

Barriers to South Asian Sexual Development and Sexuality

by

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Abstract

The objective of this capstone is to examine the barriers to sexual development and sexuality in South Asian (SA) culture. This paper will analyze the impact of the acculturation process and the pressures to conform to new ways of living in an individualistic society that can cause cultural distress and family tension within the SA household. This paper explores the impact of colonization on SA culture and SA influences, including filial piety, patriarchy, gender roles and socialization. This study reflects cultural influences that sustain issues of sexual silencing and moral policing, which reinforces sexual shame and stigmas which limit an individual's ability to enjoy safe and pleasurable sexual experiences. Finally, this paper will explore challenges within SA culture, such as gender roles, socialization processes and sexual communication, which reinforces sexual taboos and fears pertaining to sexual development, sexuality and intimacy.

Keywords: acculturation, collectivism, culture, individualism, sex, socialization, South Asian, Western culture

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Barriers to South Asian Sexual Development and Sexuality**Chapter One: Introduction**

Today, South Asia (SA) is one of the most densely populated regions on the planet. It includes countries of India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and the Maldives (Britannica, 2023). Research shows that Canada is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, and as of 2016 SAs are the largest visible minority group accounting for 29.6% of visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2018). In recognition of cultural globalization and diversity, the American Psychological Association established multicultural guidelines to promote diversity in the education, training and practice of psychology (APA, 2003). However, despite culture being recognized as an important influencing factor in sexuality, there continues to be an underrepresentation of visible ethnic minorities in sexual research (Brotto et al., 2005). This oversight suggests the need for more ethnically diverse research in the field of sexology and questions the generalizability of sexual health research across cultures (Buksh, 2019).

Sexual Development

Sexual development is an important topic encompassing physical, emotional and social aspects of human sexuality. Research shows that sexual development has a significant influence on one's overall personal well-being; this includes physical, emotional and mental health, sustaining healthy relationships, and promoting sexual rights (Buksh, 2019). However, promoting sex and sex-related topics among SAs is a security issue for many individuals, particularly women and young girls (Tanyag, 2018). Sex-related matters continue to be silenced

in many regions in SA due to conservatism and traditional values influenced by religion, caste systems, and societal norms, which often discourage conversations about sex and view sex-related topics as private (Tanyag, 2018).

Cultural Beliefs

Cultural beliefs and values play a vital role in the conceptualization, expression and experience of sexual development, which can cause significant barriers for SAs (Buksh, 2019). In SA, sex inequality remains a fundamental challenge due to traditional cultural beliefs, high levels of stigma, pressures to conform, and fear of repercussions such as threats to one's life or social ostracisation (Dignity Alliance International [DAI], 2021). SA youth raised in Western society face a unique set of challenges from family perspectives, such as intra-community (within the SA community) perspectives and inter-community (between SA and other communities) perspectives (Sharma et al., 2020). SA adolescents in Canada face many mental health stressors, such as intergenerational and cultural conflict, academic pressure, relationship stress, family difficulty, and discrimination (Islam et al., 2017).

What is Sex

Human sexuality has been researched, documented and scrutinized through centuries, and we continue to find depth in its layers. The concept of sexuality and the constructs that represent sexuality have evolved over time and depend heavily on the legal, social, political, and cultural attitudes prevalent at any given moment in history (Das & Rao, 2019). Generally defined, sexuality is the feelings and activities that are connected to a person's sexual desires; sexuality means different things to different people and has no one fixed meaning attached to it (Singh, 2021). Sexuality is a spectrum which encompasses many ideas and issues within its domain; this includes sexual acts, sexual orientations and sexual preferences (Singh, 2021).

India played a significant role in the history of sex, from writing the first works of literature that treated sexual intercourse as an art and science to present-day modern India, which carries many nuanced perceptions about sexuality (Chakraborty & Thakurata, 2013).

Gender

Western science focuses on biological explanations of gender and prioritizes attention to the physical body, procreative functions and gendered behaviour; thus, the differences between men and women lie in fixed biological and physiological facets that position gender as immutable (Thakur, 2023). However, social constructionists explain that structural influences, social interactions, and language shape the meaning of sexuality, including how it is internalized, expressed and valued; therefore, differences between males and females are not inherently biological and reflect differences based on the cultural socialization process (Thakur, 2023). Therefore although biological factors play a vital role in sexual development, they are not facets that reflect a sex/gender binary; sexual facets, such as gender, shift over time with changes in relational meanings (Das & Rao, 2019)

In traditional SA culture, gender and family expectations are strongly connected to the expressions and experiences of sexuality; SA beliefs about sexuality are upheld by religious and social influences, which contribute to the perception of gender as binary (Thakur, 2023). It is essential to acknowledge that SA views on gender as binary are not universal and vary across regions and individuals. Research shows increasing awareness and advocacy for a more inclusive understanding of gender diversity within SA societies and movements supporting the recognition and acceptance of non-binary identities (DAI, 2021).

Who Can Benefit from This Knowledge

Many studies in North America indicate the unique challenges that SA immigrants encounter with domestic violence and minimal support; however, few studies document the barriers that keep SA women in dysfunctional relationships (Aujla, 2021). The pressure for SAs to acculturate or assimilate to Western norms has been shown to increase family conflict and the likelihood of experiencing abuse, which reinforces the silencing of women and perpetuates violence (Aujla, 2021). Research shows that cultural factors shape sexual attitudes and behaviours; however, stigmas and silencing strongly undermine the need for assertiveness and control in sexual relationships, which decreases safety and pleasure and can increase the risk for unsafe sex, and sexual violence (Thakur, 2023). With this in mind, this paper explores how traditional SA culture creates barriers that negatively impact SA beliefs, expectations, and experiences of sexual development and sexuality.

One of the most significant limitations in sexuality counselling is the lack of well-trained professionals to address culturally relevant sexual concerns; research shows that many clients lie or provide limited information about sex-related concerns due to fears and stigmas; therefore, this research is fundamental for mental health practitioners (Emelianchik-Key et al., 2022). Sex education must extend beyond human physiology and the reproductive system; rather, sex education should be conceptualized holistically by providing age-appropriate and culturally relevant information that allows adolescents to feel empowered to better understand their sexuality and relationships (Leung et al., 2019). Therefore, by utilizing an intersectional lens, I consider collectivist factors, patriarchal values and systems, and structural limitations (i.e. sexual education and communication) in SA culture and how social identities such as gender, culture, and religion interact to shape the experiences of sexuality amongst the SA demographic.

Moreover, approaching this issue using an intersectional lens allows mental health practitioners to better understand how power and privilege operate across different contexts (Aujla, 2021).

Situating Myself within the Research

As a second-generation SA cis-gender woman, I understand the nuances of SA collectivist culture and how it perpetuates the silencing and stigmatization of sex. I firmly believe everyone has the right to safe and pleasurable sex free from fear, coercion, shame and judgment. Moral policing is a term used to describe vigilante groups that act to enforce morality codes in SA without legal authority; they oppose cultural concepts they believe to be imported from Western culture and attack those who go against Indian culture (Kar & Anirudh, 2018). Moral policers are an ongoing reality for many individuals, particularly for SA females and individuals from the LGBTQ+ community (Kar & Anirudh, 2018). Issues of moral policing are not unique to SA and can be found worldwide; moral policing reflects a societal tension between collectivist values and changing social dynamics, leading to violations of personal freedom, harassment and the suppression of individual rights. Moral policing significantly impacts sexuality and sexual freedom, including the repression of sexual expression, stigmatization and shame, threats to LGBTQ+ rights, lack of sexual education and restrictions on intimate relationships.

I believe that, in part, feelings of self-dissatisfaction come from being unable to be our authentic and genuine selves. For many SAs, self-limitations are connected to historic collectivist traditions and beliefs. Sexual health is fundamental to the overall health and well-being of individuals. Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality; additionally, sexual health requires a respectful approach to sexuality and

sexual relationships which are free from coercion, discrimination and violence (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).

Key Terms

Acculturation

A process of cultural and psychological change that results from the continuing contact between people of different cultural backgrounds (Berry, 1997).

Collectivism

“Within collectivism, the core unit is the group; societies exist, and individuals must fit into them. Individuals are seen as fundamentally connected and related through relationships and group memberships.” (Oyserman & Lee, 2008, p. 311).

Culture

“Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditioning elements of future action.” (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952 (as cited in Adler & Gundersen, 2002, p. 18).

Individualism

“Within individualism, the core unit is the individual; societies exist to promote the well-being of individuals. Individuals are seen as separate from one another and as the basic unit of analysis.” (Oyserman & Lee, 2008, p. 311).

Sex

“encompasses many ideas and issues within its domain, from the act of sex itself to the varied sexual practices adopted by people; sexuality may also refer to the sexual orientation or preference a particular individual chooses.” (Singh, 2021, p. 77).

Socialization

the process whereby an individual learns to adjust to a group (or society) and behave in a manner approved by the group (or society). Socialization essentially represents the whole process of learning throughout the life course and is a central influence on the behaviour, beliefs, and actions of adults as well as of children. (Britannica, 2023).

South Asian

“Individuals of South Asian (Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Indian, Maldivian, Nepalese, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan) ancestry account for almost a quarter of the world’s population, and the South Asian diaspora is one of the largest and most widespread across the globe.” (Kandula, & Kanaya, 2021, p. 423).

Western Culture

a term broadly used “to refer to a heritage of social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, religious beliefs, political systems, and specific artifacts and technologies. Specifically, Western culture may imply Western European cultural influences concerning artistic, musical, folkloric, ethnic and oral traditions, whose themes have been further developed by Romanticism.” (Jariya, 2012, p. 65).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Many SAs face challenges in romantic relationships due to traditional norms and values that conflict with issues of human desire, such as intimacy, dating and sex. This literature highlights how barriers to SA sexuality and sexual development lead to sexual silencing,

increasing the risk of physical and emotional safety, particularly for SA women. This research will focus on the history of SA sexuality, religion and patriarchal systems that have evolved to impede sexual growth and experiences. The process of acculturation, including gender roles, sexual communication and sex education, is vital to examine since many SAs hide their romantic relationships out of fear of family and community consequences (Khera & Ahluwalia, 2021).

What is South Asian Collectivist Culture

To understand SA collectivist culture within the Western world, it is essential to recognize the theories and principles that establish the cornerstones of Western psychotherapy, which present Western ideals and biases, one of which is individualism. (Kuchel, 2000). Individualistic cultures emphasize independence and individuality, whereas collectivist cultures promote social cohesion and cooperation, highlighting the family unit as a valuable support system (Chadda & Deb, 2013). Collectivist worldviews include values such as social connectedness, harmony, unity with friends and family, collective responsibility and the belief that individuals from different generations will continue the family lineage and remain connected to others in the community (Kuchel, 2000). It is vital to note that collectivist cultures can be pathologized, particularly when compared to individualistic cultures and evaluated against individualistic cultural normalities and values. This can lead to cultural biases and misunderstandings that, in turn, can result in stigmatization and discrimination; although this literature focuses on the barriers to SA sexuality, there are many positive aspects within collectivist cultures.

Although individual differences within SA culture will occur, variations of different cultural sub-groups manifest intergenerational histories of traditions, collectivist values and practices reflected in every aspect of human life (Yim, 2022). Individuals with collectivist values

practice filial piety and prioritize group goals, norms and obligations that emphasize loyalty and interdependence to the family and community over individual needs and desires (Yoon, 2020). SAs from collectivist cultures are nested within interrelated social systems that range from micro levels (cultural contexts in the home) to macro levels (the broader socio-cultural context); collectivism influences how people relate to the world around them, including their beliefs in maintaining established social systems (Yoon, 2020).

SA collectivist orientations play a central role in family dynamics and are rooted deeply in patriarchal systems of power and hierarchy that dictate gender roles and expectations of males and females within the household and community (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Many SA collectivist culture systems place a high premium on maintaining a good social image, which is patriarchal in structure and reflects strict gender roles with the expectation that females demonstrate their worth within the family unit by exhibiting collectivist values of loyalty, humility, unconditional compliance and submissiveness to males and older females (Lowe et al., 2018). Collectivist practices teach children that female subordination and male authority are the norms and that disobeying authority figures can result in family conflict and rejection (Singh, 2020).

Historically, gender has been viewed as a binary construct, and it is critical to acknowledge that gender is recognized as a spectrum with a range of identities beyond the binary (Wick, 2022). The patriarchal values and social norms keep gender inequality alive in traditional SA collectivist culture (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Far too often, conversations around gender and gender roles are brushed off or met with defensive statements; for this reason, discussions about gender are silenced, and the principle of conformity seeps deeper into SA culture (Singh, 2021).

Many SA families, particularly first-generation SA parents and elders, hold traditional, often religiously-based values and beliefs about gender roles and sexuality (Tummala-Narra et

al., 2016). For example, premarital sex is widely discouraged in SA culture due to the social stigmatization that a girl should be “pure” before marriage and that sexual intercourse should be used for procreation which is not encouraged before marriage (Singh, 2021). According to Khalaf et al. (2018), sexual purity is the abstinence from vaginal sex; studies show that SA women refer to sexual purity as an absolute that defines a woman’s social honour and place in society, which highlights the inner struggle of a women's sexual pleasure and trying to maintain sexual purity to avoid social stigma and risk.

One of the most significant reasons to maintain female sexual purity in SA culture is related to the Indian caste system, where people are born into hierarchically differentiated castes (Lee, 2011). Sexual control was used to ensure paternal certainty to enable succession through the male line and to uphold cast purity; therefore, the emphasis on sexual control was stronger for higher-caste females (Lee, 2011). In SA culture, a woman's sexual purity is an essential factor in her marriageability status as it places a price on a woman's virginity (Badesha, 2021). A woman’s purity is viewed as a symbol of honour and dignity for the family; however, males do not typically face the same pressures to remain sexually inactive before marriage as women (Badesha, 2021). The collectivist system, combined with the gendered nature of family honour, results in the obligation of women to prioritize family honour and needs over their own; women must consider, more than men, how their actions will impact the entire family (Couture-Carron, 2020).

Given the primacy of sexual purity, many SA cultures strongly fear and discourage or forbid intimate premarital relationships; dating is considered shameful because of the belief that it leads to premarital sex behaviour, which would bring shame to the family (Couture-Carron, 2020). Many collectivist ideologies about gender roles are reinforced through generations and

place pressure on married couples to reinforce masculine dominance and ensure wives remain submissive to their husband, tolerate his actions and remain faithful; in this way, male dominance over the female kin is maintained, and the social hierarchy of SA culture is upheld (Lowe et al., 2018).

Filial Piety

For centuries, children were socialized from birth to show respect for their parents, obey members of authority without question, recognize their obligation to their family, and ensure the vitality of their family lineage (Blair & Madigan, 2019). Many Asian countries in East and Southeast Asia conform to traditional Confucianism principles, including the cultural virtue of filial piety, which is the moral relationship between the parent and child and establishes a child's respect and care for their parents (Choy, 2018). Filial piety is the cornerstone of all family matters; to serve the family, children achieve economic success, support their elder parents and find a spouse to continue the family line. The moral principles of filial piety extend beyond demanding respect; it includes sustaining close relationships with family and the community, continuing the family line, and working hard to bring honour rather than shame to one's family (Hoang & Kirby, 2020).

Filial piety specifies the norms of the family and provides social and ethical foundations that create social order within the community (Bedford & Yeh, 2019). The precept of filial piety is understandably more than a singular construct; although it demands the submission of children, it includes the protection and affection from parents to their offspring (Blair & Madigan, 2019). SA ethnic community engagement among elders and adult children who practice filial values has been shown to improve psychological wellness in elders and increase psychological distress in adult children (Li & Dong, 2018). Examining the relationship between

the pressures of filial expectations and how filial behaviours are perceived by elders has been shown to result in depressive symptoms in SA children (Li & Dong, 2018).

Filial morals can rob younger adults of privacy and sexual openness, leaving them feeling unsafe and unable to communicate their sexual needs or concerns (Buksh, 2019). Traditional SA culture promotes a strict view of abstinence before marriage, and female sexuality is considered a submissive duty (Buksh, 2019). Collectivist SA beliefs about female purity and filial demands of respectable communication work to silence sexual curiosities and desires in young adults (Khera & Ahluwalia, 2021). Traditional collectivist beliefs, filial constructs and the pressure to conform to filial morals leave many SA children to explore their sexuality in secrecy due to the fear of bringing shame to the family, which results in significant stress and safety concerns (Khera & Ahluwalia, 2021).

SA beliefs and collectivist values play a significant role in the conceptualization, expression and experience of sexual development and sexual desire. In SA culture, sexuality is a cultural construct that differs with age, social class, division of labour, freedom of social life, and kinship arrangements, specifically gender roles and expectations (Singh, 2021). However, sex before marriage is considered taboo and silenced within many traditional collectivist cultures, creating significant barriers for children and adolescents with sex-related curiosities or concerns (Singh, 2021).

Zaidi et al. (2016) identify three pivotal points of cultural divergence that result in barriers to SA sexual development; the foundations of culture, socialization, and acceptance of dating and premarital sex. SA families migrating to the Western world are constantly pressured to negotiate between two polar-opposite cultural societies; a western society that promotes

individualism and welcomes sexual openness and a SA culture that demands conformity and abstinence.

Khalaf et al. (2018) explain that sexuality is an individual phenomenon influenced by social norms, cultural expectations, religion, and personal experience; however, before colonization, the beliefs and social mores were far more accepting of sexual demeanour and sexual repertoire. Sexual interactions and expressions of sexuality should be considered within a cultural context; therefore, it is pertinent to understand the cultural spectrum which shifted SA sexual liberalism to sexual barriers and moral policing.

The History of SA Sexuality

SA is a large multiethnic and multilingual society, rich in history; the contradictions of SA attitudes toward sex can be best explained by looking at the context of history (Chakraborty & Thakurata, 2013). However, due to the limitations of this paper, many nuances of SA history cannot be included. The history of SA sexuality is foundational to understanding gender, culture, and politics that challenge sexuality and sexual desire experiences (Chakraborty & Thakurata, 2013).

Precolonization

The oldest surviving literature in the world illustrates that the first evidence of attitudes towards sex is found in the ancient scriptures of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism; the most ancient texts, the Vedas, reveal moral perspectives on sexuality, marriage, and fertility in SA culture (Chakraborty & Thakurata, 2013). In early 1500 bce, monogamous marriages among civilians were common and considered a reciprocal duty in which equal sexual satisfaction was the norm, whereas polyandrous and polygamous marriages were common amongst rulers to ensure dynastic succession (Das & Rao, 2019). Therefore, it is debatable if these laissez-fair

attitudes applied to all social classes or only to the royals and wealthy classes (Das & Rao, 2019).

In the second century, the conceptualization of the history of sex was illustrated by Vatsyayana's Kama Sutra (aphorisms of love), which embraced sexual understanding, philosophy, and eroticism through rare sensitivity and warm emotion. The Kama Sutra influenced research into sexual desire and pushed the boundaries of sexual gratification; it depicted sexual desire as pleasurable and natural for both men and women (Buksh, 2019). The Kama Sutra enforced the expression and attitude that sex is a central and natural component of SA culture and mental wellness (Chakraborty & Thakurata, 2013).

Texts such as the Kama Sutra were a source of permission to allow people to celebrate sexuality, sexual practices and play. However, it is vital to note that SA is home to multiethnic societies with numerous cultural identities, complex caste systems, different religious and spiritual practices and diverse social customs (Singh, 2021). For this reason, it is difficult to generalize the beliefs, values and attitudes toward sexuality to the whole of SA.

Gender and Sexuality Pre-colonization

In ancient India, during the Vedic age, the patriarchal male-dominated system was highly prevalent; however, women were revered and held equal status to males; women were seen as powerful and productive members of society (Mahapatra, 2018). The history of Indian culture shows Hindu festivals celebrating same-sex acts, the description of sodomy in the Kama Sutra and references to women loving women in the ancient texts of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which created the belief of universal bisexuality in human personality (Tiwari, 2010).

Recognition outside the male and female genders has only recently been discussed in Western

societies; however, non-binary identification has played an important role for over two thousand years in Hindu society (Rhude, 2018).

Hijra, often called transgender by outsiders, are known in SA society as a third gender, neither male nor female, who are typically born male but look femininely (Rhude, 2018). Historically and culturally, hijras are based in Hinduism; many identify as Muslim and few as Christian (Rhude, 2018). Hijras are believed to have incredible religious power and often perform religious ceremonies and blessings at marriage and birth celebrations; typical work for the well-respected Hijra group included begging, dancing, and sex work (Rhude, 2018).

Ancient Indian scriptures viewed sexuality as having biological, emotional, erotic, and spiritual aspects; sex work was considered a service to god and within the patriarchal structure, sex work was considered a socially sanctioned profession (Pal & Mondal, 2021). Sex work in pre-colonial India did not have the same undertone as the degraded prostitute label in England (Chaterjee, 2021). The life of a professional courtesan in India had different usages and rules, which were recognized by the courts; they were not met with aversion or commiseration as others with similar livelihoods from more civilized countries (Chaterjee, 2021).

The C Word: Colonization

Religion and Sexuality

Religion plays a vital role in one's pattern of sexual behaviour, attitudes toward pregnancy, premarital sex, and choice of marital partner (Mahajan et al., 2013). This section will explore SA sexuality, which has foundations in religion, colonial law, gender and patriarchy. These foundations directly relate to SA sexuality and sexual development, including how it is understood and practiced. The impact of colonization clashed with many SA religions and was

targeted by colonial missionaries who described SA religions as “mystical” to differentiate the essential historical truth from inferior rival religions (Heath, 2012).

Religion and spirituality are significant factors that shape human behaviour, values, beliefs and pathways to healing; these influences define the acceptable attitudes and beliefs around sexuality (Darmansjah et al., 2019). It is critical to note that many religions influence SA sexuality; however, due to the limitations of this paper, we will examine only three significant faiths found in SA culture, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, to acknowledge their impact on how sexuality is perceived in SA culture (Mahajan et al., 2013).

In polytheistic religions such as Hinduism, many gods engage in non-heterosexual unions and present as having both male and female characteristics; and individuals of the third gender (hijra) have long been known to illustrate sex work as one of its normalities (Darmansjah et al., 2019). Homosexuality, homoeroticism, and transsexuality are important aspects of Hindu literature and depict sexual liberation where all humans are equal, and women have an equal say in their sexual desires and preferences (Chandrasekar & Gurusamy, 2019). However, female virginity and chastity are considered integral to a woman's self-esteem and family honour, placing expectations and limitations on female sexuality (Ramanathan & Weerakoon, 2013).

The Old Testament of the Bible speaks poetically about sex and the proper need to guard sexual expression within the marriage (Mahajan et al., 2013). Non-traditional sexuality is considered sinful, freely chosen and a violation of God’s design of sexuality; religious spirituality is used to explain the moral viewpoints of Christians (Kelly et al., 2018). Western Christianity has diverse viewpoints on sexuality; some Christian thinkers believe sexuality can lead to a divine connection, which delimits sexual activity to heterosexual relationships and disapproves of all other types of sexual relationships and behaviours (Moles, 2017).

The Bible explains that changes in sexual behaviour result from cultural shifts and that marriage is a way of life between a man and a woman (Mahajan et al., 2013). The Bible states that the purpose of sex is procreation and to deepen one's intimate relationship; however, some forms of sex are considered taboo; therefore, sex should be engaged appropriately (Mahajan et al., 2013).

The Holy Quran explains that women and men are created equal, one gender is not superior to the other, and a woman is not created for the purpose of a man (Mahajan et al., 2013). The Islamic belief system explains that women are given liberty within the confines of Islamic rules; this includes prioritizing their role as wife and daughter, displaying modest behaviour, and dressing appropriately (Mahajan et al., 2013).

Research shows that polygamy in Islam is permitted and sometimes encouraged; however, divorce for women is taboo; therefore, many women accept polygamy, indicating lower power within the marital gendered relationship and patriarchal society (e Azam et al., 2021). However, sex is not restricted to procreation as in many other monotheistic religions; instead, sexuality is seen as an expression of spirituality bound by religious rules which carry social, economic and public consequences if sex is engaged within a socially unacceptable manner (i.e. sex outside the marriage) (Smerecnik et al., 2010).

Although there are many different religions within SA, it is vital to recognize the spiritual fluidity within SA culture. Sexuality is often associated with a mind-body connection, while spirituality is an internal experience and process of transformation separate from organized religious institutions (Joshi, 2015). Recent literature shows that the impacts of spirituality on the mental health of sexual and gender minorities can contribute to more positive outcomes and more balanced well-being (da Rosa & Esperandio, 2022).

Gender and Sexuality

Colonialism introduced a binary purview to gender and notions of perversion and criminality toward gender-diverse populations (Shankar et al., 2022). As a result of British settlement, a proliferation of laws in Colonial India was created, which reflected the shifts in values and attitudes amongst the British and its impact on Indian culture (Wald, 2009). During the British rule of India, section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was created in 1861 to criminalize homosexual activity, calling it unnatural and resulting in a punishment of life imprisonment. (Megha, 2020).

Although queer engagements continued, it was dangerous and led to a complete silencing of queer identification; many states worked hard to hide queer relations as it challenged the masculine heterosexual colonial dominance (Megha, 2020). SA sexuality before colonization was a complete contrast to the norms of Victorian courtesy; the overarching goal was to maintain the colonial state's hyper-masculinity (Megha, 2020). The imperialist influence on SA sexuality took the form of domination, repression and control; there was a deep silence among sexual minorities (Tiwari, 2010).

The freedom of the hijra community did not survive British colonization as the English views on gender did not believe in a third gender ((Rhude, 2018). In 1871, the British condemned the hijras as criminals and colonial authorities were instructed to arrest them; however, due to their religious functions for Hindus, the hijras persisted in serving their roles and were met with harsh stigmatization, which diminished their religious respect and shifted their meaning of beauty to shame ((Rhude, 2018).

The British Influence on Sexuality

Two significant events that impacted sexual ideologies and practices within SA culture and influenced the beginnings of gender discrimination, systemic marginalization and the dehumanization of the female gender include the Contagion Disease Act and the Anti-masturbation Movement (Dang, 1993; Ramanathan & Weerakoon, 2013). Within the regimental bazaars, SA women were tasked to care for and home British soldiers; in the 1850s, medical treatment of male soldiers revealed a significant increase in venereal disease within the British Army and Navy (Chaterjee, 2018).

In 1864 the Contagion Disease Act was applied to British empires to regulate sex workers in India and protect the health of men, specifically the British military men (Hiersche, 2014). A key element of the Contagion Disease Act was the compulsory examination of women (mainly sex workers) suspected of having venereal disease; in India, sex workers who were known to be visited by British soldiers were picked up, segregated and medically examined (often without consent), and if they refused they would be prisoned for up to six months (Chaterjee, 2018).

This act gave government forces the power to determine who was a sex worker and reinforced a double standard in society where only women were condemned, and men could remain unchecked in their sexual pursuits (Hiersche, 2014). In the early 1800s, relationships between British men and South Asian women were common and seen as an opportunity to marry a docile wife (Smith & Marmo, 2014). British men desired South Asian women because they were deemed submissive, obedient and paradoxically less sexually inhibited; the idea of the submissive South Asian women was widespread across most sections of India under the British Colonial system (Smith & Marmo, 2014).

British men were able to have multiple wives in India, and sexual relationships created social anxiety for women around the ideals of ethnic purity and political stability (Howard,

2018). The ideal woman in Victorian society was one of dependence, morality and chastity; the Contagion Disease Act targeted women as the sole cause of the spread of venereal disease while ignoring the role men played in soliciting sex (Green, 2022). The expectation for women to keep their sexual purity while being educated to ignore their husband's sexual transgressions was a message being passed down generationally in England and reinforced through legislation (Green, 2022).

Anti-masturbation Movement

Colonial power and race were understood through the lens of gender; the female body became a classic symbol of the racial and sexual other which was meant to be controlled and subjugated (Megha, 2020). Sexuality was seen as taboo in the Victorian era, and any kind of sexual activity which was not intended for reproduction had become detested; reproduction was seen as the only purpose for intercourse, while masturbation, fornication and sodomy developed great repugnance (Megha, 2020). The colonial ruling put women under the lens of colonial moral scrutiny and allowed heterosexual SA men to conduct marital or sexual relationships without colonial interference (Gerressu et al., 2008).

Despite masturbation's sexual health potential, masturbation had been morally stigmatized over centuries and seen as a sin in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity; in the eighteenth century, masturbation was perceived as a fatal threat to health (Gerressu et al., 2008). The anti-masturbation movement occurred during the eighteenth century; masturbation was renamed onanism, and physicians warned patients about the illnesses associated with masturbation, such as insanity, blindness and impotence (Gerressu et al., 2008). Many cures were developed for males and females, including castration and circumcision, which caused extreme anxiety (Gerressu et al., 2008).

The sexism from colonial law and principles, combined with the pre-existing patriarchal norms in SA culture, created a misogynistic framework that led to the discrimination of queer peoples and women, which was once foreign to SA culture. Victorian laws such as marital rape, adultery (now repealed), and criminalizing homosexuality led to greater marginalization and discrimination of queer peoples and women of SA culture (Chaturvedi, 2010). It is vital to note that in September 2018, several important policies regarding sexuality and gender changed in India; this includes decriminalizing homosexuality and adultery, which are significant shifts in how the States in India regulate gender and sexuality (Azhar, 2019).

In 1947 British rule in India ended, and South Asians could apply for Canadian citizenship (Ghosh, 2017). Canada has been home to people for thousands of years and was first colonized in the sixteenth century by European settlers (Blakemore, 2023). In the 1980s, the SA population was rapidly growing in Canada, and through globalization and technology, the experience of today's SA immigrants is very different from that of early immigrants (Ghost, 2017). However, literature informs us that immigrant SA women face multiple oppressions both within the SA community and as part of a racialized minority group; therefore, research needs to examine the stressors of immigration and intersectionalities of oppression (Chaze & Medhekar, 2017).

The SA process of acculturating to Western society and its sexual norms is complex. It requires a deep understanding of collectivist processes and filial principles that interfere with understanding human sexuality and intimacy. Attitudes toward sex and sexuality are changing rapidly in SA along with economic liberation and modernization, which can create cultural ambiguity regarding sexuality, particularly for adolescents and young adults (Ramanathan & Weerakoon, 2013).

Acculturation

According to Stats Canada (2017), the South and Southeast Asian demographic represents the two largest visible minority groups in Canada, each exceeding a population of one million. This suggests that immigrants from each immigration wave and Canadian-born descendants have significantly contributed to the ethnocultural diversity of Canada's population (Stats Canada, 2017). As migration continues to increase globally, many disciplines have examined the demographic, political, economic, social and psychological phenomena that led to and resulted from these migrations (Berry, 2022). As a result of immigration, western societies have become pluralistic, meaning many people with different cultural backgrounds come together to live in a diverse society and form cultural groups that are not equal in power (numerical, economic or political) and therefore have unequal influential power in the acculturative process (Berry, 2022).

Acculturation is a term used to describe the cultural shifts that occur as a result of connection between two or more cultural groups and involves integrating the beliefs and behaviours of a new dominant culture (Tummala-Narra, 2013). According to Berry (2022), acculturation refers to the cultural changes resulting from different group encounters, and psychological acculturation and adaptation refer to the psychological changes and outcomes resulting from individuals experiencing acculturation. Therefore acculturation tends to induce more influence and change in the acculturating group (heritage country) rather than the host or dominant group (host country) (Tummala-Narra, 2013).

Berry's (2022) acculturation framework proposes four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. The integration strategy refers to individuals who maintain their heritage culture and adopt elements of the host culture; the

assimilation strategy occurs when immigrants reject their heritage and embrace the host culture; and the marginalization strategy refers to immigrants who reject both heritage and host cultures (Needham et al., 2017). Cross-cultural psychology extends the complexities of acculturation by explaining that acculturation can be reactive (trigger resistance to change in both groups), creative (stimulating new cultural forms not found in either of the cultures), and delayed (initiating change that solidifies over time) (Berry, 1997).

Cultural differences between SA collectivist and individualistic cultures can create significant challenges in the acculturation process. Contextual factors such as ethnic density, social cohesion and quality of environment influence the acculturation process and mental wellness of the immigrant population (Needham et al., 2017). Considerable research shows the adverse effects of acculturative stress on second-generation SA adolescent development, including risky sexual behaviour, increased intimate partner violence (IPV), and profound physical, mental, and social well-being challenges (Meherali et al., 2021).

SA Gender Roles and Acculturation

Socialization remains a central concept in psychology and has been used to explain a plethora of psychological matters, including race relations, gender roles, moral decision-making, self-control, and self-concept, among others (Morawski, 2014). Socialization refers to the developmental processes through which individuals acquire the values, behaviours and motivations necessary to become competent members of a culture and regularly applied to explain and manage influences in education, parenting, and political affairs (Morawski, 2014). It is important to note that many North American women are socialized within a patriarchal ideology, and many have had the opportunity to experience a feminist movement (Inman et al., 2001). Although patriarchal beliefs exist in most cultures, the hierarchical structure of male

dominance and female subordination is of a lesser degree in North American culture and more rigid and controlled in South Asian culture (Randeniya, 2021).

In Western culture, adolescence is viewed as a period to socialize and explore sexuality and sexual beliefs and develop a sexual identity (Gravel et al., 2016). However, in SA culture, socialization begins in early childhood and dictates gender roles that control and regulate sexual socialization beliefs and experiences (Badesha, 2021). While SA boys are taught to be providers, SA girls are taught to be responsible, nurturing, and obedient; research shows that most SA girls are more protected, controlled, and sheltered compared to other non-SA teenagers in Canadian society (Badesha, 2021).

Rigid gender roles are a significant factor in IPV within SA communities; the division of labour within SA families shows that women are responsible for caregiving while men are expected to earn an income and financially manage the household (Tripathi & Azhar, 2022). Therefore women may be viewed as intellectually and physically inferior to men, which makes them feel that their emotional and mental health concerns are trivial compared to their tasks and roles (Tripathi & Azhar, 2022). Many SA women are inundated with gendered and racialized messages from their ethnic communities and mainstream society, which feeds stereotypes that reflect SA women as being passive, weak, exotic, submissive, subservient, asexual, hypersexual, and a model minority (Tummala-Narra, 2013).

Stereotypes can contribute to internal conflicts that can become construed as SA cultural traits; for example, when a stereotype of submissiveness is interpreted as a SA cultural value (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Cultural oppositions in values can create identity conflicts that shape how SAs, particularly women, negotiate their sense of belonging and authenticity within their cultural community and mainstream society (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Gender-based cultural

norms and expectations are a source of contention between SA girls and their families, generating further acculturative stress (Sharma et al., 2020).

Historically, SA culture favours the male gender; girls more than boys bear the burden of being demure in dress, submissive in nature, and abstaining from premarital sexual experimentation (Sharma et al., 2020). First-generation SA parents are unable to effectively cope with their children's cultural influences and interpret behaviour which deviates from their expectations as cultural betrayal or rebellion and often project a knee-jerk virulent response in efforts to force their children to conform (Islam et al., 2020).

Today, many SAs express egalitarian gender view roles; however, traditional gender norms within a patriarchal structure are still widely practiced and respected in collectivist cultures (Evans et al., 2022). Misogyny is a feature of a patriarchal society and is seen in multiple forms, such as male privilege, patriarchy, gender discrimination, sexual harassment and the belittling of women; sexism filters the disregard for women, while misogyny upholds the social system (Yap, 2019). Misogyny is not the sole hatred of women but rather a social system that reprimands women for going against social order and cultural expectations, such as dressing promiscuously or being demanding, which is the opposite expectation for SA women (Yap, 2019).

Misogyny continues to permeate the cultural and political landscape of SA culture; authors argue that sexual violence spans from sexual assault to rape and is a deeprooted social problem within SA culture (Roy & Dastidar, 2018). The daily degradation of women is dangerous and can set unhealthy preconceived notions about how women should exist, which stems from societal expectations (Cherry, 2018). Internalized misogyny is a social byproduct that causes women to feel shame, uncertainty, doubt, and undervalue themselves and others of the

same gender; internalized misogyny can cause women to project sexist ideas onto other women and themselves (Cherry, 2018).

Despite the growing acceptance of sexual minorities, heterosexuality continues to be the normative sexual orientation in both collectivist and individualistic cultures. As a product of living within such social contexts, some sexual minorities and heterosexuals may develop internalized heterosexism which is a form of oppression and occurs from the assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual (Puckett et al., 2018). Internalized heterosexism includes the internalization of stigma, stereotypes and negative perceptions of sexual minorities, which become ingrained in their self-concept as a product of social bias; internalized heterosexism has several mental health concerns, including depression and anxiety (Puckett et al., 2018).

Parenting and Acculturation

The SA acculturation process wrestles between two competing cultures that entertain different lifestyle scripts. Many Western individualistic cultures value independence, individuality and individualism; the role of the parent is to teach their children to use good judgement, make their own decisions and support their children to grow outside of the family, whereas family structure and honour dominate any other relationship in traditional collectivist cultures (Zaidi et al., 2016). SA cultural views on sexuality, intimate relationships, and gender roles differ immensely from the Western lifestyle, which can reflect sexual liberation and freedom without threat to self-esteem or safety (Meherali et al., 2021).

The transmission of parenting practices and cultural values in SA immigrant groups is a complex process that involves biological, sociological, and psychological considerations, which adds layers of intricate constructs to examine (Iqbal & Golombok, 2018). Research shows that SA adolescents acculturate to Western formalities faster than their parents in terms of language

development, communication, career path, and cultural and social adaptations, which increases parent-child conflict (Islam et al., 2017). Parenting behaviour is deeply influenced by culture, which decides the behaviours to be controlled and praised (Abdul & Kurukkan, 2014). Research shows that many SA parenting styles involve a combination of parental demandingness (i.e. controlling child behaviour) and warmth (i.e. providing support and meeting child needs) (Abdul & Kurukkan, 2014).

However, other SA parenting styles are authoritarian and influenced by patriarchal family models that justify gender roles and intimate partner violence (IPV) (Ragavan, 2018). Often, SA women describe their experiences of IPV as part of their cultural upbringing; research finds that IPV within the SA community is likely underreported because SA women may not recognize certain aspects of behaviour as abusive due to expectations of family obligations and traditional gender roles (Tripathi & Azhar, 2022). Moral values and obligations of filial piety create significant challenges for SAs who feel trapped between their filial rules and independent desires for autonomy (Hoang & Kirby, 2020). As time passes, immigrant groups change, and new generations emerge and evolve differently. Children born outside the host country learn to adapt and develop in varied trajectories compared to previous generations; parenting styles may also change and adapt to new cultural and social normalities (Iqbal & Golombok, 2018).

SA Sexual Communication

In SA culture, sex and intimacy before marriage is viewed as an immoral topic; therefore, sexual communication is often silenced and viewed as shameful, which deters children and adolescents from asking important sex-related questions and increases the stigma around sex and sexuality in SA culture (Ragavan, 2018). Dating in SA culture can be problematic since premarital intimacy is viewed as inappropriate and disapproved by SA parents; this taboo makes

it challenging for SA adolescents to speak to their parents about relationships, forcing them to date in secrecy and leading to potentially unsafe circumstances (Ragavan, 2018).

Shame is a universal and powerful deterrent that arises from internal judgments about how an individual should exist or from the impressions they make on others; central to shame is the idea of being watched or observed by others, feeling self-conscious, and fear of being negatively evaluated by others (Tonsing & Barn, 2017). In most SA communities, family disputes or shame topics are kept within the family; shame is a source of social control and can profoundly impact people's lives, causing them to feel alienated, worthless and stigmatized (Tonsing & Barn, 2017). The politics of traditional collectivist cultures are embedded in the customary notions of shame and honour, which control the sexuality and reproductive rights of young individuals, particularly the bodies of younger females, usually by men and older migrant populations (Werbner, 2005).

In South Asian culture, the impact of shame affects the individual, family, and social and communal institutions; SA family members are widely discouraged from sharing taboo or shameful news with outsiders, thus relaying the message to keep silent and avoid bringing shame to the family (Tonsing & Barn, 2017). Research shows that shame hinders one's ability to engage in help-seeking behaviour and hinders the disclosure of IPV and sexual violence, therefore to understand shame, we must understand denial, secrecy and silence as methods to keep individuals safe (Tonsing & Barn, 2017).

The SA patriarchal structure and cultural restrictions on sexual morality prevent women from openly discussing sexuality, and sexual health, due to the stigma and fear of being labelled unchaste and bringing shame to the family and community (Buksh, 2019). Research shows that SA adolescents refrain from discussing forbidden topics with their parents because they fear

bringing shame and dishonour to the family; therefore, their coping and support are limited to friends (Kim & Ward, 2007). Parent-adolescent dyadic differences on the views of dating limit adolescent support systems for those experiencing teen dating violence, as many do not feel comfortable talking to their parents about their experiences (Ragavan, 2018). Parent-adolescent dyadic differences on the views of dating limit adolescent support systems for those experiencing teen dating violence, as many do not feel comfortable talking to their parents about their experiences (Ragavan, 2018).

Khera & Ahluwalia (2021) explain that many SAs feel as if they are in a cultural closet which is a result of the cultural values associated with dating and sex; this parallels the closet which LGBTQ+ individuals can experience because it involves hiding aspects of one's life, which causes significant distress and concerns for safety. SA queer experiences involve fulfilling the heteronormative expectations and holding the fear of being rejected by the family which can result in social, emotional, and economic seclusion which perpetuates feelings of guilt and isolation (Mishra, 2020). Khera & Ahluwalia (2021) explain that many SAs feel as if they are in a cultural closet which is a result of the cultural values associated with dating and sex; this parallels the closet which LGBTQ+ individuals can experience because it involves hiding aspects of one's life, which causes significant distress and concerns for safety.

As a result of the filial piety culture, many queer SAs report feeling guilt for causing distress to their parents for being queer which can result in severing family and community ties and harm the hierarchical status within the community (Mishra, 2020). Furthermore, research shows that there has been a surge in sexual violence cases in SA in recent times, and it is fundamental to acknowledge the underpinnings of various socio-cultural barriers to sexual communication, including religion, sexual illiteracy, and gender inequality attitudes (Kumar &

Chandran, 2020). It is vital for research to explore SA queer experiences of sexual development and sex-related concerns; unfortunately due to the limitations of this capstone, there is little space to go into depth on SA queer culture and the specific concerns, consequences and risks that the SA LGBTQ+ community face.

Sex Education

Research shows that many SA youth have an inadequate understanding of sex and hold a variety of misconceptions and concerns about sex-related topics, which can lead to unhealthy attitudes about sex, unsafe sexual practices and significant health consequences (Mukherjee et al., 2019). Due to the stigmatization of sex-related topics in SA culture, many sex education programs in school have been met with objections and apprehensions from teachers, parents, and politicians, stating that the program goes against Indian values and will corrupt the youth (Ismail et al., 2015). Furthermore, sexual education creates the possibility for safe and pleasurable sexual experiences free from coercion, discrimination and violence; sexual education has been shown to decrease sexual violence and contribute to positive sexual health and well-being (Ismail et al., 2015).

Kim and Ward (2007) explain that the practice of collectivist cultures keeps family problems within the family unit, limiting an adolescent's sense of voice, feelings, and ability to seek solutions and support. Additionally, filial piety emphasizes that direct communication and assertiveness can be considered inappropriate and disrespectful, which causes young SAs to feel restricted in what they can share with their family. Therefore many SA women use submissive responses to de-escalate conflict and sustain their filial responsibility; however, research shows that submissiveness is damaging to psychological development and a salient factor underlying stress and depression in SA women (Hoang & Kirby, 2020). However, sexual health is

fundamental to our well-being and should be addressed in a positive and respectful manner and promote the possibility of having pleasurable and safe experiences free from coercion, discrimination or violence (The World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).

Sexual Socialization

Sexual socialization involves active interpretations of societal messages and the process of internalization; therefore, sexual socialization is an ongoing process of acquiring new knowledge and engaging in experiences that shape one's sexual identity (Gravel et al., 2016). SA sexual socialization is a byproduct of several influences, including one's host culture, media culture, parental expectations, and Western societal influences, which dictate the demeanour and conduct of sexual behaviour (Badesha, 2021).

Unfortunately, many traditional SA parents are ill-equipped to openly and honestly discuss sex with their children, and when they try, their children may feel uncomfortable receiving this information (Chakraborty & Mishra, 2021). Social media has played an integral role in providing sex education to SA adolescents; it is an accessible, affordable, and anonymous platform where youth can explore their sexual curiosities (Chakraborty & Mishra, 2021). However, social media, including pornography, does not always provide accurate or helpful information, harming viewers and misleading their understanding of safe, pleasurable and consensual sex (Chakraborty & Mishra, 2021).

Sexual socialization is learned through cultural scripts taught and enforced by the family and community, often resulting in a take-for-granted assumption about sex, marriage, and womanhood (Mehrotra, 2016). SA parents prefer to communicate indirectly about sexual matters, and many SA adolescents report receiving messages about puberty and sexual morality rather than factual discussions or feelings towards sex; as a result, SA adolescents learn about

sex for the first time in the classroom or through social media, peer influence, and porn (Badesha, 2021).

SA mothers are held responsible for teaching their daughters to be ‘good girls’ whose sexual behaviour should conform to the patriarchal rules and norms of the family; SA female adolescents are taught to feel shame, modesty, and shyness about their bodies (Badesha, 2021). Sex and female sexuality are considered taboo in SA culture; women are viewed as subordinate possessions rather than partners; the patriarchal paradigm controls female sexuality through unwritten social codes and gender socialization (Buksh, 2019). SA culture views abstinence as a sign of purity and cleanliness; therefore, the female body is heavily restricted and protected to fulfil its future role as a wife and mother (Buksh, 2019). Research shows that SA sexual socialization is connected to gender roles, where SA fathers engage in sexual communication with their sons and refrain from discussing sexual topics with their daughters (Kim & Ward, 2007).

Furthermore, the impact of sexism and racism on SA women challenges them to identify with traditional cultural values associated with weakness and submissiveness or with mainstream Euro-American cultural values of assertiveness and self-assurance (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Research suggests that patriarchal attitudes and traditional gender norms contribute to domestic violence being perceived as acceptable and influence how SA adolescents view their role in romantic partnerships (Ragavan, 2018).

Conclusion

Sex is a universal and complex topic that carries many layers of traditional, religious, economic, political, and social facets that dictate the beliefs, practices, and knowledge of sex and sexuality. Research shows that children as young as two years old can start developing sexual

curiosities and behaviours, and often parents report feeling uncomfortable discussing sex-related matters with their children, which can lead them to explore sex in unsafe and unhealthy ways (National Centre on the Sexual Behaviour of Youth [NCSBY], 2022).

Sex and sexuality have evolved and changed throughout history. However, many barriers continue to cause extreme challenges for SA individuals to experience optimal sexual development and understanding free from fears and stigmas. Post colonization, SA traditional collectivist values have generationally silenced sex, leading to a lack of sexual education and knowledge which results in avoiding sex related topics and enhancing sexual stigmas and shame. Research shows that many SAs rely on pornography, social media, or friends for sexual advice, which increases sexual risk and chances for coercion or violence (Chakraborty & Mishra, 2021).

SA sexual development has experienced many cultural and social shifts grounded in tradition and influenced by Western norms. Young individuals begin forming their sexual self-concept through sexual scripts and socio-emotional growth processes; because individualist and collectivist cultures have opposing scripts, this process can be difficult and unsafe for many SAs (Karnat et al., 2018). Additionally, considerable research highlights the negative impacts of acculturative stress on mental health, including anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal ideation (Tummala-Narra, 2013).

As the SA immigration population grows in the West, the challenges between traditional collectivist values will continue to conflict with Western liberal practices and beliefs around sex and sexuality. Due to the negative impacts of acculturative stress on mental health and well-being, practitioners must acknowledge how sociopolitical factors such as race, culture and ethnicity influence clients and their presenting issues (Khera & Ahluwalia, 2021). Counsellors who are unfamiliar with SA cultural traditions and family expectations must refrain from using

their clients as a cultural teacher; they must have appropriate resources and skills to learn from client experiences (Khera & Ahluwalia, 2021).

Chapter 3

Key Findings

The generation entering adolescent years now is the largest in history, and research shows that young people are experiencing puberty at earlier ages than previous generations which is more likely to result in critical and life-defining moments such as their first sexual encounter (Pachauri & Santhya, 2002). However, SA parents are often not emotionally available to their children to discuss topics of sex, drugs, coming out and mental health; and many SA parents silence these topics to manage their own fears of their children being pulled astray by “Western values” (Bhat, 2023). Bhat (2023) explains that issues such as limitations in space, a context for dialogue, the nuances of language, busy family-role and working parent schedules serve as barriers to parent-child discussions about sex and other taboo topics such as drugs.

A significant risk factor for suicidal ideation and behaviours amongst the SA population includes acculturative stress, and because a large percentage of the SA community is foreign born, adjustment to the dominant values and norms can be challenging (Jha et al., 2022). SA adolescents are vulnerable to a range of preventable mental health issues which result from acculturative stress, particularly in circumstances that involve dating, sex, desire, and sexual communication (Buksh, 2019).

As a result of moral policing, sexuality and sexual silencing within the SA community, many SA adolescents are uncertain about how to develop romantic relationships and often date in secrecy, which can lead to unsafe situations, including sexual coercion, IPV, substance use and risky sexual activity (Ragavan, 2018). Furthermore, studies show that most second-

generation SA adolescents wish they could discuss intimate relationship concerns with their parents but feel unable due to the stigma and taboo on dating (Sharma et al., 2020).

Limitations in Research

Cognizant of the current limitations to the research explored and the bio-psycho-social-cultural factors of sexuality, I recognize that this research does not reflect the full variation of SA experiences of sexual development and sexuality. SA represents a diverse group of individuals with a wide range of values, beliefs, traditions, and experiences that this capstone cannot fully explore. Moreover, with diversity comes many inter-cultural variations, such as country of origin, immigration, education, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status and acculturation pressures which cannot be fully explored (Buksh, 2019).

Research shows that SA cultures have traditionally not utilized mental health services and have little understanding of mental health, which is influenced by stigmas that have harmful effects on SA individuals (Jha et al., 2022). According to Jha et al. (2022), there is a growing perception among SA American community leaders who argue that mental health concerns are left untreated because there are few mental health services that can meet the needs of the SA community. Therefore, practitioners, researchers, and sexual health advocates must work with the SA community to invalidate the sexual stigmas and develop respectful strength-based approaches to welcome parent-adolescent sexual communication.

Although little is known about SA adolescent coping in North America, research shows that SA adolescents with high availability of social support report less acculturative stress and fewer psychological symptoms than those without parental support; moreover, parental support is seen as a primary protective factor against adolescent psychological issues (Tummala-Narra, 2013). Additionally, most SA societies continue to be predominately patriarchal, which

reinforces structural power and gender inequalities; therefore, cultural norms serve as a barrier and perpetuate the subordination of women socially and economically (Niaz & Hassan, 2006). Furthermore, most research on the barriers to SA sexuality focuses on the binary heterosexual status; therefore, research needs to explore the cultural closets for SAs and all marginalized LGBTQ+ ethnic minorities (Khera & Ahluwalia, 2021).

Workshop Proposal

Based on the research (or lack thereof), it is vital for practitioners working with the SA population to develop a framework that serves to decolonize sex in safe, respectful and unrestricted ways. To successfully engage collectivist cultures, it is necessary to establish an environment that honours SA culture and values and recognizes the cultural shifts in sexuality and the need for safety. It is vital to discuss the harm of moral policing and to provide sexual health knowledge that can reduce sexual shame, stigma, fear, and unsafe sexual practices.

Therefore, I propose a free workshop (Appendix A) funded by the government for SA parents and caregivers to learn about sexual health and sexual development and to feel empowered to open communication channels with others, particularly children and adolescents, to discuss sex-related topics. As we discuss issues of colonization, social assistance (i.e. government funding) continues to reflect power and control dynamics within our society which serves to maintain a colonized society. Therefore, this workshop should be facilitated by SA mental health practitioners who can intertwine SA values and beliefs within a Western context to address SA sexual concerns. A major objective of this workshop is to validate the topic of sex as uncomfortable and to address sexual shame and stigma as a result of colonization; this workshop will take a myth-busting approach that provides a common language and understanding of sex and sexual health knowledge.

Facilitators must take a direct and empathetic approach that explains the history and society's role in the attitudes toward SA sexuality and provide space for caregivers to digest the realities of adolescent sexual desire. Based on the literature review provided in this capstone, the findings suggest that colonization has shaped the SA cultural discourse by influencing religious beliefs and sexual constructs that provide guidelines for what is acceptable and what is not. The socio-cultural discourses of patriarchy, religion, gender roles, and socialization limit access to sexual health knowledge and restrict sexual activities, which contributes to sexual shame and/or guilt, sexual anxieties, sexual violence, and sexual dysfunction (Buksh, 2019).

Therefore, a significant portion of this workshop will provide sexual health education, including the fluidity of gender, the reproductive system, desire, orgasm, and how sexuality can impact the acculturation process and influence mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and self-esteem concerns. Due to the nature of SA culture and sexual silencing, a major accomplishment would be to open group dialogue for individuals to share their fears and distress around sexuality and to discuss sexual matters without fear of judgment or shame. In addition to psychoeducation, it is vital to provide appropriate resources and supports that can support acculturation challenges, such as connecting individuals with skilled counsellors or introducing them to SA cultural groups.

As previously discussed, most SA adolescents report wanting to discuss sex-related concerns with their parents but feel unable due to stigmas and fears; therefore, the overall goal of the workshop is to open parental communication channels that allow adolescents to feel safe and comfortable asking sex-related questions to the people they trust most and who have the knowledge to provide safe and accurate sex-related information. Furthermore, as mentioned, there is a large underrepresentation of visible ethnic minorities in sexual research. Therefore by

creating sexual health workshops that open gateways of communication, sexual facts, and common experiences, more ethnic populations may feel comfortable participating in sex-related research, which will significantly advance the field of cultural psychology and sexuality.

Limitations of the Proposal

As research reflects, there are many stigmas and taboos associated with sex, sexuality and pre-marital sexual engagements; therefore, I believe it could be challenging to find participants that are willing to engage in group discussions about sex, sexual identity, pleasure and orgasm. I believe that participants may have interpersonal fears and feel judged or worried about confidentiality issues that limit their participation. Secondly, it may be challenging to find SA facilitators that are qualified to provide sex therapy and who can present information in ways that can be easily digested by the participant population. Moreover, good communication is a core feature and essential skill for quality practice and patient-centred care; research shows for both settled and new SA migrants, language barriers contribute to a significant number of healthcare-related challenges, including unfamiliarity with rights and entitlements, lack of understanding and sensitivity to other cultures, social exclusion and discrimination (Ahmed et al., 2015). Therefore, sex-educated facilitators who speak SA dialects would be valuable, yet may be hard to find. Furthermore, it might be challenging to find adequate mental health and sexual health resources that align with SA values and beliefs.

Focus for Future Research

Future research should focus on demographic variables such as socioeconomics, immigration status, and the length of time in the host country (Khera & Ahluwalia, 2021). Education systems must implement programs that acknowledge how culture, values and beliefs can impact sexual development and sexuality, including social media culture, pop culture and

individual and group social and cultural locations. This research highlights the need for clinicians, educators, sexual health facilitators, and community leaders to advance their cultural competency skills and work collaboratively with collectivist cultures to acknowledge and navigate acculturation stressors and issues of sexual shame and stigma. Although there is a growing amount of sexual education programs being implemented in the SA education systems in India, the stigmas on sexuality continue to reinforce sexual silencing, moral policing and violence (Chakraborty & Mishra, 2021).

Reflections

The journey to experience love, intimacy, desire and connection should not be the uphill battle that most SA adolescents have to endure. This paper is important because it reflects how historical-cultural shame and stigma continue to create barriers for SA adolescents to confidently and safely transition through adolescence in Western society. Addressing cultural concerns about dating is not meant to challenge SA culture but to develop more social support for SA adolescents and parents to help ease the acculturative process and nuances of adjusting to new and more sexually liberal societies.

My hope for future generations is for SA parents to feel empowered to learn and ask questions about their children's acculturation stressors and to help their offspring feel confident in areas of interpersonal development, not only in areas of education and career achievement. Moreover, although this paper focuses on sexual barriers in a heterosexual context, future research must explore sexual challenges for SAs who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer and non-binary. Finally, I hope that all SA individuals, regardless of age, caste, religion, gender, and politics, can experience pleasurable intimacy and honour their sexuality safely and fearlessly.

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Appendix A

Workshop Outline

Title: Brown Sugar: A sex therapy workshop for South Asian parents and caregivers.

Participants: This workshop is designed for SA parents and caregivers wishing to develop a deeper understanding of sexual development and how they can support their children's sexual health and understanding of healthy and safe intimate relationships.

Facilitators: This workshop will be facilitated by a SA registered counsellor who specializes in sex therapy and sexual health. This individual will have in-depth knowledge and understanding of SA culture, history, and moral policing issues.

Duration: This is a weekend workshop which will take place on Saturday between 9-12 pm and Sunday 9-12 pm.

Cost: Free

Materials: A room with a whiteboard, paper and pens for note-taking.

What Is This Workshop?

We understand that talking about sexuality and addressing issues of desire and intimacy with your children can be challenging and uncomfortable; however, it is fundamental to their development and progression through life to provide them with accurate information, guidance, support and love to ensure that they develop healthy attitudes towards sex and relationships. This workshop is built to empower parents and caregivers to stay curious about their child's needs and provide awareness about the impact of sexual silencing (shame, fear, risky/unsafe behaviour, and mental health struggles). Through a SA lens, we will discuss what it means to be living in the West, a more sexually liberated society which embraces intimacy. This workshop is designed to equip you with the knowledge, tools and communication strategies necessary to navigate

discussions about sexuality with your children. And to do this, we must first foster an open and non-judgmental environment which is vital for the parent-child bond.

Objectives: Day One

Introductions

Create a safe, non-judgmental and respectful environment

Start by acknowledging the importance of becoming comfortable in the uncomfortable. It is fundamental for the facilitator to note how the very presence of being in the workshop can feel unsafe, and as a group, our goal is to empower and comfort each other with the challenges that will come up.

Participant introductions and icebreaker

The facilitator will ask participants to share their names (if they feel comfortable), what brings them to this workshop, and one goal they hope to accomplish. The facilitator will acknowledge this group as a support group for each other and how sharing our stories strengthens feelings of safety, understanding, and relational bonds, which are the tools needed to discuss sex-related topics with their children.

What Is Sex?

The facilitator will start the workshop by asking participants to think about what sex means to them. The facilitator should ask thought-provoking questions such as, is sex something that happens between two married people? What values do we carry around sex? What, if any, consequences might accompany sex-related topics and attitudes in your family, and how do you feel when discussing sexual context.

What is Collectivist Culture?

Discuss the meaning of collectivist culture and individualistic culture. Ask participants to think about how they relate to collectivism and the concept of filial piety and how this might relate to their childhood and their children to bring a common understanding of culture and cultural attitudes to the forefront of the group.

A Brief Overview: The History of SA Sexuality

It is important for the facilitator to provide a brief history of SA sexuality pre and post-colonization, which will provide a deeper understanding of the shift in attitudes toward sex and sexual engagements.

Gender Roles

Participants will be asked to think of and/or describe how they were raised in their family, what roles they saw their parents take on, and the values and morals which were instilled in them as children. It is vital to ask participants to ask how their thoughts about their roles have shifted and when including what they wish was different about their role and why. By having participants acknowledge shifts in their own needs, they may better relate to the constant changes, barriers, and acculturation pressures their children face. Furthermore, the facilitator must address the fluidity of gender, including the LGBTQ+ community and non-binary folk. It is vital to acknowledge the shifts in sexology and gender as an evolving aspect of humanity.

Socialization

Discuss what socialization means as a group to develop a common understanding of how we relate in our social world, including family, peer groups, and the community. What are the social expectations and rules in each social and cultural location, and how do group norms impact our ability to live authentically? How do we think this relates to our children?

Acculturation Process

The facilitator will explore acculturation stressors among participants and ask how they coped with acculturation distress. The facilitator must have knowledge of current adolescent acculturation challenges and consequences, including sex-related pressures and issues of discrimination. Here, we can discuss values and beliefs and how these shift over time and can differ based on our social and cultural locations. Additionally, it is important to discuss the consequences of acculturation on mental health.

Breakout Groups

The facilitator will ask participants to form small groups and engage in a recap of day one. This is an opportunity for participants to share stories, concerns, challenges, and fears. The facilitator will ask the groups to share what they discussed to reflect similar emotions and thoughts. The floor will be open for group discussion and questions.

Day Two: Sex Education and Fighting the Stigma

What is safe sex?

The facilitator will ask the group to define safe sex. This includes choice, permission, free from coercion, play, etc. Ask the group to stay curious about their sex lives and if they have experienced safe sex.

Debunking the Myths

The facilitator will ask participants to share their own stigmas about sex and sexual development. The facilitator will start by debunking common myths about sex, sexual pleasure and safe sex.

Anatomy

The facilitator will provide a brief overview of the anatomy and reproductive health, including biological sex, puberty, menstruation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV, hygiene, and pregnancy. Discuss body image and self-esteem.

Common Language & Communication

The facilitator will explain why parents should talk to their children about sex and continue the conversations as they get older. Barriers that can prevent parents from openly talking about sex and sexuality include fear, lack of information, effective communication skills, myths and misconceptions. Ask parents what fears might stand in their way and how we can minimize those fears here. Research shows that effective parenting and communication skills include recognizing teachable moments and clearly communicating factual information, beliefs, attitudes and values, which build trust and foster a relationship that allows children to feel comfortable approaching parents with important questions related to sex, relationships and other major life events (Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, 2019).

Current Barriers

In small groups, ask participants to discuss with each other the barriers that still exist and strategies they think will be helpful. Discuss these barriers as a large group and work collectively to navigate individual and group challenges. **Wrap up**

Relational Empathy

The facilitator will validate sex as a challenging topic that is continuously evolving and the importance of holding empathy for themselves and their children.

Key Takeaways

Ask group members what they feel was most helpful and how they feel about discussing sex-related topics. Ask for feedback to better strengthen the design of this workshop.

