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The Formation of Intimate Partnerships among Ethnic Minority Youth in Denmark: Generational Relationships and Religious Endogamy

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Introduction

The dynamics of the formation of intimate partnership patterns – the management of sexual romantic relations and marriage among minority youth – has been a topic for societal and political discussions for the past few years in Denmark. Empirical investigation has been more limited. The dominant discourse presents a picture of the ethnic minority as a rather homogenous group of persons having Islam as religion, and practicing parental pressure in the intimate relation formation of the youth (Mogensen & Nørgaard 2003; Sareen 2003).

Despite the dominant discourse about the negative role of the parental generation in the minority youth's marriage pattern, the forced marriage issue for example, there are surprisingly few studies of intimate relationship formation in the Nordic countries in which the voice of the parental generation is included (Syed 2002). Young peoples' and professionals' perceptions are generally highlighted. In a recent study of the killings of young immigrant women with the motive of restoring family honour, the Norwegian anthropologist Borchgrevink (2004) analyses culture's role in these killings and raises the provocative question: why there have only been just a few killings over the span of eight years in Sweden and Norway. Her answers to the question point to the negotiations between the generations and implies inclusion of the parental generation in future research.

I attempt to shed light on some aspects of intergenerational and religious endogamy dynamics by inclusion of youth as well as parental voices in this article¹. The results indicate a complex picture of partnership formation

¹ A part of the article was presented as a paper at the 13th Nordic Migration Conference, Aalborg, Denmark, 18-20 November 2004 and the part about intergenerational relation was first presented in the "2nd European Conference for Family relations", University of Fribourg, Switzerland, 29 September-2 October 2004.

patterns. Most of the youth form partnerships within their own religious group, but relate this to a variety of reasons: both their family dynamic, the experiences of exclusion from the majority society and avoidance of ‘high divorce rates’ associated with the majority population. In the context of late modernity, most of the youth’s partnership patterns implies a combination of the positive as well as the negative aspects of modernity – the young people want to make their own choices but at the same time they want parental acceptance as the emotional bond with parents is valued. Similarly, the parental generation can also be characterised as flexible, rigid or transitional. Some youth experience serious problems with the parents about their intimate partnership formation. These problems are seen as related to parental rigidity accompanied by the continuity of some cultural practices in a context of societal marginalisation.

The article begins with an introduction to the social psychological framework with focus on the intergenerational conflict as a perspective for examining intimate relationship formation patterns among youth. In the next section the methodological aspects and some results pertaining to religious belonging and parent-youth relations under the headings of positive relations and serious conflicts are described. The third section describes the dynamics of religious endogamy in the context of the prevalent practice of homogamy. In the final section the earlier sections are summed up. Some implications for further research and intervention for the persons who experience psychosocial problems related to intimate relation formation are discussed.

Theoretical framework and the conflict perspective

Social psychological theories related to the processes of modernization often argue that societal changes due to technology and the media lead to psychological changes and new modes of action. These imply that individualisation is associated with freedom from traditions and narrow social groupings, but is also influenced by constraints from the labour market and the consumer role (Heitmeyer & Olk 1995). There are not only ‘bright’ but also ‘dark’ sides of individualisation. There may be uncertainty related to taking responsibility for one’s own choices and consequent feelings of guilt and self-reproach. If these choices are mistaken, they may also be accompanied by isolation and loneliness (Jørgensen 2002). The generational relationships are therefore not only characterized by individualisation but also by complex patterns of mutual contact and interaction, affecting the lives of young people and families (Dencik 2002).

One of the ways of examining these relationships in the processes of intimate partnership formation is through the conflict perspective. Conflict is seen as a collision between interests, judgements, actions, goals and interests of the

different persons involved in a relationship. Conflicts can be functional or detrimental depending on their nature and the nature of the relationships. Power is an important factor in conflicts and often revolves around 'who should decide', which can be suppressive as well as positive. Conflicts can be construed in several ways but one way of perceiving conflicts, which has relevance for this present study is by conceptualising open and hidden conflicts (Lenneer-Axelsson & Thylefors 1991). Open conflicts are perceived as conflicts which are conscious and openly brought up between the involved persons, whereas hidden conflicts may be unconscious or concealed by the involved persons. In the present investigation, the focus is on the conflicts which the youth mention themselves. However the conflicts have not been examined through indirect clinical psychological method. Thus conflict is used as an analytic concept to shed light on the intergenerational relationship.

Belonging to different generations implies different experiences as well as interests, though not serious conflicts according to Baumann (2001). On the other hand, there are studies which observe that a potential for conflict exists between ethnic minority parents from so-called third world countries living in Western countries and their children (Lalonde et. al. 2004). Thus it is important to shed light on both the conflictual and harmonic aspects of intergenerational relationships. At the same time it is relevant to shed light on the dynamics related to the parental and younger generations' experiences as an ethnic minority in the Danish society. There is ample evidence that in the process of adaptation, minorities are dependent on more than just themselves. Environmental contexts including policies related to aliens play an important role. Perceptions of oneself as a victim of discrimination is for instance one of the major problems according to Leibkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti & Solheim (2004), based on a study of minority youth in Finland.

The present investigation

The article is based on an investigation conducted in 2003-2004 in Denmark.² It consisted of a national questionnaire survey conducted by professional interviewers through home visits with 626 ethnic minority youth and in-depth interviews with 30 young persons, 20 parents and 11 professionals. The young persons and the parents belong to the five largest ethnic minority groups. According to Denmark's statistical records (Statistisk Årbog 2005) the three

² The study has been funded by the Danish Ministry of Integration, and conducted by the undersigned & researchers from SFI, The Danish National Institute of Social Research in the period February 2003 – January 2004. Psychologist late Kiisattat Wimmer Hansen, Copenhagen contributed to the first phase of the project formulation. Thanks to Dr. Tuomas Martikainen and Dr. Connie Christensen for commenting on the earlier drafts of the article. I thank sociologist Mustafa Hussain and sociologist Gwynth Øverland for helping with the article.

largest groups of immigrants and their descendents on 1st January 2005 are from Turkey (54,859), Ex-Yugoslavia including Bosnia, Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia-Montenegro (43,954), Pakistan (19,301). Two other refugee groups are from Lebanon (22,232) & Somalia (16,952). The youth in the age group of 17-27 years from these groups constitute a population of approximately 30,000.

It is important to point out that there are large groups of immigrants and their descendents from European Union countries like Germany (25,446) and Sweden (14,285) but the objective of the present project was to cover the groups belonging to the countries outside the EU and North America i.e. from the so-called third world countries. In social psychological terms, these countries have a relatively low power position and immigrants from these countries are the 'visible minorities'. The societal debates are predominantly about these groups of minority populations.

Responses to the question "what is your religion?" indicate that 88% of the young people pointed to their religion as Islam; 7% named Christianity; 3% said they were Atheists and 2% other religions. The survey was conducted only among youth, whilst both the parents and young people were part of the qualitative research. The parental generation was not included because of resource limitations, in particular the cost of interpretation. There were a number of methodological considerations especially in relation to the ethical aspects against the backdrop of the socio-political situation in the country. One of the methodological decisions was flexibility in conducting the in-depth interviews especially with the parental generation, which were conducted in different settings and forms based on the convenience of the participants. In some interviews interpreters were used; some of the interviews with the Pakistani respondents were conducted in their mother tongue Urdu/ Punjabi, as the author could speak these languages; and a couple of the interviews were done in English by the researcher Garbi Schmidt. Otherwise most of the in-depth interviews and the whole questionnaire survey were conducted in Danish.^{2a} The respondents for the in-depth interviews were contacted through relevant institutions and through key persons in groups from differential geographical and socio-economic strata. Interviews were conducted in different parts of Denmark. The respondents should have lived at least 7 years in Denmark in order to experience the influence of the host society. The respondents for the questionnaire survey, however, were selected through random sampling among the persons who fulfilled the previously mentioned criteria for ethnic group, age and period of residence in Denmark. Totally, 200 young people were sampled in each ethnic minority group and all 628 questionnaire based interviews were conducted by the Danish Social Research Institute's professional interviewers.

^{2a} Garbi Schmidt conducted 23 interviews, among them two parental interviews. The present author conducted 37 interviews, including 18 interviews with the parents.

These methods of sampling and data collection suggest that these participants are representative of the subject population, but they also imply some shortcomings such as possible exclusion of the most vulnerable section of the population: the youth who participated may be better educated and more ‘open and well formulated’, than the 38% who did not participate. Besides there can be desirable and expected responses from the participants regarded as ‘researcher effect’. There has been awareness of these shortcomings in analyses of the data and the following results should be considered as tendencies with some reservations. We keep in mind the potential limitations of broad claims.

This article focuses on the young persons’ and parental generations’ own understanding of religious endogamy and parental conflicts related to intimate partnership formation and religious endogamy.

Emergence of a picture with various patterns

As can be seen in the following table, the analysis indicates that about *half* of the young persons had formed intimate relationships – 24% were married, 7% were engaged and 19% had a boy/ girlfriend.

Table 1

Ethnic minority youth aged 17-27 years classified according to form of intimate partnership and country of origin.

	Married	Engaged	Have a girl/ boy-friend	Is neither married, engaged nor in an intimate relationship	Total percent	Total number
Ex-Yugoslavia	19.29	7.14	31.43	42.14	100.00	140
Turkey	37.80	7.09	17.32	37.80	100.00	127
Pakistan	22.69	8.40	10.92	57.98	100.00	119
Lebanon	31.50	9.45	12.60	46.46	100.00	271
Somalia	9.73	1.77	19.47	78	100.00	113
Total	24.44	6.87	18.69	50.00	100.00	626

Of course, there are significant differences among the youth belonging to the different ethnic groups. One example is that there are three times as many young people with parents from Ex-Yugoslavia, who have a girl/boyfriend compared to youth with parents from Pakistan or Lebanon, which could be explained at multiple interpersonal and personal levels through the acculturation process, the cultural practices, and the experiences of discrimination. These processes will not, however, be taken up in detail in the present article.

In the present study the experiences of discrimination and marginalisation termed as ‘experienced discrimination’ is reported by “only” 50% of the youth. These experiences combined with the minority’s impression of the majority’s way of intimate partnership formation affect the generational relations.

Table 2

Ethnic minority youth aged 17-27 years divided according to the experienced discrimination on the basis of ethnic background

	Percent
Never	51
Once	16
More than once	32
Do not know	1
Total percent	100
Total number	626

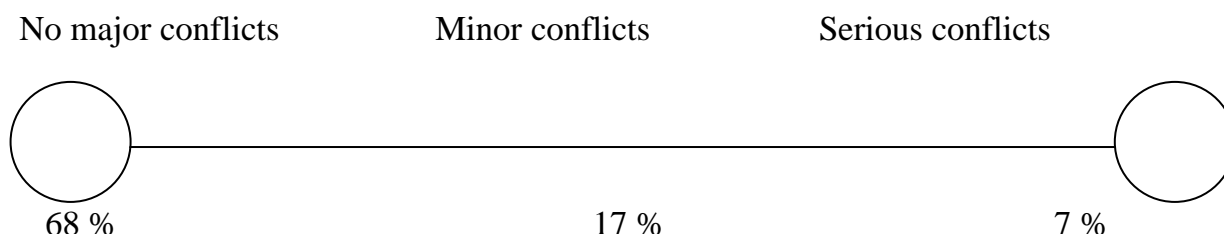
The overall conclusion based on the analysis of the data from the questionnaire survey depicts a picture with variations/multiplicity concerning intimate partnership formation. A large number (68%) do not report conflicts with the parents regarding the issue of intimate relationship formation, though they mention everyday life’s disagreements, and 17% report minor conflicts, while a smaller number of youth (7%) report serious conflicts with the parental generation. The term conflict is used directly in the questionnaire^{2b} and the young people are given the choice of pointing out the nature of conflict with the parents about having a girlfriend/boyfriend. It is relevant to mention that in Danish the term ‘kæreste’ is used, which is difficult to translate into English as it implies a romantic, intimate relation without differentiating between the genders, the nearest translation chosen in the present study in the everyday life for youth is girlfriend/boyfriend.

In the following figure the relation between the young persons and parents is analysed by placing them in the three above-mentioned categories, disregarding the fact that 8% answered that the question was not relevant for them. I am also aware of the dynamic nature of such a relationship but limitation of the research methods – questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews, is that they cover the particular point of time and not the development over time. The analysis is, however, based on the dominant features of the relationships and some overlapping can hardly be avoided.

^{2b} The question asked was: Have you had small or serious/big conflicts with your parents on the following – about a girlfriend/ boyfriend? The possible answering categories were: serious conflicts, small conflicts, no conflicts, not relevant, do not remember, not informed/ not answered

Figure 1

The continuum showing the number of youth experiencing intergenerational conflicts related to intimate partnership formation based on the empirical investigation



Furthermore, an age-wise analysis shows that a large number of young people in the age group 21-23 years have conflicts with their parents about intimate partnership formation than the youth in the age groups 17-20 years or 24-28 years. One implication is that the youth in the first age group are not as involved in the intimate relationships as in the older age group. This corresponds to the result of analyses of the sexual experience of youth in Denmark (Ung 1999) that the average age for the first sexual experiences for the Danish youth is 17-18 years, while non-Danish youth may have their sexual debut at a later age. Another implication is that more youth in the older age group (21-23 years), involve their parents in their intimate relationships than they do in the younger age group (17-20 years), or that parents take it more seriously as they come of age.

Table 3

Ethnic minority youth aged 17-27 years divided according to the intimate partnership and the age categories.

	Married	Engaged	Have a girl /boyfriend	Is neither married, engaged, or in an intimate relationship	Total percent	Total number
17-20 years old	4.38	5.98	19.92	69.72	100.00	251
21-23 years old	30.34	8.43	18.54	42.70	100.00	178
24-28 years old	44.22	6.53	17.09	32.16	100.00	199
Total	24.36	6.85	18.63	50.16	100.00	628

Based on a combination of analysis of the survey data and the data from the in-depth interviews we will examine below what contributes to making the intergenerational relationship a positive one for some.

Table 4

Ethnic minority youth aged 17-27 years, indicating percent-wise answer to the question ‘how much does the religion mean to you?’

Much	57%	360	
Something	26%	165	
Little	10%	65	
Nothing	6%	36	
Not informed		2	Total 628

Although almost 87% of the youth and 90% of the parents in the present in-depth interview study answered that their religion is Islam, there was no other measure and analyses of the salience attached to the religion in the survey, than the table given above. Thus the data cannot be used to point to the number of persons for whom religion is important, yet it contributes to the understanding of some broad trends about the significance of religion. It is relevant to consider the dynamics related to an ethnic minority group’s religion following Martikainen (2005) who points out that when considering the cultural integration of ethnic minorities, the religious closeness or distance to the mainstream society is of great importance.

Positive relations:

The youth parental relations and the religious endogamy

For some young persons, managing romantic relations, sexuality and partnership formation is an area of crucial negotiations with their parents, probably a very salient area in which they reformulate their identities. Their prior experiences of help and guidance from the parents play an important part in this phase of life. The survey data from the youth in the present study also indicates that about 69% of the parents accept the boy/girlfriend relation for their young sons and daughters. There are, however, significant differences between the different ethnic minority groups. Most of the youth from Ex-Yugoslavia, for example express parental acceptance of their girl/boyfriend whereas only 31% of the youth originating from Pakistan report parental acceptance.

A narrative from a 19-year-old Ex-Yugoslavian girl, Nadima, may contribute to an understanding of the positive intergenerational dynamic. She did not have a boyfriend at the time of the interview but expressed her expectations regarding her parents’ guidance. She appreciated that the parents had worked hard in order to provide better life conditions for their children and that they were always there to help them.

They [parents] will of course advise me and guide me, and tell me ‘he is the right person’ or how it is. I think in some way or the other, it will be a learning process... One learns a bit, one prepares for the future...our parents have always advised and guided us regarding all sorts of things. If there is something we want to know, we can just ask them.

Nadima’s narrative implies inclusion of parental views in her choice of a partner and also implies rejection of the totally individualised way of forming intimate partnerships. A similar pattern is seen in the next narrative, which points to another factor in a positive relationship in the parental-youth relation. Another factor is positive communication and trust between the generations as illustrated by an Ex-Yugoslavian college student, Jana, who had a boyfriend at the time of the interview. She emphasises the mutual trust and openness between herself and the family, especially her father.

I have really good relations with my family and we are very open. We talk about everything at home; there is nothing that is taboo, not even sex. There are of course limits to what I can talk to my father about ... though I know he is open. He helps as much as he can.... . We really communicate well.

Similarly in the present study, through the narratives of a Pakistani mother, Tahira, with two adult children; a son and a daughter, there is evidence of the parental supportive role in the choice of an intimate partner for the young persons. Her narrative shows that parental involvement can contribute to making the process easier for the younger generation, if there is mutual understanding and flexibility.

I would like to be a part of the marriage process for my young ones, but it doesn’t mean that I will decide. Others [family members] will be just invited, no more interference. ...we have our Indian and Pakistani friends, from whom they can get support and meet the right person. The most important is that they understand each other. They will not choose some one from the Danish culture. I don’t think so.

[But] We give them a chance. If something happens for my children, in the first place for their happiness, I will listen to them, their reason why they have chosen a person who is not from their own culture. Of course, they are welcome with either one or the other. If it has to be someone close to our culture, then it is Indian who is much like us, but in fact I like Danish young people and I have nothing against them.

The above narrative may seem contradictory in the first place. An in-depth analysis directs attention to the difference between the mother’s wishes and what is acceptable for her, making her narrative meaningful. She states that her son and daughter should have the possibility of choosing themselves which implies an acceptance of dating – the practice of a romantic relationship. The narrative implies that Tahira expects that the young peoples’ relationship will

lead to marriage. The results from the present questionnaire survey indicate that 2/3 of the youth expect that the boy/girlfriend relationship will lead to marriage. A large number of youth and their parents consider dating and romantic relationship as a step on the path to marriage.

At the same time Tahira hopes that the choice of partner will be within the same culture and religious group, which is perceived primarily as the Pakistani group, secondly as the Indian group, though she adds that she is willing to accept a son/daughter-in-law from the majority group also. Tahira's narrative implies religious endogamy – her first preference is for the youth generation marrying within one's own religious group, though she is also open for a marriage with someone belonging to other religious groups. The aspect of endogamy is taken up later in the article.

The narrative by Tahira also forms the basis for placing her in the category 'flexible', in contrast to parents who are placed in the 'rigid and transitional' category.³ The above narratives indicate the young people's definition of psychological attachment to parents, including positive aspects of communication, trust and love and also the parental role in the intimate relationship formation. Yet only a few youth trust fully the parents to make the crucial decisions for them without their own involvement. Most youths want to be involved in these processes themselves. The youths are struggling to find a middle ground between the parental perceptions and the changing practices in their environment. Although they are in the process of redefining their identities, the young people benefit from parental advice and guidance in these matters similar to the positive effect of the perceived parental support in alleviating the negative effects of *perceived discrimination* and *enhancing school adjustment* (Leibkind et al. 2004).

Comparative perspective: Empirical findings from other contexts

Furthermore a positive youth/parent relationship is perceived as an important factor in preventing abusive and exploitative girl/ boyfriend relationship as indicated by Gupta (1999, p.135) in a study about dating and marriage among the South Asian youth in the USA. There are examples of youths struggling with emotionally and physically abusive relationships as they are cut off from parental access and advice.

To further elucidate these complex processes, we direct our attention to some of the newer studies in the British context involving the Pakistani (as part of the south Asian) group in which parental voices are also included. Samad & Eade

³ A categorising combining psychologist Pel's (2000) & Juliusdottir's (2002) account for family dynamic and parental roles in the complex, changing, Western society. The categories are not perceived as absolutes but as ways of systematisation of the analysis, in which some overlapping is unavoidable.

(2002) have analysed the generational differences (youth, middle and elder group) in relation to matrimonial and religious patterns. They conclude that the young Pakistanis identify themselves as Muslims, which is an example of a shift in the social identity and not of increasing religiosity. On a psychological level, there is a more holistic and dynamic perception of spirituality and religious belonging, which implies a movement away from mechanical thinking for some of the young people (Berthelsen 2004). Marrying outside one's ethnic group is acceptable, but marrying outside one's religion is unacceptable, even for most of the youth in their study.

While the parental generations insist that both religious and cultural factors should be taken into account, i.e. the young people should marry someone from the same ethnic group; young people are saying that culture is not as important as religion is. One of the implications is that even for the youth inter-religious marriages are problematic if the partners do not convert. There are changes in the parental generation as well which imply flexibility and accommodation of the youths' choices as expressed by some of the parents in the present study.

Parents do recognise that social changes are taking place and are much more accommodated to their children's concerns and demand for choice. If the young people insist on consummating relationships then it is better to accept and formalise their demands than to use force or see their children running away. (Samad & Eade 2002 p.96).

It is paradoxical that the accommodating parental attitude is explained by both parental love, duty to maintain the family's honour and the religious prescription – 'elders argue that they are obliged by religion to ensure that marriage is voluntary and negotiated.' (Ibid p.63).

Thus there is a form of denial of the practice of forced marriage by the parental generation as it is explicitly forbidden in Islam. The younger generation is more open towards admitting and criticising this practice, thus there appears to be a tension between normative positions and the continuing influence of cultural practices among the elder generation.

It is equally paradoxical that most young people are happy with the concept of arranged marriages but it is clear that they want the practice to be adjusted according to the changing times – they want far more 'say' in the process than they have enjoyed so far. One of the explanations offered by Samad & Eade is at the interpersonal level.

Emotional ties with parents remain strong and some young people are sorry that their parents are seen in a negative manner. (Ibid p.95).

The Home Ministry in Britain differentiates between the flexible forms of arranged marriage accepted by the youth and the “forced” marriage, characterized by use of force by the family.

Arranged marriage is a legitimate and central part of some British Asian communities – a culture the government respects and values. We need to make the distinction between this and forced marriages, which we do not tolerate and are working with communities to crack down on.

(Hindustan Times, 23.9.2004)

However there is a discourse about rather limited difference in these practices in the Nordic countries as demonstrated by Rytter (2003) in Denmark and Schlytter (2004) in Sweden, taken up later in the article.

Discussion of the positive relationships

The overall intergenerational patterns indicating changes in both the parental as well as the youth in Britain are congruent with the analysis of the results of the majority of the young people who do not report major conflicts with the parents about their intimate partnership formation processes. These illustrations of mutual emotional closeness and flexibility direct our attention to the combination of the processes of individualisation and interdependency between the two generations. This is in contrast to the conceptualisation of psychologist Contratto (2002) who explains the young persons’ adaptation to the outside world, using the binary concepts: individualisation/autonomous mastery of the environment in the ‘Western’ context in contrast to fitting with the others/interdependence in ‘Eastern’ cultural contexts. The present results suggest that most of the young people reject the individualised ways of forming intimate partnerships and that there is an emergence of patterns, which are *neither autonomous nor totally fitting within the family’s traditional pattern*. There is a creation of patterns which combine *both the young generations’ own choices and the parental acceptance*. There is both a redefinition of the young person’s identity and an ‘updating’ of the traditional system of intimate partnership formation. Øverland (2001) has also documented the dynamics of generational change in her description of the marriage patterns among minority youth in Norway. She has focussed on the re-winning of trust between generations in a multi-cultural society through self-reflexivity and identity building.

The practice among these minorities’ youth indicates that these binary concepts are being dissolved or reformulated. On the one hand terms like amalgamation of the different modes of life, creolisation, hybridisation (Ålund 1997; Mørck 1998; Tireli 1999) are used in the Nordic context in empirical studies to clarify these processes based on a processual view of culture. On the other hand, there are studies (Baumann 1999), which argue that in everyday life and praxis these

combinations may not be so prevalent due to an essentialist view of culture. Though at the same time Baumann (1999 p. 94) appeals for viewing culture as a double discursive construction – an object of two discursive competences: an essentialist and a processual one, thereby culture is both making as well as having. For some of the young people religion becomes important as a marker in relation to the parents as well as the surrounding world.

According to an empirical study of 10,000 young between the ages 21-30 years, with ethnic minority backgrounds similar to the respondents in the present study, the number of ‘very religious’ persons has gone up (Mikkelsen 2004). Some youths develop a socio-religious identity, which enables them to act more independently in regards to their parents. A partial explanation is that a different religion than that of the mainstream in the host country, can lead to religious revitalisation (Martikainen 2005). Perhaps Østergaard’s statement further describes these young peoples’ psychological situation:

These young Muslims feel rather as Danish Muslims or international Muslims than Turkish or Pakistanis. It implies that they are aware of areas, where being Danish is linked to being Christian or being member of the national church. (Østergaard, citeret i Grøndahl 2005).

This complexity is also seen in the youths intimate partnership patterns. The young people’s patterns of partnership formation are neither like their parents’ nor like the majority youth. The present study suggests that the young people’s patterns of intimate relationships also involve a critical assessment of these patterns among the majority populations i.e., so-called *Danish intimate partnership* formation patterns. The author is aware that this conceptualisation is too simplistic as there are many divergent ways of partnership forming among the Danes, and this simplistic form contributes to making stereotypes of ‘us’ and ‘them’.⁴ In the environmental context of dominant discourse about minority partnership formation patterns, however, it is relevant to examine ethnic minority’s understanding of the mainstream Danish patterns. The ‘mainstream’ Danish way of intimate relation formation is presented here on the basis of research reports and theoretical analyses (Ottosen 2000; Visholm 2001) Of course; a comparison of boy- girlfriend formation pattern between Danish religious minority groups like Jehovah’s Witnesses and sections of Pakistani Muslims would perhaps not indicate significant differences.

⁴ Deluze & Guattari’s remarks about the European racism are provocative in this context, according to which European racism has never operated by exclusion, or by the designation of someone as Other.... Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the white man’s face, ... From the point of view of racism, there is no exterior; there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us, and whose crime it is not to be (Palumbo-Liu 1999, p. 103).

The analysis of the youths' and parents' responses on the in-depth interviews indicates an understanding with nuances, which doesn't just accept or reject the *Danish way* characterised by relatively higher age of marriage, fewer marriages, cohabitation (called 'Paperless' living in Denmark), *non marital* childbearing (regarded as old-fashioned 'out of wedlock') and higher divorce rate (Ottosen 2000). There is an awareness of both the negative and positive aspects. For example getting to know a partner before marriage is seen as a positive aspect by both generations, especially the young people. On the other hand a high proportion of men and women who never marry, cohabitation, non-marital childbearing and divorce rates are perceived with negative criticism. At least in their expressed attitudes (if not in the actions) the youth distance themselves from the practice of easily getting separated and divorced. It is suggested that the ethnic minority members – both the parental and the youth generation are critical about some aspects of the 'retreat from marriage' – evident in the above mentioned trends (Oropesa & Landale 2004).

The narratives and the discussion document that a large number of youths do not experience destructive conflicts with their parents on the issue of intimate partnerships due to a variety of reasons such as the reciprocal emotional bonds where both the youth and the parental generation are flexible. This flexibility can be related to both generations' distancing themselves from the 'retreat from marriage' and high divorce rates associated with majority patterns. There are attitudes of accommodation from the parental generation partly based on the religious prescriptions about voluntary marriages. The flexibility involving own choice and the parental acceptance can be related to different processes such as cultural mixing 'amalgamation' or 'religious revitalization'. The latter is related to religious endogamy to be discussed later in the article. In the next section we turn to the youths who experience serious conflicts with the parents, related to the intimate partnership formation.

Serious conflicts

There are also narratives about generational differences. The young people agreed that family pressure in intimate partnership formation is a bigger problem than parents consider it to be. The narratives of the youth belonging to the serious conflict category in the present study present a complex dynamic of disagreement with the parents. The narratives range from total concealment of the boy/girlfriend, which may lead to '*tearing apart*' the family, to keeping the relationship secret at the preliminary stages and making it public when a serious, committed relationship is established. Thus the sharing of the relationship with the parents can be postponed for some period. As the following narrative from a young Turkish woman, Ayes, illustrates, timing is a significant factor, and it can lead to concealment for a period. She is not sharing with her parents that she is having an intimate relationship with a Turkish boyfriend at the time of the interview but plans to disclose it later, before getting married. Her narrative implies an uncertain, rather ambivalent

situation. She regards her relationship with her parents as open but is still holding the boyfriend secret because she is unsure whether the family will accept him, though she suspects that the family is already aware of his existence.

... I think I am open with my parents, much, much open. Also with my father. I talk to him about many things. I do not tell him that I have a boyfriend in that way, but I think he knows that I have a boyfriend. Somehow one keeps it little secret...

Some youth experience major dilemmas – they do not want their parents to influence the crucial decisions, yet they care about them. At the same time, controlling and limiting what their parents learn of their feelings and activities makes the relationship with the partner untidy. (Leonard 1999). This way of dealing with the dilemma has been termed as *partial concealment* and is illustrated by the following narrative. The young Turkish woman Sengul explains how her conflicts lead her to keep certain activities secret, because of what she terms her mother's lack of trust for her and worry about the networks' negative reaction – 'their reputation'.

.... She misunderstands me. She often thinks so when I come late [and asks] Why do you come home late? And I don't want that she ask: "Do you have a boyfriend, have you been out with a man, where have you been?" As if she doesn't trust me. I know, I can see it, she hardly trusts me. ...in a way she reminds me to remember and take care. It really irritates me a lot that she messes up in everything.... What they are afraid of is that people begin to say that they have a daughter who is not proper. That is it. They say all the time "Remember now, what people say. Take care." I will run away if I am caught with a man / boyfriend.

These conflicts including processes of secrecy and deception have different intrapsychical implications for the youth. Just keeping the relationship secret for a time may involve ambivalence and uncertainty but lack of mutual trust can be harmful for the mental health and can lead to psychological self-destructive and aggressive behaviour. There are of course, different patterns related to the factors such as gender.

The expressions of emotions of pain and suffering related to concealment and a form of rebellion against parental reaction to *what others will say* indicate some of the dynamics involved in the intergenerational conflicts. The parental reasons for these actions indicate a lack of flexibility and can be termed 'rigid' according to the earlier-mentioned conceptualisation. The following parental narratives illustrate that for some parents, the main weight is on following the guidelines – based on an oversimplified, static cultural and/or religious

foundation, without considering the societal changes. Turkish father Bulent explains his point of view about the young persons' intimate partner formation. His narrative points to the salience of religion in his understanding of the gender relations and intimate partnership formation including marriage.

In our religion [Islam], this [having a boy/ girlfriend] is not allowed. Not live together. It is opposite to my religion. First get married. Those who live like that, they decide themselves. We cannot do like that.

Similarly, a Pakistani mother, Abida, discusses the clear frontiers for the young generations' possibilities for intimate relation formation. She implies that it is part of the parental socialization to make the youth internalise these religious and cultural practices related to contact between the two genders. According to her narrative there is no place for romantic sexual relationship before marriage or for the youth to choose a partner themselves.

The parents set a limit for their children. If you cross these limits, it is not good for you. To children ... what is halal [allowed].... And girls and boys, we are not much [open]. My child will think, before she says: "I love that young man, and I will marry him."

Discussion of serious conflicts

The above narratives from youth and parents point towards a lack of understanding and openness between the generations. At the same time they challenge the argumentations about ethnic minority youth's religion and identity, '...they approach the Danish social patterns, as far as work, language and education are concerned, but at the same time they hold on to certain parts of the parental culture such as religious traditions, importance of the family, and the sexual moral.' (Bektovic 2003 p. 27). Some of the youth are showing signs of rebelliousness, among others, changes in their sexual morals, which lead to clashes of interests with parents who are not showing openness and flexibility. Consequently, there are destructive conflicts between the generations, which can even lead to '*tearing apart*' of the family, if there is no suitable intervention.

Religious belonging can be a possibility as well as a hindrance in a broader definition of the existing marriage patterns. Young people employ religion-based arguments to challenge cultural norms opposing inter-ethnic marriages, whereas in case of inter-religious marriages there are religious interjections that have to be considered. Most interpretations of Islam allow men to marry Christians and Jews without the necessity for conversion as these religions are considered 'to be of the book' (*ale kitab*). Women from other religions have

to convert to Islam. Similarly non-Muslim have to convert to Islam to marry a Muslim woman (Samad & Eade 2002 p.86). Failure to do so would lead to rejection by the woman's family. Of course, it comes down to the acculturative dynamics of the family and the societal conditions- in a family 'highly influenced by the western life style' it may be possible, though not in a 'traditional family'.

This focus on the Islamic practices related to the marriage pattern can lead to an oversimplified conclusion that problematic forms of intergenerational relationships and marriages are only seen among a particular religion, But studies in Britain (South Hall Black Sisters 2001) document that young women belonging to Hindu, Sikh and Christian groups with South Asian backgrounds also experience parental pressure in the marriage process. Similarly, Schlytter (2004) analyses the forms of marriage among the ethnic minority groups in the Nordic countries among others based on Bredal (1999) and concludes that the 'arranged marriages' (defined as a marriage in which others decide who should get married, without differentiating between forced and arranged marriage) in which parental pressure can be involved is a prevalent practice among several ethno-cultural groups, which cannot be attached to a particular religion. Furthermore, the practice is not seen among all the persons coming from these countries (ibid p. 36). At the same time the present study confirms that there are serious conflicts and the risk for the earlier discussed extreme reactions among a small number – 7% of the youth. Some aspects for suitable intervention are delineated in the last part of the paper. In the next section some light is thrown on the issue of religious endogamy – defined as intimate partnership formation – especially marriage within particular groups.

Homogamy and religious endogamy. A universal practice with contextual variations?

Gshur & Okun (2003 p. 289) have discussed the universal principles of homogamy within the ascriptive dimensions such as ethnicity, race or religion. In light of these principles the results of a survey by the Hindustan Times (14.9.2004) in England are thought-provoking.

While 88% of young white Britons and blacks are willing to marry some person from a different race, far fewer Asians are willing to do so – only 54%. Furthermore, the survey shows that many Muslims are willing to marry within their own community and find marrying a white person or a Hindu a big culture clash.

These survey results confirm that the homogamy principle's ascriptive dimension such as religion becomes salient when a number of complex factors such as cultural practices; social distance related to discrimination, intergenerational obligations and duties become dominant for the persons involved. Research has documented the prominence of various types of marital

endogamy and homogamy in different socio-political contexts. Though at the same time the generational effects on the marriage patterns are pointed out – with increase in ethnic intermarriage over time. It is suggested that intermarriage patterns are good indicators of social distance between the groups and of opportunities for social mobility. Glazer (1997) notes in Wikan (2002) that intermarriage is an important step in the relation between a minority group and the majority – “Intermarriage is so crucial a final step because it does more than mark the attraction between two individuals – it marks the highest degree of social acceptance”(p. 261).

According to an analysis of marriages registered in the years 1994-1999 (Botelho 2002) 93.2% native Danish males and 94.7% native Danish females are married within their own ethnic group, thereby implying the prevalence of majority population homogamy in Denmark. Similarly Wikan (2002 p.262) discusses the fact that statistics from Norway show little change in intermarriage across national boundaries for first and second-generation immigrants of the largest groups. Among Pakistanis over thirty years of age, the percentage married to native Norwegians is 3.9% while it is 2.3% for those younger. Among other groups – Turks, for example – there is no registered change.

Due to socio-structural similarities between Norway and Denmark, congruous patterns of ethnic intermarriage in the Danish context are implied. In comparison, in the USA ethnic intermarriage runs in a different direction: at least one third of the Asian and Hispanic immigrants marry outside their ethnic groups (Wikan 2002). This is in line with the classical assimilation theorists that the ethnic endogamy will be weakened in the second and subsequent generations (Ian & Lighter 2001 in Gshur & Okum 2003). The possible explanations for these differences could be that USA has been a ‘melting pot’ for over 100 years, whereas some of the other complex explanations could be the presence of xenophobia and accompanying discrimination experienced by the minorities in the Nordic countries (Ålund 1997), ethnic and cultural preferences of the marriageable population (Botelho 2002); cultural practices involving ‘family reunification’ which provides visas to a liberal welfare state (Wikan 2002). These dynamics require further empirical research in the Nordic region.

These discussions confirm that marriage is a part of a wider constellation of social phenomena. Of course at the personal level there are pragmatic reasons for marriage, although marriage in the mainstream European society and the USA is based on the idealized concept of ‘love’. In the present investigation also 88% of youth attached great importance to “romantic love” as a factor in the intimate partnership formation. Sherif-Truck (2003) discusses that the dominant discourse about the ‘romantic love’ and ‘the right one’ makes it improbable that a person will confess to family and friends that they had

decided to marry solely because the newly found partner would now help them accomplish a goal, such as career advancement, children or financial security.

In practice there are combinations of a number of factors both ascriptive and achieved ones like social class, education, religion, race, appearance, similar values and common interests which the young people consider while forming their intimate partnerships. Thus a comprehensive study of homogamy with focus on endogamy requires further research that combines the religious factor with a number of the other factors on personal, interpersonal and societal levels.

The analyses of the intergenerational relationship form a basis for a suitable intervention system for helping the young people and the parental generation when such serious conflicts arise and furthermore preventing such conflicts, described elsewhere (Singla 2004b). The next section briefly covers the involvement of the family in the intervention provided to the youth who experience problems related to the formation of the intimate relationships.

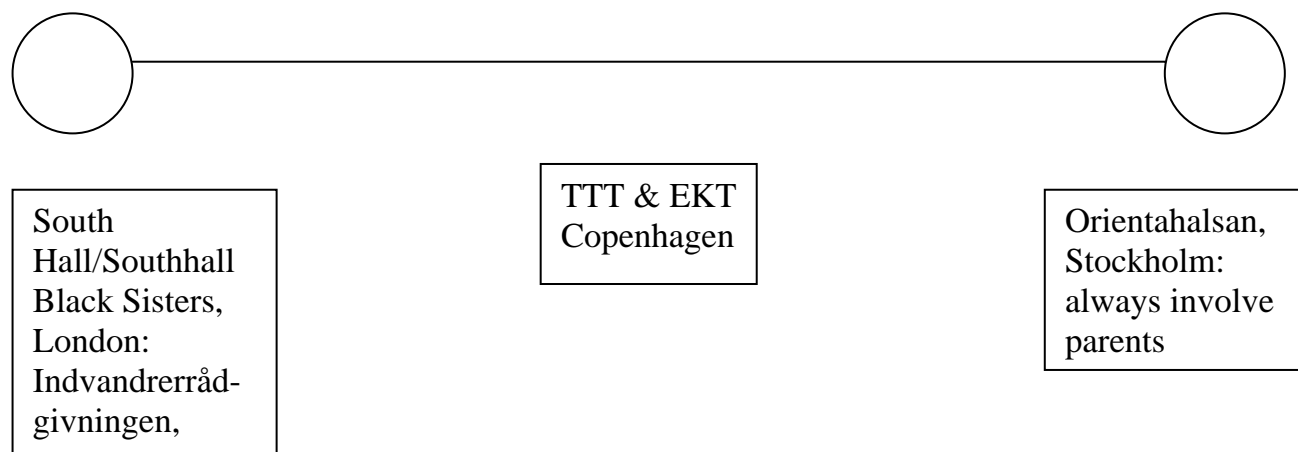
Intervention model for helping youth with problems related to intimate partnership formation

This illumination of the intergenerational dynamics makes it clear that a suitable form of intervention for helping the youth with these problems involves the parental generation to some degree. The last part of the article throws light on the form and extent of parental involvement in the intervention by throwing light on the different interventions models and finally drawing up a relevant model for helping minority youth with problems related to intimate partnership formation.

The analyses of the strategically chosen institutions in international context – South Hall Black Sisters in UK (Southhall Black Sisters 2002) Mira Centre in Oslo (Salimi 2002; Seland 2003) Orientalhalsan in Stockholm (Lumholdt 2003) Ethnic Consultant Team (EKT 2001) & Transcultural Therapeutic Team for young migrants and refugees (Singla 2004b, Singla, 2006) in Copenhagen, Immigrant Counselling, (Indvanderrådgivningen) in Aarhus (Sareen 2003) show that there are great differences in inclusion of parents in the intervention. These can be placed along the following continuum

Figure 2

The continuum about the family's role in the intervention with the youth with intimate partnership formation related problems.



Southhall Black Sisters is highly critical of parents who pressurise their daughters into marriage, considering the practice as control of female sexuality and autonomy. They are categorical in their *rejection of mediation with the aim of reconciliation* when it comes to forced marriages. They recommend not offering mediation and oppose its formalisation and institutionalisation as a service by professional agencies. On the other hand, the above-mentioned institution in Stockholm points to the psychosocially vulnerable situation of minority parents and recommends strongly *working parallel with the family*, primarily to reduce the fear and anxiety of the young women who have left family as a result of conflicts related to partnership formation. In Denmark the above mentioned institutions – EKT and TTT – can be placed in-between the two extreme points of continuum. The reason for this placing is these two institutions' involvement of the parental generation in intervention, though after acceptance of the young person. Miracentret in Oslo can also be placed similarly.

The study recommends an appropriate model for intervention at multiple levels, which not only addresses 'ageism' – awareness and inclusion of the psychological suffering of the family members irrespective of age thus includes both youth and parental generation, but also addresses sexism and racism. Negative differential treatment of women (and also to some extent, of ethnic minority men) in the domestic and societal sphere is also an important feature of the model. Instead of considering ethnic minority women as passive *victims*, strengthening their position in the educational and labour market sphere contributes to real gender equality. Lastly, the model addresses the issue of racism at a personal and societal level and recommends that the professionals focus on both the experiences of discrimination and the immigration processes, judicial procedures which undermine the human rights of ethnic minority in the

country, especially the highly restrictive new laws (2003) for family reunification with the spouse in Denmark.⁵ To some extent the political strategies used in this field are also a part of the problems experienced by the youth related to intimate partnership formation.

Conclusion

This paper provides a picture of the complex and heterogeneous aspects of ethnic minority youth's intimate partnership formation, especially religious belonging and intergenerational relationships.

The results indicate that the patterns of intimate partnership including romantic relationships – having a girl/boyfriend, marriage, cohabitation, and dissolution of marriages is changing, engaging both generations. The present empirical study shows that processes like trust, emotional closeness, and positive communication contribute to intergenerational harmony regarding these changes. The majority of young people with an ethnic minority background in Denmark are able to negotiate and reformulate their identities and relationships at different levels, through other processes like amalgamation and creolisation. They adapt ways for combining their own choices with the parental choices and acceptance. Conceptual frameworks involving simple binaries like 'arranged'/'love' marriages, *chosen by parents/ self-chosen* fail to capture the complexity. While these terms may hold some truth, the differences are exaggerated. In the processes of intimate partnership formation, some part is played by both the youth him/herself and some part played by the parents; similarly there are elements of 'love' involved in the marriages which are arranged by the family and voluntarily accepted by the youth, or the 'love' relationships are accepted by the parents and subsequently marriages are 'arranged' by the parents. The differences are therefore a matter of degree.⁶

The hegemonic, one-sided, simplistic discourse of problematic partnerships, especially forced marriage, is challenged by the youth and parental narratives

⁵ The so-called 24-years-rule, the affiliations criterion, economic conditions and the residential situation, from 2003, are unique in whole Europe. The first two rules restrict the entry of a spouse from a country outside Denmark, who is under 24 years of age and who does not fulfil certain arbitrary affiliation criteria.

⁶ Wikan (2002) rightly criticizes anthropologists for propagating a fundamental difference between "the collective" self in the East and the "individualistic" self in the West. She regards the difference as overdrawn as all selves are relational and all persons have some experience of themselves as unique individuals. The difference is a matter of degree and it crosscuts a simple paradigm of East versus West. According to Busch-Jensen (2004) freedom also involves contradictory power and control forms. To some extent Wikan overstates the oppression by the parental generation based on some tragic examples and ignores the negotiations between the parents' generations and the youth for a large number. Thus she sustains a notion of Western individualism which is exaggerated and romanticized. In other words, she contributes – perhaps unintentionally – in her zeal to 'salvage' the 'wretched' young women, to a hegemonic demonising of ethnic minority parents, especially the fathers.

and shows a pluralisation of the forms of intimate relationship formation. A complex, multi-layered picture of the intimate partnership formations among the minority youth emerges and is one of the major results of the present study. Reciprocal flexibility between the youth and the parents, and supportive parental relationship are some of the salient explanations for the positive generational relationships related to partnership formation. Analysing the minority youth in the context of a highly modern society, we can conclude that the young people want the positive sides of the individualisation – their own choice, yet at the same time they want to avoid the negative side, that is, isolation, as they value a psychological attachment to the parents. Thus they combine their own choice with parental acceptance. The parents also display changes and a number of parents are flexible in regard to the youth's intimate partnership formation. The reductionistic dichotomies like own choice/parental choice, autonomy/relatedness are to be interpreted critically, reformulated or rejected in the simplistic form in understanding these patterns. We recollect that many major societies in the third world refuse to think in terms of clearly opposed, exclusive Cartesian dichotomies (Øverland 2000).

Though at the same time a small number of youth with ethnic minority background experience serious conflicts with the parental generation on these issues in the contentious relationships characterised by lack of or decreased closeness over time. Complex factors like marginalisation, exclusion by the majority society leading to continuance of the oppressive cultural practices related to the young generation's intimate relationship formation may be focussed at for understanding the parental rigidity. Of course, the results also suggest different patterns among the different ethnic minority group studies. Nevertheless, there is a need for more research to illuminate these intergroup differences.

The article draws attention to the role of religion among the ethnic minority youth in the Danish context, where religious endogamy is important due to a variety of reasons. For some youth, the primary social psychological explanation lies in their own choice of socio-religious identity in the society characterised by late modernity and increasing polarisation between 'us' and 'them'. The youth's experience as a religious and ethnic minority in Danish society also affects the intimate partnership formation. The prevalent pattern of religious endogamy may be explained by the motivation for avoiding 'a high divorce rate and non-marital child bearing' associated with the majority group 'them'. Similarity in religious background is expected to contribute to a stable marriage life. Nevertheless, this explanation ignores the increasing number of divorces both among ethnic minority groups in Denmark and among the younger generation in the youths' countries of origin. Following the theoretical framework of this paper, this explanation ignores the significance of societal changes like late modernity. However, for some of the young persons, the dominant explanation for religious endogamy may be found in the family dynamics, especially the positive relationship with the parental generation.

On the whole, the results provide a basis for intervention practice targeting specific areas of personal, familial and societal functioning. More extensive knowledge is required both to confront the stereotype stigmatisation attached to the problematic forms of intimate partnership formation among ethnic minority youth and to provide appropriate intervention to the youth who experience serious conflicts and problems.

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