchy and gender inequalities, but this may be part of the bargain they engage in to preserve harmonious marital and in-law relationships. Some of the choices and decisions they made about navigating their in-law relationships may not be what they wanted, but they have felt tied to the social structure they reside in. For Nasima, she may not have wanted to stay in an abusive relationship, but her response may have been shaped by the need to uphold *izzat* and ward off any judgement

or blame for the breakdown of her relationship with her in-laws. Similarly, Tina may not have wanted to deal with the pressures of her in-law relationships but maintaining her and her daughter's *izzat* influenced her to persevere so that she would not be stigmatised by the community for another 'failed marriage' and the status of divorcee.

The findings of this research have shown that despite the pressures, constraints and/or abuse women may face with in-laws, women deploy a myriad of strategies that demonstrate their agency. Importantly, it directly challenges the stereotypical representation of 'third world' women as passive with no agency. In the face of abuse, British Bangladeshi women may not opt for leaving as part of their agentic act. The diversity of these experiences is mediated by the relative perceived choice, and the perceived capacity to exercise agency that women feel they have in different situations. In order to understand the various strategies they use to manage difficult situations, it is important to appreciate that the process is rather complex and may differ from the way that agency has been conceptualised by feminists who utilise a western framework. As shown in the present study, participants did not always express agency through direct, outward resistance, or acting autonomously to challenge power relationships.

At face value, compliance in in-law relationships may suggest that the participants in the study are passive, submissive and obedient. However, this may be an indication of their agency, whereby women make bargains by deploying strategies to cope with patriarchal constraints. These agentic acts or bargaining may not be obvious or entail outward expressions of resistance. Whilst their goals in bargaining may reproduce and perpetuate restrictive gender roles and inequality, tolerating stress in in-law relationships may improve their situation. The research has also shown that choosing either to stay in an abusive relationship or leave it may not be a reflection of women's goals but may be reflective of the constraints that shape their agency in particular situations at a particular point in time.

The current research highlights the importance of understanding the sociocultural context and factors that shape British Bangladeshi women's experiences. Crucially, it asks us to reconsider what constitutes agentic behaviour. Some of the participants' reactions and responses may appear passive when taken at face value, but upon close inspection, they may be more indicative of agency. For example, when Hasina found that her in-laws were more religiously inclined, she knew that not praying would invite ostracism. In her situation, it may have been futile to argue against the family rules by which her in-laws abide. By engaging in backstage performance and pretending to pray, she was able to ward off any further potential criticism

and conflict. Although her response may indicate passivity and compliance, her subtle resistance is her way of exercising agency to cope with patriarchal constraints. This is a clear example of how agentive acts with affinal kin may not be overtly expressed, but rather women carefully work out how to behave to keep the peace.

Furthermore, some of the women's responses may suggest that they are consenting to patriarchy by not challenging the status quo; however, their tolerance of the actions of in-laws may be part of the 'patriarchal bargain' (Kandiyoti, 1988) they make. For example, Asma tolerated the dissatisfaction of her in-laws about not being 'domesticated' enough and not having learned to cook before marriage. By observing and learning from her mother and sisters-in-law, over time, she was able to ameliorate her situation and improve relationships with her in-laws. She also appears to attain some power within the home, especially after the resistance of the new daughter-in-law to comply with the domestic duties in the house. It appears as though Asma's efforts to blend in with the expectations of her in-laws were appreciated more after affinal kin noticed the new daughter-in-law not being as compliant as Asma. Her sister-in-law's annoyance at Asma doing more than her causes division between them; the daughters-in-law supposedly share similar, albeit low, positions of power within the affinal home. The new daughter-in-law's resistance positions her as a 'difficult' and 'undutiful' daughter-in-law and raises Asma's status as the 'good' and 'dutiful' daughter/sister-in-law.

Asma appears to have internalised the traditional gender rules and expectations that her in-laws had of her when she moved into their home. Although she shared her difficulties in adjusting to the family home after marriage, Asma appears to only partially empathise with the new daughter-in-law and expected her to have adjusted as she did. It is open to question whether Asma's in-laws would have appreciated Asma as much had they not experienced another daughter-in-law's resistance. Over time, Asma garners much praise from her in-laws and power levels also appear to equalise. She transitions from being her 'mother-in-law's assistant' to a member of the family who is equally capable of showcasing her domestic skills. Asma also feels proud that she has been able to develop these skills. In comparison to the other daughter-in-law whose resistance ended in a breakdown of relationships and being rejected, Asma's early compliance affords her the status of being elevated in the family in the eyes of her affinal kin.

Other examples show participants challenging notions of passivity by engaging in more overt acts of resistance. Besides Asma's experience, Hamida's, Halima's and Tina's mothers-in-law also seem to have been unimpressed by their lack of skills in cooking traditional Bangladeshi

dishes. Whilst Asma, Halima and Hamida were determined to learn, Tina did resist openly and confronted her mother-in-law. Since other daughters-in-law can cook, Tina justifies her decision to not acquiesce to her mother-in-law's expectations and demands.

The range of strategies that women deploy varies according to their individual context and from situation to situation. These are carefully engineered, subjective and complex. Their compliance is not to be confused with passivity but rather may be part of a lengthy strategy to achieve their personal goals over time. When their responses are explored and considered against the backdrop of the constraints they face in their individual settings, their behaviour may be seen as more agentic. Whilst the strategies may work in their favour to achieve their goals, at other times they could be counterproductive.

It is questionable how much Asma was able to benefit from her early docility; her desire to move out of her in-laws' home and establish her own space came to an end after difficulties between the family and the new daughter-in-law. Her expression of resentment and the constraint that her mother-in-law cannot live alone begs the question of how much she was able to benefit from the situation. Whilst she may have been unable to achieve all her goals, Asma is able to be as domesticated as her in-laws, quieten the discontent she initially faced for lacking these skills and forge good relationships with them. Had she displayed resistance like the other daughter-in-law she may have had to endure more distress and risk losing relationships if she chose to move out. Whilst she can maintain good relationships with her in-laws, her narrative clearly indicates how patriarchal rules and gender inequality are perpetuated amongst women.

For some of the women, the lack of benefit from compliance may lead them to engage in more outward resistance. For example, Nasima's experience of the new daughter-in-law being afforded the right to work and flexibility in what she wore made Nasima question the fairness of the situation. In contrast to Asma's narrative, where the new daughter-in-law was ousted for her outward resistance by in-laws, the resistant agency from the new daughter-in-law in Nasima's narrative indicated that she was able to benefit from speaking out and negotiating rules and expectations with affinal kin. Furthermore, Nasima's experience of physical abuse and her husband's repeated infidelity led her to eventually leave the relationship. Unlike Asma, Nasima's narrative indicates that her compliant agency and striving to be the perfect daughter-in-law resulted in no long-term benefits. Shuma also found her compliant agency resulted in no long-term gain. After trying to be diplomatic with her brother-in-law, she engaged in resistant agency by arguing with her husband. Shuma left to go back to live with her family.

Cultural factors can induce shame and guilt, leading women to endure pressure from in-laws. For example, some of the participants' behaviour appears to be motivated by protecting themselves and the honour of their parental kin. Several references were made to the pressure of possessing cooking skills before marriage. As Rina stated, she socialised in such a way that no one can say 'her mother didn't teach her'. This may have partly influenced Halima's, Hamida's and Asma's compliant agency in pushing themselves to learn to cook.

The conceptualisation of shame from a biopsychosocial perspective suggests that it can be both external and internal (Gilbert, 2002b). Additionally, whilst this view sees shame as a universal human emotion, it also acknowledges that people's experiences of shame will vary according to cultural and historical contexts (Gilbert, 2002b). This coincides with the findings of the current study, where participants may have experienced shame both in the form of negative self-evaluation (internal) and of fearing the judgement of others (external). The type of shame the participants have experienced may reflect values that prioritise the group and group harmony over the individual.

The biopsychosocial perspective suggests that shame provides evolutionary advantages and is beneficial to group cohesion. The findings of the current study showed how women desired to have a good relationship with their in-laws, and the pressure to be perfect may have been influenced by their need to deflect any shame due to not being good enough. This coincides with theories that view shame as a factor that enhances group cohesion, avoiding collective exclusion (Keltner & Buswell, 1996; Keltner & Harker, 1998).

Cross-cultural literature, particularly in South Asian cultures, has suggested that negative self-evaluation associated with shame is not universally harmful to psychological well-being (Menon & Shweder, 1994; Wong & Tsai, 2007). Instead, it may be positively valued and perceived as an appropriate response to failure in some situations (Bhawuk, 2017; Lindquist, 2004). It may also lead to constructive behaviours such as building relationships with others (Bagozzi et al., 2003; Wong & Tsai, 2007) and enhance one's ability to perform one's duties (Wong & Tsai, 2007).

The findings of the current study concur with this perspective. Some participants placed importance on being a dutiful daughter-in-law and took pride in trying to meet their cultural and familial expectations. Some also reported positive experiences and building better relationships with their in-laws over time. However, participants in the current study demonstrate that the drive to be a 'dutiful' daughter-in-law can also be associated with



psychological distress, breakdown of relationships and social isolation. Therefore, although preserving honour and fulfilling one's perceived duties can be socially advantageous at an individual level, in some contexts it can become problematic, particularly in abusive situations. Shame within the context of abuse has negative implications for an individual's emotional well-being, regardless of the individual's culture.

The findings of the current study also align with Dillon's (2007) theory of inequality and discrimination, in that they demonstrate that women are particularly vulnerable to being made to feel inferior, degraded and abused.

When examining participants' experiences over time, their narratives indicate how women engage in evaluating situations and select different strategies to manage situations and relationships. Therefore, women do not commit themselves to either compliant or resistant strategies but engage in multiple strategies that may involve navigating back and forth between the two.

When working with British Bangladeshi Muslim women, it is important to understand their subjective experiences and goals for relationships. Leaving a relationship may lead to some women feeling ostracised and isolated in the community. For example, in Tina's case, working on her second marriage was pertinent to preventing further marginalisation. Examples such as these show how gender and other aspects of a British Bangladeshi Muslim woman's identity intersect with other forms of oppression.

### ***5.3 Identity***

The narratives shared by the participants include many features of struggle and oppression and how these served as an integral part of their identity formation and empowerment. Many of the participants demonstrated a narrative of how they survived challenges and developed psychological strength from their difficult experiences. These examples indicate how narratives of oppression, pain, and conflict can promote psychological growth and development (hooks, 1989). The narratives exemplify how their experiences may be more empowering than how Muslim women are typically presented, which contributes to the 'othering' process by locating them as pathologised, oppressed, and victimised (Ahmed, 2003).

In line with previous research, some of the participants also identified faith as a key to their empowerment and a source of agency that increased their confidence and access to rights

(Bolognani & Mellor, 2012). They cited faith as providing answers to women's issues, affirming their rights (Abdugafurova et al., 2017). Mernissi (1991) suggested that 'depending on how it is used, the sacred text can be a threshold of escape or an insurmountable barrier' (p.62). The findings illustrate, however, that women negotiate between cultural practices and religion, especially with regard to living with in-laws and their duties towards them. Khadija and Selina appeared to be aware that they had no duties to their in-laws but recognised a son's duty to his parents, and their duty to their husbands. This indicates that simply being aware of Islamic rights may not be enough to challenge certain cultural practices. Women may feel that they need to accept some cultural practices to fulfil their religious obligations, highlighting the gendered nature of power embedded in religious and cultural practices that benefit men and oblige women to adopt a particular way of thinking (Purewal, 2003; Thomas & Brah, 2011). This is in line with the study by Abdugafurova et al. (2017) which found that, although Islamic law advocates female autonomy and argues against a daughter-in-law's religious obligation to care for her husband's parents, the Muslim jurists direct attention to the importance of pleasing the husband. As a result, jurists fail to protect women from the cultural obligation to serve in-laws. Hussain (2012) argues that one of the ways of tackling this dilemma is to develop women's religious knowledge to help them distinguish between Islamic law and cultural discourse.

The findings of the present study show how participants synthesise the different parts of their intersecting identities and values received from their parents, culture, and religion to guide their behaviour. Bhaba's (1990) concept of 'third space' illuminates how participants choose which parts of culture they preserve and which they negotiate. Rather than succumbing to binary notions of agency, it explores how participants create a 'third space' to exercise agency. In addition, viewing agency over time acknowledges everyday enactments of negotiation and resistance in which women use alternative tactics and strategies to manage their daily struggles (Das, 2010).

The narratives shared by the participants demonstrate that their autobiographical memories are developed within specific social and cultural contexts (Fivush, 2011; Nelson & Fivush, 2004) related to the multiple layers of their identity (Fivush et al., 2011). The narratives shared by participants demonstrate how dominant or culturally canonical narratives shape stories, and Fivush's (2010) ideas on autobiographical memories from a feminist perspective have been particularly useful in indicating how an individual's identity and position in the world determines the type of experience they may have. Many of the participants in the current study

drew upon their gender, culture and religion to share and describe their experiences. In their narratives, they shared occasions where they remained silent or felt silenced, as well as when they challenged dominant narratives and developed resistant narratives. Halima spoke about her former self before marriage compared to her experiences after marriage. Her story demonstrated how her experiences were influenced by culturally dominant narratives. Her in-laws' expectation that she conduct herself in a particular way led to her being unable to challenge the mistreatment she experienced, electing to endure the distress in silence. At times, Halima struggled to remember details of her experiences. She also discussed being unable to share her experiences with her friends for fear of being judged or blamed. This demonstrates that when silence is imposed or if individuals silence themselves, they may feel powerless, which can lead to a loss of memory and identity (Fivush, 2010).

#### ***5.4 Intersectionality***

The diversity of the British Bangladeshi women's experiences noted in this research indicate that, whilst women may share common experiences based on gender, individual experiences are not shaped by, and cannot be understood by, focusing solely on one aspect of their identity. Rather, their experiences are best understood when taking a holistic approach and taking into account their complex and multidimensional identity. Whilst there are aspects of abuse that all abused women may share, the specificity of British Bangladeshi women's experience of abuse lies in intersecting factors such as kinship structures and culture which can compound their experiences. For Hamida and Tina, for example, leaving marriage may mean being further stigmatised in the community, being the target of blame and shame. Tina recognised that many of her actions in enduring difficult situations were influenced by the idea of having been accepted by her in-laws despite her divorce status and bringing a child from her previous marriage. This acceptance seems to override the difficulties she experienced with her mother-in-law. For Tina, another 'failed' marriage was not an option; she did not want to let her husband down or face further ostracism from the community, so striving to forge good relationships with her in-laws by trying to please them was a way of managing and improving her situation.

Feminist perspectives have provided a useful framework for understanding domestic abuse, arguing gender equality to be the source of violence against women, thereby serving as a valuable way of understanding the gendered perspective of violence against women. However, this perspective is limited. First, post-colonial feminists would argue against essentialising

women's experiences and challenge the view that gender alone means that all women have a shared, female experience. The intersectional approach has been particularly useful to understand British Bangladeshi Muslim women's experiences of abuse. In particular, it challenges mainstream perspectives of terms like 'domestic abuse' that place a strong emphasis on abuse based on gender alone. Additionally, feminist research on domestic abuse is confined to the context of men perpetrating abuse against women in nuclear family living arrangements (Fernandez, 1997). The focus on a single part of an identity provides a narrow view of domestic abuse for British Bangladeshi women who do not fit into mainstream descriptions. The current research demonstrates the role of the wider family in the perpetration of abuse and, at times, how this may also influence intimate partner violence. Some of the findings from the current study illustrate how multiple persons can be complicit in the perpetration of abuse against women. It indicates that the structural roots, i.e., the extended family kinship structure and power dynamics within these relationships, can make women vulnerable to abuse.

The current research has shown how an intersectional lens can provide a useful heuristic tool to explore the specificity of British Bangladeshi women's experience of abuse, whilst also acknowledging and appreciating their individual and unique experiences. It acknowledges how kinship structures, culture, socio-economic status, and structural factors such as race and previous marital status can also compound and shape women's experiences in a variety of ways. Importantly it highlights how culture cannot be viewed as a monolithic entity, and cautions against generalising and universalising women's experiences. As such, women need to be understood within their own individual contexts without assuming their support needs are similar. The diversity of experiences highlighted by the British Bangladeshi Muslim women in the current study demonstrates that they are not a homogenous group; it illuminates both similarities and distinctive experiences of in-law relationships.

### ***5.5 Concluding Remarks***

The ten women discussed in this study share the same ethnic, cultural, and religious background, and are united in the commonality of having experience of in-law relationships. However, they are not a homogenous sample and differed in the frequency, duration and intensity of exposure to in-law relations, living arrangements, and length of marriage. Their narratives also presented a variety of perspectives of themselves and others, and they varied in the interpretations of their experiences and level of religiosity. Within the narratives, the

Bangladeshi women express diverse views of how they contest, negotiate, and redefine (Kandiyoti, 1988) their identity and relationship with their in-laws. Their stories highlight their varying degrees of expectations, goals, and desires for married life, and the various ways in which they exercise agency and personal choice within these relationships. Whilst not always successful in meeting their goals, their stories highlight the diverse strategies women employ in their relationships; this challenges stereotypical notions of passive and oppressed Bangladeshi Muslim women.

In the current study, women's agency is evident, even before living with in-laws, with respect to how the majority of the marriages were organised. Rather than the Eurocentric assumption that women play a passive role in their life choices, the majority of the women in the research played an active role in their choice of life partner. The approval of family members was also significant for the women, although exercising personal choice did not always result in a favourable outcome (for example, for Hasina).

Women in the current research aspired to have good relationships with their in-laws and strove to be a good wife and daughter-in-law. It is apparent that women desired to be part of a joint family system and carefully worked within this framework to mould their identity. Despite their recognition of the problematic nature of in-law relationships and how it affects women, the idea of having good relationships with in-laws was a significant feature of the women's lives. This led me to reflect on one participant who dropped out after the sharing of the transcript and provisional analysis (pilot interview). The participant felt she was too identifiable from some of the experiences she described, and felt, in hindsight, that she was not comfortable reading what she said about her husband's family, who were still 'family'. I wondered if, on reflection, the participant felt that by withdrawing her participation, she could still claim the position of a 'good' wife and daughter-in-law.

Against the backdrop of gender and cultural expectations, the women in the study illustrate the various ways in which they negotiate and deploy strategies to deal with tensions and conflicts whilst finding their role and position in the family. What these narratives indicate is that the women did not just passively submit to expected gendered roles but, rather, they subtly negotiated their way around cultural expectations. Rather than outrightly rejecting canonical cultural narratives, the stories describe lives that fit with the multiple layers of their identity. Their experiences illustrate the diverse ways in which they manoeuvre and negotiate their cultural and religious identity within the British context. This entails a delicate negotiation of

what some of the women have labelled ‘traditional’ values with ‘western’ values, whereby values of individuality are negotiated within cultural parameters that assert the importance of upholding *izzat* and conforming to gender roles. Within these narratives, there are many instances where women have displayed agency that has defied cultural norms which, at times, work against them.

The experiences of the women in my study have shown how, at times, men can be equally powerless. In contrast to the unequal power status of the sexes purported by classical feminists, their stories have shown how female in-laws can have a considerable amount of power and influence over and above men. From this perspective, a zero-sum approach, which seeks to seize and reverse the power between genders, is particularly unhelpful. Rather than struggling for equal power with men in the family, some narratives have highlighted the struggle for power and negotiation among women. The findings of this research indicate how, in internalising misogyny, female in-laws can become complicit in the persistent oppression of women and men. Consistent with a post-colonial feminist framework, men can play an integral role in being part of the feminist movement (hooks et al., 1993), and both genders can work together to change the structures that adversely affect them.

Not all women displayed overt and resistant agency; rather, they rebelled against authority figures in the family through manipulation, tactical submission, and compromise. Contrary to the notion that Bangladeshi women are passive victims of their culture, whose lives are orchestrated by patriarchal values, the experiences of the women in the study provide a counternarrative to these stereotypical representations. The stories show how women can skilfully negotiate within cultural parameters to establish their desired identity and goals in life. This often involved working within cultural scripts that regulate gendered roles. This view is in keeping with a post-colonial feminist perspective that values the diversity of women’s experience within the context of an individual’s cultural, religious, family, and community context, rather than an outright rejection of these values. Rather than viewing the extended family system and living with in-laws as a symptom of patriarchy that needs to be overturned to improve the conditions of women’s lives, the findings highlight how women’s individual situations need to be considered. In not doing so, we may fail to generate a nuanced understanding of the social and cultural meanings that women apply to certain cultural practices, and how they negotiate and reflexively engage with such practices.

Canonical cultural narratives and power structures can certainly strain and marginalise women, and not all women may be afforded opportunities to exercise agency in severely subordinated contexts. However, as the current research has shown, stereotypical representations of women fail to acknowledge the diversity of women's experiences in their individual contexts. In the current research, a post-colonial perspective has provided a valuable framework to challenge essentialising and binary depictions of 'third-world women' as passive and oppressed. The findings highlight the diversity of British Bangladeshi women's subjective experiences of in-laws, highlighting the importance of a nuanced understanding of how cultural and social factors shape their world. The women in the current study demonstrated that the ability to exercise agency varied according to the perceived level of choice that the women felt they had in various situations. Rather than viewing agency as synonymous with autonomy, the women in the current study showed how the agency must be viewed from a temporal perspective, which emphasises the idea that the degree to which agency can be exercised can shift over time.

The strategies used to exercise agency reflect the diverse, dynamic, fluid, and hybrid nature of post-colonial feminist subjectivities. Though it may not be consistent with western sensibilities, especially when considering the oppressive contexts some women found themselves in, the findings illustrate the importance of considering agentic acts within oppressive and subordinate contexts; that is, instead of assuming a lack of agency, focus should be directed to understanding women's experiences and choices when forces of agency are brought together upon a 'common conceptual canvas' (Madhok, 2013). The current research has shown how women engage with family politics to exercise agency in their lives, even though in some instances some choices may not have been their preference. It challenges depictions of women as a homogenous category and illustrates how the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and religion (Crenshaw, 1991) influences how they exercise agency in a way that is 'fit for purpose' (Pande, 2015) in their lives, which considers the wider familial social and cultural context.

### ***5.6 Implications of Findings and Recommendations for Policy And Practice***

The current research aimed to explore Bangladeshi women's experience of their in-laws. The study hoped to educate academics, clinicians, social workers, law and policymakers, and the general public, to better understand the cultural context of Bangladeshi women's experience and their relationship with their affinal kin.

Positive reactions to sharing experiences in the interview suggest that talking about shame and honour in the therapeutic setting could be helpful.

The findings of the current study and existing literature suggest that shame-focused interventions could be beneficial for Bangladeshi women (Tonsing & Barn, 2017). These could be particularly beneficial for women who engage in self-blame for their experiences of abuse. Interventions such as compassion-focused therapy (Gilbert, 2011) and strengths-based empowerment projects (Lloyd et al., 2017) could be particularly helpful.

Anyone designing an intervention for British Bangladeshi women needs to be aware that this cultural group is not a homogeneous population, and therefore individuals will require a comprehensive, person-specific and culturally informed assessment before engaging in an intervention (Sue et al., 2009).

Training for women in understanding relationships, specifically inequality in relationships may be a helpful alternative to western medical models of distress. An awareness of the role of *izzat* and how that influences the experience of shame may be helpful to women and alleviate psychological distress. However, the sensitive nature of discussing abuse and shame means that it is a topic that is avoided in therapy (Dearing & Tangney, 2011; Gilbert, 2011; Teyber et al., 2011). Gilbert (1998) argues that it is crucial in clinical practice to raise awareness of shame and find strategies to enable clients to discuss sensitive matters. Less confrontational intervention may encourage discussions about *izzat* and abusive experiences. Group sessions allowing women to meet others in similar situations may enable them to express themselves and talk about their experiences. Additionally, online support may be helpful for women to have discussions, and may particularly benefit women with limited opportunities to leave their homes. Additionally, online sessions may also allow women the freedom to remain anonymous, particularly those who fear being shamed or ostracised by the wider community. Furthermore, survivors of difficult in-law relationships may be consulted and even lead support groups for others in similar situations. This may be particularly beneficial for those who have been isolated and unable to engage with others in the community, receive peer support and work collectively for social change.

A family systems framework sheds light on how power dynamics influence relationships and individuals in a family (Schmidt, 2008). Two fundamental dimensions of the family systems theory are cohesion and power (Minuchin, 1985). This framework argues that problems relating to the hierarchy, boundary or alignment of the family structure result in impairing the resources



for coping with and adapting effectively to stressful situations (van As & Janssens, 2002). Consequently, family problems are conceptualised by understanding how power is distributed amongst family members, how boundaries are managed and how conflicts are resolved (Minuchin, 1974). This could be a helpful group or community intervention to raise awareness of family dynamics.

Cognitive behavioural approaches to abuse may be useful for those who prefer one-to-one or couple therapy. This framework would view abusive behaviours as emanating from gender stereotypes, misogyny and sexist attitudes. These components are typical of patriarchal culture and have particular implications for an individual's thoughts and behaviour. From this perspective, men are socialised to uphold specific and rigid beliefs and behaviours, which results in a deficit in managing conflicts and in their ability to control anger (Stuart et al., 2007). Imbued with gender stigma, perpetrators develop hostile attitudes and beliefs and a distorted understanding of relationships (Gould et al., 2012). Cognitive behavioural interventions would focus on challenging long-held and rigid core beliefs about gender norms and roles and re-educate them to increase their awareness of abuse (Hilder et al., 2016).

Singh and Hays (2008) found that Feminist Group Counselling was helpful for South Asian victims of abuse. These group interventions also considered the role of culture in shaping experiences and intersectional feminism. The groups allowed space for women to understand systemic factors that lead to shame, thus allowing them to externalise feelings of guilt and shame. Similar groups could be set up; design and facilitation of such groups would require some consideration of factors that may help or hinder engagement. This would include designing culturally sensitive interventions, selecting a facilitator who can manage and reduce power imbalances, and carefully managing sessions to prevent clients from feeling 'othered' or further stigmatised.

Ethnic matching may be helpful, in order for facilitators to be viewed as someone who is aware of the culture. However, a facilitator will have to be aware that some clients may also be apprehensive about speaking to someone from the same community, and fear being judged. In that respect, non-Bangladeshi facilitators may be a helpful alternative; however, again, they will need to be aware of clients' fear of confidentiality being breached. Non-Bangladeshi facilitators may also have to engage in learning about the cultural and familial values of the Bangladeshi community and reflect on their own biases and assumptions. Whilst it is important to understand and respect a client's culture, the United Nations clarifies that practices that

involve violence against women cannot be condoned or overlooked on the grounds of culture (Coomarswamy, 1996). Meeto and Mirza (2010) argue that it would be a misguided form of cultural relativism if abuse against women is accepted in the name of respecting a particular culture. Instead, James (2010) argues that practitioners can be both respectful of someone's culture and simultaneously challenge unjust ideologies and practices.

Rather than taking at face value the prevailing negative stereotypes of in-law relations, the current research illustrates the complexity of such relationships and how women make sense of their experiences. Their narratives illustrate subtle and nuanced experiences shaped by the participants' cultural context. For example, the tension of moving out of in-law settings may not be an issue in the western context but may be a complicating issue that compounds women's experiences with in-laws. Furthermore, the values held by the participants have important implications for women who may use psychological services. The research highlighted some of the participants' needs to consider other people's well-being at the expense of their own. Within a therapeutic setting, this may be important for clinicians to consider, as promoting self-care may not be a concept with which clients can easily resonate.

Crucially, there is a need for greater awareness among service providers and the wider community of the abusive aspects of in-law relationships. The current research revealed the risk of abuse from in-laws, which contrasts with the conventional western understanding of domestic violence as being within couples. It illustrates the ways in which wider familial and cultural factors need to be considered to understand how gender stereotypes are used to control and perpetuate the abuse of women. To fully appreciate Bangladeshi women's experience of abuse, the role of the wider family must be recognised in the perpetration of abuse by multiple perpetrators. Within therapeutic settings and risk assessments, questions about the wider family as a potential source of abuse need to be considered. Additionally, service providers must explore the role of the wider family in also influencing and instigating intimate partner violence against women. Furthermore, the current study highlighted how some participants persevered to maintain in-law relationships despite emotional abuse. This necessitates that service providers and clinicians be aware of the complexities that shape women's experience of abuse.

Training and education are vital for service providers, policymakers, faith leaders/imams, and the community at large. Awareness must be raised of the structural inequalities that exacerbate women's experience of abuse. Therefore, training and education that highlight the cultural

specificities of how family structures and relationships can become the place where women face abuse need to be considered.

Many of the women in the study spoke about relying on their faith as part of their coping mechanism and as a way of exercising agency in their lives. Some attended classes that helped them to apply a religious perspective to understand relationships and facilitate better communication. Previous research has shown that the Bangladeshi community turns to multiple sources of support for their health needs and, for many, religious support or a faith leader may be their first point of contact. This points to opening a dialogue between service providers, clinicians, and imams for sharing information on how best to support the Bangladeshi community. A multidisciplinary approach can make a substantial impact in protecting women against abuse.

In conclusion, raising awareness and educating the wider community on various forms of abuse, including those that can be experienced within an extended family, is paramount in helping to identify signs of abuse early on. Raising awareness of Bangladeshi women's experiences through training and education can be particularly beneficial for clinical practice, services provision, and the benefit of the wider community. However, as the post-colonial perspective has highlighted, it is crucial not to homogenise Bangladeshi women's experiences and assume they all face abuse or that all in-laws are abusive. Instead, Bangladeshi women's experiences need to be considered in their contexts.

### ***5.7 Strengths, Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research***

The main objective of this research was to expand knowledge of in-law relationships and address gaps in the literature which has not explored the experiences of British Bangladeshi women in the UK. The strength of the current research is that it has attempted to fill this gap and build on the limited research on affinal relationships. Previous research has mostly focused on the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law dyad. An additional strength of the current research is that it has also demonstrated the role of the wider family. Moreover, it includes how the role of the husband can mediate in-law relationship experiences and considers a temporal perspective to illustrate how these in-law relationships may change over time.

As with most narrative research, the findings generated from the small sample of women I interviewed mean there is room for further exploration in this topic area. Whilst my research has covered a handful of Bangladeshi women's experiences of living with in-laws, further research into this group, and other cultural groups from various backgrounds and ages, would help to illuminate and add depth to this topic area. For example, all the Bangladeshi women in the study were relatively young and spoke fluent English and were motivated to share their experiences. This may have led to bias in the research, reflecting the views of those willing to talk about their experiences. Most of the participants from my research were not living with in-laws at the time. This may have given them time to process their experiences and be able to verbalise them relatively more easily. It also means that the research does not account for women who are in particularly subordinate positions and who may have been able to provide valuable insight into this research area. It may be that participants who currently live with in-laws are less accessible and may not even have the opportunity to speak, especially if there are constraints around going out. Alternative research designs, such as anonymous web-based research, may have reached more women, particularly those who may face constraints around participating in research.

It is important to point out that even within the same demographic group, samples are not entirely homogenous. Several factors within the same cultural group could affect the results of a study. Whilst collecting more detailed demographic information from participants may have compromised confidentiality, perhaps additional information on education and employment history may have added some context for consideration during analysis.

Whilst it was initially thought that having broad inclusion criteria would encourage participation from a hard-to-reach group, this does have its disadvantages. The participants'

experiences were diverse and perhaps it may have been helpful to limit the inclusion criteria to a more specific group such as by age, ensuring they still live with in-laws or perhaps exploring experiences early experiences of in-law relationships for those who are newly married. Nonetheless, the current study the diversity of women's experiences.

The impact of in-laws on the marital dyad has been typically explored in western contexts; the assumption in non-western contexts may be that marital quality is a less salient concept in comparison to the relationship between in-law members. However, the current research illustrated how some participants (e.g., Halima, Hamida, Shuma and Selina) shared how relationships with their in-laws affected their marital relationship. Further research on this area would also make a valuable contribution to this topic.

An area to develop as part of future research would be to generate perspectives from different members of a family, which would certainly enrich understanding of in-law relationships and illuminate multiple perspectives and multiple realities. Not only would it be interesting to continue exploring experiences with similar backgrounds to those already interviewed, but also older women, those with limited English, men's experiences, and other participants within an extended family setting to explore alternative views and beliefs. It would also be interesting to explore gender, generational, and cultural differences and consider how their beliefs and meanings would further add more knowledge to the limited literature.

Another way of researching this topic would be to see how people would talk about in-laws in group settings, and it would be interesting to see the outcome of a focus group. There are also many blogs with people talking quite openly about their experiences with in-laws, which would make an interesting study in itself, with data already generated and ready to be analysed. The current research also points to further research to be conducted on the potential abuse that women experience among in-law relatives, to highlight further the cultural factors that influence abuse from in-laws.

It is important to note that the in-law family system is not exclusive to the Bangladeshi culture, and it would be interesting to explore this in other cultures.

## ***5.8 Summary and Conclusion***

The current thesis documents the subjective experiences of Bangladeshi women's experiences of in-law relationships. Prevailing beliefs about in-laws can easily be taken for granted and seem so obvious on the surface so as to not warrant further attention and inquiry. The research has highlighted that, even within the same cultural group, there are subtleties and nuances that bring to surface the depth and multifaceted nature of the experiences and highlight the complexity in supposedly shared experiences. The research highlighted the overarching role that culture and religion play in shaping women's experiences. It also illustrates that the simple notion of marriage being reduced to the union of husband and wife actually extends beyond this for this cultural group; that really, marriage is a "family marriage". Participants showed the various ways in which they perceived their sense of agency within the in-law family system and how they negotiated and claimed identity within this context. Fundamentally, the diversity of experiences expressed by the participants highlight that culture is a flexible construct subject to change.

I feel privileged to have been a participant and a contender in both camps in relation to this research topic. As I inquired about their experiences, I entered and witnessed their storied lives and as I listened to their stories, my own stories were shaped in different ways as some experiences resonated with me, and I felt challenged and moved by others. In all these ways, my own understanding and knowledge was being enriched, as is intended by the process of heuristic inquiry. Steier (1991) asserted that research enables the revealing of our own tacit world. A simple but poignant emphasis that was commonly shared by the participants and that helped bring to being some of my own tacit understanding, was their unrelenting efforts to make the in-law relationships "work", even under extreme circumstances and at the cost of their own well-being. The current research highlights how unwritten cultural rules are set invisibly in stone, internalised strongly within individuals, and exercised in ways that could be detrimental to the physical and emotional well-being of others. It points to taking seriously how in-law family dynamics can often lack awareness or hide behind cultural rules to substantiate and legitimise abuse. Education on how such dynamics are played out can be extremely fruitful for professionals and are in line with Berkland and Jain (as cited in Dunn & Manning, 2018); that the wider community may benefit from family-wide education on in-law relations and dynamics and the impact this has on individuals.

My hope for writing this research is that it will probe the curiosity of others, and I remain optimistic that the story I have presented here of other people's stories does not remain confined within the borders of academia but goes beyond in reaching out to people for whom these experiences resonate the most, to the wider community. I also hope it will influence and be a useful contribution to counselling psychology and help in shaping and executing the delivery of mental health services, the training of staff about different family systems as influenced by cultural beliefs, and the refining of supervisory practices to avoid falling prey to the "Procrustean dilemma" of fitting clients in with a theory.

## **CHAPTER 6: REFLEXIVITY**

Having grown up within Bangladeshi culture, I have come to take for granted many aspects of its values and systems, including the tradition of Bangladeshi women marrying and moving in with their in-laws, and their experiences within the extended family system. My main objective was a qualitative exploration of Bangladeshi women's subjective experiences of in-law relationships.

Within this thesis, I have kept in mind Riessman's (1993, 2008) and Yardley's (2000) criteria for ensuring validity, to demonstrate the various ways in which I ensure commitment, sensitivity to context, transparency, coherence, persuasiveness, impact and importance.

The introspective and retrospective account that follows reflects awareness of the constructive nature of the research, which involved both a contemplative stance and active engagement (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2011). It also illustrates the constant movement between being in the phenomenon and stepping out of it, where knowledge is created and co-constructed in liminal spaces, emanating from mutual reflection by myself and the participants, and within the interview process.

Discussing the research with others in the early stages produced some interesting responses. I noticed marked cultural and gender differences in reaction to talking about the topic. It generated much excitement among friends, relatives and potential participants. My conversations with other Bangladeshi women evoked excitement, as they felt that women's voices would finally be heard; some also expressed apprehension, however, especially those who felt that their parents had had a difficult relationship with their daughters-in-law.

This excitement was not shared by Bangladeshi men in general, perhaps because I was a Bangladeshi woman researching other women, leading them to feel that I would naturally have a bias toward the women's side of the story. I experienced distance and suspicion. I, myself, questioned and interpreted the potential impact of my research on many levels; did I appear to threaten and perhaps betray the cultural tradition of a family system that has been preserved for generations? Was I problematising relationships unnecessarily, and consequently creating potential conflict and tension through my enquiry that may not have arisen had I not invited women to share and reflect on their stories? Will my questioning and probing make the women question their own story and identity in ways that threaten the family system? And as a result, will this create conflict in their homes? Will I be opening up wounds and exposing the hidden



and dark dimension of in-law relations? And how will men be portrayed in their multiple familial roles as son, husband, brother, uncle, etc.? I felt that, from their perspective, I could potentially be responsible for damaging relationships, and this could lead to undesired outcomes. Ultimately, being part of Bangladeshi culture, was I inadvertently committing some kind of cultural treason? During my training, I was exposed to the challenge of the growing older adult population, to social and voluntary sector services becoming increasingly unsustainable as service provisions were being cut, and the difficulty of accessing psychological care in providing mental health support. I reflected on how the in-law family system provided in-house care for some families without the need to burden already over-subscribed services; I became concerned about whether my research would become over-critical of the very family system that may prevent issues such as loneliness and poor mental health in older adults. My moral and ethical compass remains unsettled.

It was clear from these thoughts, that I documented at various points of my research journey, that I was perhaps preparing myself to hear negative experiences; this realisation helped me to be more open-minded towards the stories, listening to them holistically. I found that my initial expectation of hearing negative stories mirrored the interpretation by some participants of my research topic – that it is seeking to identify people who have had negative experiences with in-laws, rather than seeking to understand their experiences as a whole.

Berger (2015) presents both the benefits and challenges of three possible research positions; (1) when the researcher shares experience with the participants, (2) when the researcher shifts from ‘outsider’ to ‘insider’ during the course of the research, and (3) when the researcher is unfamiliar with the experiences of the participants. I was able to relate to the first two points, and it was difficult to find unfamiliar aspects; some experiences were similar to both my personal experience and my professional experience through hearing others’ stories. Quite notably, I was an ‘insider’ in the research in many respects; I am a Bangladeshi, Muslim woman who has lived with in-laws, studying other Bangladeshi women who have lived with or were living with in-laws. Other points at which some of us converged were that we were born, raised, educated and worked in the UK.

Vernon (1997) suggested that researching from the ‘inside’ and making experiences known can be empowering. The points at which we diverged are highlighted in the research. I oscillated between being an ‘outsider’ and being an ‘insider’. Some of the experiences where I felt like an outsider were related to certain opinions shared by participants, especially with regard to

the extent that which hardship was tolerated at the expense of well-being. Also, at times, I felt that I was not on the same wavelength, from a religious perspective, as some of the participants, though was able to grasp what they were trying to communicate.

My position may have influenced how participants told their stories. Our shared ethnicity may have made them wonder about confidentiality. For example, one of the participants asked me which district my family is from in Bangladesh. She may have felt that she would not be able to be completely honest about her in-law experiences if I revealed I was from the same district. Some may also have feared that, being Bangladeshi, I may judge them for their actions or for what they had experienced with their in-laws, and they may not have revealed all the details. Therefore, the analysis may not reflect the participants' experience in its entirety. Nonetheless, the research has provided insights into some British Bangladeshi Muslim women's experiences of in-law relationships.

The shared ethnic and religious background may also have been a strength. Bhopal (2010) suggests that shared gender and identity allow for rapport and trust to be built to encourage respondents to openly discuss their personal experiences. Ethnic matching and insider status can produce more accurate details in research (Papadopoulos & Lees, 2002), but Bhopal (2010) suggests that it is actually ambiguous, complex and fraught with tensions. However, narrative studies are not concerned with seeking an objective 'truth'; what was more important in the current research was exploring the participants' subjective experiences. My insider status did not guarantee access to participants, but once I was able to obtain access, our shared identities may have helped to develop trust and encourage participants to share their experiences.

Gender matching can be important in a researcher/researched relationship. In Hossain and Khan's (2019) research on Bangladeshi carers, many participants refused to attend the interviews due to the gender difference between them and the researchers. It was also found that the shared ethnicity posed some problems in recruiting participants as they were suspicious that the researchers were secret government agents. Taking into consideration the tight-knit nature of the Bangladeshi community, one of the disadvantages of being an insider and researching a sensitive topic is the risk of threat and ridicule from the community (Skinner, Hester & Malos, 2013) and also by family and friends (Schwartz, 1997). Additionally, due to confidentiality, it may also mean that some aspects of the work cannot be openly talked or written about (Skinner et al., 2013).

Any research that draws attention to abuse within minoritised communities has the potential to fuel racism and stereotyping further (Burman & Chantler, 2004; Pratt et al., 2004). I experienced some anxiety about being an insider in the research and writing about participants with whom I share a culture. I was concerned that I may be doing the participants and the Bangladeshi community a disservice by unintentionally misrepresenting them in writing up the research. For example, I was aware of feeling uncomfortable about how to present negative views expressed by the participants about Bangladeshi culture and was also concerned that the research may stereotype this group further. Sharing the initial global impressions from provisional analysis provided an opportunity for participants to offer their feedback. Further discussions in research supervision in relation to the analysis also gave the opportunity to ensure that the written themes and interpretations were closely aligned with the raw data.

To remedy some anxiety about being an insider in the research, I endeavoured to embody the stance of a scientist-practitioner and reflective practitioner (Woolfe, 2012), and integrate these within my research (Hanley, 2017). Hanley argues that integrating the two models can enhance the ongoing practice of Counselling Psychologists. Counselling Psychologists often negotiate and manage ‘two different underpinning philosophies’, the technical features of the scientist-practitioner role and the subjective and relational features of the reflective practitioner role (Kasket & Gil Rodriguez, 2011, p.21). For example, reflective practice denotes a ‘way of being’ which aids other key functions of the identity of Counselling Psychologists (Donati, 2016). As well as attuning to the values of reflexivity, intersubjectivity and the social construction of meaning-making, it also supports the scientist-practitioner model and the need for critical awareness of how different features influence the research process and outcomes (Donati, 2016)

Carrying out high-quality research is a requirement in Counselling Psychology doctoral programmes (Kasket, 2016). The scientist-practitioner model advocates for practitioners in training to allow their applied clinical work to be influenced by research, as well as for their clinical work to inform the areas they go on to research. Adopting this evidenced-based approach to both clinical practice and research means that when conducting research with careful attention, representing as much integrity as possible, the narratives of participants. My commitment to attempting to capture the narratives of the people who participated in this study is also a reflection on my acknowledgement of the need to aim to produce good-quality research.

As an insider, I was also aware of the risk of reaching premature conclusions based on preconceived ideas about the outcomes. Being an insider also meant that my familiarity with my own culture would lead to me taking for granted the tacit information present in the data. Mercer (2007) referred to this as the challenge of an insider's inability to 'make the familiar strange' (p.7). To allay the risk of premature conclusions, I stayed close to the raw data, following the analytical steps for each participant carefully to ensure that the data is rigorously interpreted and thus credible and trustworthy. Sharing the data with my research supervisor, with whom I did not share the same culture, also helped to delineate tacit patterns and regularities in the data.

There were some definite advantages in the shared identity of being Bengali, Sylheti-speaking women. For one thing, it allowed the participants to communicate in what I have termed 'Banglish', i.e., speaking in both English and Bengali-Sylheti, as I understood both. Our shared culture meant that I was an insider for some experiences. My identity meant that they did not need to elaborate on some terms and matters, as I had 'cultural intuition' and 'the ability to understand implied content...in a nuanced and multi-level way' (Berger, 2015). However, the similarities can be both a blessing and a curse. Whilst Bhopal (2010) found it useful in her research to maintain a 'distance' and encourage participants to explain details of their lives of which they both had knowledge, I felt I was not genuine in asking participants to elaborate on Bengali phrases which I fully understood, such as asking Halima to explain what '*betin thor khofaal*' means, for the purpose of explaining it in the interview context. At other times I succumbed to my own cultural blind spots, as I did not ask them to elaborate on some terms, because I took the similarities for granted and overlooked certain aspects of their experience (Daly, 1992).

The pluralistic philosophy of Counselling Psychology means that there are many ways in which in-law relationships could be explored. I have only presented one of the ways in which narrative research could be carried out, analysed and interpreted. As Riessman (2008) stated, narrative research is not a panacea and there are also various other ways in which to research and document a topic. Having had some time out of research and returning to it, I too noticed the different ways in which I now look at my data. As Finlay (2002) points out, any '*reflexive analysis can only be partial, tentative, provisional*' (p.542). I extend this idea to the reflexivity

of the entire research process as, when I look back on it in the future, I am sure I shall find other points for reflection.

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## APPENDIX 1 – Phases of Heuristic Inquiry

Hiles (2001) summarised the research phases within a heuristic inquiry. I have utilised this table to outline how I have used the heuristic approach to inform how the research has been shaped retrospectively and how it hopes to evolve. I have provided my response in italics in the table to illustrate how I have adopted each phase.

**Table 1: Summary of Moustakas' phases of heuristic inquiry (p. 27-37)**

**Initial engagement** - The task of the first phase is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications. The research question that emerges lingers with the researcher, awaiting the disciplined commitment that will reveal its underlying meanings.

*A prerequisite of the heuristic inquiry is that, “research the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated. There must have been actual autobiographical connections (Moustakas, 1990). Hiles (2001) explains that in effect “it is not you who chooses the research question, but the research question chooses you, and invariably the research question is deeply personal in origin.” This rings similar to Frank’s (2012) criterion for carrying out Dramaturgical Narrative Analysis; “...narrative research can enter into dialogue with people’s stories only if the researcher has sufficient proximate experience of the context of the stories.” Furthermore, he explains that, “a standpoint begins with someone’s personal troubles.” Like heuristic inquiry, part of the narrative analysis process requires that the researcher declares their “animating interest.”*

*The structure of Bangladeshi families and in-law relations has been something I have been preoccupied with for some years now. I felt a “pull” towards the research topic and it felt naturally fitting to pursue this research venture. I detail this later in the chapter highlighting both my personal and professional interest in this topic.*

### **Immersion**

The research question is lived in waking, sleeping and even dream states. This requires alertness, concentration and self-searching. Virtually anything connected with the question becomes raw material for immersion.

*Ever since I have embarked on the research journey and have spoken to others about it, I have been inundated with new stories, YouTube clips, messages related to in-law relations from others. It has seemed to spark interest with those around me which has kept me immersed in the topic too.*

### **Incubation**

This involves a retreat from the intense, concentrated focus, allowing the expansion of knowledge to take place at a more subtle level, enabling the inner tacit dimension and intuition to clarify and extend understanding.

*As I took a break from the research journey and revisited it, there have been many opportunities to think about my research from various stances and questioning my own positioning, beliefs and ideas about the topic, giving rise to alternative perspectives. I highlight some of these in the reflexivity section of the thesis.*

### **Illumination**

This involves a breakthrough, a process of awakening that occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition. It involves opening a door to new awareness, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or new discovery.

*I have found the process of analysing the data to be particularly illuminating in understanding and being able to articulate some of these experiences by organising these into meaningful themes. I have also found my own self-awareness and my personal journey in the research to be transforming particularly with the way I can talk about the topic.*

### **Explication**

This involves a full examination of what has been awakened in consciousness. What is required is organization and a comprehensive depiction of the core themes.

*The thesis has partially allowed some catharsis to explicate the findings of the research and my interpretations of it, giving me the opportunity to express to some extent poignant and compelling findings. It has also allowed me to deconstruct a topic area that is often taken for granted.*

### **Creative synthesis**

Thoroughly familiar with the data, and following a preparatory phase of solitude and meditation, the researcher puts the components and core themes usually into the form of creative synthesis expressed as a narrative account, a report, a thesis, a poem, story, drawing, painting, etc.

*The thesis is an amalgamation of my personal memories, clinical encounters, discussions with friends, family members, relatives, colleagues, knowledge from movies, soaps, songs, poems all of which has allowed me to be creative in the presentation of my research journey. Over the years I have become inspired by non-Bangladeshi academic researchers who have impressively embarked on writing about the Bangladeshi community and allowed me time to discuss their research experiences. I feel also that my thinking would have not evolved in multiple ways, had it not been for the previous teachers in my educational history, who have sparked intrigue and shaped my interests and taught me to nurture my personal interests in education and using it as a guide to for further exploration. The current thesis, implicitly is a product of all these experiences.*

### **Validation of the heuristic inquiry**

The question of validity is one of meaning. Does the synthesis present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience? Returning again and again to the data to check whether they embrace the necessary and sufficient meanings. Finally, feedback is obtained through participant validation, and receiving responses from others.

*I have adopted this phase by listening to the recordings of the interview and reading through the transcriptions repeatedly whilst involving the participants to check their transcripts for verification and validation. I hope to present the research to the wider community and invite the participants who were interviewed to keep them part of the ongoing discussion.*

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

School of Psychology

## **APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL**

**FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS**

**BSc LEVEL 6 PROJECTS**

**MSc/MA DISSERTATIONS**

**PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE RESEARCH IN CLINICAL, COUNSELLING &  
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY\***

\*Students doing a Professional Doctorate in Occupational & Organisational Psychology and PhD candidates should apply for research ethics approval through the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and not use this form. Go to:

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/>

Before completing this application students should familiarise themselves with the latest *Code of Ethics and Conduct* published by the British Psychological Society (BPS) in 2009. This can be found in the Ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard (Moodle) and also on the BPS website

<http://www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/ethics-standards/ethics-standards>

For BPS guidelines on Internet mediated research see

<http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/Public%20files/inf206-guidelines-for-internet-mediated-research.pdf>

UEL's code of practice in research is a useful brief outline of good ethics conduct - see

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/>

Note that researchers conducting research that solely involves animal observation or analysis of existing data (secondary analysis) should complete separate forms. These can also be found in the Ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard on Moodle.

### **HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THIS APPLICATION**

1. Complete this application form electronically, fully and accurately.
2. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (5.1).
3. Include copies of all necessary attachments in the **ONE DOCUMENT SAVED AS .doc** (See page 2)
4. Email your supervisor the completed application and all attachments as **ONE DOCUMENT**. INDICATE 'ETHICS SUBMISSION' IN THE SUBJECT FIELD OF THIS EMAIL so your supervisor can readily identify its content. Your supervisor will then look over your application.
5. When your application demonstrates good ethical protocol your supervisor will type in his/her name in the 'supervisor's signature' section (5.2) and submit your application for review. You should be copied into this email so that you know your application has been

submitted. It is the responsibility of students to check this.

6. Your supervisor will let you know the outcome of your application. Recruitment and data collection are **NOT** to commence until your ethics application has been approved, along with other research ethics approvals that may be necessary (See 4.1)

### **MANDATORY ATTACHMENTS**

1. A copy of the invitation letter that you intend giving to potential participants.
2. A copy of the consent form that you intend giving to participants.

### **OTHER ATTACHMENTS (AS APPROPRIATE)**

- A copy of original tests and questionnaire(s) and test(s) that you intend to use. Please note that copies of copyrighted (or pre-validated) questionnaires and tests do NOT need to be attached to this application. Only provide copies of questionnaires, tests and other stimuli that are original (i.e. ones you have written or made yourself). If you are using pre-validated questionnaires and tests and other copyrighted stimuli (e.g. visual material) make sure that these are suitable for the age group of your intended participants.
- Example of the kinds of interview questions you intend to ask participants.
- A copy of ethical clearance from an external organisation if you need one, and have one (e.g. the NHS, schools etc). Note that your UEL ethics application can be submitted and approved before ethical approval is obtained from another organisation (see 4.1). If you need it, but don't yet have ethical clearance from an external organisation, please let your supervisor know when you have received it.

### **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates:**

- **FOR BSc/MSc/MA STUDENTS WHOSE RESEARCH INVOLVES VULNERABLE PARTICIPANTS:** A scanned copy of a current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate. A current certificate is one that is not older than 6 months. This is necessary if your research involves

young people (anyone under 18 years of age) or vulnerable adults (see section 4.2 for a broad definition of this). A DBS certificate that you have obtained through an organisation you work for is acceptable, as long as it is current. If you do not have a current DBS certificate, but need one for your research, you can apply for one through the School of Psychology and the School will pay the cost.

If you need to submit a DBS certificate with your ethics application but would like to keep it confidential, please email a scanned copy of the certificate directly to Dr Mark Finn (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee) at [m.finn@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.finn@uel.ac.uk)

- **FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS WHOSE RESEARCH INVOLVES VULNERABLE PARTICIPANTS:** DBS clearance is necessary if your research involves young people (anyone under 18 years of age) or vulnerable adults (see 4.2 for a broad definition of this). The DBS check that was done, or verified, when you registered for your programme is enough (even if older than 6 months) and you will not have to apply for another in order to conduct research with vulnerable populations.

## **1. Your details**

### **1.1. Title of your course:**

*Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology*

### **1.2. Title of your proposed research:**

**1.3. Submission date:**

*May 2017*

**1.4. Please tick if your application includes a copy of a DBS certificate**

☐

**1.5. Please tick if you need to submit a DBS certificate with this application but have emailed a copy to Dr Mark Finn (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee) ([m.finn@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.finn@uel.ac.uk)) for confidentiality reasons**

☐

**1.6. Please tick to confirm that you have read and understood the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009). See link on page 1**

☒

**2. About the research**



### **2.1. Research question(s):**

*The aim of the current research is to explore the narrative of Bengali women and their subjective experience of life with in-laws.*

### **2.2. Likely duration of the data collection from intended starting to finishing date:**

*It is hoped that the data collection will start around May/June 2015 (or as soon as ethics has been cleared) and the intended finishing time for collecting data is April 2016.*

## **Methods**

### **2.3. Design of the research:**

*The research is essentially qualitative in nature and a narrative method will be used to gather data. In line with the research aim, the plan is to elicit narratives through the use of semi-structured interview questions. It is expected that each interview will last from 60 - 90 minutes.*

### **2.4. Data Sources or Participants:**

#### **Sampling criteria and strategy**

*The research aims to interview around 10 people which is reflective of typical narrative research.*

*Recruiting from the Bangladeshi community per se may not be entirely difficult as the researcher has worked in two boroughs in London with the highest population of Bangladeshis.*

*The researchers discussion about the research topic has sparked some interested participants who are willing to share their stories. An opportunistic sampling strategy will be adopted to interview those Bangladeshi women willing to speak about their experiences of living with in-laws and by “snowballing” it is hoped that those participating will help to identify interested others.*

*A range of methods will be utilised to recruit participants such as word of mouth, advertising on Facebook or other social media where potential participants can contact the researcher directly.*

#### *Inclusion criteria for research*

*Participants will need to be of Bangladeshi origin, aged 18 or over who have had at least two years of living with in-laws. The researcher is able to speak in English and Bengali and will therefore be able to conduct the study in the language the participant feels most comfortable with.*

*Single/married/separated/divorced/widowed participants may have had some experiences of physically living with in-laws. For this reason the participants do not need to be married at the time of interview as long as they have had some experience of having had lived with in-laws for two years.*

## **2.5. Measures, Materials or Equipment:**

*For the purpose of the interviews a digital audio recorder will be used to record the interviews.*

*A semi-structured interview schedule will be used to elicit narratives. Please refer to Appendix A for the interview schedule. Once ethics is cleared, it is hoped that a pilot test of the interview schedule as well as guidance from research supervisors will help to refine the questions for the*

*actual study.*

*A Family Systems Test (FAST) assessment tool will be used to trigger stories of living with in-law families. The FAST test is a board that was developed to analyse relational structures. The figure placement technique was designed to evaluate cohesion and hierarchy in families across different situations according to distance between figures and the elevation of figure with different levels of block. The use of this tool is a good way of representing families across the three situations; the way typical structure of the family, the ideal situation and in conflict situations. These triggers may elicit a rich construction of the way the family is perceived and help to verbalise the narratives with more ease than for example asking directly about power dynamics in the family.*

*Please refer to the following link for a visual image of the family systems test board.*  
<http://www.fast-test.com/>

**2.6.** If you are using copyrighted/pre-validated questionnaires, tests or other stimuli that you have not written or made yourself, are these questionnaires and tests suitable for the age group of your participants?

*The FAST test will be suitable for the age group of participants*

**2.7. Outline of procedure, giving sufficient detail about what is involved in the research:**

*Below is an outline of the procedure the researcher will intend to use for each participant.*

*a) Once a potential participant shows interest in the study, give participant "Information Sheet" (See Appendix B) outlining aims of study, details of what the research entails, and their rights as a participant. Encourage participant to ask any questions they may have about the*

*research.*

*b) If participant is happy to participate, arrange a time, date and location\* carry out interview.*

*\* Location of the interview will be based on a place which is convenient for both researcher and participant. The researcher will try and hire a private room at UEL. If the interview is to take place in the participant's homes, for safety reasons, the researcher will inform someone that they will be carrying out the interview (with details of general location so that participant's details remain anonymous) and the intended duration. Researcher will call once the interview is finished. Researcher will request that they are contacted if no calls are made after 30 mins of the intended finishing time.*

*c) Provide participant with a "Consent Form" (See Appendix C) to sign before the interview.*

*d) Interview to last approximately 60-90 minutes. Audio record interviews.*

*e) Debrief clients. Ask client if they would like to read the analyses of the data and inform them that they will be contacted once the data is transcribed and analysed.*

*f) Transcribe interviews and analyse data. Researcher to write down any reflections from the interview.*

*g) For those participants who requested to read their analysed data, contact them and arrange a time to meet with. Audio record the meeting for any further reflections from the participant.*

### **3. Ethical considerations**

**Please describe how each of the ethical considerations below will be addressed.**

See the BPS guidelines for reference, particularly pages 10 & 18, and other support material in the Ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard on Moodle.

#### **3.1. Obtaining fully informed consent:**

*If participants are interested in being interviewed for the research, a consent form will be given for them to sign before the interview. Please refer to Appendix B for details of the form which also includes the participants right to withdraw from the study at any time.*

#### **3.2. Engaging in deception, if relevant:**

*No deception is involved in the proposed research.*

#### **3.3. Right of withdrawal:**

*Participants will be advised of their right to withdraw from the research study at any time without disadvantage to them and without being obliged to give any reason. This will be made clear to participants on the information sheet sent to them. If they withdraw, all the information they have supplied will be erased and will not be included in the research. This means that all audio, paper and electronic files and any other documentation related to the participant will be destroyed.*

#### **3.4. Anonymity & confidentiality: (Please answer the following questions)**

**3.4.1.** Will the data be gathered anonymously (i.e. this is where you will not know the names and contact details of your participants?)

*No. Given that the research method is qualitative, the data gathered will not be anonymous.*

**3.4.2.** If NO what steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of participants?

*The "Information sheet" (Appendix A) includes measures taken to ensure confidentiality and protections of participants. Personal contact details of participants will be kept in a locked draw which only the researcher has access to and will not be shared with anyone else. Data will be treated confidentially and personal details which could potentially reveal the identity of the participant will be replaced with pseudonyms. Participants will be informed that supervisors and examiners will have access to the transcribed data where their identity has been anonymised.*

*Personal details of the clients will be destroyed after the data collection. Unless there is a possibility of publication of the research, all data will be destroyed. All data will be saved in a password protected laptop that only the researcher has access to. Any paper files will be kept safe in a locked draw that only the researcher has access to. Data will be kept for up to three years post data collection for the reason of possible publication.*

### **3.5. Protection of participants:**

*Although a participant information sheet will be provided to all participants so that they are aware of the nature of the research before providing informed consent, it is difficult to predict what the exact outcome of participating in the research will be and what they might*

*experience during the interviews and their reaction to the analyses. For example, sharing narratives may trigger difficult experiences for the participant. Furthermore, analyses of results may also elicit unexpected reactions that they didn't anticipate before participating.*

*In the event that the participants appear feeling distressed, they will be given a reminder to withdraw their participation at anytime through processual or on-going consent.*

*Previous narrative research by Lieblich, (1996; cited in Elliot, 2005) documented how her research of collecting life stories in the kibbutz was similar to opening up a Pandora's box, leaving them with the pain. Holloway and Jefferson (cited in Elliot, 2005) asserts that participants experiencing distress may not be necessarily harmful but may in fact be therapeutic and reassuring to have a space to talk about an experience.*

*The researcher has experience in counselling skills in therapy settings and this will help to facilitate sensitive situations with empathy and active listening. Debrief at the end of the interview will also be provided. The participants will be reminded that the research is not a therapy space and will sign post information of local therapy services if the participants wished to explore their experiences further (for example local counselling and IAPT services)*

*The participants will be informed that their data will be shared with the supervisors that are overseeing the project. Although not anticipated, if there are serious concerns about the safety of a participant, or others, during the course of the research, the researcher will contact the research supervisor for guidance before breaching confidentiality.*

### **3.6. Protection of the researcher:**

*There are no grave anticipated healthy and safety risks for the researcher. However the following two points will be considered:*

- *If the interview is to take place in the participant's homes, for safety reasons, the researcher will inform someone that they will be carrying out the interview (with details of general location so that participant's details remain anonymous) and the intended duration. Researcher will call once the interview is finished. Researcher will request that they are contacted if no calls are made after 30mins of the intended finishing time.*
- *The proposed research stems from the researchers personal experience and interest in the topic under study. There is the potential to feel personally affected by the narratives of the participant. The researcher has regular personal therapy which can be utilised if the researcher is distressed by any aspects of the research. The researcher will also inform research supervisors about any distress or difficulty experienced in the research process.*

### **3.7. Debriefing:**

*Participants will be provided with a "Debrief Sheet." This sheet will include details of what will happen to the data they provided and if they are still happy for me to use the material. Sign-posting information will also be included on the sheet for the relevant services participants can contact if they feel they feel distressed or feel they want to further explore things they talked about at the interview. Participants will also be provided with the opportunity to ask any questions they may have about the research.*

### **3.8. Will participants be paid?**

NO



### 3.9. Other:

(Is there anything else the reviewer of this application needs to know to make a properly informed assessment?)

*The researcher will make regular use of research supervision to ensure that the research is ethical and participant and the researcher's wellbeing is monitored.*

## **4. Other permissions and clearances**

**4.1.** Is ethical clearance required from any other ethics committee? NO  
(E.g. NHS REC\*, Charities, Schools)

If YES please give the name and address of the organisation:

Has such ethical clearance been obtained yet? N/A

If NO why not?

If YES, please attach a scanned copy of the ethical approval letter. A copy of an email from the organisation is acceptable if this is what you have received.

**\*If you need to apply to another Research Ethics Committee (e.g. NRES, HRA through IRIS) please see details on [www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/external-committees](http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/external-committees). Among other things, this site will tell you about UEL sponsorship**

**PLEASE NOTE:** Ethical approval from the School of Psychology can be gained before approval from another research ethics committee is obtained. However, recruitment and data collection are NOT to commence until your research has been approved by the School and other ethics committees as may be necessary. Also note that you do not need NHS ethics approval if collecting data from NHS staff except where the confidentiality of NHS patients could be compromised. Speak to your supervisor if in doubt.

**4.2. Will your research involve working with children or vulnerable adults?\*** NO

If YES have you obtained and attached a DBS certificate? N/A

If your research involves young people between the ages of 16 and 18 will parental/guardian consent be obtained. N/A

If NO please give reasons. (Note that parental consent is always required for participants who are 16 years of age and younger)

**\* You are required to have DBS clearance if your participant group involves children and young people who are younger than 18 years of age.** You should speak to your supervisor about seeking consent from parents/guardians if your participants are between the ages of 16 and 18. 'Vulnerable' adult groups includes people aged 18 and over with psychiatric illnesses, people who receive domestic care, elderly people (particularly those in nursing homes), people in palliative care, and people living in institutions and sheltered accommodation, for example. Vulnerable people are understood to be persons who are not necessarily able to freely consent to participating in your research, or who may find it difficult to withhold consent. If in doubt about the extent of the vulnerability of your intended participant group, speak to your supervisor. Methods that maximise the understanding and ability of vulnerable

people to give consent should be used whenever possible. For more information about ethical research involving children see [www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/involving-children/](http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/involving-children/)

SEE PAGE 3 FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT ATTACHING A DBS CERTIFICATE IF YOUR RESEARCH INVOLVES VULNERABLE PARTICIPANTS AS OUTLINED ABOVE.

#### 4.3. Will you be collecting data overseas?

NO

This includes collecting data/conducting fieldwork while you are away from the UK on holiday or visiting your home country.

\* If YES in what country or countries will you be collecting data?

**Please note that ALL students wanting to collect data while overseas (even when going home or away on holiday) MUST have their travel approved by the Pro-Vice Chancellor International (not the School of Psychology) BEFORE travelling overseas.**

Please refer to the following link for the Approval to Travel form and the Fieldwork Risk Assessment form that should accompany an application.

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/>

Basically, you must:

1. Complete the Approval to Travel form AND the Fieldwork Risk Assessment form (both found through the above link).
2. When completed, pass the forms to your project supervisor who will give your application to the Deputy Dean of the School of Psychology for signing.
3. The School will then forward your application to the Pro-Vice Chancellor International on your behalf. Applications must be received by the Pro-Vice Chancellor International at least **two weeks prior to travel**. Details about where to send an application can also be found through the above link.

## **5. Signatures**

TYPED NAMES ARE ACCEPTED AS SIGNATURES

### **5.1. Declaration by student:**

*I confirm that I have discussed the ethics and feasibility of this research proposal with my supervisor.*

Student's name: NORJAHAN BEGUM KARIM

Student's number: 1141390

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> September 2015

### **5.2. Declaration by supervisor:**

*I confirm that, in my opinion, the proposed study constitutes a suitable test of the research question and is both feasible and ethical.*

Supervisor's name: Jane Lawrence  
2015

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> September

APPENDIX A – Interview Schedule
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**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

The following questions will be used as a guide with the general addition of prompts (for example, could you tell me more about that? How did you feel about that? What did that mean for you? What was that like? etc).

- I was wondering if you could tell me about yourself before you got married?
- What beliefs did you grow up with about married life and living with in-laws? What were these beliefs influenced by?
- What stories did you hear about living with in-laws as you were growing up?
- Did these beliefs change over time?
- Could you tell me about how the marriage was arranged?
- What hopes/expectations did you have about getting married?
- How did you feel at the time about the prospect of living with in-laws?
- Could you tell me a little bit about your current living situation?
- What was/is life like living with in-laws?
- How was married life different from your pre-married life?
- What positive experiences did you have, if any, living with in-laws?
- What negative experiences did you have, if any, living with in-laws?
- Did you feel living with in-laws changed you in any way? How do you see yourself now?
- If you could change your story in any way, what would you change?
- What would your advice be to other women who will marry and live with-in laws?
- What do you think the future looks like for other Bangladeshi women and the topic of in laws?

Questions relating to FAST (Family Systems Test) (extracted from <http://www.fast-test.com/>)

**The exploration of the *typical* representation includes the following four questions:**

- Does this representation show a specific situation? If so, which one?
- How long have the relations been the way that you have shown them here? How are the relations here different from the way they used to be?
- What is the reason that the relations have become the way you show them here?

**The exploration of the *ideal* representation includes the following five questions:**

- Does this representation show a situation that has occurred at some point? If yes, what was the situation? (If the answer is no, omit the next two questions)
- How often does this situation occur and how long does it last when it does occur?
- When did this situation first occur and when was the last time it happened?
- What would have to happen (outside event, change in behaviour, etc.) to make typical relations correspond to how you wish they were ideally?
- How important would this be for you and the other family members?

**The exploration of the *conflict* representation includes the following six questions:**

Who is involved in this conflict?

What is this conflict about?

How often does this conflict occur and how long does it last each time it does occur?

When did this situation first occur and when was the last time it happened?

How important is this conflict for you and the other family members?

What roles do the different family members have in solving this conflict?



## APPENDIX B – Information Sheet

### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

School of Psychology

Stratford Campus

Water Lane

London E15 4LZ

#### **The Principal Investigator**

Norjahan Karim

Email: u1141390@uel.ac.uk

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate a research study. The study is being conducted as part of my Professional Doctorate of Counselling Psychology degree at the University of East London.

#### **Project Title**

Bangladeshi Women's Experience of Life with in-laws: A Narrative Analysis

#### **Project Description**

In-law relationships have been relatively under-researched compared to other relationships. For many Bangladeshi women, moving into the husband's home and living with in-law families can be a major life change. The purpose of the current research is to explore how individuals make sense of these experiences.

The study will include Bangladeshi women aged 18 or over. To participate in the interview, you do not necessarily have to be currently living with in-laws as long as you have had at least two years experience of living with in-laws.

As part of the research, you will be asked to participate in an interview which will last approximately 1 to 1 and half hours although the length of time will vary depending on how much information you feel comfortable to share. The questions will generally focus on your overall experience of living with in-laws, including your belief and expectations about marriage and living with in-laws before your marriage and during the course of your marriage. It will also look at how your experiences have changed over time and how you have coped with different situations. The interviews will be audio-recorded,

Some people feel that talking about their experiences openly can be quite therapeutic although personal information can sometimes bring up difficult feelings. As a participant, it is within your right to not answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable or distressing. You can rest assured that you can withdraw from the study at any time. You will also be provided with a list of contact information if you feel you need further support.

Once the transcribed data has been analysed, you will have the opportunity to read the data and make any further comments you wish to add.

### **Confidentiality of the Data**

Everything you share will remain confidential. All your personal details will only be accessible to the researcher. The recorded interview will be transcribed and your personal details will be anonymised in the transcript. All audio recordings will be erased once the research is complete. Transcribed information will be kept up to 3 years and will be stored securely.

### **Location**

If you agree to take part in the research, an interview date, time, and location will be arranged that is suitable for you. The interview is likely to take place in a private room at the University where the researcher studies, your own home or anywhere that is convenient for you.

### **Disclaimer**

You are not obliged to take part in this study and should not feel coerced. You are free to withdraw at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason. If you do withdraw from the research, all your personal details and interview material will be erased and will not be used for the research write-up.



Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue you will be asked to sign a consent form prior to your participation. Please retain this invitation letter for reference.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been conducted, please contact the study's supervisors:

Dr Jane Lawrence (j.lawrence@uel.ac.uk) or Dr Nicholas Wood (n.wood@uel.ac.uk)

School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

**OR**

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee:

Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4493. Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

Norjahan Karim



**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

**Consent to participate in a research study**

**Bangladeshi Women's Experience of Life with In-Laws: A Narrative Analysis**

I have the read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and the data will be anonymised. I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....



Date: .....

APPENDIX D – DEBRIEF SHEET

## **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

### DEBRIEFING INFORMATION

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in the current study.

Marriage is considered a major life event in many cultures. In the Bangladeshi culture, it is customary for the woman to move in to the husband's home and live with his family. The aim of the current research was to explore the stories of Bangladeshi and their experiences of living with in-laws.

In-law relationships have been relatively an understudied area of research in comparison to other close relationships which calls for more research to be conducted.

Research has demonstrated how culture can play role in shaping in-law relations and it was hoped that this exploratory research would help to generate insight into your experiences, and contribute to the existing research for further discussion around the topic of in-law relations. It is also hoped that your experiences would provide a foundation for and illuminate discussion around current psychological theory and practice in the planning and delivery of psychological interventions.

### **What will happen to the information I have provided?**

Everything you share will remain confidential. All your personal details will only be accessible to the researcher. The recorded interview will be transcribed and your personal details will be anonymised in the transcript. All audio recordings will be erased once the research is complete. Once the transcribed data has been analysed, you will have the opportunity to read the data and make any further comments you wish to add and check if you are happy for me to still use the material.

### **Who do I contact if I have any further questions about the research?**

Should you have any questions or issues you would like to discuss in relation to the research, please contact myself or my supervisor using the details below. We will be available for contact for a period of 6 months after your interview has occurred.

Rima Karim, Trainee Counselling Psychologist

University of East London

Email: [u1141390@uel.ac.uk](mailto:u1141390@uel.ac.uk)

Dr Jane Lawrence, Research Supervisor

University of East London

Email: [j.lawrence@uel.ac.uk](mailto:j.lawrence@uel.ac.uk)

### **FURTHER SUPPORT:**

Talking about your experiences can be both therapeutic and difficult. If you feel that after your interview you have been feeling low or you feel that you wish to explore some things further:

1. your GP can refer you to receive further support from psychology or counselling organisation if you feel this may be of benefit.
2. The Samaritans also provide emotional support and can be contacted on 08457 90 90 90. For further support please visit [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

## APPENDIX 3

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (Before pilot interview)

- I was wondering if you could tell me about yourself before you got married?
- What ideas did you have about married life and living with in-laws before your own arranged marriage? Prompt: Who or what influenced your ideas / hopes/ expectations?
- Tell me about your own arranged marriage?
- How did you feel at the time about it?
- What do you think now about what you expected/hoped for? Prompt: how is life different?
- What was/is life like living with in-laws? Prompt: What was good about it/not so good?
- How do you see your role in the family now?
- If you could change your story in any way, what would you change?
- What would your advice be to other women who will marry and live with-in laws?
- What do you think the future looks like for other Bangladeshi women and the topic of in laws?

## APPENDIX 4

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (After pilot interview)

- Could you tell me a little bit about how your marriage was organised or arranged?
- What ideas did you have about married life and living with in-laws before your own arranged marriage? Prompt: Who or what influenced your ideas / hopes/ expectations?
- Tell me about your own arranged marriage?
- How did you feel at the time about it?
- What do you think now about what you expected/hoped for? Prompt: how is life different?
- What was/is life like living with in-laws? Prompt: What was good about it/not so good?
- How do you see your role in the family now?
- If you could change your story in any way, what would you change?
- What would your advice be to other women who will marry and live with-in laws?
- What do you think the future looks like for other Bangladeshi women and the topic of in laws?



# University of East London Psychology

## REQUEST FOR TITLE CHANGE TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

### FOR BSc, MSc/MA & TAUGHT PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS

**Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for proposed title change to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology.**

By applying for a change of title request you confirm that in doing so the process by which you have collected your data/conducted your research has not changed or deviated from your original ethics approval. If either of these have changed then you are required to complete an Ethics Amendments Form.

### HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THE REQUEST

7. Complete the request form electronically and accurately.
8. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).
9. Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to: [Psychology.Ethics@uel.ac.uk](mailto:Psychology.Ethics@uel.ac.uk)
10. Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with reviewer's response box



completed. This will normally be within five days. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your project/dissertation/thesis.

### **REQUIRED DOCUMENTS**

3. A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.

Name of applicant: Norjahan Begum Karim

Programme of study: Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Name of supervisor: Dr Claire Marshall

Briefly outline the nature of your proposed title change in the boxes below

Proposed amendment	Rationale
<b>Old Title:</b>  Bangladeshi Women's Experience of Life with In-Laws: A Narrative analysis	Change of title was suggested by the examiners in their post-viva report to better reflect the nature and findings of the study.
<b>New Title:</b>  British Bangladeshi Muslim Women's In-Law Relationships: A Narrative Analysis	

Please tick	YES	NO
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and agree to them?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Does your change of title impact the process of how you collected your data/conducted your research?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Student's signature (please type your name): Norjahan Begum Karim

Date: 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021

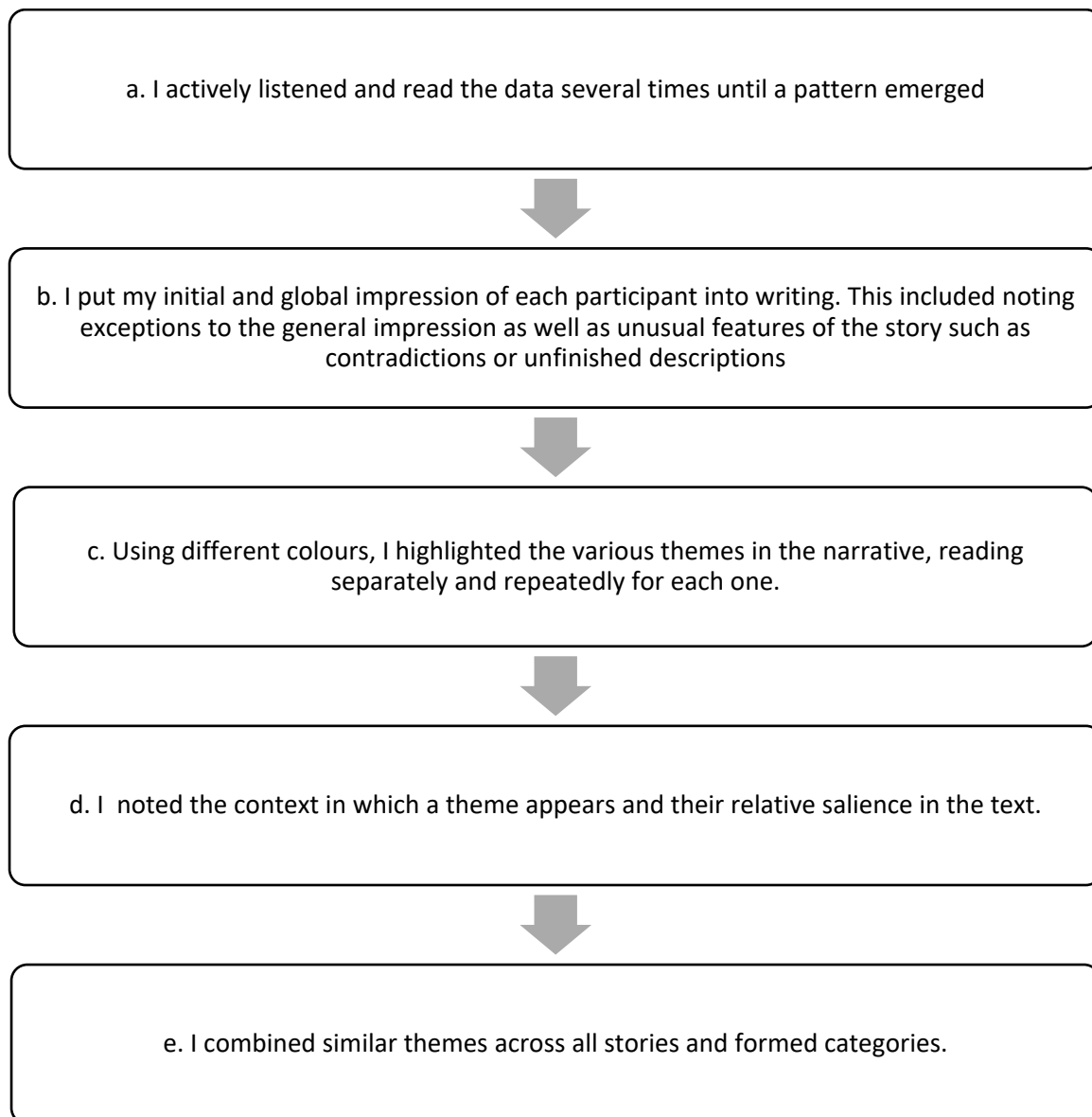
TO BE COMPLETED BY REVIEWER		
Title changes approved	YES	
Comments		

Reviewer: Glen Rooney

Date: 22/03/2021

### AUDIT TRAIL

The diagram below outlines the process of holistic content analysis and how the themes arose. Using excerpts of one of the participant's narratives, an audit trail is provided to clarify how the themes were generated. The multiple stages and layers of analysis helped capture the complexity, richness and nuanced features of the narratives.



Participant: Nasima

**a. Actively listening to and reading the data several times until a pattern emerged**

This stage involved reading and immersing myself in the narrative. As well as listening to the interview and reading the transcripts simultaneously, I made notes of patterns that I noticed and my personal reflections. This included paying attention to the tone of what was being said as this is not captured in the written transcript. I focused on both the content and the performative elements of the narratives, concentrating on what felt important to be heard, how the narrative was told and focusing on any repetitive storylines or phrases. Additionally, I noted my reflections after the interview in a reflexive diary. Excerpts of this are included below:

*Personal reflections:* Throughout the course of listening to her narrative, I felt saddened, frustrated and at times anger as she shared her experiences of her in-law relationships. I met her at a time where her story appeared to be moving forward as she was no longer living with her in-laws whom she shared having difficult experiences with. However, although she was trying to live life in her own terms and her story appears progressive, I also hear the long term impact the struggle and burden of wanting to be the “perfect” and “good” daughter-in-law has had on her life. I felt saddened that Nasima had compromised significantly on her wellbeing and acquiesce to meeting expectations of her husband and in-laws so that she can prove that daughter-in-laws should not be blamed for breakdown of relationships. I feel surprised that although she wanted to share her story to console others who may have gone through difficult experiences, she still seemed to advocate for women to live with in-laws and to give “100%” like she did.

Nasima reminded me of both relatives and previous clients who had shared similar experiences. Post the interview, I found myself reflecting a lot on her experiences, especially around women tolerating distress as a marker of not spoiling the image of the “good” daughter-in-law and going to extreme lengths to protect this image. I feel these reflections will be important to bear in mind through the analysis so as not to confuse or impose my previous experience onto Nasima’s account.

- *What were some of the common patterns/themes/storylines?*

Loss of her identity and who she was before marriage compared to after marriage; many experiences of being controlled and abused, not supported; isolated; not being able to share her difficult experiences and tolerating distress even at cost of own wellbeing.

- *Why was the tale told that way?*

There had been a significant amount of time that had lapsed since she decided to leave her ex-husband and in-laws and it appeared she has had some time process some of her experiences. It appears that Nasima felt that daughter-in-laws are often blamed for not wanting to adjust and adapt to living with in-laws after marriage and she wanted to share her story as a way to disprove this belief (that she felt was commonly held by the Bangladeshi community). She also thought that sharing her story may help others.

Nasima shares a variety of experiences of going to all lengths to make sure she fully “embraced” doing what is expected of her by her in-laws. These experiences often included conducting herself in a way that fit the ideal image of the perfect daughter-in-law; this included wearing saree, to be at a constant servitude to her in-laws, cooking, tidying and cleaning, and eating after everyone had eaten and being told what to eat. She wanted to share that she did everything she could to please her in-laws demand and do what is expected.

Nasima would avoid eye contact and laugh when sharing emotional aspects of her stories or maybe she felt uncomfortable talking about painful experiences. I wondered whether she was experiencing shame in recounting some of her experiences and wanted to downplay the intensity of some of her experiences. I also wondered being a Bangladeshi woman myself she may have felt I may judge her like the way she feels the rest of the Bangladeshi community would judge women; she perhaps wanted to prove to me that she is not to blame for the breakdown of the relationship with her in-laws and did everything that she could please them.

- *In what kinds of stories did the narrator place themselves?*

I felt that Nasima placed herself in stories of struggling to be seen and heard within her in-laws. She seemed to occupy a subordinate position in the family with little power to challenge and manoeuvre around her difficult experiences. It seemed she was determined to tolerate any distress, no matter how difficult, to prove that she was a “good” daughter-in-law.

- *How does the participant locate themselves in relation to the audience, and vice versa?*

It appeared that in telling of her story, I represented the audience she wanted to give the message to; the wider Bangladeshi community or communities in which the norm is women marry to live in extended family settings with in-laws. It appears that her narrative is a way of getting

herself heard and seen in the way that she perhaps was not when she got married. She locates herself in the story as someone who has had experiences of living with in-laws and is able to talk about her experiences to prove and dispel beliefs that the onus on maintaining relationships with in-laws lies on the daughters-in-law. She seems to want to highlight to the audience that she is someone, who was committed to building a relationship with her in-laws and provides the lengths she went to maintain the relationship, despite very challenging experiences. She seems to want to send a clear message that women should not be blamed. As she explains at one point in her narrative, the relationship is two ways, don't just blame the daughter in-laws.

- *How does the participant strategically make identity claims through their narrative performance? What other identities are performed or suggested?*

Nasima provides a variety of experiences where she places herself as the role of victim. Her sharing of cooking and serving guests after giving birth to a baby, not being supported and feeling like no one understood highlights that she felt powerless to challenge some of the difficult experiences. Her lack of support from her husband and experience of being bullied places Nasima as the victim and her husband and in-laws as villains in the story. It is not until Nasima finds out about her ex-husband's extra marital affair and experiencing physical abuse in her marital relationship that she decides to leave. It is interesting that difficult experiences with her in-laws did not influence her decision to leave; this may be because she did not want to be judged for ending the relationship and being blamed for this. By sharing her decision to leave her marital relationship after psychological abuse from her ex-husband, she is able to position her ex-husband as the villain and herself as the victim/survivor of her experiences.

- *What was the response of the audience and how did they influence the development of their narrative, and interpretation of it?*

I really felt Nasima was proving to me that she did everything she could to be the “good” daughter-in-law and despite her efforts, the relationship broke down. I continuously wondered how maybe my presence as a Bangladeshi woman made her feel that she needed to convince me that she is not to blame for the ending of the relationship and perhaps as a researcher I was in a position to get her story heard in the community and change their perception about perceived judgements made about daughter-in-laws.

**b. Noting initial and global impression of each participant into writing. This included noting exceptions to the general impression as well as unusual features of the story such as contradictions or unfinished descriptions**

This stage involved summarising the initial impressions and interpretations of the narratives after the transcripts were read several times. These summaries formed the “global impressions (Lieblich et al. 1998) which include descriptions of the salient features of the narrative and how the stories were told. The excerpt below is an interpretation that I noted of the initial impressions of Nasima’s narrative.

**Global Impression**

Nasima’s narrative account is reminiscent of the role of “Cinderella” who didn’t really have a happily ever after. Nasima presents herself in a “passive” way, unquestioning the new traditions and rules of her in-law’s household around dresswear and duties. She likened her experiences at her in-laws as regressive as though “they’re living in Bangladesh in the village” expecting a daughter-in-law to respond to their every whim and desire with little flexibility. Nasima appeared to work tirelessly to meet these expectations at the expense of her own self-care. Putting others first was paramount including eating when told to, usually after everyone else had finished eating, and eating what was given to her.

Nasima seemed to be happy to present her story with the hope that it may help others and demystify the idea that daughter-in-laws are not open enough to adapt to living with in-laws. In the telling of her story, it was clear that Nasima did not want to be blamed by society or her husband for not doing enough for her in-laws. Informed by Indian movies, Nasima was in agreement with the idea that it is “morally correct” to respect the heads of the households and she wanted to fit into the mould of the daughter-in-law as presented in the soaps and movies. Whilst Nasima seemed passionate about advocating for ensuring daughter-in-law are not mistreated, her narrative was expressed in an ambiguous way; flat tone, reducing eye contact when recounting difficulties and simultaneously upholding a hesitant but painful smile. There appears to be sadness and deep-seated anger with the “bullying” she experienced and her identity in the story seems to be disparate to the “passionate”, “strong-minded” person she described herself to be. Despite her negative experiences, Nasima still felt as a daughter-in-law one must preserve the cultural values and persevere to make the relationships work.

- c. **Highlighting the various themes in the narrative using different colours, reading separately and repeatedly for each one. I organised the quotes for each theme in a table.**

Themes were identified based on either the space devoted to a particular storyline, the strength of a particular theme based on the details the participant provided about it. Additionally, themes were also identified based on the perceived importance of a particular theme or a position adopted by the participant in the narratives. These themes and meanings were discussed with the supervisor. Below are selected quotes that were organised into tables for each theme. Notes were made on the transcript and reflexive diary.

*Theme: Shock*

A few of the quotes selected for this theme:

Nasima	(laugh) "It was the biggest shock of my life. It wasn't a shock...It was the biggest change." (81-82)
Nasima	"...I was in a big shock. I couldn't sleep, I hadn't even brushed my hair for like days and I ended having these knots, because I had to rush downstairs first thing in the morning because I know I'm going to be into trouble if I'm not down because I could hear the room door opening that's 5:30-6 AM." (115-118)
Nasima	"... I think on the second week I just burst into tears. It all hit me. I was like, "Oh my God what's happened to my life?" I just... I was like crying as I'm cooking and his siblings were just talking and giggling and I think his brother saw and I kind of wiped my tears and eventually he said, "Oh what's the matter has anyone said anything?" I'd say no, no. I couldn't explain. I said, "No, I can't explain what it is..." Yes, it was just shock." (23)

*Theme: Control*

Nasima	"...his family is very strict and I knew his dad wasn't going to take me and my dad was very old-fashioned they wouldn't have said, "Oh my daughter is still going to work." My parents wouldn't even allow me. They wouldn't expect a daughter-in-law to do that. It wasn't the norm then..." (47-50)
Nasima	"...my sister was married five years before I was married... she had in-laws yet and I knew that it's expected...she had to wear sari, she has to cook, she has to ask for permission before she comes (visits natal family). I knew all that and I thought, "Yes, that's normal." But my experience was slightly different. She still had flexibility that she can eat whenever she wants. She didn't have to wear sari anymore... certain things that I wasn't ready for. Like you can't eat until you've been told to eat and you have to eat what's given in your plate...(146-156)



Nasima	“...to be told what you eat, when you can eat it. Everybody's ate, the guests have ate, you have cooked for 15 hours but you are not going to eat because your father-in-law... he hasn't come from the mosque until he is and your mother-in-law hasn't come down and sat down you can't sit down. For me that is something that nobody goes through.” 231-237)
--------	--

*Theme: Lack of Support (from husband)*

A few of the quotes that selected for this theme:

Nasima	“But then there was something that he said that after I get married, I can work, he would facilitate for that. And like kameez and that he will speak to his dad... but he never brought it up... he never asked his family if I can wear kameez. It's just something that was left (275-289)
Nasima	“He was difficult as well. I guess he did expect me to give him his breakfast at six o'clock although like... I've had like God knows how many stitches I have just come from the hospital and the baby has to eat. Waking up every two hours he still expected me to give him his breakfast give him his curry, cook for his sister...” (336-339)
Nasima	“He wanted more even more.... just wanted me to make his family happy and if they say things to me whatever, I shouldn't be coming in telling him or anybody. (390-393)

*Theme: Abuse*

A few of the quotes selected for this theme:

Nasima	“...say I was so busy trying to finish the six curries by the time my father-in-law comes from the mosque and I was busy and I forgot to ask her whether she wanted tea. She'd come in and putting the kettle on and she'll be like, “Khaitai ni amma saa?” (mum would you like tea?) just to her mum “aar khew khaita ni?” (Does anyone else want tea?) (358-361)... The fact that she came and I didn't give her tea upstairs. She has to make her own tea. And now she feels obliged she has to ask to make one for me... but see the thing is not her role... (368-370)
Nasima	“I just felt that his family bullied me, he bullied me. I saw everything was unfair.” (433-434)

**d. Noting the context in which a theme appears and their relative salience in the text.**

I followed each theme throughout the narrative and noted my conclusions, keeping note of where the themes appeared, the transitions between themes and the context for each one. I paid particular attention to episodes that seem to contradict the theme in terms of content, and mood

of how the participant evaluated the story. Additional notes were made on the transcript and reflexive diary.

**e. Combining similar themes across all stories and forming categories.**

After completing the above analytic steps for all 10 participant's accounts, the narratives were considered collectively. Reading across the narratives, shared plots were identified resulting in four main overarching themes. Quotes for each theme were merged into a table. Subthemes for this were also identified, highlighting the similarities and differences across participants in positions adopted, content or performance. The themes highlighted presentation of the varying positions and experiences within the participant narratives. This meant that whilst each participant is represented in a theme, they do not necessarily appear in all the subthemes; this reflects the heterogeneity of their experiences which highlights the subjective and nuanced features of the narratives.

**Initial process of highlighting and making notes (Interview Transcript: Nasima)**

**Interviewer:** First of all thank you so much for agreeing to take part in the research. My first question would be is if you could just talk me through how your marriage was arranged or organized when it did happen.

**Interviewee:** I got married it wasn't an arranged marriage. It wasn't an arranged way but my parents and his parents, they organized it, set the dates and the whole venue and that. I knew him from the age of 15 and then by the time I was 18 and a half, his family sent marriage proposal to my parents and then my parents agreed. We had a nice like our marriage plans probably eight weeks or about six weeks. Then we took and we-

*Nasima got married quite young (common to get married young at that particular time in the 90s?) Finds it difficult to say she was dating before marriage and instead says it "wasn't an arranged marriage" (perhaps of fear of being judged, (culturally and religiously frowned upon to be in relationships outside of marriage). Marriage required family approval. Despite cultural and religious rulings around dating demonstrates going against traditions...*

**Interviewer:** It happened very quickly?

**Interviewee:** Yes. It happened really quickly, both family really got on. It was one of those. When you look back now it was one of the most big plush weddings.

**Interviewer:** You knew your partner?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And your parents, both parents agreed?

**Interviewee:** My parents knew that I know him. That's one of the reasons why they just kind of agreed because they wanted me to be happy. They wanted to get me married to who I wanted to get married to, make things simple. But his dad didn't know. His mum and sisters knew because **his dad's very strict and very old-fashioned.**

*Makes a distinction between her natal family and in-laws. Suggests her parents wanted her to be happy and "agreed" to choice of partner (family approval still important) Contrasts this and labels father-in-law as "strict" and "old fashioned" suggesting that marrying a partner of choice would not have been accepted. Presents and implies her family is more supportive and "liberal/modern/progressive."*

**Interviewer:** How long ago was this?

**Interviewee:** 1997. That was 19 years ago.

**Interviewer:** 19 years ago. Okay. You got married and... what was life like at that time for you so you were quite young?

**Interviewee:** I dropped school at 16 years **I wanted to study and by that time it was a bit of a taboo and stigma. My parents weren't very sort of academic encouraging parents.** Although they knew that I was quite enthusiastic in studies and I was quite an able child, quite a talent but they didn't really-- **it was a whole like society thing, they had to get me married.** Then I worked... so I stayed at home by a few months so my mum went to Bangladesh after I left school with my brothers my younger siblings and then that was like mid... Then I didn't put the my name there because my dad said he didn't want me to study because it was a mixed school that I had been going to.

He didn't want me to go to sixth form there, so that I could still go and enrolled in a girl's school. Even then, he wasn't very happy because I wanted to do business admin. That was like March-February time, so I still had a few months to play around until September. I went in and got myself a part-time job after my mum came back in April, in a supermarket. Again I had to find a local because I wasn't going to be allowed to travel far and my mum came to pick me up. Then I worked there as a cashier because I've had work experience from the age of 14. I used to work in a local corner shop. I just worked there and then I didn't go back into studying because my parents didn't want me to go back to school.

*Studying – was a bit of a taboo (women not expected to pursue options outside domestic sphere?– exercised agency within her situations (working in a shop from age 14. Went to work whilst compromising on not going far and being picked up by her mum. Did not go to study because of gender expectations. Extracts illustrates some contradiction with her previous comparison between her family and in-laws. Selective rulings about what is acceptable (father accepted Nasima to marry partner of choice but did not approve of going to mixed school; did family rush marriage to avoid shame for people finding out about Nasima's relationship? Protecting honour?)*

**Interviewer:** It wasn't encouraged?

**Interviewee:** No. I just stayed there about a year and a half and from there I got married. A week before I got married I left two weeks before.

**Interviewer:** At the time that you got married you gave up work?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Is there a reason for why you gave up work?

**Interviewee:** It was just because of my ex...he did say that after I get married he'll help me find a better job or something else. But his family is very strict and I knew his dad wasn't going to take me and my dad was very old-fashioned they wouldn't have said, "Oh my daughter is still going to work." My parents wouldn't even allow me. They wouldn't expect a daughter-in-law to do that. It wasn't the norm then.

*Gave up job 2 works before getting married. Her ex-husband said he will help find a better job. Parents and in-laws were "strict". Wasn't the norm for DILs to work then. Message: there is an expectation of what a daughter is able and not able to do. She mentions it wasn't a norm then suggesting that certain expectations can be understood within the context of a particular time. Nasima also seems to be accepting of this as daughters-in-law not working was not something that applied to her only but to other women in that time period. Nasima labels father-in-law as strict but doesn't label her family this way even though she acknowledges her family wouldn't have approved her to be in employment. Shows how natal and in-law family are complicit in controlling women.*

**Interviewer:** Back in 97? You gave up your job and your ex-partner thought you might be able to get a better job after marriage but you kind of in your mind knew that it might not happen.

**Interviewee:** I was happy with it.

*Nasima replies that she was happy with this choice. Choosing to agree with others also a choice? Perhaps a desire to be a good DIL and wife overshadowed her desire to work. An acceptance of cultural norms over her personal wishes.*

**Interviewer:** You were okay with that at the time?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Tell me a little bit about what happened after you got married. Who did you live with?

**Interviewee:** After that my dad lived with his family. He's got very big family, but when I moved in he only had a brother who was 17 and sister was 13, although he's got five sisters and a brother.

**Interviewer:** Big family?

**Interviewee:** Two brother actually, yes. One of them from my step-mum and there was...when I got married, three step brothers and sisters were still in Bangladesh. When I moved here I moved into a temporary accommodation that was decant. They'd lived there for years but people were being moved.

**Interviewer:** Decant?

**Interviewee:** Decant as in they were going to bring them down.

**Interviewer:** Okay

**Interviewee:** We were the last people at the whole block to stay. When I got married, the second or third day later, they got the key for the new house, but they knew they were going to get it. They just wanted the wedding to happen here and then they were going to move. But that was a temporary accommodation. The house they were going to rebuilt there. The plan was that they were going to come back to the same place in a new building. On the ninth day I moved, but yes it was the father-in-law, mother-in-law, myself and my kids' father and his brother and sister. He has two sisters and brothers all local, like the married ones. They used to come around every day or less with their kids and them. I was just a housewife really.

*Lived with husband PIL and siblings in law. She had other siblings in law, who were married and who all lived locally. Described herself as housewife. Talked in a low tone. Agreed to give up and said she was happy before but sounded like she wasn't entirely happy with being "just a housewife." Narrative indicates that having all the married of in-laws coming around regularly, positioned her to be at home as housewife.*

**Interviewer:** Okay, all right. You moved in with them. How was life different or was it different after you got married compared to before?

**Interviewee:** (laugh) It was the biggest shock of my life. It was the biggest change. As a person I've always been very strong-minded but I've always been very resilient. I knew his family was very opposite to my family, very orthodox were very strict in their own fashion.

*Describes her experience as a shock after she got married and then change and laughs about this. Perhaps the change was shocking? Describes herself as strong and resilient perhaps setting the context for the following sentence where she describes her in-laws as orthodox and strict in their own way. Described her family as strict before and now sees another version of "strict" "in their own fashion." Each family has their own rules about what is acceptable...*

**Interviewer:** In what way?

**Interviewee:** Like the daughters were not allowed to wear anything other than shalwar kameez. They had to wear the headscarf and salaam their dad first thing in the morning, they were not allowed to wear lipstick. The mum would get the brother to beat them up if she found them curling their hair, can't listen to music, can't watch TV. Opposite of my family, total opposite. I had my hair, I use to wear t-shirt in front of my dad, hold his hand. Whereas with them it's a very formal relationship. Ji, Ji-oy-ji-na khoilai na khene? This, that. "Why is your chest showing? Why is the scarf here?" It was just totally different, although I knew it I didn't know the full extent.

*Restrictions on clothing, expectations on conduct and how to address parents, rules around what the can and cannot do. Had to be more formal. Implies a very distant relationships This is very different to her parent's home – may explain the "shock". Consequences for breaking rules so mother-in-law would get son to physically abuse the daughters. Witnessed how women in the family are controlled and abused, may have influenced her to not "break the rules" Illustrates the power that family have over women,*

and how women may also be complicit in abuse, maintains patriarchy.... power help by elders over youngsters... rules appear to be for girls only?

I always got married thinking that for me I'm one of those people whatever I do has to be excellence. So I thought if I'm going to get married, I'm going to be the best bow the best wife, so I went in there with that mind that I'm going to combat whatever. When I got there, "Yes okay if you want me to wear sari 24/7, I'll wear the sari."

*Nasima conformed to the dress code (sari) expectations as she wanted to fulfill her role as a wife and daughter-in-law to the best of her ability. Demonstrates a strong desire to be a good daughter-in-law and not challenge rules/culture/tradition of what is expected of a daughter-in-law. Clear rules that other girls in the family can wear salwar kameez but daughter-in-law has to wear sari.*

I have never worn kameez other than on Eid days. Even then I was like, [unintelligible 00:07:10] as I grew up thinking that I always wanted to be different to the Bengali girls. I was always different but in a very modest and a dignified way. I never wanted to just follow the norm. I always wanted to be different. I never wore kameez. My dad had never made us to wear headscarf,...

*She talks about not wearing traditional Bengali clothes and wanted to be different but still conforms to rules around modesty and dignity. Was not expected to wear headscarf at home Heterogeneity on what is considered modest within Bengali community. Nasima's narrative illustrates some conflict with following some norms but also "wanting to be different." She let's the audience into her personality pre-marriage in the beginning of the interview. It appears that after marriage there is little room to be "different" or to be "herself" as there are lots of rules to follow and abide by after marriage in her new role and identity after marriage.*

...we were never told to really pray unless once in a blue moon. Whereas his family you can't eat unless you've prayed. When I got there, yes, I tried to fit within their expectations.

*At home wasn't really required to fulfil religious obligations. Control around fulfilling religious duties at in-laws in order to eat. Her narrative reveals a lot of themes around learning about expectations and control over 'how to be.' Perhaps this explain her experiences of shock and labelling her in-laws as strict which she feels is different from life before marriage.*

**Interviewer:** What were their expectations?

**Interviewee:** Their expectation were... I don't know. Even till now I still search and I think the expectation was that they wanted somebody...they wanted a daughter-in-law who they see in the Indian movies back in the black and white times and whatever they've heard of back home. But their mind was sort of like...they're living in Bangladesh in the village but they're in a real..they're not in that world though. You're in the modern times now, if you know what I mean? They wanted a **bow** (daughter-in-law) who wakes up first thing in the morning wearing sari salaams the father-in-law, touches their feet, breakfast is ready before

they even come down, cooks a meal, cooks...I can't explain. I don't know they just wanted...but I tried my best. I always tried.

**Interviewer:** Did you do all of that?

*Implies the expectations were unspoken. Sounds like she was trying to work out their expectations as she was living with them. "Learning on the job." She makes assumptions on what she thinks her in-laws wanted. She portrays her in-laws as "backwards" and implies that their expectations indicate that are stuck in their life in the village in Bangladesh which isn't fitting with modern day living. She draws on old movies as a way of illustrating on what she assumes may have influenced and shaped what her in-laws wanted from a DIL. Says she really tried her best. It sounds like the desire to be the "best" daughter-in-law also has costs to it; in trying to be the best does not match how she thinks things should be...*

**Interviewee:** Yes. At the beginning and then I was in a big shock. I couldn't sleep, I hadn't even brushed my hair for like days and I needed having these knots, because to rush downstairs first thing in the morning because I know I'm going to be into trouble if I'm not done because I could hear the room door opening that's 5:36 AM. Eventually when I went to my mum. That was three weeks after. That was the longest three weeks of my life [laughs] and all I did was to sleep and my auntie thought I was pregnant.

*Whilst trying to adapt she talks about the impact this had on her. She reverts back to using the word "shock again." She speak of how trying to keep up with expectations impacted on perhaps her self-care and physical and emotional wellbeing such as her sleep. Pressure from herself and in-laws to be perfect and also avoid consequences of getting into trouble. As a daughter-in-law, she implied she had to conform to complete servitude. The pressure to live to these expectations came from herself too as she wanted to be the best daughter-in-law. She probably found it hard to balance the expected demands on her. She also notes the natal home being a place of rest and respite where perhaps she can be "herself."*

**Interviewer:** Because you were tired.

**Interviewee:** Then the day before going...first I was going back to his brother when he said, "Well, but you're so excited you're going to your mum's now." I said, "Yes. I'm just going to go and all I'm going to do is sleep." And then he went, "Oh my God don't say that and your family is going to think we don't let you sleep." I was like, "That's what I want to do." Ami boya o gumai zitam, I used to sit in one place and I used to fall asleep...

*In-laws do not want to portray themselves in a negative light to others. Daughter-in-law is also responsible of how she presents her in-laws? Is able to express her feelings but in a jovial tone and not able to express it fully in how she truly feels. Perhaps not able to talk about her struggles. Handles situations as way of preserving relationship without offending?*

**Interviewer:** Doze off?

**Interviewee:** Yes, one time. I think on the second week I just burst into tears. It all hit me. I was like, "Oh my God what's happened to my life?" I just...



**Interviewer:** Second week of your marriage?

**Interviewee:** Yes. I was like crying as I'm cooking and his siblings were just talking and giggling and I think his brother saw and I kind of wiped my tears and eventually I was asked if I had seen anything, I'd say no. I couldn't explain. I said, "No, I can't explain what it is."

*Elaborates on the shock of experience. Feelings caught up with her. Adjustment appears to be difficult. Sibling-in-law asks how she's feeling but she wasn't able to understand the experience herself at the time in order to explain it to others. BIL shows some concern. Also demonstrates that sometimes the host family may not be aware of adjustment that a new person makes and their experiences. Hard to articulate experiences as its happening. Takes time to process and make sense of? Perhaps the shock and being a novel situation also makes it hard to make sense and articulate experiences.*

**Interviewer:** Do you know what that feeling was at that time?

**Interviewee:** Yes, which is just shock.

**Interviewer:** Because of the change?

**Interviewee:** everything...It wasn't a nice experience, that's why when I hear marriage I just think, "What have you gotten yourself into?" Because it was...I can never explain that feeling.

*She is able to make sense of that memory over time. Perhaps the pressure of meeting expectations of others meant she may have neglected her feelings and needs, didn't consider it as important as being a "good DIL." The pressure of being the perfect DIL may also affect the way information is processed which may lead to difficulties in understanding and articulating experiences hence not being able to "explain that feeling."*

**Interviewer:** All right. You touched on it a little bit as we were talking before, you were saying that your parents-in-laws probably expected a daughter-in-law from the Indian movies or something from black and white or something you were talking about. I wanted to know, did you have any expectations or ideas about what life would be like living with in-laws? Did you have any idea?

**Interviewee:** Yes. I thought it would be similar because my sister was married five years before I was married seven years, she had in-laws yet and I knew that is expected. She had to wear sari, she has to cook, she has to ask for permission before she comes. I knew all that and I thought, "Yes, that's normal." But my experience was slightly different. She still had flexibility that she can eat whenever she wants. She didn't have to wear sari anymore and her husband was so more-- he had more authority in the family so his parents would listen more to him.

*When discussing her expectations of married life, she conveys that she learnt from her sister and this seems to match her assumptions about what she thinks her in-laws wanted from a DIL (DIL from Indian movies/black and white days). Although she is aware and familiar of the implicit expectations of DIL this doesn't make the actual experience easier and the familiar may still feel new as they "live" and adapt through the experience. But she describes her sisters experience of being different from hers. Implies that her sister, over time didn't have to conform to dress codes in the family, was able to eat in her own time*



*and felt her sister's husband had more authority over his parents. She implies a husband's role is important in mediating experiences and paving a way for more comfortable living for wives. This segment also illustrates that even coming from the same ethnicity, experiences can be different like it is with her and her sister.*

Because mine was different, because my ex is not in control of his mum, sisters and dad. He's still submissive, if you know what I mean. He has to follow their rules as well and certain things that I wasn't ready for. Like you can't eat until you've been told to eat and you have to eat what's given in your plate.

**Interviewer:** Food was given on a plate?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** By who?

**Interviewee:** Mother-in-law

**Interviewer:** You didn't serve yourself?

**Interviewee:** No. And it was always like until you've been told.

*Implies that her ex-husband was under the authority of his family (could be that he was also young, 18 when he got married). Implies that her husband was powerless. Despite being male, Nasima implies women in the family like his mother and sisters had more authority over him and describes him as submissive. Although unclear, his position may also have been affected by the idea that his mum and siblings allowed him to get married to a partner of his choice which gave them leverage to control him and Nasima in exchange for their support for marriage?*

*Talks about being unprepared about control over food – mother-in-law had authority over this.*

Their food was even different. The way they cook their rice was different. I never showed that I didn't know so different, so alien. I just watched and just took it on thinking, "Oh, I know this," kind of attitude, I never saw easy cook, I never knew what una rice was, I was only 18, and my dad and as we grew up we were like, sheltered, we never went to other people's houses," we're not like those kind of families that enor goro henoro gya boi roi I had a very less life experience. I didn't know that

**Interviewer:** Other ways of living.

**Interviewee:** I did show, "Okay, I know."

*Talks about difficulties of adapting to food and how it was cooked. She didn't want to show that lack of knowledge and familiarity with different cooking and eating patterns. Perhaps as a part of preserving the image of the perfect DIL? Looks back and acknowledges she was only 18 and didn't have much life experiences. She talks about not having much exposure to others as she describes living a very sheltered life before marriage and not visiting other people's houses (hence lack of exposure to the different ways that people live)*

**Interviewer:** It sounds like you wanted to adapt.

**Interviewee:** I was also ready to adapt. That's why I managed very long. Someone could say, "Oh my God, like my sister in laws when they came, that got married..." What I was doing and how they treated me they were like, "What the hell." Some would have left a week... They would tell me, "Oh you need to leave, this is disgusting."

*She implies that she survived the length of time that she did at her in-laws because of her intention to want to adapt. It appears that Nasima tried consistently hard not to tarnish the image of the subservient and dutiful daughter-in-law. Some indirect support from sister-in-law (husband's brothers' wives) evaluated her experience negatively:*

But because I always had it, "No, I'm going to make it work" because one of the reasons why I do want to actually share my stories because I know some people think, "But if daughter-in-laws are not open or they don't sacrifice or they don't adapt or they don't welcome and embrace their in-laws, how is it going to work?" It's always the daughter-in-laws...

*Here Nasima presents her intention of why she stayed even under difficult circumstances. She implies that "people" (relatives/family/community?) assume that DILs are judged and blamed for not embracing living with in-laws and adapting to them. She really tried to challenge this assumption that portrays DILs as non-conforming of the cultural norms. She also presents here that the role of a daughter-in-law requires that they make active steps to "sacrifice" "adapt" and "embrace in-laws"*

**Interviewee:** but actually I feel very passionate that that's not because I can tell you 100% my experience. I went in there, ready adapted, I embraced it. There were certain things that were so painful but I never shared it with anybody. I just kept going. My point is it's not a one-way-- it's not a one-sided coin. It's two-sided and it always has to be known by that. I don't want people to think-- and when people say it when I sit there I think, "Am I doing justice to the whole thing by saying, 'no, hold on a minute, I'm a living proof. Actually I've been there and that.'" Because if I felt there was a bit I went in there with this expectation and I wasn't ready and I was judgmental or wasn't ready, I didn't give 100%. Nobody gave-- I can say people know, who've been part of my life in that journey will say that, "Yes, she gave her part." Don't say it's just the daughter-in-laws doing that.

*Nasima very firmly talks about being proof that daughters-in-law cannot be blamed. She implies that the relationship is two-way and it's not just the daughter-in-law who should be blamed. She stumbles. She talks about not sharing her "painful" experiences and her perseverance to keep going. It appears that much of the way she conducted herself was to ward off any potential blame that could be directed at her for not conforming to her role as a DIL. It maybe that it was too painful to share her experiences? Perhaps not talking about difficulties, tolerating distress and to keep "going" is part of the sacrifice she perceived a daughter-in-law needs to make?*

She needs to understand how they eat. We cook our rice differently. My mum says I was taught to cook rice in a way that we never chucked the water...we never drained the water.

But when I got there I saw that's how they did it and never ever told them that, "We don't cook rice like that." I had to be told how to... I was shown by his sister how he eats his bread, the day after I got married. I could have said I don't wana know how I make I never did that. I still sometimes don't get it right. After 17 years 19 years I've tried to make for my kids but... I was only 18, I still accepted that but that's their way.

*She refers to not just big adaptations that DILS have to make but particulars of everyday living that may be different from pre-married life and gives an example of cooking rice. In keeping with the pressure to be the perfect DIL it appears that, showing any resistance or rebelling against the family norm/rules would taint that image and so she expresses that although she knew she had the choice to rebel or not conform, she chose not to do that. Perhaps this preserved her image of the subservient DIL, who accepted a different lifestyle, who does as she is told without complaining.*

**Interviewer:** It just sounds tough actually and it sounds like you kind of suddenly got on with it because you wanted to adapt, so some--

**Interviewee:** Yes, for me I never wore sari and I wore sari 24/7 like if I went to bed, took my sari off and put my pajama on, oh Nasima nise aaw tumar howr re dakhra. Again I had to put the whole garment back on and go down. When someone says, "Oh but you know since..."

**Interviewer:** Why was that important, the sari?

**Interviewee:** Because my father-in-law and mother-in-law that's the image of a bow and I got married to please them.

*She talks about having to wear a sari in the presence of her in-laws as this was consistent with the image of a good "bow" (wife/daughter-in-law) and being a DIL meant pleasing her PIL.*

Again my husband is happy if his mum and dad are happy. It was like a triangle thing

*Nasima also implies that pleasing her parents-in-law was a way of ensuring her husband was happy. She uses the metaphor of the triangle to suggest that her behaviour impact on the her husband and in-laws.*

**Interviewee:** but psychologically, sometimes that's affected me in life because I think sometimes I've had my reactions in some way and people find it a bit abrupt. It's because it was always about pleasing other people. Sometimes I think of people as being unfair and expecting them. Again I feel some of that I react in aggressive ways because they don't understand where that's stemming from. I'm quite fed up, I just I'm fed up of trying to make everybody happy now because they don't understand where I've come from.

My family do in a way but they are not learning in that psychological way that actually, I'm affected by my past. They're just a bit different now but hey, and sometimes it's reflecting...

*She reflects on the long-term impact this had on her life. She talks about her reactions and how some people find her abrupt. She alludes to the pressure of pleasing others that may have led to this. She explains that this is because people don't know about her past. She said her family may understand some parts of her experiences but suggest they may not fully understand how her past affects her current behaviour as they're perhaps not psychologically minded. It appears that whilst she chose to remain quiet about her story she also has a yearning to be understood.*

**Interviewer:** But you've made sense?

**Interviewee:** I make sense of it, why I react like that and all that. I might just be short tempered at this...

**Interviewer:** That's why...

**Interviewee:** That's why because I've always had that, oh my goodness, from childhood. I was 18. I never got to be who I wanted to be. I was meaning to be somebody and then I tried to please everybody but I never made anybody happy. I just made myself more miserable.

*She suggests that although others can't understand the way she is, she has been able to make sense of why she is the way she is now she also implies that pleasing others may have been a trait that she has had from childhood. Perhaps this may have been an expectation at home and from women in particular? She reflects that in the process of pleasing others she has made herself more miserable. She perhaps assumed that she would be happy as person if others were happy with her but in pleasing others she may have neglected herself which has made her unhappy.*

**Interviewer:** Yes, it does sound like actually you were really trying hard to please everyone and I want to stay with what you were saying before I just want to understand kind of way your ideas about being a daughter-in-law, moving in with in-laws and where that came from. You had some experience with your sister getting married but you noticed that there was more flexibility with her. She still had to ask and come to your mum's.

**Interviewee:** All that wasn't a big shock. For me that was general and I had like sister-in-laws like mamur goror bhair bow. You know that when you're married you have a husband you have to make sure you have that authority and all that, but I think there were other sort of things that I think sometimes I still can't... I haven't shared with my own sister. I never shared that. I felt that was quite like... to be told what you eat, when you can eat it. Everybody's ate, the guests have ate, you have cooked for 15 hours but you are not going to eat because your father-in-law is still [unintelligible 00:18:12] he hasn't come from the mosque from Esha and it's 12:00, 11:45 and you are dying to get to bed but he's still going to sit here and food is gone cold again so you're going to have to reheat it and put it back in the khotta for him, and until he is and your mother-in-law hasn't come there and sat down you can't sit down.

For me that is something that nobody goes through. My two year-old is crying on the floor because he needs to be in bed-- in fact I can't go home because I've not eaten and I can't eat without my mother and father-in-law because [crosstalk]

*Nasima reiterates again that expectations of DIL in general wasn't a shock to her but she feels some of her experiences were very unique in comparison to others. There*

*is some suggestions that there must have been some shame around her experiences which is why she couldn't share this with others, for example she talks about not being able to tell her own sister. It could also be that not sharing negative experiences was about protecting her in-laws image as a family or assuming that talking about negative experience is not in keeping with the idea of a perfect DIL.*

because I had my own house here but I still. Basically, two years after I moved to the temporary place while they were rebuilding the house the council found out that me and my kids father we got married they said, wait, so they are not going to rehearse us back into a four-bedroom house, they're going to rehouse us into a three-bedroom because I am an extended family apparently, me and my ex.

My father-in-law he tried to, he got a (inaudible word) with the housing but they said, "Well, that's the law but what they can do..." because he filed a complaint, legal case against them. So then kind of said, "Fine you can have a house nearby." They gave us this house and my in-laws lived on the end of this road here. But they said that, well my in-laws said that, obviously they're not going to move in here. That wasn't a discussion with me that was a discussion with his sister. She was saying, "What are we going to do?" Why are they getting their own their own house, "Are they going to leave you?" their mum was like, "Nah they're not gonna move." I was pregnant with my eldest

*It appears in Nasima's story that she had a place of her own which she used to go to at night and sleep. Because they lived on the same road as each other she was expected to be present at her in-laws everyday. In her story it is suggested that her and her husband were not allowed to move in. Her sister-in-law seemed to have also contributed to this and also played a role in controlling Nasima's life.*

I'd stay in one of his sister's bedroom when she stepped on the living room although my house wasn't ready. My house wasn't ready for... Once it was ready anyway six weeks later, I wasn't allowed to move in. I just moved my stuff in and then his sister, one of his sisters moved in. He exchanged the house. She lived in one of the bedrooms rent-free. A few months and then Ramadan came my baby was about nine months still sleeping on the baby basket. So they realized actually they have to let me come and sleep here now. At night I used to come and sleep here.

**Interviewer:** But during the day...

**Interviewee:** When I used to wake up straight away I used to go there cook, clean whatever and then after dinner I used to come back. Obvious I can't come to bed, come home here because I have to feed them, mop, clean put everything back then come and go to bed.

*It appears considerable effort was made for Nasima not to move out even in overcrowded conditions (perhaps because they expect a DIL to live and benefit from the servitude, independence not encourage for DILs, a way of maintaining power over DIL?). When her son was 9 months had and needed more space to sleep, Nasima said only then she was able to go and sleep in her home.*

**Interviewee:** ...Obviously like certain things like that and then not having your own bedroom because it was only three bedroom. Mother-in-law has her own bedroom and then **dewor and nonond**. I always had to pray in the hallway and it's such a busy house. Son-in-laws, everybody stepping over you, the kids are running after you. You pray get up and go back in, what your character is. They were very young into their food, family. There kind of things were the struggles that I wasn't prepared for. You know what I mean?

*Pressure to serve constantly. Not expecting everyday struggles that made experiences difficult*

**Interviewer:** Yes, of course. It doesn't sound like you knew what life would be like after marriage.

**Interviewee:** I mean I understood all that.

**Interviewer:** What did you understand? What was the usual?

**Interviewee:** I understood that I would probably have to wear the sari, I would have to ask his mum permission **if I want to go to my mum's**. But then there was something that he said that after I get married I can work, he would facilitate for that. And **like kameez and that** he will speak to his dad. But when I got there his sister was like, "Oh let me see all your clothes, what you got from your mum's" I had luggage full of kameez but quite a new one, because I never used to really wear trousers and stuff at my mum. Then she's like, "Where do you get kameez? You know my dad doesn't allow that." I said, "Yes." I got a bit upset with her comment. I said, "Oh, never mind" **[unintelligible 00:22:13]**

Because my point is that that's the discussion between me and my husband and she was like, there was an outfit she was actually mine before I got married and then she borrowed it. She is like, "Why don't you just give me the outfit that kameez of yours because you are not going to be allowed to wear it?" And I know she liked it because she borrowed it from me once. And I said yeah I'll see but it's the first time I was quite assertive actually. Anyone I would have given to, because I got upset by her comment. I was like, "Yes, maybe." I just shut my luggage. I was like, "That's between me and him" but he never brought... he never asked his family if I can wear kameez. It's just something that was left. I just continue wearing that.

*Nasima implies that as an ideology, she understood what would be expected of her as a DIL but probably didn't anticipate the intensity of her experiences and how it would impact on her. What she feels disappointed with is some flexibility around certain rules around clothing and work and she looked to her husband to facilitate for these for her. Her narrative illustrates the absence of direct communication between in-laws.*

I mean there were things that I thought that might be but it wasn't bad. **I never really made a big deal out of it because I knew so it wasn't going to go anywhere.** If we do with this we can't-- **His dad was a very strict man.** Just cause problems. My expectations of his dad was you have to cook and stuff.

*Nasima implies that she knew there were certain expectations, like cooking but didn't think that was a "bad" thing for that to be expected. Nasima implies that she didn't make a big deal out of her requests as it may have been futile to bring it up due to perhaps the high likelihood that these requests may not be fulfilled. and may cause more problems especially as her FIL was a very strict*



*man. Her FIL assuming the position of power places Nasima as subordinate and powerless in the relationship.*

**Interviewer:** You had to cook maybe seek permission if you want to go to your mum's, if you-- and wearing saris these things you were familiar with?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so where did this knowledge come from? How did you know that this is to be expected? Where does that come from?

**Interviewee:** Because I saw it everywhere and then when I was a daughter-in-law

**Interviewer:** Okay, you mentioned...so your sisters and do you mean your friends as well or family and relatives-?

**Interviewee:** No my relatives weren't in it. Although there was one that they just continued being normal wearing whatever they wear. I think also I knew I was culturally expected and I was quite a cultural girl as well quiet it's still believing following the culture where I was...

**Interviewer:** And you talked about before from the Indian movies, did you mean--?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I used to watch Indian movies then.

**Interviewer:** Okay. When you were talking about your in-laws, they also got influenced by...

**Interviewee:** They're the biggest followers of Indian movies.

**Interviewer:** What did you learn from the Indian movies?

**Interviewee:** The daughter-in-laws. They have to respect mother-in-law, mother-in-law is like a head of the house, the father-in-law is the head. You have husband and sisters who you can have to look after and away. That kind of thing.

*In the conversation we clarified that Nasima expected that she would cook and would need permissions to go to her mums and wearing saris as this what she saw other DILs do and implies she conformed to it because she was a "cultural girl" and believed in "following culture." Her identity as a DIL was also shaped by Indian movies and her desire to fit into that. It appears that she also was also influenced by movies like her parents-in-law were (even they she implied that they were perhaps old fashioned in their thinking)*

**Interviewer:** How did that influence your thinking?

**Interviewee:** It was just something that I thought morally it was good. You respect your elders, you know there is always somebody who is the head in the house. I didn't think that was wrong. I was a passionate teenager I always knew what was wrong. If it was a violation of a human right or that was barbaric, I would stand up to that. Certain things I wouldn't follow. Like when you give the leftovers to a daughter-in-law. No, I don't believe in that. I was strong minded in that sense

**Interviewer:** In terms of seeing other people getting married and the movies, it doesn't sound like it was a negative influence on the thinking.

**Interviewee:** I didn't feel there was anything. I actually quite felt, “Yes, I want to fit into that.”

**Interviewer:** Yes?

**Interviewee:** Yes. I didn't mind.

**Interviewer:** What was attractive about that or fitting into that?

**Interviewee:** I think it's just morals. That's what's morally correct ...

*In Nasima's story there seems to be some contradiction... she described herself as a passionate teenage and values of standing up to wrongdoing, however in her narrative she is unable to do this. This could be because some situations power structures are more oppressive than others and it maybe difficult to negotiate power under certain conditions; in Nasima's being the subordinate position of the DIL, her FIL being in a position of authority and her husband unable to support or mediate for due to his own subordinate position in his family. It appears that in doing what was “morally correct” and be a good daughter-in-law meant she had to be “strong” enough to deal with mistreatment.*

**Interviewee:** ...and I did have ambitions and I did want to stay as a daughter-in-law. I did want to have like my own time. That be able to do something like work, come home, cook for the family. Try and sort of fit everything in.

*Nasima was experiencing some internal conflict with her identity; she like the idea of a moral and dutiful daughter-in-law and although in her position as a teenager she could stand up to wrong, asserting her rights as a DIL may mean going against the ideal image of a dutiful DIL. It seemed like Nasima wanted to occupy many roles but within her own situation it was difficult to accommodate all her desired ambitions as they may have contradicted the image of the ideal DIL in the eyes of her in-laws.*

**Interviewer:** Okay. All right so you had some expectations about what life would be like. Did you hope for anything before marriage?

**Interviewee:** I think yes. I think as a 18 year old I just though yea...I will be a person that I want to be with.

**Interviewer:** What do you think happened to your hopes and expectations after marriage?

**Interviewee:** I think at first, first years I knew that his family were different, they had their own expectations, they have their way. And I try to fit into that and I still had that part, that my own private side which was like ok this is me and my partner. But then afterward after I had my son and moved to this new place and everything I just felt that no. I can't explain it. He was very distant.

**Interviewer:** Your husband...

**Interviewee:** Yes I kept telling him that and he's like oh

**Interviewer:** So you spoke to him about your difficulties?



**Interviewee:** Not more about his family. He was difficult as well. I guess he did expect me to give him his breakfast at six o'clock all day. I've had like God knows how many stitches I have just come from the hospital and the baby has to eat. Waking up every two hours he still expected me to give him his breakfast give him his curry, cook for his sister, his mum is in Bangladesh

**Interviewer:** His sister is who

**Interviewee:** Still live local.

**Interviewer:** Oh they used to come over?

**Interviewee:** Yes. Their mum was in Bangladesh and the baby was six weeks old I had to cook for that 30-40 of their guests. After I was running the house still, because she's just packing and people are visiting her and he would never understand.

*Nasima explains that as well as his family, she also found her husband to be "difficult." She describes him in a manner that perpetuates his fathers' expectations. He may have been socialised into normative gender roles in the family and maintain that status quo Also it may have been expected of him as son to carry on these norms. Nasima's story implies that her husband didn't challenge these norms and he didn't occupy much power in the family. With the "strict" FIL being the main head he was also perhaps expected to maintain a subordinate position. Nasima describes not having a supportive husband*

**Interviewer:** The pressure. So his sisters used to live locally. Did they come regularly or was it..?

**Interviewee:** Yes all day with their kids.

**Interviewer:** Did they expect you to be doing--

**Interviewee:** Yes and they just seemed to be very conniving, bitching, bullying.

**Interviewer:** How was your relationship with the manner or it doesn't sound great but what would they--?

**Interviewee:** It was funny. They'd show you they're nice I stood and asked sometimes a thing I pretend I don't know I have never heard them say that a thing about me or just ignoring their behaviors.

*Nasima described having very difficult relationships with her SILs who used to come over regularly with their kids. She said they'd show they are nice but weren't nice people, one way she coped with this was by ignoring their behaviours. She felt she was always expected to serve her SILs and didn't feel like anything was enough for them*

**Interviewer:** What would they do or say about-- how would they treat you I mean?

**Interviewee:** I would probably come in and if say I was so busy trying to finish the six curries by the time I father comes to a mosque and I was busy and I forgot to ask her whether she wanted tea. She'd come in and catch her lawn and she'll be like, [Bengali] just to her mum.[Bengali] Or she come in or she's like, "The doorbell rings go and open the door" If she

saw that it was just me in the kitchen, she just go upstairs stay in her sister's room. One day she came and had mum came down from the bath and they had their little meeting and the sister couple hours later she came down. I don't know who came. That's when she had like a bit of tantrum trying to finish drop it down. There was... never good enough for them.

**Interviewer:** Tantrum about?

**Interviewee:** The fact that she came and I didn't have her tea upstairs. She has to make her own tea. Now that she was obliged she has to ask to make one for me because is obviously. If you're going to make tea yourself I say would you it doesn't only but see the thing is not her role as a sister to make tea for her sister-in-law.

*Example of passive aggression/Emotional abuse from SIL?*

**Interviewer:** Okay, so in a way, it seems like it wasn't just your mother and father in law like everyone expected.

**Interviewee:** She's actually, sometimes even if her mum would let certain things go she would make a negative comment. She'd instill that in her. Should would be like, tumi ekhon kita, tumi ekhon khene abaar gelai gi kitcheno? Tumi khatya dewa lage ni igu? ...They'll be like ohhh, tumar lakhan khew faiba ni horin, aso khali bowaintore araam dewaat"and all that.

*Nasima felt even if her MIL overlooked an "error" on Nasima's part, the SIL would influence her MIL negatively. She relay a situation where she implies to her mum why is she in the kitchen when theres a DIL in the house and why is their mother making things easy for Nasima – example of exploitation and suggesting domestic chores are for daughter-in-laws.*

**Interviewer:** Okay and those comments didn't help?

**Interviewee:** No I'm like, "Why didn't you ask your mum?" You understand? [Bengali] all that. Somebody has to be, for sure I don't understand you. I didn't hear it better because obviously, you're human. You probably didn't know. I have never had, I was never allowed to say anything back. So this kind of things I was... I had to—

*Reaction/coping strategy: Nasimas way of coping was that she pretended she would hear the comments and she didn't feel like she was allowed to say anything back*

**Interviewer:** Who told you that you're not allowed to say anything back? Where did that come from?

**Interviewee:** Because my ex- wouldn't want to hear it. Would just say, he is just a bitch. (unintelligible) my sister.

**Interviewer:** Did he expect you to be doing this as well? He expected what his family were expecting as well.

**Interviewee:** He wanted more even more.

**Interviewer:** What did he want from you?

**Interviewee:** I don't know. He just wanted me to make his family happy and if they say things to me whatever I shouldn't coming in telling him or anybody. Then I go, "Okay, I won't tell anybody but then obviously I'm human so if I'm always quiet because there's no one to talk to because nobody talks to me."

**Interviewer:** No one talked to you?

**Interviewee:** Who's going to talk to me? He works 12-hour shifts and comes home and wants his food and his friends to two, three o'clock in the morning. And he has got his mum and his dad, sister and brother college or whatever.

*Lack of support from husband/ verbal abuse: Nasima was unable to share these difficulties with her husband and said he had more expectations from Nasima than her in-laws. She seemed to be quite isolate in her in-laws with no one to speak to*

**Interviewer:** You are at home most of the time with your sister-in-laws and your mother and father in law?

**Interviewee:** Just mother and father-in-law. Until he came home and you give them their food.

**Interviewer:** Then the sister-in-laws would come here and there.

**Interviewee:** Yes over there and stuff.

**Interviewer:** Okay. All right. It seems like there was a lot of expectations. How long did you live with them?

**Interviewee:** Twelve years.

**Interviewer:** Twelve years.

**Interviewee:** The five years... No, I can't remember that. The five years I think five-six years I did... Two years I lived with them and then five years I used to come and sleep at night and go in the morning. About eight years I was in their house as a daughter-in-law eating everything and then after eight years, I stayed in my own house here. I used to visit but they didn't want to know me then because their point was you left now technically...

**Interviewer:** Could you talk me through kind of what changed? When did you decide to? Or how did that happen that you moved?

**Interviewee:** I mean after first I found out that my ex was really into other girls. That's why I was able to sense the change, he was always on the phone. He used to treat me very differently. He never wanted to do anything with me anymore. He wouldn't discuss anything, his doing his plans or want to go out or he wouldn't even take me to his cousin's house and expect that I'm not supposed to go. He just take his sister and I can tell I was able to suss things out that and then I think, there was a time when he had an affair with the girl. My husband came and complained there was a big hoo haa and I was gonna leave.

*TURNING POINT: when husband started seeing other girls. She stay after find out about one of the affairs and after repeaed incidents of infidelity, she no longer wanted to serve him by going to her in-laws house. She made the decision to leave*

**Interviewer:** You was going to leave.

**Interviewee:** Yes, I stayed. Then he said he was going to change and then good feeling. Remember I didn't know changed. To find girls here and there. Their phone numbers and that. Then I got bit fed up and then I go to his mum's house. I didn't want to know him. And then he said how he has been sorry. Because I was fed up of that life. I said, "Well, I'm not going to tell you to leave your mum and dad, never have. But I want this life anymore, I don't want you walking around with me and I don't think I want to continue going there" and you know.

Because his brother got marriage, she had a boy, he and a wife. She was allowed to wear trousers and go to work, she's allowed to wear kameez in the house but double standards. I just felt that his family bullied me, he bullied me. I saw everything was unfair. I had two children by now. That's to turn off to school. Come and then come in with my baby and I'm being put into cooking on and she's going to work. That's lunch buy her own house, she built her own house. She's told to come back after work and eat what I cooked.

*Nasima's decision to leave was also prompted after her BIL got married and saw how differently the other DIL was treated. She found it unfair and hard to accept the double standards. The rules appeared to be different for the DIL*

**Interviewer:** So she was a...

**Interviewee:** Tai khamo zaito and I used to cook.

**Interviewer:** Okay so the rules they had for you was different to hers. Why was that?

**Interviewee:** Because she didn't want to stick to their rules. She left, three years later, she came back. So they already, because she filed divorced. She came from a more modern family and she was-- His brother hid all that about his family. But my ex he never hid. He told me his family is like this, they are strict that, whereas his brother, never and she was in a bigger shock. She's a girl, her sister-in-laws unable to wear trousers in front of-- She was a very modern girl and she was told to wear the full time the knee cap and she was like-- she couldn't deal with it.

*Nasima continues the story to suggest this was due to the new DIL not conforming to the in-laws' expectations. She presents a contrast of the new DIL who was very "modern" and came from a "modern family." Nasima suggests that the new DIL didn't want to be controlled*

She left within six months. But then I think he wanted to maintain his relationship with her. So a mediation I think but they kept all that quiet from me. For the months, to I was just the lady who cooks. I was never told that. I didn't know I knew when she came back. She told me all that, the mediation she discussed all the things that she found hard to live with. Having to cook all between 12 to 15 hours.

*Nasima explains that her BIL wanted to repair the relationship with his wife. A mediation took place but Nasima was not part of these conversations. It appears that despite doing things for the family and trying to be part of the family she was included from parts of it and in someways treated as an outsider. Perhaps because she's a woman, or maybe they don't Nasima to be influenced by the new DIL which may alter Nasima's behaviour? It seems the new DIL after leaving and hving the mediation was able to articulate her expedencies. The new DIL also*

*expressed that she didn't want to be like Nasima and didn't share the same ideals of being the "good DIL" in accordance to what the in-laws expected*

**Interviewer:** The six months that she stayed with you, you didn't talk about your experiences.

**Interviewee:** Yes she often said, "I don't know how you live like this, shouldn't be living like that."

**Interviewer:** Well so she did say it to you?

**Interviewee:** Yes just to say, I know the times when she used to stand there and cry in the hallway because she's starving as well but we can't eat and I was just normal. And she's like, "you will get used to it." She's like, "No I'm not going to be like you. I'm not going to get used to it."

**Interviewer:** So she was wasn't having the answer and so she left? So then she came back?

**Interviewee:** But she came back in with the agreement that she's going be allowed to do what she wants to do. She doesn't have to live like under their rules.

**Interviewer:** But she had her own house so--

**Interviewee:** She had her own house but he left. They used to stay there [Bengali]. Sometimes afterward they used to come back, have a shower, stay and at least go to their house and sleep. Some weekend she'd stay. Although they had their own bedroom, igu roise tarar. No one's allowed to go in there or anything.

**Interviewer:** Okay, how was that for you knowing that you are both daughter-in-laws but you're both treated differently?

**Interviewee:** I was upset but I wasn't able to express that. Not to my husband. He's the last person I was going to talk about it. That's because he doesn't want to know. He doesn't want to know me as a person let alone. He saw it. Everybody saw it everybody knows but this is elephant in the room.

*Nasima said she was upset by the differences in treatment and she couldn't approach her husband either. She felt maybe the topic of the DILs being treated differently was an elephant in the room. The NEW DIL spoke which shifted the family to adjust to DIL...if Nasima spoke the family risk losing a dutiful DIL. Nasima's compliance hadn't helped her change her situation whereas the other DIL's resistant behaviour helped her.*

**Interviewer:** Did your family know your parents?

**Interviewee:** No, my family first, didn't want to support me first few years because they thought I was just being again I want to do all I want to do in life. So I want to get my playground. Just again I'm not persevering more I make I'm just being too selfish. They were not supporting me. And they just thought in-laws are just until later yes my parents they saw what husband was doing because they used to see him out with the girl. They used to try to make me understand to leave him, and then they saw how I was being treated.

*Nasima said initially she didn't get much support from her natal family. Although Nasima said her family were supportive of her to marry a partner of choice, it seemed like her choosing her partner also framed her in a particularly way where she was viewed doing whatever they wanted in their like regardless of others' feelings. She also gives the impression that her family viewed her in-laws behaviour as something that is normal and its just something to tolerate perhaps. It wasn't until her family witnessed her ex-husband with another girl that they encouraged her to leave. It seems like from this perspective that even if Nasima wanted to leave her in-laws earlier, she probably would lose the support of her family, in-laws and perhaps community. Until the place of blame could conveniently be placed on her ex husband, this appeared to be a legitimate reason to gain support. This highlights how natal families can be complicit in the mistreatment of their daughters by normalising certain cultural norms and practices.*

**Interviewer:** They did find out. How did they find out?

**Interviewee:** My brother used to see him from the bus. My sister-in-law saw him in our place once. So other things came and my cousins used to see him as well. Then there some guests who used to come and visit me and they used to see me wearing sari being told ekhon aw ono mataw aya tumar bhai aysoin, zawgi ekhon, khani ani law, they used to think what is that. We wouldn't do with our own sister-in-laws. And they knew that wasn't me. I'm the biggest chatterbox the lively person, centre of you know, part of everything... just stand stand. Now you can go, go

*After her family saw her ex-husband, they were able to see how she was being treated at her in-laws, being dictated when to sit with her family, dictated when to leave the room and when to serve food. Her family didn't recognise Nasima in her identity as a DIL which was in contrast to the more extraverted version of Nasima they knew of. She relates a story where her cousin stopped visiting Nasima because they find it "painful" and feel Nasima is not being herself:*

**Interviewer:** It sounds quite robotic.

**Interviewee:** [laughs] I remember my second cousin told me is that why I don't come to see you afa because it's really painful, because that's not you. We don't come with (inaudible) like you.

**Interviewer:** That's not how they knew you. The person you were before was very different than before marriage. Could you talk me through how you were? How would you describe yourself?

**Interviewee:** Lively and confident. Very... I don't know. But I was loving, I was very giving but I wasn't allowed to talk. I wasn't allowed to be where I am very artistic, Very you know hard working.

**Interviewer:** Before marriage. So, there's some restrictions even before you were generally quite lively and-

**Interviewee:** Yes, I was restricted as I wasn't allowed to go out. We come from a strict family in that sense. But we have those liberty days where you can wear what you want in a decent way allowed out, straight home. We had our limitations. So, I left and then elsewhere, I think my son was five. So I'm going to leave and not live like that anymore. Then he decided "Oh,

no I'm going to stop going there anymore" But we live here, we visit his mum and dad here and there. But that's his choice, it wasn't mine.

*I go on to ask Nasima to describe herself before marriage to gauge the identity shift. Interestingly her earlier version of the narrative where she described her family as the "total opposite" of her strict and orthodox in-laws. Nasima's description of her family highlights different notions of "liberty" and "strictness" that can co-exist in the Bangladeshi community. She relates that she couldn't be herself before marriage as well*

**Interviewer:** To want to live here and then visit?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I wasn't going to say "Oh, I'm not going to be with you unless you leave your mum and dad's house." That's not for me to say. He wants to be one of those sons who gets all the shopping for his mum, he's done for his mum. Why am I going to say, you have to go live with mum. You might as well be with somebody who's happy to do that with you, your mum, but I'm not happy to do that.

*In expressing that she couldn't be herself at her in-laws either. She decided to leave and didn't want to continue being the DIL. She didn't imply that her husband had to leave to (perhaps because of his religious and cultural obligations towards his parents?) Nasima makes her life choice without imposing this on her ex-husband*

**Interviewer:** That's when your first son was five?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** That's when you decide to be--

**Interviewee:** Nine months, yes, but that's his choice. But they were not happy, my in-laws.

**Interviewer:** That you moved?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I can tell like she used to go, she used to make sarcastic comments of--

**Interviewer:** What would she say?

**Interviewee:** Like if I salaamed her and she pretended she didn't hear me and she'd go to my sons Okhon aiso ni?. Like she's trying to dodge greeting me. Then she used to -- and then they started treating me like I was a guest.

**Interviewer:** What does that mean?

**Interviewee:** Khaitai ni go saa, saa ditam ni beti, and if is naa...

**Interviewer:** Like in a sarcastic way?

**Interviewee:** No, like if you had a guest in your house, "Sit, sit, please sit". It's like suddenly I'm like a guest who needs to be treated... I'd be like and I get up anything "Oh, are you going to cook, do you need anything for cooking and she'd be like nah there's nothing to cook." And then I'd open the cupboard to put something away, some stuff from the sink. I see that there were meat or something put out but she wasn't getting it out because she didn't want me to cook.



When she decided to leave, this changed the way her in-laws related to her, by ignoring her or treating her like a what Nasima describes as a “guest.” Nasima was ousted by in-laws. Nasima says that she didn’t want to stop being part of the family or helping them out but wanted to perhaps negotiate the relationship which wasn’t so one-sided

**Interviewer:** What do you think that was about?

**Interviewee:** It's all about the fact that tumi ekhon aya dekhai tai ni manchore, tumi ze bala bow, tumi gesso gi... but I wanted to. I left because it's not convenient, it's time I moved on. But I still want to be -- I want to be part of your lives. I want to do what I can do for you guys. I'm happy, I often [inaudible Bengali]. She did because it was all about.. for then to the point if you're not gonna live under my control. No, it's not about the curry, is it? It's not about the fact that we want. It wasn't about that.

*Nasima explained that preventing her from cooking was that would be showing the world that she's a good DIL when in their eyes she lost the status when she left. Nasima explains though she physically left she still wanted to be part of their lives and still be a dutiful DIL in some ways but this was not accepted as she explains, Nasima's decision to leave mean she violated rules about who was in control.*

**Interviewer:** What it was about, do you think?

**Interviewee:** It's about the fact that... the point is you left, you can't come and cook.

**Interviewer:** Okay, Who is it to show.

**Interviewee:** Who is it to show, you know why.

**Interviewer:** How do you see, obviously at the time... you mentioned before you're seen as the cook. How did you see your role change over time in the family? If it didn't change?

**Interviewee:** It didn't change.

**Interviewer:** How do you see your role when you moved out?

**Interviewee:** I don't know, I just wanted to be... again it was just the whole, I suppose you know, the whole concept of self self-actualizing. I just wanted to be who I want to be. It's natural, you can never be moulded into something and stay like that and be happy. Because I was unhappy, that's why I was always moody, also shocked and hurt, I was always upset.

*Nasima realised over time she just wanted to be herself. She talks about self actualising (did she use this comfortably because of her knowledge that I was a psychology student?) It also appears her hurt and upset motivated her to want to leave and have her own space. Not needing to justify why she wants her own space also signifies some of power she gained from asserting her needs:*

**Interviewer:** And understandably, yes.

**Interviewee:** So yes, I just wanted to do what's good for me, I'm not going to justify it. Nothing wrong with me, having my own space.



**Interviewer:** So, now you have no connection with them?

**Interviewee:** No.

**Interviewer:** Okay, when did... you mentioned EX, when did your relationship end?

**Interviewee:** Five years after I moved away from staying with him. That's been seven years now.

**Interviewer:** Seven years now, and what made you end the relationship?

**Interviewee:** I think I like to say overall. The period of twelve years, things escalated so he just...it wasn't safe. There's domestic violence, so violently, so fast.

**Interviewer:** From him?

**Interviewee:** Yes, the temporary place, and I came back to the house, with the help of the law.

**Interviewer:** Okay, must have been a really hard time for you actually.

**Interviewee:** I left work, it was work actually who were nice. I went on a career break six months to...

**Interviewer:** So you did work?

**Interviewee:** Yes, after I left his mum's house.

**Interviewer:** Oh, you did go back?

**Interviewee:** I tried to bring back what I really wanted to do so I started working part-time. I studied a little bit and then I do this job that I do now. I did part-time and I also took driving lessons and passed in driving. But sadly, I had to end my marriage which I didn't want to, so that was hard. Because I didn't want to end it, but I had to.

*Nasima later also speaks of leaving her husband when over time the relationship became physically abusive. It appears that she sought help from the law to return to her home. She also found her workplace to be supportive. It appears that Nasima was able to exercise much of her agency when she left her MILs place. Her desire to have it was not successful (in-laws, work, other personal aspirations and relationship with husband) and suggest that she had to leave her in-laws and subsequently her marriage in order to meet her personal ambitions. Though it is clear that this was not her preferred choice but a choice she felt forced to make. Nasima explained that even though she left her husband some years back she didn't understand why he became physically abusive. It is interesting that Nasima was able to recognise abuse when it was physical but didn't articulate other experiences as abusive*

**Interviewer:** Yes, it does sound really, really tough. I know this is going to sound painful, but what eventually led to him being abusive towards you? What were his... what do think happened?

**Interviewee:** I don't know, I'm still trying to figure that out myself [laughs]. But then I got all these assumptions. Some things don't make sense. Only he knows what he was doing.

**Interviewer:** Okay, where there...I know this probably sounds like a really silly question, but were there any positives in moving life after marriage?

**Interviewee:** I learned how to be a good cook from them [laughs]. Yes, that's part of it. I think it made me resilient and learned to cook. That still lives on. So yes, just self-discipline really.

**Interviewer:** Self-discipline, what do you mean by that?

**Interviewee:** I think living with in-laws makes you more disciplined, in a way that -- if you get I'm really young, I was quite young. I was a bit immature. It just sort of keeps you grounded.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and you think that's a good thing?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I think now it is what's lacking people. When I see youngsters get married now, I dissolve in my head I don't tell them what I see on the other side of that coin.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean that? I don't understand.

**Interviewee:** I think everybody's so relaxed now. They get married today, it's not a big change from their mum's house.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so you think that people are just living life in their own terms and that's what you-

**Interviewee:** Yes, and I think that might some -- I don't think that's a really good thing all the time. But then what I see that some mother-in-law's, let the old expectations are gone from the mother-in-law's. But now, I think the too laid back, where they're not helping the newlyweds to understand this change, the adaptation is it. But I think-

**Interviewer:** Could you give me examples of that so I understand a bit more.

**Interviewee:** I feel that naturally when you get married, there's good and bad changes. But I think I've got family members I've seen that certain family members got married and they've got their wife come--

**Interviewer:** To your family, to your parents?

**Interviewee:** That the newer generation, they don't really understand that you've adopted a new role and that comes with understanding cult values--

**Interviewer:** Cultural values?

**Interviewee:** Yes, some of the cultural values and the fact that there's somebody who is in the house that is to be respected. I think sometimes, yes this will get married women value, say freedom of choice a lot.

*Nasima's story takes an interesting turn. Despite the negative experiences she has had at her in-laws, she feels that marriage has changed drastically where everybody is too relaxed – she implies the loss of “old” expectations from in-laws does not help newly weds to understand change and adaptation. She looks towards her own natal family to give examples. She feels that women in the “newer” generation do not understand their role as a DIL and the cultural values that dictate the shaping of this role and implies loss of respect for household members. I*

*wondered if Nasima “experience” toughened her up and she expected other women to also go through the same process, that she too also expect women to mould themselves to the life of their in-laws so that they stay grounded and maintain cultural values. Despite her negative experiences that may have been shaped by cultural norms, she still seems to support this. It is possible she is sing the lens of her own experiences to evaluate her brothers getting married and the impact the new generation of DILs are having on her own family. Perhaps it is more personal now.*

**Interviewer:** Okay, I will come back to that. That is really interesting and might be related to the next question that I have for you. If you had to change your story in any way, what would you change?

**Interviewee:** Any? I will change my story, I want it to be in a place where I wanted it to be. Because I was also adamant that I wanted to show [Bengali] can live in harmony with in-laws. And be able to live with them, up until now I was able to but, to be able to maintain a marriage where a husband understood his wife and his family, mature enough to meet both needs and be just.

*It seems like Nasima’s unrelenting need to prove that daughters-in-laws can live with harmony with in-laws impact on the way she sees all marital relations and implies much of the effort is dependent upon the daughter-in-law to make the relationship work. She too places herself in the position with the rest of the Bengali community she criticised earlier on in the story where she argues that “people” blame daughters in law for not wanting to embrace embracing life with in-laws. This illustrates how ones own experiences can become a cycle of perpetuating women subordinate and vulnerable position of being blamed when the joint family breaks down. Nasima talks about her ideal of living harmoniously with her in-laws. She goes onto explain that she wasn’t asking for her husband to disown his family but to ne mature and fair to meet the needs of his wife and family*

**Interviewer:** Yes, so it sounds like you really really wanted to make it work in your ideal world you would still be with them.

**Interviewee:** Yes, I wanted to pick up whoever could in my remit because I always wanted to show that. There's nothing wrong with being a daughter-in-law who cooks and who's nice. There's no such thing as our daughter-in-law and sister-in-law is naturally hate sister-in-laws. I wanted to really make – no, I really, really wanted -- I really wanted to show that actually it's not like that.

*Nasima provides a view of challenging assumptions that comes with in-law relationships such as the DILs expected to cook and hatred between SILs and DILs:*

**Interviewer:** You wanted to make it work?

**Interviewee:** Yes, to show that there's good to it and it does work. Again, I went through I know that many times there were saris that I'd never worn people have given me and sister-in-law told me like that, “No, you take it. Now you can wear it.” I haven’t worn it yet. There

were times when I didn't buy myself eid clothes but brought his sister and stuff his mum I didn't buy it because I knew you can't afford it. I'd made sure that I give his brother spending money. I've made sure that his younger brother, his sister's son they were going to Bangladesh and they have no – my ex would never think of stuff like that... I'll be like Oh make sure you give them money, he'll be like yeah yeah

**Interviewer:** You took a lot of responsibility.

**Interviewee:** Yeah there were loads of responsibility I had to become like this mature lady but I was on it and I was alright with it. There was a time his time when his brother, his mum told me that she thinks that her brother doesn't...her son doesn't go to college. And she wants me to phone the college and find out. And I was like, because obviously, he's going to kill me. She said...I said, "Okay." She goes, "Yes, would you do it for me?" I said, "Yes, okay whatever, yes." Then she goes, "Get the phone ask your school, ask this college does it go." I pretended that I was calling them [laughs].

**Interviewer:** To keep the peace.

**Interviewee:** Yes, then when he came I said, "Your mum thinks you're not going college she made me call. Obviously, I had to pretend, so you better sort yourself out." He said, "Thank gosh."

**Interviewer:** You were a savior?

**Interviewee:** Yes, and his sister, eugh, I had to be her mum at school once [laughs]. Yes, yes. I don't always talk about this. I don't like boasting, I don't want to talk. Yes, I just always I know in my heart that I tried. I wasn't...it's not that if you give as a daughter-in-law you will get. I don't like that statement because it's not always true.

*Nasima provides many examples where assumed the role of kinkeeper and facilitated relationships within her in-laws family. She also speak of two stories where she helped her brother and sister in law out for getting into trouble in school and college so in turn they don't get into trouble within their family home.*

**Interviewer:** You've learned that you don't always get back what you give?

**Interviewee:** No. I'm not going to say it's wrong. I'm going to say that that was my destiny. That made me who I am. Sometimes I sit here and I think, "No, at that point me having my own story. Maybe sometimes I can use it to motivate people or to console people."

**Interviewer:** Okay. What would your advice be even if you knew that other women were getting married and they were going to live with in-laws? What would you advise be to them?

**Interviewee:** I would only say give 101%. It doesn't matter if you feel that they don't respect -- giving it back. You keep going until you think one day you can't. That same advice I would tell everybody.

**Interviewer:** When you say give your 100%, like do what?

**Interviewee:** Yes, continue to be the, you know a better person. Whatever you can do because it's -- when the going gets tough and you think, "I've had... this is it. I can't do it." You know in your heart that you left no stone unturned. That gives you resolve and strength.

**Interviewer:** Has that given you resolve and strength?

**Interviewee:** Yes, yes. That's why I go to sleep just like that, because I don't have these ifs and buts in my head. There's maybe one or two but—

*Nasima makes sense of her experiences that it was "destiny" for her life to be the way it is and accepts that this was part of her fate. She also contests the transactional view of relationship that what you give as a DIL you will get back because "it's not true" Nasima feels that her story can be used to "motivate" or "console" people. Nasima seems to conclude that her experiences with her in-laws is strengthening and advises that other women too should always give "101%"*

**Interviewer:** You feel like you've done everything you could to be part of the family. Your advice to other daughter-in-laws would be to still--

**Interviewee:** Still give it, yes. I wouldn't say I know of my experience. I'll say don't give to whose, think about yourself and all.

**Interviewer:** Why? I found that really interesting.

**Interviewee:** It may be a lot of it is my personality, is I just think that two wrongs don't make a right. That's what I always say to my boys.

**Interviewer:** For any girls getting married you would say be part the family.

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Do what it needs to, to take to--

**Interviewee:** Maybe if I had got married to a different family and not that family. Don't forget, whatever however they treated me or how they responded to me or however they must have misunderstood me was because of their personality, their upbringing, their values and who they were. People in society knew my in-laws were very difficult people.

**Interviewer:** Okay, okay.

**Interviewee:** Yes, there's just like a really unique type. Maybe had I, my two different family, maybe I would have been able to you know they would have embraced or understood me better and maybe we would have got along better.

*Over-time Nasima is able to make sense of her experiences in a way that suggests that the difficulties in the relationship was largely to do with the attributes of the family she married into and it may have been very different to another family. This suggests that as well as making an effort to be a good DIL, further reflections also minimises the likelihood that she is to be blamed for her relationships not working out*

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** That's why I'm saying it's not fair.

**Interviewer:** If another girl was to move into a family like the family you moved into, what would your advice be?

**Interviewee:** I would probably say don't get married into that family, will try and stop them. If you already have, I would say well I will still give you 101, work around them understand them, know the dynamics.

**Interviewer:** Okay, all right.

**Interviewee:** Try and persevere with it.

*When asked if a woman was to move into a family like the in-laws she experienced, Nasima is quick to say she would try and stop them but would advise them to persevere if they were already married. It appeared that Nasima is of the view that women have the responsibility to persevere to maintain ties with in-laws*

**Interviewer:** Okay, okay, and what do you think -- obviously you've you know you've already touched on this in your story. Where you talked about how things were very different for your own sister-in-law. When your husband's brother got married and there was different rules for you and the different for her. What do you think the future looks like for this whole in-law family system?

**Interviewee:** I think I see change. I think in-laws are not so controlling and they want it all.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that's going to be the case in the future?

**Interviewee:** Yes, yes, yes. I've been seeing it evolve.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Well have you seen--

**Interviewee:** From colleagues, from my own experiences that her my mum was when my best sister-in-law got married. She got married a year and a half after me.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How was that?

**Interviewee:** [unintelligible 00:56:37] She still had the similar expectation to wear a sari. Oh you know meman aisoin, bizaw, rando, I will be there [unintelligible 00:56:41]. That's was how we all knew, it was the norm. [unintelligible 00:56:47]. My second brother who got married ten years later, I think it was different. She was allowed to go to lakeside the day after the wedding. Do you get it? Yes, and she's allowed to...she goes out and eats. Then Ramadan came four weeks later she's out eating with her friends, with him. My mum wouldn't say anything. Although I know that she's not happy with it. Then this one got married seven years later and he's different. She goes to work, [unintelligible 00:57:16].

**Interviewer:** Your sister-in-law you're talking about?

**Interviewee:** Yes. My brother's wife.

**Interviewer:** Your brother's wife.

**Interviewee:** Yes. My mum, she accepts that she's happy with it.

**Interviewer:** Happy with what?

**Interviewee:** My sister-in-law going to work.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Whereas with the other two--

**Interviewee:** First one -- even if she'd gone out and she's bored, if she was and I mean my mum didn't approve of it even though she's wearing a scarf whatever. [unintelligible 00:57:37] I know the dynamics have changed I see it everywhere now, you know in-laws. There's more positive experiences of—

*When asked about how her thoughts of in-law family systems in the future, she mentions that relationships are likely to be far more “liberal” and “not so controlling.” She relates these ideas according to her own experiences and how her mum’s relationships with her daughters-in-law over time. She talks about how expectations from her mum has evolved where her relationships from many years ago had a different set of expectations to now. 7 years back her SIL was expected to wear saree and cook and host guests, when her 2<sup>nd</sup> brother got married her SIL was able to go out and eat although her mum was not happy with this and the another brother who got married most recently, they are happy with her working. She alludes the idea of culture not being fixed and changing.*

**Interviewer:** Of in-laws?

**Interviewee:** I like that. Like I said before sometimes I think they're not really helping being some where I think in some cases. I think, I don't know. Maybe it's the mum's and whoever he's mum's or mother-in-laws, they're not instilling these, keeping hold of the certain values that they still should be holding onto.

**Interviewer:** What values do you think is important to hold on to?

**Interviewee:** Respect for elders.

**Interviewer:** How is that shown?

**Interviewee:** I think that's shown by in what you wear, how you behave, how -- it's like they just -- I know everybody wants their own autonomy. I think there needs to be and -- I know this might be petty, but I'm still traditional. I mean that, if you got married and there's your dad side wants to invite you. You get them to ask your mother-in-law and it's a whole family invitation. It's not your invitation with your husband. Nowadays I see girls think, “That was -- my sister's invited me, I'm going. Why do they not want me to tell my mother-in-law.” There's certain values I think that it's morally disrespectful. I think it's because the in-laws I've got showing that, “It's okay, you've got married to my son you know your wife.”

**Interviewer:** Yes, aside they're probably not happy.

**Interviewee:** Yes. Not happy I know and I hear it as well. I think yes that's kind of morally wrong. Because if he lived in a like if she had a flat and he was a flatmate, you shouldn't tell you flatmate you're going away for two days. It's like the same morals I think still should be instilled.

*Nasima still maintains however that certain values need holding onto especially when it comes to respect for elders. She implies that a marriage between a couple is not just about the couple but about 2 families. She calls herself “traditional” in that sense. When I asked her how is respect shown to elders.*

**Interviewer:** Okay, so like informing. What other cultural values do you think needs to be held?

**Interviewee:** As well. I think the fact that there's the role. I think roles, doesn't matter how much we hate the fact that everybody has evolved, role, gender role. Roles are important in life. I might be modern some ways. Even with my son's I always say that, "You have a role to play when I'm old. You would have to come and visit your mum. You would have -- you have a duty." Not because I'm a Bangladeshi but that's a moral just part of society that you look out for your parent.

*She also still believes in traditional gender roles*

These things, I think if you as a parent don't have that, if you don't vocalize it, you don't teach, because parents nowadays are very distant from talking about these things and--

**Interviewer:** It seems that some of the values that you're talking about is coming from your own brothers getting married and how your family might be experiencing new daughter-in-laws, as in your case, your new sister-in-laws.

**Interviewee:** Yes or just what I see at work, or what I hear.

**Interviewer:** What do you hear at work?

**Interviewee:** Or what I see. There's a girl who got married a few years ago and she still kept coming to work wearing these tights and she's quite big. She got married and she's still wearing the same clothes. I kept on thinking, if that was my son, that was my daughter in law, I would, as a mother-in-law, I would prefer that she didn't go out the house wearing clothes like that. I'm not saying she needs to wear the face veil or anything, which I do. Just modesty. You're a daughter. It's just that she's the daughter-in-law.

**Interviewer:** So, a dress?

**Interviewee:** Modestly. In a way that respects the mother and father, because I know, I'm sure that mother in law is not happy, in reality, to watch her children walk out the house wearing leggings where—

*Nasima relates a story of her colleague who got married few years ago and shows her disapproval for wearing tight clothes as this does not seem to fit with the cultural expectations and image expected of DILs*

**Interviewer:** You think certain cultural expectations about dress sense. Asking for--

**Interviewee:** Not even asking, but just keeping them part of it.

**Interviewer:** Is important to keep by.

**Interviewee:** Yes. I'm not saying that all day you need to say yes you can go and you need to ask permission everything. It's just about saying, "Oh I sort of plan to do--" I think certain things are just courtesy.



**Interviewer:** Thank you. You've given a lot of information. Thanks for sharing that. Is there anything else that you wanted to add, just in relation to this topic that you felt is important to say?

**Interviewee:** I think I would say that even though I've had whatever experience I've had with negative, I still think that you should respect husband's side. You do, they do. You still need to respect them.

**Interviewer:** That is important because?

**Interviewee:** I think it's respect same way you'd respect your brother and your mum. It's whoever goes, "Mum." I bump into my kid's father's dad. He lives across the road. It was very nasty break up, but yes. I see him, I salam him. I get my kids to **salaam** him, but ideally, I don't really want to bump into him, but that you got to respect. It's there. It's just innate I think. It's just one of those things that you can't explain. Respect is there but some people might say it has to be both ways. Sometimes it's bit higher. I would still advise people that yes, you still respect. I actually listened more to my mother in law and my father in law, than I did to my parents.

**Interviewer:** It's interesting, isn't it? That idea of trying to please others. Trying to keep the peace. Listening to them and meeting the expectation was very important to you.

**Interviewee:** Yes it was. I think it wasn't just because I wanted to make my husband happy. It was just something I want to do it because I felt that that's right. Maybe I wanted to challenge myself.

**Interviewer:** You wanted to, I suppose -- I heard you say something for you wanted to show that it can work.

**Interviewee:** Yes. Nothing wrong in that. I still won't say is anything wrong in that. I will still advocate for it. I would still advocate that yes, you should still live with in laws. There's a social element to it. You're never lonely, in a way, but sometimes you want your own space but yes. My advice is that you shouldn't really always by default think that in-laws are bad. Should always give them a go, but you need to start off on the right foot.

**Interviewer:** What would be the right foot for you then?

**Interviewee:** To embrace the differences and the similarities, because there will always be differences and similarities.

**Interviewer:** You embraced?

**Interviewee:** Yes, but it just didn't work out, because of who they were as well probably, isn't it?

**Interviewer:** It works two, as he said, it works two ways.

**Interviewee:** Yes. You should give them the benefit of the doubt. Perseverance is important. It would probably work out better if dad's been more stronger, or his focus wasn't on something else. Or he didn't understand the value of marriage. He didn't understand, because again, he got married because he was forced to get married so he thought, "Oh I'll get

married," but he wasn't ready to get married. After I got married I realised he was not ready to get married. That's his focus wasn't there. He wasn't mature enough. Loads of things.

*In working toward closing the interview Nasimas shares her final thoughts which reaffirm the need to respect husband's family. She later alludes to the importance of the role of husband and implies that the relationship would have worked out better if her husband was "stronger" – she shares that she later found out that he was forced to marry and hence didn't value the marriage. She acknowledges that he wasn't mature enough*

**Interviewer:** Sure. All right. Well thank you. That's really helpful. Do you mind if we stop now? Is that okay?