

**A black feminist exploration of the cultural experiences and
identities of academically 'successful' British South-Asian girls**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

This study draws on a black feminist theoretical perspective, to develop an understanding of the cultural identities and experiences of twelve, academically 'successful', British South-Asian girls. The girls are aged between 16-18 years, and from Hindu, Sikh and Muslim religious backgrounds, selected across two West London secondary schools.

A narrative interview approach is used to explore how these girls configure and invest in 'culture' and their cultural identities, during a critical stage in their academic lives before entering university. A series of unstructured interviews have been held with each girl, and these were complemented with reflective journals. The girls' narratives reveal how 'culture' (a contested term) is discussed with high weighting in relation to the importance of education, which they all narrated as an important key to unlocking 'success' in their future lives. The girls' identities move beyond media discourses that stereotype them as 'passive' and lacking a voice. These girls demonstrate agency and high aspirations for 'having it all', narrated through discourses of hard work, meritocracy and aspiration.

This study reveals the complex interaction of experiences that influence South-Asian girls' cultural identities, and the interplay of structure and agency in their journeys towards becoming 'successful', irrespective of their largely working-class backgrounds. Whilst I recognise that all adolescents will face challenges of some kind, being a South-Asian girl embodies its own particularities, linked to markers of difference in 'culture', religion, gender, ethnicity, 'race', class, language, dress, amongst other historical influences. These differences are not necessarily embodied as negative forces by these girls, but rather, used as a catalyst for personal growth, where they draw on their psychological strength, aspirations and desires, to become 'successful' young women.

This thesis makes a unique contribution to black feminist theory, girlhood studies, as well as narrative and educational literature. It acknowledges the uniqueness of South-Asian girls' cultural experiences and backgrounds, and challenges some of the cultural discourses in the media that pathologise them. It is written in a critically reflexive style, from the perspective of a second-generation, British-born, South-Asian academic, who, at the time of writing this thesis, was also raising two academically 'successful' daughters of her own. The inspiration for this research is rooted in the researcher's narratives of girlhood and early womanhood.

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Publications and conference presentations

Peer-reviewed publications

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Ludhra, G. (2011) Exploring the experiences of South-Asian girls: how well do semi-structured interviews 'unveil' complex lives? Rizvi, S. (ed.) *Multidisciplinary Approaches to Educational Research: Case-Studies from Europe and the Developing World*. UK : Routledge, pp.89-103.

Ludhra, G. (2011) Asian women in higher education: shared communities (book review). *Gender and Education*, 23(6), pp. 790-792.

Ludhra, G. and Chappell, A. (2011) "You were quiet – I did all the marching": research processes involved in hearing the voices of South-Asian girls, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 16(2), pp.101–118.

Ludhra, G. and Jones, D. (2010) Friendships, Talk and Identities: South-Asian Girls Tell Their Stories. Papanikos, G.T. (ed.) *The Teacher and the Teaching Profession: Current Research and International Issues. Issues on Education and Research: Volume 2*, pp. 23-40, Athens: ATINER.

Ludhra, G. and Jones, D. (2009) 'Unveiling' Complex Identities: An Exploration into the Perspectives and Experiences of South-Asian Girls. *The International Journal of Learning*, 16(8), pp.615-628. Common Ground Publisher.

Rogers, C. and Ludhra, G. (2011) Research ethics: participation, social difference and informed consent. In Bradford, S. and Cullen, F. (eds) *Research Methods for Youth Practitioners*. UK : Routledge, pp.43-65.

Conference presentations

Abbott, J., Byrne, J., Chappell, A., Ludhra, G., Martin, V. and Stanley, K. (2013) '*Hairstories: Images and women's tangled narratives in weaving identities*'. Presentation on 'Picturing the Self and Identity: Images of auto/biography' the BSA Auto/ Biography annual conference, 11 July, Barcelona.

Chappell, A., Ernest, P., Ludhra, G. and Mendick, H. (2012) *Unknowingly entering the 'darker' areas: how a narrative exploration into the experiences of South-Asian girls 'unlocked' the researcher's voices of girlhood*. 'Psychosocial explorations' conference, 17 December, Institute of Education.

Ludhra, G. (2012) *'Exploring South-Asian girlhoods'*, Modern Girlhoods: Growing up in the 21st Century: *Gender and Education conference*. Brunel University London, 8 February. London.

Ludhra, G. (2012) *'Bet you think this thesis is 'bout YOU: Striving for harmony amongst a choir of complex voices'*, Heroes, villains and fools: BSA Auto/Biography annual conference. University of Reading, 12 July. Reading.

Ludhra, G. (2011) *Exploring the 'hidden' lives of British South-Asian girls: a critical and ethical reflection on the re-presentation of 'voices'*. BSA Auto/Biography annual conference on 'Hidden Lives', Reading University, 7 July, Reading.

Ludhra, G. (2011) *'A narrative exploration into the cultural experiences of British South-Asian adolescent girls: challenges, ethical dilemmas and constraints'*, the 8th Annual Gender and Education Conference, 28 April, University of Exeter.

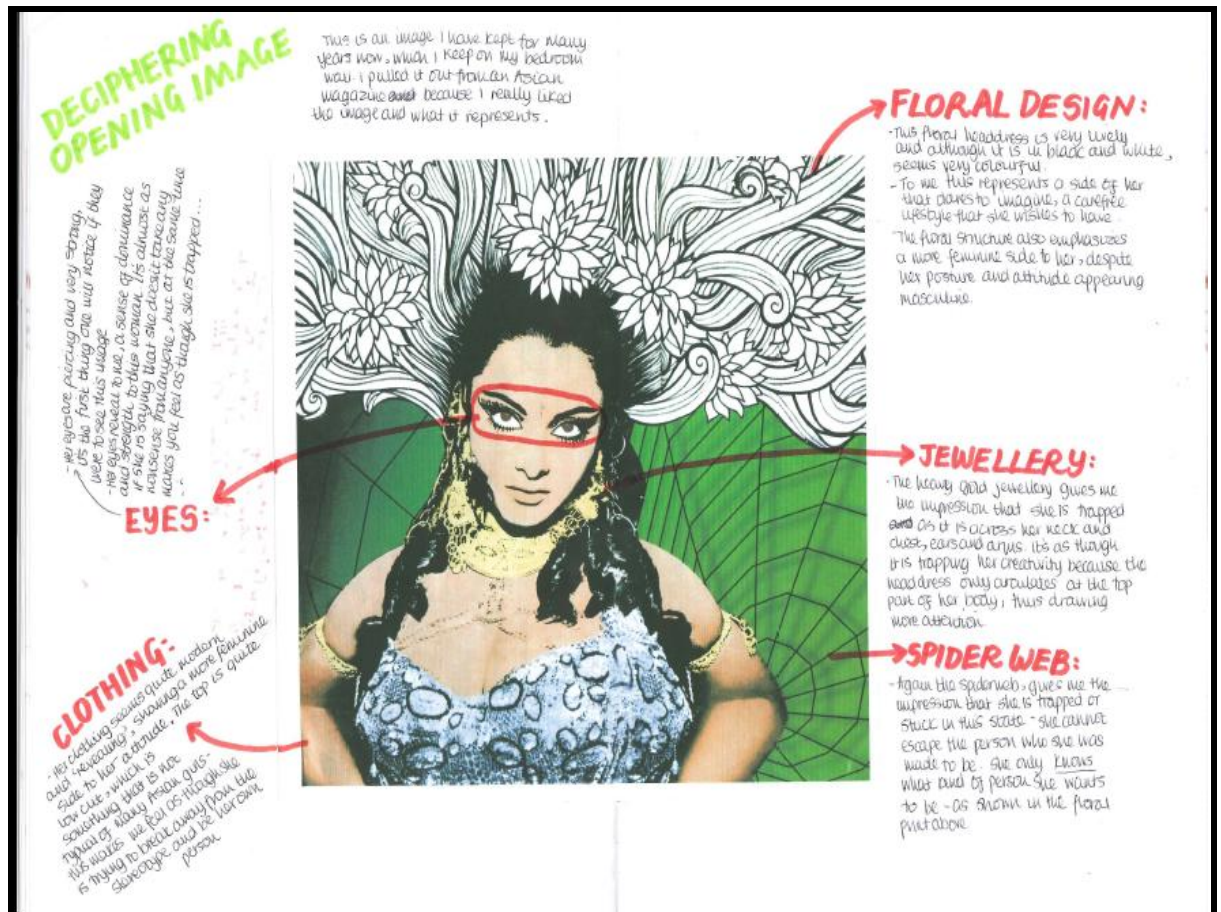
Ludhra, G. (2010) *'You were quiet. I did all the marching'*, Research processes involved in hearing the voices of South-Asian girls, BSA Auto/Biography 'Legacies' Annual Summer Conference. University of Leicester, 8 July, Leicester.

Ludhra, G. (2009) *'South-Asian girls tell their stories'*, Learning: the 16th International Conference, University of Barcelona, 2 July. Barcelona.

Ludhra, G. (2009) *'Telling their Stories: Insights into South-Asian adolescent girls' lives'*, AERA Annual Education Conference, 4 April, San Diego.

Ludhra, G. (2008) *'Exploring the cultural identities of British South-Asian adolescent girls'*, Education: the 10th International Conference. Athens, unit of the Athens Institute for Education and Research, 26 May. Greece.

"We are the want it all girls... but we jolly well graft for it! (Manpreet)



'A bit of Asian girlpower about her' (Arti)

Chapter One: Introduction and Historical Backdrop

Introduction and context: 'I believe in myself as a succeeder'

I believe in myself as a succeeder in life... After getting my degree, my future aspirations are I'd like to become a highly qualified solicitor and I want to get married. I want a high status job before I'm married though and to earn my own money but I'd also like to be a young mum too – that's my one dream.

...I'm able to see different cultural dimensions that are crossing me and I'm able to tackle these problems like with my family and school life. I feel like I can actually overcome these problems and in a way it's all preparing me for a better future - it just makes me a stronger girl so I can cope with it all later.

(Alka: Interview 3 extracts)

This narrative extract provides a valuable backdrop to the study, as it captures intersecting markers of difference in one of the twelve, academically 'successful' girls in this research. Here, Alka, a working-class girl of Muslim religious family background, discusses dimensions of her identity in relation to what she perceives as being and becoming 'successful', within the cultural configurations of her life - i.e.: desiring a good education; securing a high status career; having a 'successful' family life, and the psychological strength to 'tackle problems'. Alka has learned to navigate, and to some degree accept without resistance, the cultural expectations made of her by her parents - they have become an embedded part of her life. She has navigated the challenges of home life, whilst finding space to develop her personal aspirations for academic and career success in law. Her narratives reveal the complexities of conflicting and intersecting identities across her life, and how she narrates challenges as good preparation for future life, and as psychologically making her stronger.

The extract above, provides a useful backdrop, and supports why I have used black feminist theory to help me understand how the twelve girls of South-Asian background, navigate and 'negotiate the markers of difference' across their lives - differences such as religion, gender, ethnicity, 'race', language, dress, class and caste (Mirza, 2013, p.10). It further highlights the role of 'psychological capital' (which I will discuss later), in becoming 'successful'.

Research question and aims

The overarching research question for this thesis is:

How can black feminist theory illuminate an understanding of the cultural identities of twelve, academically 'successful', British South-Asian girls, as told through their narratives?

I presented the following research question to the twelve adolescent girls during their Advanced level (A-level) study at secondary school:

Talk to me about how you see your cultural identity as a 21st century, South-Asian girl, living and studying in West London.

The aim of this exploratory study is to draw on black feminist theory to develop an understanding of:

1. **The girls' configurations of 'culture':** How they understand, configure, and invest in 'culture' across their lives
2. **The girls' configurations of their identities:** How they configure and invest in their identities across their lives

3. **What 'girlhood' looks like as a British South-Asian girl:** What do their narratives reveal about 21st century, British South-Asian girlhood from their particular standpoint?

Through the girls' interviews, and other forms of data (e.g.: their reflective journals), a wealth of rich narrative has been generated, including my own reflective writing as a researcher, which I position as part of the knowledge-generation process (Skeggs, 2002; Hollway, 2012). The girls' narratives reveal a broad understanding of what happens beyond the school gates, into different spaces of their busy lives (Kehily and Nayak, 2009). Their narratives have drawn, in parts, on the girls' parents' and grandparents' migration histories, and the challenges and aspirations for their children to become 'successful', and lead a better life than they had in their challenging youth. As Tinkler and Jackson (2014) discuss, an understanding of girls' histories is essential in enabling researchers to interpret present day, gendered and educational experiences in a more informed manner.

Discourses: defining 'success' and 'South-Asian'

'Success'

Black feminist theory responds to the inequalities and forms of discrimination experienced by 'black' women as part of their 'herstories'. Historical experiences (rooted in slavery and diasporas of migration), have played out for 'women of colour' in different ways to white women, where black women's 'success' journeys have been compounded through markers of social difference. Of interest here is the work of bell hooks (1989), a black African American feminist, who writes about her intersecting experiences of girlhood oppression through 'race', gender and class. Brah's (1996) theory incorporates her journey of migration from East Africa to the UK, and South-Asian women's diasporic experiences and sense of belonging/not belonging. Brah (ibid) discusses how intersecting differences across women's lives, incorporate power operations in psycho-social ways. I will discuss the

theoretical dimension of black feminism, and how I have drawn upon it, within the first section of Chapter Two.

The notion of 'success' is a contested one, and it can be interpreted in various ways beyond academic qualifications and IQ tests. Within third-wave feminist literature, 'success' is constituted within the neoliberal and meritocratic discourse of girls who can 'have it all' if they work hard (Ringrose, 2013). Bradford and Hey (2007) refer to 'success' as part of this neoliberal discourse (I discuss neoliberalism within Chapter Two, section one), where a 'person's psychological capital' draws on 'practices of self-esteem, confidence and self-belief...' (p.600). However, as Gladwell (2008) discusses, 'success' can include practical intelligences, personality traits, hard work ethic, and ways in which family values and emotional support can 'steer' children's 'success' journeys.

Mirza's (2013) research, adds a valuable black feminist perspective to Bradford and Hey (ibid) and Gladwell's (ibid) work. In her study with three professional Muslim women, she discusses ways in which they draw on their 'psychological capital' to develop their 'success' stories. Within the context of Mirza's study, 'psychological capital' illuminates how her participants performed their agency to 'negotiate the markers of difference' (p.10) across their lives. An acknowledgement of 'psychological capital' (alongside social categories of difference), therefore provides a deeper understanding of how the women in her study, survived and navigated the differences that they experienced on a daily basis. Mirza's participants, drew for example, on psychological desires and emotions such as 'rage, shame, resentment and pain, as well as power and pleasure' (p.10). In a similar vein, hooks (1989; 1991) also discusses the psychological dimensions of black women's strength, power and survival abilities, through their narratives of oppression and pain.

The academic literature and media have tended to focus on the cultural differences, conflicts and oppressions of South-Asian girls, and their generally 'good girl' nature across school and home. The notion of how their 'success' is configured, invested in, navigated and drawn from, as in the context of this study, provides a different perspective to the passive Asian girl discourse that often circulates the media. Although some South-Asian groups are doing very well academically, an exploration of their narratives of 'success' have been very limited in the literature. Within this study, 'success' (and a perceived sense of 'failure') refers to various dimensions of girls' lives, where high A-level examination grades form only part of the 'successful girl' narrative. The twelve girls participating in this study were all aspiring to achieve the highest grades, as well as aiming for Russell group university places in most cases. Alongside this, most girls acknowledged the importance of developing a broad CV, which incorporated a range of leadership and cultural experiences, so that they came across to potential universities and employers as having a range of skills. As I discuss in Chapter Four, some of the girls were 'omnivorous' in their consumption of, and investment in, cultural experiences, where they adopted cosmopolitan cultural identities (Burns, 2009; Bauman, 2011).

As my study developed, the notion of 'academic success' had to be embedded within the research question. I did not plan to attract a highly academic sample, but as will be discussed in later chapters, the characteristic of aspiring for, and achieving academic 'success', has emerged as a uniting feature across these twelve girls. For example, 'culture' was configured and invested in, with the heaviest weighting in relation to the role of education. Education was a key 'driver' for this sample, but as will be revealed in Chapter Four, these girls configured, and narrated the role of education in different ways, depending on motivation and interest, available 'choices' and time, support from home and so forth.

South-Asian

'South-Asian' is a broad term that encompasses diverse groups (Brown and Talbot, 2006). In this study, South-Asian will refer to girls whose parents or grandparents have migrated from the Indian sub-continent, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri-Lanka. These include, as Ghuman (2011) states, East-African Asians who came to the UK via Tanzania, Kenya or Uganda. South-Asian can also include people from Mauritius, but my sample does not. The category 'Asian' is a contested one, and can also be used to describe Chinese, Korean, and Japanese people. The latter, however, tend to be aligned with their country of origin, rather than the continent. The girls in this study were from Hindu, Sikh and Muslim religious backgrounds, and influenced by Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam (to varying gradations of intensity), being the religions broadly followed by their parents and grandparents. Malik (2012) discusses how, within everyday discourses, the term 'Asian' is synonymously aligned with the word 'Indian', and this is particularly noticeable when discussing Sikh and Hindu communities.

According to the 2011 Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2012), there were approximately three million Asians in England and Wales, representing almost 5% of the UK population. Those of Indian origin comprised 2.3%. Pakistanis are the largest minority ethnic group of British Muslims, comprising around 1.9%, with around 0.75% being of Bangladeshi origin. Muslims now constitute the third largest faith community in the country (ONS, 2012). The five major languages spoken by these groups include: Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, Urdu and Hindi, with other languages and dialects (e.g.: Tamil and Sinhalese was spoken by two girls in my sample, whose parents were originally from Sri-Lanka).

Between and within each South-Asian group, there exist further differences of gender, class, caste, race, language (including regional dialects) and religio-cultural beliefs, to name but a few. In this thesis, I use Black Feminist

Theory to illustrate how these differences are configured in intersecting ways, where women in particular, will 'wear' and invest in their cultures to varying degrees of intensity, through the structures and 'choices' prevalent in their lives, as well as their psychological desires to invest (Brah, 1996; Phillips, 2010). Differences may be influenced by the geographical 'roots' of families from India or Pakistan, and Ghuman's (2011) and Brah's (1996) research in particular, discusses the importance of family heritage and cultural values. Abbas' (2003; 2004) research discusses the classed, ethnic and cultural capital differences of South-Asian families, and how parents' educational and social capital influences South-Asian children's educational success (also discussed by Archer, 2011; 2012 in relation to middle-class Asian parents' capital and aspirations for their children).

The phrase 'South-Asian woman' (or 'girl') should not therefore position girls within a homogeneous category, not least because the homogeneity of 'women' is an area critiqued by black feminists. As Bhopal (2010) states, 'South-Asian woman' should be seen as 'a starting point from which to focus on the varied lives of women who share a migratory background' (p.1). Media discourses have presented South-Asian people in particular ways, where, for example, British-Sikh and British-Hindu communities are portrayed as being more 'assimilated' and forward-thinking than British-Muslim, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities (Malik, 2012). Sikh and Hindu communities tend to be perceived by the West as more tolerant - i.e. more aligned with the 'modern' ways of the West (Ghuman, 2003). Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities have tended to under-achieve academically and, as a result, suffered more heavily from gendered, racial, religious and cultural discrimination in schools, the workplace, and society at large (Abbas, 2000; Haque, 2000; Tomlinson and Hutchinson, 1991).

In this way, markers of social difference intersect differently across individuals and groups. For Muslim teenage girls, the role of education and

schools becomes highly significant in navigating some of the discriminatory challenges and, at times, disturbing discourses, located for example within Islamophobia (Ijaz and Abbas, 2010; Iqbal et al., 2014). Stereotypes, literature and the media, form part of the depictions above, where Asian communities, particularly women, are often typified through the more superficial and aesthetic aspects of 'culture'. For example, bhangra music, Bollywood movies, exotic women in silk saris, bindis, henna patterns, curries, and passive women who live in patriarchal families - cultural superficialities discussed for example by Handa (2003); Chanda-Gool (2006) and Zagumny and Richey (2013). The definition of South-Asian can be heavily emphasised within media discourses surrounding Muslim women who have tended to suffer the most by being positioned in exaggerated ways, that depict them as following the extreme cultural practices of Islam, where they are discussed as having limited 'choices'. They are often presented as women who lack independence, voice, or agency (challenged by researchers like Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2009). Such forms of Islamophobia have been further amplified after the New York and London bombings of 9.11.01 and 7.7.05 (Shain, 2012).

On a lighter side, successful reality TV shows like 'Goodness Gracious Me' (Asian comedy), the 'Grewals' (British Punjabi family) and 'Citizen Khan' (British Muslim family), further typify and exaggerate how British-Asian families lead their lives in culturally and gendered stereotypical ways (Malik, 2012). The more recent reality drama series '*Desi Rascals*' presents a more Westernised view of young, British South-Asians (almost mirroring the 'Made in Chelsea' series), which is more aligned with contemporary discourses of Asian middle-class 'success' and young professionals. The Internet further includes a wealth of YouTube comedies that make fun of South-Asian people by overstressing media discourses to inform comedy skits - for example, the work of Muslim comedian, Zaid Ali.

To summarise here, what it means to be a 21st century, British South-Asian girl (and academically 'successful' as in this study), is layered and mediated within a configuration of physical, psychosocial, cultural, religious, historical, economic and socio-political factors (Brah, 1996; Mirza, 2013). My literature search and in-depth fieldwork, has revealed that there is no single definition of what a South-Asian girl is like. This diversity will be illustrated in Chapter Four, and further discussed in Chapter Five, particularly in relation to Aim three of my study.

An overview of the twelve girls and schools

At this point, it is useful to contextualise the twelve girls and the two schools that participated in this study.

Table 1: Participant Overview Chart

Name (Pseudonym) Languages spoken	Family religion Parents' occupation and country of origin	Family Structure	A levels	Degree choice
School: Valley High (Academy)				
Arti (Headgirl) Basic Punjabi German (AS level)	Hindu Dad (admin): Fiji Mum(admin):UK	1 younger sister	English Literature Biology Psychology German Critical Thinking	English Literature
Sunita Basic Punjabi French (GCSE)	Hindu Dad (accounts admin): Nairobi Mum (admin): Nairobi	1 older brother	English Literature Psychology Sociology Media Studies Critical Thinking	English Literature
Manpreet Fluent Punjabi German (GCSE)	Sikh Dad (admin): Kenya Mum (admin): UK	1 younger brother	English Literature History Psychology Sociology Critical Thinking	English Literature (after taking a GAP year)
Ravi Fluent Punjabi German (GCSE)	Sikh Dad (admin): UK Mum (admin): UK	1 younger sister	Chemistry Biology Maths Psychology Critical Thinking	Psychology (considered medicine first)
Fauzia Bengali, Urdu Hindi, Punjabi Arabic Basic French German (GCSE)	Muslim (Bengali) Dad (restaurant cook): Bangladesh Mum (housewife): Bangladesh	3 younger brothers	English Literature Psychology Sociology German Philosophy & Ethics Critical Thinking	Law
Alka Urdu Punjabi Arabic	Muslim Dad (was self-employed and then off sick): Pakistan Mum (housewife): Pakistan	2 younger brothers 1 younger sister	Economics Applied Business Psychology Sociology Critical Thinking	Law

Name (Pseudonym) Languages spoken	Family religion Parents' occupation and country of origin	Family structure	A levels	Degree choice
School: Park Rise (selective grammar)				
Sara (Headgirl) Tamil Sinhalese Arabic (fluent)	Muslim Dad (hotel work): Sri-Lanka Mum (hospital carer): Sri-Lanka	1 younger brother	Chemistry Biology Maths Psychology Critical Thinking	Medicine
Maheera Urdu Farsi Mirpuri	Muslim Dad (labouring work): Pakistan - Azad Kashmir Mum (housewife): Pakistan - Azad Kashmir	1 younger brother 2 older sisters 1 younger sister	Chemistry Biology Maths Geography Critical Thinking	Medicine
Preeti Punjabi	Sikh Dad (own business): Kenya Mum (supports father): Kenya	1 older brother 1 older sister	Chemistry Biology Maths English Literature Critical Thinking	Engineering (considered medicine)
Maya Hindi	Hindu Dad (car mechanic): Kenya Mum (teaching asst): Kenya	1 younger brother 2 older sisters and 1 younger sister (1 brother and sister are twins)	English Literature Geography Sociology Media Studies Critical Thinking	Film and Media
Anjula Tamil	Hindu Dad (admin): Sri-Lanka Mum (Solicitor): Sri-Lanka	1 older brother	Chemistry Biology Maths and Further Maths English Literature Critical Thinking	Biomedicine (first choice was medicine)
Narinder Punjabi	Sikh (classified herself as 'mainly Sikh' - mum was Hindu-Gujarati and father Sikh) Dad (chauffeur): Punjab Mum (admin): UK	1 younger brother 1 younger sister	Psychology Biology Maths and Further Maths Critical Thinking	Bio-dental materials (with a view to transfer to dentistry)

These girls were all studying A-levels and aged between 16-17 years at the start of the study. They were selected across two large, West London secondary schools, both with over 50% of their pupils having English as an additional language, with the majority South-Asian. One school was an Academy (Valley High), and the other a selective entry, non-fee paying grammar school (Park Rise). The schools were secured through academic contacts from Brunel University's Education Department. Both schools had 'outstanding' OfSTED (Office for Standards in Education) reports (2010 reports). Their geographical locations did not generally serve privileged communities but, rather, they comprised a significant proportion of working-class and lower middle-class families, serving predominantly black minority-ethnic and Asian pupils. The inclusion of the selective entry school meant that the six girls studying within that setting, had to pass entry tests.

The girls in this study comprised of second- and third-generation British, South-Asian girls, where some had grandparents living in the UK, others in India, Pakistan, Sri-Lanka and Bangladesh. At points, the girls' narratives touched on, and discussed, parents' countries of origin, where they referred to holidays 'back home', work experience, or charity work in Sri-Lanka for example. Six girls from each school were invited to participate, and the sample included Hindu, Sikh and Muslim girls - four from each religious background. Upon completing their A-levels, only one girl, Manpreet, took a gap year, and the other eleven directly entered university. Out of the twelve girls, two were Headgirls (Arti and Sara).

So, this study is an in-depth, narrative exploration of the cultural experiences, perceptions and identities, of these twelve, academically 'successful', British South-Asian girls, studying in West London secondary schools. The above sets the context for the remainder of Chapter One, which will be organised across two parts. Part One will present the historical backdrop which contextualises South-Asian communities within the

historical, political, economic and social contexts of South-Asian communities. Part Two will outline key areas of the study and present the structure the thesis.

Part 1: Historical backdrop: South-Asian communities

Context

As Tinkler and Jackson (2014) stress, it is important to develop a 'historical sensibility' to contextualise gendered and educational discourses (p.70). As Hall (1996) states, it is through acknowledging the importance of the past, that researchers are better able to understand present and future imagined identities. Gladwell (2008) further states that it is necessary to go 'beyond the individual' and understand the 'culture of a person', to include their friends, families and place of origin (p.10). This backdrop is intended to contextualise the 'herstories' of the twelve girls in this particular study.

First, I sketch the backdrop to the socio-economic, historical and political contexts for the migration of South-Asian communities to the UK. This section plots key historical events that have been part, even at a distance, of these girls' lives (Shaw, 1995; Purewal, 2010). I will discuss phases of the South-Asian community experience in relation to early migration patterns, and reasons for coming to the UK, related opportunities and threats, and the cultural discourse of 'son preference', which still circulates media coverage today. I focus on South-Asian communities, and in doing so, acknowledge that these experiences are not exclusive to them. Similar challenges were experienced by other immigrant communities who also settled in the UK post-1947- i.e. those from the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, Eire and the old Commonwealth (Ghuman, 1994).

Migration patterns and reasons for coming to the UK

Although the mass migration of South-Asian communities took place post-1945, it can be traced back to the 17th century as a result of long-recognised and profitable trading links between India and Great Britain with the East India Trading Company (Bisit, 1997; Anwar, 1998). Cheap labour was recruited from India for the dockyards, foundries, textile mills and catering companies (mirrored in the current context through Eastern European communities settling in the UK). During the early 19th century, the East India Company lost its trading monopoly with India and, as a result, 'free trade' prevailed. The British had control over India by 1859, when the notion of European superiority was seen through the 'Western enlightenment' phase of India's development (Visram, 1986). 'Western enlightenment' was aligned with a more 'civilised' and 'cultured' country (Varma, 2006).

As well as 'ayahs' (maids for children of affluent British ladies), 'lascars' (seamen), and soldiers (particularly 'Jat' Sikh soldiers during World War I), there were also a small, yet significant group of educated, middle-class Asians who came to the UK during this time. Over 100 Indian women studied the professions at British universities, yet the literature does not celebrate the existence of this 'successful' group (Bhachu, 1991; Bisit, 1997). As a result of early migration, small communities of South-Asian people began to settle, predominantly in the East End of London, and in port cities such as Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow (Desai, 1963; Ghuman, 1994). They established the early roots for future pioneers of the 1960s. For many English people, this may have been their first encounter with an Asian person and for some, this played out through racist discourses of 'othering' and practices of discrimination (Brah, 1994).

Broadly speaking, many South-Asian communities migrated for religious reasons, financial, political, social and educational betterment for themselves, and their children. The need to fill unskilled labour shortages in

the UK during the post-war years made it relatively easy for South-Asian communities to gain low-grade employment in the UK when the economy was expanding during the post-war boom (Brah and Minhas, 1985; Ballard, 1994). Immigration numbers increased significantly as a result of the 1948 Nationality Act, granting Commonwealth citizens the right to enter the UK without visas and work permits (Ghuman, 1994). During the early 1960s, men ventured over first and tended to live in all male, over-crowded households, often related through kinships and village friendships (Desai, 1963). For many early migrants, settlement in the UK was seen as a temporary and short-term measure to earn more money and support the family back home (Abbas, 2005). Moving to the UK elevated the 'family's standing back home in the local and social hierarchy' (Ballard, 1994, p.11).

During the mid 1950s, a form of sponsorship supported chain migration patterns, but this was only until 1962 when stricter immigration laws were enforced. The 'migratory elite' - those with technical skills - were privileged (Ghuman, 2003; Abbas, 2005). Immigration from the Indian sub-continent reached its peak in 1961 due to fears of more selective criteria being introduced. The East African Asians (described by Bhachu, 1991 as 'twice migrants'), immigrated to the UK between the 1960s and early 1970s, and were mainly the descendants of those employed to build railways by the Imperial British East Africa Company. Many later became successful in setting up businesses and entering professions. This group had high levels of cultural and economic capital (Brah, 2002; Abbas, 2005).

Although many of these immigrants were keen to maintain their exclusiveness (e.g. Sikh identities through wearing the *turban* and *kara*), some received a hostile reception, where they were constituted through the discourse of 'Pakis' or 'Asians', echoing colonial encounters of the 'Other' (Ghuman, 2003; Townsend and Weiner, 2011, discuss the prevalence of racism at this time).

Researchers like Watson (1977) and Anwar (1979) have contextualised the reasons for migration using the terms 'push' and 'pull' factors. 'Push' factors have included war, persecution, scarcity of farming land, forced migration from East Africa, and aspirations to improve one's social position. Visram (1986) outlines how the two sovereign states of India and Pakistan, created after the partition of 1947, meant that patterns and motivations of migration from India changed. Large-scale migration across India led to almost four million people being displaced.

The construction of the Mangla Dam in Pakistan was another reason for the migration of mainly the Pakistani Mirpuri community (Anwar, 1998). Haque (2000) comments on the low level of economic and educational development within rural areas such as Sylhet and Mirpur, from where some Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities came. The tradition of education was very weak in these areas, and this raised implications for both parental knowledge and confidence, in how they engaged with the British school curriculum. As Tomlinson and Hutchinson (1991) and Ghuman (1994) valuably discuss, low levels of parental education or experience of schooling, does not equate to low parental aspirations for children.

The main 'pull' factors towards the UK were the promise of better housing, higher living standards, education, health services and employment (Anwar, 1979). As stated earlier, some Asian communities did not come to the UK with long-term aspirations but, as time passed, they became used to the new culture and conditions, and perceived opportunities (Ghuman, 1994; Anwar, 1998). It is important to stress here that the common notion of poverty was not the only reason for migration, as some early pioneers were already established and educated within their homelands (Gaine and George, 1999). Moving to the UK was not an easy option, and it involved the raising of considerable funds, aspirations and dreams. As Gaine and George (ibid),

discuss, as a result of early migration challenges, parents often invested heavily in their children's education so that they could have better lives.

Opportunities and threats

Asian communities mainly settled in inner-cities, and areas which were characterised demographically as being poorer in socio/economic terms than the majority of the UK, as housing tended to be cheaper (Brah, 2006). By 'sticking together', they gained a sense of 'community' and 'camaraderie between people of the same village' (Desai, 1963: 16; Brah, 1999), which provided confidence as a minority group in a new place. Shared histories acted as a positive force of emotional security through shared cultural identity (Bhopal, 2010).

Ballard (1994) raises a number of concerns faced by early Asian communities and, although they acknowledged several benefits as highlighted earlier, they did not appreciate the perceived 'lack of standards' of the British, for example: different hygiene standards in bathing or washing; the absence of 'moral values'; lower levels of respect for the elderly; 'personal dignity' in relation to sexual freedom; the sense of individualism, and the nuclear family structure within British society (p.13). So for early immigrants, the British culture was not considered worthy of emulating, and was perceived as one that could potentially damage (or even corrupt) their children (Brah, 1979). Clearly, the above illustrates one perspective, and some British people will have perceived certain aspects of Asian cultures to be undignified from their standpoint (discussed by Ghuman, 1994; Abbas, 2005).

Most Asian people filled the low-grade labouring jobs (working-class work). Within the difference of class, many were also familiar with the caste system, and although it is perceived as something of the past, village connections from 'back home' informed settlement patterns, including more discrete

segregation in places of worship like the exclusive 'Jat' (Punjabi farmers), caste Gurdwaras or Hindu temples (Valmiki mandir) (Desai, 1963; Bhachu, 1991; Ghuman, 1994; 2011). In this way, the relationship between caste and class was also important, but this is not always discussed in the literature. Some researchers have discussed caste (Varma, 2006; Bhatia, 2007; Ghuman, 2011) and it has also been highlighted on mainstream television (Newsnight findings, 2013).

In relation to the migration of South-Asian women, Sikh women migrated in the late 1940s to get married, and join their husbands (Rait, 2005). They were not necessarily passive or totally dependent on men when they arrived in the UK, as many worked in private sector factories and production industries (Mirza, 1997). Bhachu's (1991) and Wilson's (1978) research on Sikh women raises important points in relation to their active roles on arrival to Britain. Bhachu refers to them as 'self determinative' and 'active agents in the economies' (p.410). They recreated traditional and cultural Sikh identities through generating traditional practices, rituals and ceremonies from India, which provided a sense of community and security (Brah, 1999).

Bhachu's (1991) research has conveyed the powerful cultural, economic and political activist role played by some Sikh women during the industrial disputes and strikes of the 1970s, where many were seen to work alongside the men in line with the equality ideologies of Sikhism (echoed by Purewal, 2010; 2013 and Wilson, 2006). Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism advocated equal rights for women: *"Women who give us birth, nurture and sustain us should be honored and not exploited. It is the ignorant who treat them badly"* (Ghuman, 2011: 15). Scholars of Islam and Hinduism may also argue that their religious scriptures promote equality between the sexes. However, how gender equality is written and interpreted within religious scriptures is open to translation and power/knowledge discourses that operate within religion and 'culture' (Foucault, 2000; Hussain, 2012). Brah

(1996) and Wilson (1978; 2006) discuss the active role of some early groups of Asian women, acknowledging the particular difficulties of first-generation Bangladeshi and Pakistani women who settled later in the 1960s. As Haque (2000) states, these groups had less financial resources or education than the previous Sikh and Hindu Asian groups. The Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities tended to settle in industrial cities like Bradford, Manchester, Oldham, Glasgow and Luton, but the largest community settled in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (Ghuman, 2003).

To a large degree, first and second generation Asian immigrants accepted and tolerated some of the racism, hardship and discrimination when first settling in the UK for the sake of perceived betterment (Bhachu, 1991). Asian communities, particularly Muslim groups and Sikh men wearing turbans, faced discrimination in terms of acceptance in employment, housing, as well as being seen as a possible threat by some members of the host community (Brah, 1999). Many first generation immigrants experienced language difficulties and Ghuman (1994) cites a well-known example from the popular 1977 British comedy, 'Mind your Language', where minority ethnic adults are learning to speak English with strong Indian accents. Early pioneers with weak language skills relied on more literate members of the community, and later their own British educated children (Desai, 1963; Brah, 1996).

Politically racist undertones permeated speeches from MPs, notably Enoch Powell's well-cited 'Rivers of Blood' Speech in 1968. This reflected what was happening at the local level within British society. More recently, there have been debates surrounding Jack Straw's *niqab* comments for Muslim women (Shain, 2010) and David Blunkett's speech (Home Office, cited in Ghuman, 2003:2) as the UK Home Secretary. David Blunkett appeared to welcome cultural diversity in 21st century Britain, seeing it as being positively enriching for the country. His later remarks showed that he did not recognise the role of the mother tongue, discussing it as a reason for a lack of assimilation. The

undertones of these political messages conveyed a preferred assimilation approach, where the responsibility lies with the immigrant (Ghuman, 2003). This has been further illustrated through Tony Blair's assimilationist call to Muslims and new migrants to adopt British values (Blair, 2006). The debate on how best to integrate/assimilate and control immigration, continues in today's political debate as we approach the 2015 general election.

Early settlers were keen to maintain aspects of their religious, cultural and community beliefs (Ghuman, 1994). As communities grew in inner-cities, funds were raised to build places of worship which became central points for prayer, socialisation, cultural and political events. South-Asian communities set up structures that mirrored their homelands, particularly in places like Tower Hamlets, Southall and Bradford (Ballard, 1994; Brah, 1999). Positive notions of community ethos and respect for the elderly were important cultural values embedded in the family structure. Therefore, leaving elderly members of the family behind in India raised ethical dilemmas for many sons (Ballard, 1994). Ballard (ibid) highlights the strong sense of obligation to support parents and families, where this resulted in the extended family structure being a solution. Gladwell (2008) refers to this historical sense of community values as providing 'magical benefits' for families (p.10).

The historic role and preference for sons

There exist prevalent discourses that most South-Asian families prefer sons. The media has highlighted the extent to which some people will go to via sex-selective abortions and gender selection clinics in the UK and abroad (Purewal, 2010). Although this is not simply isolated to Asian families alone, it has received heightened media attention for Asian groups, due the uneven gender statistics in India. Purewal's extensive research (2003; 2010; 2013) has been central in this area, particularly her narrative work with South-Asian women with daughters (like me, this built on her personal experiences of having two daughters).

The notion of preferring sons is important in relation to understanding shifting attitudes of parents and South-Asian communities towards girls today, and the degree to which girls are perceived as a 'burden' - financially, emotionally and from a status perspective. In line with the narrative mode of this study, it is important to understand how the girls themselves perceive their status in relation to the opportunities and 'choices' available to them, compared to boys. Although seminal texts (and current media coverage) tend to portray a rather depressing picture of South-Asian communities still operating within patriarchal value systems, contemporary literature suggests how structures are open to differences between South-Asian communities (and castes), and how they are being re-shaped by social, structural, cultural and economic forces (Ghuman, 2011). I would add here, the ways in which girls themselves use education to reconfigure historical inequalities, and as a way of empowering themselves (hooks, 1989; Bhopal, 2011).

Wilson's (1978) seminal research outlines the historic, social and economic reasons for son preference, where after the British Raj in India, peasant farmers owned and cultivated their land plots which resulted in inheritance rights for their sons. The British imposed revenue taxes that made situations like poor harvests difficult to sustain financially. During periods of financial stress, sons were seen as hope, representing the strength required for labour-intensive work and to support their fathers. The woman's role was primarily a domestic and nurturing one, and to produce the labour force of sons. Such messages were reinforced through religious interpretations, mythology and blessings from matriarchal figures. Blessings such as 'May God give you 100 sons' [translated as *Rab thinoo sor puthar dhiver*] would be (and still are in my experience) uttered to daughters-in-law in the hope of bearing sons to continue the family legacy (Bumiller, 1990; Purewal, 2010). Traditionally, women who produced only daughters were seen as carrying 'misfortunate' (illustrated in Purewal, 2010). The financial burden of the dowry system contributed to families not wanting daughters (Bhachu 1991;

Bhopal, 1997). For parents (and the community), marrying a daughter off with respect [translated as '*izzat*'] was seen as a huge responsibility. A daughter should not bring dishonour [translated '*badnami*'] to the family, but always behave in a 'respectable' manner.

'Traditionally', when an Asian girl entered marriage, she was seen to belong to her husband's family and would be expected to prioritise them in her post-marriage life. In this way, her identity from daughter is re-shaped as she assimilates as daughter-in-law and wife. When married, a woman can elevate her status, especially if she produces sons (Wilson, 1978). The latter are 'rooted' in historical views, but as Purewal (2010) discusses, this does not dismiss their existence in present-day cultural discourses

Part 1: summary

In the above, I have contextualised the historical backdrop. The experiences of early South-Asian pioneers embodied hardship, sacrifice, racism and discrimination, alongside an optimism for a better future for their children and families (Wilson, 1978). They were willing to sacrifice their livelihoods for the good of the collective, as this was seen as honorable, where a sense of duty was embodied in their psyche (Gaine and George, 1999). As Bauman (2001) and Gladwell (2008) highlight, being part of a community carries benefits - what Gladwell refers to as 'magical benefits'. But as Bauman discusses, community sacrifice and duty come at a price when individuals have to forego their desires for the benefit of the collective. This section illuminates how early pioneers' lives, particularly women, were embodied with intersectional experiences and 'oppressions', but this does not mean that the women had no agency, as often discussed within the dominant feminist discourse of 'freedom' (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2009; Phillips, 2010). In the context of this study, black feminist theory is very helpful, as it acknowledges cultural and historical experiences through a critical lens, recognising how markers of difference operate for 'women of color'.

Part 2: Journey of the study

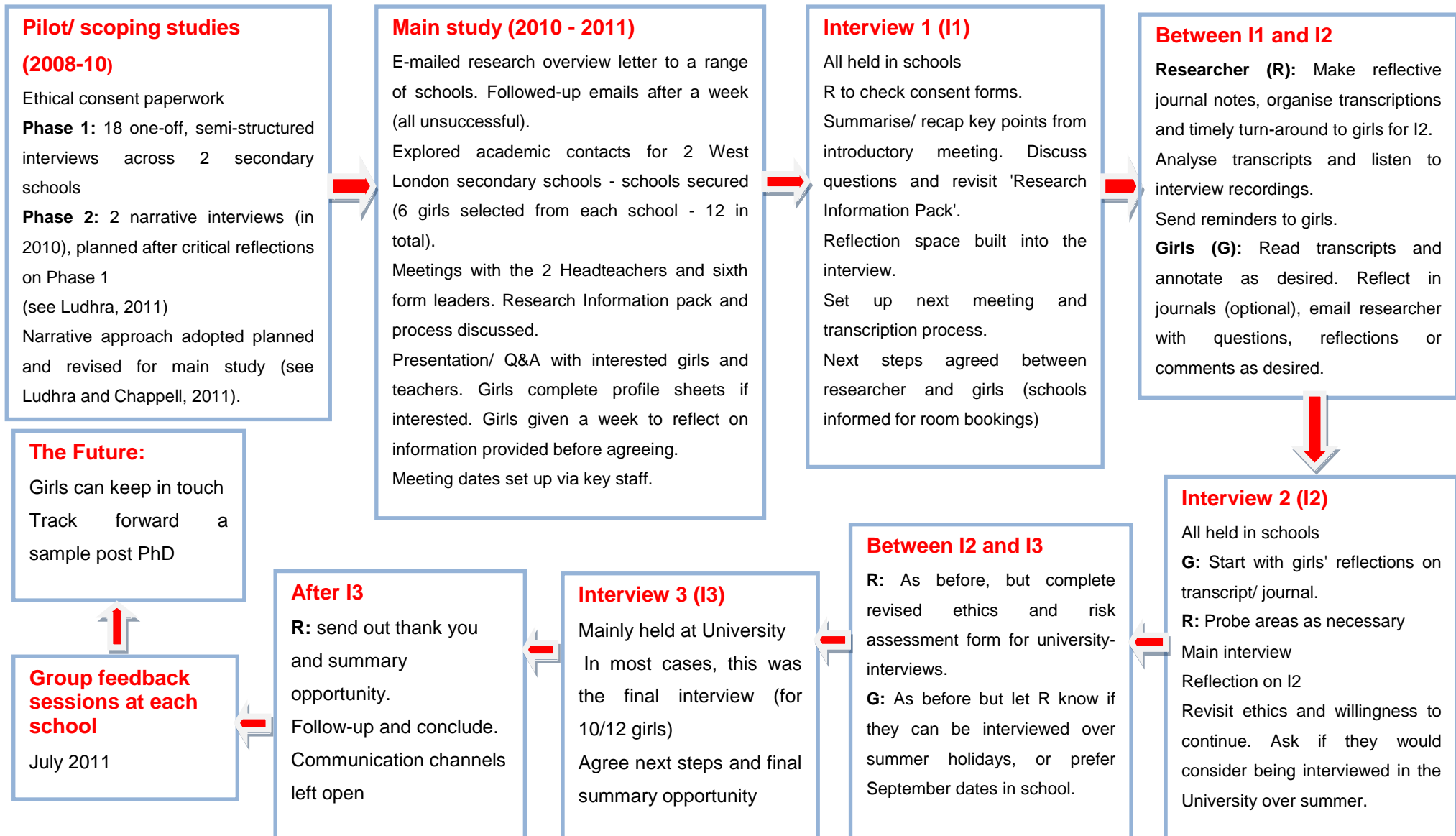
From pilot phases to the main narrative study

Part two of this chapter plots the journey of this study. The main study adopts a narrative interview approach, and builds on lessons learned from the two pilot phases - this will be discussed in Chapter Three. The pilot phases allowed me to 'scope' the field and try out ideas. Phase One was conducted from 2008 to 2009 with eighteen, British South-Asian girls across two West London secondary schools. This was funded through an Early Researcher's Award at Brunel University, when I first entered higher education from working in a school. Phase One adopted a semi-structured interview approach, and I have reflected on, and critiqued this phase elsewhere (see Ludhra, 2011).

Phase Two was a refinement of Phase One, where I modified my approach towards a narrative interview style, which was piloted with two girls. The two pilot phases enabled me to explore the best possible methods within the available resources and time. The pilot study data has not been presented in this thesis, but written up through research papers (Ludhra and Jones, 2009; 2010; Ludhra, 2011; Ludhra and Chappell, 2011), as well as presentations at national and international conferences (e.g.: Ludhra, 2008; 2009a/b; Ludhra, 2010).

Data for the main study was collected over two academic years. I draw the reader back to the earlier 'Table 1: Participant Overview chart', as it presents biographical information and context on the twelve girls. Each girl participated in three to five unstructured interviews, lasting between 1-2 hours each (Appendix 1 presents extracts of three girls' interviews to illustrate the transcription style). My Research Information Pack (selected extracts presented in Appendix 2), outlines key information provided to the girls. The stages of the study are illustrated in the diagram below:

Table 2: Methodology - Diagram of Process



Participation in the study was wholly voluntary, and followed an informal invitation to all interested girls to attend a presentation. My presentation focused on the research question, aims of the study, and processes. The twelve girls shared personal experiences and reflections through open-ended interviews, email dialogues, telephone conversations, mobile phone texts, sharing of UCAS personal statements, Headgirl speeches, and reflective journal entries - all to varying degrees of detail as they were optional. Overall, the twelve girls conveyed a strong commitment, with what I perceived to be genuine enthusiasm and commitment. They were keen to read the final thesis and any emerging research papers, as well as an interest in postdoctoral follow-up research (see Conclusions and future research avenues). I believe that their enthusiasm contributed to none of them dropping out of the study. The girls were given the space to 'steer' the content of the interviews within the overarching research question and aims presented at the start of this chapter. The 'Research Information Pack' was emailed to the schools prior to my introductory presentation, so that interested pupils (and staff) had time to read it before they met me.

I was interested to explore the girls' interpretations of 'culture' in its broadest sense, and how they experienced and understood its influence on their identities. Like Kearney (1998; 2003) and Mirza (2013), my preferred approach was that the participants raised topics that they perceived as significant to them in their lives, so that the study was 'grounded' in their lived experiences. Overall, prompts were not needed (although planned for) as the girls had so much to say, where at times I struggled to stop them talking, and there was disappointment when the interview finished. The first conversation with each girl was central in setting the scene for subsequent interviews, and building a positive relationship in which the girls felt 'safe' to share their narratives. Interview one provided anchor points for follow-up interviews. As in Maylor's (1995) valuable study, the girls were all given their

transcripts as a record of the meetings, and this process proved useful for me and the girls (discussed in Chapters Three and Six).

Each girl's interview comprised of fragments of life experience, shared with me as mini-narratives during a critical phase in their academic lives, where they were preparing for transition to university. Their interviews followed an individual map, and these meandered across topics to reveal their unique journeys. I mapped the key topics of each interview in the form of conversation maps, using Excel spreadsheets (see Appendix 3 for an example of Arti's, which I have colour-coded). I have removed significant detail for reasons of anonymity. Like our fingerprints, each girl's narrative revealed a unique configuration of how she chose to narrate dimensions of her cultural identity to me, at a particular moment in time.

Inspiration: the auto/biographical

The motivation for this study is complex, multi-faceted, and rooted in my girlhood experiences. A particular catalyst was becoming a mother to two girls when I lived within a 'traditional' and patriarchal extended family. Critical reflections on those experiences led to deep questioning of the self. I reflected on the tensions (and joys) that I experienced when growing up as a second-generation, British South-Asian girl, living in Nottingham and moving to London post-marriage at the young age of nineteen. My experiences led to a critical interest in how gendered influences play out in reality, for working-class girls like me. I questioned the 'power' dynamics of interactions across spaces, and ways in which I navigated and 'wore' dimensions of my culture and religion, when educated in a predominantly white, working-class area. Personal experiences made me think about the ways in which 'choices' were made and presented to me, and how I was agentic through drawing on my 'psychological capital' (Bradford and Hey, 2007) for strength and a change in how I led my life (I found hooks, 1989, particularly inspirational).

With hindsight, my autobiography encompasses notions of becoming 'successful' (whilst also feeling 'unsuccessful' across some contexts where I felt 'suffocated' as a woman), as I moved from a working-class, and at times challenging upbringing, to a now middle-class position, working as a Lecturer in Education at Brunel University. Interestingly, I still struggle to call myself a 'middle-class woman' as I feel rather nostalgic about my working-class roots, and the motivation that those girlhood challenges brought about in me - I am who I am as a result of those critical experiences (Craib, 1998). Through questioning dimensions of my 'culture', identity, heritage, sense of belonging/not belonging, the crucial identity question - 'Who am I?' seemed almost impossible to navigate, as it shifted over time and context. hooks (1996) narrates her girlhood challenges powerfully, where as a black girl, she drew on them to drive her 'success', particularly her career in academia. Like hooks (ibid), the critically reflective process of questioning and reading, required me to journey through dimensions of 'culture' in sometimes emotive and tangled ways (Letherby, 2002).

Finding 'safe' spaces to discuss my responses to such questions within academia seemed difficult, as sharing the personal is not always perceived as legitimate. Over time, and through reading black feminist and narrative works, I developed greater confidence to articulate how the personal connected to my research (and was highly relevant in the knowledge-generation process), particularly within research spaces such as the British Sociological Association's (BSA) Auto/Biography group, where I presented early doctoral work-in-progress (Ludhra, 2010; 2011; 2012), and within the 'Brunel Theory Reading Group' where I presented collaboratively at a psychosocial conference (Chappell, Ernest, Ludhra and Mendick, 2012) and later submitted this paper to a special issue of that conference (Chappell, Ernest, Ludhra and Mendick, 2014).

So I return now to Alka's opening quote at the start of this chapter and, in ways, dimensions of my girlhood connected to her vision for becoming academically 'successful', alongside a desire to be 'successful' in family life. I entered marriage at nineteen with low academic status, as I perceived it. I was educated to A-level standard, but had no financial or career independence when I moved to London from Nottingham. This positioned me in a particular way as a married woman, assimilating into the extended family of my husband, where I often felt lonely and isolated away from my family. A significant phase in my life was entering higher education as a mature student, after the birth of our two daughters. Education acted as a tool for personal transformation, as it provided me with a form of 'power', feminist 'voice', status and agency. Gradually, I started to psychologically invest in my beliefs and values as a mother of daughters (Brah, 2006). Education gave me greater confidence to become a more critically-informed mother, where I developed a heightened awareness of some of the potential gendered challenges that my daughters may face as they grow up (Purewal, 2010). I wanted their lives to be different to mine, and for their voices to be heard in ways that were respected.

As the thesis title states, this study is about how twelve, academically 'successful', British South-Asian girls narrated, configured and invested in their cultural identities. Within their narratives, sit personal experiences that I bring to this study as part of my 'herstory' (this dimension of my research was presented with BSA narrative researchers: Abbott, Byrne, Chappell, Ludhra, Martin and Stanley, 2013). Therefore, to ignore the self would be dishonest, and my position is, that no researcher enters the field *tabula rasa*. Like many black feminist and narrative scholars, I am an interpretative researcher, and make my history and position explicit at the start of this thesis so that the reader has context of the lens through which I have heard, written and interpreted the narratives. In this sense, I draw on Kearney (2003), in that my 'tracks are central to the story' that I tell, and how I tell it

(p.60). This research stems from the heart, mind and body, and therefore sits within an embodied study of life experience (George, 2012; Letherby, 2013), which I see as part of the knowledge-generation journey.

The various topics raised in this chapter may lead to a questioning of crude, yet well-known phrases in everyday discourses and academic texts - 'culture clash', 'culture conflict', and being 'trapped between two cultures' - the 'modern' and 'traditional' binary poles (Ballard, 1994:30; Tee, 1996; Haw, 2011). Ballard (1994) and Phillips (2010) question the degree to which such widespread assumptions realistically capture a deep understanding of Asian people's cultural experiences, particularly women and the complex interplay between structure, agency and 'choices' available across spaces. The cultural discourses raised here, will be explored further within the next chapter.

Overview of thesis

This thesis is organised across six chapters as follows:

Chapter One. This has been split across two parts, where part one presented the research question, aims, historical context and key biographical characteristics of the twelve girls and two schools. Part two outlined the journey of the study, from the two pilot phases (which I refer to as scoping studies), through to the narrative approach adopted in the main study. The diagram (Table 2) illustrated the stages involved.

Chapter Two. This chapter will provide an overview of the literature from a range of scholarly disciplines, to include sociology, social psychology, cultural studies and youth/ girlhood studies. I foreground the chapter with a theoretical overview of black feminist theory, followed by sections on: Configurations of 'culture'; Cultural identity: An interdisciplinary approach,

and the final section on South-Asian girls: a review of girlhood studies. By drawing on interdisciplinary literature, it has allowed me to broaden my knowledge and understanding of what 'girlhood' represents across disciplines.

Chapter Three. The Methodology Chapter outlines stages of the study, providing detail on the diagram presented in Chapter Two. It discusses critical perspectives of 'voice', 'power', ethics and researcher positionality, as these were all important considerations as part of the narrative methodology. Here, I will introduce Phillips' (2010) notion of 'wearing' culture heavily, lightly or otherwise, and illustrate this through the 'weighted continuum' concept that I have developed, using their terminology as a starting point. I will discuss Bauman's (2011) coined analogy of investing in 'culture' in 'omnivorous' and 'univorous' ways, where I will modify and apply these phrases to my twelve girls. I will introduce three Profile Charts that emerged as part of the thematic coding process:

- Chart 1: Profile of Cultural Configurations
- Chart 2: Profile of Educational 'Success'
- Chart 3: Configurations of cultural identity

These charts will illustrate at a glance, how the twelve girls configured and invested in dimensions of 'culture', education and their cultural identities.

Chapter Four. I have called this chapter 'Narratives', to align with my interpretative approach. I will present verbatim extracts from the girls' interviews, and selected entries from their research journals. Their narratives will be presented across three sections as follows:

- Configurations of 'culture'
- Culture: the highly weighted role of education

- Configurations of cultural identity

Each section will begin with a Profile Chart to exemplify the broad picture.

Chapter Five. This chapter discusses the girls' narratives, where I present my story and interpretation of the data through a birds-eye view. I use visual diagrams at points, to help illustrate key messages.

Chapter Six. I have split the final chapter across two parts. Part one focuses on reflections discussed by the girls, and those experienced by me as a researcher. Here, I will reflect on the research journey and present 'backstage' insights (Goffman, 1990), drawing on psychosocial dimensions of the study (Hollway, 2012). This will build on the 'Inspiration for the study' as outlined earlier in this chapter. Part one will also outline how the girls' participation in the study engaged them in deep levels of reflection about their cultural identities. Part two ends the thesis, and takes the reader through a set of conclusions and key points, as revealed through the girls' narratives. I will highlight some of the limitations of this study, discuss my contribution to new knowledge, and suggest directions for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction and context

The previous chapter set the scene for this study, where I outlined phases of the research, to include an overview of the girls and two schools. I presented the historical backdrop to South-Asian communities, the research question, aims and thesis structure. This chapter presents the literature under four headings:

1. Theoretical framework: black feminist theory
2. Configurations of 'culture'
3. Cultural identity: an interdisciplinary approach
4. South Asian girls: a review of girlhood studies

I begin by providing a brief rationale for the structure of this chapter. The first section presents the theoretical framework of black feminism as this makes transparent the lens through which I have analysed the study. This will help to contextualise how I position myself within the literature. I will follow through the principles of black feminist thinking (that draws on an intersectionality framework) in subsequent chapters. My review of literature has not followed a grounded theory approach in its original meaning - Glaser and Straus's (1967) early work challenged any prior literature search before fieldwork, as it was seen to stifle creative interpretations, quality and the originality of research. Dunne (2011) adds to this by arguing that a prior literature search can 'contaminate' the data and analysis (p.114) - what Becker and Richards (2007) refer to this as 'exerting an ideological hegemony' over the researcher (p.147). Corbin and Strauss (2008) later modified this, moving towards an early review of relevant literature. On the contrary, as highlighted in Chapter One, the topic of this study has been inspired by personal experiences, which I view as part of the knowledge-

generation process (supported by Mills, 1959). Following Charmaz's (2006) view and feminist studies in the field of narrative, the personal cannot be omitted from ways in which I have approached, engaged with, and responded to the literature.

In my research question, I set out to explore and understand how these girls configured and invested in 'culture' and their cultural identities. In the second section, I will therefore undertake a journey through different perspectives on the contested notion of 'culture', going back to classical writers like T.S. Eliot (1948). In the third section, I adopt an inter-disciplinary approach to the literature on identity and focus my position in relation to black feminist ways of theorising identity through an intersectional lens that acknowledges how the social and psychological work in complementary ways (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2006; Chappell et al., 2014). The fourth section will discuss key studies on South-Asian girls and youth more broadly, and here, I make reference to international girlhood studies (e.g.: Anita Harris's work) for a broader perspective. I end this section by highlighting what I see as being my contribution to existing literature.

Section 1. Theoretical framework: black feminist theory

To understand my rationale for drawing on black feminist theory, it is important to discuss the principles of dominant feminist theory, and how discourses surrounding 'girl' and 'woman' have evolved across 'waves' of feminist thinking. In the first part of this section, I will provide some background to feminist thinking, and how dissatisfaction with parts of it led to the emergence of 'black' feminist theory (linked to Critical Race Theory from the United States). In the second part, I will discuss key principles underpinning black feminism, to include an intersectionality framework that acknowledges the diversity of girls'/ women's experiences beyond a gender only analytical lens (McCall, 2011). In the third part, I will outline why I was

drawn to black feminist theory, where I will critique some of its potential limitations.

Meanings of feminism have shifted over time and across the globe, and therefore I see it as more fitting to talk of 'feminisms'. The literature on the feminist movement outlines three 'waves' (Doull and Sethna, 2011). First and second wave feminists have focused on the collective struggles of women - a view sharply criticised for being too homogeneous and anglo-centric (hooks, 1989; Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Ahmed, 2012). First wave feminists prioritised the experiences of white, middle-class women, and this effectively excluded the voices of women from minority-ethnic backgrounds or 'women of colour' - the term used in black American studies literature (Collins, 2000). First and second wave feminists have tended to locate women's experiences within notions of patriarchy and capitalism (Beechey, 1979), and British South-Asian feminists also did this in their early writing (Bhopal, 1997; Wilson, 1978).

Schools, communities, families, religious and cultural organisations were seen to 'regulate young women's lives so that errors are minimized' (Harris, 2004: 49). This process of regulation connects to systems of 'surveillance' that operate across spaces, and also ways in which girls can self-regulate their lives. The notion of governance, and the surveillance of sexuality have been discussed by Rose (1999) and Foucault (1984), but their theoretical research has not addressed the particular experiences or power differences that minority ethnic women experience. Ringrose (2013) and Collins (2000) argue that an understanding of 'power' is essential to discussing these girls' experiences and their spaces for agency and 'choice'.

Third wave feminist thinking shifted from the collective category of 'women', towards a more individualistic approach, located within a neoliberal framework (Bradford and Hey, 2007). The current neoliberal climate of the marketplace, focuses on individuals meeting their end goals, with an 'emphasis on measured outputs...' (Olssen and Peters, 2005, p.313) Within this, Olssen and Peters (ibid), discuss how individuals work within a competitive environment of compliance and obedience, generated through the auditing culture of government. Brooks (2013) further discusses this in relation to young people, and how 'The interests of students are broadly in line with those of business and ... that young people can only benefit from adopting business values, such as enterprise, entrepreneurship and competitive individualism' (p.321).

Within the neoliberal marketplace, women are seen to invest in the personal benefits of self-fulfillment, self-achievement, and a 'belief that structural inequalities are personal problems' (Pomerantz and Raby, 2011: 549). However, this idea that failure is a personal problem has been critically discussed by feminist writers (Phillips, 2010; Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013; Mirza, Meeto and Litster, 2011). In this vein, Ringrose (2013) argues that neoliberalism focuses on girls' agency, freedom, and 'choices', rather than structural weaknesses in society. She argues that third-wave feminism is part of the 'gender equality illusion', whereby girls are constructed as 'entrepreneurs of their own lives' who 'engineer' their 'success' journeys (p.3). Gonick (2007), Khoja-Moolji (2014), Mendick and Francis (2012), too, discuss notions of meritocracy as a false illusion. Taft (2004) adds to this critique by arguing that such third-wave discourses of 'Girlpower fail to provide them with tools to understand and challenge situations where they experience sexism and other forms of oppression' (p.73). Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik (2013) argue that 'successful girl' discourses 'trap girls between an idealized neoliberal girl subject' - one where she is told that she can 'run the world' and be anything that she wants to be - compared to the everyday

realities of girls' lives, which include experiences of inequality (p.187), some of which maybe compounded through the 'weight' of intersectionalities (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Inequalities and power operations are experienced differently for 'women of colour' (Brah, 1996; Collins, 2000) and this underpins the emergence of black feminist theory. Leading black feminists include some of the following researchers: bell hooks (1989;1996) – her name written in lower case because she adopted in respect, the pen name of her grandmother; Audre Lorde (1984); Kimberle Crenshaw (1998); Patricia-Hill Collins (1991); Angela Davis (1981); Heidi Safia Mirza (1992; 1997); Avtar Brah (1996; 2012); Kalwant Bhopal (1997; 2009) and Amrit Wilson (1978; 2006). This list is just a selected sample, and their personal experiences (including their insider/outsider positions of connection) of coming to black feminism are very different. For example, Brah (1996) and Wilson (1978) have focused on the historical and diasporic experiences of South-Asian communities, and feelings of being a stranger - what Brah (1999) refers to in her seminal migration essay as the '*paraya*' [stranger] experience (echoed by Puwar, 2004). hooks (1989) has written extensively about her girlhood experiences of black oppression in the US context, with a focus on 'raced', gendered and class discrimination, and how she drew on those experiences of inequality and discrimination as a catalyst for 'success' (Craib, 1998, discusses challenge as an identity-building experience). The latter research has provided space to discuss black women's narratives of struggle from a historical and political perspective.

Broadly speaking, black feminism is a response to the invisibility of black women's voices and the need to include their narratives in research (Collins, 2011). For example, hooks (1989) discusses the scholarly elitism of white feminist researchers who she perceives as having a limited knowledge or understanding of black women's everyday experiences of discrimination and

inequalities. Within black feminist literature, gender is discussed in relation – not least - to women's differences of 'race', class, caste, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality (Shain, 2012).

The word 'black' is contested, as like 'Asian', it can apply to various groups (Rasool, 1997; Malik, 2012). Housee (2004) discusses ways in which the participants in her research wanted the words 'Black' and 'Asian' as separate categories. She found that Asian groups were further differentiated through their religious and cultural backgrounds, particularly since the 9/11 tragedy, and the strengthening of Islamic identities for some young people (echoed in Shain's, 2011 pertinent research). The experiences of British 'Black' and 'Asian' women's identities, comprise of a range of experiences, and these debates are set against a complex tapestry of historical, political, cultural, social and geographical origins of displacement (diasporas), alongside experiences of racism (Mirza, 2009; McClellan, 2012). In this way, British (or US) 'Black' identities are not linear social constructions, but exist in a constant state of 'becoming' as they interact and potentially assimilate with aspects of, in this case, British culture (Haw, 2011).

Ang-Lygate's (1997) research on the experiences of Chinese and Filipino women, revealed the complex variations of 'Black' within identity politics literature. Variations included: 'black', black, Black, black and minority ethnic, diasporic women of colour, immigrant, migrant, visible minority, ethnic, non-white, women of colour, 'Third World' women, native (female), 'Other' and so forth (p.170). She highlights the differing cultural and academic meanings of 'Black', where for example in the US context, it commonly refers to those people 'of African descent with a specific history of slavery'. In Britain, it is usually based on 'skin colour and shared ex-colonial origins' (p.171).

Using the term 'Black' in quotation marks highlights these contested meanings (Maylor, 1995; 2009) and people positioned under the 'black'

umbrella may not view themselves as such (Aziz, 1995; Anthias, 2005). In the US context, 'Asian' is used more broadly to incorporate peoples from the Asian subcontinents, as well as those from Southeast and Pacific Asian countries such as Japan and Korea (Barker, 1998; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). Narrating identities through the label of 'black' alone, can in my view, lead women to discuss their lives on a 'raced' level only, ignoring other significant identities across their lives. This is one of the reasons that I did not enter my study through a single lens, as I found that limiting. Historically, black women have been 'racialized' and gendered, but also 'sexualised' and 'exoticized' (Fanon, 1986). In this way, a 'Black gendered identity embodies multiple layers of oppression' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992: 104) which Mirza (2013) discusses through the valuable phrase 'embodied intersectionality'.

Black feminists question 'whose feminism?' and collective 'sisterhood' is being written about, and critically argue that gender alone is not sufficient to discuss this. Brah (1996) warns that 'white' and 'black' feminism must not be seen as 'essentialist categories' that are positioned in opposition to each other (p.111). Young (2000) though, argues that Brah's vision, while useful, is difficult in reality when 'feminism is only ever prefixed by 'white' when it is being problematised...' Young (ibid) argues that 'white' coupled with 'feminism' signals 'supremist 'white' power, rather than the 'progressive politics concerned with equality and justice' (p.50). So being 'black' and 'female' in black feminist literature, signals additional burdens to white women. I prefer to use the language of 'compounded experiences' as the girls/women may not perceive their intersectionalities as additional burdens. In this thesis, I side with Young's critique of point-scoring between black and white experiences where 'hierarchies of oppression' are often presented (p.53).

Intersectionality is a key expression in black feminist theory, and entails the study of how differences - for example, 'race', gender, class, caste, sexuality, ability and so forth - are configured and interact across the lives of minority ethnic and black women (McCall, 2011; Bhopal and Preston, 2012). It draws attention to the layers of complexities and power operations across women's lives. Although the notion of intersectionality moves away from a 'class-plus' (Neo-Marxist approaches); 'gender-plus' (feminist approaches) or 'race-plus' (critical race theorists) analysis, it is naive to simply map these differences without raising questions about the interplay between their intersections (Gillborn and Youdell, 2009: 183; Maylor and Williams, 2011).

Feminists like Collins (2000), Mirza (2013) and Ringrose (2013), have discussed intersectionality in ways which incorporate notions of 'embodied intersectionality' - i.e.: acknowledging the psychosocial dimensions (Mirza, 2013: 5). Collins (2000) for example, states that: 'Oppression is not simply understood in the mind - it is felt in the body in myriad ways' (p.274). Intersectionality is central to black feminist thinking, and as a theoretical tool, it is 'designed to combat feminist hierarchy, hegemony, and exclusivity' (Nash, 2008, p.2). McCall (2011) presents 'intersectionality as the most important theoretical contribution of women's studies so far' (p.89). Adopting an intersectional standpoint, as I do in this thesis, provides broader ways of understanding the complex process of identity (McClellan, 2012), in relation to categories of difference, power relations, 'discursive positionings' and 'psychological influences on the self' (Ringrose, 2007: p.276). The list of identity differences can be endless, and move beyond the three well-cited divisions of 'race', gender and class (Lutz, 2002, outlines 14 differences).

To collect ideas together here, mainstream feminist literature has enabled me to understand what the feminist movement originally stood for. I do not view 'white' and 'black' feminism in opposition (Young, 2000), but rather, I value the criticality of black feminist principles, which include the following:

- A response to 'white' feminism that excluded the narratives of black women (Collins, 2000)
- A position from which 'black' women can narrate their cultural (and historical) experiences of oppression and discrimination
- A space for black feminist writers and researchers to lead in discussing the experiences of minority ethnic women from their communities. Here, they can take on the role of 'insider' researchers, with a deeper, perceived sensitivity, and knowledge base of the 'cultures' that they are researching (Bhopal, 2001; Lander, 2014)
- An acknowledgement of the complexities in narrating women's identities by drawing on an intersectional framework. This includes Mirza's (2013) valuable notions of 'embodied intersectionality' and 'embodied practices', and Collins' (2000) view of feeling oppression in the body.

Whilst I am mindful of some of the potential criticisms of black feminist theory, within the context of this particular study, it provides me with a number of benefits, which I outline below:

First, black feminism provides a framework that has encouraged me to pose and explore questions beyond gender and patriarchy (Beechey, 1979; Pyke, 2010). It acknowledges the historical, political and economic dimensions of girls' lives, and how the past influences the present (Tinkler and Jackson, 2014). It has encouraged me to explore black and Asian feminist literature from a more global perspective (i.e.: leading Indian feminist, Rita Banerji, (Banerji, 2009; 2012)).

Second, it provides space to discuss the girl's experiences in relation to the power dimensions across their lives, and how power operates in different directions to reveal spaces for agency (Phillips, 2010). The girls in this study

did not all narrate oppression, or even recognise intersecting structures as oppressing them. However, as the researcher, the framework has allowed me to interrogate the nuances of the girls' narratives, to explore how differences in 'culture' and religion should not always be viewed as oppressive, not least because some of these respondents actually understand them as empowering and supportive (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2009).

Third, as I discuss later, such a theoretical orientation is aligned with participant-centered, narrative methodologies, and these stress the importance of listening to women's experiences (Gilligan's, 1982, pioneering research on women's voices). Moreover, it has provided space for participant and researcher reflexivity, where my voice as a South-Asian woman is acknowledged as part of the knowledge-generation process (discussed in Chapter Six). If feminist researchers are to understand and listen to the voices of 'marginalised' girls, research methodologies must allow their voices to 'breathe' (Frank, 2010).

Section 2. Configurations of 'culture'

Before exploring the wealth of literature on 'culture', a moment of personal reflection on my own exploration of the concept as a British-born, second-generation, South-Asian woman. Brah (1996) conducted a similar activity when tracing her own identity (pp.1-10). Such personal starting points reveal the complexities of 'culture' with its array of meanings across context, space, people and time. I recorded my reflections in a journal, and these revealed psychological and social influences on my understanding of 'culture' and cultural identity. Like Brah (2005), my reflections related to where I was raised; my working-class background; ethnicity; Hindu religious background; the narratives of my parents from India and their migration experiences in

the 1960s; experiences of racism and 'othering' at school, and gendered ways of experiencing the oppression of 'culture' and patriarchy.

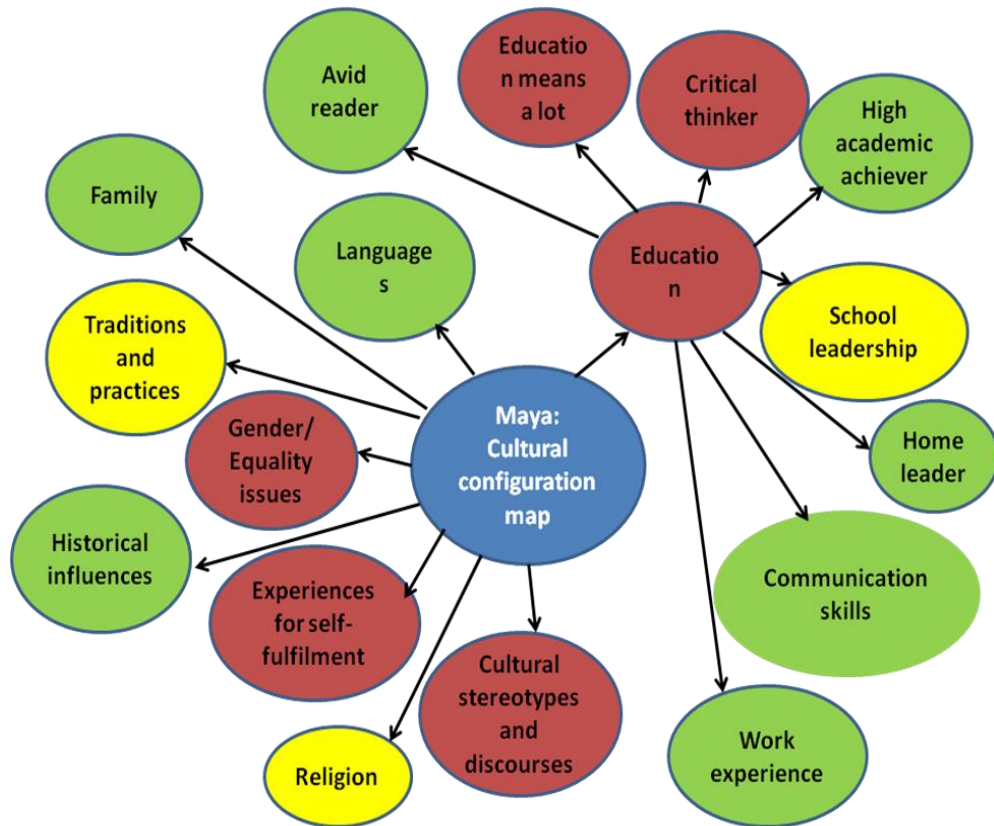
For me, growing up in a predominantly white, working-class community in Nottingham, meant that I experienced 'culture' in a particular way during girlhood - one that felt rather fake and 'othered' from my mainly white friends. This brings me to Phillips' (2010: 8) valuable phrase of 'wearing culture lightly', as that is fitting of how I felt in the school and particular social spaces. I later follow through with this language in my analysis of the girls' responses. Enough to say here is that, as a girl myself, I quickly learned to code-switch and 'wear' culture 'more lightly' or 'heavily' (and proudly) in relation to specific contexts, spaces and audiences (Marsh, 2013). How I configured and 'wore' dimensions of my 'culture' intersected with notions of gender, class, 'race', ethnicity, culture and religion that were time- and context-specific. This process was also related to notions of my 'safety', 'respectability', and a sense of belonging/ not belonging which, at times, was related to experiences of racism (Puwar, 2004; Lander, 2014).

In my life, 'culture' intersected with notions of being working-class, but slightly differently to how Skeggs (1997; 2004) discusses white working-class women's negotiations of 'respectability' through dress, talk and social manners. For Asian girls like me, notions of 'respectability' were - and still are - compounded and aligned with family honour (*izzat*) - which my father continually stressed. 'Honour' for South-Asian communities (and others) is historically rooted within patriarchy. I have reflected on my mother's life in considerable depth through black feminism, and her configuration of intersectionality (Brah, 2012). I can see first-hand how the affects of intersectionality and oppression played out in her life, as a result of extended family commitments which were viewed as honourable duties. Over time, my perceptions of 'culture' shifted as I explored it more critically in relation to the inequalities in gender that I observed and was experiencing. Intersecting

differences overlapped at particular points in my life, where the 'weight' of these intersections was experienced in embodied ways through the mind, body and social context (as discussed for example by Collins, 2000; Brah, 2012 and Puwar, 2012). The 'weight' felt heavier when I was less educated, younger, and living in an extended, patriarchal family.

My reflective experiences (noted through reflective writing) revealed how 'culture' can take on very specific and individual meanings, as well as shared, common principles that a group of people influence, buy into, follow and adapt, with power operations pervading every level of interaction (Collins, 2000; Foucault, 2000). Personal reflections allowed me to understand how intersectionality worked in my life beyond the theory (see Chapter Six reflections), and was, and still is, particularly rooted in my mother's experiences (discussed by Puwar, 2012). My reflexive exploration enabled me to think broadly about the possibilities of girls' configurations and investments in 'culture', despite being from a different generation to me.

I illustrate this below, through Maya's configuration of 'culture' using a visual map. In Chapter Five, I present two more maps like this to illustrate Arti and Sunita's configurations. I have selected these three girls as their narratives reveal quite different patterns. The Profile Charts presented in Chapter Four outline the girls' configurations of 'culture' using the 'weighted continuum' concept which I have developed from Phillips (2010), and this illustrates data across the twelve girls at a glance - i.e.: the 'weight' with which the girls narrated different themes.



Key:

- Yellow: 'wears' and invests in lightly
 Green: 'wears' and invests in moderately
 red: 'wears' and invests in heavily

Figure 1: Maya: Cultural Configuration Map

Maya's map shows that she 'wears' and invests lightly in the areas of 'culture' related to: religion, traditions and practices and school leadership. The green balloons highlight the moderately weighted areas and red ones the heavier. This map provides a visual picture of Maya's configuration, but does not provide depth in relation to why areas are 'weighted' the way they are, explanation of how Maya invests across dimensions, and the degree to which areas are positively or negatively configured, invested in, or 'worn'. For example, as will be illustrated in Chapter Four, Maya narrates her parents as

role models of equality, where the home is organised in ways where 'everyone pulls their weight'. To stress my point, these maps provide an immediate picture, but the layers of meaning and nuances are woven between the rich narrative that the girls shared with me over time.

Hall (2013), a leading cultural theorist, presents 'culture' as one of the most complex concepts in the human and social sciences. The study of 'culture' has dominated the field of anthropology, to encompass so much and everything, where distinguished anthropologists such as Eliot (1948), Tylor (1958), and literary/ cultural theorists like Williams (1976) and Geertz (1973), amongst others, have devoted lifetimes to studying its meaning. It was during the nineteenth century that the pluralist term 'cultures' emerged out of comparative anthropology, and this highlighted its 'significantly total' dimension (society) to 'partial dimension' (individual) of reference (Williams, 1981:11). 'Culture' for Williams (1976) is not transmitted across generations, but debated and amended through creative processes. Williams (1981: 90) presents 'culture' as:

describing a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development indicating a particular way of life of a people, a group or humanity in general including intellectual and artistic activities.

Alexander (2000) discusses this in relation to 'Arnoldian connotations of 'culture' linked to class, elitism and specialist knowledge'. This view presents 'culture' as something belonging to the elite. Alexander (2000) discusses the various adjectives that separate different kinds of 'culture': 'high, low, popular, youth, ethnic and gender'. In addition, there exist an array of prefixed cultural terms such as post-modernist culture and sub-culture. When such nouns are added, it shows what people do with 'culture': 'cultural capital, reproduction, transmission, oppression, politics' and so forth (p.163).

Similarly, Said's (2003) research presents 'culture' as belonging to particular groups, particularly in relation to the East/ West binary and Western views of the Orient as something for consumption by the West (he does not address the gendered dimensions of Orientalism). However, discussing 'culture' through static, binary oppositional phrases, is not in my view helpful, as it dismisses the more creative ways in which 'modern girlhoods' are configured (Ludhra, 2012). Fixed categories generate and amplify oppositional cultural discourses such as: East/West; forced/arranged marriage; modern/traditional and repressed/free.

Sarup (1996) provides a valuable critique of Williams and chides at notions of cultural 'othering' embedded in experiences of historical oppression. Sarup draws on the work of postcolonial critics, for example, Edward Said (1993; 2003), Homi Bhabha (1994) and Gayatri Spivak (1998), who discuss perceptions of 'Englishness' and European superiority over non-European cultures. Sarup has critiqued the lack of reference within Williams' influential essays, *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1967), to the 'functioning of imperialist ideology in Britain'. He argued that Williams' texts 'spanned the years of colonial conquest' yet made no reference to it (p.146). Jenks' (2005) critique is aligned with Sarup (ibid), stressing that 'culture' in relation to the dominant European meaning of 'civilization', must be used 'with integrity in opposition to that which is vulgar, backward, ignorant or retro regressive' (p.8). Spivak (1998), too, has criticised 19th century history as being taught with no consideration of imperialism and cultural representation, and within contemporary education, this debate has been further ignited by the poet and political activist Benjamin Zephaniah, in relation to the restricted history curriculum for Asian and black pupils (Richardson, 2012).

While Said's (2003) writing does emphasise the importance of historical contexts, geography, place and territory, in relation to imperialism and 'culture', his direction is criticised by Bhabha (1994). Said is influenced by Gramsci's thinking and, in his acclaimed text 'Orientalism', he argues that 'culture' works through what Gramsci calls 'cultural hegemony' (Gramsci, 1991). Bhabha (1994) is critical of Said's binary simplification between the powerful and powerless and Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2009) argue that he does not engage with gendered depictions of Orientalism. Bhabha's (1994) work is particularly valuable within the context of my study, as it draws attention to the spaces in-between cultures and 'hybridisation' whereby cultures preserve their unique features, yet creatively form something new (echoed by Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, 2005). For me, these in-between spaces highlight how personal agency can work through psychological motivation.

Bauman (2011), an internationally renowned social theorist, discusses fluid representations of 'culture' in the 'liquid modern world' - from the early English concept of refinement and the German *Bildung*, where the cultural elite were marked out from those lower in the 'cultural hierarchy' through signs such as attending opera and fine art. Bauman (ibid) coins the term 'omnivorous' from Richard Peterson (2010), which explains how the elite now consume a range of interests from 'highbrow art' and opera, to heavy metal and mass popular music. In this way, 'no works of culture are alien' to them, as they 'omnivorously consume a wide range of popular and highbrow art forms' (p.2). As I view it, Bauman's analogy moves beyond 'refined' taste versus 'vulgar' taste (a binary reading), to a sliding continuum approach of 'univorous' to 'omnivorousness' consumption/ investment. I adopt and draw on this analogy and, as will be seen later, I connect 'omnivorous' and 'univorous' investment/ consumption of 'culture' to Phillips' (2010) notion of 'wearing' culture lightly (or otherwise) and develop a 'weighted cultural continuum'. This provides me with enormous flexibility in that the notion of 'omnivorous' is useful to describe potential ways in which 'supergirls' (part of third-wave

discourses of girl) 'want it all' and invest heavily/ consume readily, a range of 'cultures' and experiences to contribute to their 'successful' girlhoods (Kehily and Nayak, 2009). In my study, these may include for example, the two Headgirls - Sara and Arti.

However, unlike Bauman (2011), my position is that those 'lower down' the cultural class hierarchy, can use their agency, psychological desire and aspirations to invest in 'culture' in 'omnivorous ways' - 'omnivorous' is not just related to the elite. Having said this, what the elite do have, are the financial resources to support a broader consumption, and in cases 'hot' knowledge/ capital and networks to access particular areas of cultural knowledge (Archer, 2012). Phillips (2010) states that where the concept of 'culture' is not critically interrogated (particularly for 'women of colour') there exists the danger of culturally pathologising women, mirroring early anthropological studies that 'othered' people in crude ways (a view echoed by Geertz, 1993).

In this thesis, the 'fluid interplay' of 'culture', religion, gender, class and caste (to name but a few), are seen as intersecting influences. It is important to discuss 'culture' for women in relation to power operations, knowledge, the blurring and contradictions of religious and cultural beliefs. The Indian feminist, political activist, Banerji (2009), for example, raises the oppressive, gendered nature of religious and cultural knowledge in India, and how that disadvantages women. The importance of such religious knowledge connects to a point made in Eliot's (1948) early essay, which in my view, still carries weight: "A religion requires not only a body of priests who know what they are doing, but a body of worshippers who know what is being done to them" (p.24). Both Bakhtiar (2011) and Hussain (2012) develop the relation of 'culture' to power and religion, where they discuss how holy texts such as the Quran are often misinterpreted through the translation process in ways that suit the needs of the powerful, who tend to be men.

In this way, 'pure' religious meanings become blurred with cultural beliefs and discourses. As also discussed by Purewal (2003), one outcome of this male authority in the translation process of religion, is the suppression and regulation of groups of women to generate and maintain a particular culture of thinking. For example, the Hindu priest is perceived as holding knowledge and power in the temple and, as part of his authoritative position as a Brahmin, he can (should he wish to) promote cultural discourses such as the importance of women having sons and being dutiful, obedient wives. Thomas and Brah (2011) discuss the 'gendered nature of power dynamics embedded in religion and culture' (p.2). With this in mind, Hussain (2012) emphasises the importance of developing religious knowledge for Muslim women so that they are in a position to question what is cultural discourse and what is part of the scriptures. Bose (2012) for instance, documents how principles of equality are rooted in Hinduism, through the high status of female deities in worship, and similarly Mandair (2013) and Purewal (2013) discuss the equality principles of Sikhism.

This thesis is built on the premise that 'culture' is difficult to understand in solely abstract and theoretical ways when not connected to empirical studies (Kearney, 2003). In my view, theoretical research becomes more valuable when it links the concept of 'culture' historically to an individual's heritage and gender, and their experiences across cultural spaces, which reduces essentialising discourses (Tinkler and Jackson, 2014). When 'culture' is viewed relationally to differences of religion, education, gender, 'race', class, caste and ethnicity, this draws on intersectionality principles, rooted within black feminism, as discussed in section one of this chapter. This enables researchers like me to move beyond media representations that present *their* version of 'culture' on South-Asian girls as being the truth (discussed, for example, by Malik, 2012 and Mirza, 2013). More dynamic meanings that incorporate spaces for girls' agency within their 'cultures', can only be

configured within frameworks that position their experiences centrally (discussed by Gilligan, 2011).

Phillips (2010) and Narayan and Purkayastha (2009), however, warn against over-emphasising the 'choices' now available to women. Phillips (2010) for instance, argues that in over-stressing women's agency and 'choices' in relation to 'culture' (third-wave feminism), there is a danger that it can lead to complacency about structures of domination, where some women may perceive themselves as having more 'freedom' and 'choice' than in reality. The cultural processes that organise and regulate their lives may become so implicitly embedded that they take them for granted in hegemonic ways (p.10). This is echoed by Collins (2000).

Alive to this danger, I do see how 'culture' can play out through women's agency when discussed in relation, for example, to education, their greater knowledge and understanding, and the emancipatory nature of knowledge through growth of the mind (Williams, 1981, discusses 'culture' in relation to growth of the mind). Here, women may feel more informed to invest in 'choices' through research (e.g. wearing the hijab or following the principles of Islam), as they believe in them and feel empowered through following them. For example, hooks (1990b) and other black feminists (Ahmad et al., 2003) discuss education as 'cultivating the mind' and as enabling a stronger voice. This leads me to accentuate the role of education, and learning more broadly in relation to 'culture', particularly how feminist writers have discussed the empowering dimension of knowledge for girls and women (Bhopal, 2010; 2011). As Mayo (2014) argues, culture, gender, education, power and politics, are connected principles. As Harris (2004) discusses, these connections play out in different ways to empower, oppress and regulate girls' lives to different degrees of intensity in school and the home.

The processes of gaining knowledge, and the establishments called schools are two distinct entities. Alexander (2000) refers to the school as an institutional setting. He draws on the Marxist philosopher Althusser to present the school as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) that conveys and filters messages of wider social structures. In this way, schools and classrooms, like families and communities, can act as important 'cultural channels' through which young identities are developed (p.164). It is a view that underscores the social power of cultural influences, and Bibby (2010) illustrates how school compliance, discipline, surveillance and policing of children's behaviour, strongly inform ways in which cultures are established within the school's hidden curriculum.

In contrast, Reiss and White (2014) stress the importance of a broad view of education and learning - one that contributes to a life that is 'personally flourishing' and enjoyable for young people (p.76). Furthermore, they discuss a view of education that moves beyond schools, curricula and simple examination success (dimensions highlighted in Profile Chart 2). They suggest that a key aim of education should be: 'to prepare students for a life of autonomous, whole-hearted and successful engagements in worthwhile relationships, activities and experiences' (p.79). As part of this cultural orientation, students should have opportunities to participate in political affairs at different levels, discuss values of freedom and choice, liberal democracy, individual autonomy, equal rights and cooperation. Their argument focuses on dimensions of education that result in self-fulfilment and ones that create spaces for individuals to flourish and be happy, as well as benefitting society through their active citizenship roles. As will be discussed in the cultural identity section, individuals are not simply positioned through discourses of language or social structures, but, as Phillips (2010:11) suggests through her discussion of women's agency:

'...everyone has agency, even though some clearly have more options than others. We should, in other words, recognise the agency of women even under conditions of severe oppression and exploitation, and not ignore the choices they make..'

The above could be read as women's 'choices' being mediated through dimensions and experiences of 'culture'.

In Chapter Five, I will illustrate this through Maheera's context, using an intersectionality diagram. Maheera lived in a patriarchal family where the intersections (cultural differences) as part of her life, could potentially have limited her 'success' - as her narrative extracts will reveal, the intersectional differences were compounding her experiences, but also acted as a catalyst for her agency in the limited spaces in-between cultural and social influences (Bhabha, 1990). While Phillips (2010) acknowledges 'cultural and other pressures' across women's lives, she is determined not to present women as 'captives of culture' or 'the body as a passive recipient of cultural meanings' (p.1). She argues that society should respect the 'choices' women make without assuming that these have been 'forced on them by oppressive and patriarchal cultures' (p.11). I buy into this view, and this notion of 'respect' highlights the importance of narrative approaches like mine, that create less restricted spaces for girls' narratives to 'breathe' at length (Frank, 2010; Ludhra and Chappell, 2011).

Section 3. Cultural identity: an interdisciplinary approach

Some of the questions posed about the nature of identity have been discussed for over 60 years, going back to some of the classic theorists such as Freud (1963); Erikson (1968); Marcia (1980) and Klein (1975). Erikson and Marcia's work built on Freudian psychoanalysis theory, and Marcia's empirical model developed Erikson's developmental stages of identity.

Klein's psychoanalytic work stretched beyond childhood development, to explore identity positions throughout life. Early identity theories focused on stages of development, and going through some sort of crises before moving onto the next stage. These early studies have largely adopted developmental-stage, gendered and biological approaches, in contrast to post-structural accounts that discuss identity as an evolving process that is never complete (Seaton and Beaumont, 2011; Hall, 2013).

Traditional Marxist perspectives have located the study of identity within struggles of economic power and the exploitation of the working-class by the bourgeoisie (Burkitt, 2008). Marxist explanations, though, generally ignore notions of 'race', gender and other psychological categories (Sarup, 1996; Shain, 2003). Moreover, these writers have paid little attention to the various influences (including the power operations) that affect identity development for girls, particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds. In contrast, postcolonial theorists explore spaces for previously silenced voices to speak against dominant Western discourses (Spivak, 1998). More contemporary approaches (symbolic interactionists, poststructuralists, critical humanists, cultural theorists and black feminists) have drawn on the wider role of the family, socialisation practices, interactions between individuals, and the ways in which power/ knowledge and discourses operate throughout all levels of society (Scott, 2009).

As with 'culture', my position on cultural identity draws on these sources, on black feminist principles and psychosocial influences. Critical feminist perspectives recognise the need for an intersectional framework to understand the differences between women (Collins, 2011; Maylor and Williams, 2011). Exploring the concept of cultural identity through South-Asian girls, has required an understanding of similarities and differences, and the interplay of these in potentially intersectional ways. I enjoy Brah's (2007a; 2012) standpoint that a woman psychologically and emotionally

invests in her identity, not least in relation to how she perceives her identity as being regulated both by structures and the degree to which she can self-regulate and exercise agency and 'choice' across cultural spaces (echoed by Ringrose, 2013). As discussed in section one, black feminists (hooks, 1996) highlight the importance of 'experiences' as an embodied process (Mirza, 2013), which is one that I concur with.

Questions of identity, and who we are, or not, are linked to personal narratives of experience and memory (Craib, 1998; Kearney, 2003), and these cannot exist outside of embodied experiences (Seidler, 2010). Kearney (2003) refers to the latter as 'storied identities', aligned with the social psychologist's view (p.37). When an individual is asked about their identity - Who are you? - a series of events emerges through a non-linear plot, comprised of mini-narratives (Horsdall, 2012). 'Experiences', in this way, draw on conscious, unconscious and repressed processes (Laing, 1960; Billig, 2006).

In everyday discourses, identity tends to be spoken of in relation to the performance of social roles (Josselson, 1987; Goffman, 1990; Butler, 1993), where social constructions highlight the influence of others through phrases like: the self, subjectivity, the subject, the agent, the individual and experience (Jenkins, 2008). For me, 'experience' is an important concept underlying identity formation, and this is discussed within Craib's (2001, p.216) research on 'experiencing identity':

'...that loss, frustration, pain and conflict are necessary for growth and development... We do not grow through having our needs satisfied; we grow, develop and change through having them frustrated, denied or redirected, and it is the experience of the frustrations...'

What this usefully illustrates is the importance of experiences needed for growth (echoed by Skeggs, 2004). Critical reflexivity and exploring/ finding oneself through a process that revisits previous experiences will inevitably draw on difficulties and troubles to varying degrees. Particular life experiences may trigger a desire for individuals to delve deep in existential or psychoanalytical ways, and engage in a search for the self through posing critically reflective questions (Calvert, 2002; Ashton, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). For me as a researcher, this critically reflexive process can mirror a form of self-therapy (Sikes and Potts, 2008). In my case for example, revisiting Hinduism has raised tensions through its karmic philosophy that implies we are all simply players on a grand Shakespearian stage (Jenkins, 2008). This has troubled my view of agency and psychological investments, and desires to influence change (Phillips, 2010).

As discussed by Frank (2010) and Ricoeur (1988), personal stories shape who we are - the stories we choose to narrate to audiences, are reshaped for the public sphere, and they in turn shape individuals and their actions. For Bruner (2003) narratives have an important personal dimension since they allow a person to form a story of their experiences, both in relation to the past and future. For Ricoeur (1988), the identity of the story shapes the identity of the character, and through this psychological process, individuals become, and take on the identities of the stories that they narrate to others.

Parekh (2008) suggests that young people ask a myriad questions in trying to navigate a sense of their imagined futures in relation to what they desire, or fear becoming. These questions may include: Who am I/ we/ they? What/ who do I want/not want to become? What are my values, beliefs, expectations and goals? What is my life purpose? To what degree am I fulfilling it? In what ways am I similar/ different to other people that I know? How do I want others to think of me? What matters most to me? What guides my actions? In posing 'deep' questions such as these, young people

engage with aspects of the self through a process or journey, which may draw on transitional experiences of emotional crises, in line with Erikson's (1968) development stages of identity.

Such questions may draw on religious, spiritual and emotional capacities, where individuals strive to understand and regulate personal actions (Seidler, 2010). The psychologist, Howard Gardner, refers to this as 'intrapersonal' or emotional intelligence. An emotionally intelligent person will understand the feelings, desires and motivations of others - 'interpersonal' intelligence in relation to their own motivations and feelings (Gardner, 1983). The difficult question for identity researchers is how to understand the tensions and interplay between the structure/ agency debate. It is my view that the weighting of the two influences will vary across contexts, as some individuals will have less space for exercising their agency because their lives are more heavily regulated, and compounded through their intersectionalities. For example, Burkitt's (2008) notion of 'social selves' argues that individuals are not 'self-contained atoms' that operate in vacuums, but that 'society will place a sizable imprint on the self we become' (p.3). He uses the metaphor of the body as a canvas for these social imprints and, to me, this lends the social too great a weighting. From my position, I see all individuals as having agency where, to a greater or lesser extent, they will resist, challenge or embrace society's imprints with varying degrees of intensity, influenced by their personalities, confidence, willingness and motivation to take risks and consequently tolerate consequences.

Collins (2000: 276-284), too, takes a 'domains of power' model that presents structural influences as largely immutable. Of her four domains, only one agentic area entails the 'interpersonal':

- Structural (these organise oppression)
- Disciplinary (these manage oppression - for example, surveillance)

- Hegemonic (these justify oppression). Schools, religion and communities can 'manufacture ideologies that maintain oppression'
- Interpersonal (these influence everyday experiences).

It is difficult to discuss issues of social power like these without reference to Foucault (2000). His work has been hugely influential in relation to explaining how power operates across private and public spheres of life, at all levels, not just through the powerful on the oppressed (Hollway, 2007; Hall, 2013). Foucault's work has influenced contemporary identity theory of representation, but it has been critiqued for 'discursive determinism', rather than focusing on the conditions in which 'power' operates - for example, material, economic and structural factors (Miller, 1993; Ringrose, 2013: 69). In terms of this thesis, he has neglected to address how women and people from different ethnicities navigate difficult conditions. And, while an understanding of such power domains is vital to black feminist thinking and in answering the question 'Who am I?', I want also to draw attention to opportunities, 'choices' and power operations that enable agency, alongside the psychological motivations and desires (Ringrose, 2013).

Craib (1998) makes the distinction between 'social identities' (roles that come and go), and a coherent 'sense' of identity. He states that in losing a social identity (a role), one loses an identity but not an actual sense of identity. Parekh (2008) also makes a distinction between social roles and individual identities, where he argues that within some institutions, particular roles embody personal identities, particularly where there are high levels of importance, status, stress and expectations - for example, the role of Headgirl embodies these characteristics (echoed by Seidler, 2010). Following Goffman's (1990) work on the performance of identities across 'stages', where social identities are not performed 'successfully', the individual can experience 'stigma' or 'shame' in the form of psychological

and emotional stress, in particular where public expectations are not met. Goffman's work highlights how identities are constructed through social relationships and interaction orders - what Goffman (1990) described as 'the presentation of self', where the performance requires validation (or not) through the other (audience). Developing a sense of identity is linked to the process of identification (Hall, 1996), which refers to 'the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively' (Jenkins, 2008:13).

Individuals develop a sense of self by comparing themselves to others within a hierarchical matrix. In this way, identities operate as 'points of identification and attachment' that are constituted 'through difference and discursive practices' (Hall, 1996: 6). Over time, theorists have emphasised differences throughout but, as Jenkins (2008) discusses, identification as a comparison process involves recognising the interplay between similarity and difference, and he discusses how the process of identification requires:

'...an understanding of who we are and who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us). It is a very practical matter, synthesising relationships of similarity and difference.'

He adds: 'To say who I am is to say who I am not, but it is also to say with whom I have things in common' (Jenkins, 2008:21). So, in considering the significant 'other' in a child's life, particularly within the school space, young people will draw on other young people (often, rather than adults) to open up new conditions of possibility for configuring their identities. Arnett (2001) usefully proposes a transition phase between adolescence and adulthood called 'emerging adulthood' (18-29 years), and this period is seen as critical in identity exploration when preparing for adult roles. Chanda-Gool (2006) discusses how young people develop bicultural knowledge and identities, new skills, broader beliefs and meanings through diverse friendships. For

those young people whose relationships span beyond local spaces to other countries, they are able to form 'webs of relationships' which will shape their identities in more globalised ways (Narayan and Purkayastha, 2009: 155) and cosmopolitan ways (Burns, 2009). Brah (2007) proposes a useful model for analysing the problematic of 'difference' which incorporates social, cultural and psychic dimensions:

- Difference theorised in the sociological sense, which takes on board structures, policies and dynamics of power
- Difference theorised in terms of human experience as a way of narrating symbolic representations
- Difference understood as subjectivity, which relates to emotional life, unconscious processes, as well as conscious agency.
- Difference understood in relation to social/ political identities from processes of subjectivity.

This model addresses a range of areas that influence identity formation processes. As might be expected, 'Othering' emerges consistently throughout identity literature (Brah, 2007; Parekh, 2007) although it, too, is clearly controversial. For instance, Brah (2007) goes on to problematise the 'other' and to explicate its 'loadedness' within discourses of 'difference'. In relation to the colonialism, Aziz (1995), Puwar (2004) and Hall (2013), argue that difference is relational, and operates in a way where 'whiteness' is seen as the norm, and superior to 'blackness' (in contemporary society, this maybe viewed very differently). My position is to view the social and psychological as differentially complementing each other (as Kearney, 2003; Bibby, 2010 and Marsh, 2013 do). As an important distinction in identity research is the difference between the 'I' and 'me' identity, the 'I' operates at a more individual level, whereas 'me' is 'self-produced through the social

influences of others' gazes'. So 'I' is the more active and agentic, whereas 'me' is the object (Hollway et al., 2007: 130).

In this vein, postmodern principles of identity formation reject notions of grand narratives and universal experiences of a stable and homogenous identity. Rather, they highlight multiple, fragmented and contradictory identities, operating in a process of constant flux (Hall, 2013). Black feminism sits within poststructural perspectives and problematise essentialist notions of the homogenous 'woman'.

Linguistic frameworks have privileged the symbolic nature of language - i.e.: symbols, signs and metaphors, before biologic and psychological assumptions (Hall, 2013). Lacan (1977), a French psychoanalyst, put forward the argument that 'society inhabits each individual' and in this way 'culture imposes meaning on anatomical parts' (Sarup, 1993:7). For Lacan (ibid), language as a social system creates the subject, and unconscious processes (dreams, fantasies and memories) are also governed by language. Lacan presented the metaphor of the 'mirror stage' where the 'self' engages in processes of recognition with the mother between the age of six to eighteen months. This 'mirror stage' stems back to Hegel's idealist philosophy and raises the important Lacanian idea of 'the dialectic of recognition', where 'we get knowledge of what and who we are through how others respond to us' (Sarup, 1993: 12). This idea may seem rather disempowering, as it views individual identities as heavily reliant on others' recognition. Taking this forward to today's technology, the 'mirror image' can be seen to some extent through the medium of 'Facebook' or other social networking arenas for performing and exploring identities (Seidler, 2010). In these virtual, alternative worlds, identities can be shaped through language and images in digital forms (Kehily and Nayak, 2009; Crowe, 2010).

I observed a modern example of Lacan's (ibid) mirroring principle in the 2010 movie 'Precious', where the young, overweight black girl aspires towards a perceived perfect identity through the acceptance and validation of others. She realises that being slim, white, intelligent and blonde, could gain her greater acceptance and status, as they are deemed likeable characteristics. As a result of her traumatic girlhood experiences (hooks, 1990b), the mirror image reflected back at particular points of tension, is that of the desired representation of the 'perfect' white girl. The metaphor of the 'mirror image' is extended to her photograph album, where she only sees visual representations of what she desires/ aspires to be, based on what she lacks. In this way, symbolic discourse from the media, and popular culture, generate powerful ways of understanding how young people might present themselves (Marsh, 2013). Lacan's linguistic approach has been critiqued for being phallo-centric, privileging masculinity and the role of the mother in a child's life. Linguistic approaches in general, tend to imply that the individual has little autonomy, but is entirely the product of language. In contrast, Craib's (1998) approach challenges this and emphasises the importance of inner processes alongside the social, in order to make sense of 'our experience of identity' (p.168).

For Foucault (2000), nothing had meaning outside of discourse as they operate like narratives that exert a compelling and seductive power over individuals (Frank, 2010). Discourses have the creative potential to 'produce and regulate the world, and as Gillborn and Youdell (2009) discuss, they extend beyond speech and writing to include 'visual representations, bodily movements or gestures, and social and institutional practices' (p.180). Foucault's (1984) work explored sexual identity and notions of sexual policing and surveillance, self-regulation and censorship, as applied to the body and mind. Although the importance of Foucault's work was mainly framed within disciplinary institutions such as the prison, clinic and asylum

(Foucault, 1961), it can be applied to explaining regulatory practices within schools and families (also discussed by Bibby, 2010).

Religious identities

I take space here to discuss ways in which some young people, particularly South-Asian youth, may 'wear' and invest heavily in their religious identities. As Mirza (2013: 10) discusses, some women may view religion as a 'second skin', and a way of deriving 'an inner strength and spiritual space' (echoed by Hussain, 2012). For some South-Asian girls (and those from other ethnic groups), religion may inform an important part of their identity. In line with my own way of thinking, the following researchers have stressed the more agentic aspects of young people investing in religion: Mythen (2012); Madge (2013); Sahin (2005); Smith (2007); Shain (2003; 2010); Phillips (2010); Singh (2013).

In times of great change, research has shown that some young people (particularly British Muslims after '9/11' and the '7/7' terrorist attacks) have turned to religion for increased meaning, solidarity and inner peace, which has provided them with a sense of stability (Smith, 2007; Mondall, 2008; Shain, 2010). Religion is perceived to provide stable frameworks for making meaning and developing a sense of belonging, within which to define identities during possibly hostile situations (Modood, Beishon and Virdee, 1994; Akhtar, 2005).

Bauman (2001) provides a useful analogy, comparing religion to a 'compass' that provides orientation. Religious views may shift over the course of an individual's life and therefore Bauman's comparison of religion to a 'sextant' (a tool used by sailors to calculate their relative position) encompasses this relational aspect of time and space (p.78). Madge's (2013) large-scale study 'Youth on Religion', highlights the role of religion as being strongest for

Muslim young people, compared to other South-Asian groups. She also notes the significance of family religious views (particularly during early adolescence); the role of individualism (where young people had respect for difference and valued space for individuality), and the space for personal agency in making independent religious decisions outside of family background (during later adolescence). She develops a useful typology of religiosity that classifies young people's affiliations with religion as:

- *Strict adherents*. This group had strong religious beliefs and religion formed an integral part of their life.
- *Flexible adherents*. This group were seen as 'modern' in their religious beliefs and adapted religious practices flexibly.
- *Pragmatists*. This group had some faith and predominantly valued exploration of different religious ideas.
- *Bystanders*. Religion played a minor or no role in this group's lives.

Alongside religion, spirituality can inform identity in relation to developing spiritual, moral and ethical ways of experiencing and exploring life (Walters and Auton-Cuff, 2009). An understanding of diverse religions, cultures and practices can contribute towards what Erikson would call a 'healthy personality'. 'Healthy' does not necessarily equate to psychologically or emotionally healthy, as the process of exploring religious, spiritual and cultural beliefs can raise tensions, questions and contradictions, through the development of a critical consciousness (hooks, 1989).

Religion (and faith in God) may support some girls (and young people more broadly) in developing a more confident 'voice' that provides nourishment of the soul and mind in different ways to formal schooling (Narayan and Purkayashtha, 2009; Baird, 2010; Reiss, 2013). Bhimji's (2009) research of Islamic study circles for British Muslim, second-generation women, is useful

as she explored ways in which 17-28 year old women used religious, male-dominated mosque spaces to 'assert various identities...to comprehend Islam' (p.365). She discusses the cosmopolitan religious identities that these women adopted across spaces (religious, political, virtual, transnational) to reveal how they did not adhere to the oppressive dimensions of religion as conveyed in media discourses, but rather, demonstrated their agency through critical dialogues. Bhimji (2012) further argues that increased media coverage of the veil is only one visible aspect of girls' religious identities. Although on the surface, an outsider may think that feminism plays no role in their Islamic-led lives, by exploring the girls' understandings of religion across spaces (including virtual spaces), these educated Muslim women demonstrated how they performed their agency through transforming, critiquing and adapting aspects of their male-dominated religion (echoed by Haw, 2011; Mirza, 2013).

Singh's (2013) research with 18-30 year old British Sikhs, highlights ways in which they engaged with Sikhism in innovative and agentic ways through online spaces and social events. His research showed that the participants were keen to learn about Sikhism in ways that allowed them to understand prayer, peace and a sense of community. So religious, spiritual and cultural identifications, can be powerful psychological forces in the lives of particular women (Francis, 2005; Marsh, 2013), and as Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009) found in their study of 18-23 year old young women, religion provided a sense of 'meaning, order, and purpose' for young people, where their spirituality and sense of connection with God, was narrated as offering stability, rather than passive submission (Phillips, 2010).

Section 4: South-Asian girls: a review of girlhood studies

This leads me to the final section that primarily considers UK studies of South-Asian girls, whilst acknowledging research on South-Asian and black

women at an international level (Ward and Benjamin, 2004; Harris, 2004; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009; Mirza, Meeto and Litster, 2011; Liu, 2014; Marsh, 2013). I have already touched on some these studies in previous sections. The growing body of girlhood literature raises questions about ways in which notions surrounding 'girl' have been discussed within contemporary postfeminist discourses of 'success', 'girl power' and girls as neoliberal subjects (Archer, 2007; Ahmed, 2012; McRobbie, 2012; Ringrose, 2013; Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013).

There are various ways in which feminist and postfeminist literature has discussed what it means to be a 'girl' or 'woman' across cultures and religions. Harris (2004) argues that the categories of 'girl' and 'woman' are contested ones, as 'girl' is not a 'universal, one-dimensional category', but one that is 'constantly being constructed and deconstructed' over time (Harris, 2004: xxiv). Paechter (2012) and Jackson (2010b) also challenge the use of labels that fix girls' identities in essentialised ways. As Baumgardner and Richards (2004) suggest: 'girlhood is more of a state of being than an age' (p.61), as girls are investing longer periods in education and careers.

I discuss how the category of 'girl' is configured in relation to different social and cultural influences over time, space, religion and culture, alongside the psychological experiences of embodying inequalities (discussed by Collins, 2000; Brah, 2012; Mirza, 2013). What it means to be a 'girl' must, in my view, be viewed with differences (alongside similarities) in mind, paying attention to specificities of 'culture', religion, space, experiences and age, to name a few (Philips, 2010). Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of 'becoming a woman' challenges the essentialised and fixed categorisation of 'girl', as they draw attention to the unfolding process of transformation and performance of girls' identities over space and time. This unfolding process is cleverly

discussed in Jackson (2010), in relation to the performance of a cheer-leading girl. 'Girl' (like the previous concepts of 'culture' and 'identity'), is best discussed relationally as a fluid concept.

I illustrate this through the question: What does it mean to be an academically 'successful', British South-Asian girl of Muslim religious background, and working-class? This question heralds several more in relation to exploring influences that potentially inform the girl's identity. For me, it begs a black feminist and 'intersectionality' framework to explore how different social and psychological influences work on identity.

As previously stated, third-wave feminism focuses on girls with agency - notions of 'girlpower' and 'supergirls'. The 'Supergirl' is a born leader who 'succeeds' - exceeds - at everything in an effortless manner: school work, extra-curricular activities, family life, relationships, dating and social life (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2007; Jackson, 2010a; Pomerantz and Raby, 2011). 'Supergirl' discourses have been exaggerated through media representations of 'successful' women such as Victoria Beckham, and British girl bands like the 'Spice girls' and 'Girls Aloud' (discussed by Aapolo, Gonick & Harris, 2005; Machin and Thornborrow, 2006). However, despite the waves of feminist movements, girls today still struggle to identify with the label of 'feminist' because it still raises negative connotations, such as 'women who hate men' (Adkins, 2004; Ahmed, 2012).

'Successful' girls may see women's struggles and inequalities as something of the past - as Ahmed (2012) puts it, a 'legacy' that has 'passed by' or 'they've got over it' (echoed by Dalley-Trim, 2012). This 'gender blindness' mirrors aspects of 'racism' - 'colour blindness' as discussed by Puwar (2004) and Lander (2014). As a result, feminism is perceived by some girls and women as having been achieved, and this links to the notion of 'Gramscian common sense' (Scharff, 2011: 120). So, although notions of 'girlpower'

have attracted heightened media attention in national campaigns and feminist research (McRobbie, 2007; Ringrose, 2013), the degree to which the feminist literature has discussed 'successful' South-Asian and black minority ethnic girls' narratives of experience, particularly during the transition phase from school to university, has been limited (an area critiqued by Reynolds, 1997; Maylor and Williamson, 2011; Marsh, 2012). Furthermore, attention to psychosocial methodological approaches has also been limited (Skeggs, 1997; Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2006; Hey, 2009, discuss psychosocial dimensions of girlhood, but largely with white British girls). Shain (2003); Maylor and Williams (2011); Marsh (2013) and Mirza (2013), have conducted studies with minority ethnic girls as 'insider' researchers.

Third-wave Feminist researchers located in have used an array of labels to discuss girls' identities, where recent images and campaigns have been aligned with images of 'girl power' (e.g.: #thisgirlcan campaign) and 'successful girls' who can 'have it all'. The Australian feminist researcher, Anita Harris, has conducted considerable work on twenty-first century girls, and associated labels that discursively position them within society as 'successful' (Harris, 2004). 'Successful' images convey a girl as someone who has 'power', 'choices', 'opportunities' and 'agency', to lead her life the way she wants to, if she invests the time and effort (Jackson, 2010a). This perspective positions the girl as being responsible for her own 'success'.

In the UK, there have been a number of girlhood studies, many focused on the experiences of Muslim schoolgirls (Dwyer, 1999; Brah, 1993; Basit, 1997; Haw, 1998;2009; Ahmad, 2001; 2011; Shain, 2003; Rizvi, 2007; Kabir, 2010). Studies have been conducted with Bangladeshi schoolgirls (Haque, 2000; Tomlinson & Hutchinson 1991; Begum and Eade, 2005) as well as British Sikh and Hindu girls (Bhachu, 1991; Drury, 1991; Rait, 2005). In all likelihood, this interest mirrors heightened media attention on the perceived

oppressive nature of Islamic culture and religion on Muslim girls' lives. Some studies have focused on one of the three religious groups - Muslim, Hindu or Sikh, and a small number have explored variations across South-Asian groups (Anwar, 1998; Bhatti, 1999; Abbas, 2004; Housee, 2004; Bhopal, 2010; Ludhra and Chappell, 2011).

Basit (1997) argues against drawing on different sub-groups, as she states it underestimates the religious dimensions of girls' lives. For me, this makes an assumption from the outset that religion will be integral to their lives (in my study this was not the case across all girls). Interestingly, many of the studies above have been predominantly conducted by 'inside' researchers - those who share the same ethnicity, religion or gender (or all) as their participants. In Chapter Three, I critique the blurred boundaries notions of 'insider/outsider'.

As outlined in Chapter One, differences in 'success' can be related to family migration points from the Indian subcontinent, parental education levels, and their experiences and knowledge of the British education system (Abbas, 2004). Those from middle-class backgrounds are seen to benefit from the 'cultural capital' of their family networks (Skelton and Francis, 2008; Reay et al., 2011; Archer, 2011; 12). Structural factors within schools, and policies also play a role in academic success, particularly ways in which schools support access and genuine equality of opportunity (Collins, 2000; Bibbly, 2010). Research on South-Asian girls' academic progress shows that they generally out-perform boys at GCSE level and at university (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Bhopal, 2010; 2011; Mirza, Meeto and Litster, 2011). Although at GCSE level, the achievement of Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils is lower than children from white ethnic backgrounds and other Asian groups (DfE, 2010), they are more likely to enter higher education (Abbas, 2002a; Shah, Dwyer and Modood, 2010).

As Ringrose (2013) discusses, academic success in terms of gendered exam score comparisons, does not mean that educational equality has been achieved. Rather, she argues that gender and 'success' must be discussed and 'differentiated' through 'intersecting axes of experience', which draw attention to differences of class, 'race', ethnicity, cultural and economic contexts (p.25). Bhopal's (2011) empirical research discusses ways in which South-Asian women navigate the transition from school to university in a manner that combines academic and aspirational career success, within the boundaries of cultural expectations from families and communities, and through support networks with women from similar cultural backgrounds (critiqued in Ludhra, 2011a).

South-Asian girls

As youth studies literature in general reveals, young people's 'social worlds are complex and multi-faceted' and the experiences of South-Asian girls are no less so, 'shaped by a multiplicity of factors such as 'race', ethnicity, class, gender, religion and region' (Shain, 2003:29), as well as sexuality (Ringrose, 2013). Early research during the 1970s on the experiences of South-Asian women in the UK (Wilson, 1978; Brah, 1979) has tended to present them in essentialised ways, as passive victims of 'traditional' and patriarchal families (Puwar, 2004; Archer, 2007). As noted above, to some degree media representations continue to echo such discourses, where Muslim women in particular, are seen to be oppressed by Islam as a 'sexist religion' (Bulbeck, 2010: 496).

In relation to media discourses, Muslim communities have received heightened attention, particularly discourses surrounding the headscarf (hijab), 'the preoccupation with veiling as a signifier of patriarchal oppression' (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2009:111) and, the perceived aggressive behaviour of Muslim men (Dwyer, 1999; Shain, 2010). The veil controversy

was sparked by Cabinet Minister, Jack Straw, and echoed in Tony Blair's assimilationist call to Muslims and new migrants to adopt British values (Blair 2006), along with Michael Gove's and Nikki Morgan's calls for the promotion of British values (or fundamental British values). Further discourses have surrounded 'arranged' marriages (Basit, 1996), honor killings, and depictions of the passive Indian wife, daughter or sister (Meetoo and Mirza, 2007). The work of Asian support groups such as 'Southall Black Sisters' has been historically instrumental in supporting some of these women who 'suffered' (Mirza, 1997). The recent gang rape case in Delhi, India (BBC News, 2012) has further heightened media interest in the gendered and cultural oppression of Asian women more globally, and ways in which statistics have generated the discourse that Asian communities lack respect for women.

The sociological literature on Asian communities during the 1980s moved away from such essentialised cultural accounts to acknowledge the historical contexts of communities. The 1990s literature focused more on Asian subgroups. Within contemporary Asian studies literature, there now exists emerging feminist writing, including religious translations that draw on feminist viewpoints (see Bakhtiar, 2011) and critical interpretations on the meaning of 'choice' and agency for Muslim women (Afshar, 2008; Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2009; Haw, 2010; Mirza, 2013). It is important to understand the word 'patriarchy' as not relating exclusively to Asian groups of women, as it operates across the lives of all women, but to different degrees of intensity (Beechey, 1979). Some of these discourses are rooted in the early Community Relations Commission (CRC, 1976) Reports, where Asian children, particularly girls, are depicted as experiencing high levels of inter-generational, cultural conflict, as stated below:

The children of Asian parents born or brought up in Britain are a generation caught between two cultures. They live in a culture of their parents at home, and are taught a different one at school, the neighbourhood, at work...parents cannot fully understand their children and children cannot fully understand their parents' (CRC, 1976:1)

This view is outdated and simplistic, and Anwar (1998) focuses on the different values and conditions required to make adaptations across home and school contexts. This narrow depiction of binary opposition models portrays Asian pupils as having only two cultures, where these are often presented as raising tensions (Ghuman, 1999; Chanda-Gool, 2006). As Anwar (1998) posits: '...young Asians are adopting a new culture which is a synthesis of the 'old' and the 'new' (p.192). Mythen (2012) refers to this dynamic 'adoption' process as inventing new cultures and identities, drawing on Bhabha's (1990) 'third space' theorisation. Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009), also refer to the 'third culture kids' (with hybrid identities), which is neither wholly part of the host or home culture, but rather, a synthesis.

Some discourses surrounding Asian girls and women have tended to be negative and 'backward', where Asian girls may be viewed by some, for example teachers/ lecturers, as 'ideal' students because of their quiet and studious natures (Shain, 2003; Mirza, Meetoo and Litster, 2011). These negative stereotypes have been documented as far back as the Bullock Report (DES,1975) and Swann Report (DES, 1985), where the 'tightly knit' British-Asian community and family were seen to create a supportive, educational environment, yet at times, the same family exerted too much stress on their daughters. However, contemporary empirical research incorporates a more dynamic view of girls' identities (as discussed by Shain, 2003; Tyrer and Ahmed 2006; Hussain and Bagguley 2007)

In support of these ideas, Marsh's (2013) American study of academically 'successful' black girls in a selective High School setting, illustrates how the

nine girls in her narrative study were able to maintain and invest in their black identities, whilst developing versions of 'Blackness' across social spaces to help them 'succeed'. Their ability to 'code-switch' (adapt to the social interaction context) across spaces and audiences, allowed them to develop psychologically solid identities, as they did not necessarily assimilate into white culture, but were able to accommodate alternative and varied ways of being a black girl. They did this whilst acknowledging the importance of interacting with similar others, and having spaces where they could be 'very black identified' (p.1236).

Large-scale studies have been conducted into the experiences of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim adolescents by male researchers like Anwar (1998), Abbas (2004) and Ghuman (1994; 1999; 2003). Their empirical studies have involved various stakeholders, and the nature of their studies has been largely grant-funded, with policy-focused aims and outcomes. Their mixed-method approaches have reflected their larger sample sizes. For example, Anwar (1998) used mainly survey tools to deduce the views of parents, community experts, professionals and policy makers. His 1994 survey included 3777 South-Asian adolescents, where he emphasised the 'over-ambitious' aspirations of South-Asian parents, and the high level of importance attached to education. He found, like Archer, DeWitt, Osborne, Dillon, Willis and Wong (2012), the traditional subject focus steered them towards mathematics and sciences, and professions such as law, dentistry and medicine (Archer 2011; 2012, also discusses class and career choices).

Anwar (ibid) found clear classed and gendered differences in his research with working-class Asian youth, where the girls were found to desire more freedom from their parents than boys, and their middle-class counterparts (particularly the Muslim girls). He attributed the possible cause to the more conservative, restrictive outlook of working-class Asian parents - their rural backgrounds; times of migration to the UK; a lack of education or

professional jobs (see also Basit, 1997a). Anwar also noted parental reasons for restricting daughters to socialise in relation to religious and cultural beliefs, and the need to be modest.

Anwar's research also raised religion as an important factor in the lives of all three South-Asian groups, but as more prominent for Muslim participants, who followed Islam as a way of life. The young people were very aware of their parents' negative experiences and struggles during early migration to the UK, and they were not prepared to tolerate racist experiences themselves. Although social class has been significantly linked to Asian girls' career aspirations and 'success' trajectories (Abbas, 2004; Reay et al., 2011), working-class Asian parents can - and do - hold high aspirations for upward social mobility, often following their migration struggles and their own lack of education (Haque, 2000; Shain, 2003; Ahmad, 2003; Basit, 2007). It could therefore be argued that aspirations for upward mobility and 'success' are not unique middle-class phenomena but, rather, they are linked to a community value set that promotes progression, stemming from experienced life struggles, alongside the psychological motivation and desire to become 'successful' (Gladwell, 2008; Marsh, 2013).

Similarly, Abbas (2003; 2004; 2005) and Ghuman (2001; 2002; 2003) have used semi-structured interviews, alongside attitudinal surveys with pupils, parents and teachers, exploring their influences on South-Asian children's educational expectations and aspirations. Abbas's research is located within Bourdieu's (1993) cultural capital theory, and this has largely focused on the impact of social class, alongside ethnicity, religio-cultural home values, and the role of schools in educational achievement (see also Reay et al., 2007; 2011). This notion of social and cultural 'capital' is useful in part for South-Asian communities, and as Putnam (2000) posits, social capital can be generated through networks that potentially benefit the community and individuals to succeed.

Abbas's (2004) sample drew on 176 survey responses, alongside group interviews. He found that South-Asian girls of Muslim and Bangladeshi origin experienced the greatest difficulties in relation to educational success (Haque, 2000; Begum and Eade, 2005; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007). Ghuman's (1994; 1999; 2001; 2003) ethnographic studies on second-generation Asian girls and Asian youth more broadly, highlighted the difficulties and conflicts between home and school on issues related to gender and differing cultural expectations. He has reported on the specific difficulties of South-Asian girls in British and Canadian school contexts, where he compared the values of Western societies: individualism, a secular outlook, gender equality, to those of South-Asian societies: collectivism, religious commitment and gender role differentiation. Ghuman's work in turn draws on the 'psychological mechanisms and social strategies' that Asian girls employ to help them cope with the tensions between home and school cultures (Ghuman, 2003:4). Ghuman's view is that South-Asian girls are disadvantaged because they tend to carry an unfair burden in the family, a finding that mirrors Ballard's (1987) early research.

Abbas (2000; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2010) has been hugely influential in the field of South-Asian youth, where one of his key findings was in relation to the significant role of parents in shaping their children's religious, cultural and educational values. His earlier research found less progressive attitudes towards higher and further education from Muslim parents, as they feared that their daughters would 'go astray' if they left home for university. More recent research (Ijaz and Abbas, 2010) challenges this, showing that Muslim parents are just as encouraging of the education of their daughters, as Sikh or Hindu parents (Bisit, 1997; Bhopal, 2010). Abbas (ibid) found notable differences in the levels of cultural and social capital between Hindu, Sikh and Muslim families (echoed by Bhopal, 2010), and middle-class Asian parents were more informed of educational practices and opportunities, and were therefore not so heavily reliant on schools for advice (Archer, 2011).

While Asian parents have been noted in the literature as valuing education for their daughters, the concerns have been in relation to the effects of 'Westernisation', particularly if leaving home to study at university (Ijaz and Abbas, 2010). Although religion has been discussed as a useful life structure in these studies, Abbas (2004) notes that for Muslim women, Islam presented particular tensions. The young women in his study wanted to discover a 'proper' Islam, rather than the outdated religio-cultural practices of their parents (discussed also through Bakhtiar, 2011 and Mirza, 2013). Abbas's research also revealed that being a 'good Sikh' or 'good Hindu' was not as demanding as being a 'good Muslim'.

Turning now to Ahmad's (2001) qualitative fieldwork, she undertook this with mainly working-class, London-based undergraduate, British Muslim women. She used semi-structured interviews with 15 students aged between 19 to 30 years). Despite low levels of parental education across her sample (as in my study), these respondents' parents strongly valued and promoted education for their daughters, where higher education was viewed as necessary to maintain social prestige and respect, rather than economic capital. Parents spoke of educational success as a useful 'back-up' plan that assured a certain degree of security against worst-case scenarios – for example, marriage failures. 'Suitable' future husbands were perceived to appreciate a potential wife's mental acumen and career, and therefore they would be less patriarchal in their behaviour. Educated daughters signaled 'liberalism' for the family, positioning parents as 'modern' and socially astute.

Bhopal's (2010; 2011) more recent research aligns with Ahmad's key findings above. Ahmad (2003) raises pertinent concerns about feminist critiques in girlhood literature, arguing that they 'rarely highlight the rights of Muslim women or the 'heterogeneity of Muslim cultures' (p.53). Her doctoral thesis (Ahmad, 2006) was hugely important in relation to these points, particularly in raising concerns about women becoming 'too educated' or too

'successful', where they would 'disadvantage themselves in the marriage market'. Prestigious career choices such as medicine, dentistry, law and accountancy continued to be the most highly respected professions by South-Asian parents, as discussed earlier. Some girls in Ahmad's (ibid) study also studied the more creative subjects, which were aligned with 'middle-class aspirations' as they were seen to signal individuality, and resisting parental pressure to study the sciences.

Finally, in terms of reviewing aspects of this work on South-Asian girls, I turn to Shain's valuable research in the field (1996; 2000; 2003; 2010; 2012). As I stated in Chapter One, Shain has been hugely influential in terms of South-Asian girlhood, where her work has inspired my thinking during the early stages of my doctoral journey, in relation to the different roles that South-Asian girls play across school and home. Shain (2003) detailed how particular challenges are experienced by Asian girls, and rooted within historical, political and economic constructs (as do Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2009; Tinkler and Jackson, 2012). Her empirical research presents adolescent South-Asian girls in a more active role compared to the passive stereotypes in the media. For example, she refers to some of the girls in her study as 'active creators and re-creators' of their identities.

Shain's (1996) doctoral thesis drew on a sample of 44 South-Asian girls of working-class background, and her sample included girls from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian descent (38 followed Islam, 2 followed Hinduism and 4 Sikhism). She used one-off semi-structured interviews across 8 secondary schools in Manchester and Staffordshire. She has argued (1996; 2003) that racism needs to be understood in reference to other (intersecting) social relations, such as gender, class and sexuality. She draws attention to old colonial racism and maintains that more contemporary racism contains fragments of old themes. Zephaniah (Richardson, 2012) concurs with this in his politically motivated work with schools on the English and History

curriculum. Shain (1996), like Ahmad (2006), has critiqued cultural pathology models that problematise Asian girls and groups as being 'caught between two cultures' - the 'culture clash' discourse. She highlights the concept of 'resistance' and presents four categories of Asian girls, as connected to the girls in her study. These cameos are organised based on the strategies girls employ to cope with their lives. As I understand Shain's work, these categories are not intended to act as fixed groups as she acknowledges that girls will employ different responses across spaces:

'Gang girls' positively assert their identities as South-Asian girls, in direct opposition to the dominant culture of the school, which is seen as largely white and racist. Their friendships are comprised of girls from the same ethnic group and religion and play an important role in their lives.

'Rebel girls' are located in the mid- to higher- ability sets at school and prioritise uneven gender relations within the family and community. They see racism as a form of oppression, though some of them view their parents' views as 'backward'. They actively disassociate themselves from Asian girl groups in the school and even use racist terms like 'Paki' to 'Other' other Asians. School and teachers are seen in a positive light and the home viewed as a restrictive site of oppression. Religion is seen as a guide, rather than a prescriptive set of rules. They have high aspirations for their careers and futures, and do not prioritise marriage before career.

'Survivors' adopt a passive coping strategy and work within the stereotyped discourses of Asian girls. These girls are aspirational, pro-education and see schooling as a positive route to success. They choose friends from different cultural backgrounds, which makes them less vulnerable to racism.

'Faith girls' work hard to achieve academic success and have aspirations for university life, but many know that they will be 'married off' before fulfilling

their aspirations. They do not necessarily view this as oppressive, because they respect their parents' wishes. They positively assert their religious identities and are subject to racist name-calling because of their religious affiliations. Although they are aware of institutional racism and teachers' stereotypes of Asian girls, they do not resist or fight back. Their friendship groups comprise mainly Asian girls from the same religious group.

Shain's (1996; 2003) research was theorised through Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony, arguing that social structures and practices can limit some experiences, but not wholly determine them (as discussed by Phillips, 2010). She argues that girls' lives are not wholly determined by the conditions in which they operate, but rather there is 'space' in the cultural sphere to resist and challenge dominant definitions, and it is in and through this process of articulation, that identities are produced. I connect this to what Bhabha (1997) refers to as inventing new identities and cultures in the third space (further supported by Walters and Auton-Cuff, 2009). Shain's (2012) more recent research on Muslim boys has shed valuable light on the shifting identifications of young Muslim men through political discourses.

A summary: positioning my study within existing literature

This chapter has been structured under four headings:

1. Theoretical framework: black feminist theory
2. Configurations of 'culture'
3. Cultural identity: an interdisciplinary approach
4. South Asian girls: a review of girlhood studies

I have found it enriching to draw on a swathe of inter-disciplinary research, not least because this has expanded how I have explored and discussed the contested notions of 'culture', identity, girlhood, equality and 'feminisms'. As

can be seen through the discussions of all this work, the lives of British South-Asian girls are incredibly varied. In particular, I have recognised the importance of addressing how the social and psychological interact (Bibby, 2010) in girls' 'success' journeys, and the importance of addressing how women psychologically invest in their identities (Brah, 2006; Mirza, 2013; Ringrose, 2013). I conclude this chapter with a set of principles that I draw on to inform my work - from the use of methodology in the next chapter, through to the description of narrative data in Chapter Four, and the ensuing discussion in Chapter Five.

First, I rest heavily on the principles of black feminist theory, as discussed in section one of this chapter. This position allows me to explain 'culture', cultural identity and girlhood, in relational and intersecting ways, acknowledging both historical and current experiences. Because black feminism draws on intersectionality principles, it recognises how social differences and power relations operate for 'women of colour' at every level (Collins, 2000). Black feminism allows me to explain 'culture' in relation to the powerful and emancipatory role of education, while, at the same time, avoids falling into reductionist and pathologised representations of women.

Second, 'omnivorous' approaches towards 'culture' and cultural identity, are not exclusive to the elite classes. I do not see 'culture' as fixed and exclusive, belonging to the financially privileged and intellectual. Rather, I prefer to draw on Bauman's (2011) coined terms 'univorous' and 'omnivorous' consumption of cultural experiences, to help explain ways in which 'successful' girls (largely working-class/ lower middle-class in my study) can also be 'omnivorous' (like the more privileged in society).

Third, I recognise multiple configurations of 'culture' and cultural identity. Both psycho- and social- dimensions inform identity development, and the types of experiences that individuals undergo inform the strength of their

identities. 'Who am I?' has to be read in situational ways as it shifts between contradictory discourses and psychological investments, configured across 'space, place and time' (Haw, 2011: 566). In this sense, I recognise 'culture' as a multidimensional and 'liquid' concept that is constantly evolving through debate and experience over time.

Fourth, 'culture' is a psycho-social process. For me, it is best understood both socially and psychologically, as influences are embodied through the mind and body, and connected to emotions (Billig, 2006; Frosh, 2001; Mirza, 2013). As Gilligan (2011) argues: 'Culture appears in the unspoken', and in this way 'it becomes part of everyday living that it never has to be articulated' (p.15). In this sense, 'Culture' does not construct individuals like robots where they are powerless without agency (Phillips, 2010).

Fifth, 'culture' and cultural identity can be 'worn' heavily, lightly or otherwise across space, audience and time. In this work I draw on, and adapt Phillips's (2010) phrase '...those who are deeply embedded in their cultures and those (from majority or Western groups) who can 'wear' their culture more lightly' (p.10). The weighted continuum at the start of Chapter Four illustrates this.

Finally, I view my study as making a contribution to the fields of small-scale narrative research methods, rather than large-scale survey studies such as some of those discussed earlier. My methodology is in-depth and participant-focused, where each girl's perspective is given prominence throughout the process (Ludhra and Chappell, 2011). To my knowledge (based on my literature search and conversations with academic colleagues), there are no studies in the UK like mine, but general research on South-Asian 'success' in relation to particular groups achieving well academically. The next chapter presents a methodological discussion of the empirical work that I have conducted.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction and context

In Chapter Two, I critically reviewed the literature on black feminist theory, 'culture', cultural identities, and girlhood studies. The methodological literature, and my active involvement in the British Sociological Association's (BSA) Auto/Biography group, steered me towards narrative study, and a recognition of its benefits in relation to researching girls' in-depth experiences. This study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist epistemology. I have used an unstructured, narrative interview approach to explore the cultural identities of twelve, academically 'successful', British South-Asian girls studying in West London. The study was planned in an open-ended style so that there was space for the girls to direct the content of the study in line with participatory principles (Gilligan, 1982; Letherby, 2003).

In this chapter I provide a detailed account of the methodological tools and processes, and explain how my choices have been influenced by black feminist theory and the literature that I draw upon. I discuss the perceived opportunities and ethical dilemmas that were part of this study, and the impact of researching in a critically reflexive style as an 'inside' researcher (followed-up in Chapter Six reflections). I outline the evolving journey of this study, building on the overview presented in Chapter One. This chapter is presented under the following sections:

- Methodological backdrop
- Pilot/ scoping studies: reflections on phases one and two
- Main study: a narrative interview approach
- Welcome to the twelve girls
- Chapter summary

Methodological backdrop

I adopt an interpretative approach which does not search for laws and absolute truths, but rather, focuses on exploring 'deeper' explanations of the girls' experiences. As illustrated in 'Table 2: Methodology - Diagram of Process', this study evolved in its methodology, from a semi-structured interview approach (Ludhra, 2011) to a narrative approach (Ludhra and Chappell, 2014). This was influenced by my critical reflections on notions of 'voice' and the ethics and challenges of genuinely listening to, and re-presenting the girls' narratives (dimensions discussed by Gilligan, 1982 and Mazzei and Jackson, 2012). As I progressed through the two pilot phases, I developed a stronger understanding of the notion of 'embodied experience' (Mirza, 2013) and 'embodied identities' (Seidler, 2010), and the affects of in-depth research on the researcher's and participants' psychological responses (discussed in Chappell, Mendick, Ludhra and Ernest, 2014; Hollway, 2012).

Within the main study, I focused my data collection on the girls' perspectives, rather than widening it to other stakeholders such as parents/ grandparents or teachers (discussed in section 4 of Chapter Three). Although some researchers will boast increased validity, breadth, trustworthiness and rigour through triangulation and bigger samples, I believe that my approach provided greater clarity and focus on my aims (Oakley, 2000), without compromising ecological validity. Data collection for the main study comprised of:

- The narrative interviews (between 3-5 per girl, totalling an average of 6 hours of face-to-face interview time)
- The girls' reflective journals and other reflective writing (journals were optional and 9/12 girls kept them)
- My researcher reflective journal (discussed in Chapter Six)

- Electronic correspondence (this included phone calls, email reflections and mobile phone messaging). I have not included extracts of text messages or phonecalls for ethical reasons.
- One focus group feedback/ discussion session at each school (discussed in Chapter Six).

The nine girls that kept a reflective journal, included some visual images and drawings, and these added a rich dimension to the interview data, as noted in the studies of Katsiaficas et al., (2011) and Basit (2013). By adopting a participatory research approach, I was striving to reduce some of the power differentials and ethical issues that are well-documented within the literature, some of which I have discussed elsewhere (Ludhra, 2011; Ludhra and Chappell 2011; Rogers and Ludhra, 2011). The girls in the main study were referred to as 'co-researchers', and I believe that this was positively received by the girls in relation to giving them a real position, status and 'voice' through which to share their experiences (Marsh, 2013 approached her research through a similar position and rationale). In Walters and Auton-Cuff's (2009) study (and Gilligan's, 1982, seminal feminist 'voice' research), the young women were referred to as 'autobiographers' of their own lives (p.759), and evident in my end of study summary reflections, the girls talked of how they valued this status (see Appendix 5).

There exists a wealth of methodological terminology in the literature and I take some space to explain a few well-used terms as relevant to this study. 'Methods' refers to techniques and procedures used in the gathering of data, the analysis process, and the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions (Cohen, Manion, Morrison and Bell, 2011). 'Methodology' is much broader, referring to the research process and design, including the 'theory behind the method'. The researcher's theoretical perspective includes the 'philosophical framework' or stance that informs the methodology

(Manen, 1997: 27-28). I view methods as more than just technical exercises - they build on, and are informed by, the researcher's epistemology and ontology (Flick, 2009).

The scientific (positivist) paradigm, favours quantitative data, and therefore the methods would measure or predict, rather than describe and explain 'thick' processes of experience and cultures (Geertz, 1973), where the researcher has to explore in more interpretative ways. This sits within the creative outlook of Mills (1959), where the researcher is positioned as a 'craftsman' who draws on flexible approaches to 'develop the sociological imagination', and 'avoid the fetishism of method and technique'. I align myself with Mills' view on theory and method, which is 'part of the practice of a craft' (p.224). As stated, the methodology of this study was re-designed through critical reflections on the two pilot phases, and in this way, methods became the 'servant', rather than the compass of the research (Plummer, 2010: 150).

A researcher's epistemology and ontology are linked, and will inevitably influence the methodological choices. Epistemological assumptions relate to the nature of knowledge, and the relationship between the researcher and researched. Any claim about knowledge must be justified and made transparent in relation to how it was generated (Oakley, 2000; Kearney, 2003). My reflections, feelings and observations were recorded in my research journal, and I see this writing as contributing to the knowledge generation process (Collins and Cooper, 2014). To summarise here:

Our choice of methodology is based on the personal beliefs and philosophies that inform our world view (ontology) and our ways of relating to and understanding how knowledge is created (epistemology) (Etherington, 2009: 83).

Most importantly for me, the method should not govern the question, but the research question and aims should lead to an exploration of the most suitable methods. The phrase 'research paradigm' refers to the belief system (or theory) that guides the research. Basit (2010) defines research paradigms as 'models, perspectives or conceptual frameworks that help us organise our thoughts, beliefs, views and practices into a logical whole' (p.14). In section one of Chapter Two, I discussed in detail how black feminist theory provided a useful model for this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005:183) present four dimensions/ questions, as part of a research paradigm, areas which I will address at points throughout this chapter:

- Ethics: How will I be a moral person in the world?
- Epistemology: How do I know the world?
- Ontology: What is the nature of reality?
- Methodology: What is the best means for acquiring knowledge?

As a researcher, I did not enter the research *tabula rasa*. As Yin (2009) and Schank (2000) state, qualitative, interpretative research is never neutral, but value-laden. I observed, planned questions, described, analysed and interpreted, based on my epistemological perspective. Basit's (2010) binary position of how theory is used in research does not align with what I experienced:

- The research is guided by a theory at the outset which helps the researcher to formulate questions and hypotheses.
- The research can generate a theory 'grounded' in the data so theory emerges from the data. Basit (2010: 37).

My position is that the two areas are not as divided as Basit suggests. There is some degree of theoretical direction before entering the study, as research

is not approached a-theoretically as pure grounded theorists would suggest (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The core premise of Glaser and Strauss (ibid) was based on the sociological concept of 'symbolic interaction', where the researcher's role was to discover a theory, rather than a theory being generated in the abstract (Price, 1999). A theoretical model would emerge after coding the data (Wasserman, Clair and Wilson, 2009), but this is not as 'clear-cut' as I experienced it. Whilst I concur with the notion of inductive theory, and how the theory must align with the nature of data generated, like Hammersley (1992), I also recognise the romanticism of this binary position.

Black feminist theory provided me with a framework for posing questions about the intersecting differences across the girl's lives, acknowledging the psycho-social dimensions. For me, paying attention to life experience has to be grounded in both psychological and sociological theory - as Bibby (2010) discusses, one does not operate without the other. Leading sociologists like Mills (1959), Goffman (1990), Becker (2007) and Giddens (1991), stress the importance of understanding individuals within their particular contexts:

The life of an individual cannot be adequately understood without references to the institutions within which his biography is enacted. (Mills, 1959: 161)

Mills (1959) discusses the importance of moving beyond the 'external biography' of actors in their social roles, to understanding those internal and psychological features such as 'self-image', 'conscience', 'growth of the mind' and 'facework'. As Plummer (2010) highlights, the here and now are 'haunted by the past', and in this way, the 'social always has a past, a present and a future, and it is always on the move' (pp.110-111). Goffman's (1963; 1990) metaphor of everyday life as a theatre, stresses notions of acting and performance within social interactions, and ways in which individuals perform facets of their identity, where behind these performances sit psychological emotions.

The above sets the context for this chapter, and reminds the reader of my position within an interpretative domain, and how I have drawn on black feminist principles, and psycho-social dimensions of narrative research (Collins, 2000; Mirza, 2009; Bhopal, 2010). I have explored and listened to the girls' narratives, and processed personal emotions and 'voices' through a critically reflexive lens (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 2011). I have used my research journal and collaborative writing opportunities, to discuss and write about these at key points in the journey (Ludhra and Chappell, 2011; Rogers and Ludhra, 2011; Chappell, Mendick, Ludhra and Ernest, 2014).

Pilot/scoping studies: reflections on phases one and two

Phase one

Phase one of the pilot/ scoping study, represents where my early interest began. This phase was conducted from 2008 to 2009 as part of an Early Researcher's Award when I first entered Higher Education. Here, I was inspired by the research of Ghuman (2001; 2002; 2003) and Shain (2003) in particular. Given the immediate pressures to publish within academia, the funding allowed me to develop skills in managing my first research project, and present pilot study findings at academic conferences, as well as writing research papers (see 'Publications and conference presentations' at the start of the thesis). Phase One acted like a 'dress rehearsal' for Phase Two (Yin, 2009: 92), and I explored the girls' social, cultural and religious dimensions of their lives through one-off semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews, lasting between 45 minutes to 1.5 hours, were conducted on a one-to-one basis with eighteen, British South-Asian girls aged between 13-17 years. Interviews were all held on the school premises and nine girls from each school setting were interviewed, with an even spread of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim girls, which was mirrored in the main

study. The study also involved two, one-hour interviews with senior members of staff: one teacher of Muslim religious background, and one British-born white teacher.

At the end of the research project, I provided generic feedback to both head teachers with the permission of the girls, and later emailed both schools my first research paper. The feedback process raised important implications for anonymity, and contrary to my assumptions, most girls were happy for me to feedback using their names. I did not use names and discussed my rationale for anonymity with them, and how that was part of my researcher responsibility. The nature of semi-structured interviews allowed me to extract data under the key headings of the interview schedule with relative ease. The 'looser' nature of some questions provided scope for new ideas to be raised by participants (Robson, 2002). As some of the intended questions could have raised sensitive issues, the semi-structured approach provided flexibility to exercise professional judgment in the degree to which I probed particular topics (Ghuman, 1994).

Two of the eighteen girls expressed emotional signs when narrating particular events from the past and, in both cases, these interviews were paused before continuing. Both cases related to racist events and bullying that the girls had previously encountered (managing sensitive research topics is discussed by Renzitti and Lee, 1993). Through narrating sensitive experiences, participants can potentially be 're-traumatised', but the process may also be viewed by participants as a space for healing, as Goodson and Sikes (2001) discuss. These research experiences were central in scoping the changing landscape for phase two and the main study. Phase one therefore allowed me to 'make mistakes and experiment with the process...' (Basit, 2010: 74), as well as 'test the waters' (Kvale, 1996:147). Within the limited space of this thesis, I cannot report pilot data, but I direct the reader

to research publications that emerged (Ludhra and Jones, 2009; Ludhra and Jones, 2010; Ludhra, 2011).

My research journal reflections at the end of this phase, echoed those of Drew (2006), who discusses the pressures to conform to the academic requirements of institutions. Drew argues that as a result of institutional pressures, researchers sometimes resort to the 'Seagull Imperative' - flying into the research community, leaving a mess, and then leaving them to tidy up (p.40). Like Drew, I left Phase One with lots of questions about the 'power' dynamics across interactions, and my methodological approach in relation to how well I was centralising of the girls' voices. My methodology did not incorporate spaces for the girls to reflect or feedback, and as a result, I designed Phase Two to eliminate some of these weaknesses. In this way, it became the 'dress rehearsal' for the narrative interview approach that was finally adopted.

Phase Two: 'dress rehearsal' for the main study

As a result of the critical reflections highlighted above, I immersed myself in the narrative literature, and joined the BSA (British Sociological Association) Auto/Biography group, where I presented early doctoral work. This group of experienced narrative researchers provided valuable feedback over the years, and this also resulted in a collaborative research paper, where one member invited me to co-write with her (Rogers and Ludhra, 2011). My intention during this phase was to rehearse the skills of a narrative interview approach, one which would be far more guided by the girls' agenda (a view supported by Woods, 1985; Riessman, 2008; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). I locate my narrative interviews within the symbolic interactionist tradition, where ideas and meanings are co-constructed, performed and explored with audience in mind (Trahar, 2009; Reissman, 2010). The concept of performance is often applied to narrative interviews, and this connects to the

dramaturgical concept of Goffman (1990) and Butler's (1993) notion of performativity.

I trialled two narrative interviews in a local secondary school with sixth-form South-Asian girls. I quickly realised the benefits of researching girls' experiences in this way, as their stories had more space to 'breathe' and flow without interruptions (supported by narrative researchers like Frank, 2010 and Plummer, 2011). The narratives generated as part of this phase will not be reported in this thesis, but I direct the reader to a research paper that discusses the transition from Phase One to Two (Ludhra and Chappell, 2011), where Mirza (2013) later refers to our methodology.

These interviews opened with a 'generative narrative question' to 'stimulate' and frame the topic (as discussed by Flick, 2009: 177). I opened with two questions: "Talk to me about your cultural experiences as a British-Asian girl" and "What is it like being an Asian girl today?" These two questions were probed at points, but only when the girls requested prompts, and to maintain a focus within the topic (Kearney, 1998 and Marsh, 2013 support such an approach). One of the girls, Jyoti, illustrated her reflections on this process by referring to herself as the 'leader'. She described her position as one where she 'did all the marching' in the interview (the power dimensions of this are discussed in Ludhra and Chappell, 2011).

The methods and techniques developed across Phase One and Two, can be contextualised within Kvale's (2009) useful metaphors, where the researcher is compared to a 'miner' or 'traveller'. During Phase One, I was researching in the style of a 'miner', where I was digging for nuggets of information through semi-structured interviews. When rehearsing through a narrative interview approach, I adopted the role of a 'traveller' who was exploring experiences (echoed by Kearney, 1998). As a 'traveller', I developed a deeper and less fragmented understanding of the girls' cultural experiences,

and I could follow-up on areas raised in interview one during subsequent meetings. During this phase, I was learning about the creative craft of the methodology as I critically engaged with it (Mills, 1959).

Main study: a narrative interview approach

This brings me to discuss some key points on narrative as adopted in the main study. Although I used the word 'interviews' during the pilot phases, I modified this to 'research conversations' within the main study, as the interactions felt like conversations (echoed by Marsh, 2013), and the girls' final reflections supported this (see Appendix 5). Provocatively, the unstructured interview has been recognised as 'seductive' in the same way as 'reality TV shows' (Hey, 2000; Silverman, 2004: 344). Its form originates from psychiatric and therapeutic fields, such as Freud, Jung and Rogers' work in free association. These approaches have since been used in social and educational settings (Cohen et al., 2011). However, the qualitative interview is neither a 'romanticized view of seamless authenticity emerging from narrative accounts' (Miller and Glassner 2004: 126) nor is it a counselling session for either the researcher or participants, and therefore it must not be mistaken as such (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Within each social interaction that took place, complex psychological factors came into play, and these moved beyond the interview encounter alone (discussed by Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001; Maylor 1995). It is difficult for the researcher to understand how the participant views the interview space, unless there is space to ask and honesty in response. In my case, some girls did discuss a sadness when the study was over as they felt important and listened to (see Appendix 5).

Each interview interaction was 'situated and accomplished with audience in mind' (Riessman, 2008: 106). In relation to earlier points made about Goffman's 'interaction order' and dramaturgy, the girls engaged in different

types of sign activity during the interviews in relation to the expressions they 'gave' - verbal signals, communication in the narrow sense, and the expressions they 'gave off' - i.e.: non-verbal signs. I acknowledge that individuals can inevitably convey misinformation, and present carefully engineered impressions to convey a particular impression (discussed by Goffman, 1990 and Riessman, 2010). The researcher has no control over these factors, as actors can 'give shows' to varying degrees. This does not however suggest that the girls' identities were inauthentic, as the words 'perform' and 'engineered' tend to imply a kind of fakeness. Based on my interactions with the twelve girls, I judged their 'performances' as authentic, noting contradictions across interviews in areas. Contradictions emerged as part of the reflection process, and these included justifications in cases from the girls.

Through writing in my research journal, I was able to capture the 'fringe areas' of the social interactions - the emotions and non-verbal signs that were observed, experienced and embodied psychologically (Hollway, 2012; see Chapter Six reflections; Appendix 4 extracts). Manen (1996) discusses how conversational interviews like mine, can lead to 'new levels of self-awareness' for both the researcher and participant (p.163), and as a result, participants develop a heightened understanding of learning about themselves through reflective processes.

I did not enter the narrative study with the dominant feminist metaphor of 'giving voice to the silent' (Oakley, 2000: 47) as I view this as patronising, and going in from a preconceived deficit perspective - one that assumes the participant previously had no voice, which was not the case. Notions of 'voice' are far more complex than some of the literature reveals (Ludhra and Chappell, 2011; Mirza, 2013). To illustrate this, I draw on Gayatri Spivak's seminal words when challenging Western academics in how 'third world' voices are represented: "With what voice consciousness can the subaltern

speak?" (Spivak, 1988: 285). Researchers should ask the question: "What is at stake for girls in replacing silence with voice?" (Gonick, 2007: 434), and Skeggs (2002) adds to this by suggesting rather than asking: "Can the subaltern speak?", researchers should ask themselves: "Can we hear?" (p.369). I value Skeggs' point, and how researchers 'hear' the voices of participants, is layered within their own biases and life experiences to some degree. As Gilligan (2011) points out, 'voice' is an embodied process that connects the 'body, breath and physical world' with 'language and culture' (p.8).

Securing access, consent and generating the sample

In March 2010, I emailed fourteen secondary schools within a ten mile radius of my home, and these e-mails were followed-up by phone calls. In the initial email, I outlined the project aims, and requested a preliminary meeting with interested head teachers. However, only two of the fourteen schools replied with an acknowledgement, and neither of them followed up my requests for meetings. As this process was not fruitful, I approached academic colleagues at Brunel University for connections, and as a result, the two schools secured, resulted from their established research relationships. The school contexts have already been presented in Chapter One, so I will not repeat again. My rationale for choosing two schools was guided by the following reasons:

- With a sample of twelve girls, I wanted to ensure anonymity as far as possible, so two schools strengthened this dimension.
- I was spreading the workload for staff at each school, as the time and organisation could be seen as intensive.
- I reduced the risk of complications in the unfortunate case of one school dropping out.

Staff at both schools communicated in a highly professional manner which continued throughout the study. Their 'goodwill' and 'co-operation' were vital ingredients to the success of this fieldwork (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 54). During my first meeting at each school, I met with the heads of sixth form to discuss the contents of the detailed Research Information Pack (extracts presented in Appendix 2), alongside practical aspects such as setting up meeting dates, timetabling and examination matters, and booking 'safe' room spaces. The staff were encouraged to pose questions, e-mail or phone me at any point in the study. After discussing the sample composition (Hindu, Sikh and Muslim girls), staff in both schools invited interested girls to a lunch-time research meeting, where I provided context to the study through an informal presentation. The girls were encouraged to ask me questions, and the schools were emailed the research pack beforehand to allow time for the girls to read it in advance. The girls posed the following questions:

- What made you choose this topic?
- This topic is so interesting and I didn't know you could do PhDs in these kinds of subjects. I've always thought of scientific PhDs.
- Is a thesis like a book and who will read it? Will it be in libraries?
- Can we read your thesis even if we don't take part?
- How will you use our direct quotes and would our names and school be confidential? (*interestingly, a few seemed keen for their real names to be used, as in Phase One of the pilot study*)
- Do you do a PhD full-time or work too?
- Have you got a family?

At this meeting, the girls were asked to complete a short, biographical form and state their reasons for wanting to participate. I have included a selection of their reasons to illustrate the broad nature of their motivations:

- 'Cos I have many, many opinions and thoughts to share about this topic 😊
- It seems interesting and it would be great to help you achieve your PhD one day. It would also be good to find out more about myself as you don't always have time to think about yourself and your culture.
- Because I am happy to share my views on this topic with you- I think I would find it an interesting topic to talk about.
- As strange as this may sound and since I have been studying AS psychology at school, I have always wanted to be part of a sociological or psychological study or experiment! Also, learning about what I have to say about culture and religion is something that should be interesting. I've never heard of anyone doing this kind of PhD research and I think it will be good to get involved with you to experience it and help you.
- I am studying sociology at school which crosses your topic. I know a bit about research methods from the books we have read but it would be good to do it in real life with a researcher from university. I found the initial talk and research pack really interesting and it's something that I could easily talk about.

The girls were encouraged to e-mail me if they had further questions, and asked to think carefully about the time involved before committing. I stressed the voluntary nature of their participation, and freedom to withdraw at any point in the study. Thankfully, there were no withdrawals, and if anything, new girls approached the sample once the study had started, requesting to join in if an opportunity arose. Two girls in one school opted out after the

initial meeting, as they felt it was possibly too personal (both girls were from Muslim religious backgrounds). They wished me success and conveyed their interest to read the final thesis. In the same school, one further girl dropped out after signing the consent paperwork (she changed her mind on the morning of the interview). In the second school, only one girl decided to opt out at the start, because of time commitments and concerns raised from her parents (this girl was of Muslim background). This left me with a sample of twelve girls, six from each of the two schools.

When 'negotiating access' and consent, I was guided by the checklist of principles outlined by Cohen et al. (2011:103-104), particularly their valuable point that securing access and consent is not simply about setting up entry arrangements at the start of the study. Consent required continual negotiation and discussion with the girls and staff, at each stage of the study.

To summarise here, I reflect positively on the time taken at this early stage of recruitment, as the twelve girls who signed up, all continued through until the end. My ethics reviewer's feedback suggested that I increase the sample as some girls could drop out because of the time factor, and the personal nature of the topic. Hence, the suggestion was made to increase the sample from nine to twelve which I did. When 'recruiting' the girls, I did not look at their academic credentials, as this was not part of my selection criteria. However, very quickly I realised that I had clearly attracted an academically 'successful' sample.

Dimensions of the interview interactions

I engaged in face-to-face data collection intensely, from June 2010, through to the end of September 2010 (this spanned the summer holidays). The data collection phase was exciting, yet emotionally tiring in a way that I had not anticipated (Collins and Cooper, 2014). I would stay up at night to write my

reflective diary soon after the interviews, so that those initial thoughts were captured immediately (see Appendix 4). Alongside the mechanics of managing the research process and interviews with twelve girls, I was also managing personal emotions of joy, tears at times, and revisiting 'old ghosts' (Ramsay, 1996). Like Maylor (1995), the consequences of adopting a narrative interview approach generated a type of 'soul searching' and critical consciousness (see Chapter Six).

As already outlined, each girl was interviewed between 3-5 times in line with their motivation and time. Participation stretched beyond the interview interaction, as the girls could communicate via email or phone should they wish to. Each girl was given a writing journal at the first interview meeting, and this was presented as an optional space in which to reflect. To my surprise, nine out of the twelve girls did reflect through a journal to varying degrees of detail, although not necessarily in the journal that I presented. Two girls - Maheera and Sara - presented mini identity projects, and Arti's journal was extremely detailed.

The girls shared their experiences through the narrative interviews (which I called 'research conversations'), email dialogue, telephone conversations, mobile phone text correspondence, UCAS personal statements, Headgirl speeches, and reflective journal entries. I was keen to present options so that they could communicate in their preferred style. They were all offered dictaphones at the start of the study in case they wished to keep audio reflections – none of them were keen on this option. Most of the girls used email, the reflective journal, or they shared their reflections during the physical interview encounter. I created space at the start and end of each interview for them to reflect (see Appendix 3, Arti's conversation map with the blue reflective areas).

The first interview with each participant was the second face-to-face interaction (the first was the introductory meeting). During the first part of this interview, time was spent recapping the aims, outlining the research processes, and providing further opportunities for them to ask questions. This part was important in re-establishing the context, and it allowed me to engage in 'civil pleasantries' in order to put the girls at ease and establish rapport (Woods, 1986: 76). Although the interviews were open-ended, back-up prompts were planned. A couple of girls felt slightly uneasy at first, because of the non-directive nature that they were not used to.

The first interview tended to mirror a descriptive sign-posting of the girls' lives at a broad level. At times, the girls appeared concerned about presenting the 'right kind of information' and being 'useful enough' to me. I had to stress that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' responses, but rather it was their perspective that I wanted to hear (discussed by Chaitin, 2004). At the end of the first interview and subsequent ones, I drew the interviews to a close through a short reflective summary. This encouraged the girls to reflect not only on the content of what they said, but the process of talking about their experiences to a stranger. We concluded each interview by agreeing the next steps for the research and transcription turnaround dates (see Appendix 3). By negotiating these aspects with the girls, rather than facilitating staff, I was guided by the girls' individual commitments.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim, and the girls were emailed their transcripts prior to our next meeting. The method for sharing was negotiated within the girls' individual preferences, where eleven requested an emailed copy and one girl also requested a printed hardcopy. This process allowed them to read over their previous interviews beforehand, and elaborate on content as they felt necessary. Only two girls asked to retract small extracts of the transcript, and these related to one girl's views about her mother, and an extract about a father's slightly aggressive manner in the past. In both

cases, the girls reflected on those extracts as being irrelevant or too personal (the girls used 'track changes' to indicate deletions). Sharing the transcripts was welcomed by the girls and I believe it 'warmed-up' subsequent interviews prior to the interaction starting. Upon reflection, I can also see how reading over experiences could be painful, and lead the participant towards some degree of orchestration of future content - as stated before, I had no control over how they chose to respond.

After receiving transcript one, most girls commented on the shock of seeing their conversations transcribed word for word, and this raised discussion about their speech style and how they potentially come across to people in everyday life, making them reflect on future university interviews. I prepared for each interview by reading over the transcript, making annotations all over it, listening to the audio clips, and reading my reflective journal notes. The audio clip allowed me to revisit and experience the interview interaction, alongside my field notes that 'captured' the fringe areas. In this way, I was engaging with data analysis whilst collecting it. I closed each sequence of interviews when the girls wanted to, stressing that although three interviews had been outlined within the Research Information Pack, they could have more. By being open to more interviews, I provided an opportunity for the girls to say all they wanted to, and close the study when they felt ready. Although I use the word 'close', it was not as 'final' as that, as communication continued beyond the physical interview interactions (see Chapter Six).

As part of black feminism, there is a recognition of the power influences in narrative research with 'women of colour' (Brah, 1996; Collins, 2000). Within Chapter Two, I discussed notions of 'power' in relation to cultural identity theories, particularly within intersecting differences of gender, religion and 'culture' for example. The Foucauldian perspective on power views it as fluid, and one that operates at all levels of social interactions and society (Foucault, 2000). I see power and ethics as being connected concepts that

shift in relation to time, context, space, audience, and points of connection established between those in the interview interaction. I believe that a researcher who is guided by ethical research principles, and 'emotional intelligence' (Collins and Cooper, 2014) is more likely to connect with participants in a way that reduces some of the uneven power dimensions of researcher/ researched relationships (Neumann, 2012).

May (2001) discusses the 'philosophical ethics' of narrative researchers, and ways in which they ask deeper questions, rather than accepting matters at face value. An engagement with 'deep' ethics has informed my methodology through critical reflexivity. I have written and presented elsewhere about the ethical and psychological dimensions of my research (Rogers and Ludhra, 2011; Chappell, Ernest, Ludhra and Mendick, 2012; 2014).

To contextualise the UK ethics context, social science research generally requires ethical approval, especially when involving vulnerable children. Organisations such as British Education Research Association (BERA, 2004); Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2005); British Psychological Society (BPS) and the British Sociological Association (BSA), set ethical guidelines (Flick, 2009; Basit, 2010). In addition, universities have their own Ethics Committees to review the 'ethical soundness' of individual projects. As an ex Deputy headteacher, my work with children and children's services, required me to behave responsibly, ethically and responsively at all times - this was absolutely integral to my professional identity in the school context (Sikes and Potts, 2008).

Thinking about ethics solely at the beginning of the research process, or within the ethics form, does not constitute a 'critical engagement' (Miller and Bell, 2002; Laimputtong, 2007). A sense of 'humanness' and consideration for 'fairness' (Laimputtong, 2007) to those involved is vital - what Collins and Cooper (2014) refer to as the researcher's 'emotional intelligence'. As Chase

(1996) discusses: 'An informed consent form cannot possibly capture the dynamic processes of interpretation and authorship' (p.57). It is therefore more ethically sensible to consider consent as a process (Smythe and Murray, 2000), and work within an 'ethics-as-process' framework, where continual re-negotiation takes place (Liamputtong, 2007: 44). I draw attention to suggested questions for consideration when conducting participatory research with young people:

- Who benefits from the research?
- What purpose does the research serve?
- Who is the audience for the research?

(Rogers and Ludhra, 2011: 50).

The above are by no means 'new' questions in narrative research as Cahill (2004) suggests, but, as highlighted by Keddie (2000), they are questions that are not asked enough in research with young people. Academic research concerning young people should not simply be an 'exclusive conversation' between 'us' as researchers, about 'them' as participants (Cahill, 2004: 282), as this in my view, results in academic elitism. I am aware that some researchers have taken this notion of girls' participation to a different level, for reasons connected to their research aims and particular circumstances. For example, Kay's (2006) study with Muslim girls in a participatory sports project, revealed the benefits of involving them from the research design stage, where they were raising the questions, conducting interviews with their families, and transcribing the interviews. As a white, female researcher, Kay saw benefits of conducting her research in this style in order to access more participant-centred views as the perceived 'outsider'. She drew on her female, Muslim research assistant to do more of the face-to-face work with the girls.

As some of the girls in my study were studying A-level Sociology and/or Psychology, they found the ethics and power dimensions of this study interesting. The ways in which power and ethics play out in the interview interaction, can influence how a participant talks about their experiences, and how this is read and re-presented by the researcher (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). When discussing 'participation' in relation to power and ethics, it is important to establish whether the researcher and participant see this in the same way. For example, I referred to the girls as 'co-researchers', rather than 'participants', and I discussed my rationale for this in the introductory meeting. I see it as important for the researcher to make meanings transparent from the outset, however obvious they may seem.

Notions of power and ethics pervade the researcher/ researched relationships. Questions such as: What does the research relationship mean for each girl? What ethical boundaries or rules are crossed when participants try to become friends? What is there to be gained in maintaining research relationships? (Thompson and Holland, 2003). Is it wrong to maintain relationships with young people for the purposes of research? (Rogers and Ludhra, 2011: 59). At the start of the study, I was very conscious of maintaining boundaries and my 'professional' identity, but once engaged with each participant, I realised how complex and blurred my role was. In cases, I developed a deeper empathy for some of the participants because of their particular narratives, and the ways in which I connected with them due to my personal experience (see Appendix 4 - reflective diary on Fauzia). I was touched by the girls' enthusiasm for the research, for example during the summer period of fieldwork, three Muslim girls participated during the fasting period of Ramadan because they were enthusiastic.

As I became more familiar with the girls, the interviews became like conversations, which signalled how the power balance had shifted. The girls did not question my personal life in much detail during these interactions, but

if asked, I shared some aspects in a general way - e.g.: my 'arranged' marriage, being a mother of two girls, how I studied after marriage with young children. Oakley (2005), amongst other feminist researchers (Bhavnani, 1993; Reynolds, 2002; Bhopal, 2011), discusses the importance of self-disclosure to minimise distance, diffuse power differentials and enhance rapport. My position was that I did not volunteer personal information during the fieldwork, and felt it unnecessary to do for no reason. I believe that disclosing my own experiences at length early on in the study, could have complicated or shifted the girls' responses (Ribbens, 1989).

Mills (1959) discusses the importance of researchers drawing on their own life experiences and Hertz (1997), in talking about 'reflexivity and voice' echoes this, and states that parts of an interview may 'prompt us to recall parts of our own lives' (xiii). Walkerdine (1997) refers to this as 'confronting phantasies', where a researcher is painfully or 'nostalgically catapulted back in time' to their own experiences (p.66). It could be argued that being critically self-reflexive about emotions, and the relationships between the researcher and participants is critically ethical and sensible (Maylor, 1995; O'Connor, 2004; Etherington, 2009; Gillies and Robinson, 2010). Hollway (2012) has gone as far as saying that some researchers may require counselling during highly emotive research projects, where logging emotions is an important part of their research journey and knowledge generation process. Walkerdine (1997) suggests that the emotive feelings 'stirred up in the researcher' may be 'an indication of what is actually happening psychically for the interviewee' (p.72).

I view my researcher position as a flexible 'insider/ outsider' one, as it was not as clear cut as anticipated - it can shift even within the space of an interview. For example, a shared religion could position me as an 'insider', with a girl, but age and classed differences could position me as an 'outsider'. What my 'insider' points of reference did offer, was a shared

language and understanding of experiences, which I believe was beneficial (Hodkinson, 2005). To summarise here, 'insider/ outsider' positionalities can influence the powered dimensions of the research relationship, but they should not be seen as simplified dichotomies (O'Connor, 2004: 169). These positions draw on feelings and emotions, rather than just the physical persona of our identities, and spoken language (Collins and Cooper, 2014).

Recording, transcribing and tracking the interviews

Each interview was recorded verbatim using a digital dictaphone. I always conducted a short test run before starting. All girls agreed to the interviews being recorded, and the reasons for recording were made transparent at the introductory meeting, and explained in further through the Research Information Pack (see Appendix 2). The girls seemed to ignore the recording device once they started talking, particularly after interview one when they had established a rapport. Most interviews would continue once the dictaphone was switched off, and at times this revealed interesting data. Recording allowed me to concentrate on listening, observing, making eye contact, and allowed me to make observational notes. After the interviews, I would listen to the recordings through headphones - sitting in a coffee shop, running on a treadmill, or when walking in a park to facilitate thinking. The digital medium provided flexibility to immerse myself in the girls' narratives.

The process of transcription requires a critical engagement with what the transcripts actually represent, and the value that researchers attach to them as 'data', 'tools', or even 'sacred texts' (Hammersley, 2010: 564-565). I developed a broader awareness of their position as 'data', when I repeatedly listened to the audio clips, and wrote in my reflective journal. I realised the importance of reading and interpreting beyond the words on the page, developing a holistic awareness of the narrative interview context as an embodied process, rather than a one-off encounter. For example, it was

important to reflect on surrounding context; the interview space; mood and emotion at the time of interview; how the original 'voices' of the girls were narrated, heard, and made sense of within, and outside of the interview space. The transcription re-told the event through the spoken word, yet it missed important fringe areas that only I had experienced as the researcher (discussed by Denzin, 1995; Kearney, 1998).

One of the challenges of the transcription process, related to the girls' use of Indian phrases at points - for example, Bollywood movie titles and actor names. Some girls used a few Indian phrases and their phonetic spelling raised difficulties for the transcribers as they were unfamiliar with the languages spoken by the girls. In such cases, the transcribers would highlight unusual spellings within the transcript, and I would add in the correct versions after listening to the audio clip. The two transcribers were interested in the topic as they had daughters of their own, and for me, it was interesting to hear their reflections as 'outsiders' when they returned the transcripts. Overall, the girls did not comment on the quality of transcription, but one girl (Maheera) pointed out incorrect spellings or typos. The verbatim transcripts were viewed as useful by all of the girls, where two girls referred to them as diaries. They were not keen to share them with anyone other me, but hold them as private records of their thoughts.

The data collection process had to be carefully organised and tracked once I started interviewing. Transcript turnaround times had to be aligned with the girls' diaries, and allow sufficient time for them to read them before the interview. I set up a colour-coded Excel spreadsheet to track the status of each girl, and this ensured effective communication between the girls, school staff, the transcribers and myself. At one point, two transcripts needed to be ready within a short turnaround time to suit the girls' availability. I had to transcribe two interviews within short deadlines, and this took me many hours. However, transcribing enabled me to experience the process, and

immerse myself at a microscopic level - I was analysing the interviews at word, sentence and text level, which reminded me of my days as an English teacher. I could not have physically transcribed all the interviews within the challenges of a full-time job and family at the time.

My interview timeline slipped slightly due to workload demands, and therefore I had to continue interviewing into the summer holidays. I held some interviews at the university, and although this was not planned for, the change in setting worked out positively. The option of being interviewed during the summer holidays was conveyed as optional, and I submitted a revised ethics and risk assessment form to the Chair of the Ethics Committee. The university office was provided with a schedule of interview dates and times to track my whereabouts with potentially 'vulnerable' young people. All participants were reimbursed for travel, and their reflections on the use of different interview spaces revealed interesting considerations for future research.

Analysing, reporting and discussing the data

As highlighted before, I used Excel as a valuable organisational tool. I liked the way in which information was visible on sheets, and easily tracked across cells. I also used it to track the topics discussed within and across each girl's narrative interview, and this tracking resulted in the creation of, what I called, 'conversation maps' (see Appendix 3 for Arti's example). I was engaging in the analysis process during the fieldwork, as each transcript was annotated before meeting the girls in order to prepare. Going through this process several times immersed me in the data, to the degree where each girl's narrative was 'singing' in my head. Although I did attend an NVIVO software course at the time to explore its potential, I decided not to use it. This could have been due to a lack of confidence with new software, or, as I see it, it felt like the fear of losing control over the rich narratives. I was reluctant to put our narratives through software that would fracture them, in what felt like a somewhat sterile manner. I agree with researchers who

suggest that the creativity and craft of the narrative researcher can be undermined if software is over-relied upon (Geertz, 1993; Glaser, 2003; Davidson and Jacobs, 2008).

The repeated process of thematic, inductive coding required several readings of the data at various stages of the study, where themes emerged through a process of 'constant comparison' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This meant that the girls' mini-narratives were compared across the sample, as well as respecting their uniqueness (Wasserman et al., 2009). I sat with my first supervisor to analyse sample extracts across the girls, and this allowed me to discuss the process with an experienced qualitative researcher who shared my view of not using software to analyse rich, narrative data (see Appendix 1 for transcript extracts).

I was keen to share this process of analysis and narrative themes with the twelve girls, as I had promised them I would do so. As later discussed in Chapter Six, they welcomed the opportunity for a focus group discussion a year later after the study. The importance of sharing the findings with participants, is in my view, understated in methodology textbooks. For me, this was an important part of the analysis process, and I wanted to share my findings before writing them up, so that there was space for questions and discussion, and for me to see their reactions. I visited each school for a focus feedback session. The staff members of each school considered this to be a useful stage of the process, particularly before the girls went off to university. During this focus group meeting, the group feedback discussion was recorded and transcribed with the girls' permission (see Chapter Six Reflections). As signposted in Chapter One, I created three Profile Charts from the girls' narratives, which I signpost below, and present fully in Chapter Four:

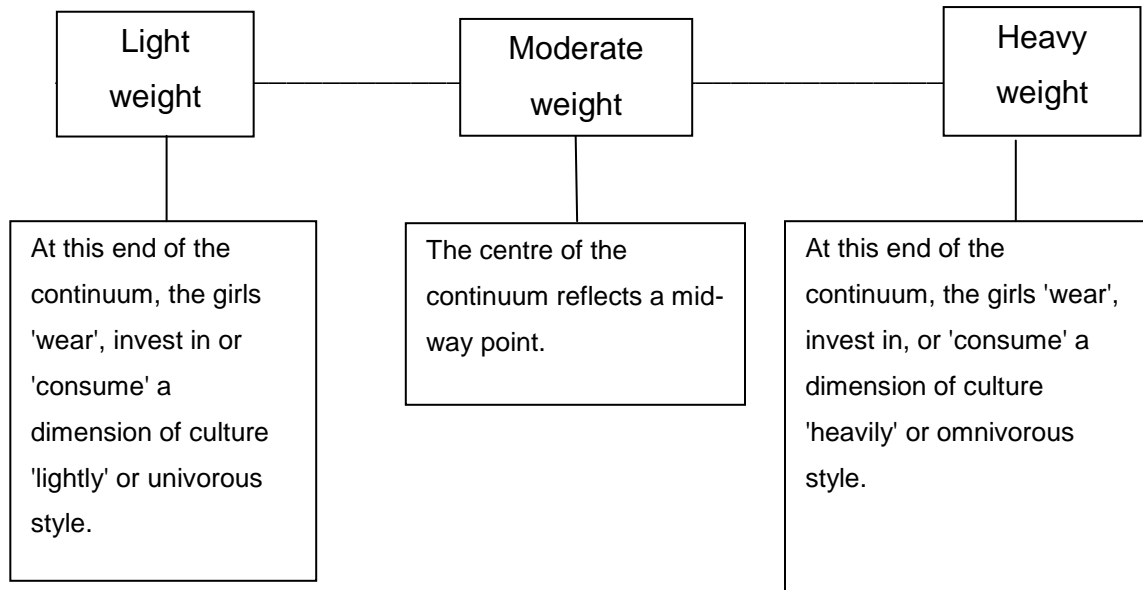
- Table 3: Chart 1: Profile of Cultural Configurations
- Table 4: Chart 2: Profile of Educational 'Success'
- Table 5: Chart 3: Configurations of Cultural Identity

The charts illustrate at a glance, ways in which the girls broadly configured the importance of (heaviness/ lightness) of dimensions of 'culture' and their cultural identities. I guide the reader back to Chapter Two, where I discuss Phillips' (2010) concept of 'wearing' culture lightly (or otherwise), and Bauman's (2010) discussion of 'omnivorous' consumption of culture by the elite, where they invest across several areas in cosmopolitan ways. In Chapters Four and Five, I will draw on words and phrases like: 'configurations of..', 'invested in', 'wore heavily' and 'omnivorous/univorous consumption' of 'culture'. The phrase 'configurations of...' allows me to illustrate the multidimensional and relational nature of 'culture', to include intersectional differences that operate across the girls' lives. 'Investment' provides an indication of time, energy, and enthusiasm in an area. The notion of 'wearing' culture illustrates how dimensions are 'worn' heavily across some areas and spaces, but possibly more 'lightly' across others. In some spaces, particular dimensions of 'culture' maybe foregrounded ('worn' more heavily) because a girl feels 'safe', proud or more confident to do so.

Presenting narratives using the concept of 'weighting'

Within the three Profile Charts, I assign a 'weighting' to each theme, using light, moderate and heavy descriptors. The diagram below, illustrates this through an imaginary continuum, which provides flexibility to discuss the girls' narratives more fluidly:

Figure 2: A 'weighted' continuum



The connecting thread (or backbone) across all twelve girls in this sample, was the heavy weighting of education in their lives. Around a quarter of the girls in this sample, secured a straight grade A profile of grades at A-level (and GCSE level). I draw on, and develop Phillips' (2010) phrases: 'those who are deeply embedded in their cultures' and 'those who wear their cultures more lightly' (p.8). I will align 'deeply embedded' with 'wearing' culture heavily. Following this line of thinking, the concept of agency and 'omnivorous/ univorous' consumption of 'culture' could also be configured in light to heavy ways across context, space and audience. Using Fauzia as an example, in the home space she revealed light agency, whereas in school, this was heavy, as she put herself forward for leadership roles and worked hard to make things happen, investing heavily in her academic and leadership identities, despite some of the cultural challenges at home.

My rationale for not presenting the girls' identities within fixed categories (e.g.: religious girls, girls as leaders, academic girls and so forth - the list could have been endless) was that if a girl is assigned to a category, this could limit how other facets of her identity are discussed or understood. My point is supported through Maheera's comment below, which she made during the focus group interview:

You can't line up all the girls in your study and say this one is this type and this one is that type... it's all about your struggles and own respective rights, values and beliefs... I don't like categories and I'm glad that you are not using them on us - I'm a human being and different categories will apply to different phases of my life and it depends on so many things like how I'm feeling on the day or who I'm with etc...

Backdrop to the presentation of the girls' narratives

The process of researching in a critically reflexive style, sharpened the way in which I engaged with the girls' narratives, and wrote in my reflective journal (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The narratives presented in Chapter Four focus on the girls' voices (rather than dimensions of my narratives). This approach has allowed me to step back from the personal (not dismiss it entirely), within the known challenges of 'insider' positionality. I outline below some of the dilemmas that I experienced when writing and discussing the girls' narratives, and in making these transparent, I contextualise the rationale behind particular decisions:

- *Friendships and anonymity.* Six girls participated from each school, and they knew each other to varying degrees of friendship - a few were also close friends. These relationships were not known to me until I started the interviews, and this knowledge raised ethical concerns about presenting highly sensitive aspects of data, if other

girls in the sample were referred to by name. I therefore had to exercise some caution and sensitivity.

- *Coding the data.* As discussed earlier in this chapter, I trialled NVIVO software, and I could see benefits for future, larger research projects. At the time, I experienced it as a hindrance as explained earlier.
- *Data equality.* Particular girls generated more data due to longer discussions, where they had more to say about topics. This was particularly notable with the two head girls - Sara and Arti, and Fauzia, Maheera, Manpreet and Anjula. This raised concerns about possibly over-foregrounding particular narratives. I arrived at the conclusion that it was not possible to grant equal justice to all girls in such an in-depth study, as the content of what the girls share will inevitably vary. The fluid nature of narrative interviews, and the psycho-social dimensions of the interaction order (Goffman, 1990), will inevitably raise variable narrative content. I have therefore presented narrative extracts that best illustrate points, and deepen the reader's understanding, whilst highlighting girls that provided a contrasting position through their experiences.
- *Revisiting 'old ghosts'.* As highlighted in Chapter One, this study has catapulted me back to particular experiences of my girlhood, and those experienced by my daughters, who were, like my sample, investing in the 'successful' girls' discourse (discussed in Chapter Six reflections).

Introducing the girls

In this section, I present mini introductions to the twelve girls, in order to provide the reader with a flavour of their personalities and key characteristics. I stress that these are my interpretations. The first six girls studied at Valley High (a non-selective Academy school), and the second six attended Park Rise (a selective entry grammar school). Only one parent in the sample was a graduate, Anjula's mother, and she was a qualified solicitor from Sri-Lanka.

Alka had two younger brothers and one younger sister. As the oldest child, she carried significant caring responsibilities for her siblings, as well as her parents, as both of them did not work (father due to ill-health). Alka led a fairly restricted out-of-school life due to her heavily-weighted household responsibilities, which she was not resentful of, but rather, saw as part of her good daughterly/Islamic duty. She narrated a genuine respect for her parents' cultural values, and appeared to hold a parenting role in the family. She aspired to become a lawyer, and she was conscious of how the future might look for her if she was to 'juggle' a demanding legal career, marriage, and meet the expectations of an extended family after marriage (she assumed that she would live in an extended family structure). Religion was 'worn' heavily, but her narratives revealed a lack of critical engagement with Islamic principles (compared to Sara and Maheera for example). Alka was always positive during our interview interactions, but her enthusiasm 'masked' some of the challenges and stresses of her home life.

Arti was a confident and popular Headgirl, showing high levels of agency, and an 'omnivorous' approach to consuming 'culture'. She was always willing to 'put herself out there' and lead on new initiatives in school. She described herself as a 'unique individual' and demonstrated critical views on gender. Her high profile leadership role contributed to her 'supergirl' identity, where

she spoke of herself as a role model to other girls. She was a strong communicator, ambitious, and invested energetically in a range of extra-curricular experiences. She was passionate about English Literature, which included feminist works like Virginia Woolf. She enjoyed family holidays, and narrated a positive relationship with her family, teachers and friends. Structurally, she was in a favourable position, as she had more 'choices' than other girls in the sample, and fewer restrictions from parents. Her Head Girl position provided rich opportunities for a diverse range of extra-curricular engagements.

Fauzia had three younger brothers, and her home life was narrated within a 'traditional', patriarchal family, where she carried high domestic responsibilities, and had a 'light' voice at home, which in my view carried little status. The importance of education, and her aspiration to become a barrister, emerged very strongly throughout the study. Education and career were described as her only route to future 'freedom', equality, and independence, providing her with greater 'choices' and 'status'. Although Fauzia had no educational or moral support from home, she showed agency, as she actively researched career opportunities and invested in school leadership roles. Her school identities stood in sharp contrast to her 'traditional' home ones. Fauzia was emotionally very disappointed to not secure the role of Head Girl, and discussed this 'failure' in-depth. She wore a headscarf, but not out of choice, and she enjoyed experimenting with it through creative fashion options and colour. Her relationships at home were not narrated positively, and she was critical (and bitter) of gendered contradictions in religion and 'culture' that favoured men. Fauzia's home life was narrated as being heavily regulated by parents and the extended family.

Manpreet had one younger brother. She was a confident and ambitious girl, who invested heavily (in omnivorous ways) in school leadership roles and extra-curricular experiences. Like Arti, she was passionate about English

Literature and travel experiences, alongside striving for the top grades (known as 'Hermione Granger' by family). Manpreet took a GAP year as she did not achieve the required grades for her chosen university, and she invested the year in high quality work placements. She was the only girl to apply to Oxford University. Manpreet was a critical thinker, and she questioned gendered inequalities (drawing on areas of AS-level Sociology), as well as 'racism' in relation to concerns about her highly Asian lifestyle, and apprehensions of moving to a mainly white university. She had a positive relationship with family, teachers and friends.

Ravi had one younger sister. She was academically driven, organised, but not at the expense of socialising with her 'all Asian friends', which included a balance of boys and girls. She aspired to study medicine, but her narratives did not reveal a heavy investment in planning for 'success' to secure a highly competitive medical place (Sara, Anjula and Maheera invested heavily at the planning stage). Ravi was very close to her mother, and although she narrated the importance of gendered equality, she also embraced her mother's cultural views on girls learning 'certain basics' as part of 'Indian tradition'. Ravi 'wanted it all' - a successful education, a well-paid career, a partner that would treat her equally, two children, and a bit of the 'Indian cultural qualities' that she appeared to value.

Sunita was a quiet girl, who invested heavily in her academic grades, where she narrated high expectations from home. She did not invest heavily in school leadership roles or extra-curricular experiences, as her 'free' time was reserved for study and family. She followed the guidance of her mother and older brother (and grandmother) in most decisions, and in this way, her decisions were led by significant others. She was ambitious and wanted a successful career, money and a well-providing partner. She did not have a focused career plan in relation to university degree courses, but took the advice of family. She enjoyed socialising and partying, including online

communication, always very conscious of performing her identity within the 'respectable boundaries of culture'. Her narratives revealed contradictory messages, where she described herself as an 'independent and modern girl', whilst living a life heavily guided by her family, particularly her older brother.

Anjula had one older brother. She invested heavily in school leadership roles, and like Fauzia, she was devastated that she did not secure her 'dream role' of Headgirl. She was the only girl in the sample with a parent who had been to university, and she admired the sacrifices of her grandmother in her mother's success journey. Like Maya and Arti, Anjula talked about her parents as being 'open-minded' and equal partners at home, in contrast to the views of her more 'traditional' extended family. Anjula invested heavily in her academic grades, school leadership roles, her aspiration to become a doctor, and South-Asian classical arts. She did not secure a place in medicine, and this was a huge disappointment to her as she had prepared intensely. She discussed the stress of being so academically driven, to the point where she wanted to develop her 'worldly' side. She was critical of religious rituals at the Hindu temple, and cultural traditions.

Maheera was ambitious, creative and adventurous, with a quest to explore life and experiences in an omnivorous and globalised way (she planned a GAP year which she did not eventually follow through). She had one younger brother and sister, and two older sisters. Like Fauzia and Alka, her home life was heavily regulated within a patriarchal family, and like Fauzia, Maheera did not narrate an overly positive relationship with her parents at the time, as she did not align herself with their cultural values. She was a confident, highly critical, and determined girl, who stood out in the sample as a girl who genuinely believed that she could achieve anything, and from my perspective, she seemed to. She managed to negotiate her way with her father, drawing on her 'genius child' position, which afforded her extra privileges compared to her siblings. Like Sara, religion was worn 'heavily' in

her life, but she was highly critical of the gendered aspects of Islam and 'culture', seeking spaces to develop her religious knowledge in a scholarly way. She wore the headscarf out of choice. Like Sara and Anjula, she invested heavily in her aspiring medical identity, charitable work, and extra-curricular experiences. She described herself as her own best role model, and as a girl who made her own way in life.

Maya had one younger brother, one younger sister, and two older sisters. She was new to the sixth form, coming from a non-selective school. Her narratives revealed balanced views on 'culture' and a supportive home background, where parents were described as 'equal partners'. She was aware of Asian stereotypes and the patriarchal families of friends, but narrated her family as 'open-minded', and far removed from 'traditional' Asian stereotypes. She wanted to pursue a career in media and film-making (a non-traditional Asian route), and talked of her family supporting any dream, as long as she worked hard.

Narinder had one younger brother and one younger sister. Her father was of Sikh religious background (the dominant influence in her upbringing), and her mother of Hindu-Gujarati background. She had huge respect for her parents' challenges during their early life together, and recognised the gendered inequalities in her family, particularly between her parents. She talked about her grandparents' views on boy preference, cultural taboos of girls dating Muslim boys, pre-marital sex, gendered inequalities at home, and caste elitism. She respected her parents, particularly her mother's sacrifices to fit in with her father's family, and their motivation for her become a successful dentist, so that she did not have to suffer like them. She was dating a boy outside of her religion, which increased the level of surveillance in her life.

Preeti invested heavily in her academic grades at the expense of exploring extra-curricular experiences. She had one older brother and one older sister, both studying medicine. There was an expectation that she would follow them in medicine, but her passion was engineering which she did follow. She was family-orientated, and looked up to her older siblings, particularly her mother who she admired for 'juggling so much in life', and the sacrifices she made for the family. Preeti was critical of 'culture' as she had no time for it, and she also discussed cultural stereotypes of Asian girls, which she distanced herself from. She recognised the stress that she put herself under as a result of being so academically driven, and wanted to have a more care-free approach, as summarised in her end-of-study summary reflection (see Appendix 5).

Sara was a confident, calm-mannered, and highly-organised Headgirl. Her Headgirl role formed an important part of her identity, but not to the same level of intensity as Arti. She demonstrated a hard work ethic, and resilience to stress, despite her very busy life. Religion was weighted heavily in her life, and she invested time in following the principles of Islam, through a scholarly and critical interest. She described Islam as providing her with a sense of calmness, well-being, and moral guidance, and talked of how this helped her across all areas of her life. Like Fauzia and Maheera, she wore the headscarf and this was out of choice, and she discussed the importance of modest dress for women to protect them from unnecessary attention from men. She was ambitious, and invested heavily in her aspiring medical identity, charitable work and extra-curricular experiences. Sara narrated a positive and respectful relationship with her family, teachers and friends, and like Arti, she saw herself as a role model to other girls, where she wanted to leave a legacy in her school.

In the final section of the Discussion Chapter (Aim 3), I will build on these introductions, and discuss what these twelve girls taught me about their particular girlhood and cultural identities.

Chapter Summary

Within this chapter, I have discussed methodological techniques and processes that I used across the two pilot phases (scoping studies). I have discussed dimensions of the main narrative study, to include ethics, 'power' dimensions, and how I have strived for research rigour and ethically sound research through a process of critical reflexivity. The process of the girls' involvement in this study was a conscience-raising one (as discussed in the studies of Maylor, 1995; Syed, Juan and Juang, 2011). This study includes the voices of twelve, academically 'successful', British, South-Asian girls, who narrated their experiences of 'culture' during a critical stage in their educational lives. These girls participated enthusiastically, in a rare research opportunity. This study also draws on dimensions of my life experience, which have acted as a catalyst for this study. The critically reflexive, narrative approach, sits well within black feminist theory, as it also draws on my own 'herstory', and psycho-social dimensions of in-depth studies like this.

The next chapter presents narrative extracts from the twelve girls in this study.

Chapter Four: Narratives

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the methodology, research stages, and introduced the twelve girls. This chapter will present my interpretation and analysis of the girls' narratives, and in Chapter Five I will discuss these by making connections to the literature. The interviews generated a wealth of rich data, and this made the selection process of which extracts to include/exclude difficult. I have prioritised data generated through the girls' interviews and their reflective journals, and in Chapter Six, I will outline other forms of data that were generated at the margins - there is not enough space to present all this in the thesis. This chapter will be organised as follows:

- Configurations of 'culture'
- Section summary
- Configurations of cultural identity
- Section summary

As signposted in previous chapters, I will present three Profile Charts to illustrate the girls' configurations of 'culture' (where education was narrated heavily within this), and their cultural identities. The three charts are:

Table 3: Chart 1: Profile of Cultural Configurations

Table 4: Chart 2: Profile of Educational 'Success'

Table 5: Chart 3: Configurations of Cultural Identity

These charts will be followed by narrative extracts, to illustrate points made by the girls.

Configurations of 'culture'

Context

The girls' responses to the open-ended research question:

Talk to me about how you see your cultural identity as a 21st century, South-Asian girl, living and studying in West London

revealed varied responses on how they configured, invested in, and 'wore' dimensions of 'culture' across their lives. Whilst their responses were largely narrated in positive ways, there was evidence of high levels of criticality and questioning, particularly through the narratives of Fauzia and Maheera. These girls 'wore' dimensions of 'culture' at home in a negative way, where it was heavily configured through gendered and patriarchal views. In contrast, Alka also 'wore'/ invested heavily in, the more 'traditional' dimensions of 'culture' at home, but narrated her experiences more positively.

As section one of Chapter Two illustrated, black feminist scholars have critiqued the notion of 'culture' and religion, in relation to the different ways in which 'women of colour' experience them, through the intersectionalities of gender, class and 'race' for example. These intersections will inevitably vary for each girl, as will the impact of their configurations. In this study, all twelve girls 'wore' and invested 'heavily' in education, and this formed an important part of the 'success' philosophy that this sample espoused. Education was configured through different dimensions, depending on the girls' views of life-long learning, interest in education beyond the exam syllabus, and desire to invest in extra-curricular experiences that could potentially add to their well-being and develop a broader skill-set for their CVs.

The Profile Chart below, presents a map of each girl's configuration of 'culture', in relation to the key themes that emerged, and the light to heavy principles discussed through the continuum diagram presented in Chapter

Three. This chart provides one way of presenting their configurations of 'culture' at a glance, and in Chapter Five, I will present other visual forms to discuss points.

Chart 1: Profile of Cultural Configurations

The key below should be used to read Profile Chart 1:

Key

- H Heavy weight
- M Moderate weight
- L Light weight

The letters do not equate to frequency of discussion (although they could do in another study or analysis). For example, the word 'religion' may have arisen several times in passing, but only discussed as having a light weight in a girls' life, as it was in Arti's for example. My in-depth interactions with these girls provided me with a strong knowledge base to make these interpretations. For example, Fauzia is assigned 'H' (heavy weight) in relation to the 'weighting' of religion in her life, however, this does not mean that she 'wears' religion heavily and positively. Based on my knowledge of Fauzia, through the analysis of her narratives, alongside my field notes (and other data), religion was weighted heavily in her life as a South-Asian Muslim girl of Bengali origin, but she narrated heavy tensions and contradictions, which were filtered through gender inequality. In contrast, for Sara, religion was narrated heavily and positively, and she invested time in studying and understanding Islam as a way of life. It is therefore important to read the three Profile Charts as a way of building an initial picture of the weightedness of different dimensions of 'culture', education and the girls' cultural identities, at a broad level. The charts provide hooks for the narratives, which provide depth and meaning.

Table 3: Chart 1: Profile of Cultural Configurations

Culture narrated in relation to...	Arti HG	Manpreet	Fauzia	Sara HG	Anjula	Maheera	Alka	Ravi	Preeti	Maya	Narinder	Sunita
The importance of education	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
Gender/ equality issues	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	H	H	H	H	M
The importance of family	M	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	H	H
Awareness of stereotypes and discourses of SA girls	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	H	H	H	H	M
The importance of languages (inc. mothertongue)	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	M	M	M	M
The importance historical influences	M	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	M	M	H	M
Religion	L	L	H	H	H	H	H	M	L	L	M	L
Experiences for self-fulfilment/ personal interest	H	H	L	H	M	H	L	M	L	H	M	M
Traditions and practices	M	M	H	H	H	M	H	M	M	L	H	M

- HG= Head Girl
- All 12 girls narrated education as carrying a heavy weight (Profile Chart 2 provides a breakdown of education)

Cultural configurations: girls' narratives of experience

I direct the reader back to Chapter Three and the girls' introductions. I open with Preeti's extracts as her narratives and journal entries touched on a broad configuration of 'culture' across the weightings, and she questioned the concept throughout. She also wrote an end of study summary (Appendix 5). Preeti highlighted a lack of 'time' as a key obstacle to investing in broader experiences, and the extract below illustrates her configuration of 'culture' during the third interview (held at the university). Her response highlights the importance of the physical features (cultural signifiers), historical context, and cultural traditions:

I think talking about what culture means is really hard. I mean - culture is all that stuff – like you could say it's about... wearing Indian suits or Indian cooking or where you come from, but I don't think it's just about that typical stuff. It's much more... it's hard to pinpoint it really as it means so much. Culture to me is just... I think it's all the traditions that you have come from historically and grown up with - historical traditions probably make up a key part of your particular culture and that history kind of separates you from other people and cultural groups - umm...

I have embedded the above extract within a broader section of her transcript (Appendix 1), where it illustrates the importance of the psychological alongside culture. Preeti was very focussed on achieving high grades for medicine, her parents' preferred choice, whereas she wanted to become an engineer. She described her life as being 'far too busy with school work', so there was 'no time for cultural stuff'. Like most girls, she touched on the importance of 'culture' in relation to traditions, and how particular spaces and events (temples and weddings) heightened the visibility of 'culture' and brought it to the forefront:

I don't think culture comes into my life a lot really. It's only when you go out to a wedding or temple or some religious place, because right now in life it's like - just focus on school work, good grades and home! Culture doesn't really come into it as there's no time for culture, it's only if you've got an Indian occasion, like a wedding or someone's having like a prayer thing at the temple and then everyone kind of gets together and the cultural traditions all start coming out....

In the above, 'culture' is discussed as being a contained 'thing', rather than an embedded dimension of her life. Preeti took it upon herself to conduct some web-based research on the concept of 'culture', and she was posing questions about the differences between 'culture' and religion, yet in everyday discourses they are often aligned:

culture and religion are different things but people just talk about them as if they are the same. When I went on the Internet there was so much stuff and I realised how we don't really understand when we talk about it.

Preeti raised the notion of a 'common core culture' across people - one 'that unites', rather than focus on the 'cultural differences between people':

...we all share a lot of common things with everybody across different cultures - you're not so separate and different as you may think you are, even though you might have a different skin colour or language you would all share a common core culture because you're all the same core human beings basically.

Preeti's extract (Appendix 1) shows that for her, culture does not totally influence identity, and it was not an embedded part of her life. Hence her profile reveals lighter and moderate weightings across some areas (based on my reading and analysis of her narratives and data over time). Her life framework was heavily guided by a vision for academic success, motivated by parents and her two older siblings who were both role models as successful medical students. Preeti narrated more critical views (heavy

weighting) of 'culture' when discussing it in relation to gendered topics - e.g. how Asian women are/are not presented within media discourses; the gendered role of Asian women in the family; the importance of education and career for women. As part of this, she discussed how the media and glamour magazines typified Asian women in ways that she distanced herself (I brought her copies of mainstream and Asian magazines for the second interview which she fed forward into interview 3). For example, she discussed how South-Asian women are under-represented in the media, stereotyped within glamour magazines such as 'Asian Woman' and 'Asian Bride', promoting discourses of 'fair-skin in Bollywood style'. She described the 'modern Asian woman' (positioning herself as one) as 'intelligent and successful in her career', yet stated how magazines like Asian Woman, '...still had a long way to go'.

Within Preeti's discussion of 'culture', she discussed Asian beauty in relation to shades of skin darkness, where being fair-skinned (as she was), was in her view, still perceived as being more beautiful and desirable within Asian communities. She highlighted the negative role of the media, Bollywood movies and Asian TV channels, in promoting fair-skinned actresses, and 'skin bleaching cream adverts'. She was aware of old wives' tales for lightening the skin, and wedding matrimonial ads that requested fair brides. This point was further echoed by Manpreet, Maya and Maheera. These extracts, although illustrated through Preeti, were messages conveyed/touched upon by other girls to varying degrees of intensity.

I contrast the above with Manpreet's narratives of culture, as she was the only girl to take a GAP year, and invested heavily in a range of experiences, carving time in her busy diary to do so, even though she said 'it gets stressful at times'. Across interviews one and two, Manpreet's configuration of 'culture' was heavily narrated in relation to her passion for English Literature as a subject. Her narratives were filled with CV building activities, further evident

through the narratives of girls like Arti (Head Girl), Sara (Head Girl), Maya, Anjula, and Maheera. Her interest in languages and literature, framed her configuration of culture, which was influenced, in part, by her experiences of studying German and Punjabi at GCSE level (the role of the mother-tongue was narrated with a heavy weighting by Manpreet and six other girls in the sample). Her leadership roles in school drew on her strong communication skills, and this dimension was echoed through the accounts of other girls - i.e.: Arti, Sara, Maya, Anjula and Maheera. Manpreet's narratives painted a colourful configuration of 'culture', which highlighted her 'omnivorous' consumption and investment through:

- A passion for language, literature and communication
- An investment in charity-related projects and school enterprise schemes (such as Business Enterprise, Duke of Edinburgh Award)
- School leadership roles -i.e.: School Council
- A passion for travel and exploring other cultures
- A hard work ethic across all areas of her life, which included being a part-time Kumon maths tutor
- An interest in popular culture: fashion, music, and technology
- An awareness of 'high' and 'low' cultural activities in relation to social class alignment. For example, she discussed theatre and opera as being more associated with the middle-class, but an area that she was exploring and 'trying out'.

Manpreet's experience of visiting the Punjab, India, revealed her understanding of how 'culture' is configured differently across parts of India, particularly through caste, where she had observed caste discrimination during her family holiday. Like 10 out of 12 girls, Manpreet configured 'culture' heavily (and positively) in relation to the role of family and her 'Indian heritage' (to include grandparents' as they lived nearby). She arrived at the second interview with a mind-map sketch, presented in her reflective journal.

She used this to illustrate some of the ways in which 'culture' worked across her life, where religion did not feature as she 'wore' it lightly (5 girls' narratives revealed a 'light' weighting for religion). This is the map that she presented:



Figure 3: Manpreet's map of culture

Although education was heavily weighted for all girls, what was interesting to note as part of my 'deep' analysis, was how differently it was configured across the sample. For example, Manpreet was considered a suitable Oxford University candidate by the school, but education in relation to qualification success, was not located at the core of her map. Her narratives revealed the importance of investing in diverse experiences, which she acknowledged as important for building her CV (other girls also saw the importance of having CV credible experiences). Education was discussed as

providing a sense of happiness and self-fulfilment, and she was one of five girls who narrated 'culture' heavily in relation to investing in experiences for self-fulfilment, which the extract below illustrates:

Culture, I think... to me it means where someone's interests lie. You know... what they – how they live and the type of experiences in their life, what they get interested in and how they react to people around them... Who they are and where their interests are...[she then discussed areas of her mind-map]. But I suppose it originally stems from your family background and heritage. Not necessarily just who you are today, but the history of your life from your parents - what they experienced when they were growing up and the stuff your grandparents taught them - where you live now and how you and your family used to experience life before...

For Manpreet, she acknowledges the influence of the historical, which to my surprise pervaded the narratives of other girls to varying degrees, where 7 out of 12 narrated it with high weighting, and grandparents were often cited as important cultural and historical informants. Manpreet was the only girl to connect 'culture' to sport (in relation to her passion for watching the World Cup football at the time). When reflecting back over her interviews, she was surprised at how much her family were embedded in the transcripts when talking about 'culture', as she entered the study viewing herself as far more autonomous of them as illustrated below:

I thought I made my own way more before this study - like I was my own person and more unique - but family are obviously very important in your life once you start talking about your culture. That was a bit surprising when I read back over the transcripts.

Throughout my interactions with Manpreet, I developed an understanding of how her understanding of 'culture' spanned beyond the local, to incorporate

a global interest in cultures, which built on her experiences of family holidays to India and European destinations, reading widely beyond the curriculum, and her motivation to invest in extra-curricular experiences and learning languages. In this way, Manpreet invested in 'culture' in omnivorous ways within the time and resources she had.

In contrast, Ravi's discussion of 'culture' focussed on nationality and classifying her ethnicity within the UCAS application form and passport paperwork that she has completed (other girls hardly mentioned this). 'Culture' was configured in relation to her ethnicity as 'British-Asian':

Umm... it [culture] links to ethnicity and nationality and there was like umm... we had with our UCAS forms to fill in recently and that's when a lot of us were like kind of confused because our nationality might be seen as British-Asian but obviously like with passports and stuff, it's like - it's like - UK National so that confused us a lot because obviously we were looking for the British identity box - or rather I was- that's your natural response to it of course. So it was like umm... I don't know... it was like it made me think of the way we associate ourselves - it's a lot different to maybe how someone official sees you - does that make sense?

Ravi talked about the notion of 'British-Asian culture' at length during interview one, and how the 'British aspect always used to come first', but how 'this was changing'. She discussed the breadth of cultural influences across her life (including religious aspects from parents), particularly her recent desire to strengthen her 'Asian cultural-like roots' through 'stronger Asian friendship groups' so that she could learn more about Asian culture:

I think for me it would always be British-Asian identity... because you're born and raised in this country- this is where you first started your life so it's the first culture - you've picked up the Asian culture along the way - it doesn't start there though because you are born here. So that's how I would say it matters to me - British-Asian always and I don't think - 'cos I know some girls specify being more towards the Indian side first, but I still consider myself as being obviously like British-Asian. Then as you got older - like me now- you start to pick up more of your Asian cultural-like roots and get interested in that side of culture - if that makes sense?

For Ravi, 'culture' was narrated in binary ways, where the Asian side was 'picked up along the way', narrated as secondary to British culture, whilst also acknowledging a leaning towards the Asian side. Like other girls, Ravi's discussion of 'culture' also touched on the importance of the mother tongue to maintain links with family elders within the UK and India. She talked about her mother and grandmother as important cultural informants, where her mother taught her 'cultural things' such as being able to cook Indian dishes, cleaning, maintaining a good family home, respecting elders, religious rituals, and the importance of a 'respectable Indian girl' preserving her virginity before marriage. These areas were discussed as lessons from her mother that she valued, whilst emphasising that she also embraced the 'modern values of British culture' and tried to combine elements. She described the cultural values of her family as 'fairly open-minded and liberal', and she never gave the impression of feeling restricted at home. Rather, she conveyed family as providing a supportive life framework. Ravi's grandmother was discussed as developing her knowledge of 'historical cultural stuff', like the India-Pakistan partition, and the sacrifices made by her generation when first settling in Britain. As Ravi had visited India just before interview two (as had Manpreet), she was able to share first-hand observations, and again uncomfortable observations of caste inequalities in a Punjabi village: 'I thought caste was a thing of the past but I was shocked

to see how some people are still treated'. She referred to the cultural views of some of her extended family as 'outdated and ignorant'.

Some girls discussed religion and 'culture' in blurred ways, or religion barely featured in their narratives (5 out of 12 girls narrated religion with low weighting). Fauzia (like Maheera), conveyed strong views which were framed heavily in relation to religious misinterpretations and gendered inequalities within her family (self-fulfilment and happiness did not feature highly). Like Maheera, Fauzia described her experiences of the negative influences of what she called 'culture blurring with religion'. She referred to this as the 'mixing up and confusing of religion and culture where new rules emerge'. It was these 'new rules' that Fauzia took issue with, as she saw no religious basis for them, and they disadvantaged her as the only girl in the family. Having three younger brothers, and what she called a 'traditional' family, informed her heavily-weighted and critical responses on matters relating to gender and equality. These points sit in contrast to Fauzia's very positive discussion of 'culture', when narrated in relation to the perceived benefits of succeeding in education. Fauzia discussed the visible aspects of cultural practices within the home, and in the extract below, she explains the heavy and negative weight of 'culture', which she compares to a 'heavy chain':

...there is nothing in religion that says anything about superstitions because it's all culturally formed that people make up as they go along - maybe back in the days it worked - I don't know when... when parents were younger....that's why, when you asked me - 'how do you know there is a culture?' It's like you just see it - I think as you grow up you always see it hanging around you and can almost feel it, smell it, but you don't always talk about it out loud or work out what it means. Oh, your mum's always at home, your mum's always cooking, cleaning, so you're like... every single day you're growing up watching your mum do all of that householdy, typical womanly stuff - you automatically sort of think maybe that is what you're supposed to do too as a girl - this is like the social norm maybe... And then the whole culture thing comes in... and

when you have umm... cultural weddings for example. When you go to a wedding you see cultural things happening to girls, and then I ask myself 'why is this all still happening today?' and they go 'oh it's because of tradition' so I go... since when did anybody ever say or write this down in the actual religious texts?' I'm not a big fan of cultural things as you will see - I really don't like it - I wish there wasn't any culture in this world... because when culture comes in the mix, everything gets muddled up and complicated in life.

This extract reveals a negative configuration of 'culture', despite a high weight to some of the themes in Profile Chart 1. Fauzia's mother was a housewife who had never gone out to work, and she did not describe her as a positive role model, but rather, wanted to be a totally different woman to her (a perspective shared by Maheera and Narinder to some degree). Fauzia's brothers and father positioned her in a lower status within the family, and although she was very aware of how this made her feel, she did not challenge parents explicitly. Fauzia's narrative sits very differently to Maheera's, who although shared a similar family context in areas, was put on a pedestal as the 'genius' child in her family. Fauzia's cultural experiences, narrated heavily and critically through differences of religion, gender and patriarchal family (including uncles), conveyed sadness in her life, which I saw and heard across points in the study. Her highly critical discussion of 'culture' is illustrated below, where she uses the analogy of the 'culture knife':

Geeta: You talk about this knife? Tell me about this.

Fauzia: Yeah, you could almost call it a 'culture knife' or a 'tradition knife', that just cuts everything down in one go. I think it's better to call it poison because then it just kills you straight away... They [referring to parents and future in-laws] won't even take into account that you've worked so hard for five years to get your job [referring to her future law degree], oh it doesn't matter because the family must always be more important than you are...

Fauzia's negative presentation of 'culture' was further compounded through the super-surveillance that operated from parents and the extended family, which restricted her out-of-school socialisation and privacy, including mobile phone scrutiny. She discussed family, friends, culture and religion as being linked areas, and she drew me a ladder to show the different components that contributed to culture, although friends were not narrated as being significant in her life outside of school. She drew this before coming to interview one, as she felt it would help to get the discussion started.

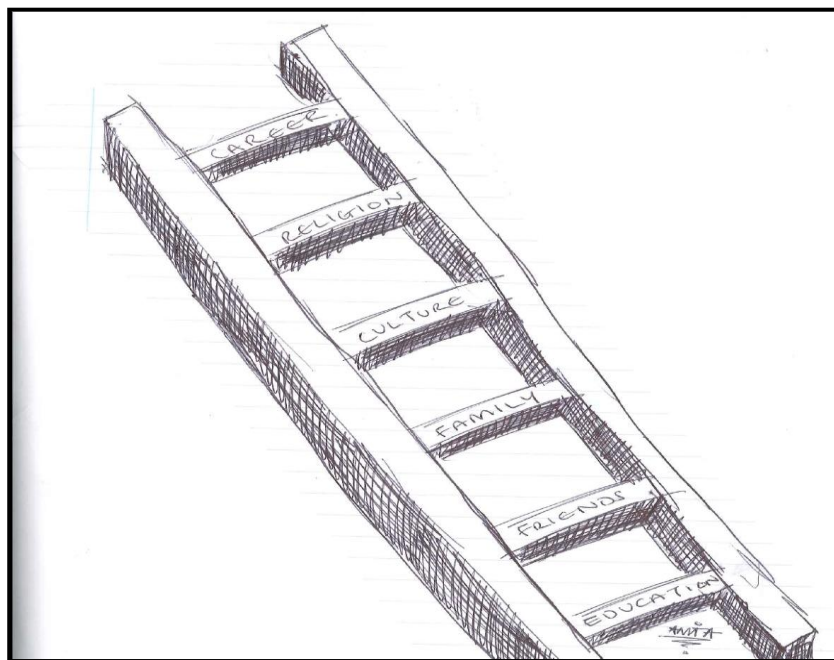


Figure 4: Fauzia's culture ladder

The start and end rungs of her ladder (education leading to a successful career) were discussed as being the two most important goals in her life, narrated as a way out of her current position, and as providing her with status and equality with a future partner. Fauzia further discussed how maintaining cultural practices and traditions from 'back home' - i.e.:

Bangladesh - meant that girls like her would be seen as 'abnormal' and 'backward' compared to other Asian girls. She was very aware of the different lifestyle that she led compared to other Asian girls at her school, and talked of keeping her 'two lives very separate'. For example, she discussed parental pressure to marry a Muslim Bangladeshi boy, but also someone from the same caste. This preference was also narrated by Narinder, whose parents wanted her to marry a Sikh boy of Jat caste, due to the problems her mother had faced (discussed later).

Fauzia illustrated how distinctly different the home, school and work cultures were (she secured a summer law internship) through her reflective journal images and interviews. Home was heavily aligned with 'traditional' female roles, where the journal extract below is labelled with her own caption.

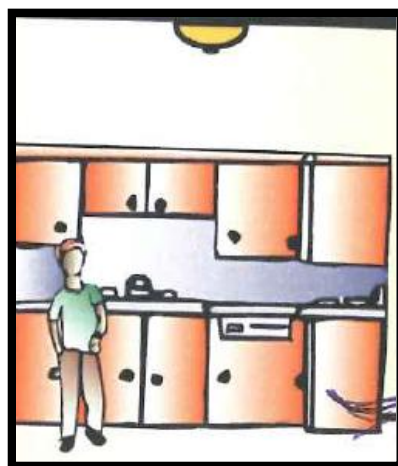


Figure 5: Fauzia in her traditional role at home

Fauzia narrated the workplace (summer law internship) and the school space, as representing cultures of justice, gender equality and diversity, as illustrated below:

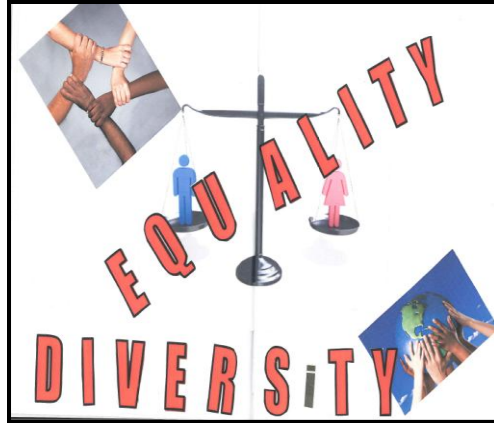


Figure 6: Fauzia's work and school space cultures

For Fauzia, coming home from school represented what she referred to as 'a distinct cultural shift'. In her words: 'It was with the 'ching' of a magic wand that my life immediately changed when I walked through the door':

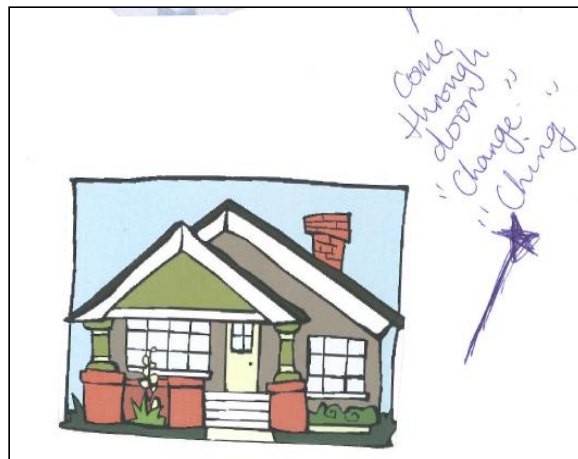


Figure 7: Fauzia's cultural shift at home

Fauzia and Maheera (to some degree, Alka and Narinder) narrated notions of patriarchy and gendered inequalities at home. Fauzia's experiences were compounded through a lack of parental support, encouragement or interest in her educational aspirations to become a barrister, and her interest to invest in extra-curricular activities.

In contrast to Fauzia, Sunita discussed religion and culture in less critical ways, referring to them as 'the same kind of thing'. Her configuration of culture focused on the heavily weighted dimension of family values, rather than religion. I experienced her as the quietest girl in the sample, although she discussed the social dimensions of her life more than other girls. Her configuration focused on the 'high values' and 'wisdom' of her mother, grandmother and older brother (her father seemed almost invisible), and she talked of her family culture as providing her with 'a useful travel guide in how to lead your life properly and teach you the rights from the wrongs'. The importance of having 'common cultural interests and values with friends' (particularly her Sikh friends) was stressed in relation to seeking cultural similarities for building 'solid friendships', particularly when socialising outside of school. Her Hindu and Sikh friends were preferred because they had more freedom to socialise outside of school, as opposed to her Muslim girlfriends who led 'stricter lives at home' and could not go to parties.

Sunita discussed culture in relation to 'strictness', 'boundaries' and notions of 'respectability', ideas stemming from her mother, grandmother and older brother. She linked these to having 'higher cultural values' to white girls, and although she said these rules made her annoyed at times, she respected her parents' restrictions because she knew that 'they did it for her good' (views echoed by most other girls, where familial boundaries and surveillance were largely discussed as reasonable). Sunita made comparisons between white and Asian girl cultures, talking about 'high' and 'low' parenting values, where low values were narrated through examples of smoking, excessive drinking

and loose sexual relationships that she associated as 'part of white girls' lifestyles' (she cited for example higher teenage pregnancy rates amongst white working-class girls). This notion of cultural 'Othering' operated with white girls, but also Muslim girls, because of their restrictions on freedom outside of school.

'Othering' emerged across other girls' interviews too, but in more implicit ways, whereas Sunita was more transparent in how she narrated her stereotypes. Sunita's 'othering' extended to Facebook and online socialising culture, which led to discussions of how girls presented themselves on Facebook in highly orchestrated ways (i.e.: a lot of thought went into their online presentations and profiles). Facebook was discussed as a space to 'show off their social life and friends', in 'wild and fake ways' that she distanced herself from. She was however happy to be part of that Facebook space as an observer, even though she disapproved. She remained cautious about what was uploaded to her Facebook page to maintain her 'cultural reputation' as a 'respectable girl' (i.e.: reflecting on the message her pictures conveyed to others through wearing appropriate clothing, not being photographed with too many boys or drinking alcohol).

Returning to Preeti who I opened this section with, she also echoed some of Sunita's 'Othering' points, but her tone was far more cautious, where she even apologised for articulating such stereotypical views (after reading her transcript):

...we're not the type of girls who would be umm... I don't know how to describe it. We're not as... I don't want to say it out loud really - as slutty as the other girls. We kind of have a little bit more.... you know, a bit more... we don't feel the need to do those kinds of things basically.

In the above, Preeti struggles to articulate her perceived higher values, compared to white girls in relation to sexuality, where she positions them as being more 'slutty'. Sunita 'othered' other girls by plotting their sexual and relationship practices along a good to bad continuum, where she positioned herself in the middle band where everything was done in moderation and a sense of sensibility. For example, she presented herself as adhering to the cultural values of her family, whilst also having some fun - i.e.: attending parties and having a few drinks, but never getting drunk to make a fool of herself; having a boyfriend, but never sleeping with him as it was important to remain a virgin [she left him when it was going 'too fast in this department']; holding strong family values and respecting elders by not answering them back. So Sunita adhered to various cultural aspects of being a sociable girl, whilst she remained cautious to 'never overstep the line', and live within boundaries of moderation. 'The line' of boundaries was also discussed by Alka, through the analogy of a safety barrier. Sunita's narratives highlighted the importance of following 'high' cultural values from the family, being sociable and outgoing, but in a moderate way, leading a 'balanced life with fun', whilst also achieving the top grades as expected by her mum and brother. She managed this as her family kept her 'on track'.

Education in relation to achieving the top grades were high on Sunita's agenda, and also a point of stress, as there were high expectations from family to secure grade As across all subjects. Religion or any knowledge of Sikhism was barely touched upon. She spoke conversational Punjabi and watched Bollywood movies, which she narrated as important connection points 'to maintain my culture at a basic level'. Beyond this, her level of critical reflection was minimal compared to other girls, as she accepted the cultural values conveyed by her mother, grandmother, and older brother, where she saw their advice as 'wise'.

Maya, like Ravi, discussed culture in binary ways as British and Asian, presenting them through two mind maps.

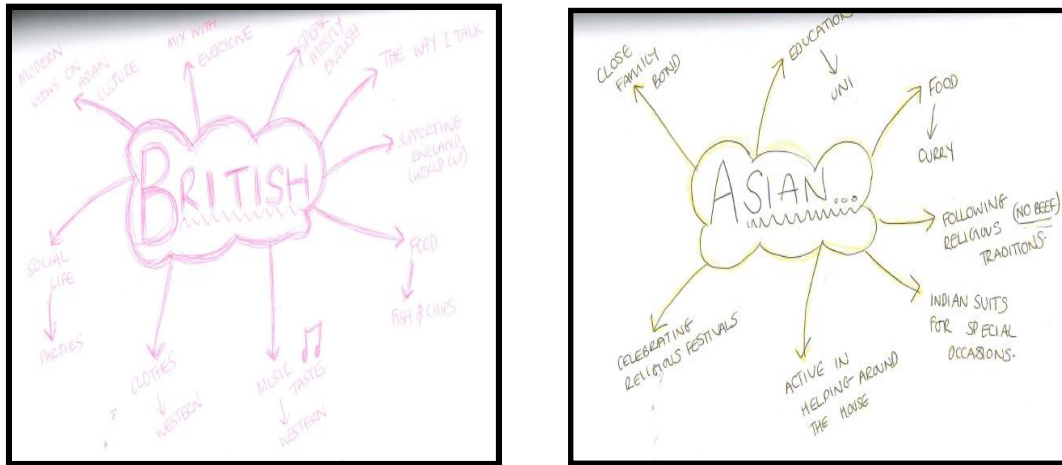


Figure 8: Maya's cultural mind-maps

Religion was not discussed as an integral part of Maya's life, but she was very aware of Hindu religious festivals, cultural traditions and superstitions. Maya was able to articulate the cultural differences within and between Asian groups, particularly 'culture' in relation to gendered inequalities that she had strong views on. She described her parents as 'equal partners in their relationship', where 'everyone has to pull their weight in our house' as her mother insisted (in contrast to Fauzia and Alka's household where they carried a heavy domestic load). Maya was very aware of the cultural challenges faced by other Asian girls in her school, particularly her Muslim girlfriends who she described as having a 'stronger connection with their culture and faith than Hindu and Sikh girls', and also 'stricter parents and less freedom'. She was aware that her family context was more 'liberal' comparatively.

For Maya, 'culture' was narrated and configured in positive ways, and her experiences were not discussed as being extreme, or as presenting her with

challenges that she needed to navigate or resolve. Her parents gave her the space and freedom to 'make mistakes' and saw them as 'part of the learning experience' which she appreciated. Any expectations were described as her own, and she made it clear that her family did not fit the typical Asian cultural stereotypes reflected in the media. She exemplified this when she discussed her academic and artistic cultural interests in film, media and photography, which she described as being a 'non-traditional Asian degree route', but one that her parents fully supported because it was her passion.

Maya had strong views on the importance of young people like her developing diverse friendships across cultural and religious backgrounds (she experienced diverse friendships through her part-time job in a theme park). Whilst stressing the importance of diverse friendships, she also commented on how easy it was to talk to her Hindu girlfriend 'and share insider jokes in Punjabi'. As a new pupil to the school's sixth form, she spotted things that other girls didn't. For example, she highlighted 'common room cliques' within religious groups, and how 'the black girls stick together too'- she did not view these groups as 'healthy'. As the newcomer, she was very aware of how hard it was to access these groups, as friendship cultures had already been established so she would sit at the margins.

Like Preeti and Manpreet, Maya also commented on the cultural discourses of fair skin for Asian women, where fairness was associated with beauty. She explained how Facebook picture uploads led some girls to edit them and make themselves 'look fairer' (with an interest in photography and the media, she had critical views and technical expertise in this area). Maya had a dark Asian complexion, and she discussed how this used to be associated with the lower castes in India, and those holding outdoor labouring jobs. When I asked her how she developed this knowledge, she said her grandmother would tell her stories about Indian marriages and 'how men always wanted a fair bride' (her grandmother would tell her stay covered

from the sun when working in the theme park to avoid getting tanned). Like Preeti, Maya viewed cultural messages of Asian beauty as being further perpetuated through Asian and mainstream glamour magazines, Asian TV and Bollywood movies, where 'there is almost a message of shame for being truly brown or dark-skinned'. She compared this desire for fair skin to the 'European beauty of blue eyes, blonde hair and fair skin'. I return to Preeti to illustrate their shared point of discussion about skin fairness:

I think within most Asian communities they seem to be obsessed with it a little bit. I think it goes back a long way in history that people associate being fair-skinned and being whiter with being more beautiful, maybe from like when the British Raj ruled in India.

Alka's positive configuration of 'culture' focused heavily on the religious dimension of Islamic values and beliefs, and the importance of respectability and care for the family, where she played a key role in caring for siblings and her parents to some degree. Her subject knowledge of Islam was not discussed as strongly, or as critically as the other three girls of Muslim religious background - Sara, Fauzia or Maheera. She described Islam as 'a beautiful religion', and as adding 'colour and real meaning to my life', in relation to the importance of praying five times a day; being respectful to parents; a good daughter; a role model older sister, and 'behaving as a decent Muslim girl'. In relation to this, Alka discussed ways in which the hijab (headscarf) and modest clothing that 'doesn't reveal too much skin', helped to convey this sense of decency, and help a Muslim woman gain more respect through modest dress. Alka did not wear the hijab (her mother did), and she believed that the way in which she conducted her life through 'good behaviour' conveyed stronger Islamic messages than wearing a headscarf (Alka had long, well-groomed hair, and it was a striking physical feature when I first met her). In this way, religion (as narrated and understood by Alka), was an embedded part of her life.

Alka's parents were discussed as positive role models, and she described their cultural and religious beliefs as keeping her 'on track' (she talked about 'straying a bit' in her previous school, but her parents guided her 'back to the right path'). She conveyed absolute respect (almost idolisation) for her parents, and never spoke of questioning them. This absolute, almost blind respect for parents, was also mirrored through Sunita's responses through respect for her older brother and mother. Alka was the oldest sibling of four, and she conveyed an incredible maturity in character, and carried significant leadership and caring responsibilities at home - for example, taking care of siblings, taking her mum to places as her English was weak, and helping her dad as he didn't work due to ill health (Fauzia and Maheera also carried heavy roles at home). Alka did not narrate any resentment towards her family responsibilities, but said: 'my family are part of my cultural upbringing and it's part of my Islamic duty to look after them as the oldest'. It was not until the final interview (held at the university), where she offloaded at a more personal level and cried (see Chapter Six reflections).

In her second interview, Alka discussed 'culture' in relation to boundaries and surveillance systems, and like Sunita, these were narrated positively, and seen as being good for her. She said they showed that her 'parents genuinely care', where she compared her parents to other girls' parents who gave them 'too much freedom' and 'let them stray'. When asked who these other girls were, she said 'white girls' and 'loose Indian girls'. Alka's narratives conveyed resilience and maturity, where she never moaned or felt bitter about home circumstances as she respected her parents so much. She invested so heavily in her family, and I felt that as a result, she had less time to achieve her full academic potential through exploring broader extra-curricular learning experiences.

Arti (like Manpreet) configured 'culture' with high weight (and passion) in relation to the importance of language and literature. Arti was one of the two Headgirls in the sample, and like Manpreet, she applied for English Literature at a prestigious Russell group university. She shared her UCAS Personal Statement with me, which highlighted diverse reading interests such as: critical feminism, Marxism, philosophy, psychology, along with her favourite - Virginia Woolf's essay 'A Room of One's Own'. She did not discuss 'culture' in relation to religion, but rather, her responses focused on the more dynamic, gendered, agentic experiences, that were part of her Headgirl leadership role. Like Anita, the importance of investing in diverse cultural experiences were crucial to her, and she narrated these experiences positively and conveyed a sense of enjoyment and personal fulfilment. This operated alongside her desire to secure the top grades, and this recurring notion across the sample of 'wanting it all' and believing that she could have it all, if she invested the time and worked hard - in this way, hard work was equated with reward.

Arti was the only girl studying a modern foreign language (German to AS level). Other girls were fluent to varying degrees in their mother tongue and most had studied a European language to GCSE level. Arti talked positively about her school trip to Germany and how AS level German (compared to GCSE) enhanced her ability to 'immerse' herself 'properly in the cultural aspects of language and Germany as a country':

...So I guess with A level German it's... for me, it's like made me feel much better that I can actually speak another language more fluently and because I enjoy it so much it's made me interested in learning more languages too and also exploring different cultures, because at A level, learning a language... it isn't just about the language itself and picking up key vocab and grammatical phrases - it's about learning the whole culture that goes with that group of people, which is the part I really enjoy. ...at GCSE level it was always about the language

– focus on the language and grammar - teachers never had time to teach us about the cultural stuff so I'm glad I picked it for A level... it gives you a real reason for why you want to learn another language and travel to that country.

As stated, Arti's discussion of 'culture' was configured within a broad range of experiences, as she adopted an omnivorous and cosmopolitan approach. She coordinated the prestigious annual school concert, where she was keen to 'fuse Eastern and Western cultures', and getting the 'right cultural balance' in the representation of acts (I was invited as a VIP guest).

I gained detailed insights in to how Arti configured 'culture' in relation to academic aspirations, relationship views, gender equality values, leadership, and broader cultural interests such as travel and learning languages. She was very open and produced in-depth reflective journal entries (one of the most detailed, along with Fauzia, Sara and Maheera). Her reflective journal entries included: her Headgirl speech which drew on Hilary Clinton's words; inspirational quotes from key figures like Mahatma Gandhi; her critical views on how girls presented themselves on Facebook; friendship mindmap of girl groups; her future life vision; role models; reading and travelling interests; learning languages, and her commitment towards international and local charity projects, which really positioned her as a global citizen who had interests beyond the UK. Arti's narratives (along with Sara, Fauzia and Maheera) could have formed a significant part of this thesis, if not all of it.

The journal extract below, presents one of Arti's favourite bedroom wall images, and one that she suggested as a front cover for my first book (it appears on the subtitle page as I wanted to credit her wish in some form). She talked around some of the gendered and cultural points that she connected with, and said the image would help her to summarise her views on 'culture' at our last meeting (held at Brunel University):

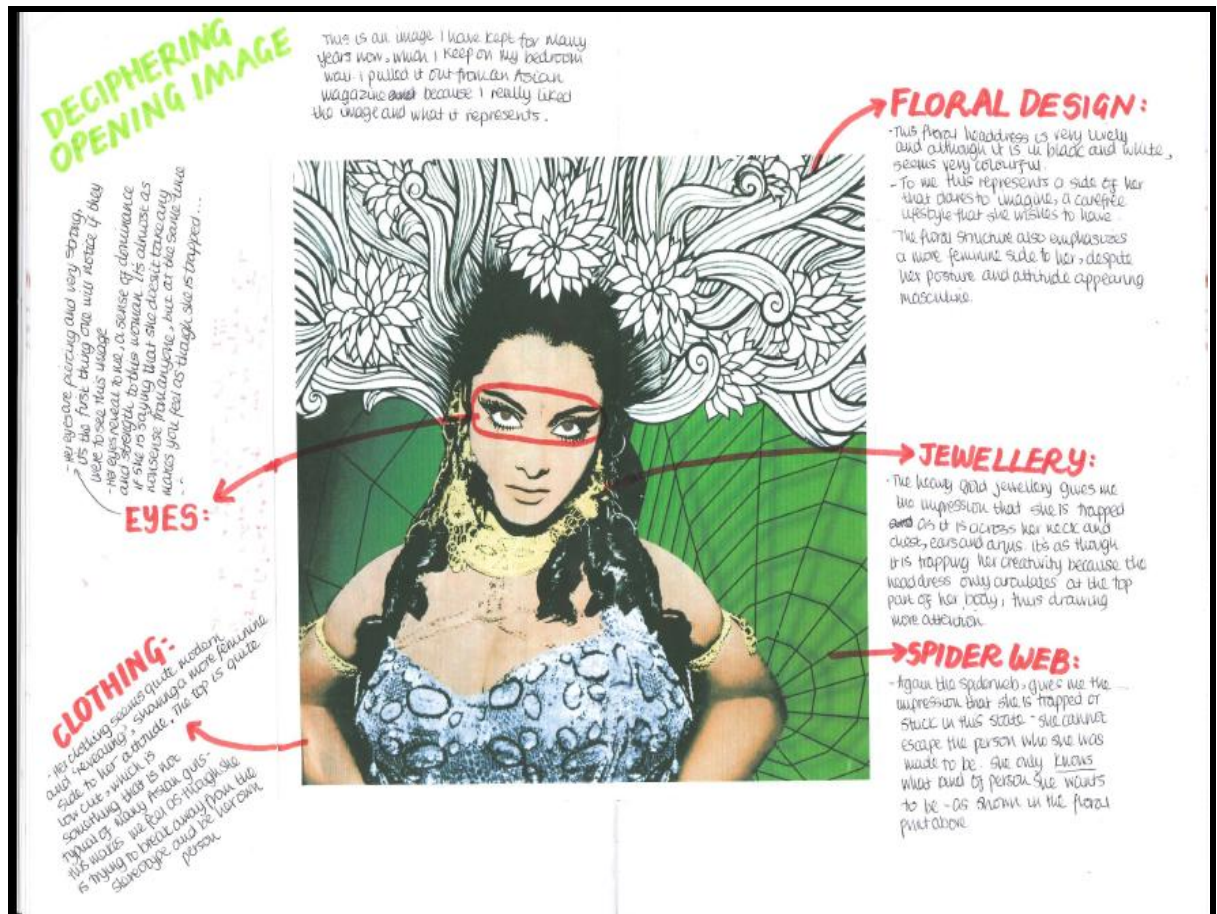


Figure 9: Arti's bedroom wall image: 'a bit of Asian girlpower'

Within this image were layered meanings of 'culture', particularly in relation to her confident and agentic identity. During her final interview, she talked about powerful Asian women who 'knew what they wanted to be but sometimes felt trapped by their culture' - her mother was discussed as being a 'strong woman'. She said the picture had 'a bit of Asian girl power about her' which she liked. Arti described herself as 'not really traditional or stereotypically Asian' (as did Maya). At the end of the study, she reflected on how her understanding of 'culture' had shifted through participating in the study - i.e.: from 'culture' as a collective and shared view, towards one that is more unique to her as an individual (see Appendix 5).

Like Maya, Arti narrated a fairly relaxed relationship with parents, but she articulated some of the extended family's cultural prejudices in relation to mixed heritage relationships - this is where she presented me with the 'BMW rule', which was very new to me. This 'rule' was also discussed by Narinder, Fauzia and Maheera, in relation to parents insisting on marriage within the same religion and caste.

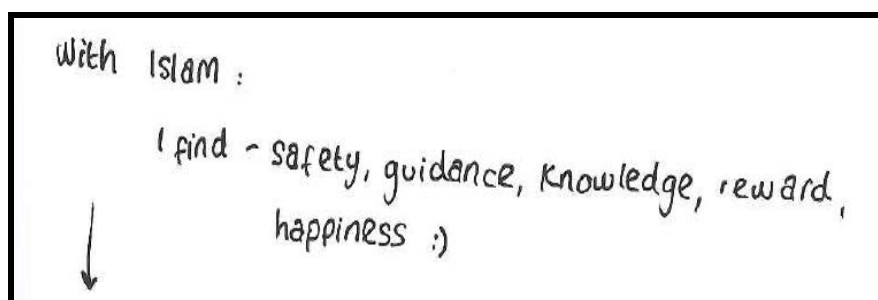


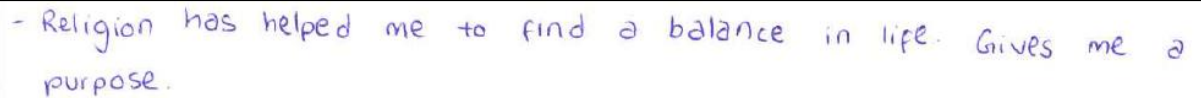
Figure 10: Arti's 'BMW' rule

In contrast to Arti, Sara (the other headgirl in the sample), configured 'culture' heavily in relation to the positive role of religion that pervaded her life in an embodied way. She discussed Islam as providing a 'valuable life framework' and she was interested in it as a devotee of Islam, and as a girl keen to explore the scholarly aspects. Sara drew on extracts from the Quran during the interviews to illustrate points, and also presented some of the verses in her reflective journal. For example, she discussed different Islamic

values and the rights of women through the chapter 'Al-Nisa' that she photocopied for me; the significance of education for Islamic women; the rationale for modest dress; the importance of marriage and having children; fasting and the importance of prayer; the role of charity and kindness - she had a rationale for everything she did, where she was able to make links to Islam for her actions, as her subject knowledge was fairly strong. She read the Quran on a daily basis and engaged in religious discussions with her parents 'over the dinner table'. No other girl discussed this level of open religious dialogue with parents. Sara also engaged in online Islamic discussion forums for young people (as did Maheera), and in this way, Sara was driving her parents' (and younger brother's) education of Islam in a more critically informed way. For Sara, the role of 'culture' was discussed with clarity in relation to religion, particularly the perceived high moral values of Islam for women.

I learned a great deal about Islam from Sara and Maheera, as they were both passionate and knowledgeable in different ways. Maheera was the more critical of the two, as she was still at the exploratory stage posing questions about her 'unstable position' within Islam. Sara never conveyed feeling burdened by religion or culture, but instead, described both as a 'compass', and like Alka, she also conveyed a sense of calmness, satisfaction and security in following Islam, writing about its benefits as:



A rectangular box with a thin black border containing handwritten text in purple ink. The text reads: "- Religion has helped me to find a balance in life. Gives me a purpose."

- Religion has helped me to find a balance in life. Gives me a purpose.

Figure 11: Sara's benefits of Islam

The sense of 'balance' came across strongly during all my interactions with Sara, and unlike Arti, being Headgirl did not absorb every part of her life. Alongside religion, Sara (like Arti), invested heavily in school-based leadership projects and had won several prizes. She invested heavily in local and international charity projects (this included hospital and charity work in Sri-Lanka like Anjula, her friend); business enterprise and Duke of Edinburgh awards, amongst others. The list of activities and experiences seemed endless, and I will discuss some of these examples in the next education section. Like Arti, Sara was also omnivorous in her approach. She also shared extracts of her Headgirl speeches with me, where she described part of her leadership role as supporting and inspiring fellow pupils. Her hard work ethic, charitable donation of time to help other pupils, and commitment to religion and education, were highly commendable qualities that illustrated her strong work ethic and maturity. Sara spoke fluent Arabic, Tamil and Sinhalese, and like most girls in the sample, she recognised the importance of being multilingual, as well as further developing new language skills as 'languages are so important today'.

Maheera's participation in the study was the most extensive. At the start of the first interview, she made a point of stressing that she would be very different to other girls in my study, because of the degree to which her family fit the Asian cultural stereotype. She believed that she had little or no support from home and had to make her own way in life (as did Fauzia). She created detailed reflections, mainly through emails and her 'mini thesis', which was

presented to me during the final university interview. Her thesis revealed a lot about her configuration and investment in 'culture' and her cultural identities, and acted as her summary of the study. She introduced it to me as follows:

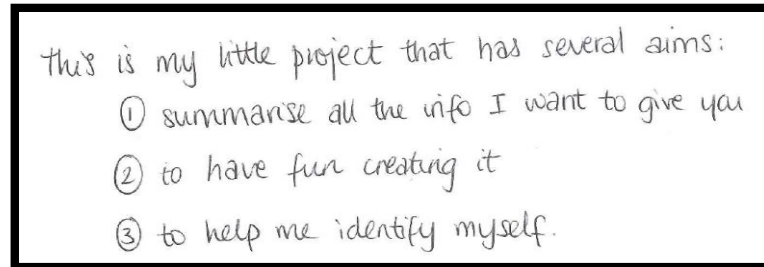


Figure 12: Maheera's 'thesis'

Maheera talked about enjoying the research and she was one of the four girls (Fauzia, Sara and Anjula) with a strong subject knowledge and interest in the scholarly aspects of religion, which she developed through self-study. Like Anjula and Fauzia, she was critical of religion and culture, questioning the contradictions and misinterpretations that she experienced first-hand. She described her faith as 'shaky' and 'unstable' at that stage, but also said 'there is a God' but she had 'not experienced his love yet'. She was different to Fauzia in that although they shared 'traditional' and patriarchal home contexts, their ways of navigating challenging home circumstances varied - Maheera spoke out, challenged, and negotiated privileges and change, whereas Fauzia accepted the cultural norms at home (as did Alka).

At home, these two girls were positioned in different ways by their fathers, and the sibling structure was female weighted for Maheera, compared to male weighted for Fauzia. Maheera was given a high status within the siblings, and this was largely attributable to her educational achievements and confident personality, where she talked about being 'willing to speak out' and 'make her own way in life', describing herself as 'a headstrong girl'. She

had more negotiating 'power' because she was positioned as the 'genius' of the family, and her father would draw on her skills in an advisory capacity (he was described as 'uneducated and backward' by Maheera). During her initial interviews, Maheera stated that she preferred 'a more spiritual way of looking at the world', alongside her passion for science and politics which were highlighted in her project/ thesis. She was exploring Islam through a critical lens, studying the Quran, and seeking discussion spaces to discuss her questions with more knowledgeable others. Her passion to pursue a career in medicine was supported by reading around science, where science was called a 'hobby subject'.

In exploring Maheera's narrative data, it became evident that her configuration of 'culture', was multidimensional she consumed/ invested in 'culture' in omnivorous ways. She had a passion for learning about the world - not just the local and prescriptive systems of schooling and exam success, but a yearning to be 'creative' and 'free' through travel experiences. She said, she was 'desperate to break the mould' and 'make my own way in life' (as was Fauzia, but in a more silent way). Maheera was extremely able, as her academic track record was exemplary, achieving nothing less than a grade A in any examinations. Her ability afforded her confidence to explore other dimensions of 'culture'. In order to exemplify Maheera's varied responses of how she understood 'culture', I present selected extracts of her 'mini-project' (also called a 'mini thesis') below, accompanied with short explanatory notes to reflect the key ideas that she presented:

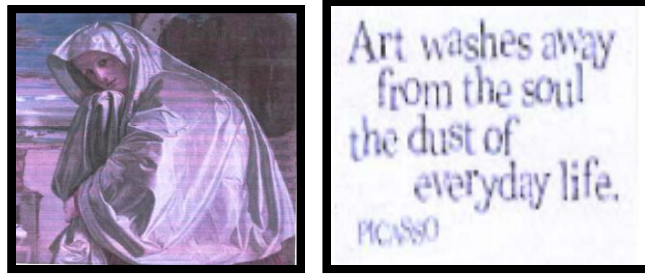


Figure 13: Maheera's culture thesis extracts

- A passion for art and nature. A painting of Mary Magdalene was included as she connected with its sadness and loneliness. A quote by Picasso illustrated what art did for her soul.
- A desire to visit museums, theatres, cultural landmarks, and wonders of the world.
- A passion for science as a 'hobby' subject, and understanding the complexities of the human body and mind. She read the BMJ journal (as did Sara).
- An interest in computer technology and gadgets (including blogging).
- An interest in popular musicians who convey strong political messages (e.g.: Pink and Lady Gaga were described as 'strong, passionate women who speak out about what they believe in').



Figure 14: Pink

- A broad love of reading and watching movies across genres (movies did not include Asian films, but focused on animated movies with 'moral messages that have something strong to teach us').
- A passion for travel (part of her GAP year plans): 'I want to travel as much as Alan Sugar wanted to be rich. I want to learn about...:

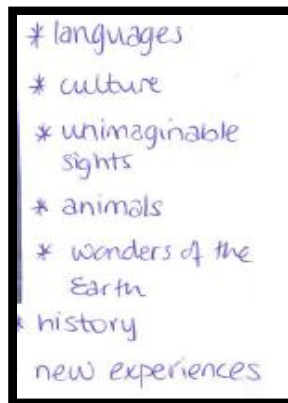


Figure 15: Maheera's passion for travel

- An interest in charity projects and voluntary work that she invested heavily in at school and outside in her free time.

- Her project revealed that she had a strong awareness of the challenges facing 'successful' South-Asian girls like her, where expectations were high. This image was used to illustrate how she saw herself:

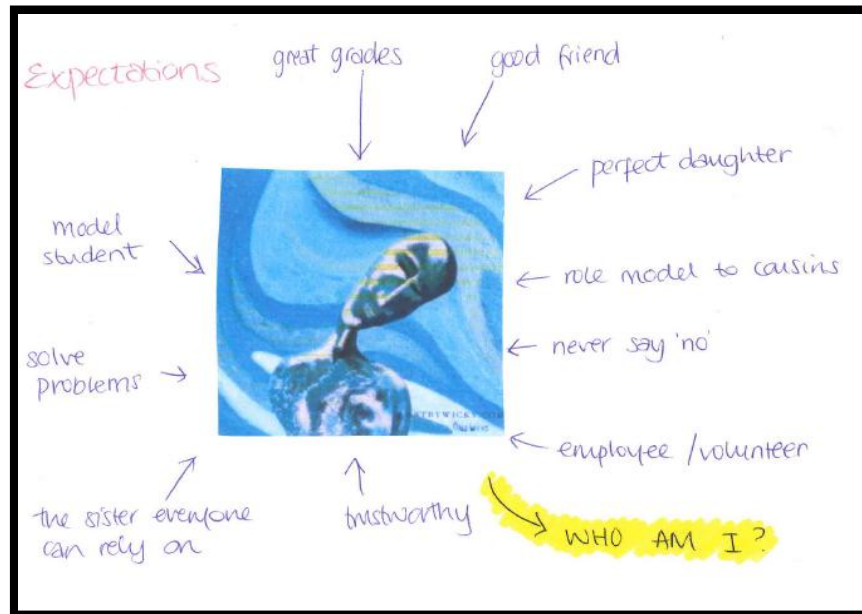


Figure 16: Maheera 'Who am I?'

- A passion for poetry and philosophy (extracts of poems, lyrics, religious verse and well-known speeches like Martin Luther King's: 'I have a Dream' speech, which she edited from the 'American dream' to the 'Asian dream'). The poem below was presented as one of her favourites, and emailed to me after Interview 1:

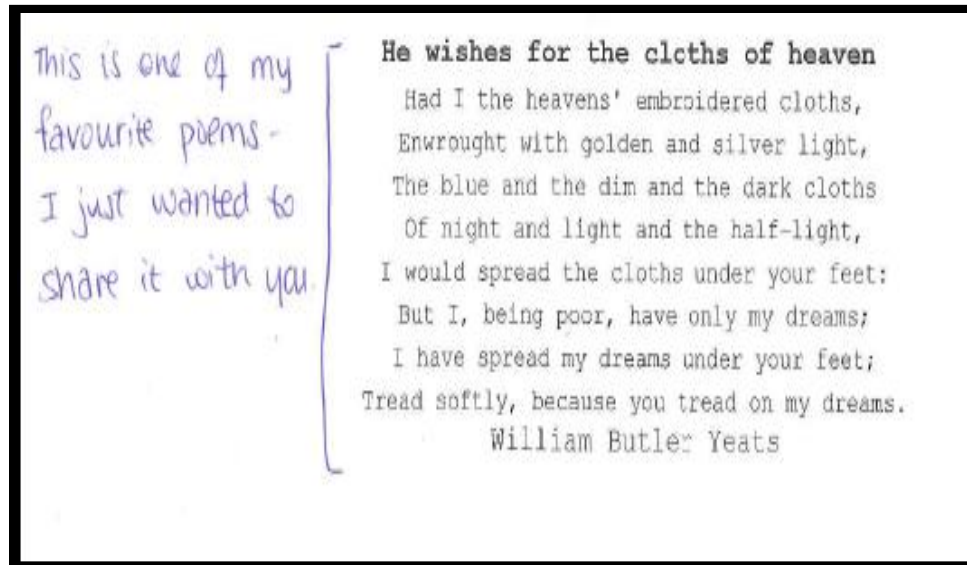


Figure 17: Maheera's favourite poem

Maheera's parents were conveyed as strict Muslims, particularly in relation to gendered ways of thinking and their super-surveillance on the girls. She was always questioning their 'traditional' and Islamic values and behaviour, where traces of disapproval emerged continually throughout her narratives. She heard and saw contradictions in their beliefs in relation to what she called a 'real Islam' - their version was positioned in opposition to hers. Her view on her parents lightened in tone, as she became more sympathetic of their lack of education during interview two, and attributed their 'backward cultural ways' as being down to their upbringing in Azad Kashmir (she spoke of their financial issues and extended family struggles). In this way, narrating her stories enabled her to shift her position. Maheera conveyed real confidence across her interviews and said that she was 'not willing to be caged in at home' - illustrated in the thesis extract below [the faded text reads: *How can the bird that is born for joy sit in a cage and sing*]:

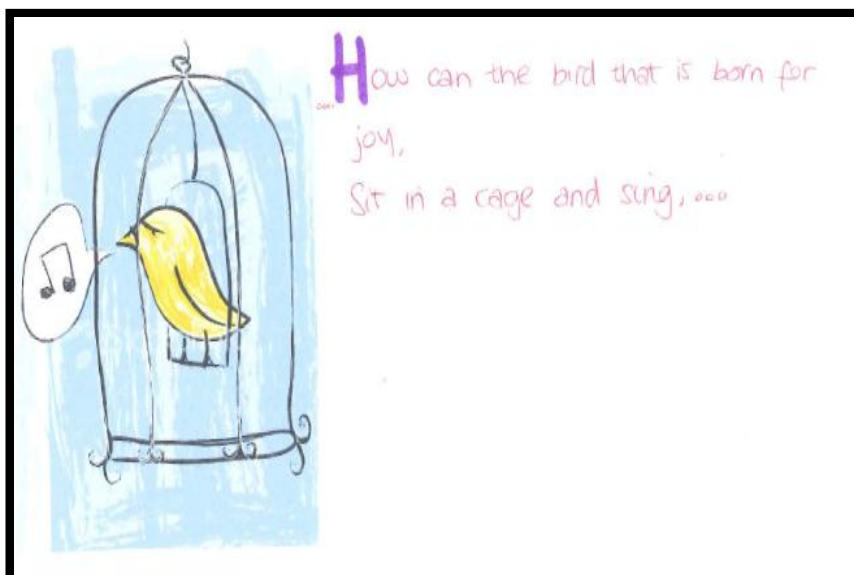


Figure 18: Maheera's analogy of the 'caged bird'

Anjula (a deputy head girl) was the only girl of Hindu religious background, and Tamil, Sri-Lankan (Sara was from Sri Lanka, but she followed Islam as a religion). There were links between these Anjula and Sara as they were both good friends; wanted to study medicine, both parents' country of origin was Sri-Lanka; both did hospital work experience and charity work placements in Sri-Lanka; both applied for the position of Headgirl, where Sara secured it. Academically (like Sara and Maheera in particular), Anjula was a secure grade A student, but sadly her exceptional grades did not secure her a medical place. Being educationally successful was very important to her (discussed in relation to her mother's and grandmother's educational values in the next section).

Anjula was different to the other three Hindu girls in the sample in that she was the most confident talking about Hinduism in relation to: the deities, Hindu temples across the UK (including a temple in Skanda Vale that she visited annually) and Hindu festivals and practices (despite being critical of

these). Anjula's parents did 'not impose religion' but were 'religious in a fairly relaxed sense'. She had strong views on Hindu religious rituals and prayers (*pujas*), describing them as 'overly-indulgent practices' when there was poverty in the world (e.g.: she challenged the offering of luxury foods during worship). She discussed the poverty that she had observed in Sri-Lanka when she visited some of the poorest villages (she undertook charity work with her father).

For Anjula, 'culture' was not only configured through religion, as her life was described as being 'more guided by ethics, politics and spirituality', which drew in part on principles of science. She discussed for example, the Big Bang theory; Darwin's theory of evolution; the core values of humanity and the importance of charity work to help the poor. Sara and Maheera also talked about similar values, connecting them to Islam. Anjula was very aware of historical, political and global issues, as she discussed her interest in global warming, the holocaust, poverty across the world, and animal rights issues as a strict vegetarian. Although she attended the temple, she said that 'Religion is only important if it helps me to understand these bigger things in the world'.

I learned the most about Hindu culture through Anjula, as she had a critical perspective (like Maheera), and was heavily involved in South-Asian cultural arts as part of her weekly extra-curricular activities. She shared at length, an insightful example of religious/cultural practices that she found highly contradictory. The example that I share relates to the cultural rites of passage ceremony that marks a girl's first menstruation (*ruthu sadangu*), seen as a significant transition point for some Sri-Lankan families. Anjula was critical of the elaborate celebration of a family member's daughter, as she saw menstruation and sexuality as topics that were not seen as culturally acceptable for public discussion and celebration, yet here, it was

being were publicly celebrated. This raised questions for her and she felt uncomfortable attending the ceremony.

Anjula invested heavily in South-Asian classical arts, which included professional vocal lessons and traditional kathak dance at the Hindu temple. She watched Tamil movies (the booming 'Kollywood' industry in competition to 'Bollywood'); attended the Sri-Lankan Hindu Tamil temple, and spoke what she called 'broken Tamil and Sinhalese'. She took her cultural, enrichment activities seriously, where dance and music were learned to examination level. She saw her engagement as the 'only opportunity to meet other Tamil friends on a weekly basis'. No other girl discussed this level of participation in South-Asian arts, yet for Anjula, it was an embedded part of her connecting with her Sri-Lankan culture.

Like Arti and Maya, Anjula described her parents as being 'quite liberal', using phrases like 'cool', 'they work as a team', and 'open-minded', where her mother was described as the 'more dominant' and 'out-spoken parent'. She said that she could talk openly with her parents and did not feel as if she had to 'go behind their backs like some friends'. Her views on marriage (in relation to Asian stereotypes), were far removed, and she had strong views on equality in relationships, as well as critical views on the big sums of money being spent on Asian weddings today, as part of the 'community competition' (mirroring views presented in Channel 4's recent documentary 'My Big Fat Asian Wedding'). Like Preeti and Sunita, Anjula also discussed her cultural values in relation to no sex before marriage, dress and modesty, the different types of Asian girls, and cultural 'Othering' (categories such as 'slags and sluts' for white girls) and stereotyped messages conveyed through 'modern' Asian movies. Despite this 'othering' discourse, she described herself as 'very understanding and accepting of different cultures' and adopted this mid-way, moderation approach to culture (like Sunita), where she was cautious of 'over-doing it', as illustrated below:

...I mean there's nothing wrong with a bit of glamour, but there's no point overdoing it. I think what they do in Asian films now is they kind of overdo it and they kind of use everything in one hit - like they do the whole drugs, sex an' rock an' roll kind of thing, and are overdoing it. Everything should be in moderation.

She went on to discuss the importance of recognising cultural diversity between South-Asian girls, in that they should not be seen as one homogenous group, particularly girls of Sri-Lankan background, whom she felt were often a forgotten group of South-Asian girls:

...you don't want people to assume that just 'cos the women in the films are like that, like all Asian girls are all like that and it's kind of like umm... there are so many different types of Asian girls today so you can't - and because the media stereotypes them within films, TV and magazines, people immediately assume us all to be like one type.... we are not one type and that's just not reflecting the real diversity of cultures for Asian girls today, especially Sri-Lankan Asian girls like me who are often forgotten!

This brings me to discuss Narinder's cultural context, which was unique in that her parents were from different religious backgrounds - her mother was Hindu-Gujarati, and father Punjabi-Sikh - he was described with the added clarity of 'Jat' (the *Jat* caste were traditionally farmers and land owners in Punjab, carrying high status). The difference across her parents' religions influenced how she discussed 'culture' in relation to religion, gender, history and caste, including the status of religion and caste through a gendered lens of her parents' experiences. In the following extract, Narinder shares her understanding of religion and culture as interlinked concepts when 'done properly':

Religion is just - it reminds me of God and everything to do with God, but culture... culture is more about - for me it's about what you do in everyday life and how you follow it doing something like wearing an Indian suit, going to the Gurdwara or ummm... praying I s'pose. But if you follow your religion properly then you'll automatically be doing all the cultural stuff too anyway if that makes sense, so it's all sort of interlinked religion and culture if it's done properly.

Narinder described herself as 'not really that religious', but her three interviews revealed that she had a stronger affiliation with her father's Sikh religious heritage, to her mother's Hindu-Gujarati background. It became apparent that the importance of her mother's views and pre-marital experiences, influenced the lens through which Narinder was making decisions about her future. She expressed huge admiration for her mother's sacrifices (and father's hard work ethic) in relation to how her mother had 'totally changed' for her 'dad and his extended family' to 'fit his family's culture' through: speaking Punjabi; cooking Punjabi food; dressing and looking the 'Sikh way', and her willingness to change her name to a Sikh one. As a result, Narinder talked of how she had lost out on learning about her mother's Hindu-Gujarati heritage as this was not conveyed as important.

Another cultural influence was the negative, early marital experiences of Narinder's mother, which heightened her awareness of the challenges of marrying outside of religion and caste. Narinder provided extensive insights in this area, and acknowledged that she could never make the same sacrifices as her mother. She accepted that marriage with a Sikh person of Jat caste would save her 'a lot of hassle' and 'please the family'. Narinder started the first interview by talking about 'culture' in relation to school friendships, and like Sunita, she highlighted her close circle of friends as being mainly Punjabi Sikh (valuing their shared cultural values and language, as well as similar freedom levels outside of school). She discussed some of the difficulties of socialising with her Muslim girlfriends

after school hours because of their 'stricter boundaries and parents'. She did acknowledge that in a predominantly Asian school, there were limited opportunities for diverse friendships beyond Asian groups, and this contributed to her being 'more Asianified' in her culture.

Although religion was narrated with medium weighting in her life, Narinder did participate in surface-level aspects such as attending the Gurdwara with parents and grandparents. Her grandparents lived with her for part of the year, and their cultural influences were described in relation to how they encouraged her to speak Punjabi, attend the Gurdwara, and how she was more aware of dressing modestly out of respect for them living in the house. She also commented on the respect that her grandmother showed towards her grandfather - i.e. in relation to waiting on him with food and not referring to him by his first name, but saying '*jee*' - a respectful way for a woman to address her husband. She discussed how her grandparents taught her about the India-Pakistan partition, historical facts about India, and the related tensions between South-Asian groups, particularly Hindus and Muslims.

Narinder said that historical issues should not influence how people behave and interact today, particularly in relation to Islamophobia, where she commented: 'Everyone should be seen as an individuals and not marked by their religion or history'. She was the only one in the sample who discussed the police, and ways in which they were more likely to 'stop and search Muslim boys because of terrorism threats' and some of the stereotypes surrounding Muslim boys, which she gained insights of through her male Muslim friends, and Muslim girlfriends' experiences of their brothers' experiences.

Like Sunita, Narinder enjoyed socialising and going to parties, and also had a Muslim boyfriend which caused issues at home when her mother found out

(through phone scanning). Like Arti, she referred to the 'BMW rule' with the added dimension of caste). She said:

There are certain guys that you just couldn't bring home and you definitely don't bring home a black, white or Muslim boy - that's a huge no-no!.

Although she disagreed with the above prejudices (and her grandparents' views), she made clear that she or her family 'were not racist'. She discussed some of the challenges of falling in love with a Muslim boy in relation to having to convert to Islam when she was 'not even very religious'. Narinder posed critical questions about caste, and raised contradictions in relation to the Sikh scriptures (*Guru Granth Sahib*), and the teachings of Guru Nanak. She was aware of the principles of equality in Sikhism and no discrimination through caste and gender. Because of the cultural experiences of her mother and extended family, Narinder said: 'Asian girls like me definitely face more challenges than white girls as we have to juggle more cultural pressures'. Like, Sunita and Preeti, she discussed this in relation to cultural 'othering', where white values were discussed as being lower to Asian values. The notion of surveillance from parents was strong, particularly after having a boyfriend. Narinder's parents chaperoned her to and from school after this, but she did not seem too troubled by this level of surveillance and said: 'it was for my good'. She went on to say that her parents' actions allowed her to focus on securing grade As for a future career in dentistry and 'not get distracted by boys'.

Like Arti, Narinder highlighted the diversity of Asian girls' cultures, from being very connected to culture and religion (particularly her Muslim girlfriends) to those friends who partied, drunk and smoked behind their parents' backs. Like Sunita, she directed me to scan Facebook for evidence of 'wild girls', and suggested this as a future research angle (see Chapter Six - future research avenues). Like most of girls, she had critical views of Bollywood

films, yet also saw them as exciting and glamorous, and a way of keeping her language skills up. She commented on the over-modernisation of Bollywood in relation to how it has 'all gone too far' with 'women wearing little skirts, bras and stuff rather than traditional saris'.

Another area of cultural awareness for Narinder, was in relation to son preference and the significant way in which she observed her parents' desire for having a son, narrated as the 'Punjabi way of just wanting boys'. Likewise, Alka, Fauzia and Maheera, echoed this cultural preference for boys in their families. Narinder discussed old wives' tales and the pressure from her grandparents on her mother to conceive a boy (e.g.: taking a special tablet and chanting religious mantras every day to 'make it happen'). She was very clear that her parents did not differentiate between them as three siblings, and loved the two girls immensely. However, she was very aware of the views of the older generation through celebratory differences observed when her younger brother was born (important Punjabi festivals like *Lori*) and the excitement of grandparents being able to name land after her brother.

Cultural configurations: summary

This sample configured and invested in 'culture' in a range of intersecting ways. Drawing on my weighted continuum and Profile Charts, I have discussed their configurations from light to heavy investments, and univorous (as with Maheera, Sara, Arti, and Manpreet for example) to omnivorous investments/consumption of 'culture' (as with Sunita, Alka and Preeti). Some dimensions of 'culture' were 'worn' heavily, some moderately and some lightly. The girls' narratives revealed the degree to which they 'wore' dimensions positively and heavily (or otherwise) - for example, Sara 'wore' religion heavily and positively, where it was an embedded part of her life. The most heavily weighted area was education, which will be presented

in the next section. The theoretical framework of black feminism sits well within the variations of intersecting narratives shared by these girls, as it provides a wide net (beyond gender-only) to capture their broad experiences and meanings associated with 'culture'.

Culture: the highly weighted role of education

Context to section

Alongside striving for high grades, this sample of academically 'successful' girls, invested in broader areas of education and learning, through extra-curricular and enrichment experiences. By investing in these, the girls were developing valuable experiences that they could use to 'show-off' on their CVs, UCAS Personal Statements, and develop a sense of personal fulfilment during a busy and stressful time in their academic lives. I acknowledge that some of these areas have already been touched upon in the section above, in relation to cultural activities that the girls invested in - i.e.: Anjula investing heavily in South-Asian classical arts. The areas are all inter-linked as it has been difficult to separate themes in clear-cut ways. I will contextualise this section through the 'Profile of Educational Success Chart', and organise it under the following headings:

- Profile of Educational 'Success'
- Embracing education: 'unlocking' doors for a brighter future
- Educational 'extras': beyond the formal curriculum
- Section summary

Chart 2: Profile of Educational 'Success' context

This section follows the pattern of the previous one, where the same key is used as in Chart 1, with some additional symbols * and +. The * relates to a particular entry exam for dentistry and medicine (called the UKCAT), and the

+ sign indicates an exceptionally high level of weighting/investment attached to that area - i.e.: investment in the role of Headgirl, or exceptionally high grades (e.g.: an overall grade A profile with some A stars).

- **H** - high weighting
- **M** - moderate weighting
- **L** - low weighting
- ***** - UKCAT IQ tests
- **+** - exceptionally high weighting

It is useful here, for me to draw on Manpreet's focus group interview phrase, where she stressed the importance of 'successful' girls having 'the whole package plus'. Manpreet, and other girls to varying degrees, were very aware that high examination grades alone were not enough to secure a competitive university course (particularly a Russell group choice), as they had to 'stand out from the crowd'. I draw attention to a few interpretations in the chart to help contextualise the mini-narratives that will follow. First, the notion of educational 'success' must be read broadly, and beyond examination outcomes. I have identified eight areas that emerged strongly across these girls. Even in relation to academic achievement through grades, there exists a variation, ranging from H*+ (for girls like Sara, Anjula, Maheera and Narinder preparing for medicine and dentistry) to Manpreet who was the only girl to take a GAP year, and her careful planning and experiences during that year, resulted in improved grades (i.e.: all grade As) to secure the Russell group university of her choice.

Table 4: Chart 2: Profile of Educational 'Success'

	Education/learning characteristics	Arti HG	Manpreet	Fauzia	Sara HG	Anjula	Maheera	Alka	Ravi	Preeti	Maya	Narinder	Sunita
1	Self-motivated learner-educn means a lot	H	H	H+	H+	H+	H+	H	M	M	H	M	M
2	Critical thinker who questions areas of life	H	H	H	H	H	H+	M	H	M	H	M	M
3	High academic achiever in relation to grades	H+	H / H+	M	H*+	H*+	H*+	M	M	H	M	H+*	H
4	School leadership role/s	H+	H	H	H+	H	H	L	M	L	L	L	L
5	Communication skills	H+	H	H	H+	H	H+	M	M	M	M	M	L
6	Work experience and part-time paid work	H+	H/ H+	H	H+	H+	H+	M	M	M	M	M	M
7	Avid reader across genres	H	H	M	H+	H	H+	M	M	M	M	M	M
8	Home leadership roles	M	M	H	M	M	H	H	M	L	M	L	L

HG= Head Girl

N.B. Manpreet has 2 scores in areas 3 and 6 as she took a GAP year. The second letter indicates post GAP year evaluation based on what she told me over her email and text updates.

Embracing education: 'unlocking' doors for a brighter future

Education, particularly achieving the right profile of A-level grades, was aligned with 'unlocking' doors for the future, in relation to, for example, getting into the 'right' university and course, securing a good career and future salary, giving them extra status and equality with future partners, and a good back-up plan in case things ever went wrong - as Anjula put it: 'it allows you to stand on your own two feet'. As highlighted in Profile Chart 2 above, high grades alone were not enough, and these girls recognised that they needed the 'whole package plus', which comprised high grades, plus all the 'extras' that would give them that 'cutting-edge' as 'successful' girls. University was talked about as a positive and assumed next step in their journeys, where some girls wished to study local to home in line with parental wishes (e.g.: Fauzia and Alka for cultural and financial reasons).

All girls recognised the 'power' and benefits of being an educated girl. At one end of the continuum sat girls like Maheera, Arti, Sara, Manpreet and Anjula - all committed to achieving a profile of Grade As, alongside developing other areas of learning beyond examination success (omnivorous but also high academic achievers). Then there were girls like Fauzia and Alka who were keen to invest in broader experiences of education (e.g.: Fauzia wanted to attend Master classes after school and do more work experience), but family commitments and parental values about girls' freedom, limited their 'choices'. Across these girls, education was narrated as 'it opens doors to a brighter future' (Fauzia's words, but highly reflective of all girls), where the following reasons were discussed across the girls:

- It could give them more negotiating power, status and 'freedom' within the immediate and extended family and community - e.g.: Maheera positioned as the 'genius' child and had less surveillance compared to her sisters.

- University education meant becoming a graduate and a future professional. This carried status for the girls and their families ('bragging' rights), and was seen to provide increased chances of securing a highly educated partner.
- A successful education would lead to a successful career (in theory) which would give them financial independence and security in the long-term. This was discussed in relation to 'a good back-up plan' in case things ever went wrong in a future relationship.
- Education and gaining knowledge, were aligned with Islamic beliefs (e.g.: Sara and Maheera discussed this). As Sara stated: 'The prophet said you should seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave' and she connected this to her future career path of medicine where she would always be learning and studying to keep up with the latest medical advancements:

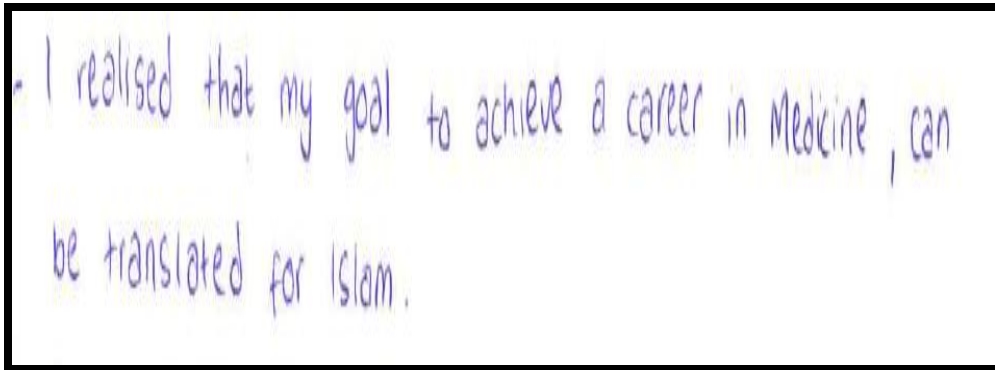


Figure 19: Education, career and Islam

- Further education was discussed as a way of developing a personal area of interest and a vocation (i.e.: medicine, law, dentistry, journalism, engineering, teaching). This sense of vocation emerged most strongly for those aspiring towards medicine, law and teaching for example.
- If they were the first in the family to go to university, they would become a role model to younger siblings and cousins (as with Alka for example).

Education was discussed by all girls as an asset - 'something for life' and a long-term investment. As Preeti stated: 'Education should be prioritised over everything else' which is what she did. Anjula illustrated the 'weight' and importance of education in her life through a conversation that had taken place with her grandmother (an inter-generational perspective). She discussed how her mother's career in law, was facilitated by her grandmother's determination to educate her three daughters, when growing up in Sri-Lanka. She believed in women having a good education before getting married and she would 'put money aside' so that she could pay for her mother's tutoring fees to ensure successful completion of her legal exams. Anjula talked with admiration of her grandmother's educational 'push' as the extract below illustrates:

Anjula: There's a saying that my gran shared with me through one of her stories – give a man a fish and feed him for a day, teach a man how to fish and feed him for life.

Geeta: What do you think that story means?

Anjula: I think...say if I catch fish for feeding someone, yeah... they'd get food for that day, but if you taught someone how to fish and get the food for themselves, they'd be able to fish for themselves and their family in the future, so even if you went away and left them they'd still be like able to carry on with their life independently. I think that's what education's all

about, yeah. It's not about doing something just for now, it's about learning it so that when you become older you can put it into practice - you know - live your own life confidently and not have to ask others or a man for help all the time. It makes you independent and more confident to stand proud.

Not all girls saw their parents or grandparents as role models of education in the same way as Anjula, whose mother was more educated than her father. For Anjula, her educated mother, highly supportive father, and inspirational grandmother, all believed in the 'power' of education as 'opening doors' for girls. This shared vision from home acted as a 'driver' for Anjula, but at times she narrated the stress of being so academically-driven that other facets of her identity were lacking. Not all girls articulated the same type of privilege in terms of high levels of moral support and encouragement from home. For example, Fauzia, Alka and Maheera were not particularly supported in practical or emotional ways at home. Despite difficulties, these three girls demonstrated strong personal motivation to succeed, drawing on their 'psychological capital'. The desire to succeed academically, emerged most intensely for Fauzia. I attribute this partly to her circumstances, which were rooted within a patriarchal family structure that she wanted to get out of so that her future could be very different. Maheera operated in a similar structure, but she resisted family structures as shared in the previous section. For Fauzia, a successful education would help her to realise her 'dream career' of becoming a barrister:

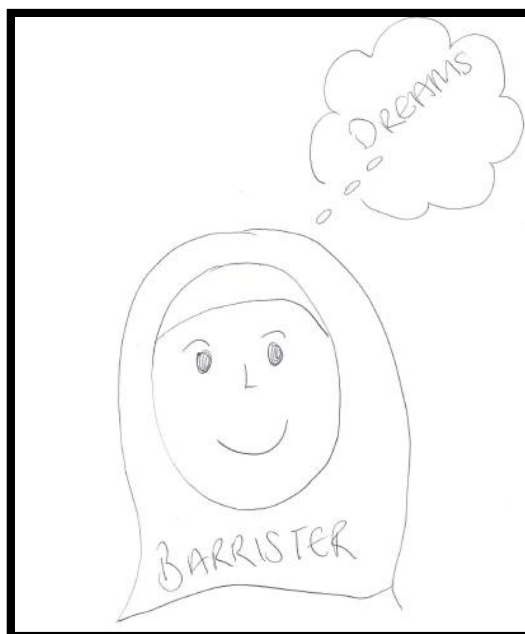


Figure 20: Fauzia's dream career as a barrister

She recognised how difficult this journey would be academically, financially and emotionally, and it was one that she would have to 'make alone' without parental support. Fauzia embraced every aspect of education, despite the challenges that she had to navigate at home. She invested many hours of research into her career and work experience opportunities. She was searching for a role model or mentor, someone to guide her as an expert (a mentor was temporarily secured through her summer law internship project which she valued). She equated becoming a barrister with being independent, fighting for justice, having freedom, financial status, and long-term security if anything went wrong.

Although most girls (10/12) discussed their aspirations of becoming a mother one day, they were mindful that they would need to be 'juggling it all' and this could raise tensions if they did not 'choose' the 'right' partner wisely - i.e.: someone who would also be educated, career-minded, supportive of their

career, share in the upbringing of children, and be an equal partner in household chores. Although education was narrated as reaping positive benefits, some girls also articulated their concerns about Asian extended families and 'all the cultural duties' that came with them (discussed most strongly by Alka and Fauzia). Three girls discussed living with an extended family as a possible bonus with a high profile career. All girls conveyed how they would continue their careers after having a family, as they would have invested so heavily in their education and professions. As Fauzia put it: "We owe it to ourselves to use our education in the future and not just become housewives and mothers that waste it away". Ravi's extract below illustrates the importance of having an understanding partner, if her career and education is to be put to use:

...it's like...it's important to marry someone who can obviously understand your professional commitments but to an extent can also make sacrifices too like you're making for them – so I don't know - I just think women tend to sacrifice a lot more in their careers and the men don't tend to realise how much they've invested especially when like- if they've put like 6 years into a medical degree and then have to do 2 years as a junior doctor before you specialise, so that's 8 years gone already ...and just not to go anywhere with that education after marriage and children is a huge disappointment. A man would need to support the long hours that you would work as a doctor and be there for you. If you are highly educated you need a man who respects that.

The above shows a very mature view, where Ravi is highly conscious of having the 'right' kind of conditions for her career to flourish later in life. So although education 'opens doors', the girls recognised that for a flourishing career to continue, certain ingredients needed to be embedded within future relationship values. To my surprise, only Manpreet applied for the Oxbridge exams, although three girls did mention considering this. Fauzia did say that if she ever got into Oxford, she would be allowed to move away from home because her parents recognised Oxford as 'the best high status university'.

Although all the girls embraced education and saw its benefits, some appeared to be guiding themselves through networks of friends, school information in part, and personal research via relatives. School-based advice after the AS level results seemed limited across both schools and unfocused, particularly if the girls were not on line to meet the requirements of their chosen degrees, or if considering a GAP year as a back-up plan (see conclusions chapter).

To pull together points here, being 'successful' was not as straightforward as a 'successful' education 'unlocking doors'. Other factors came into play - i.e.: family support and encouragement, finances to move away and study and so forth. A strong factor was the girls' own values (stemming from family in most cases) and their self-motivation to invest in education through hard work, perseverance, and long hours of studying. Education was narrated as giving them extra 'power' as girls and women in the future.

Educational 'extras': learning beyond the formal curriculum

The above section has focused on the more formal aspects of education and the girls' positive attitudes towards the perceived benefits (and 'power') of being educationally 'successful'. This section reports on the 'softer', yet equally important dimensions of education and learning - what I refer to as the 'educational extras'. I frame these areas of learning, as those that have the potential to enhance CVs and UCAS applications for university, as the girls were conscious to have exciting things to write on their applications.

Some girls invested in several educational 'extras' because they recognised the perceived benefits at a personal level of interest and as evidence for university applications, particularly girls like Sara, Arti, Anjula, Maheera and Manpreet. Some did far less, as they chose not to for various reasons - e.g.: Preeti said she had no time, Fauzia and Alka had restrictions after school

hours. Some aspects of educational 'extras' carried a higher status and examples of these include: Headgirl; the Duke of Edinburgh Award; Business Enterprise Scheme, Internships relating to a career choice, or voluntary/part-time paid work, particularly abroad (Sara and Anjula went to Sri-Lanka for work experience in hospitals and undertook charity work). The categories of educational 'extras' for these girls included:

- Charity/ voluntary work (e.g.: Cancer Research, Mencap, elderly care home work; religiously affiliated voluntary work)
- Part-time work (around half of the sample had part-time jobs where five worked in a Kumon maths centre)
- Work experience placements (e.g.: law internship; hospital work including medical placements; dental surgery experience; newspaper writing experience; school assistant work)
- Leadership roles in the school (e.g.: Headgirl; deputy headgirl; key stage leader; school council; behaviour support leader)
- Duke of Edinburgh Award (around half of the sample participated)
- Business Enterprise Scheme (discussed in the selective entry school)
- Hobbies/ interests (overlaps with cultural interests): visiting art museums; theatre; films; writing a diary, blog writing; photography; science research; reading literature and the classics; reading religious and philosophy texts; politics; participating in Islamic discussion circles; learning sign language; appreciating music; using computer gadgets; classical dance and music at the Hindu temple.
- After-school Master Classes
- A Government scholarship award aimed at particular groups of children who had to be eligible (Fauzia applied for this)
- School debating club

Investment in the educational 'extras' was highly strategic, as the girls' diaries were so busy that time was precious. Investing heavily across areas, could lead to stress and tiredness, when also revising and doing homework. Some of the girls discussed their coping mechanisms for 'juggling' such busy lives, and investing in several areas (discussed later).

The role of Headgirl was a high status 'extra' that carried significant expectations of the girls' time. The role assumed excellence of character and academic achievement as a role model pupil. These qualities were highly evident across both Arti and Sara's interviews. Both girls prepared and presented speeches in their respective schools and shared the scripts with me. Arti's speech extract below, promotes the message of getting involved in the educational 'extras' and embracing the challenges:

Many opportunities will come knocking at your door over the coming months. It's about striking the right balance, whether it's visiting universities for master classes and shadowing schemes, taking part in extra-curricular activities such as The Duke Of Edinburgh Award, engaging in work experience and being involved in the School Council - these are just a few examples. It is important that you do get involved; I cannot tell you how much your teachers will remind you of this and at the end of the day, Universities are looking for those students who have pushed themselves to the limit and those who seek new adventures. Go out and nominate yourself to become your form rep, work with the school council, lead a book club for a term, and challenge yourself!

Arti then drew on a Hilary Clinton quote to conclude her speech about confronting challenges and embracing new responsibilities. Arti talked about the stress of all the 'extras' that she invested in, particularly during the second year of A levels: 'I have to do all my Headgirl stuff and keep my eye on the grades at the same time'. As part of her role, she had the opportunity to shadow the Headteacher for a whole day, and she found this process enlightening, as she could experience first-hand all the 'extra' things that she

'juggled' as a leader of a large school (Arti was the only girl in the school to have had this unique opportunity).

Sara's Headgirl speech extract below, further exemplifies Arti's message above, and this notion of 'grabbing' those 'extra' opportunities:

Furthermore, in Year 12 you will have opportunities to become charity reps, year group councillors and senior prefects. These roles need motivation and strong commitment, teaching you the importance of balancing your duties with homework and revision. They will also help with UCAS applications when you start thinking of your career choices. You will also have the chance to participate in the Young Business Enterprise Scheme, where you create your own company and brand image... Try to grab all the opportunities that X Sixth Form offers you and don't sit back! Not only will it help you develop skills for school but also for the future!

Both Headgirls wrote motivational speeches, and were keen to leave a legacy of their work before they left their respective schools. They promoted messages relating to being a good citizen, developing a sense of duty, investing in charity and voluntary work, and developing a hard work ethic. They were key pupils in setting the vision for excellence, which followed the bigger visions of their respective Headteachers' philosophies. They both had highly developed CVs and UCAS Personal Statements as a result of the opportunities they had invested in as part of their roles.

In contrast, for some girls, attending out-of-school learning activities presented tensions at home (i.e.: for Fauzia and Alka). Fauzia had been incredibly proactive in securing a law internship, as well as a learning mentor at a top London law firm. Her parents were very strict about her travelling home late in the evening, or socialising with colleagues outside-of-work hours. When I asked her if she could have negotiated attendance at these classes, she said her parents would not understand the benefits, where Alka

said she just wouldn't ask them. This notion of parents not understanding their need to participate in 'extra' experiences was limited to mainly three girls: Fauzia, Alka and Maheera, but, Maheera was persistent in securing these opportunities as stated earlier.

Another educational 'extra' was the desire of some girls to learn about religion beyond school RE lessons. Maheera was particularly keen to learn about Islam (and other religions) in scholarly ways. Maheera (and other girls) expressed their frustration with the school's Religious Education and history curriculum, where she said that she learned far more through her independent research and talking to friends from different religions. She was keen on studying Philosophy as a 'hobby A level subject' and felt that it would help her to find her own answers. Maheera was always seeking knowledge spaces, and more knowledgeable others to debate her unanswered questions. She discussed learning and gaining knowledge as closely linked to travel experiences which she was keen to invest in. She discussed her ambitions to travel during a GAP year at length, whilst doing charity work in a hospital (detailed plans were made, although she changed her mind once she secured a place at medical school). She discussed Islamic study societies or 'women's groups with sisters' but her father was not keen as he feared that she would be 'brainwashed'. Maheera invested many hours in her interests as far as practically possible, and her post-study text updates, illustrated how this motivation continued into university life.

Taking a GAP year was only discussed by two girls - Maheera and Manpreet. For Maheera, it related to her desire to travel, be creative, and do charity work abroad. For Manpreet, it happened because she did not secure a place at her chosen university. Both girls commented on how the school did not discuss this option as a 'choice', even though they themselves saw it as a valuable year to develop their educational and cultural experiences. So, juggling high grades and 'extras' required time, motivation and interest,

Careful planning, and no distractions could 'get in the way'. Most girls did what they could to eliminate distractions and minimise 'failure'. For example, some talked about the stupidity of dating boys during A-levels and how they had even deleted Facebook or chat spaces as they 'took up unnecessary time'. Some friends developed a group agreement that they would all delete Facebook and reinstate it after exams. This level of maturity illustrated the seriousness with which they saw education.

Navigating their 'success' journeys, would inevitably bring experiences of 'failure' and these girls were not prepared to fail it seemed, with little or no thought being given to back-up-plans in case things did not materialise. One example of experiencing 'failure' is highlighted through Fauzia's application for a Scholarship Award. She did not tell anyone at home or school for the fear of failure and shame (particularly after the Headgirl election failure). As a result of no support or guidance, she felt ill-prepared at the final stage of the interview process, and this led to huge disappointment when she did not secure the Award. She was successful in the initial two rounds, and was let down at the final stage by not knowing 'the tricks that other kids have been taught by their teachers'. This sense of failure led to feelings of emotional stress that she discussed only with me during an interview (she drew tearful emoticons across her journal page). Anjula mirrored Fauzia's emotions of failing to become Headgirl, as she also talked of this as her dream role since starting school. The girls' interviews revealed in-depth data on the process of applying for Headgirl, and the related emotions of being 'successful' or a 'failure', from behind the scenes. This included the stigma of failing amongst friends and the wider school community.

So investing in the aforementioned 'extras' carried several benefits, as well as challenges and stresses. The higher level responsibilities (i.e.: Headgirl or other senior roles), required a lot of 'juggling' alongside academic investments. For those girls who were not as confident or vocal, their roles

were more limited because they were apprehensive of volunteering (i.e.: Alka, Preeti talked of not even volunteering).

Maheera's strength in weighting across profile chart 2, emerged as effortless at times. However, as I learned towards the end of the study, it came at a price where 'success' was embodied through various stresses, the content of which she chose to retract. This surface-level notion of effortless achievement was far from true, as the interviews gradually revealed how these girls coped behind the scenes, and the incredible discipline needed to do it all (at times, I felt motivated by their stories). Highly 'successful' girls like Arti, Fauzia, Sara, Anjula and Maheera, appeared to navigate and plan for 'stress' reduction in ways outlined below:

- They maintained highly organised diaries and 'things to do lists' which highlighted effective time-management skills. Sara for example, organised her work within the five daily prayers during Ramadan and school time, and this served as a valuable organisation tool. She shared her detailed lists with me, saying how easy they made her life as she just 'ticked off things' to maintain her focus. Below, I include the opening of one of her lists (the full list included names):

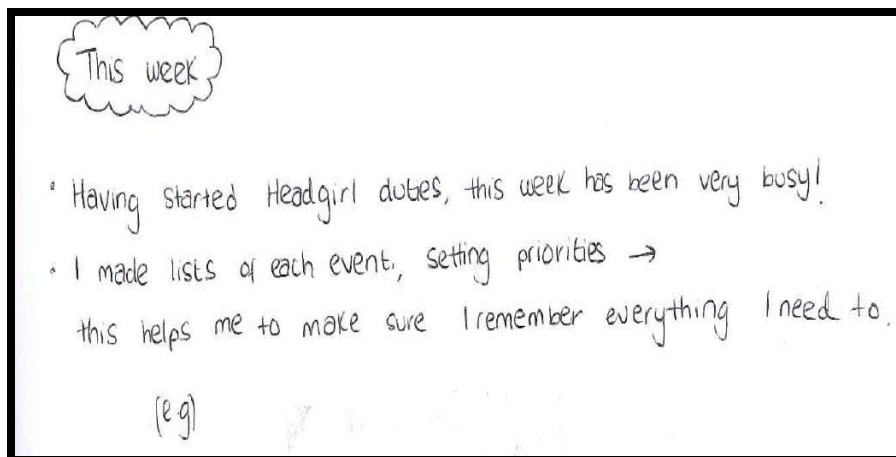


Figure 21: An extract of Sara's things-to-do list

- They set themselves clear targets and strategies - they had a vision for 'success' and were highly committed to investing long hours
- They conveyed a positive outlook that focused on a 'can do' approach, rather than seeing obstacles, as in Fauzia's journal extract below, where she kept a 'positive thinking book':

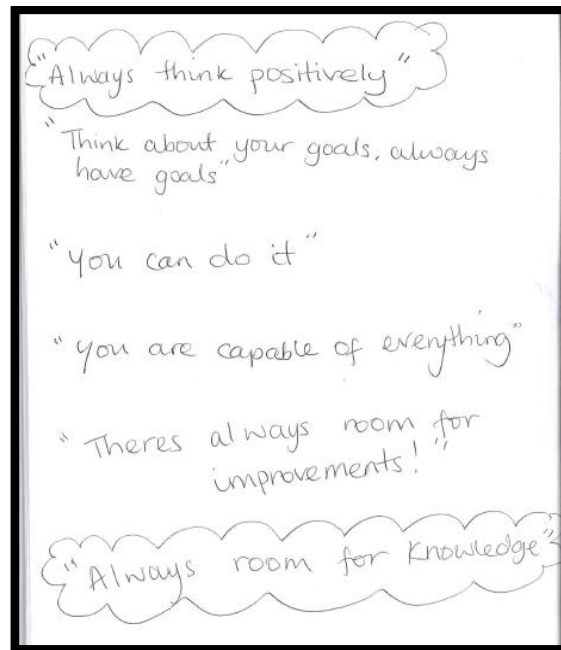


Figure 22: An extract of Fauzia's positive thinking journal

- They drew on religion and other forms of spirituality to add another dimension to their busy lives - one that provided space for calmness and reflection through faith of some kind that they connected to.
- They filled their available time well with 'useful' things and rarely talked about being idle. Sara's extract from her reflective journal below, highlights how doing 'nothing' was a waste of time:

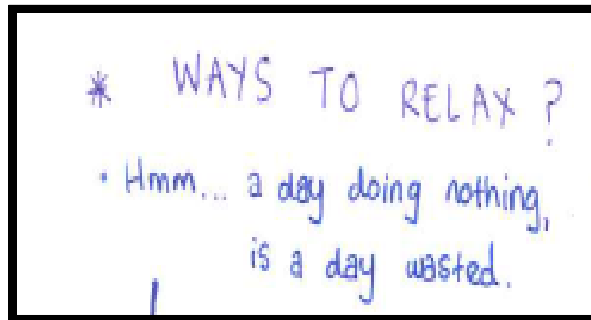


Figure 23: Ways to relax

An ability to 'graft' hard and invest heavily in the educational aims and broader learning experiences listed above, was narrated by all girls to varying degrees. This aligns with notions of meritocracy and neo-liberal discourses, which those girls studying A level sociology or psychology recognised in part. Fauzia for example, attributed her Scholarship failure and other 'failures' that she experienced to: 'I'm just an unlucky person - I always smile and work so hard and am positive, but I still never quite make it'. Rather than blaming structural inequalities and weak support systems at home or school, Fauzia started to narrate herself as 'just an unlucky person' shifting the blame towards herself.

Section summary

To summarise, the section above has highlighted how these girls narrated the heavily weighted and positive role of education, to include learning more broadly - what I refer to as the 'educational extras' - experiences that move beyond high grades. Their narratives were filled with education-related discussions, and this led to the generation of Profile Chart 2. These girls were 'grafters' as Manpreet put it in the focus group interview, and recognised the need to work hard and invest the time: 'We are the want it all girls but if you say that in your thesis make sure you add but we jolly well

graft for it' (extract used in the sub-title of the thesis). The final section of this chapter will report on how the girls configured and invested in their cultural identities, and again, there will be overlap with the sections above as 'culture' and identity are related concepts.

Configurations of cultural identity

Context to section

The final section presents ways in which the girls talked about the complex notion of identity through phrases such as: I am...; this is me; others are...; I am just myself, and so forth. I will illustrate how this sample narrated their identities through comparing themselves to others - the process of identification, difference and othering. I will include extracts on who the girls discussed as their role models (where they did), and ways in which they narrated high expectations of themselves. This study represented a first-time opportunity for the girls to reflect on their cultural identities at length, and as narrative researchers have revealed, narration is a critically reflexive process in understanding one's identity. This section will be presented under the following headings:

- Configurations of cultural identity: Profile chart 3
- Narrating the self
- Role models: the 'pick n' mix approach'
- Section and chapter summary

Configurations of cultural identity: Profile chart 3

This section follows the pattern of the previous two, where Profile Chart 3 highlights the key ways in which the girls narrated dimensions of how they configured and invested in their cultural identities. I use the following key to illustrate the 'weightedness' of their identity investments:

- **H** - heavily weighted (H+ indicates a very high investment)
- **M** - moderately weighted
- **L** - lightly weighted

Some areas of Profile Chart 3 overlap with Charts 1 and 2 (e.g.: religion, which also appears in Chart 1). This reinforces and illustrates how difficult it is to separate themes, as they are so inter-related in areas, particularly 'culture' and identity. Identity was so multi-dimensional, and my chart below can only reflect the major themes that emerged across this sample.

Table 5: Chart 3: Configurations of cultural identity

Identity narrated in relation to	Arti HG	Manpreet	Fauzia	Sara HG	Anjula	Maheera	Alka	Ravi	Preeti	Maya	Narinder	Sunita
Education (examinations)	H	H	H+	H+	H+	H+	H	H	H	H	H	H
Education (beyond examinations)	H	H	H	H	H	H+	M	M	M	M	M	M
Role of family	M	H	H+	H	H	H	H+	H	H	H	H	H+
Gender and equality issues	H+	H	H+	H	H	H+	L	H	H	H	H	M
Role of friends	H+	H	L	H	H	H	L	H	M	H	H	H
Role models	H	H	L	H	M	M	L	M	M	M	M	M
Being a good citizen	H+	H	H	H+	H	H+	L	M	M	H	L	L
Developing through challenges	H	M	H	H	H	H	H	M	M	M	H	M
Cultural 'respectability'	M	M	H	H	H	M	H	M	M	M	H	H
Cultural interests - arts based	H	H	L	H	H	H+	L	M	L	H	L	L
Leadership roles in school	H+	H	H	H	H	H	L	M	M	L	L	L

Identity in relation to	Arti HG	Manpreet	Fauzia	Sara HG	Anjula	Maheera	Alka	Ravi	Preeti	Maya	Narinder	Sunita
Leadership roles - at home	M	M	H	M	M	H+	H+	M	L	M	L	L
Aspirational future	M	M	H	H+	H	H+	M	M	M	H	M	M
Religion	L	L	H	H+	H	H	H	M	L	L	M	L
Online identities	H	M	M	H	M	H	L	M	L	M	H	H
Travel	H	H	L	H	M	H	L	M	M	M	L	M
Happiness and self-fulfilment	H	M	L	H	M	H	L	M	L	M	M	H
Fashion/ dress/ appearance	M	M	H	L	M	L	M	M	M	M	M	H

Narrating the self

The girls' narratives and reflective journal entries, revealed in-depth insights into a spectrum of identity positions that they psychologically invested in across space, time and context, as well as social influences on their identities. Identity positions drew on psychological dimensions such as self-esteem, self-belief, confidence, independence levels, hopes, fears, desires, notions of shame and modesty, anger, pain and pleasure. Through our interview interactions and broader areas of fieldwork, the girls' language (spoken/ unspoken, written, body language and emotions), conveyed messages about the types of identity experiences they invested in through 'choice' or otherwise, and the affects of those. The following phrases provide some context of the ways in which these girls described their identities:

- I am just me;
- I am a woman with my own mind and make my own way in life;
- I am an individual and unique and I like that;
- I am myself so don't need to mimic others;
- I am independent and strong-minded;
- I will stand on my own two feet and earn my own money;
- I am a role model for other girls in this school;
- I want to be a role model for other girls like me later on in life as there aren't any for me right now;
- I want to kind of leave a legacy in this school;
- I have a strong mind so I don't need other role models;
- I am British first and then Asian - always British first;
- I am a grafter and work hard to succeed! My dad told me that we have to work harder to be recognised as equals and I do.
- I s'pose I'm intelligent and have intelligent girlfriends - we have intellectual conversations together;
- I'm quite opinionated and bossy and like to be heard;

- I am like Little Miss Stresshead at times trying to fit it all in to my busy life;
- I am known as Miss Perfect or Hermione Granger by friends and family.

The above phrases, taken across the sample, paint a surface-level picture only (as do the weightings in the three Profile Charts) of the girls' experiences. Beyond 'I am...' the girls also articulated phrases to describe and classify their positions (and group positions) in relation to other girls - the process of co-identification within a matrix of available identities. Examples of 'Othering' phrases included the following: innocent girls; good girls; academic girls; geeks; book worms; girly swats; sad and lonely girls with no lives [referring to girls with no lives outside of education], the 'freshies' [recent arrivals from India, also referred to as 'just off the boat']; Hermione [from Harry Potter]; Westernised girls; white sluts, cool girls; pretty girls; sporty girls; fake and plastic Asian girls [those who performed less 'respectable' identities - 'they drink, smoke and sleep around']; the 'want-it-all' girls [i.e.: them to a large degree]. The list of labels could go on, and these girls largely narrated their identities within 'good' boundaries of 'respectability' - everything was done in moderation and with sensibility.

I start my illustration through Arti's extracts of how different girl groups operated within her school context, in relation to her positions as: highly academic, kind and caring, an active and charitable citizen, Headgirl etcetera. The detailed mind-maps below, taken from her reflective journal, illustrate her birds-eye view/ knowledge of how girls are grouped within the school. Although Arti presented these, they drew on collaborative discussions that she had with her girlfriends.

- 'The good girls'. This is the group that Arti positioned herself in, along with her very close friends.

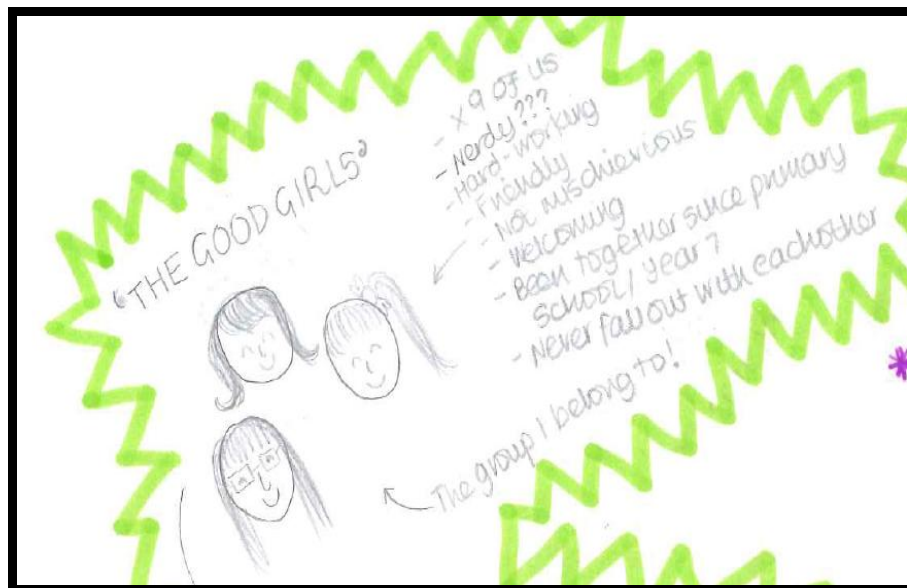


Figure 24: 'The good girls'

- 'The shy girls' [no image provided]
- 'The popular kids'

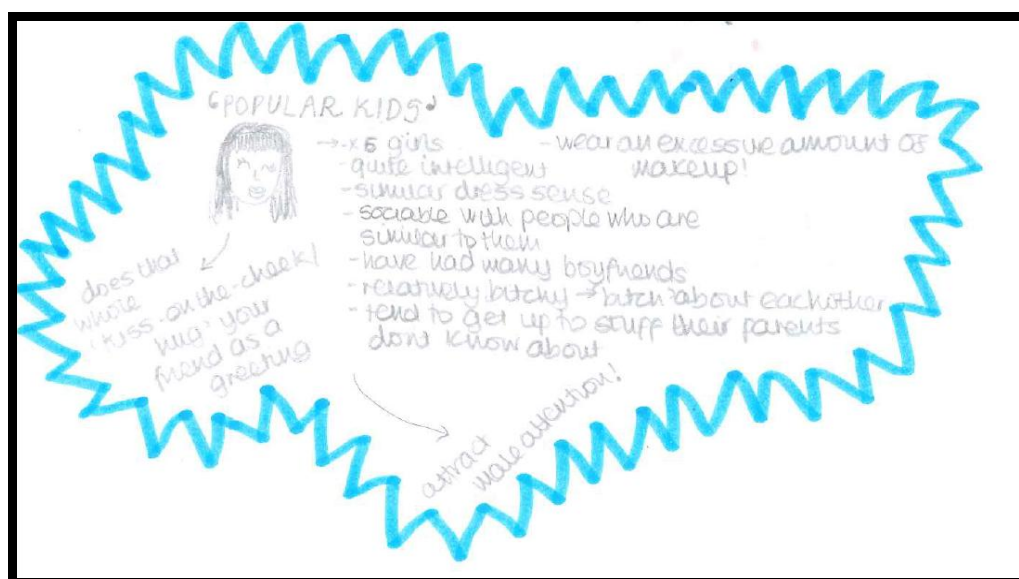


Figure 25: 'The popular girls'

- 'The Asian girls'

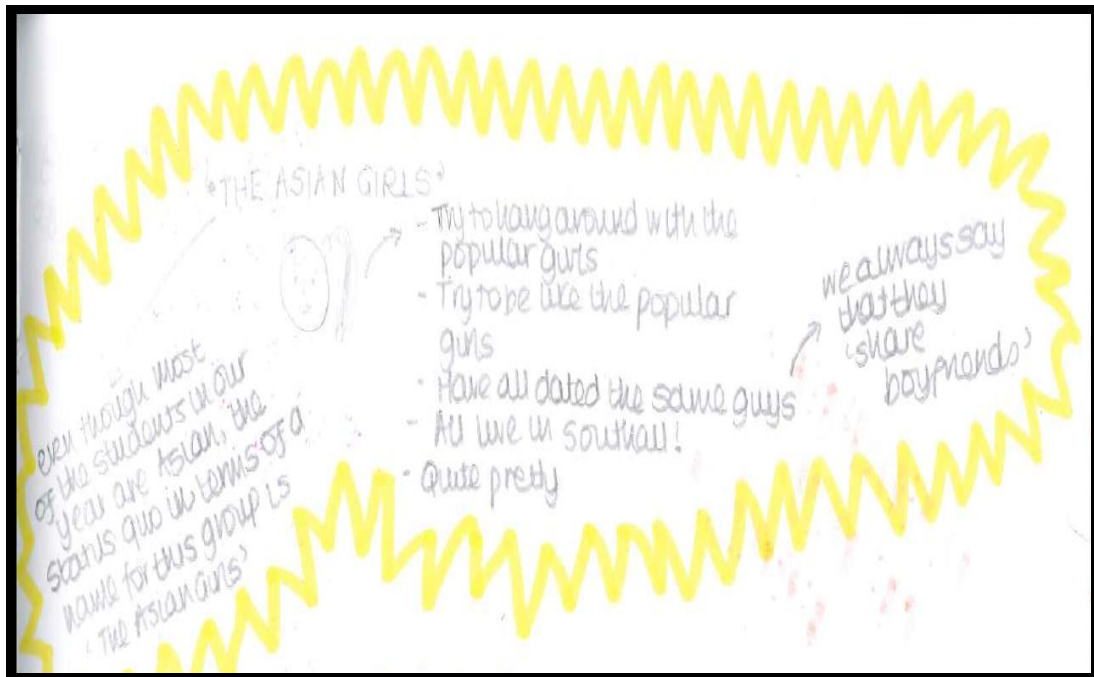


Figure 26: 'The Asian girls'

- 'The bad girls/ smokers'

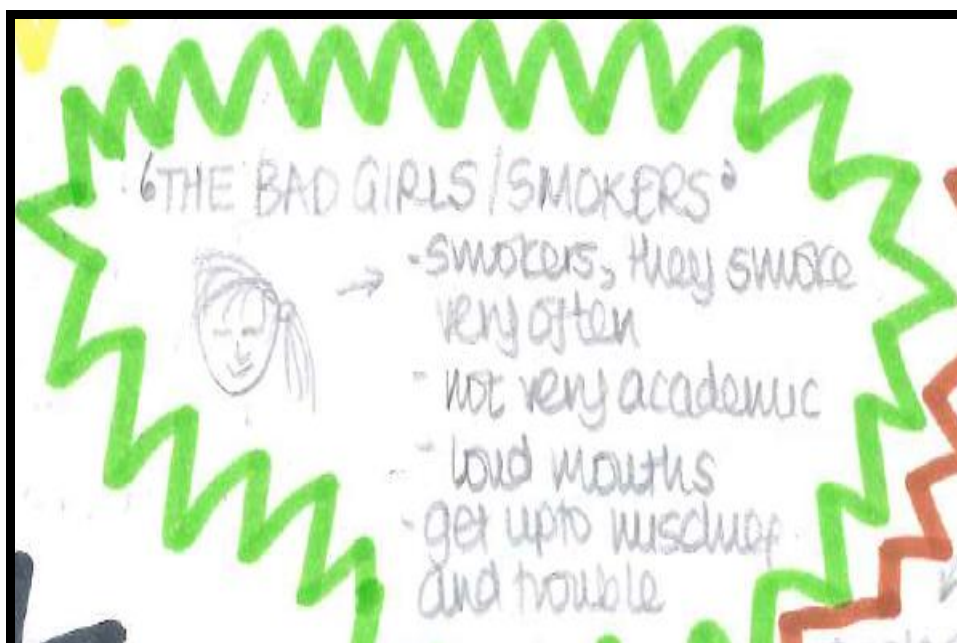


Figure 27: 'The bad girls/smokers'

- 'The white crew'

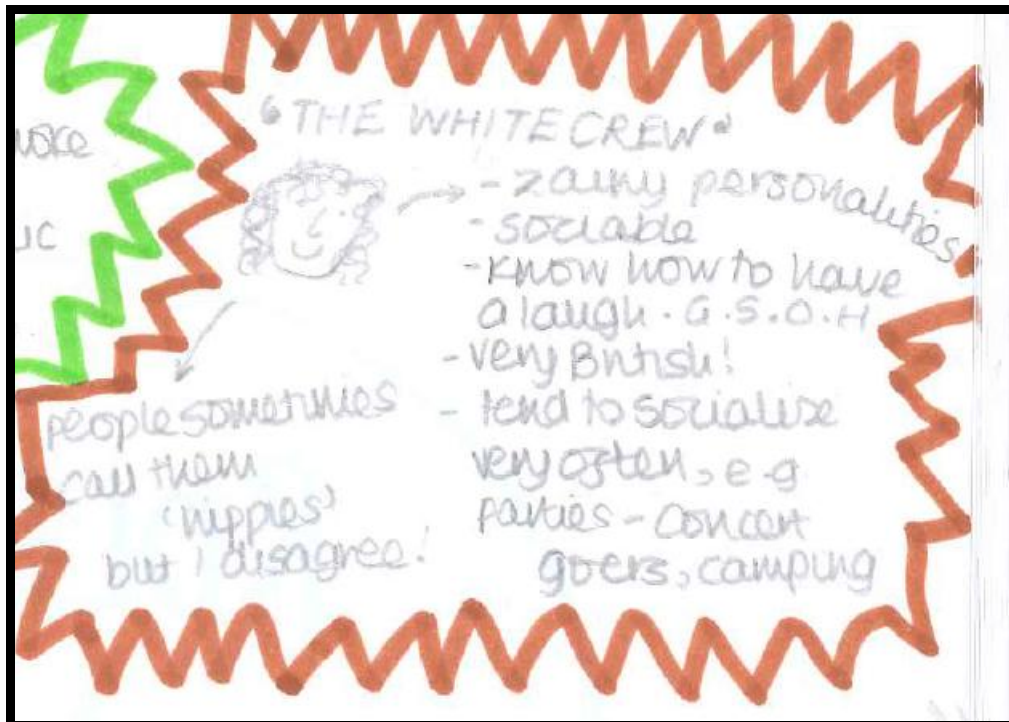


Figure 28: 'The white crew'

- 'The wannabes'

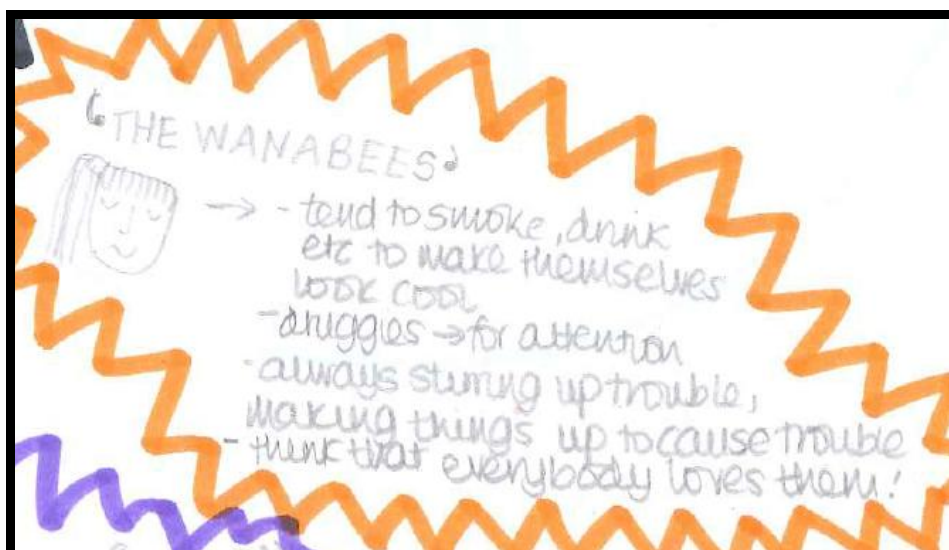


Figure 29: 'The wannabes'

- 'The foreigners/ freshies'

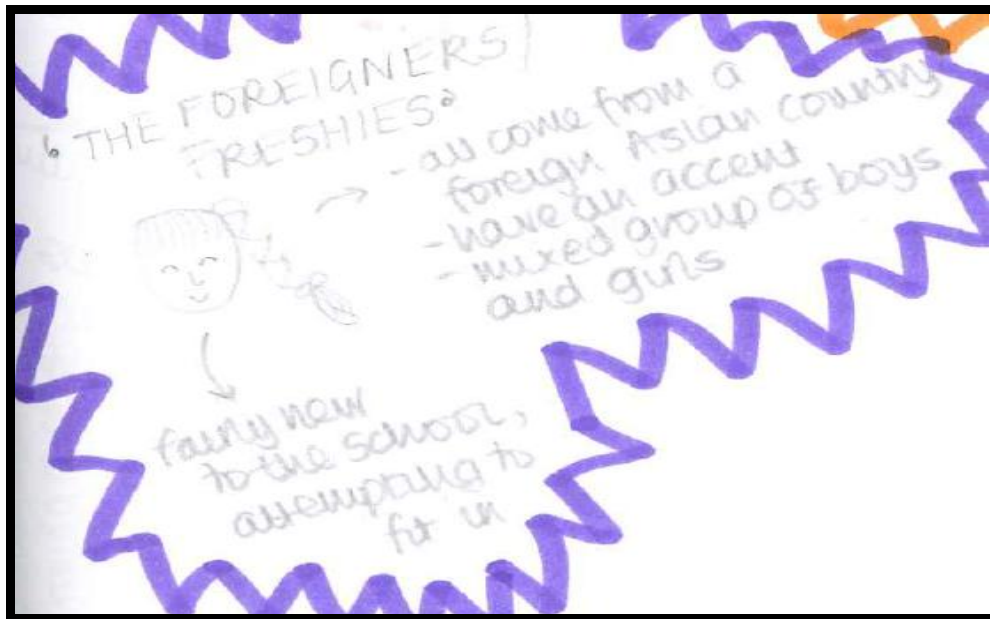


Figure 30: 'The foreigners/freshies'

- 'The losers'

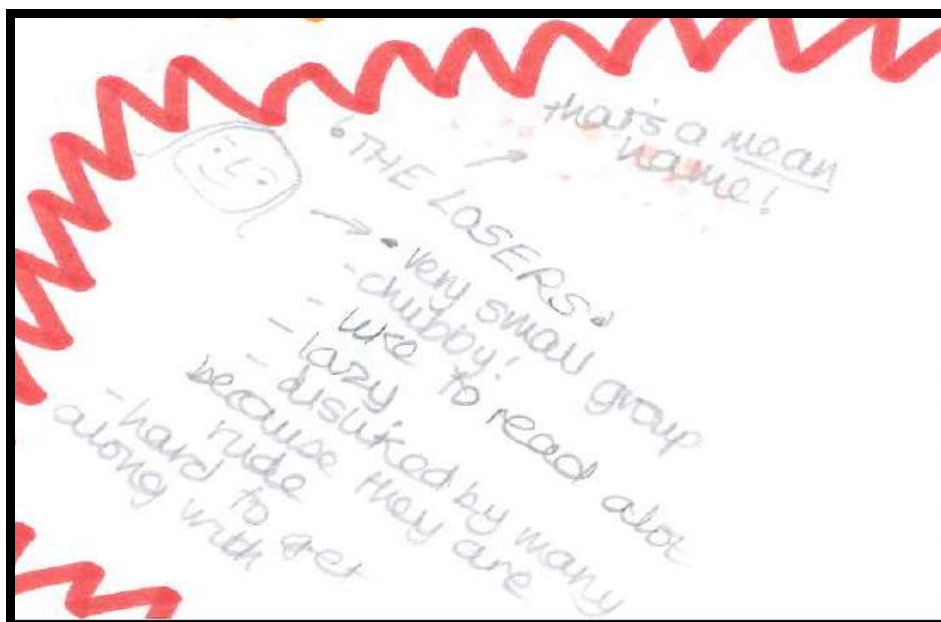


Figure 31: 'The losers'

In presenting the above groups, Arti (and her group of 'good' girlfriends) were plotting/narrating their 'respectable' identities, in relation to what they were not - i.e. they were 'good' because they were not losers, freshies or otherwise. Sunita also talked extensively about other girl groups, positioning herself in what she called the 'middle category' of 'good' and 'respectable', where she performed her identity within boundaries of moderation as illustrated below:

Sunita: You get like the really quiet girl groups and then you get the like in the middle girls and then you have the like louder out-spoken girl groups - I think it can be quite extreme because you can tell like in our groups how different we all are. And who you are all goes back to the way you're brought up by parents and what you believe in.

Geeta: So these louder, out-spoken girls, how do they behave?

Sunita: ...they do things that like their parents wouldn't be proud of like drinking and smoking and other stuff - like you know what I mean...? And umm... the quieter girl groups don't really do that much - they just like keep to themselves and stuff and don't go all wild and crazy.

Geeta: Which group would you say you fit into?

Sunita: Umm - the middle one - good girls.

Arti and Sunita (and other girls to varying degrees) discussed how some girls performed their identities in virtual spaces like Facebook. Arti created a mind-map to illustrate their 'artificial and fake ways', and described Facebook as 'baitbook' and a 'gossip forum for nosey people'. She configured her use of Facebook as being 'genuine' where she said: 'For me it has a real purpose beyond gossip'. She said it allowed her to keep in contact with primary school friends and relatives living abroad, as well as being a useful space for organising Headgirl events. In this way, she presented her use as 'genuine' and as close to her true identity:

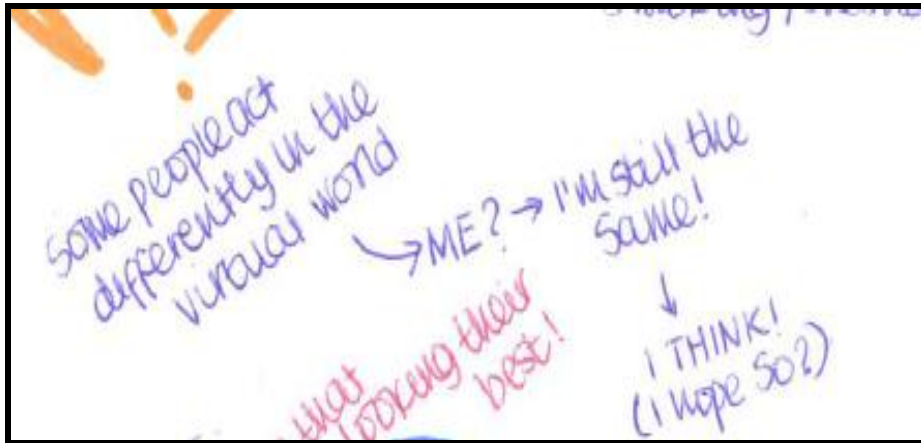


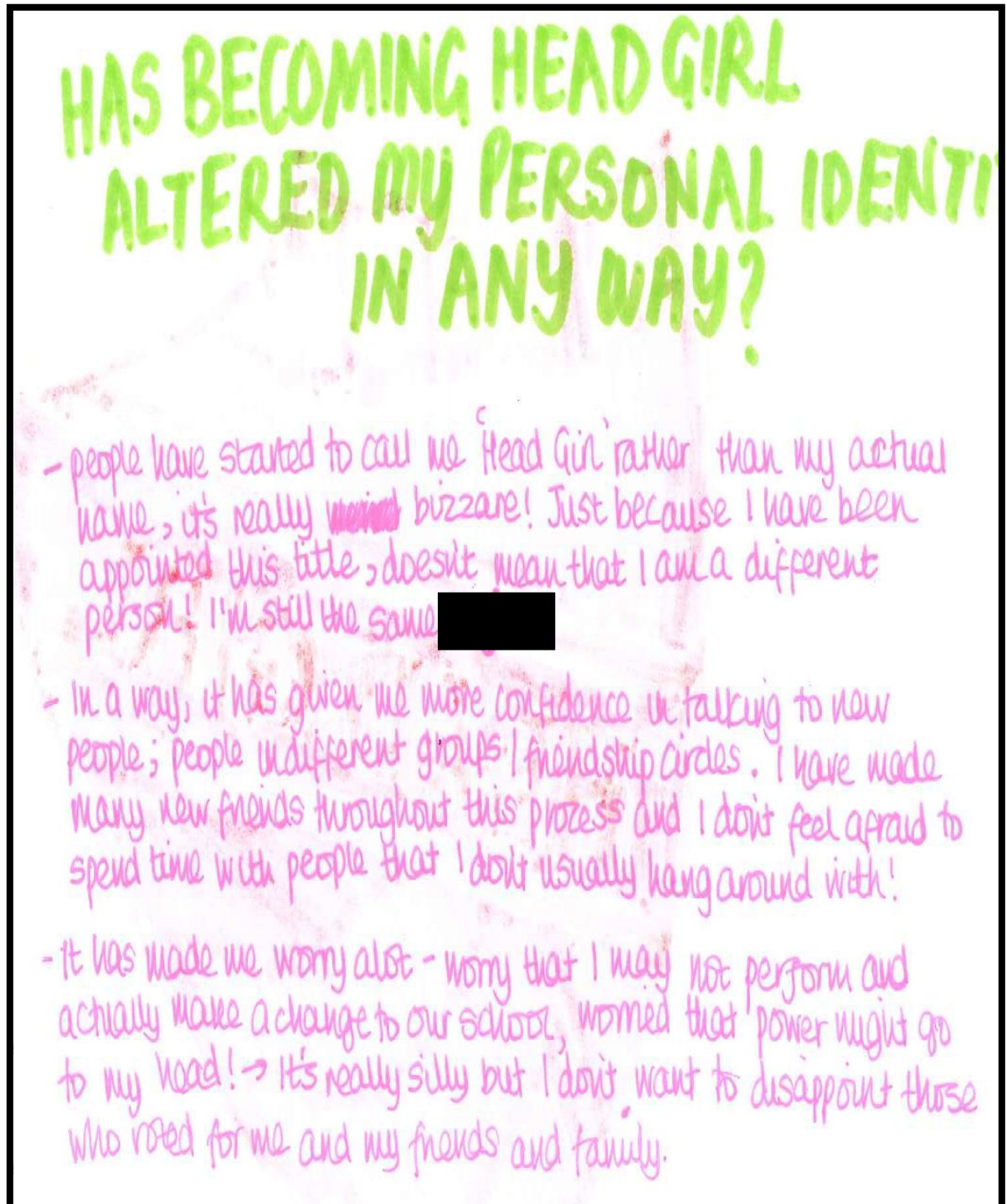
Figure 32: Arti's position on Facebook

The extract below illustrates Arti's description of Facebook as a screen (or virtual stage) for performing the 'real' identity:

On Facebook you just lose your real identity because you are hiding behind the computer screen and not actually going out there socialising and talking. You're telling everyone stuff online and so you have this ultimate power to do anything and say anything because you are hidden behind the screen and no one can do anything to you or see if you're truthful because you are hidden there. Yeah - so I guess that is how it can destroy your real identity and confidence.

Arti stressed the importance of face-to-face communication over Facebook, although it was recognised for its benefits in communicating at speed to a large audience. It was described as a space that provided 'power' and 'confidence', and this message was echoed by other girls who used it cautiously, being aware of the potential 'dangers'. The girls conveyed a strong awareness of how they read and interpreted other girls' images (photographs) and comments, and did not want 'friends' and family who viewed their pages to see them in a less 'respectable' light. Facebook was also discussed as a 'time-consuming addiction' by some girls, and the girls in Park Rise school talked about collectively deactivating their accounts during exam time as discussed earlier.

Arti's identity within the school was heavily narrated in relation to the high status role of Headgirl that she embodied so confidently on the surface. The journal extract below illustrates this (her name is blacked out):



The above extract touches on pertinent identity points in relation to narrating the self:

- responding to the title of 'head girl' rather than her name;
- increased confidence and friendships through the new role;
- associated stresses of meeting the expectations that were part of the role (fear of letting her voters down and not leaving a legacy);
- Arti's worry of 'power' (ego) going to her head.

Arti's extensive journal reflections included a short story, presented to me with the title below:

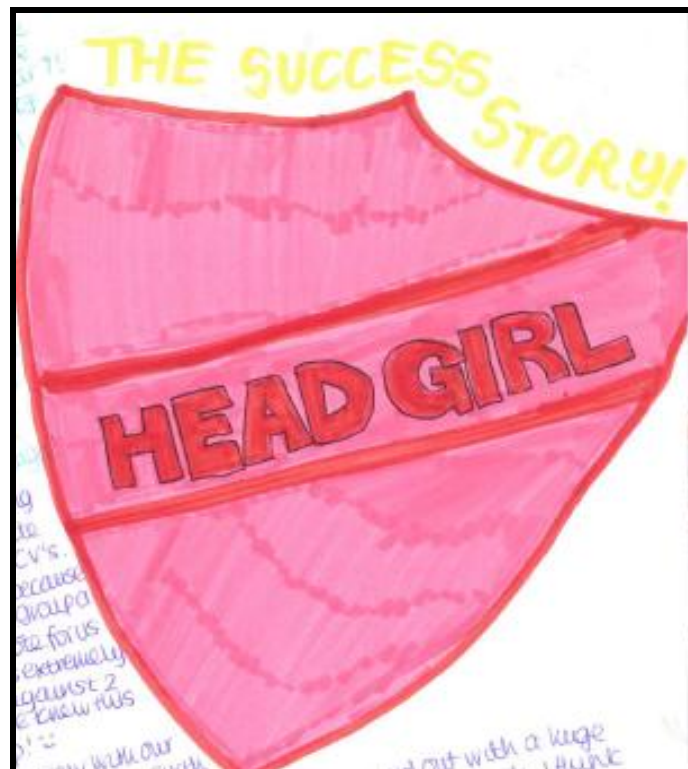


Figure 35: Arti's Headgirl 'success story'

I outline the themes of 'The success story!' below:

- her girlhood dream to become Headgirl, ever since she entered secondary school (Anjula and Fauzia also shared this dream);
- the election campaign, challenging interview, and friendship support (and tensions) as part of becoming Headgirl;
- the results process - announced through the school's Intranet;
- the celebrations post-election;
- opportunities gained through this 'special role' (i.e.: shadowing the Headteacher for a day; excellent CV enhancer; events coordinator etcetera).

The role of Headgirl was invested in heavily (H+) and took up considerable time and energy for Arti and Sara. It carried significant responsibility and status, and Arti was very conscious of performing it 'successfully', so that she did not let her voters and staff down (the fear of 'stigma'). Arti, like Maheera, wanted to 'leave a legacy in the school' to show the impact that she had made. She narrated facets of her identity in multiple ways and her journal image of the 'powerful' Asian woman (Asian girlpower), illustrated how she co-identified with the perceived qualities of that model. Arti also described herself as 'not really that traditional', 'not really too modern' and 'not the stereotypical Asian girl', but she narrated who she was as: 'I just like being myself' and 'I'm unique', where she described 'unique' as 'I don't follow the crowd'. When asked to elaborate on how she would describe her identity, her response was:

Oh gosh – I guess I see - I see a person who is very individual, strong, independent, and unique in character – even though I know we all are....but I see someone who is really different to other girls in this school and I really like that 'different' part in me.

Arti stressed not being a 'stereotypical Asian girl' as her family were 'different to traditional Asian families':

We accept the whole multicultural thing more and as I mentioned in one of the transcripts before, that my uncles and aunts are married to white people and stuff, so yeah – we are pretty open-minded, it's just this openness that we have as a family, that we welcome everyone in and I know that some of my friends - their families just disagree with that. So in my family there's this sense of flexibility and openness to welcoming different cultures and we enjoy having differences in our life.

Arti's sense of identity was versatile and cosmopolitan and she embraced differences, being open to the idea of marrying a man from another cultural background because she thought this would 'be more culturally exciting'.

In comparison to Arti, Sara, the other Headgirl, did not discuss the Headgirl dimension of her identity with such intensity, as she seemed far more relaxed about the role, amongst the other identity investments that were also important in her life. For example, she invested very heavily (H+) in her religious and aspirational medical identity, and in this way, she narrated herself in broader ways to Arti. Sara recognised how competitive it was to secure a medical place, and therefore invested strategically in this identity to increase her chances. Her journal reflections drew heavily on her Islamic identity (to include wearing the hijab, reading the Quran, importance of Ramadan), and other influences such as her heavy investments in family life, supporting friends (like a mentor), voluntary and charity work, all discussed as part of her Islamic beliefs. She discussed the importance of her religious identity in an embodied way that was highly positive - more so than any other girl in this sample.

Headgirl identity investments (and aspirations for securing the role) were also discussed by other girls in the sample - i.e.: Fauzia and Anjula. These girls invested heavily at the interview stages, and as a result, they

talked with emotion and sadness during their interviews, when they realised that they were not successful, as illustrated through Fauzia's extract below:

I remember being in year seven and thinking - wow! Headgirl - that would be such a nice role - it was my dream role... and to lose out on it I was just - I've never felt that much grief over something in my life...I still cry today thinking about it...



Figure 36: Fauzia's disappointment at not securing Headgirl

Fauzia continued:

I always thought I've always come second in everything - just nearly there but never quite there - I haven't really come first in anything and I thought maybe this time I'll be first for once in my life but I didn't really get there again and this made me feel so sad and I just couldn't stop crying. [she showed me the journal image above at this point]

Fauzia's had high expectations of herself and believed: 'nothing is out of reach if you work hard enough'. The importance of hard work pervaded the sample in establishing their 'successful' identities. I make a comparison to Sara here, as she invested heavily in her aspirational medical identity, as well as formal education to secure grade As and pass the UKCAT tests (IQ tests). These heavy investments were also evident in other girls' accounts applying for medicine (Maheera and Anjula). Other

girls had considered medicine (e.g.: Ravi), but re-considered it after weaker grade predictions, lack of relevant work experience, and fear of the competitive UKCAT tests. Like the three girls applying for medicine, Fauzia invested heavily in her aspirational legal identity to become a barrister, where she talked of wanting 'a professional identity with a high status':



Figure 37: Fauzia's aspirational barrister identity

Alka, also applying for law like Fauzia, aspired to the professional identity and status, but she did not invest as heavily. For example, Fauzia secured a law internship in a prestigious London firm, and also applied for a Scholarship Award, which she only disclosed to me (for fear of failing and losing face with friends). She discussed how family took no interest in her career, and like Maheera, she said 'I will have to make my own way'. In this way, she narrated herself as self-directing.

Maya was the only girl in the sample interested in studying media, film and photography, describing it as an extension of her general interests so 'it didn't really feel like study' - similarly, science for Maheera was a passion subject. Maya was highly determined to develop her professional identity in the film industry, whilst acknowledging the importance of

contacts and networks (alongside ability) to secure 'lucky breaks'. Although she never used the phrase 'make my own way' like Maheera and Fauzia, she was very much self-directing too, as her parents gave her the freedom to invest in an area that made her happy and allowed her to reach her full potential.

Narinder was the only girl applying for dentistry, and based on my knowledge, she was the only one who had researched a back-up plan in advance (i.e.: a bridging course). She did not have the 'right' A level choices, and said she had been incorrectly advised when choosing her subjects.

Preeti was torn between medicine and becoming an engineer (her parents' aspirations were for her to become a doctor like her two older siblings). She was keen on Brunel University because of the strong engineering reputation, and during her final interview at Brunel, I introduced her to a female, academic colleague for inspiration and information.

Other girls in the sample, invested heavily in the content areas of their subject choices, rather than the aspirational identities that could emerge in the future (i.e.: Arti and Manpreet invested in English Literature as a subject). The strongest identity investments, were by far evident in relation to the three girls applying for medicine (they read medical research journals - BMJ, undertook work experience in hospitals), and Fauzia's investment in law (summer internship, application for a scholarship, researching a mentor). As discussed earlier, Sara's identity investments were heavily weighted in relation to medicine, religion, family, Headgirl, a good sister, daughter and friend, a charitable citizen in society and so forth (also notable in other girls' profiles but to lighter degrees of intensity). Sara, like Arti, revealed high levels of emotional intelligence, and as part of their leadership roles this was needed as their various identities inevitable carried some degree of stress, which they

both acknowledged. Sara had structures in place to manage the stressful aspects of her roles, and discussed these strategies as helpful:

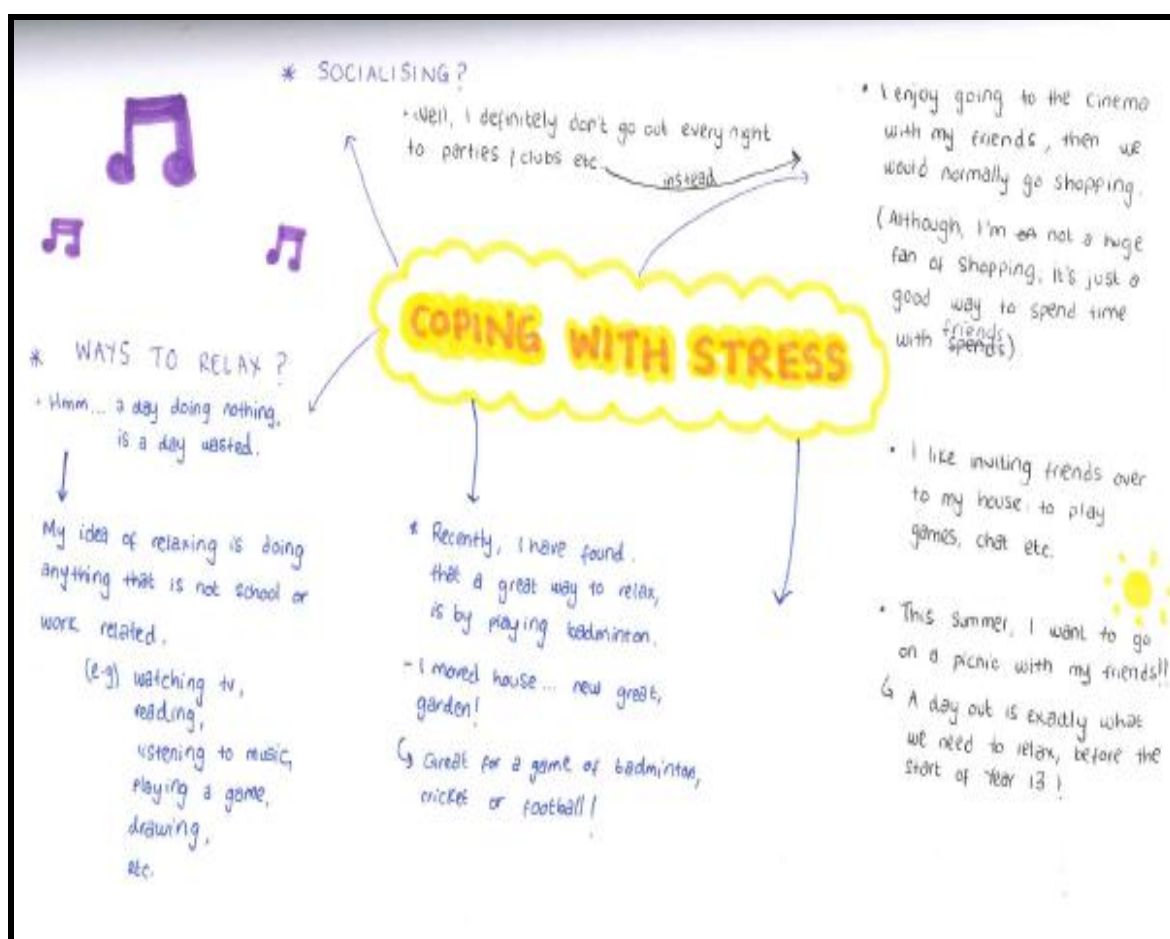


Figure 38: Sara's stress mind-map

'Stress' was narrated as an inevitable part of 'success' but never exaggerated by the girls. Rather, their narratives revealed a notion of 'taking charge' and coping, through mature ways, as illustrated below through Arti:

Arti: I've also got all these pressures from different directions and you know - getting A level A grades and teachers and my peers to kind of bring a positive change to our school, so it's going to be a really stressful year, but I think I'll be able to rummage through it all and grab the bull by its horns and just go for it and see what happens. I'll be fine and I always just manage.

Through the process of narrating themselves, Maheera and Sara created identity projects in different formats (I have shared Maheera's extracts already). Sara's 'Identity Project' was shared with me during the fourth and final meeting at the university, and as the physical project was extensive, large and contained lots of personal photographs, I will only signpost selected reflections to illustrate the identity dimension:

- She drew around her two hands and wrote a mini-narrative of experiences that influenced her life. These included: religion, philosophy, experiences of the past, aspirational dreams, investing in academic and career goals, valuing and respecting family and friends, charity work.

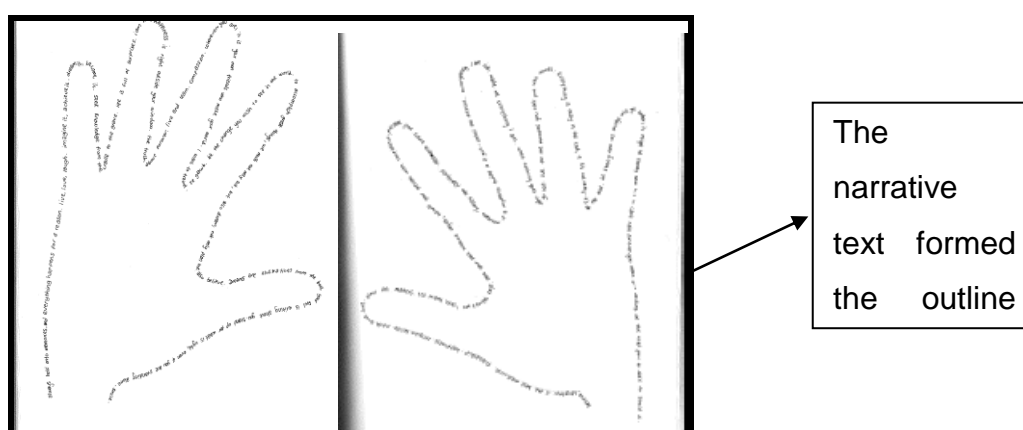


Figure 39: Sara's hand collage identity narrative

- She created a collage of images using the letters of her name (I only present one letter for confidentiality reasons). Together, the letters incorporated elements that she selected as being: 'significant parts of my identity'. In summary, the letters incorporated the following identity themes:
 - religious symbols and quotes;
 - experiences with family and friends;

- her love for watching cricket;
- her passion for reading (journals, poetry, Quran, fiction)
- her love of cartoons and art that carries strong moral messages;
- music to unwind to;
- experiences and resources linked to developing a medical career.



Figure 40: Sara's letter identity

Although Sara was an excellent Headgirl, and managed this role so confidently (and effortlessly), her identity project conveyed a stronger sense of her religious identity. It incorporated verses from the Quran; religious poetry; the Islamic chapter on women; the importance of respecting elders; values of kindness, generosity, and charity, and the importance of fasting during Ramadan. It also included a sub-section on Sri-Lanka (her parents' country of origin), where she had included

photographs and diary extracts from her hospital work experience. After her visit to Sri-Lanka, she created an in-depth comparison project on her hospital experiences across the UK and Sri-Lanka (this was compiled strategically for a potential medical interview).

Like Sara, Maheera also conveyed and invested heavily in her religious identity, but she was exploring religion in critical ways, seeking to understand the scholarly aspects of Islam through discussion spaces with more knowledgeable others (despite her father not being keen on her attending any classes). Maheera also looked at religion in relation to her interest in science and nature, which was highlighted within her university application form: 'Science reflects the wonders of evolution on God's creation and this fascinates me'.

Anjula narrated her identity as shifting upon entering year 7 (age 11), as that is when: 'I started to become more used to who I was and wanted to be and grew into a different person'. This 'different person' was discussed in relation to wanting to learn more 'worldly things' (only achievable through socialising with girlfriends who were more 'worldly' than her). Like Arti, Sara and Maheera, Anjula was a straight grade A student (applying for medicine) and she narrated her academic identity as being 'too strong' that she wanted to 'loosen it up a bit' so that she could develop other dimensions. She discussed other girls' as more 'streetwise' than her. She also referred to her grade As at GCSE and A-level as: 'the curtain' (a bit like the fringe she once had). High academic achievement provided a screen to 'hide behind' because it covered other qualities that she described herself as lacking - i.e. not being as 'pretty', 'fair-skinned', 'worldly' or as 'sporty as other girls'. She desired 'worldly knowledge' so that she could actively participate in 'girly discussions' as this extract illustrates:

...they [the other girls] read girly magazine's instead of the classics and maths text books [she was studying further maths]. I realised it wasn't all about reading Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre but more about reading Glamour magazine and watching America's Next Top Model to be up with the latest trends.

Anjula discussed the importance of being 'known for something in life' - that 'something' part of her identity was being positioned by others in the family and school as 'the clever one' (just as Maheera and Manpreet were positioned as the 'genius child' or 'Hermione Granger' the geek). Like Sara and Maheera, she was investing heavily in her aspirational medical identity, and she also undertook work experience in Sri-Lanka, but did not secure a place for medicine, which was a huge sense of failure for her. In the same way as Anjula, Manpreet and Preeti also identified themselves as having strong academic identities, and as lacking other dimensions. The difference between these girls was in their desire to also develop their 'streetwise' identity and 'fit in' - Manpreet and Preeti seemed more at ease with their 'geek' identities.

Compared to Maheera, who was the most out-spoken in the sample, Alka was a quiet girl who embraced religion, culture and family duties with little questioning or resistance - on the surface, this could position her as a passive girl. I opened Chapter One with Alka as her narratives revealed intersecting influences and how she psychologically navigated them. Alka invested heavily in her family caring identity, combining that with her academic and religious identity dimensions, stating that her duties to family always came first. In the final interview, held at the university, she narrated her identity as follows:

I am a strong individual who's always meeting the demands for everyone else and I think that's the right and respectable thing – that's what I try to do and that's what I have to achieve - I really don't mind though as I get pleasure from it.

During this interview, she cried as she became slightly emotional reflecting on what she had learned about her involvement in the study (see Chapter Six). Alka conveyed a sense of leadership and decision-making in the home, heavily supportive of parents and younger siblings - at school, she did not volunteer herself for leadership roles. For Alka, the 'I' 'strong' component of her identity was very much configured in relation to supporting and caring for other members of her family. The 'I' for self-fulfilment always came second. Although Alka required good grades for law school, like Fauzia, she attended a new university with lower requirements, so that she did not have to move away from home. As the older sibling, Alka narrated herself as a role model to the youngsters, and how she was: 'guided by my Islamic family duty'. Alka's social interests and extra-curricular investments were minimal, and she had to manage the difficult interplay between her personal desires and family responsibilities. The structures of family were not forced on her, and she said that she found 'pleasure' in 'pleasing them' (her parents).

Alka, like Fauzia and Maheera in particular, discussed her identity in relation to having 'a status beyond housewife' (like her mother). Although unlike Fauzia and Maheera, she discussed high respect and admiration for her mother. This respect, yet desire to be different, was complex, as she admired the 'housewifely' and 'sacrificing' attributes of her mother, but she also wanted to develop a very independent identity with professional status, which included a successful law career and a good salary. She was clear that she wanted to be married with children, be a 'good wife', daughter-in-law, and invest in all the cultural familial duties that would be expected of her. As depicted below, there was little resistance towards the latter as she saw them as 'normal'. Rather, Alka adopted an accommodation approach that embraced these identities without conflict:

Alka: If I'm a young mother and a solicitor which is what I want to be - I mean - it's going to be quite hard doing both - you know - meeting the family expectations and obviously I'm going to be the daughter-in-law of the family and you know- they will have certain requirements from me, but I hope that doesn't get in the way of my law career and you know - I've like- I've heard these stories, not in my family, but obviously I've heard stories like when the daughter-in-law goes into a new family and they say, you can't work and blah, blah, blah... you know what I mean. But that's just one thing that I'm a bit scared of. I hope I do meet someone nice and I hope they're not like that.

Like Alka, Fauzia also held significant household responsibilities, but of a largely domestic nature, rather than the home leadership roles as with Maheera and Alka. Fauzia's family commitments and high levels of cultural surveillance at home, limited the opportunities for her to explore her identity independently outside of school. Her aspiring legal identity was conveyed strongly across the interviews as she talked passionately about notions of justice, equality and patriarchy in relation to women's rights, religious and cultural beliefs, as well as misinterpretations of Islam and culture. Law seemed like the 'right' career choice as it was an extension of some of the 'issues' that she was experiencing and questioning in her life. She did not convey a sense of 'pleasure' like Alka.

Ravi's identity was very much discussed in relation to being a 'confident' and 'independent girl' with 'freedom' and 'choices' - these characteristics operated within boundaries from parents that she saw as 'reasonable'. She talked about the increased confidence and independence levels of young Asian girls like her, particularly those aspiring to secure the top careers. She cited examples of career women in 'Asian Woman' magazine, and compared girls like herself to their mothers and grandmothers who relied heavily on men to be the financial providers (no longer the case). She admired the 'super career women' who could 'balance it all and still be on top of everything'. Ravi 'wanted it all' and narrated her aspirational future with confidence. She narrated her identity

in relation to other girls with restricted 'freedom', which were mainly her Muslim girlfriends.

In narrating her 'confident' and 'independent identity', Ravi referred to her grandmother's concern (who lived nearby) about Asian girls today being 'too confident and mouthy' because of the focus on developing their careers. Whilst Ravi acknowledged herself as a confident, independent and 'modern', she was also conscious of not becoming 'too mouthy', 'too Westernised' and 'one of the guys' (she acknowledged the pressure to emulate men to become successful). Her narratives revealed a sense of 'wanting it all' whilst upholding some of her 'feminine' and 'cultural values'. She said she was happy 'being like a woman' but wanted 'equal benefits in a relationship', and wanted to be fully supported by a future partner.

When talking about her identity, Ravi was one of the girls able to draw on her relationships with boys, as they formed a balanced part of her friendship group. For other girls, boys did to a lighter degree. For example, Arti and Sara had to interact with boys through their Headgirl roles, but for Arti, boys also formed a part of her friendship group. Fauzia and Alka rarely socialised outside of school and having boys as part of their friendship group would not have been seen as 'respectable' by parents - as Alka articulated: 'boys should only be seen as brothers before marriage', and Sara narrated a similar position. Ravi's mixed gender friendship group enabled her to understand the male perspective on things, and she talked about understanding 'the guys' opinions'. For example, she asked them what they looked for in a long-term partner, as opposed to a 'girlfriend':

They expected girls to be like their wifey types... like basically mum to them... where they have full control, where they know where she is, what she's doing, who's she's with. And like for me and a lot of my girlfriends, we don't agree with that view because obviously we've been brought up to have that independence and freedom and education so for us to think one person can control us is a bit extreme. So some of their views are very stereotypical still but a lot of

them are really laid back and they don't mind about having the career-minded type of girl.

Her 'boyfriends' were described as the 'protective brotherly type' where they 'looked out for the girls' in their group 'like sisters', but had 'double standards' in relation to how they behaved. As illustrated in the culture section of this chapter, Ravi narrated her identity as: '...more British than Asian' and I asked Ravi: 'How do you see your identity beyond your physical features and ethnic identity?' and her response revealed the importance of experiencing challenges to develop identity in a deeper way:

I see total confusion at this stage in my life - like in a sense of not having a complete identity yet... I don't think I fully know who completely I am kind of thing right now, and to an extent what I can be like in the future because I haven't experienced enough of life and I'm too young ... I think you learn something new about yourself through having difficult situations or where there are new circumstances that really challenge your limits to the max and it's about how you cope with those harder things and how you manage them, and what kind of person you become after challenges.

So above, Ravi saw 'real' identity development as being linked to going through some sort of 'challenge' (also discussed by other girls to various degrees). Challenges were generally described positively as 'preparing you for later life' (Alka's Chapter One quote) and 'make you even more driven' (Fauzia's words) - in this way, challenges were discussed as a way of learning about identity in very mature ways, and a catalyst for change. Alka also discussed the importance of challenges as helping her to plan life:

So I always like to think ahead and challenges have helped me to plan. I look at my previous life and I like to think this is where I was, and this is where I am, and this is where I want to be and I always think about the negatives that could come up in the future and I think and plan beforehand and always try to like think, if this happens then I've got this sort of experience from life that I know will help me to tackle it.

Like being the eldest child right now in my family - If I am also the eldest in my in-laws too I know what to expect in terms of responsibilities. It all kind of helps me to become even stronger.

Challenges were discussed in terms of available resources (i.e.: lack of finances, weak parental support and educational knowledge, lack of contacts to develop networks), but a lack of resources were never exaggerated or used as an excuse for failure. Challenges were mainly discussed in relation to the girls' individual ways of navigating them - i.e.: *they* must take charge and work harder, as the responsibility for failure was largely configured as their own.

Both Headgirls exemplified how they coped with the challenges of 'juggling' whilst they acted as role models within their respective schools. Through their speeches, they conveyed messages of 'success' through encouraging pupils to face challenges and adopt a positive attitude towards education and citizenship. Arti's speech extract illustrated this earlier.

Most girls talked about themselves at some point through the words 'traditional' or 'modern', switching between the two, where they were either/or, or a fusion of the two. This complex synthesis is demonstrated through Manpreet's extract below:

I like to see myself as not the fully traditional type of Indian girl – not the fully modern Indian girl – but as somewhere in between where I take bits of both worlds. You know what I mean - I'm a kind of mix of you know - the modern and traditional at different times.

This sense of middle ground positioning (which mirrored the 'moderation' approach in performing their identities in 'respectable' ways) pervaded the interviews of other girls too where they generally wanted to have the best of both worlds (or cultures in its plural form) within the 'choices' and

structures of their lives. 'Tradition' was always aligned with the Asian culture and 'modern' with the West to a large degree. There was a recognition of this shifting with Bollywood movies being very much classified as 'modern' or even 'super modern' in relation to fashion and exoticised actresses that fuel particular discourses, which were narrated with disapproval. What emerged as a result of the 'cherry picking' process between 'modern' and 'traditional', 'respectable' and 'wild', was a synthesis process, whereby identities drew on dimensions of the 'traditional' and 'modern' without dismissing their 'Asian' identities. The girls narrated a sense of wanting to maintain parts of their culture that aligned with their values, and this synthesis happened differently for each girl, depending on levels of 'freedom', 'choice' and agency.

Some girls further discussed their British-Asian identities in more globalised ways beyond Britain, as they had had experiences through relatives living abroad, family holiday experiences, or an interest in learning languages (i.e.: Arti, Manpreet, Ravi, Sunita, Sara, Maya and Maheera in particular). The synthesis of identities also worked in relation to religious identities. For example, girls with stronger religious identities (particularly the Muslim girls - Sara, Maheera, Alka and Fauzia), recognised discourses surrounding Western women's identities as being superior because they were constructed as independent and as having more 'choices'. However, these girls (however oppressive home structures were) still showed agency as most did not narrate a sense of forced religion, but rather one that some of them were exploring or debating through personal research.

When Manpreet narrated her identity, she touched on the notion of being 'lucky' and 'hard work', alongside her academic and independent qualities:

Manpreet: If I were to describe myself I see someone who has confidence but not always...I see a hardworking girl. I don't think there's many people out in the world - you know-who work so hard as me and I really do work very hard

every day... I also see myself as someone who does have outside interests other than just education and grades. Because a lot of people will say – you don't have any social life do you 'cos you're always working – that's why you get your good grades and stuff - but I'm like, no! I do have a life too - I see myself as you know - as having lots of outside interests and I really see myself as lucky too.

Geeta: Why do you think you're lucky?

Manpreet: Umm... – I don't know – I have a good family and I have a good bunch of friends – I know I've had lots of good opportunities and amazing experiences so far. I'm fortunate as well [she listed several areas that she attributed to being 'lucky' - i.e.: being in a good school, having good teachers, a supportive family, like-minded, hard-working and intelligent friends].

Manpreet perceived her 'lucky' elements (alongside hardwork) as contributing to her 'successful' identity, until she did not secure a place at the university of her choice - her first sense of failure when she started to question the notion of 'luck' and hard work. Similarly, Fauzia questioned luck and notions of meritocracy when she did not achieve the required grades, her scholarship award, or Headgirl role, as did Anjula when she did not secure a medical place or Headgirl role. Manpreet's self-description of herself as someone who is 'fun', 'lively', 'hard-working', 'intelligent', 'independent', 'lucky' and so forth, was further influenced by her personality to 'work really hard to succeed' (she talked about being a 'grafter' and the hard work ethic modelled by the elders in her family), as well as knowing what she wanted in life:

...I think I am more independent now. I've just learned recently how to make fresh mashed potatoes so yeah – I can feed myself [she laughed at this point]...I'm less reliant on my parents and also I think I'm more mature – I can make decisions for myself and umm... I take on the consequences of those decisions and you know, I'm able to you know, kind of shape my own future and know how I want to develop my identity, rather than having just to follow or like be told how to be. I'm able to just do what I want to do – I think I have a bit more freedom now but I think that comes with getting older.

Manpreet was very mature and reflective in how she narrated her identity experiences and future plans, presenting the sketch below to exemplify her aspirational future.

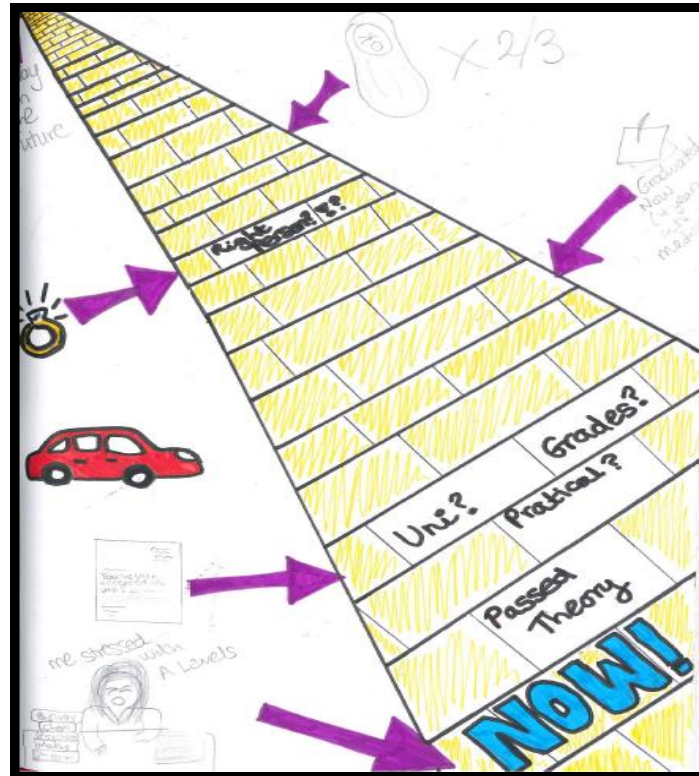


Figure 41: Manpreet's aspirational future

Her future identity included: passing her driving test and buying a nice car (like her 'very successful cousin'); going to university and achieving a first class honours degree from a good university; securing a good career job with good money; meeting the 'right' person who would be an equal partner; getting married, and having 2 or 3 children. In this way, she narrated a sense of 'wanting it all' but through hard work.

Fauzia liked to use visual images to talk about her cultural identity, experiences and aspirations (see ladder in cultural configurations section). I share two more of her journal extracts below to illustrate how she discussed her identity through the analogies of a rope and flower.

With the rope she said: 'the strands represent different parts of my identity':

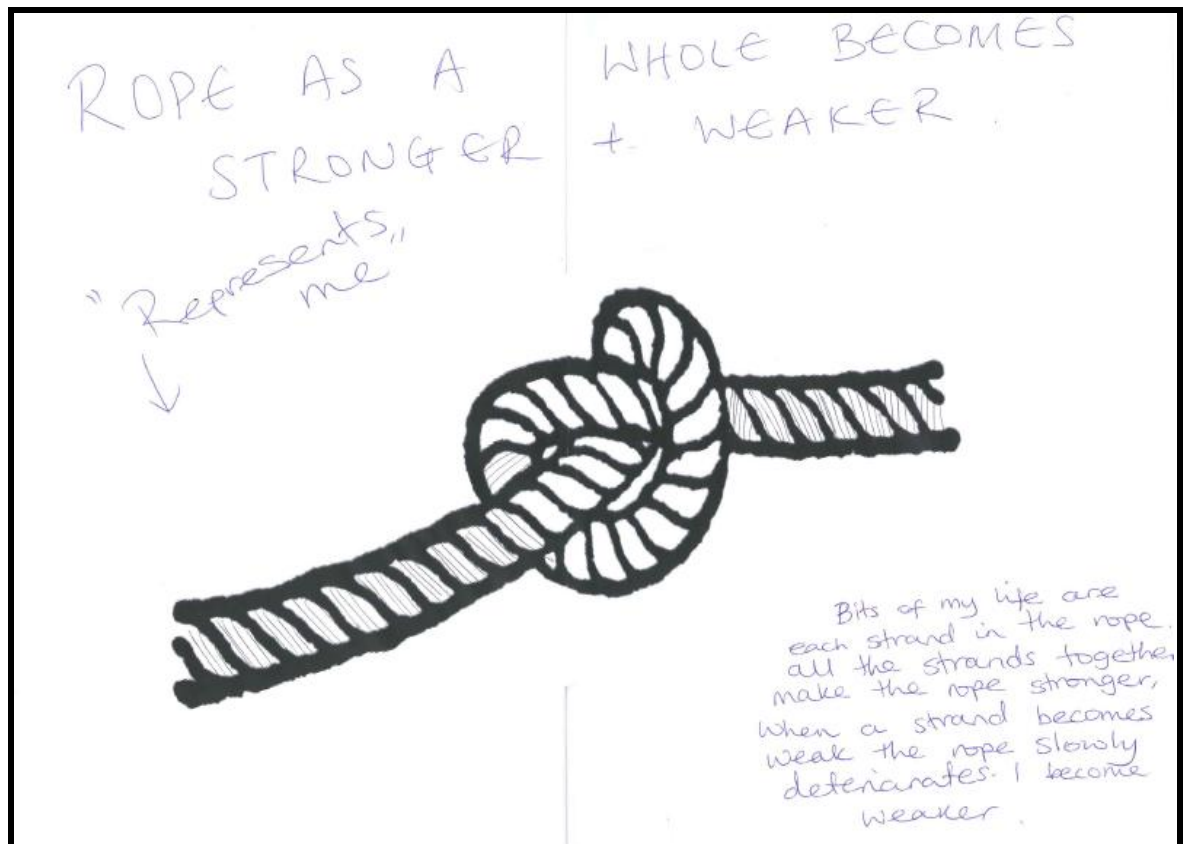


Figure 42: Fauzia's rope identity analogy

She talked about feeling 'stronger' in her identity when all the strands were securely 'tied in place' and 'working together in harmony'. I asked her to share whether she saw herself as a whole person or the separate strands, and she responded:

...I would say bits of a person at this stage in my life, maybe with bits still missing that are still growing into development - like the strands to be made in the future. So I wouldn't say I'm a complete person in anyway at all because I'm sure as time goes on different things will change and new strands will come up... I'm not a whole person yet and can't be until I've lived a bit longer and experienced more of life.

As acknowledged by other girls, the importance of life experience (and challenges) was articulated as being important to 'real' identity development. In the flower analogy below, Fauzia discussed how health, education, family, friends, and career, all required careful nurturing for her (the flower) to bloom and grow.

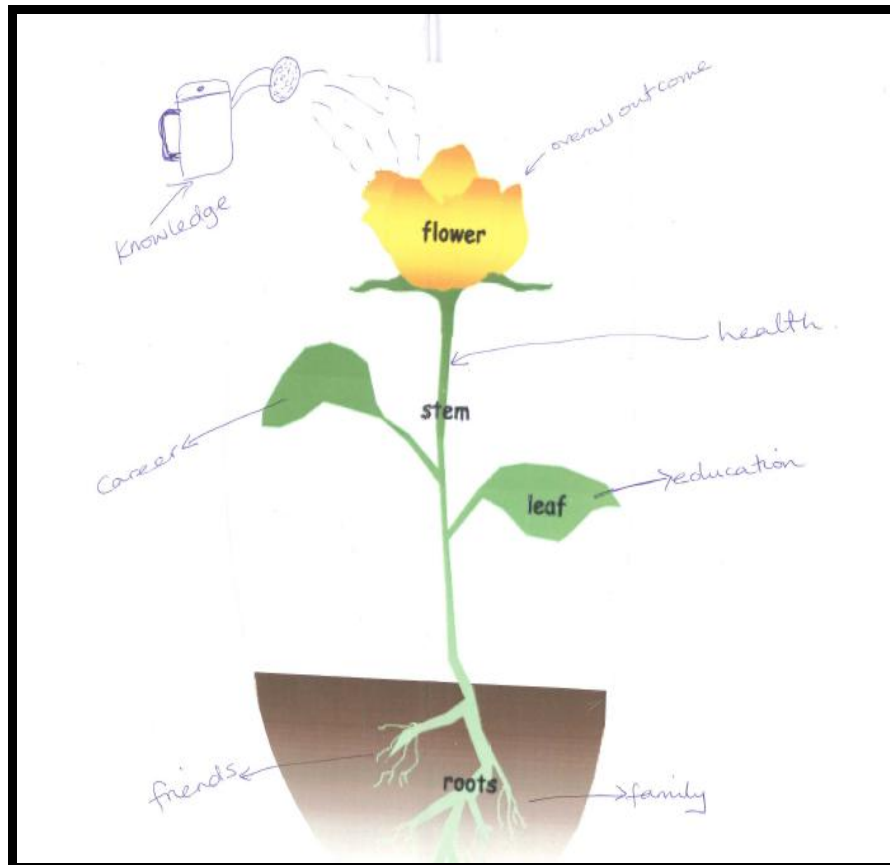


Figure 43: Fauzia's flower identity analogy

Fauzia's analogy made me think of Gladwell's (2008) example of the strong acorn tree that flourishes in the right conditions. Fauzia narrated her 'stronger' identity within the school space, where she felt more confident and had a voice, and also within the context of her law internship. At school, she was someone with status, and teachers and friends respected her: 'At school I'm someone who leads people and

everyone listens to me'. In contrast, her home identity was narrated very differently:

I don't really give any opinions at home...I just get told what to do, I just do it, just do it and have no say in it.

Fauzia therefore discussed her identities across school, home and work in very different ways, depending on the roles she played and the status they carried. She managed the different expectations very well on the surface, but again like Alka, who also carried heavy home responsibilities, Fauzia gradually revealed some of the emotional affects of the expectations and structures across spaces. She dressed 'modestly' in line with her Islamic beliefs (she wore the hijab as did Maheera and Sara). She personalised the hijab, unlike Maheera and Sara, as she enjoyed fashion and wearing bright colours and accessories, where she 'pushed the boundaries' and added high heels. She talked about others' stereotypes of girls like her who wore the hijab - i.e. they were perceived as being less confident and passive:

...just because I've got my hair covered it doesn't mean that I'm going to sit quietly and take what you're going to say to me. If you're going to say something wrong, I'm going to question you about it - I'm not going to sit there and take it all. So I think when people see me out and about I'm quite - I do kind of accessorise a bit as you can see. I do take it a bit far like I like dressing-up and showing that I can afford things. I can look good and just because I wear a headscarf it doesn't mean that I'm going to be really passive - I can stand up so yeah! I'm probably different to what they'd expect when they get to know me.

Wearing the headscarf was not a 'choice' for Fauzia (it was described as a 'choice' for the other three Muslim girls in the sample) but she talked about being 'used to it now'. She took ownership of it through her experimentation through fashion. Fauzia made an interesting point regarding her identity performance when wearing/ not wearing the headscarf across spaces:

...it's kind of funny because people think you're wearing a headscarf and you're all covered up therefore you're going to be a quiet girl - it's more like the opposite for me - I'm loud and confident at school but at home I don't wear the headscarf because I'm in the house but I'm quiet. The headscarf doesn't make you quiet, it's the people and culture that do - the headscarf has nothing to do with it.

As stated in the culture section of the findings, Narinder was the only girl with parents from two religious backgrounds of Hindu-Gujarati (mother) and Sikh (father). She did not describe herself as having a strong religious identity, other than going to the Gurdwara to please her parents and grandparents. Her identity was narrated as being more aligned with the Sikh ways of her father's family, as they played a more prominent role in her upbringing. The different status positions of her parents, played a key role, as her mother had assimilated into the father's family after marriage, and disregarded her own heritage to 'fit in' with him, which she disagreed with. As she had seen and heard the stories of her parents' sacrifices in relation to her father's strong work ethic and mother's sacrifice for the good of the extended family, she recognised the high importance of education and having a strong career (aspiration to become a dentist). Her identity was very much configured within the boundaries and expectations of parents (like Alka and Fauzia for example), and she was willing to accept this. Examples of acceptance included: marrying within the Sikh religion (and Jat caste), not having a relationship until married, and becoming a dentist in line with parents' wishes.

Role models: the sweetshop 'pick n' mix approach

In relation to identity configuration and investment, role models were discussed in varying ways, where some girls included themselves as role models for others. For example, Arti's interview discussions illustrated role model qualities that she admired in the following people:

- members of her family (grandfather, parents, and cousins)
- celebrities like Lady Gaga who spoke out for what they believed in, particularly in politics (Maheera also mentioned Lady Gaga)
- Gandhi as an important historical figure and what he stood for in India (Anjula also mentioned Gandhi)
- Hilary Clinton (used in her head girl speech to inspire other pupils, as presented earlier)
- Headteacher at school (she shadowed her for a whole day).

In relation to her grandfather, Arti admired his qualities of: 'respect, gratitude, charity work' and his ability to 'always emerge from difficult situations with a smile'. Her father was described as a 'great friend and man' and 'a bundle of joy' - she felt that she could tell him anything and he was therefore 'more than a dad' to her. Her 'cool' mum is described in the journal extract below:

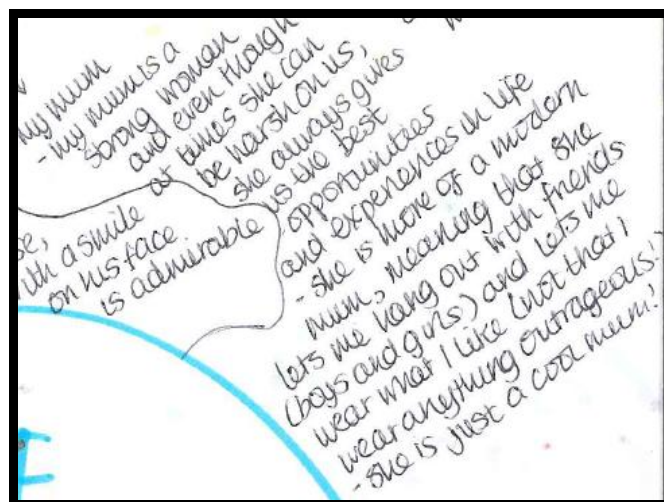


Figure 44: Arti's description of her Mum

Arti admired her female cousin for 'doing what she likes' and 'her independent qualities at the age of thirty' (she lived alone in her own flat and had a successful career). She admired Lady Gaga for 'teaching

others to be themselves' (she referred to herself as 'unique'), her '110% investment in everything', her 'hard work' ethic, and her charity work for transgender children:

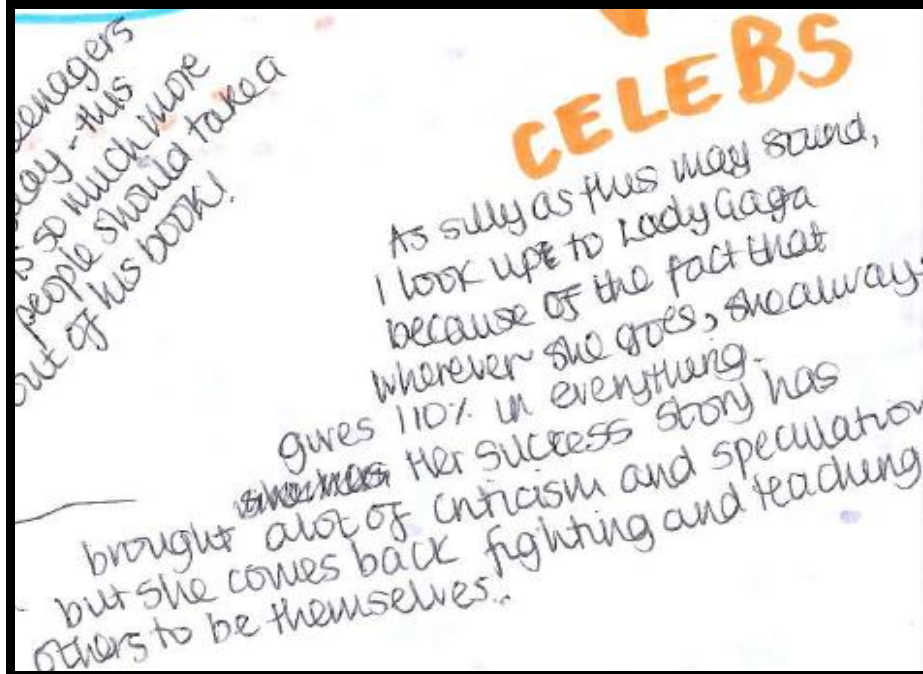


Figure 45: Lady Gaga as a role model

She talked about Mahatma Gandhi, his charity work and non-violence philosophy that she admired:

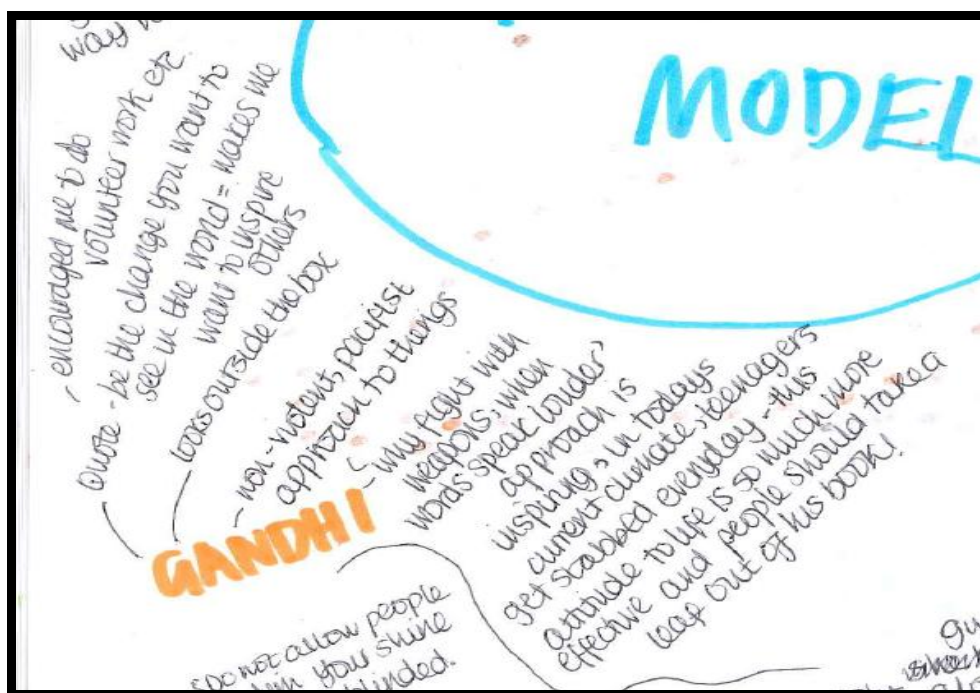


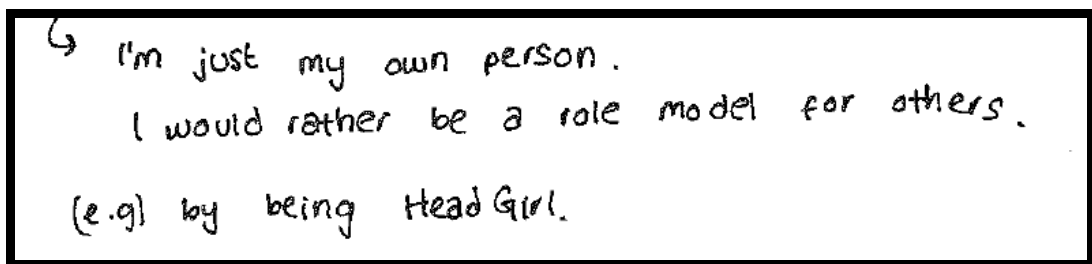
Figure 46: Gandhi as a role model

Arti talked about her Headteacher as a role model, particularly after shadowing her for a whole day, where she developed an admiration for her: "I really admire how she juggles it all". Arti embodied some of the qualities of her role models, and as a researcher, I observed how she did so through her values and investments across roles. As Headgirl, she saw herself as a role model to other pupils in the school, as she wanted to 'leave a legacy' and 'make a mark in the school'. Her speeches were carefully written with powerful messages (as were Sara's), as if they were politicians in the making.

Anjula also talked about Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi as role models, for similar reasons to Arti. She talked about Indira Gandhi being a strong role model to Indian women, and her power to lead such a huge nation. As discussed previously, Anjula talked passionately about her grandmother's strength of character because of her sacrifice and dedication to her daughters' education at a time when women's education

was not heavily invested in Sri-Lanka (her mother was raised and educated in Sri-Lanka, and a qualified solicitor before marriage).

Sara, like Arti, narrated a sense of wanting to be her own person. She discussed her Headgirl role as being a role model within the school community, where other girls came to her for advice and guidance. She saw this as a privilege and part of her Headgirl duty (and Islamic duty) to help others:



I'm just my own person.
I would rather be a role model for others.
(e.g) by being Head Girl.

Figure 47: Sara's wish to help others

Her parents were narrated with a God-like status and seen as the absolute role models in her life. She admired their hard work ethic, strong values and kindness. Her mother went to work, cooked, cleaned, brought her and her brother up with good values, and also 'protected' her from the housework during exams. Likewise, Alka spoke similarly of her parents, but she still carried a heavy load at home when revising for exams. Most of the girls respected their parents, and respect was narrated in relation to the high values of their parents. Where their values were not respected (as in Maheera's and Fauzia's case), they were developing strength through education so that their futures would look different.

Sara mentioned Dr Zakir Naik:

(<http://www.youtube.com/user/Drzakirchannel>) as a Muslim role model, with a celebrity like status. She admired his memory skills for reciting verses of the Quran, his medical research skills, and his commendable

charitable work. She wanted to develop her memory skills to a high level to enable her to become more successful in remembering facts for future medical exams.

Ravi talked of not having any role models as she did not see any in her family. She talked of how her parents and grandparents did not want her to 'do the same as they had done' and their desire for her to achieve great things. Her mother did not go to university 'for the sake of her family' and as a result, she 'pushed education' even more for her, and was keen for her to become a doctor. She talked about other members of the extended family 'always putting other people first' as a sacrifice, and although she admired this quality, she questioned the 'sense of it' in relation to how her parents lost out on fulfilling their own aspirations.

Sunita identified role model qualities in two key people - her granddad (who was no longer alive) and older brother. Her grandfather was a 'happy-go-lucky' and a 'fun' person who 'made the most of every opportunity in life' and worked very hard. Her brother had similar qualities and she would always seek his advice in any important decisions – she saw her brother as 'experienced and wise'. The idea of 'balance' came across in Sunita's interviews, and she talked of how her brother and grandfather were both successful in their lives through hard work, but they also managed to have fun and be happy people. Sunita's relationship with her older brother was discussed in detail, and she confided in him more than her parents. She saw him as a guide who taught her about the 'rights and wrongs of life to be a better person' and to 'not be the same as any other 17/18 year old girl'.

Sunita also talked about how the values she had been raised with through her family, were used by her to support 'friends in trouble' at school. For example, one of her girlfriends was experiencing personal and relationship problems and she described how she 'influenced her to be a better person' (as her brother had done with her). She talked of how

she had been a role-model to other 'girls in trouble' in her school (particularly in relation to not 'over-stepping the line' and 'getting into trouble').

Preeti discussed her parents as role models because of their hard work ethic and sacrifices to help their children succeed. Her two older siblings were both studying medicine and they were role models of academic excellence in the family. Like Fauzia, she did not feel as if there were any Asian female engineers as role models for her. During her final university interview, I introduced her to a female, academic colleague in Physics.

Alka was the eldest child, and she would be the first in her family to go to university. She described herself as a role model for her younger siblings. She did not talk of other role models in her life. Alka behaved in a paternal way towards her siblings and took her older sibling role very seriously. Although she spoke very highly of her parents in a respectful manner, her narratives did not position them as role models, but more of a respectful position in her life.

Manpreet discussed role models through the analogy of the 'pick and mix' approach in the sweet shop, selecting 'bits from different people' that she admired:

I don't think there's like one certain type of role model as one complete person. I think you can take certain aspects of people and create a new role model out of them.

Manpreet referred to a wide range of people as having role model qualities that she admired: parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family members, friends, teachers and other school-related professionals, famous people, historical icons, and other successful people. She emphasised that she only admired 'those that work really hard for what they have'. Like Fauzia (see later), she included me as one of her role models, because I was doing a PhD, alongside a family and full-time job

- i.e.: I was 'juggling it all'. She knew that I did my BA with young children as a mature student and she admired how I studied after having children. Her mother was admired for the 'high values' that she raised her with. She was one of the youngest in her extended family and she looked up to successful cousins:

One cousin- he's got a nice fancy car and stuff and he's having a really good life and I'm like - I want to be like that when I'm older, and it's not just because he's a guy - I want to aspire to be like that. I take aspects of different people's lives and say - yeah that bit would be pretty cool and that bit would - I wouldn't mind doing something like that. So it's like a pick an' mix approach thing. A pick an' mix thing yeah. I don't think there is one whole role model for me as I mix them up.

Fauzia talked of 'needing' a role model in her life as she lacked a strong female. She did not want to be anything like her mum and described a very specific type of role model who was:

- successful in her career as a barrister
- married with children
- faced similar cultural challenges to her
- was Bengali Muslim and working-class like her family.

The above presented a benchmark for her to compare herself so that it was a level playing field. In her reflective journal, Fauzia referred to three people who were role models in her life at that particular time in her life: the head of sixth form (the research facilitator in her school); her personal tutor, and like Manpreet, me as the researcher for reasons highlighted above. The extract below illustrates this:

Okay, I'll start with you. I just thought you were quite - you're Asian and I've never really met an Asian woman get to the stage that you're at now. I mean you're smart and doing a PhD - I thought that was just 'wow' when I first met you and really inspiring when you first came to our school - I want to do a PhD as well one day. Yeah and umm... so I

thought I'd put you up there [a photo of me was inserted on the journal page] because I thought umm... when you came and you spoke to us on the first day for a discussion, I was like wow - I mean if she can do it with a family then I can do it ...and you've got 2 daughters and after that you still - it's almost like you've got this thirst and passion for knowledge, but you're kind with it too - you carried on studying after marriage and children - you still wanted to work and you still wanted to continue doing well in your life. So I was really inspired by you - I thought yeah - I want to do that too, I want to be like her one day, I want to do a PhD too.

Fauzia talked of how many Bengali girls like her probably didn't follow their aspirations and dreams through for cultural reasons, and for meeting the expectations of family before themselves. She wanted to become a future role-model for Bengali girls like her, as illustrated below:

It would be really nice to be a woman who becomes a barrister, who works all the hours and has children, then at least someone like me one day will be sitting in the kitchen saying - Oh I know someone successful like that who made it. It would be nice to say that there was actually someone who made it who was like me... if one woman does it like me then more will get hope from us...more women like me hopefully will make it. It's like you, Asian women will get hope from you doing a PhD with a family.

Section and chapter summary

In the section above, I have presented the variety of ways in which these girls configured and invested in dimensions of their identity across spaces. They all narrated a strong work ethic as important to a successful identity, showing respect for family values in most cases. There were spaces for all the girls to perform their agency within the intersecting structures of their lives, and the girls 'chose' their agency across spaces according to their confidence, willingness to invest for change and take 'risks'.

In this chapter, I have presented some detailed narrative extracts and summaries in relation to how these girls configured and invested in 'culture' and the highly weighted influence of education in their lives. I summarise below the key ideas that emerged in relation to how these girls:

- narrated themselves through the 'I' using 'powerful phrases
- positioned themselves as 'good' and 'respectable' in relation to other girls and groups (process of identification, difference, similarity and othering)
- discussed their Facebook identities in relation to performances of authenticity and 'fakeness'
- discussed leadership identities across school and home
- invested in religious identities (i.e.: Sara invested heavily)
- invested in their aspirational career identities (i.e.: medicine, law)
- 'made their own way' (drawing on psychological capital)
- discussed stress and challenges in their lives as well as coping strategies
- took on identities of a more global nature
- synthesised aspects of the 'traditional' and 'modern' (pick n' mix approach)
- discussed role model qualities of others, and in cases narrated themselves as role models (values of hard work, supergirl, 'juggling' and sacrifice, emerged strongly).

The girls' moral, ethical, cultural and religious values, informed how they performed, configured, and invested in their cultural identities to different degrees across spaces. Chapter Five will discuss the diversity of narratives presented in this chapter.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction and context

In this chapter, I discuss my interpretation of the girls' narratives presented in Chapter Four, and contextualise these within the literature. First, I return to the research question:

How can black feminist theory illuminate an understanding of the cultural identities of twelve, academically 'successful', British South-Asian girls, as told through their narratives?

The three aims set out to explore and understand:

1. The girls' configurations and investments in 'culture'
2. The girls' configurations and investments in their cultural identities
3. How 'girlhood' was narrated by these girls.

As discussed in previous chapters, the research question was planned in an open-ended manner so that the girls' narratives had space to 'breathe' - they were 'too lively and too wild to be tied up' (Frank, 2010:1). In Chapter Four, I avoided injecting a personal commentary or literature, as I wanted to shine the light on the girls' voices, within the known challenges of re-presenting narratives (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012). The girls' narratives revealed various ways in which they configured, 'wore', invested in, and consumed dimensions of 'culture' (themes illustrated across Profile Charts 1 and 2) and ways in which they configured and invested in their cultural identities (Profile Chart 3). As a result of my analysis, I developed a broader picture of what it means to be an academically 'successful', British, South-Asian girl from their standpoint (discussed under Aim 3). I have already explained the 'weighted continuum' concept in Chapter Three and the Profile Charts in Chapter Four. I further illustrate the 'weighted' and investment concept through the simple graph below, where I have located four girls as examples: Alka, Preeti, Maya and Arti.

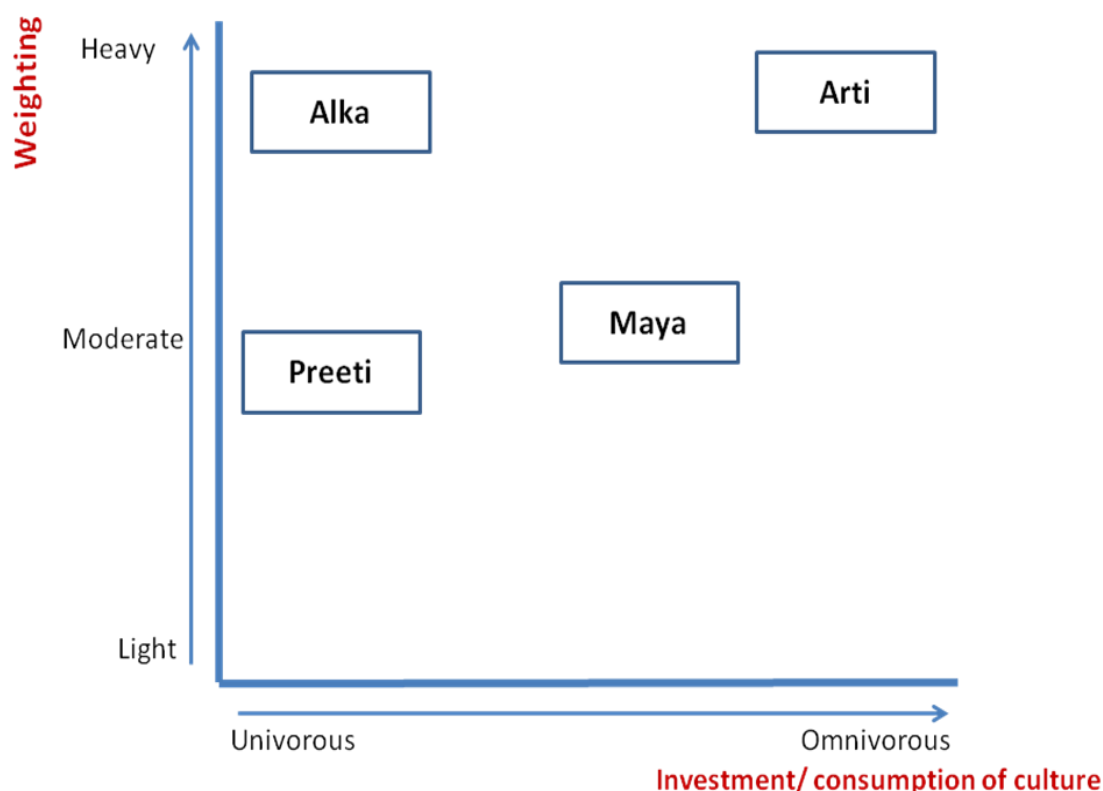


Figure 48: Graph to illustrate how the girls 'wear' and invest/ consume dimensions of 'culture' across their lives

So Arti for example, invested in/consumed dimensions of 'culture' in omnivorous ways (Bauman, 2011) and overall, most themes were heavily 'weighted'. It is by no means an exact science, but it provides valuable language with which to discuss the girls' configurations of 'culture'.

Whilst analysing the girls' narratives (an ongoing process throughout the study), I felt like the conductor of a mini-choir, listening to their individual voices (which were layered with the voices of others that they interacted with). At first, I tried to create some sort of harmony amidst the 'noise' and chaos in my head, which I lived with throughout the study in an embodied way (Ludhra, 2012). This was part of the process of understanding each

girl's narratives in psycho-social ways (Lucey, Melody, and Walkerdine, 2006; Hey, 2010). I could not 'force' harmony on their narratives, as this was not how their stories were shared, or heard by me.

As a critically reflexive and interpretative researcher, how I discuss the girls' narratives will inevitably be influenced by the experiences and emotions that emerged during the fieldwork (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Hollway, 2012). These reflective dimensions will be followed-up in Chapter Six.

Aim 1: Use black feminist theory to illuminate the girls'

configurations and investments in 'culture'

The concept of 'culture' was configured in various ways and as a reminder, I present the themes from Profile Chart 1 below:

Table 6: Profile Chart 1: Cultural configuration themes

	Culture narrated in relation to...
1	The importance of education (Profile Chart 2 breaks education down further)
2	Gender/ equality issues
3	The importance of family in their lives
4	Awareness of stereotypes and discourses of SA girls
5	The importance of languages (inc. mothertongue)
6	The importance of historical influences in their lives
7	Religion
8	Experiences for self-fulfilment/ personal interest
9	Traditions and practices

The importance of education was discussed heavily by all girls. For some - e.g.: Preeti - education took over most of their lives. I acknowledge that with another sample, for example girls who are less academically 'successful', the picture may have looked different (see Chapter Six limitations on sample). However, this study focuses on the particular, which can help researchers to illuminate the general (Evans, 1999).

As education was so heavily weighted and invested in, I had to explore the girls' narratives by digging deep, beneath and beyond academic grades, to analyse how they invested in, and configured education within its broader aims of life-long learning. This included a more global view of education (Burns, 2009), that included learning through travel, politics, and new technologies (Seidler, 2010). The girls all recognised the need to speak different languages, where some went further (Sara, Anjula and Maheera for example) to stress the importance of developing language skills as global citizens (discussed by Kehily and Nayak, 2009; Reiss and White, 2013; 2014). I also explored how the girls' narratives touched on the 'power' of education within intersecting meanings of gender, religion, class, and so forth (hooks, 1989; Mayo, 2014). I present Profile Chart 2 themes below as reminder:

Table 7: Profile Chart 2: Educational 'Success' themes

	Education and learning characteristics
1	Self-motivated learner- education means a lot
2	Critical thinker and questions (e.g. politics, inequalities)
3	High academic achiever - examination grades
4	School leadership role/s (great for the CV)
5	Communication skills
6	High quality work experience/ part-time work
7	Avid reader across genres
8	Home leadership role/s (not necessarily recognised, or known about in school)

I direct the reader back to the literature review, where I presented a set of key principles as a suggested model for understanding 'culture' and 'cultural identities' - I summarise these below as a reminder:

Table 8: Principles for understanding 'culture' and 'cultural identity'

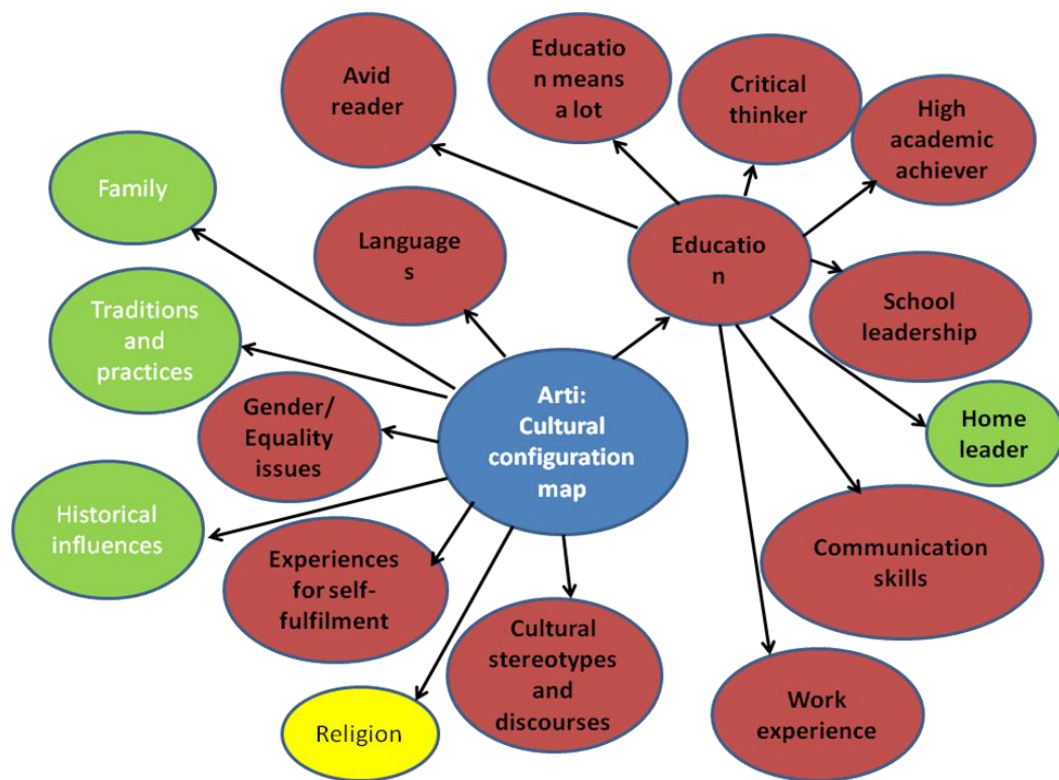
	Draws on the principles of...
1	Black feminist theory
2	'Culture' does not belong to the elite - 'univerorous' and 'omnivorous' concepts
3	Multiple and intersecting configurations of 'culture'
4	Culture as a psycho-social process
5	Culture is configured, 'worn', and invested in heavy, light or other ways

The plurality of meanings embedded within 'culture' (I use the phrase 'configurations of culture' to illustrate the multi-dimensional nature of it), led me towards discussing 'culture' in its plural form using 'configurations of culture' or 'cultures' (discussed by Williams, 1976). This sample of girls narrated 'culture' through relational meanings - i.e.: culture in relation to religion, gender, or education for example (Eliot, 1948; Collins, 2000). This signalled how they understood its complexity, beyond a narrow, one-dimensional view (Hall, 2013). A black feminist approach helped me to illuminate the complex dimensions of 'culture' through relational and intersectional configurations beyond gender. Furthermore, it encouraged me to pose questions of, the psychological dimensions and affects of 'culture', some of which are embodied by women (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Mirza, 2013)

As discussed in Chapter Three and highlighted in the graph above, I have used the concept of a 'weighted continuum' to narrate how the girls configure, 'wear' and invest in dimensions of 'culture' (Phillips, 2010) and perform their agency within the cultural influences that structure their lives (Giddens, 1991; Archer, 2007). Like Phillips (ibid), my belief is that all girls have agency, however 'lightly' it is performed or regulated, within the 'choices' available to them (echoed by Afshar, 2008).

I draw on Bauman's (2011) coined concept of the 'omnivorous' consumption of 'culture' by the elite class, where 'no works of culture are alien to them' (p.2). However, I apply this concept to the twelve girls in this study, of largely working-class and lower middle-class background, where some did demonstrate traits of being 'omnivorous', and what Hannerz (1990) refers to as 'cosmopolitan' - where young people are open-minded and invest in a range of cultures. Burns (2009) refers to this girls cosmopolitan approaches, 'harnessing their personal capital' and drawing on this knowledge to develop their 'imagined socially and economic successful futures' (p.52). This connects to what Bradford and Hey (2007) call 'psychological capital', and Brah (1996), as a woman 'psychologically investing' in her identity. I listened to how these girls invested psychologically in 'culture' to varying gradations, where some were more positive than others (Alka was more positive and embracing of 'culture' and religion than Fauzia for example, and also less critical).

The three Profile Charts illustrate the 'weighting' of themes using the H (heavy), M (moderate) and L (light) gradation (Maya's map was presented in Chapter Two as an example - see Figure 1). I present two more opposing visual configurations of 'culture', which demonstrate how dimensions are 'weighted' and 'worn' quite differently across the girls (Buckley and Waring, 2013, promote the use of visual diagrams to illustrate meanings in data, and I have found this process valuable). I have chosen Arti (Headgirl from Valley High Academy) and Sunita (from Park Rise Grammar School) to illustrate these contrasting configurations.



Key:

Red	Heavy weighting
Green	Moderate weighting
Yellow	Light weighting

Figure 49: Arti: Cultural configuration map

In Arti's map, 'culture' is 'worn' lightly in relation to religion, whilst most areas are painted red, illustrating the 'heavy' weighting and investment in educationally-related themes, except in the area of home leadership skills, which sits in contrast to girls like Maheera, Alka and Fauzia, who invested heavily in home leadership. Arti's 'heavy weighting' across dimensions of 'culture' played out in her 'omnivorous' consumption of 'culture' through her leadership roles, artistic activities, Business Enterprise Schemes, work experience, and so forth. In this way, she adopted what Burns (2009) refers to as a 'cosmopolitan' approach. The role of family, 'traditional' cultural practices and historical influences, were

more moderately weighted, as Arti narrated the 'independent' and 'unique' aspects of her identity in highly agentic ways, where she discussed her critical views on gender, and as having greater 'choices' than most girls that she knew. However, her extended family's cultural views differed to her immediate family, and this is where black feminism and intersectionality are helpful, even if at a distance. Her extended family conveyed more 'traditional' views in relation to marriage, where differences in religion and ethnicity mattered - the BMW rule (No Black, Muslim or White guy - see Figure 10). In contrast to Arti, Sunita's configuration below looks very different:

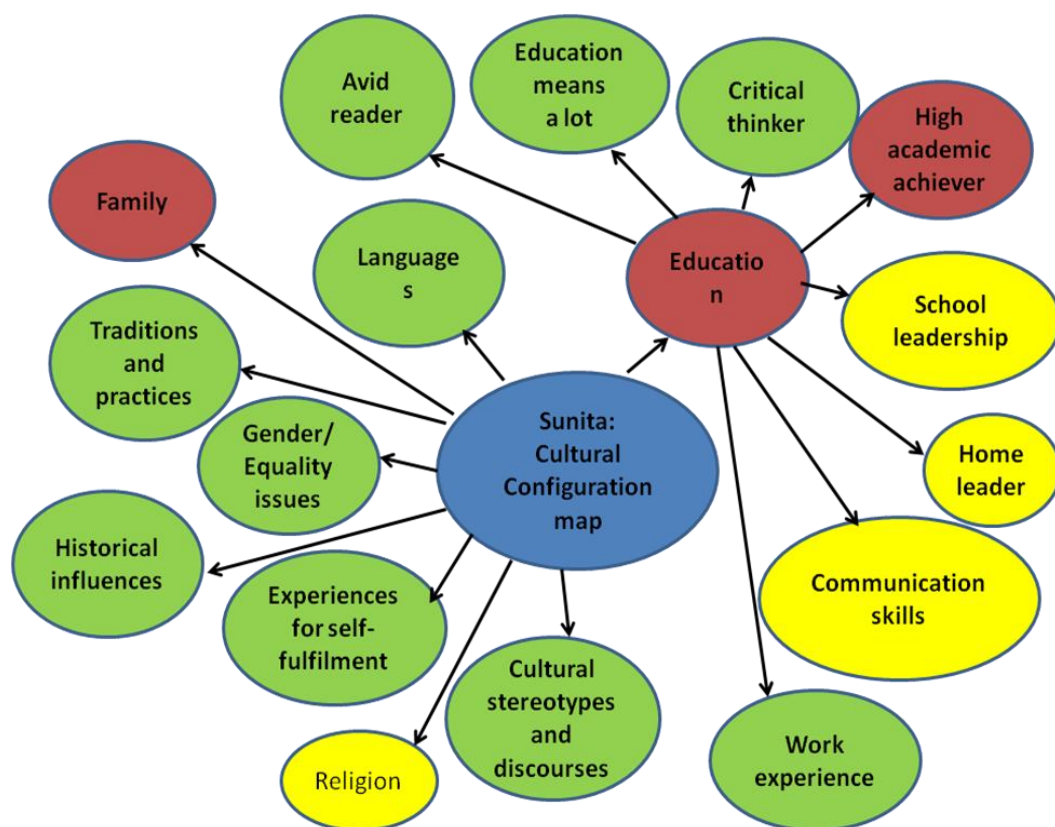


Figure 50: Sunita: Cultural configuration map

Sunita's map has far less red than Arti's, and her narratives revealed the 'heavily' weighted role of family (also discussed very positively). For Sunita, 'culture' in relation to education was heavily aligned with

achieving high grades. Based on the narratives shared, Sunita did not invest in developing the leadership dimensions of home or school life through extra-curricular investments. In this way, her investment/ 'consumption' of 'culture' was far more 'univorous' compared to Arti. Above, I have presented two contrasting girls' pictures (plus Maya's in Chapter Two), and similarly, each girl's narrative and data generated their particular configuration of 'culture' with different weightings and psychological investments (Brah, 1996).

The above diagrams illustrate what Bauman (2011) refers to as 'liquid meanings of culture' (p.12). The girls' narratives of 'culture' were not fixed, but configured in multi-dimensional ways that shifted through experiences over time (Brah, 2007). Some girls adopted a 'pick & mix approach' (Manpreet's phrase for role models), cherry-picking dimensions of 'culture' within their interest range, 'choices', resources and 'freedom'. The girls had to find or create spaces within the intersecting structures of their lives, if they wanted to make changes, and create a configuration of 'culture' that aligned with personal and family values and beliefs. Change involved discussion, debate and some degree of 'risk', as well as a psychological willingness/desire to challenge existing structures - something that Maheera did very well. In this way, the girls to varying degrees, synthesised dimensions of old and new 'cultures' (Anwar, 1998) in hybridised ways (Bhabha, 1990; Walters and Auton-Cuff, 2009). Girls like Arti, Maya and Manpreet found this quite exciting, and a necessary skill required to prepare them for diverse interactions in later life (Chanda-Gool, 2006).

Maheera was a prime example of a girl with 'cosmopolitan' cultural interests in globalised ways (Kehily and Nayak, 2009 - see Figures 12-18), compared to, for example, girls like Preeti or Alka who discussed narrower investments or interests outside of education. Maheera performed her agency heavily, even within the limited and regulated spaces of 'culture' at home (Phillips, 2010 - see Figure 51). This was very

different to how Fauzia performed her agency at home (see transcript extract in Appendix 1). Maheera drew on her 'psychological capital' (Bradford and Hey, 2007) in highly strategic ways, whilst living in a patriarchal family. At home, she drew 'power' from her 'genius child' status, and this facilitated a negotiating position with her father, so that she could invest in cultural experiences outside of the home and school. I developed an understanding of Maheera as a risk-taker, but unlike Fauzia, 'risk' was taken through her already powerful status as a 'genius' and aspiring doctor. The becoming doctor position was highly valued by her father (Anwar, 1998; Archer, 2012), even though she was not supported or encouraged in the conventional way.

Like Maheera, Fauzia and Alka also lived in patriarchal families, where culture was 'worn' heavily and 'traditionally' in the home space. An 'outsider' gazing in on their lives may not perceive them as having agency within their cultures (Archer, 1996; Ahmad, 2003 challenge this view), but rather, see them as girls passively embodying the cultural values and norms of their families. Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2009) argue that girls like Fauzia and Alka still have agency, even if they enact and embody cultural norms. For these girls, family 'culture' and values became hegemonically embedded and normalised as part of their daily routines and lives (Gramsci, 1991; Rose, 1999; Shain, 2003), where they may not explicitly express disapproval, but embody cultural values through compliance and respect, in line with their parents' wishes. This does not mean that they lack 'power', but as Foucault (2000) suggests, power operates in all directions. For example, Fauzia used small micrologies of power (Plummer, 2010) in the available spaces, to secure freedom to participate in her summer internship, and she found ways of participating in the scholarship award without her family or school knowing (she only informed me). In this way, the patriarchal family did not wholly govern her life like a robot (Foucault, 1998; Rose, 1999) and her desire to 'succeed' as an individual girl, also carried weight.

Following this theme, Alka discussed the 'pleasure' and 'happiness' that she felt from helping/ caring for her family, as it aligned with her Islamic values. Along with other girls, she discussed how 'culture' kept her 'on track' and stopped her from 'straying' (she did not want more 'freedom' - discussed in Basit, 1997). For some girls, 'culture' operated like a surveillant 'Big Brother eye' (as in Foucault's, 2000, Bentham's Panopticon analogy), where rules and boundaries were not to be crossed for fear of losing respect and family honour (Ghuman, 1994). As illustrated in Chapter Four, these girls narrated a perspective of performing 'culture' with everything in moderation, and 'not crossing the line'. They largely narrated their parents as caring for their welfare, compared to 'Other' parents (i.e.: white girls' parents) who let their daughters behave more 'freely'. 'Othering' is discussed within black feminist theory and postcolonial discourses (Spivak, 1993; Said, 2003), but from a European superiority perspective.

These girls were very aware of their own cultural stereotypes (through articulating them to me and their friends) and those of their families. 'Othering' was narrated across other South-Asian religious groups (i.e.: a Hindu or Sikh girl 'othering' Muslim girls because they were different in relation to having less freedom, stricter parents, and more religious and faith bound). These girls positioned themselves as having higher cultural values to white girls and their families, which sits differently to Sarup's (1996) notion of European superiority. As in the historical overview literature presented in Chapter One, they largely narrated themselves as having higher moral values (Brown and Talbot, 2006), whilst acknowledging white privilege in areas such as fair skin and blue eyes, that meant the white girls were not 'raced' like they were (Lander, 2014). Most girls did not narrate 'race' in relation to 'culture' but nuances in their narratives connected 'race' to the histories of their parents in particular, and their struggles in cases. Manpreet discussed how her father pushed the mantra of hard work (Gladwell, 2008; Mendick and Francis, 2012), telling her that she would have to work harder to be successful than her

white counterparts at university and in her career. These were values rooted in early migration experiences of struggle (Watson, 1977; and Anwar, 1979; Brah, 1993).

It is very difficult to separate the concepts of 'culture' and 'identity', and as Brah (1996), Hall (1996) and Sarup (1996) discuss, the two have to be viewed in relation to each other. In the diagram below, I illustrate how I see the 'wrestling match' between cultural forces/influences (the social) acting on a girls' life in intersecting ways (these intersections will be configured differently for each girl). As stated earlier, my view is that each girl had agency but drew on her 'psychological capital' (Bradford and Hey, 2007) depending on her desire, motivation, personality and willingness to invest psychologically (Brah, 2006). I use Maheera's case below to illustrate this:

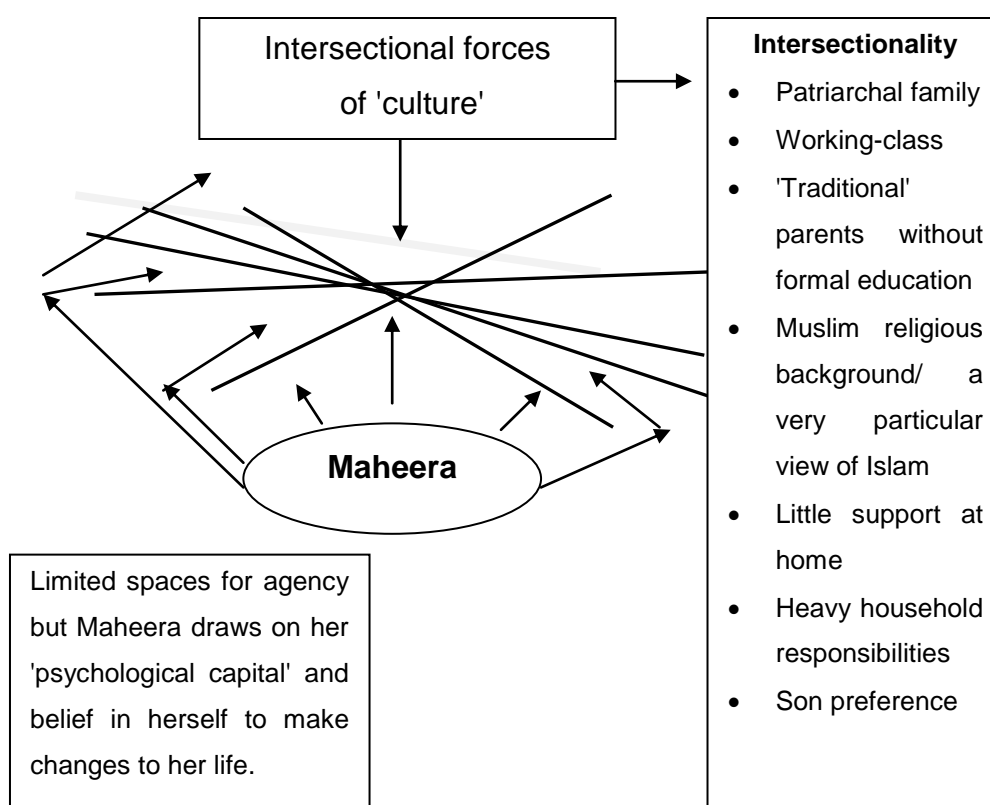


Figure 51: Maheera: intersectionality and agency map

In contrast to Maheera, Maya and Arti discussed having greater 'choices' compared to most girls. Maheera wanted to live her life by a set of cultural values that she believed in, and her critical and reflective personality meant that she would not passively follow the values of her parents, as she did not agree with them (as Eliot, 1948 discussed, culture is challenged and debated across generations, not simply passed on). The cultural intersectionality and agency diagram for another girl, may look very different for the following reasons:

- She may have fewer intersections operating across her life (Arti, Manpreet, Ravi and Maya, narrated 'lighter' intersections and more 'choices')
- There maybe bigger spaces to perform agency (the girls above had more space, but having the space does not necessarily mean that they will use it)
- She may choose not to draw on her 'psychological capital' (Mirza, 2013), as she decides to accept cultural norms and values to maintain a particular status quo in her life (as with Fauzia, Alka and Narinder in complying with family values in the homespace, but still finding small spaces for personal agency).

Girls like Maheera, and others, critically interrogated 'culture' (Phillips, 2010) and without realising it, debated and challenged its meaning across spaces (Williams, 1976). They used available spaces to synthesise meanings in new spaces - third spaces (Bhabha, 1995) that aligned with their values, as well as their parents to some degree (Walters and Auton-Cuff, 2009).

For some girls, spaces took on very different cultural meanings, mirroring the work of prominent researchers like Ghuman (1994) who discussed the contrasting elements of home and school in binary ways. For girls like Maheera, Fauzia and Alka, this binary distinction of contrasting cultures was most evident through their narratives of 'culture', compared to girls

like Arti, Maya and Manpreet, for whom the boundaries were more blurred and synthesised, where they more readily mixed elements of the old and new in creative ways (Anwar, 1998). The cultural dimensions of home and school were both narrated as restrictive by Maheera, and as a result of feeling restricted, she found spaces to be creative and follow her passion and dreams. For example, she meticulously planned a GAP year abroad so that she could explore new experiences and travel independently. She invested heavily and broadly (in 'omnivorous' ways) in varied learning experiences outside of the formal curriculum (Bibby, 2010) in order to feel fulfilled and consume a range of experiences that interested her (Reiss and White, 2014). No other girl demonstrated such high levels of interest (or agency) in such a cosmopolitan and globalised manner. Her motivation and interest in most areas was commendable.

My knowledge and interaction with the girls, revealed that their cultural configurations, as shown in profile charts 1 and 2, can only be explained in psycho-social ways (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2006; Hollway, 2012) as 'culture' was discussed and configured through social influences like family, religion, class and gender, but experienced, interpreted, debated and embodied, through psychological processes (Brah, 2007; 2012). As illustrated through Fauzia's discussion of 'culture': "...you always see it hanging around you and can almost feel it, smell it, but you don't always talk about it out loud or work it out". Gilligan's (2011) research on women's voices supports this view of how 'Culture appears in the unspoken' (p.15), not only through physical and visual representations.

In relation to Aim 1, the girls configured 'culture' at both a personal and collective level. The reflective spaces in the study, allowed them to modify how they discussed it over time, and clarify meanings. For example, at the end of the study, Arti's reflective summary revealed how the meaning of 'culture' had shifted for her, taking on a more individual meaning through the process of narrating, rather than the collective view

at society and community level that she started with (Mills, 1959 - see Appendix 5).

To pull together my discussion so far, the girls' narratives moved beyond media and binary interpretations of 'culture' depicted in cultural pathology frameworks (Alexander, 2000; Said, 2003), even though they used the words 'traditional' and 'modern' to illustrate points (discussed in Chapter One, Malik, 2012). Their narratives revealed a multi-dimensional nature of 'culture' that meant so much - as Preeti's extract of 'culture' stated: 'it's hard to pinpoint it really as it means so much' (Hall, 2013). The girls' narratives were layered with contradictory meanings of 'culture' that revealed how critically they were thinking about it, where some were more critical than others (Fauzia, Maheera and Anjula for example).

Women's critical engagements with religion and 'culture' have been discussed by South-Asian feminists who discuss their agency (rather than passivity) in submitting to religion through scholarly and critical forms (Ahmad, 2001; Bakhtiar, 2011; Hussain, 2012; Mirza, 2013) - as with Sara and Alka for example who whole-heartedly submitted to Islam, and narrated this as being a highly supportive framework in their life (Basit, 1997; Shain, 2003). In contrast, Maheera and Fauzia were searching for their versions of Islam - ones that were not outdated or misinterpreted to advantage men, but rather, a feminist version (although they did not use the word 'feminist', their narratives revealed feminist views - discussed by Ahmed, 2012). Like Maheera, Anjula was similarly critical of Hinduism and some of its rituals (Abbas, 2004; Bakhtiar, 2011).

All the girls questioned cultural stereotypes of South-Asian girls, some more so than others, where they did not align themselves as 'fitting' them, even if they lived in patriarchal families (e.g.: Maheera, Fauzia and Narinder). Most of them were critical of traditional customs, historical discourses relating to caste (Ghuman, 2011), inter-religious and ethnic marriage, discourses of fair skin being equated with beauty, overly

sexualised Bollywood actresses, boy preference (Purewal, 2010), religious and cultural ceremonies, and so forth. They were critical of those that equated with gendered inequalities or forms of discrimination, and in this way, their narratives of 'culture' moved beyond the superficial (Housee, 2004; Malik, 2012). Fauzia discussed for example, (as did Maheera), how she was not passive just because she wore the hijab, but she described herself as having a 'strong voice' in school (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2009; Haw, 2009; Bakhtiar, 2011) but a quiet voice at home where she did not wear the hijab.

What the girls' narratives all revealed was a set of 'core' cultural values that informed ways in which they configured and invested in 'culture', and how they 'wore' dimensions lightly, moderately or heavily. I interpret these to include the following:

- High value of the importance of education, as the girls narrated how parents wanted them to 'stand on their own two feet' for a range of reasons (Basit, 1997; Bhopal, 2011). Education was perceived to reap long-term benefits and a solid education was a baseline before getting married (this narrative was less evident through Fauzia, Maheera and Alka, who 'drove' the direction for their educational 'success' journeys to a heavier degree).
- A strong respect for family and elders' values, where the girls drew on these as valuable life frameworks for steering and inspiring their 'success' journeys (genuine 'respect' was less evident through the narratives of Fauzia and Maheera for reasons discussed in Chapter Four).
- A strong notion of hard work ('grafting' as Manpreet put it) and striving to achieve their full potential, irrespective of the intersecting challenges across their lives. This was rooted in parental values, and to some degree inspired by their historical

experiences of struggle and sacrifice. In this way, parents and their histories acted as a catalyst (Tinkler and Jackson, 2014; Gladwell, 2008; Mendick and Francis, 2012) to 'move up' and 'out' of their current classed positions (Reay, Crozier, and James, 2011).

- The importance of being a 'respectable' (Skeggs, 2004) Asian girl with 'honour' (Ghuman, 2001) in relation to: the performance of their sexuality (e.g.: being a virgin before marriage), modest dress codes, socialising within 'respectable' boundaries (drinking, clubbing, careful online performance), and respect for parents and elders.
- Strong values of caring, charity, being a good citizen in the collective sense of the family (and wider community/ global citizen). This collective cultural duty operates alongside developing individual visions for 'success' through education, and it was not developed at the expense of turning their backs on family and culture, but alongside them (unlike in Bhopal, 2010). This notion of acting for the collective good, means that at times, personal fulfilment appears low down on the priority agenda (Bauman, 2001), particularly for girls like Fauzia and Alka who made 'heavier' sacrifices.

For girls like Fauzia and Alka in particular, the affects of 'culture' were embodied psychologically through stress and emotions which they shared with me as they became more familiar (Frosh, 2001; Billig, 2006; Chappell, Ernest, Mendick and Ludhra, 2014). Their narratives sat in contrast to girls like Maya, Ravi and Arti for example, who narrated 'culture' as less problematic in raising tensions (although they still had an awareness of how other girls experienced it in more challenging ways to themselves). Although for example, Alka never complained and narrated her caring duties for the family as part of her 'Islamic and cultural duty',

the emotions of 'juggling' school and homelife were observed and heard by me, when I saw her cry in the final interview. Home 'culture' and challenges were never used as an excuse for 'failure', but rather, these girls, as 'strong' individuals, found ways to navigate cultural challenges where they existed (even if that meant complying with them). They tended to blame themselves if they did not 'succeed', 'achieve', or things did not go to plan - in line with the 'supergirl' neo-liberal discourse of girl (Gonick, Renold, Ringrose, and Weems, 2009; Scharff, 2011).

Religion was narrated with the heaviest weighting by the four girls following Islam - Fauzia, Alka, Sara and Maheera - (Basit, 1997; Shain, 2010; Madge, 2013; Singh, 2013) and Anjula of Sri-Lankan, Hindu religious background. 'Culture' was not therefore, as Eliot (1948) discussed, always seen in relation to religion, as 5/12 girls discussed it with low weighting in their lives, but stressed the importance of other branches of religion such as spirituality. Religion was also discussed in more contemporary ways that linked to global views on charity, ethics, and political views about the 'real' challenges facing the world today (i.e. global warming; world diseases, poverty and natural disasters). These were discussed more in relation to the Critical Thinking Curriculum, rather than the Religious Education (RE) curriculum, which was not narrated positively by any of the girls (Reiss and White, 2013; 2014).

Girls like Maheera and Sara read the scriptures with 'deep' meaning and engaged in self-directed research (in contrast to girls like Alka who accepted religion more at face value). Even the girls who discussed religion with high weighting, revealed variations in how they made sense of it, and Madge's (2013) typology of religiosity proves useful here. Maheera and Anjula demonstrated characteristics of being 'flexible adherents' of religion, where they were critically exploring it (Baumann, 2001), alongside their interests in spirituality and ethics. Maheera and Fauzia critically questioned the contradictions of religion and 'culture' that they experienced at home, where Maheera was going through a

transformation stage in her religious exploration, seeking study circles with like-minded 'sisters' to move her knowledge forward (Bhimji, 2009; Bakhtiar, 2011). Exploratory processes engage individuals in a search for the self, and can raise awareness through a critical consciousness that provides a new 'voice' (Craib, 1998; Baird, 2010). For Maheera, and others to a lighter degree, this 'voice' was narrated through feminist ways of understanding Islam (Ahmed, 2012), where they did not position themselves as passive victims, and Islam was not presented, or received, as a sexist religion (Hussain, 2012), but rather, the misinterpretations were.

For girls who were 'strict adherents' (Sara and Alka), religion was narrated as a 'second skin', as it provided them with 'inner strength' (Mirza, 2013:10). Sara and Alka both discussed religion as a compass that guided them in life (Shain, 2003; 2010), where Sara's engagement touched on online networks, and healthy dialogues with her family over the dinner table (Francis, 2005; Haw, 2011; Singh, 2013). Not only was she educating herself through her religious research, but educating her parents. This illustrates again how for Sara, Islam was not a sexist religion, as her parents willingly learned from her.

The four girls following Islam prayed and fasted, and this was not conveyed as being problematic, but rather, the periods of Ramadan represented an exciting time in their lives, which they looked forward to. The five daily prayers were embodied as part of their daily routines, and fasting was discussed as enhancing their sense of well-being, inner peace and making them think/ reflect on their sense of duty towards the less fortunate in the world. In this way, they developed a more globalised sense of girl, where they were active citizens in society (Burns, 2009; Reiss and White, 2013). All four girls saw Islam at its 'roots' as promoting equality between men and women, but people who were ill-informed (men and women of their parents' and grandparents' generation, or male

leaders in the mosque), were discussed as generating gendered discourses of inequalities (Ahmad, 2003; Hussain, 2012).

Hinduism and Sikhism were discussed in a more removed and non-scholarly style to Islam, but Sikhism was discussed in relation to equality for women and no caste discrimination (again, there were recognised contradictions of this by Narinder). As with feminism being seen as a thing of the past (Ahmed, 2012; Dalley-Trim, 2012), caste was also assumed to be, but historical meanings of caste were still entwined with religion and 'culture' by girls like Narinder, Fauzia, Maheera and Manpreet, particularly in relation to marital views and different status positions of people (Ghuman, 2011).

One of the rather sad areas of the girls' narratives of 'culture', was the way in which it was not always discussed in relation to providing a sense of self-fulfilment or happiness (Reiss and White, 2014). Only five girls discussed 'culture' in relation to developing a high sense of self-fulfilment: Arti (Headgirl), Manpreet, Sara (Headgirl), Maheera and Maya. These girls invested in a range of experiences beyond religion and the 'traditional' dimensions of 'culture', to include artistic experiences, reading for pleasure, and developing extra-curricular hobbies - they invested in 'culture' in omnivorous (Bauman, 2011) and 'cosmopolitan' ways (Kehily and Nayak, 2009; Burns, 2009), compared to Preeti for example, who had no time for 'culture'.

This leads me to further discuss the heavily weighted role of education in relation to 'culture', much of which has already been discussed above. These girls 'consumed' or invested in education beyond high grades (see Profile Chart 2). Education was narrated through a sense of perceived 'power', where for Maheera it provided negotiating power with her parents to gain more 'freedom', compared to her siblings (her 'genius' child status gave her extra leverage and status). These girls narrated education as:

- Providing a way out of 'backward' cultural structures that were viewed as oppressive in their lives (hooks, 1989)
- Providing status, independence, and a sense of equality with men (Collins, 2000; Skeggs, 1997, 2004)
- Securing access to a good career with financial independence (Hussain and Bagguley, 2007).
- Increasing their chances of marrying an educated, and open-minded partner (Ahmad, 2006; Bhopal, 2011)
- Providing a back-up plan in case things ever went wrong in the future (Basit, 1995; Bhopal, 1998; Mirza, 1992)

Different girls invested in areas of education, depending on their desire to develop their knowledge beyond the curriculum (as through the 'omnivorous' approaches of Maheera, Arti, Sara or Manpreet for example). All girls narrated education as having a real purpose - a stronger purpose than boyfriends or fashion for example. Girls like Maheera, Sara, Fauzia and Manpreet, narrated a passion for life-long learning, whereas Sara and Maheera connected the importance of education for women, as being aligned with the values promoted through Islam (Hussain, 2012).

The girls in this study were very aware of how the gendered dimensions of 'culture' played out through education (Abbas, 2004; Phillips, 2010; Mayo, 2014). The high significance of education and securing a 'successful' career with professional status, was rooted in familial expectations and values that promoted the importance of becoming 'successful' through education (Abbas, 2004). The girls mainly talked of how their parents wanted them to do well, and desired upward social mobility for their daughters (Anwar, 1998; Ijaz and Abbas, 2010). The motivation for becoming 'successful' stemmed from parents' and grandparents' experiences of migration struggles, and the girls acknowledged these experiences with empathy and pride (Anwar, 1979; Gaine and George, 1999; Reay, Crozier and James, 2011).

Educational 'success' was not however all down to parental support, as these girls conveyed high expectations of wanting to be 'successful' across all areas of their lives because they were self-motivated to varying degrees (Kehily and Nayak, 2009). They did not rely on parental guidance or their knowledge of education, as only one parent in the sample (Anjula's mother) was a graduate. The girls appeared to largely guide themselves, in contrast to the 'hot' knowledge of middle-class ethnic minority parents, as in Archer's studies (2010; 2012). These girls were largely self-regulators (Foucault, 1984; Rose, 1999) of their educational 'success' and therefore parental pressure (in its 'forced' meaning) was not obvious or needed, but rather, the girls' values, motivation and hard work ethic were important factors. The two head girls had a wealth of opportunities to show themselves off at their very best - they had the 'whole package plus' through 'consuming' and investing in a range of experiences in 'omnivorous' ways, and their position afforded them highly privileged opportunities. Their educational 'success' comprised of outstanding grades, alongside the 'extra' characteristics that made them and their CVs 'shine out' as a cut above the rest.

Although all girls were educationally 'successful', there was variation in how they connected education to developing a sense of personal fulfilment and nourishment of the mind (Williams, 1976; Reiss & White, 2014). Girls with heavy 'weightings' across Profile Chart 2, invested many hours in study, and their educational 'successes' were celebrated and seen through their personal statements and Awards (Sandberg, 2013). Those who carried significant positions of responsibility at home (i.e.: Fauzia, Maheera and Alka), were largely restricted from out-of-school opportunities, through a lack of time or sense of family duty over personal interests (other than Maheera who used her agency to explore spaces to develop herself). As Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2009) discuss, 'culture' and agency need to be rethought beyond the binary model of girls being 'caught between the poles of oppressive patriarchal structures of subordination' and 'the promise afforded by feminism of liberation'

(p.115). My analysis of the girls' narratives of 'culture', illustrate how for some, it was narrated as a 'bolt-on' in their lives (i.e.: Preeti who had no time for 'cultural stuff'; Alka who had heavy responsibilities at home), rather than an embedded and positive part of their lives, that could enhance their sense of well-being (as narrated by girls like Sara, Maheera, Arti, Maya and Manpreet for example).

Aim 1: Summary

In collecting Aim 1 ideas together, black feminist theory illuminates ways in which these girls configured and invested in 'culture' - a contested and 'liquid' concept that changes in meaning over time (Bauman, 2011; Hall, 2013). Their narratives were unique as were their configurations, but, black feminism provides a broad net that embraces their differences, however light or heavy they are. Black feminism:

1. Offers a position from which to explore the intersectional differences of minority ethnic girls' experiences beyond gender, drawing on Mirza's notion of 'embodied intersectionality' and psychosocial dimensions of 'insider' narrative research like mine (Hollway, 2012). Intersectional principles (Maylor, 1995; Brah, 2012; Mirza, 2013), allowed me to explore the girls' narratives with greater respect for their differences and the spaces in-between cultures (Bhabha, 1998; Walters and Auton-Cuff, 2009).
2. Acknowledges the positive status of black researchers writing about, and researching with girls and women from similar backgrounds, as they potentially share cultural experiences as 'women of colour'. I believe that I was able to demonstrate greater sensitivity in areas through my 'insider' knowledge, and shared points of connection in areas.

The girls' narratives illustrated how the concept of 'culture' was configured and invested in multiple ways across spaces, and influenced by the intersectional forces that operated across their lives to varying degrees of weightedness, where for some girls like Fauzia, Alka and Maheera, their experiences were compounded through heavier intersectionalities, compared to, for example, Arti, Manpreet or Maya.

Aim 2: Exploring the girls' configurations and investments in their cultural identities

As I stated in Chapter Two, my view on identity is aligned with Bibby (2010: 9) and one that acknowledges psychosocial influences:

We are psychosocial beings ... to study either ... is a form of splitting and misses the ways in which the internal and the external, the private and public, the individual and the social are deeply mutually implicated.

In this thesis, an understanding of the girls' cultural identities draws on black feminist theory, where this has already been discussed through Aim 1. 'Culture' and 'identity' are related concepts as stated earlier (Hall, 1996; Brah, 1996), and therefore this section will overlap with areas of the above, and subsequently be revisited through Aim 3 when I discuss what the girls' narratives revealed about their girlhoods. As Sarup (1996) discusses, if someone is asked about their 'culture', they will narrate this through a lifestory of events and experiences (as I found during my own reflective writing). This study represented a first-time opportunity for these girls to narrate their cultural identities in such an in-depth way, and this was an emancipatory experience for some (Sikes and Potts, 2008; Frank, 2010) - further discussed in Chapter Six. Through articulating their cultural identities - who they think they are, or are not, and how they compare/position themselves to others through similarities and differences, these girls reflected on various influences across their lives in

psychosocial ways (Hall, 1996; Jenkins, 2008). This section will discuss areas of Profile Chart 3, presented below as a reminder.

Table 9: Profile Chart 3: Configurations of cultural identity

Identity narrated in relation to
1. Education (examinations)
2. Education (beyond examinations)
3. Role of family
4. Gender and equality issues
5. Role of friends
6. Role models
7. Being a good citizen
8. Developing through challenges
9. Cultural 'respectability'
10. Cultural interests - arts based
11. Leadership roles in school
12. Leadership roles - at home
13. Aspirational futures
14. Religion
15. Online identities
16. Travel
17. Happiness and self-fulfilment
18. Fashion/ dress/ appearance

In order to avoid duplication, I will focus my discussion on areas not previously covered at length, making connections as needed. Dimensions 1 and 2 of the chart have already been discussed at length, where 'culture' was heavily narrated in relation to the perceived future-orientated power of education, very much narrated in relation to gendered equality (hooks, 1989; Bhopal, 2010).

The values of family have also been discussed in relation to the moral support and encouragement provided in most cases, where only two girls - Maheera and Fauzia - narrated difficulties in aligning themselves with parents' cultural values, where they wanted to build their aspirational future identities on a set of very different principles and values (Parekh, 2008). The girls appeared to embrace and respect their parents' structures of surveillance, that included boundaries and rules. These were seen as 'keeping them on track' as too much freedom was associated with white girls' parents (Bosit, 1997). Collins (2000) discusses disciplinary power across spaces, such as surveillance from families. She argues that disciplinary power manages oppression, and families can justify oppression that results in hegemonic ideologies. For these girls, this seemed to follow, and family provided a sense of 'historical sensibility', stability and anchorage (Tinkler and Jackson, 2014). Overall, most girls invested heavily in their families, and embraced their cultural values in configuring parts of their own identities (Ijaz and Abbas, 2010). For example, Sara fully embraced the religious and cultural values of her parents as she valued them.

'Culture' was narrated heavily in relation to gender (Phillips, 2010) and the girls had a critical awareness of how their identity positions could be compromised through intersecting structures (or forces) that provided limited spaces for them to explore their identities, just because they were girls. For example, Fauzia narrated this dimension at length. Even where gendered experiences were discriminatory in areas and rooted in patriarchal values (as with Maheera, Alka, Narinder and Fauzia), these girls still found spaces to configure their identities in ways that suited their beliefs. Girls like Fauzia, configured the more creative and 'equality' dimensions of her identity in the school space, or through work experiences, where she had more status. The school space appeared to give her confidence for exercising greater agency in leadership roles (illustrated in Appendix 1).

The girls all narrated a desire for gender equality in future relationships, where girls like Maya, Arti and Anjula, discussed their parents as role models of gender equality. In relation to son preference (Purewal, 2010), these girls largely narrated a sense of equality with brothers (other than Fauzia, Alka and Maheera who acknowledged their parents' preference/desire to have sons). Narinder discussed her parents' desire for a boy (heavily influenced by her grandparents), but stressed that her parents did not treat her as a girl any differently to her brother. Similarly for Alka, but she discussed the joy of her baby brother, where she loved spending time with him.

Friends were generally discussed as second to family, however significant the bond was in school. For girls like Fauzia and Alka, there were limited spaces for socialisation with friends outside of school, whereas the two Headgirls interacted with friends across spaces, as part of their leadership roles (as did other girls in leadership roles like Manpreet and Anjula). In relation to mixed friendships across gender, the girls mainly narrated boys as 'good friends' or 'brothers' (Alka and Sara insisted this was all they could be in relation to Islamic values), other than two cases where girls had boyfriends (Narinder and Sunaina). The impact of friendships on how the girls configured their identities was observed by me in relation to the following dimensions:

- The girls valued interacting with like-minded girls who shared the same academic vision for 'success', and intelligence levels (e.g.: Manpreet discussed having 'intelligent conversations' with her girlfriends). Anjula, Maheera and Sara were all aspiring for medicine (from Park Rise school), and this shared career goal united them as 'supergirls' (although I sensed tension when Anjula did not secure a place at medical school). This may have unduly created positive peer pressure which motivated them to better themselves. Based on my knowledge, these girls were primarily interacting with other girls at their academic level which was high,

and this supported the development of their 'supergirl' positions (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2007; Pomerantz and Raby, 2011).

- Anjula and Sara shared family backgrounds and language experiences from Sri-Lanka, and they both invested in medically-related work/ charity experiences in Sri-Lanka during their summer holidays. Their parents' country of origin provided a shared sense of identity through heritage, and they were very close friends.
- Arti and Manpreet were both passionate about studying English Literature and invested heavily in school leadership roles and broader cultural experiences which also united them as friends sharing similar interests.
- Maheera respected Sara's knowledge of Islam and engaged in critical conversations with her when she had questions (Bhimji, 2009; Bakhtiar, 2011). Anjula also respected the leadership skills of Sara (as did Fauzia of Arti), even though she did not secure the role of Headgirl. In this way, Headgirls possessed role model qualities that other girls desired or aspired to in cases.
- The girls aligned themselves with others who shared the same 'freedom' weighting (Basit, 1997). For example, Sunaina and Narinder, who both enjoyed socialising, discussed how Muslim girls were difficult to socialise with outside of school because of their stricter families and close alignment with Islamic values (Abbas, 2005). This hindered inter-faith socialisation outside of school (Chanda-Gool, 2006).
- Girls like Maya (new to the Sixth form) and Arti, valued diverse friendships (including diverse future relationships) across religions and cultures, as they saw them as being more reflective of real life in the future, and as providing creative interactions. These

narratives revealed a more global and cosmopolitan sense of identity (Narayan and Purkayastha, 2009; Burns, 2009; Bauman, 2011).

Friendships were mainly a supportive framework in the school space, as outside of school, these girls led very busy lives, where even social networking spaces like Facebook, were seen as an unnecessary distraction during exam time (e.g.: some girls developed a shared agreement to deactivate their accounts for a period of time).

The girls narrated the importance of role models in their identity configuration to varying degrees, where Maheera talked of not needing a role model as she was so 'independent' and 'headstrong' in her personality, which she later contradicted when discussing the role model qualities of people like Pink, Lady Gaga and famous poets and artists that she admired (see thesis extracts in Chapter Four). The two Headgirls narrated themselves as role models for others in the school, wanting to leave a 'legacy' and 'mark', as well as discussing historical leaders like Gandhi for his devotion to India, and his charitable values (McClellan, 2012).

Fauzia discussed how she saw herself as a future role model for Bengali Muslim girls facing similar challenges to herself, as she struggled to find a suitable role model who had experienced the same challenges as her (Abbass, 2000; Haque, 2000). The concept of role models was therefore diverse, ranging from celebrities (but only those conveying political messages with meaning), to family members which included grandparents, parents, older siblings and 'successful' cousins. They included historical and religious figures (e.g.: Dr Zakir Khan suggested by Sara), politicians like Hilary Clinton, and even me as the researcher. I was discussed as a role model for being an Asian female with children, who was also studying a PhD and 'juggling' family within my 'culture' and career. My 'insider' position possibly provided this point of connection as

a role model, more so than if I was a white researcher for example (as found by Bhopal, 2001; Archer, 2002; Abbas, 2006).

Most girls discussed the mother as a role model, mainly in relation to her sacrificial qualities and devotion to the family. Fauzia and Maheera distanced themselves from their mothers' identities (they were both housewives), as they did not narrate them with admiration, but rather, they wanted to be very different women to them in the future. Narinder similarly distanced herself from her mother, even though she respected her sacrifices for her father's family. Anjula discussed the educational and career determination of her mother as a solicitor who was more qualified than her father (as a result of her grandmother's determination and educational values for her daughters to be educated). This led me to believe that the mother's role played a significant part in how these girls thought about themselves in their future lives. The father carried a lower weighting for most girls. In cases, where the girls were the older sibling (i.e. Alka), they saw themselves as role models by virtue of being the first to university (Basit, 1995; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007). This could place additional pressure on these girls to be 'successful' role models. Only Fauzia, Anjula and Arti, narrated teachers or the Headteacher as role models in relation to their leadership qualities, and willingness to support and understand them.

To collect points together on role models, the girls valued particular qualities in role models (rather than connecting with the individuals themselves), some that they embraced in developing their own 'supergirl' 'successful identities (Harris, 2004). These included: a hard work ethic (Gladwell, 2008; Mendick and Francis, 2012); leadership qualities (Sandberg, 2014); the notion of leaving a legacy; political and meaningful messages, intelligence; notions of sacrifice for others (Bauman, 2001) and psychologically 'strong' women who 'juggled' areas of their lives and could 'do it all' (Marsh, 2013).

The girls invested in their citizenship identities to varying degrees (time constraints, parental boundaries, differing priorities and motivations), where this dimension was more heavily narrated than religious investments. They had different opportunities to invest in citizenship identities through school and outside, where some girls invested very heavily - e.g. Arti and Sara in their Headgirl identities, where Sara also invested heavily in charity, religious and medical experience identities. The girls narrated these investments as crucial, and as adding valuable dimensions to their university applications and future employability. Some of these citizenship investments were researched by the girls themselves to give them that 'extra' cutting-edge that linked to their aspirational careers (e.g. Sara, Anjula and Maheera organising medical placements in hospitals abroad; Fauzia and her law Internship and scholarship). The girls were clearly aware that they needed to present themselves as well-rounded pupils, where being 'successful' had to incorporate dimensions of them as 'good' citizens in society (for example, the medical applicants all conducted work experience placement in care homes to show this).

Theme 8 in the chart addresses learning through challenges, the value of which is illustrated in Alka's opening quote in Chapter One. The girls recognised that challenges brought about strength in identity, particularly girls with more compounding intersectionalities across their lives, as with Alka, Maheera and Fauzia in particular (and Narinder to some degree in relation to her parents' views). These girls narrated challenges as driving them, and preparing them for the future (hooks, 1996; Craib, 1998). My position is that their challenges did build their personalities in ways that other girls could not. Challenges (not discussed as 'crises' - Erikson, 1968; 1980) provided valuable learning opportunities for developing stronger and more resilient identities, as the girls had to draw on their 'psychological capital' to 'make their own way' (Bradford and Hey, 2007) and research opportunities in circumstances that were less favourable than other girls.

The notion of cultural 'respectability' was configured differently to Skeggs (2004) in areas, as these girls gave a lot of thought to how their identities may not be perceived as 'respectable' if they engaged in certain practices such as dating or sex before marriage (Schooler, Ward and Merriwether, 2005). They narrated the importance of behaving 'moderately' (i.e.: safely) within the cultural boundaries that parents set, where most girls complied with these and saw them as reasonable. This meant that they performed 'respectable' identities when socialising, drinking, talking in online platforms, their sexual 'respectability' and taking no drugs. They were 'respectable' because they did not want to let their parents down or 'lose face' in the community, but they also narrated a sense of believing in the values of 'respectability' conveyed by their parents. This was something that they felt strongly about, and were not just passively following parental 'rules'.

I have already discussed the girls' cultural interests in the previous section, and the degree to which they invested in experiences beyond the formal aspects of the curriculum. Not all of the girls had the time or interest to invest in the artistic dimensions of 'culture', or those associated with developing hobbies, interests and developing the mind. Maheera was the one girl that stood out, as she was constantly seeking spaces for becoming 'cultured' in omnivorous and globalised ways. Girls like Sara, Arti, Manpreet and Anjula, also did, but to a lesser degree than Maheera. These girls did not convey that they were held back by a lack of financial resources (despite some coming from families with limited means), as Maheera still invested in a broad range of experiences to develop her identity, despite the financial context at home. In this way, for some, it was more about their desires and motivations (what Marsh, 2013, refers to as 'psychologically strong identities' of successful girls).

I have discussed leadership roles at length in previous sections, particularly in relation to the role of Head Girl and home leadership. The point I would like to add here is that the girls' leadership identities at home

would not be known to the school, yet this dimension (shared with me), revealed important real-life skills that they had developed. It also revealed psychological resilience in coordinating and 'juggling' their lives during a critical phase in their education, as well as investing in heavily weighted responsibilities at home, that girls like Fauzia, Alka and Maheera did. It further raised questions about girls not putting themselves forward for leadership opportunities, and how schools might address this dimension of promoting all girls to explore and have a go (discussed in Chapter Six - Conclusions). Leadership identities required investment beyond formal education, and the girls had to be good 'jugglers' - or rather 'super' - along with the confidence to volunteer and maintain the role. For example, Sunita and Narinder did not volunteer themselves, so their CVs lacked a broader sense of experience beyond grades.

The girls all narrated their aspirational futures through a positive dimension of becoming better and 'successful', particularly in relation to securing successful careers, degrees, partners, and in cases material possessions like nice cars. They tended not to recognise the potential challenges in all cases, such as gendered inequalities that they may face in the workplace and home (what Ringrose, 2013 refers to as the 'gender equality illusion'). In this way, they narrated a positive picture of their aspirational futures, based on notions of meritocracy (Gonick, 2007; Mendick and Francis, 2012; Khoja-Moolji, 2014).

I have already discussed the girls' religious identities at length, and their online identities in relation to performing 'respectable' presentations of themselves. For Sara and Maheera, their online research and interactions, drew on Islamic study sites that provided spaces for communicating with others, where they were seeking to better understand Islam as a way of life (Bhimji, 2009; Bakhtiar, 2011).

Some girls narrated a heavier global identity/ awareness (Narayan and Purkayastha, 2009; Bauman, 2011), through their travel experiences in

family holidays (largely to visit family in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri-Lanka). Girls largely recognised the importance of being multilingual in a globalised world, where some were keen to learn new languages in addition to their mothertongue. Again, Maheera stood out as having a globalised identity (as she planned her GAP year abroad), and was multilingual and learning sign language in her own time. She had a passion to see the 'Wonders of the World' and write blogs about her work experience and travels. She had big dreams and aspirations and saw few obstacles - where there were obstacles, she explored solutions (Sandberg, 2014)

The girls narrated the degree of happiness and self-fulfilment as part of their identity configurations to various degrees, where for example, Sara did not convey unhappiness in any areas of her home or school identities, as everything was narrated so positively, yet she was embodying so many busy identities and roles. In contrast, Fauzia narrated her cultural identity at home in an extremely unhappy way, where she seemed constrained and unable to be herself. For example, she discussed feeling more oppressed at home where she did not wear the headscarf, but at school she performed a more agentic identity where she invested in leadership roles which gave her status and a sense of importance which she lacked at home (Dwyer, 1999; Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2009).

Fashion and appearance were not narrated as important dimensions of the girls' identities overall, but there was a critical recognition of dressing modestly, along with a strong awareness of the impression that appearances can give off about 'respectability' (Skeggs, 2004) - for example, the hijab being associated with a quiet girl, or revealing clothing associated with 'looser girls'. The girls were very aware of the pressures placed on them through the media to look good, be slim, and comply, but they did not narrate too much of a fixation in this area.

Aim 2: Summary

In summary, in seeking to understand how these twelve girls invested in, and configured their cultural identities, I came to understand the importance of their 'psychological capital' and resilience, and ability to code-switch across audiences and spaces, accommodating multiple ways of being a 'girl' (Marsh, 2013). Many of them did this effortlessly and positively, where an outsider looking in on their lives would not be able to appreciate the hard work and hours invested in their identities, to reach the stage that they were at (Gladwell, 2008; Mendick and Francis, 2012). At times, I worried about how little some of them slept in order to keep up appearances and not fail (Goffman, 1963), where they were their own best self-regulators of success (Foucault, 1984; Rose, 1999). In most cases, the girls' narratives revealed that they invested heavily in their educational identities, but unlike the neoliberal girl who is out for herself (Ringrose, 2013), these girls were striving for 'success', but not at the expense of ignoring the broader cultural dimensions of their family lives.

These girls embraced challenges as valuable learning experiences (Craib, 1998) and did not exaggerate a lack of privilege (financial or uneducated parents) as an excuse for failure. They focussed on what they could do to succeed, within whatever contexts they lived. Some girls did discuss the psychological impact of their heavy identity investments across areas. Two girls mentioned elements of depression (they did not wish to have this included as part of their narratives), where one girl had received counselling support as a result. Others like Sara, highly competent and in Headgirl leadership roles, shared mechanisms developed for coping with 'stress' in order to maintain the 'Supergirl' status that she embodied and performed in such an effortless style (Jackson, 2010a; Machin and Thornborrow, 2006).

Aim 3: How 'girlhood' was narrated by these girls?

I opened this thesis with Alka's narrative, as it illustrated the particularities of her 'girlhood' through the intersectionalities 'crossing' her life (McCall, 2011). She narrated her aspirations for future 'success' (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2006) and psychological strength, as being developed through challenging experiences (Craib, 1998; Marsh, 2013). The twelve girls had different configurations of intersections, where for some, these compounded their girlhood experiences in less favourable ways, even if they did not narrate or perceive them as such. This section acts like a synthesis - it pulls together points raised in Chapter Four and the above sections. It discusses what 'girlhood' looks like for these twelve 'successful' girls. I will go through each girl in turn, and discuss my interpretation of their narratives, drawing on my reflective journal notes, which were part of the knowledge-generation process through a critically-reflexive approach (Skeggs, 2002).

Alka's narratives revealed the strength of her personality (hooks, 1989), and willingness to make personal sacrifices, such as living at home whilst attending university (Ahmad, 2001) for the good of her family (Bauman, 2001). In this way, she would miss out on broader aspects of university life, just as she had missed out on the extra-curricular dimensions of school life where she put the family first (Ahmad, 2006). Despite the challenges in her home life (and she was always positive about them), she psychologically invested in her dream to become a lawyer (Brah, 1996), but configured her educational and career aspirations, alongside fulfilling her 'cultural duty' in a 'respectable' manner (Haw, 2011). She embraced religion, and discussed Islam as providing a valuable life framework (Mirza, 2013).

For Alka, girlhood comprised of balancing educational success, with religious and cultural values (Haw, 2010). She was a 'successful' girl, but not as narrated in the neoliberal 'supergirl' literature (Gonick, Renold, Ringrose, and Weems, 2009; Scharff, 2011) where the neoliberal girl

focuses on, and invests heavily in herself. In relation to Shain's (2003) categories, Alka shared elements of the 'faith' and 'survivor' characteristics. Alka's girlhood was compounded by the intersectionalities in her life, but by 'choosing' to accept them (without force or pressure from family), she embraced challenges and saw them as strengthening her personality and character (Craib, 1998). Her parents were not educated, but she discussed them as having high hopes for her education, wanting her to live at home for university. Tomlinson and Hutchinson (1991) and Ghuman (1994), discuss how low levels of parental educational knowledge, does not equate to low aspirations for their children (echoed in Abbas, 2003).

Anjula's drive to become a leader revealed the emotions of missing out on two of her big dreams - becoming a Headgirl and a securing a medical university place. Psychologically, these two 'failures' affected her emotional sense of 'success' (Pomerantz and Raby, 2011). She embraced the importance of historical educational values (Tinkler and Jackson, 2014), that stemmed from her grandmother in a feminist way, played out through her mother's successful career as a solicitor. She invested heavily in South-Asian classical arts outside of school, which connected her to the Tamil, Sri-Lankan culture on a weekly basis (Ghuman, 1994). She 'wore' religion and 'culture' in critical ways, questioning the religious rituals and ceremonies that were part of Hinduism (Bose, 2010; Banerji, 2012). She narrated her identity as being too heavily focussed on academic grades, and wanted to shift focus towards the more non-academic elements that would make her more 'worldly'.

For Anjula, girlhood comprised of high academic achievement that placed undue pressure on her - some of this seemed self-imposed as she was highly critical of herself and had high self-expectations (Mendick and Francis, 2012). She referred to her string of grade As at GCSE and A-level as: 'the curtain' - a bit like the fringe she once had (Baker, 2010).

Anjula wanted to broaden her experiences so that she was a more 'worldly' girl like some of her friends.

Arti's narratives revealed the intense 'juggling' act of Headgirl leadership (McClellan, 2012), alongside the need to secure straight grade As. She invested in her identities in psychological ways that involved an embodiment of the roles (Seidler, 2010), particularly the role of Headgirl that appeared to take over her school-life. She wanted to perform her role 'successfully' so that she would not 'lose face' with fellow pupils and staff in the school (Goffman, 1963). She appeared to enjoy the 'power' of this important role, and she discussed how she was seen differently by others after the roles. She discussed the importance of 'putting yourself out there' (a message promoted to pupils through her motivational Headgirl speech), and invested in 'culture' and education in 'omnivorous', 'cosmopolitan' and 'globalised' ways (Hannerz, 1990; Kehily and Nayak, 2009; Bauman, 2011).

Arti displayed 'Asian girlpower' (McRobbie, 2007; Ringrose, 2013), where she critically questioned the gendered elements of 'culture' and her views on equality (Phillips, 2010). She had the space to explore her identity in creative ways at home and school, and narrated herself as 'modern' and a 'unique girl' with her 'own mind'. For Arti, girlhood comprised heavily of leadership, being academically 'successful', outspoken, cosmopolitan and globalised in her identity, cultural values and worldview (Burns, 2009). She 'wore' 'culture' heavily, but not in its 'traditional' sense, or ways that mirrored media discourses of South-Asian girls (Malik, 2012).

Fauzia's girlhood was compounded by her intersectionalities, particularly at home. Her agency, roles and motivations played out very differently across the home and school spaces, where they were very much narrated as two separate worlds (Ghuman, 1994). Despite the 'weight' of her cultural intersectionalities (hooks, 1996), she demonstrated her agency within limited spaces whilst living in a patriarchal, highly-

regulated family context (Bhopal, 1997). Psychologically, her challenges developed her personality (Craib, 1998) where she believed she was very much making her own way in life (as did Maheera), as she had little support or encouragement from family. She never gave up, irrespective of homelife challenges, and narrated an incredible drive for educational and career success, where she wanted to become a barrister and a 'woman with status' before marriage (Bhopal, 2011).

Fauzia showed signs of emotional stress and unhappiness at times, and my view is that she was very much coping with her troubles alone, trying to make sense of them through critically reflexive, internal conversations, that helped her to psychologically make her own way (Archer, 2007). For Fauzia, girlhood comprised of challenges (not narrated as crises at any point - Erikson, 1968) that she had to navigate alone, as she never discussed socialising with friends outside of school. These challenges came across as 'heavier' than other girls, and she had elements of Shain's (2003) 'survivor' and 'faith' characteristics.

Maheera's narratives, like Arti's, revealed an 'omnivorous', 'cosmopolitan' and 'globalised' consumption and investment in 'culture' (Hannerz, 1990; Kehily and Nayak, 2009; Bauman, 2011), alongside a thirst for life-long learning across spaces (Reiss and White, 2013; 2014). Like Fauzia, she demonstrated agency whilst living in a patriarchal family, where she had big dreams for travel, a career in medicine, successful education, and very importantly, a desire to develop her creative interests more so than any other girl (e.g.: through her desire to take a GAP year). She questioned dimensions of 'culture' and religion in what I perceived to a critically healthy style, where she was seeking spaces for developing her religious knowledge of Islam through study circles (Bhimji, 2009; 2013). She invested heavily in education in broad ways beyond academic grades, and her aspiring medical identity that she embodied. Her academic profile was exemplary, and she demonstrated an effortless

hardwork ethic (Mendick and Francis, 2012) where I was left wondering when she ever slept.

Maheera, like Fauzia, configured the home and school spaces in complete contrast, but unlike other girls, she gave the impression of feeling 'suffocated' in both, hence the desire to be 'free' and travel the world (through her planned GAP year) to develop new experiences. Maheera drew 'power' through education and her 'genius' status, which gave her negotiating rights to invest in areas of interest. She found creative solutions for most obstacles in her life, and in this way, she demonstrated a psychologically strong identity (Marsh, 2013) in order to get her own way. Like Fauzia, she very much narrated a girlhood where she made her own way in life (Archer, 2007; Keddie, 2011).

Manpreet inspired the sub-title of this thesis - 'We are the want it all girls... who graft for it!' I learned about determination through her 'omnivorous' investments in 'culture' and passion for cosmopolitan experiences, alongside securing high grades, where she wore her 'Geek' identity with pride (Mendick and Francis, 2012). She invested heavily in work experience throughout her GAP year and managed to secure straight grades As to attend the university of her choice. She was heavily involved in school leadership roles (this is illustrated in Appendix 1 - transcript extracts) which she discussed as giving her a stronger voice.

Manpreet was the only girl to take a GAP year, and she updated me at key points through text messages, including an email update on the value of taking a GAP year in relation to exploring the world of work before entering university. She raised critical points in relation to schools placing greater emphasis in this ignored area, as she had to research it herself without any support or guidance. Manpreet narrated a balanced view of 'culture' where she was critical, but like Bhabha (1994), she uses the spaces in between cultures to creatively form something new in what Mythen (2012) refers to as dynamic 'adoption'.

Maya narrated the importance of gender equality learned through her parents who she narrated as 'equal partners'. Parents were discussed as giving her the space to 'make mistakes' as these were seen as part of the learning process. They encouraged her to follow her passion to study media and film studies, which did not fit the stereotyped Asian family's dream of more 'traditional' aspirations in the sciences (Ahmad, 2006; Archer, 2012). She did not narrate 'culture' as being problematic in her life, and I interpret this as her having fewer intersections acting on her life. As illustrated in Chapter Two through her cultural configuration map, the 'weightedness' of areas was more varied in colour. Maya demonstrated an independent, quietly assertive personality, where she strived for good grades, but valued the importance of having a part-time job and 'pulling her weight at home'. The components of her life seemed fairly harmonious as she tended to follow the 'modern' values of her family which she aligned herself with comfortably. In this way, there was no need for tension or conflict.

Narinder's narratives revealed some of the challenges of having parents from two religious backgrounds - Hindu-Gujarati and Sikh (Jat caste), where her father's status was discussed as far superior to her mother's. She narrated a complex configuration of intersectionalities that drew on the gendered dimensions of her mother's sacrifice where she gave up her pre-marital identity for her father. The different status of her parents' religions, boy preference from her grandparents, and caste discourses that she learned through conversations with her mother, resulted in her understanding of 'culture', being configured through religion, gender and caste as key areas.

Having dated a Muslim boy, she experienced the consequences in relation to her parents' negative views and super-surveillance as a result, where they were keen to regulate her life to avoid further 'mistakes' of this kind (Rose, 1999; Ringrose, 2013). Despite these experiences, she still

embraced their cultural values and showed them respect because she believed that they were doing it for her good so that she would not be distracted from achieving her high grades (aspiration for dentistry). She did not invest heavily in school or home leaderships, and her primary focus was achieving high grades, alongside some light socialising with friends which she enjoyed.

Preeti's narratives revealed the pressures of time when striving for high grades, at the expense of investing in personal fulfilment and experiences (Reiss and White, 2014). Her end of study reflection (presented in Appendix 5) revealed how her girlhood was very much configured through achieving high academic grades. She acknowledged that the pressures in her life, focusing on the academic part of her identity, alongside general girlhood pressures in relation to looking a certain way as conveyed by the media. Psychologically, like Anjula, she was very hard on herself and had high expectations of herself (Baker, 2010) and was conscious of living up to the successes of her two older siblings who were both studying medicine.

Ravi demonstrated the ability to synthesise East and West cultures, and configure her version that worked with family and friends (Bhabha, 1990; 1998). Ravi 'wanted it all' - a successful education, a well-paid career, a partner that treats her equally, two children, and a bit of the 'Indian cultural qualities'. She aspired for medicine but had not prepared or researched it enough, and therefore went with Psychology as a degree choice. She narrated her homelife positively, where she embraced some of the 'traditional' and cultural values of Asian culture for women, alongside appreciating the freedom (Basit, 1997) she had to be more 'westernised' in her identity. Ravi did not narrate her life as having compounding challenges, as she had spaces to be flexible and explore her identities.

Sara's narratives revealed the positive influence of 'culture' and religion across her life, and how she drew on Islam to give her strength and calmness in her busy life. In line with Mirza (2013: 10), she narrated religion as a 'second skin' and a way of deriving 'an inner strength and spiritual space' (echoed by Hussain, 2012). Like Arti, she had a very busy diary and workload, but did not embody the role of Headgirl to the same degree of stress. Headgirl was one of her key identities that operated alongside that of: aspiring medical student, family girl, religious identity, charitable and citizenship roles, supportive friend (like a counsellor at times) and so forth. She was a global girl (Burns, 2009) who invested heavily in charity and work experience at an international level, and she saw the importance of giving back to the community and supporting others in need. Her 'supergirl' status seemed effortless when I listened to her narratives, as she was so organised and positive in a mature way.

Sara's academic profile and 'educational extras' were exemplary, and she narrated a vision for a 'successful' future which drew on her strong and positive family bonds, alongside her faith in Islam. Her end of study reflection (Appendix 5) revealed the importance of her creative identity in her life, but others may not necessarily see her beyond her academic record.

Sunita's narratives revealed what it means to be 'respectable', have fun (through socialising), but live life within 'boundaries' of moderation by respecting the cultural values of elders (Ghuman, 2001; Skeggs, 2004). She fully embraced the values of her mother and older brother in particular, to the degree where she followed them more than her own vision. In this way, she did not have the opportunity to make 'mistakes' as any possible 'errors' were minimised through the heavily regulated guidance of her older brother who she idolised. Being 'respectable' was important to Sunita, and she narrated examples of advising other girls who had had difficulties with boys. She had more power at school than at

home and the 'domains of power' (Collins, 2000: 276-284), operated through disciplinary and hegemonic means. Everything down to her degree choice was heavily influenced by her family, where she embraced their views without critically questioning them.

Aim 3: Summary

This research has revealed how difficult it is to discuss British South-Asian girlhood through the added dimension of 'success' (Baker, 2010), which has largely been narrated through mainstream feminist research (Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013; Ringrose, 2013), rather than black feminist studies on minority ethnic girls (see Maylor and Williams, 2011; Marsh, 2013). As Bhopal (2010) states: 'South-Asian woman' should be seen as 'a starting point from which to focus on the varied lives of women who share a migratory background' (p.1). These girls were very different in how they configured, invested in, and 'wore' dimensions of 'culture', education and their 'successful' identities (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2006). Even when they shared the same religious backgrounds and countries of heritage, there were huge variations in how they lived and experienced their lives. For example, Fauzia and Maheera had similar home structures in relation to patriarchal families, but they performed their girlhoods very differently across spaces, through their desires, motivations and psychological investments (Bradford and Hey, 2007; Marsh, 2013).

Where some girls' configurations of intersectionalities compounded their experiences (giving them less space to be agentic as with Maheera) girls drew on their 'psychological capital' (Bradford and Hey, 2007) and invested in their identities in ways that showed 'psychologically strong identities' (Gladwell, 2008; Marsh, 2013). These girls all shared a hard work ethic and a belief that they 'could have it all' if they work hard in line with meritocratic values (Ringrose, 2013 refers to this as the gender illusion). What was evident in their journeys towards becoming 'successful', was that they did not all perform their identities in neoliberal

ways, where they turned their backs on family cultural values (Bhopal, 2010). Rather, these girls could 'juggle' and balance elements, so that they were investing in themselves, whilst also respecting family cultural values in synthesised ways.

These girls were generally far removed from media discourses presented about South-Asian girls. In areas, some did narrate more 'traditional' structures, but these were not necessarily discussed in a negative way. Their narratives revealed how critically aware and engaged they were with their aspirational girlhoods in relation to leading a life within feminist values of equality – albeit without using the word 'feminism' to discuss these values and aspirations. As Ahmed (2012) discusses, feminism is seen as a 'legacy' that has 'passed by'.

In Chapter Six, I will present reflections first, as they follow-on from the tone of this discussion. My interpretative position recognises my critically reflexive stance as part of the knowledge-generation process. The importance of recognising personal reflections and research affects, are discussed by Mills (1959) and Hollway (2012).

Chapter Six: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter will be presented in two parts:

Part 1: Reflections from 'backstage'

Part 2: Conclusions

Reflections will include my responses on the more psychological dimensions of this study as experienced 'behind the scenes' (many of these were logged across my research journals). This study has generated a wealth of rich narrative from twelve girls, and I have only been able to present selected extracts within Chapter Four. I will outline here, other dimensions of data that the girls' generated outside of the interview interactions and their reflective journals.

In Part 2 - the Conclusions, I will return to the research question and aims presented in Chapter One, and reinstate my findings from the girls' narratives. I will discuss how this study has made an original contribution to knowledge, as well as discussing some of the limitations and avenues for future research.

Part 1: Reflections from 'backstage'

Context

I presented my auto/biographical position in Chapter One, and I direct the reader back to avoid further repetition. My journal reflections have been written from the heart, where the pages of some entries are layered with emotions which have at times been painful to write, whilst therapeutic. My later reflections have been heavily influenced by my black feminist voice, and critically reflexive approach that has transcended areas of my life (Skeggs, 2002). As made transparent at the start of this thesis, and

discussed throughout, a black feminist standpoint informed my theoretical approach, where the principles supported and guided ways in which I engaged with the twelve girls during the fieldwork, my analysis, and provided valuable explanatory power for the affective responses that I experienced (also documented by researchers like Mirza, 1997; Abbas, 2006 and Maylor, 2009).

Critical reflexivity led to gazing at the 'I' and 'Me' dimensions of my identity as a second-generation, British-born, South-Asian woman of Hindu religious background, from a working-class family (Bhopal, 2001). Now positioned as a privileged, middle-class academic (Maylor and Williams, 2011; Hey and George, 2013), I reflect back on my working-class roots with nostalgic pride, for what those experiences of girlhood taught me about coping and the transformative power of life challenges and education (hooks, 1990b; 1996).

I read through my collection of research journals like a scrapbook of a significant phase in my life (Chaitin, 2004) - just as Sara and Maheera had done during our final interviews. The journal entries draw on the more psychosocial dimensions of our research interactions (Hodkinson, 2005) - those that the transcripts could not capture (Hammersley, 2012). I have analysed the themes of my journal entries, in order to illustrate the breadth of reflection contained within them. During the initial stages of fieldwork, I typed my reflections, and this allowed me to write at speed, in greater detail a more focused way (see Appendix 4). I then moved towards hand-writing my entries as and when the mood took me, carrying a journal in my handbag at most times. In the sections below, I provide a flavour of the reflective entries over the last few years.

Reflections through theory: living and writing it

I found my theoretical journey frustrating during the early stages, as I had so much to read in order to develop my subject knowledge of theories, as someone without a sociological or psychological background - in a way, I

entered my PhD with a fresh lens. I was quickly drawn to feminist studies which focused on genuinely recognising the 'voices' of girls and women. Black feminist theory made absolute sense, as it enabled me to open up more creative ways of thinking about, and posing questions of my 'herstory' and explain the girls' cultural experiences in this study. I became interested in how black feminism applied to my life and 'culture', particularly in relation to my religious background as a Hindu woman (Bose, 2010) and the interplay of power, gender, religion, class and other markers of differences (Phillips, 2010). This drew me towards Hindu literature (Pattanaik, 2006; 2010) through a more critically informed feminist lens that included South-Asian feminist writers (Banerji, 2009; 2012). This process provided space to question some of the contradictions that I had experienced as a girl and woman (just as Maheera did in this study).

I presented some of my gendered reflections on 'culture' and religion, using black feminist theory, at a psychosocial conference with Brunel colleagues. This resulted in a collaborative research paper (Chappell, Ernest, Ludhra and Mendick, 2014). My journal is sprinkled with reflections on theory that took on a personal lens, as black feminism applied to areas of my life, and some of the women that I interacted with as part of my friendship group, as well as my mother. It helped me to theorise my journey through girlhood and womanhood (hooks, 1989) in a meaningful way. At this point in my thinking, I recognise 'feminism' has having gradations of meanings across women, and therefore 'feminisms', is more inclusive.

Reflections on my 'herstory': work hard, study hard mantra!

The writing of the historical backdrop in Chapter One enabled me to reflect on the experiences of my parents and grandparents with greater knowledge, admiration and empathy. I talked to my mother about her and my father settling in the UK in the early 1960s. I have only heard 'snapshots' of their migration narratives of struggle, and I was never

taught about postcolonial history at school. What I do remember is how my parents repeated the mantra of 'work hard, study hard!' Their dream was that their three children would never work in factories and do labouring jobs like they did. We were told that we must study twice as hard as our white friends to be 'successful' and respected in Great Britain. The contradiction of this mantra for me, was getting married at nineteen, where I was subtly encouraged to refuse an offer to study at university, as 'a good opportunity for marriage should never be missed' - luckily for me, marriage worked out well, and I later went to university after having our two children.

The aspirational and 'successful' girls in this study were no different really - they embodied the 'work hard, study hard' mantra of their parents (Abbas, 2004; Gladwell, 2008), but they went onto university after school.

Research conversations with academic colleagues

Over the course of this doctorate, I talked to Brunel colleagues and academics from other institutions about the joys, challenges and frustrations of research. My reflective journal contains notes on some of these research conversations in relation to:

- Conference feedback from BSA Auto/ Biography members, where I presented over a few years and developed a good relationship with experienced narrative researchers.
- The women's Aurora leadership programme (currently on this) in relation to how 'success' discourses are presented for female academics. My critical lens found some of the materials to be superficial about the experiences of BME academics that were covered more 'lightly' and superficially as part of the programme (Bhopal, 2014).

- Discussions about ethics, 'voice', reflexivity and black feminism, which resulted in research collaborations, papers and book chapters (e.g.: Rogers and Ludhra, 2011; Ludhra and Chappell, 2011)
- Supervision notes with my experienced supervisors, where they challenged my thinking in theory which I thoroughly enjoyed
- Conversations through research group participation at the university that included the 'Brunel Reading Theory Group'.

Field notes: capturing the 'fringe' areas

I made detailed notes in my reflective journal before, during and after research interactions in the schools. In this way, I was able to capture the 'fringe' areas of interaction (Woods, 1986; Maynard and Purvis, 1994). These included observations of body language, pre- and post-interview talk, points of connection that I experienced, questions raised, and emotions stirred as part of that interaction (dimensions of these are illustrated in Appendix 4). I reported the key data themes back to each group of girls within the forum of a focus group, as well as returning the transcripts for comment and discussion at each stage of the study. This process was reflected upon in relation to how the girls felt about seeing their conversations transcribed and themes emerging across the twelve girls.

Some of the girls kept in touch with me after the study, and I logged the nature of this communication (this included text messaging, emails and short updates via phone calls). For example, Arti contacted me with brief university updates, and more recently a picture of her in graduation robes; Sara contacted me whenever she passed her medical exams; Maheera informed me of her intercolated placement in medicine; Manpreet informed me of her GAP year benefits and university place, and

Fauzia shared not so positive insights about her experiences on the law degree where she was having second thoughts at times.

Reflections on personal life

My view, like Mills (1959), is that critical, systematic personal reflection can enrich and deepen the knowledge base. This PhD has been a journey filled with rich experiences and emotions, and I cannot dismiss the impact of these on life at home, which included at times, my health, well-being and a strain on relationships. My heightened critical position influenced how I reflected on my roles as mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, wife etcetera. For example, I was a young mother of two daughters and experienced the cultural 'stigma' (Goffman, 1963) in relation to intersections of my gender, religion, class and patriarchal views. When family members had a daughter for example, I had a heightened awareness (what I call 'boy preference radar') of how current discourses still circulate, rooted within historical messages (Wilson, 2006).

I wrote reflectively about feeling 'Othered' in particular spaces, and like Purewal (2010), I recall incidents of receiving 'congratulations' wishes on the birth of our second daughter, or rather, as I received them, congratulations received through the real meaning of condolences through some members of the family - 'better luck next time for a boy!' In my journal, I have written a reflective piece called 'It's a girl!' [*Ladki hoi hai!*] and what those three words meant for me psychologically. That entry is very emotional and private as it implicates others to some degree.

Researching twelve, academically 'successful' girls' cultural identities, heightened my observation skills as a mother of two academically 'successful' daughters. One daughter was preparing for medical school, and the other studying at university (aiming for a First), preparing for her graduate post, as well as moving away from home (Hey and George, 2013). These transitions were full of mixed emotions as I was trying to be

a supportive mother, whilst investing heavily in my research and career. Through the process of critical reflexivity, I believe that I have better understood the girls that I have researched 'with' (Rogers, 2003).

Writing within the 'National Teachers as Writers Group'

Two years ago I started a student-teacher writers' group (with a school colleague), and this reflective and creative space enabled me to think and write outside of the work context, building on my creative interest in narrative with student teachers. I shared dimensions of my research with students, and found that like me, they also found the process therapeutic, creative and enjoyable, amidst the 'stresses' of studying an intense PGCE. The area of using research journals with student teachers is something that I would like to develop postdoctorate (see Conclusions).

Work-related challenges and opportunities

I was granted a short period of unpaid leave towards the end of this study, and this provided space for total immersion which I enjoyed. Working in a busy Teacher Education department became very consuming, and at times I struggled to 'juggle' the high demands of Teacher Education (and OfSTED), with the emotional investment and focus required to complete a PhD. I have always had very high standards and expectations of myself, and like some of the girls in this study, I am a good self-regulator. 'Success' was configured alongside 'failure' to varying degrees of intensity. I have experienced feelings of 'failure' along this journey, as one of the few academics in the department without a doctorate. Not having a PhD, prevented me from participating in, and applying for new projects or Research Leave, and has slowed my career progression. The topic of my PhD has not aligned with the broader interests of the Education department, and at times this made me feel like a 'body out of place' sitting at the margins of research groups (Puwar, 2004; Charmaz, 2008).

On a lighter note, I now view these challenges as making me more determined to write research papers, and develop this study in creative ways. Researching and writing this PhD outside of the field of Teacher Education, has in my view, given me a more creative and critical lens through which to now interrogate dimensions of my role as a Teacher Educator, applying a psychosocial and black feminist lens. Like Bibby (2010), also an academic and educator, I would like to explore ways of applying my doctorate theoretical lens to classroom principles.

Girls' reflections: narratives for thinking

Following critical reflections on the two pilot phases (Ludhra, 2011; Ludhra and Chappell, 2011), I modified the main study to draw on narrative principles. Here, I created more open (and creative) spaces for the girls to talk and reflect:

- At the introductory talk before committing to participation
- At the start, end and in-between research interviews
- At the focus group discussion meeting at the end of the study
- At the end of the study, where all girls were invited to reflect individually through email (optional space).

Within the limited space, I cannot present extensive data to support all the above, but I plan to use reflective dimensions of the girls' rich narrative within future papers. I highlight below, selected areas of the girls' reflections that left a 'mark' on my thinking.

At the end of the study (i.e. after the final interview and reflection opportunity), some of the girls continued to keep in contact with me through text updates in relation to university and life experiences in general, and more recently I received graduation updates and even photos. Some of the girls sent me texts at key points in the year such as Christmas, Diwali and Eid, which included encouraging messages to motivate me and ask about progress. This felt like a privilege, particularly

hearing how some girls (e.g.: Arti, Sara, Manpreet and Maheera), transferred their school-based leadership skills across to university societies and charity work.

Reflections at the start, end and in-between interviews, revealed how the girls left the interaction thinking deeply about what they had shared, and what it meant. Two girls asked to retract short extracts of narrative, and the reflective spaces provided 'safety' for them to do this. Maheera preferred to email me her reflections post interview, rather than write in her journal. The reflective spaces gave them choices, where two girls - Maheera and Sara - created mini identity projects voluntarily. Sunita, Alka and Anjula chose not to keep journals and this was always presented as an optional form of reflection.

The focus group meeting at each school was highly beneficial, and this was recorded and fully transcribed. It revealed the interest of the girls almost a year later, before they embarked into university life. Prior to this, the girls were emailed the key themes that emerged so that they had time to explore beforehand (charts mirroring the profile charts were emailed, with a brief explanation of the codes used). They were also emailed two of my published research papers, and most girls read these with interest it seemed, sharing how they were mainly interested in the girls' data extracts. They were shocked at how much data they had generated as I shared the number of transcript pages and journal entries at that point. My observations of them discussing the data revealed how they were looking for themselves within the overview of twelve girls, even though it was all anonymous and simply codes and categories. During this meeting, the girls reflected back, where one girl said if I interviewed her again things would have changed as so much more has happened since we met (she had re-read all her transcripts and journal entries in preparation for this meeting).

The girls were encouraged to pose questions about the themes and we engaged in a lengthy discussion that raised new themes to those presented in the charts. For example: university visits, making the transition from school to university life, the need for professional mentors in school, the National Leadership Programme that qualified some girls to a 'free' trip abroad to develop leadership partnerships with schools (only at Valley High School). Some talked about the fear of failing exams, how the interviews made them more confident about university interviews, and how they found me inspirational and motivating as a researcher. I asked them about my position as an Asian researcher, and how (if at all) this influenced their decision to participate. One girl said:

I'm sure we've all said stuff that we wouldn't tell a white researcher. We've opened up to you because of your personality. You were inspirational when you said stuff like 'You can do it!' It was just so easy talking to you [others agreed with her in the group through nodding and small talk]

Another girl said:

You seemed understanding and I could see that you just got it. I didn't feel judged by you and felt free like I was talking to a friend.

Ten out of twelve girls said that my position did influence their decision to participate, where two said they would have talked to any researcher as they were just interested in the research topic (Bhopal, 2001; Abbas, 2006). The girls conveyed excitement to hear about the research, where one girl said:

I was actually so excited about seeing you today and I knew you were going to keep everything anonymous but I just wanted to see what you'd done and found out from us... also to see if I had any similarities with anyone else or differences and find out if I'm abnormal! [laughter from the group].

The girls asked me more personal questions in this group space, and they possibly felt that they could as the 'formal' part of the study was over. For example, they asked me about my inspiration for the study, the role of my daughters, whether I had an arranged marriage, how I managed a family and study, and my husband's support (Oakley, 2005). The notion of 'managing it all', leads me nicely to how the subtitle of this thesis emerged:

Geeta: When I was driving in today, I was thinking about how your stories show how much you want and how ambitious you are. You are like the 'want it all girls'. That would make a good title...

Manpreet: I like that and it sums us up so well [the group laughed]. I think maybe if you use 'Want it all girls' as your thesis title it might give people the wrong impression of us like we want it all like Gucci handbags, designer clothes, a flash car, a rich husband without any effort.

Geeta: That's a good point. So what should I say if I use it?

Manpreet: We are the want it all girls but we jolly well graft for it!

The established relationship and rapport meant that we could discuss points like the above in an open and 'safe' manner. This included laughter at times, which helped to lighten the tone of some conversations. The conversations felt natural and allowed me to understand their perceptions fairly openly. All twelve girls conveyed enthusiasm for wanting to follow-up the study and reading the thesis (one girl even requested a hardback bound copy). One girl highlighted the sadness of the study coming to an end: 'it was like sharing my life with someone and you were really interested in us and then it's over. I'll keep in touch with you'. As a group, we also discussed their views on the interview space moving from their school to university, and overall, the girls discussed university as being 'more exciting than being in school' and how it felt 'more relaxed', even exciting as a new setting. 'Space' was an interesting dimension of the

study as I started to reflect critically on how spaces impact the quality, mood and 'safety' of talk within the interaction. I set up a research meeting with a Human Geographer as a result of these reflections (Ludhra and Barker, 2012).

Finally, at the end of the study, the girls were all invited, over email, to reflect on their narrative contributions more holistically, where I presented the following questions as 'suggested' prompts:

- Has your involvement in this doctoral study as a 'co-researcher' had any impact on your thinking about culture, religion, identity, friendships, family etc...? If so, how?
- How do you see me as a researcher making any impact with this research for a wider readership outside of a PhD?
- Having read all of your transcripts and journal entries (if you kept them), how would you summarise your involvement? For example, what picture do they create about you as an individual? Were there any surprises etc...? There is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer - just read them all through and send me your thoughts if you have time.

Due to the timing of this request (summer holidays), I feel it influenced the low response rate. Only three returns were received from Arti, Preeti and Sara (reflections presented in Appendix 5). However, the focus group discussion touched on areas of question 1 and 2, and the invitation provided a further opportunity for more personal individual reflection outside of the group forum. In this way, I feel assured that all the girls were offered opportunities to voice their opinions.

Summary

As I have hopefully conveyed throughout the chapters, this research was never just a piece of research for me to gain academic status and the title of Dr (although inevitably, this is one of the outcomes of a Doctorate). This thesis has been influenced by black feminist theory, and stems from

the heart, mind and body. It sits within an embodied study of life experience (George, 2007; 2012) which is part of the knowledge-generation process. Although other researchers could have written a valuable thesis with the same twelve girls, I believe that my position, personality, and points of connection with these twelve girls, facilitated such rich narrative data and enthusiasm, where three girls discussed me as a role model. My positions allowed me to better understand some of the nuances of their narratives through my:

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Working-class 'roots' (Walkerdine, 1990; Skeggs, 2004)
- Skin colour (Fanon, 1986)
- Culture and religion in some cases
- Educational insights as an ex school leader
- Insights as a mother of two academically 'successful' girls of a similar age at the time of study (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001)
- Personality - I enjoy talking to young people and feel comfortable in school settings.

For me, this research journey has been '...the roar which lies on the other side of silence' (Belenky et al., 1986: 4), and in this way, it is a reflection of my agency as a woman to become academically 'successful', where I followed my father's mantra, and drew strength from some of the colourful challenges of my girlhood and early womanhood. As Cotterill and Letherby (1993: 74) discuss:

As feminist [and other] researchers researching women's [and men's and children's] lives, we take their autobiographies and become their biographers, whilst recognizing that the autobiographies that we are given are influenced by the research relationship... Moreover we draw on our own experiences to help us understand those of our respondents. Thus their lives are filtered through us and the filtered stories of our lives are present (whether we admit it or not) in our written accounts.

Part 2: Conclusions

This section will be structured under the following headings:

- Research question, aims and inspiration
- Key areas of the girls' narratives
- Key contributions to knowledge
- Limitations
- Future research directions
- Final words

Research question, aims and inspiration

The research question guiding this thesis was:

How can black feminist theory illuminate an understanding of the cultural identities of twelve, academically 'successful', British South-Asian girls, as told through their narratives?

I presented this in the following way to the girls:

Talk to me about how you see your cultural identity as a 21st century, South-Asian girl, living and studying in West London.

Within this open-ended question, the aim of the study has been to use black feminist theory to explore:

1. **The girls' configurations of 'culture':** How they understand, configure, and invest in 'culture' across their lives
2. **The girls' configurations of their identities:** How they configure and invest in their identities across their lives.
3. **What 'girlhood' looks like as a South-Asian girl:** What do their narratives reveal about 21st century, British South-Asian girlhood from their particular standpoint?

I used a narrative interview approach, the rationale for which has already been discussed in Chapter Three, and written up elsewhere (Ludhra, 2011; Ludhra and Chappell, 2011). This study was inspired by personal experiences of girlhood and womanhood, and critical reflections on my 'herstories' - how I experienced and invested in 'culture' and my cultural identities in relational and intersecting ways over time. This led to an interest in feminist ways of thinking (Belenky et al., 1986) about my cultural experiences, which were further inspired by having two daughters and observing their shifting girlhoods (Hey and George, 2013). I have already discussed dimensions of the personal in Chapter One and Part One of this chapter. At the early stages, I was particularly inspired by the valuable studies of Shain (1996; 2003, 2010) and Ghuman (1994; 1999; 2001; 2003) who conducted research with South-Asian adolescents to explore their cultural identities and strategies for coping across 'cultures'.

Key areas of the girls' narratives

The findings of this study, presented in Chapter Four under 'Narratives', have been presented across two broad areas, with sub-sections within:

- Configurations of 'culture'
- Configurations of cultural identities

For example, under configurations of 'culture', I present the highly weighted role of education, as 'culture' was discussed heavily in relation to education (Eliot, 1948) and learning more broadly. Although the narratives revealed similarities in areas, particularly in relation to the heavily 'weighted' role of education, what it means to be a 21st century, British South-Asian and academically 'successful' girl, revealed a diversity of identity positions as illustrated under Aim 3 in Chapter Five. In this section, I present a summary of the key findings from the girls' narratives, using the three aims as a structure.

Aim 1: The girls' configurations of 'culture'

The twelve girls interpreted the contested notion of 'culture' in relational ways (themes presented in Profile Charts 1 and 2 in Chapter Four). They configured, 'wore' and invested in dimensions of 'culture' (Phillips, 2010) in 'liquid' ways (Bauman, 2011; Hall, 2013) depending on a range of social and psychological influences across their lives. I have used a 'weighted' continuum analogy (Phillips, 2010) to discuss the gradation of investments, and Bauman's (2011) coined phrase of consuming/investing in culture in univorous to omnivorous ways. As Chapters Four and Five have illustrated, the girls' narratives were unique, as were the 'weightings' of dimensions in their cultural configuration maps.

Black feminism has provided me with a broad net to discuss these intersecting markers of differences and similarities in psychosocial ways (Bibby, 2010; Hollway, 2012), which draw in parts on Mirza's (2013) valuable notion of 'embodied intersectionality' for some girls. Black feminism offered a valuable theoretical position from which to explore how these girls psychologically drew on their psychological desires and motivations to perform their agency through spaces in-between cultures (Bhabha, 1998). In this way, they were able to synthesise parts of the old with the new (Walters and Auton-Cuff, 2009) to create a unique way of performing Asian girl, within the structures and configurations of their particular lives. I stress the following key points in relation to Aim 1:

- For some girls, the concept of 'culture' was compounded through heavier intersectionalities which created less space for agency and 'choice'. For example, Arti, Manpreet or Maya had more space and 'freedom' to explore 'culture' in ways that aligned with their interests. They narrated greater gender equality across their lives, in contrast to girls like Fauzia, Alka, Narinder and Maheera, who had stronger governing and structural pressures that 'oppressed' how they lived their lives (Collins, 2000). In some cases, structures

had become so embedded in hegemonic ways (Hill, 2008). Even where experiences were compounded through 'cultural' intersectionalities in less favourable ways, this did not necessarily mean that these girls had no agency or 'choice', or that they were distressed and in a state of crisis as a result. If anything, some girls like Maheera, Alka and Fauzia, drew strength from their heavier intersectionalities by drawing on their 'psychological capital' (Bradford and Hey, 2007) as catalysts for agency and change (hooks, 1989; Gladwell, 2008).

- Most girls narrated positive experiences about the role of 'culture' in their lives, in relation to how they configured its meanings and influences, to include religion, hobbies and artistic interests for example. Even where girls discussed 'culture' in critically negative ways (e.g.: Fauzia, Maheera and Narinder in areas linked to gender and patriarchy for example), there were still spaces where they acknowledged its positive influence - even if, in relation to providing a moral compass for 'higher' values and leading a 'respectable' life compared to selected 'others'.
- 'Culture' was heavily narrated in relation to the perceived power of education in future life (see Profile Chart 1). Education was seen as the key to unlocking future 'success', and narrated as contributing to a positive sense of self, high status and equality (Bhopal, 2011). However, when 'digging deep' into the girls' narratives, it became evident how each girl embodied different characteristics of educational 'success' and learning more broadly, which spanned beyond securing high A-level grades (see Profile Chart 2 - research by Reiss and White, 2013; 2014). In this way, the twelve girls narrated their configurations of 'culture' in relation to education in broad ways, which included in parts, a genuine passion for life-long learning and an appreciation of the power of education to 'open doors' and as a 'back-up plan' (Ahmad, 2006).

- All girls had a good awareness of how 'culture' was heavily linked to gendered values in the family and communities in which they lived. This awareness led to 'othering' of other girls in relation to moral values, affiliation with faith, levels of 'freedom' and so forth. These girls narrated dimensions of 'Asian culture' as largely having superior values to British white girls' culture (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2007). None of the girls referred to themselves as 'feminists', yet their narratives revealed how their cultural values and aspirations (including religious values) were narrated through feminist discourses of aspiring for equality in the home, workspace and future relationships (McRobbie, 2012). Girls like Maya discussed their lives as having a fairly gendered balance, influenced strongly by parental values in the home.
- Profile Chart 1 highlights how girls like Sara, Maheera, Fauzia, Arti and Anjula had heavily weighted configurations of 'culture'. These girls invested in 'culture' in omnivorous ways, and in this way, they had enhanced their CVs, developed leadership skills and confidence levels, through investing in opportunities that developed broader skill-sets across spaces of their lives.

Aim 2: The girls' configurations of their identities

As stated in Chapter Two, the concepts of 'culture' and 'identity' are linked (Sarup, 1996; Hall, 2013). I have aligned my view on identity with Bibby (2010: 9) as it acknowledges psychosocial influences:

We are psychosocial beings ... to study either ... is a form of splitting and misses the ways in which the internal and the external, the private and public, the individual and the social are deeply mutually implicated.

I concur with Brah's (2007a; 2012) standpoint that a woman psychologically and emotionally invests in her identity, and in this study, the notion of psychological investment was very important in relation to being and developing 'successful' identities. Becoming 'successful' will inevitably encompass experiences of 'failure' along the journey, in this study, I heard and observed the psychological impact of 'failure' through Fauzia (not securing the Scholarship Award or Headgirl role), Anjula (not securing a medical place or Headgirl role) and Manpreet (having to take a GAP year as she did not achieve all grades As). These girls had high self-expectations and aspirations, and although their cultural identities were influenced (and regulated) by structures, they self-regulated their regimes to minimise 'failures' (Foucault, 1984; Rose, 1999).

Through listening and analysing the girls' narratives, I came to understand the importance of their 'psychological capital' and resilience in performing 'successful' identities (Bradford and Hey, 2007; Ringrose, 2013). These girls demonstrated the ability to code-switch and be flexible across audiences and spaces, accommodating multiple ways of being a 'girl' (Marsh, 2013), whilst not dismissing the fundamental cultural values that they believed in, rooted in family influences. These were not necessarily fundamental British values, but a synthesis of values that they believed in - ones that informed how they performed and lived their British-Asian girlhoods (Mythen, 2012). Many of them performed their cultural identities in effortless ways on the surface, where an outsider looking in on their lives would not be able to appreciate the hard work invested in developing their 'successful' identities (Gladwell, 2008; Mendick and Francis, 2012). Their 'successful' identities were in no way effortless, but required hard work and determination (Jackson, 2010a).

These girls invested heavily in their educational identities, but unlike the neoliberal discourse of 'successful' girl (Ringrose, 2013), these girls were developing their culturally 'successful' identities by embracing the cultural dimensions of family values. Overall, they demonstrated respect and care

for parents, and in this way, their identities were being developed in ways that incorporated the importance of working with others as a community - for example, through charity work which some aligned with Islamic values, and being a good citizen in society.

These girls embraced challenges as valuable learning experiences (Craib, 1998), where a lack of privilege (financial or uneducated parents for example) was not narrated as an excuse for failure. Their identities were being configured in ways that took on life's challenges (all of course relative) to view them as learning experiences. At points, some girls discussed the psychological impact of their heavy identity investments, particularly those who were 'omnivorous', or those that had heavy intersectionalities, configured within patriarchal families. These girls performed the 'Supergirl' status to varying degrees of stress and intensity, where on the surface, their investments came across as effortless (Jackson, 2010b; Machin and Thornborrow, 2006), but they had a complex 'juggling' act to coordinate.

Aim 3: What 'girlhood' looks like as a South-Asian girl

The stereotypes of South-Asian girls were not generally relevant to these girls, as even where they appeared to be aligned with some on the surface, their narratives revealed ways in which they challenged them. As highlighted in Chapter One, being a South-Asian girl is layered and mediated within an array of physical, psychosocial, cultural, religious, historical and socio-political factors (Mirza, 1997; Gaine and George, 1999; Housee, 2004). When being a South-Asian girl intersects with notions of academic 'success' and discourses of the 'supergirl' (Pomerantz and Raby, 2011; Lucey, Melody, and Walkerdine, 2006), the picture is further complicated, particularly where intersectionalities are configured in 'heavier' and compounding ways as discussed earlier (Lutz, 2002; Shain, 2012). These intersections of difference are not always

narrated as disadvantages, but rather, as catalysts for empowerment and 'experiences that make you tougher' [Fauzia's words].

These girls were taking charge of their lives, where two girls explicitly narrated themselves as 'making their own way' without the support of parents. Their narratives conveyed psychological strength and desire to succeed. They were girls who showed leadership qualities of some form, and the ability to 'juggle' and take responsibility for their own 'success', where some girls did this in almost adult-like ways (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2007; Burns, 2009). Their identities did not focus on the visible and superficial aspects of 'culture' as presented in TV sitcom dramas - i.e.: bhangra music, Bollywood actresses, silk saris, henna patterns, the hijab (worn by 3 girls), arranged marriages, and living passively in patriarchal families (Handa, 2003; Rizvi, 2007; 2012; Shain, 2003; 2011; Mythen, 2012; Ahmad et al., 2003; Zagumny and Richey, 2013). Rather, they were girls who had critical voices, but not necessarily the opportunity or confidence to vocalise them across spaces that were more regulated - for example, Alka, Fauzia, Sunaina and Narinder were less vocal in the home space.

Religion was not the uniting factor for these girls, as it was far more about their approaches towards, and investments in education at a broad level. However, those from Muslim religious backgrounds demonstrated a stronger affiliation with their faith, where for Maheera and Sara there was a real scholarly and critical engagement. Some girls discussed notions of spirituality and being a good citizen as more important than religion.

As my individual discussion of each girl reveals in Chapter Five, what it means to be a British South-Asian girl cannot be interpreted in ways that classify them under one discrete label - this would have been impossible in my study. Static categories would underestimate the colourful dimensions of their 'successful' identities, and agentic ways of performing girl. As the title page highlights, Arti's image illustrates her alignment with

'a bit of Asian girlpower'. British South-Asian girlhood must be read and interpreted through language that recognises the fluidity and strength of their identities, in sometimes difficult contexts that require heavy psychological investments (Brah, 2007).

Significant contributions to knowledge

This study contributes to several practice and academic fields through its inter-disciplinary nature. The findings would potentially prove valuable to the following audiences: school-based practitioners; youth workers; lecturers in higher education; careers advisors; school counsellors; educationalists writing curriculum materials in critical studies, citizenship, RE and history; parents and carers; feminist researchers, narrative scholars, and very importantly, young people through an adapted, less theoretical version. The last audience - young people - was suggested by Arti during one of her reflections.

As an ex teacher, and currently a Teacher Educator, the findings of this study raise important questions (and tensions) for practitioners and school managers in relation to:

- paying greater attention to the cultural backgrounds of South-Asian girls in more individualised ways, as there can be huge differences, even within the same religious sub-group. South-Asian girls (or other minority ethnic groups), should not be seen as a homogenous group.
- setting aside, and planning for quality time/ focused advice, to talk to pupils (and their families) at key academic points, which could include: point of A level choices; during university application stages; university interview preparation support; strategic support for work-experience schemes and internships, particularly in highly competitive fields such as law, medicine and dentistry; expert

careers counselling, rather than generic advice which students in this study did not find very helpful.

- bringing in role models from minority ethnic groups (and possibly work-based mentors) that South-Asian girls can relate to and connect with, in relation to their particular backgrounds.
- tracking students' CVs and additional experiences, beyond those of academic grades. This process would encourage practitioners to explore gaps in experience, and encourage some capable, yet less confident girls, to apply for opportunities and positions of responsibility to broaden their skill set (and CV). My findings in parts, showed how Head Girls in particular, through the very nature of their leadership role, had a broad range of experiences to add to their CVs, and this positioned them in a highly privileged way.

The narrative approach aimed to centralise the voices of the twelve girls, giving them space to narrate and reflect on their cultural experiences over time (as illustrated in the methodology diagram presented in Chapter One). The way in which I framed the research question and aims, facilitated the more fluid and relaxed approach of a 'research conversation' (Woods, 1985; Ludhra and Chappell, 2011), rather than the atmosphere of a formal interview. In Chapter Two, I have referenced valuable studies in this field (Shain, 2003; Bhopal, 2011 for example), and they have mainly used one-off, semi-structured interviews, or been large-scale studies that draw on attitudinal surveys, alongside semi-structured interviews. Some have also included participants beyond girls, such as teachers or parents (for example: Abbas, 2004; Anwar, 1998; Ghuman, 1999; 2002; 2003 to name a few studies). By focusing on the girls only, I believe this contributed to the richness of data generated as part of this in-depth study. Through the girls' narratives, I also heard the perspectives of others that they interacted with, albeit at a distance.

The studies above, and those referenced in Chapter Two, have been incredibly valuable in shedding light on my thinking (particularly Shain, 2003). However, they have not presented the richness and depth of girls' narratives in ways that illuminate their 'success' trajectories during a critical moment/phase in their educational lives, which include experiences of transition from sixth form school to university. My position is that exploring dimensions of being and becoming 'successful', must draw on the psycho-social dimensions of how 'successful' girls configure and invest in 'culture' and their cultural identities (Bibby, 2010; Phillips, 2010). Mainstream feminist studies have done this in part, but these have been heavily 'weighted' towards majority ethnic girls - i.e.: white British (see valuable studies of Hey, 1997; 2010; Walkerdine, 1990; 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001; Hey and George, 2013).

The nature of this study, and its participants, incorporates the notion of 'success', rather than the media discourse where South-Asian girls are presented as lacking, or craving Western discourses of 'freedom', independence, 'choice' and equality (Shain, 2003; Mirza, Meeto and Litster, 2011). This study adds to the body of knowledge in 'successful' British South-Asian girlhoods, an area which I am keen to develop further. The 'success' position has allowed me to explore what the girls' 'success' journeys really look like from 'behind the scenes', where an 'outsider' looking in may only see effortless 'success' and achievement (Mendick and Francis, 2012), rather than the hard work (or 'grafting') that has been part of the journey. For me as the researcher, the process of researching with twelve girls, and exploring their narratives of 'success' over time, has raised critical questions about the empowering and emancipatory nature of 'success', and ways in which becoming a 'successful' Asian girl may also be limiting. For some of these very ambitious girls, becoming 'successful' could be compared to the metaphor of being trapped in a cage, as the journey raises psychological tensions (and for some, stresses) through self-regulatory practices that fulfil personal, alongside familial ambitions, expectations and desires. I draw the reader back to

Maheera's research journal analogy (Figure 18 - the 'caged bird'), where the metaphor of Maya Angelou's cage was used to illustrate a space which she wanted to escape. In seeking to escape one cage - i.e.: the home culture - the other space (i.e.: the school, university or world of work for example) could also become a different type of cage, where different cultural rules have to be followed, which develop into self-imposed targets, as part of their high expectations of the self. To my knowledge, I have not read about 'success' through the metaphor of a cage, and see this as making a useful contribution to new knowledge.

This study also makes theoretical contributions to knowledge, particularly black feminist thinking about 'successful' South-Asian girlhoods, and how they narrate their cultural identities in relational and intersecting ways. I am grateful to the work of Phillips (2010) and Bauman (2011) in particular, for inspiring the language and underpinning principles of my models, diagrams and graph, as presented in previous chapters. I remind the reader of these in order to illustrate my theoretical contributions, particularly how I have used gradations of language to express a continuum of experiences and intensity, rather than positioning these twelve girls into discrete categories which 'fix' their identities. First, at the end of Chapter Two, I present five key principles for understanding 'culture' and 'cultural identity' which I summarise in the chart below:

Table 10: Principles for understanding 'culture' and 'cultural identity'

	Draws on the principles of...
1	Black feminist theory
2	'Culture' does not belong to the elite - 'univorous' and 'omnivorous' concepts
3	Multiple and intersecting configurations of 'culture'
4	Culture as a psycho-social process
5	Culture is configured, 'worn', and invested in gradations of weightedness, heavy, light or other ways.

In relation to point 1 above, In Chapter Three, I presented a 'weighted' continuum for explaining the girls' cultural identities, where I drew on Phillips' (2010) concept of 'wearing' culture lightly (or otherwise):

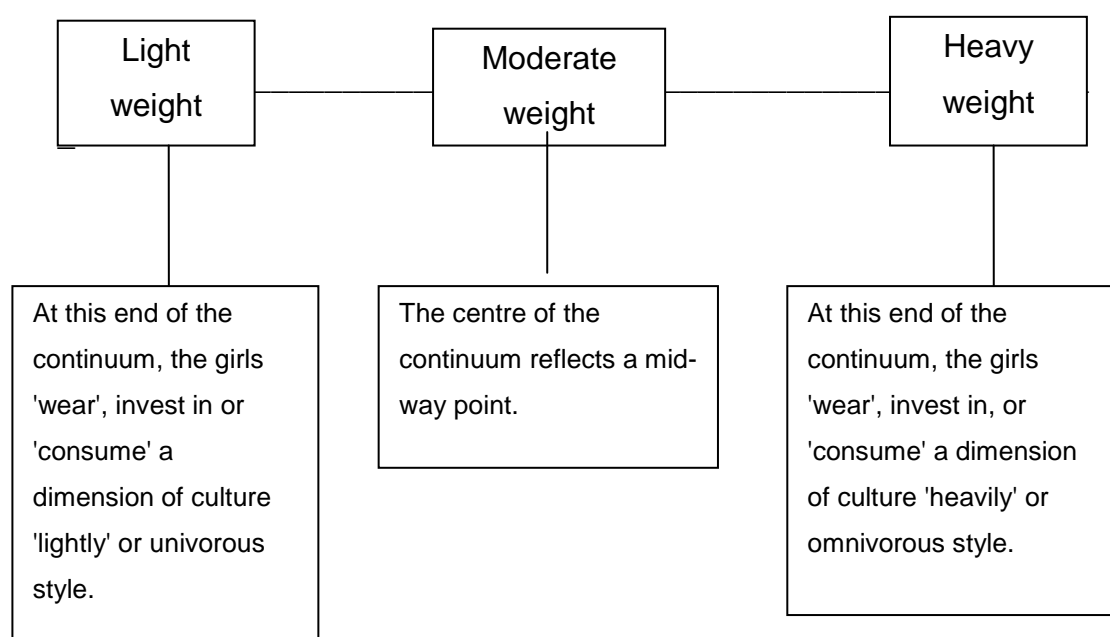
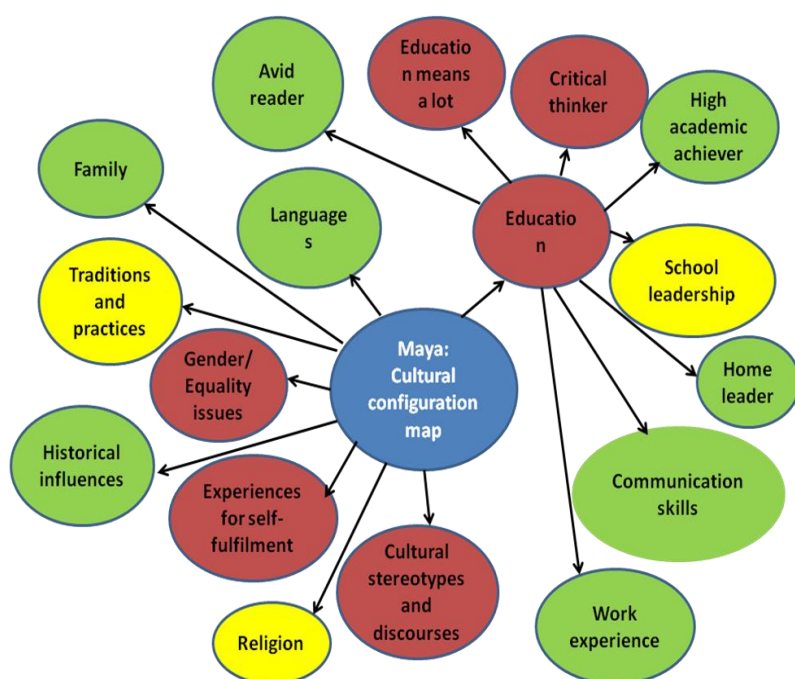


Figure 52: A 'weighted' continuum

In Chapters Two and Five, I presented three colour-coded 'cultural configuration maps' for Maya, Arti and Sunita, selecting these three girls as their configurations looked quite different. These maps illustrated the 'weightedness' of dimensions.



Maya: cultural configuration map

Key:

- Yellow: 'wears' and invests in lightly
- Green: 'wears' and invests in moderately
- red: 'wears' and invests in heavily

Figure 53: Maya: cultural configuration map

The above map is a different way of presenting the data themes from the three Profile Charts, which provide a broader picture across the twelve girls, as illustrated in the chart below as a reminder:

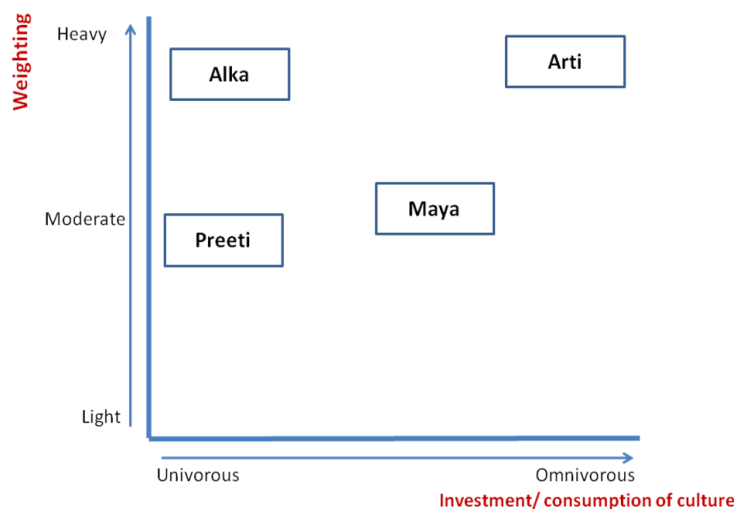
Chart 1: Profile of Cultural Configurations

Culture narrated in relation to...	Arti HG	Manpreet	Fauzia	Sara HG	Anjula	Maheera	Alka	Ravi	Preeti	Maya	Narinder	Sunita
The importance of education	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
Gender/ equality issues	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	H	H	H	H	M
The importance of family	M	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	H	H
Awareness of stereotypes and discourses of SA girls	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	H	H	H	H	M
The importance of languages (inc. mother tongue)	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	M	M	M	M
The importance historical influences	M	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	M	M	H	M
Religion	L	L	H	H	H	H	H	M	L	L	M	L
Experiences for self-fulfilment/ personal interest	H	H	L	H	M	H	L	M	L	H	M	M
Traditions and practices	M	M	H	H	H	M	H	M	M	L	H	M

- HG= Head Girl
- All 12 girls narrated education as carrying a heavy weight (Profile Chart 2 provides a breakdown of education)

Finally, in Chapter Five, I developed a simple graph to illustrate how the girls 'wear' and invest in/consume dimensions of 'culture' across their lives, which combines Phillips' (2010) language of 'wearing culture lightly' (or otherwise) and Bauman's (2011) principles on investing/ consuming culture in univorous to omnivorous ways, which I view as operating along a sliding continuum.

Graph to illustrate how the girls 'wear' and invest/ consume dimensions of 'culture' in their lives



Limitations

Throughout the study, I adopted a critically reflexive stance, whereby I noted limitations at regular points, in my research journal. The nature of a PhD inevitably raises limitations, and whilst I have been highly self-critical, I have chosen four areas below as the most important:

- The nature of the sample and 'Other' voices
- The types of schools
- Generalisability
- 'Blurring'

This study included twelve girls who had an academically 'successful' track record, and invested heavily in education and their families. They were largely from working-class and lower middle-class backgrounds, and all aspired to achieve a university education, professional careers, and without using the word 'feminism', they narrated a desire to live through the principles of feminism - but *their* version of feminism, as configured through 'culture'. As discussed in Chapters One and Three, I did not enter this study from the point of attracting only academically 'successful' girls, but this is how my participants were configured. Although I see this as a strength of the study in relation to providing a shared point of connection across the girls, as well as a stronger focus for me as the researcher, it could also be viewed as a limitation. There are potentially twelve missing voices of those who are not as 'successful' academically, or otherwise.

I chose two large West London schools as they worked well in relation to geographic location, and they were schools secured through research contacts. The type of school was not necessarily my focus - it was more about the girls' narratives of 'culture' and their cultural identities. However, with hindsight, it would have been interesting to have two more diverse school settings, where one for example, was a more rural school with a

lower South-Asian population. This would have provided opportunities to explore how notions of 'race' and 'othering' are narrated in contrasting settings and geographies, if discussed at all.

This in-depth, narrative exploration into twelve girls' lives, is not intended to be generalised across South-Asian girls in the UK context. As stated in earlier chapters, there is no one type of South-Asian girl, as each girl lives her own unique narrative and context. The study does however, raise important findings to illustrate and disrupt broader discourses of South-Asian girls in the media. It seeks to represent and value personal experiences, so that individual voices can be heard. As Evans (1999) valuably discusses, the particular can be used to illustrate the general, and in cases this may hold true for some of the girls in this study.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, I reflected in a critically reflexive style on my relational positions with the girls, and how these shifted through the research stages, depending on our points of connection/disconnection. At times, these positions were not clear-cut (as discussed by Breen, 2007), but sometimes 'blurred' and shifting. It was always my intention to :

“work towards a position that recognises both the personhood of the researcher and the complexity of the researcher/respondent relationship and yet allows for useful things to be said” (Letherby, Scott and Williams, 2013: 87).

The process of data collection and analysing the data, provoked psychological and emotional responses in me, which were inevitable due to some degree, due to the inspiration for this study, and my own autobiography (Hollway, 2012). By being transparent about this 'blurring' dimension of positions, I do not present it as problematic, but rather, prefer to draw on Breen's (2007) presentation in terms of the researcher 'in the middle', where I recognise my subjectivity. This 'blurring' may have

influenced the nature of data collected; relationships with the girls, and choices about what data are left in or out of the study.

Future research directions

This study has raised several ideas for future research which really excites me. I have selected three research areas that I would like to develop over the next academic year:

1. Follow-up research with six girls from this sample
2. Develop a research project on exploring girls' Facebook identities, which incorporates blogging and co-writing with girls
3. Working with minority ethnic primary PGCE teachers to track their 'successful' trajectories (and challenges/ obstacles).

All girls in this sample conveyed interest in participating in future, post-doctoral research, although I recognise that some may have changed their mind. Some have now completed their degree courses, whilst some will still be studying for medicine, dentistry or law for example. This would be an ideal time to follow-up the study and explore the degree to which their school-based 'successful' identities have been further developed (or not as maybe the case) through university and in securing their first graduate posts. Haw (2010; 2011) returned to her Muslim female participants as part of her Doctorate, fifteen years later.

Some girls discussed Facebook and the degree to which they used it in their lives. This included concerns about it as a distraction when heavily focused on education, and the presentation of 'respectable' identities in virtual spaces that conveyed a particular 'type' of girl. In three instances, I was directed/ encouraged by girls to join Facebook to view girls' profiles to see the range of South-Asian girlhoods (at that time I was not on Facebook, but since then have joined). For example, Arti and Sunaina discussed how there were pictures of girls heavily into socialising,

drinking and wearing less modest dress, to those who used it in a more informed and political way to discuss and collaborate through networks - for example, Islamic discussion groups, to organise events, raise awareness of a political topic and so forth. Furthermore, I have been following the blog of an academically 'successful', South-Asian medical student (<https://harleenbloggs.wordpress.com/>), where I have approached her to discuss the topics that she blogs and her inspirations. I am planning to write a collaborative blog on areas which link to themes raised in my study - for example: notions of caste in current discourses, cultural discourses surrounding 'respectability', 'Playing the virginity queen' and, becoming a 'successful' doctor.

Finally, as a Teacher Educator working on a large and very diverse PGCE programme, I am interested in applying my theoretical framework of black feminism and interest in psycho-social identities, towards research with minority ethnic student teachers. I am interested to research their narratives of 'success' (and gradations of 'failure' as discussed by them) along their becoming teacher journeys and into their newly qualified years. This area has received little attention, yet Initial Teacher Education OfSTED inspections question how different student groups perform, their recruitment, retention and 'success' rates. and reasons for leaving the course. As Lander (2014) valuably states: 'there is little content to preparing teachers to understand their own racialised positions as powerful professionals, within either predominantly white or multiethnic classrooms' (p.93). I intend to draw on my reflective journal work within the National 'Teachers as Writers Project', where I will explore, with the student teachers, ways of documenting significant training experiences across settings that act as a catalyst for 'success' or otherwise.

Final words

I opened the thesis with Alka's narrative, which illustrated her intersectionalities, desires, emotions and aspirations in becoming 'successful'. I have chosen Anjula to end, as she succinctly summarises not only the affect of the study on her, but the essence of our collaborative research journeys (as co-researchers) and the psycho-social dimensions and richness of narrative research:

It was kind of like going through a journey to a different bit of me - I don't know, maybe a journey through my life because I've been talking about my life to you a lot - it sounds really stupid but that's how it felt...I kind of looked forward to the meetings but also felt kind of confused after as they made you think - I don't know - yeah something like that. I can't think of the right words at the moment but...yeah 'cos it's kind of like summed up your whole life, especially like highlighting this time of our life which is all so hectic, hectic, hectic. Thanks for making it a bit calmer and listening. **(Anjula, Interview 3, final reflection)**

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Examples of transcripts

Preeti: Extracts from Interview 3

Transcript	Codes	My notes
Context: Preeti is talking about Asian magazines and depictions of women across them in relation to how skinny some models are, their fair skin, as well as questioning the value of some of the articles. She talks about sharing these magazines with her brother and sister and their views.		
Preeti: I was reading the magazines and then I was trying to think about what the word 'culture' really means in them because that was one of the biggest questions for me in this study and I just couldn't answer it and I still don't think I can really answer it.	CULT-DEF Seeking a definition/ meaning of culture	Exploring culture in magazines
Geeta: Talk me through that confusion.		Confusion
Preeti: I was just trying to figure it out... I went on the internet and asked my family about it and looked for definitions. And it came up with 'a shared learned, symbolic system of values, beliefs and attitudes that shapes and influences perceptions and behaviour.' So basically it's just people joining together and having similar ideas and beliefs about things which I	CULT-DEF Seeking a definition/ meaning of culture CULT-VAL Culture in relation to values,	Researching meanings Sharing ideas and beliefs Culture and

think is definitely what culture is because it's separate from religion and it's more to do with where you come from and your heritage and the traditions you hold and the way you have been brought up. So that was the main thing I kind of discovered, I still don't really know what it means to me and how it affects me in my life.	beliefs and traditions CULT-PAR Culture in relation to parents	religion as separate Heritage and traditions
<p>Geeta: Do you think it has to have one definition?</p> <p>Preeti: No it definately doesn't</p> <p>Geeta: So what do you think it means for you?</p>		Not a single definition
<p>Preeti: I think talking about what culture means is really hard. I mean - culture is all that stuff – like you could say it's about... wearing Indian suits or Indian cooking or where you come from, but I don't think it's just about that typical stuff. It's much more... it's hard to pinpoint it really as it means so much. Culture to me is just... I think it's all the traditions that you have come from historically and grown up with - historical traditions probably make up a key part of your particular culture and that history kind of separates you from other people and cultural groups - umm...</p> <p>but I don't know - I don't think it, it shouldn't define who you totally are, really - it's just part of you and it adds another</p>	<p>CULT-SIG Cultural signifiers</p> <p>REF-G Reflective - girl</p> <p>CULT-VAL</p>	<p>Hard to define</p> <p>Not the stereotypes</p> <p>Histories of people</p> <p>Part of you but not all</p>

something to you, so you know - where you come from and that kind of stuff in that sense.		
Geeta: so you don't think culture defines who you are?		
Preeti: I don't think so.		
Geeta: So what do you think defines who you are as an individual?		
Preeti: It's the person you are inside really, it's your personality and the way you act and behave so in a sense your culture does kind of come into it because your culture teaches you about being a good person and know the difference in right from wrong, then it does come into it and it does kind of make you part of the person you are. But it's not, it definitely does come totally into it but it's not everything about you. It's about the way you've been brought up and the ideas you've formed about things from the way you've been brought up and the culture you come from.	ID- CULT Identity discussed in relation to culture CULT-+ Culture discussed positively CULT-PAR Culture in relation to parents	Importance of psychological traits - personality Culture- right and wrong Upbringing

Sara: Extracts from Interview 1

Transcript	Codes	My notes
Small conversation about her daily reading of the Quran in English and Arabic and she then arrives to the chapter on women.		
Geeta: OK, so you're reading this chapter on 'women'. Talk to me any reflections it's raised for you?		
Sara: Well because it was written years	CUL-REL	Quran

ago it' not, it's obviously not got a modern twist - it's got, I don't think it's got anything on marriage but it's got like stuff you do when your husband dies and who a man can marry. So a man can't marry a daughter or your sisters' daughter – so your niece - but he can marry I think? Yeah it talks about marriage as in you know – you can't marry your daughter obviously but you can marry your sisters' daughter or something like that and it's got a whole... it's quite confusing I think but I've read it a few times and it's just for a man mainly – who he can marry and who not to marry and how he has to treat his wife with high respect and in Islam women and men are supposed to be very equal.	Culture discussed in relation to religion	chapter on women Men's rights Islam and gender equality
Geeta: In what ways?		
<p>Sara: Yeah women have the important role of looking after the children. And the one I like best...yeah they've got to look after the children at the same time as the children have got to look after the parents and my favourite quote is one – that you've got to love your mother 3 times more than your father.</p> <p>Geeta: 3 times?</p> <p>Sara: Yeah, 3 times more than the father.</p> <p>Geeta: An interesting quote</p> <p>Sara: Yeah because it's not favouritism - it makes sense because you know your</p>	<p>CUL-REL Culture discussed in relation to religion</p> <p>GEQ Gender & equality CULTR-P+ Cultural & religious</p>	<p>Women and children - high respect for mother</p> <p>Respect for parents</p>

<p>mother was the one who carried you for 9 months who was there to feed you and look after you whereas dad just went out to work. It's not saying that you don't love your father but 3 times more the mother has to have that much love. And also that chapter talked about children that they've got to respect parents at an old age and talking about obeying the parents and ... Yeah, obey, respect your parents and when they're at an old age, when they can't walk or they need help you've got to be - you know - you shouldn't shout at them- you've got to do whatever they want you to and show them respect as children.</p>	<p>values - promoting positive respect for parents</p>	
<p>Geeta. So you discussed this with your parents after reading this chapter?</p>		
<p>Sara: Yes, I talk to them about what I read, so from reading that bit I've realised that, it's not like I shout at them but I do get angry at times.</p> <p>Geeta: Can you explain what you mean?</p>	<p>G-INF-P Girls influencing parents through their views</p>	
<p>Sara: Well not in an angry way so it's taught me that - they're not that old now, but at a young age I should start respecting them more. Like if they tell me to do something I should do it ...and also I like it when I read something and I let them know what I've read and you've got to think Hadith – you know the prophet</p>	<p>G-INF-P FB-R Learning about religion through Facebook</p>	<p>Respecting parents FB and Hadiths</p>

and his poem – his teachings, it's on a Facebook group and I read them all.		
Geeta: What's this called again?		
<p>Sara: Hadith. Yeah and the Face group which has daily Hadith and so I read it and I let my parents know and I sort of teach them in a way too – let them know stuff from Facebook and so they can see that I'm getting more religious as I'm reading more and more everyday - so I think they feel like their part is done for me - they've educated me and given me good values.</p> <p><i>Move onto a slightly later section about the meaning of the chapter</i></p>	<p>FB-R CULT-VAL+ The cultural values at home are viewed positively</p>	<p>Reciprocal learning about religion - child-directed Parents and high values</p>
<p>Sara: ...it just talked about modesty. Like it doesn't say you have to wear the headscarf – you just have to be modest so you can't wear clothes that are revealing, that are too tight and what you wear should not attract another man's unnecessary attention, so another man shouldn't be attracted to you from what you wear, so it shouldn't be something bright, that you know you'll get the attention of the guy. So it doesn't tell you that you have to wear the headscarf but whatever you wear it should be..um..um... modest wear.</p> <p><i>Towards the end of interview</i></p>	<p>CUL-REL C-DRESS Dress codes in relation to cultural norms and appropriateness</p>	<p>Dress and modesty</p>
<p>Geeta: Well I'm going to round it up there. I'm conscious of your voice – do take some water. It was really interesting</p>	<p>REF-R Reflective part of</p>	<p>End of study reflection</p>

listening to your insights. Can you tell me how you felt talking about the wide range of things that you've raised today?	interview from researcher	
<p>Sara: Well I think it's been very good practice for me, because in some medical interviews at university you'll be expected to just talk for 5 minutes at a time about whatever topic they give you so it keeps you on your feet. I really enjoyed it.</p> <p>I had a good feeling because usually before today, I don't really like open-up that much. I don't like to talk this openly, even with my best friend. Like I can't stand hugs or anything so I'm quite a closed person, but it's taught me today that maybe I can open up more than I thought – maybe to a stranger though, but I wouldn't sit down with my friends and talk about all this stuff.</p> <p>Geeta: How have you found the process of the interview?</p> <p>Sara: Well it's sort of brought back memories of stuff. So it's all in my head already and I'm just kinda getting it all out, stuff like - just talking about the whole chapter, this chapter and I don't know, I finished it about 2 months ago so I haven't reflected back on it and now I have had a chance to and that's been really good - I think just reflecting back on what each chapter means like this would be good. I think maybe I should do that more at home like after I've finished this</p>	<p>REF-G+ Reflective part of interview from girl- discussed positively</p> <p>G-INF-P Girls influencing parents through their views</p> <p>VOI-H Girl has a voice at home</p>	<p>Reflection: good practice for interviews, open up more, felt good.</p> <p>Opportunity to reflect back - apply this approach to family discussion</p>

chapter maybe I ought to tell my brother and my parents about it we have a more open discussion about it. That way I won't forget it and that way we all learn more.		
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Fauzia: Extracts from Interview 2

Transcript	Codes	My notes
I've got this picture of a house, it's not exactly my house but I thought it would be quite good as an illustration so if you look over here, so you've got a plan of a house. I got the pictures from the internet. And umm... so, what I want to illustrate to you is that after coming back from school, you step almost into a whole new parallel world, just like in the school you'd be you and your creative identity comes through there, and then you come home and as soon as you step through that front door, it's like all this- whole other world with different rules and a different culture so that's so different to school.	CULT-R&B Culture- rules & boundaries REF-SP Reflection on spaces REF-J Reflection through journal	Describing two cultural worlds - home & school boundaries Journal entry used as a good talking point
Where it's all about your family, traditions, cultures, religion and stuff like that. So umm... on the second page of the journal, there's a picture of a house and what I did was inside the house there was different parts of the house so you can see the kitchen, the bathroom, the bedroom so I wanted to show you that my personal space would be my bedroom up here, where it would be I can do what I want to	ID-HHC Identity in home -heavily weighted culturally REF-J REF-SP	Spaces in the house - room connects with school

do, it would be my own private space.		
Geeta: So there's your own personal space, your bedroom and it's just you there?		
Fauzia: Just me, no else is going to come in there and put their things in there, it's my space. But when I go into the kitchen for example it would be like the whole culture thing would start to come out - the traditional role that I have to play in the house and then in the sitting room, like in the living room would be where sometimes we would relax but I don't relax there as I don't really watch TV so... It would be like the whole house is supposed to be like the umm... like the other part of my life, whereas the personal space bit would be like just me in my room and that would be the only part in the house where I can sort of relate to my school life if you get what I mean? It's like at school everyone's like Fauzia, Fauzia, Fauzia [said in a raised tone] but in my room- it's just Fauzia [quieter], but everywhere else it's....like loads of demands on me.	<p>CULT- TRAD-H Culture viewed as traditional in home REF-SP AGEN-SCL/ VOI-SCL Agency and voice in the school EXP-PAR Expectations from parents</p>	<p>Spaces in the house bring out 'culture' in its 'traditional' sense. More attention at school - Fauzia (x3) - in demand</p>
Geeta: So are you saying that your bedroom and school sort of link in a way?		
Yeah like...like that's the only link that I have. Even when I make phone calls and things, it's in my room because it would be like outside of the main house bit and it's like you have to learn to play your	ID-HHC	Playing different roles across spaces

roles differently in the two areas.		
Break in transcript to illustrate another section		
I went on work experience for two weeks, I said that last time I was going on work experience. I won it through a umm... competition that I did when you had to do a one to one conversation with your mentor.	ED-XTRA Educational extra - adds to the CV	Work experience
Geeta: Oh yes- I do remember that.		
And I'd explained last time that umm... if you did well they would give you a work experience placement, so I did two week's work experience since the last time we spoke. One week with a umm... one of the Inns of Court, there's only four in London so when you want to become a barrister you have to be called on by one of the Inns of Court, so there would be like thousands of applicants applying and only like four hundred would - maybe two hundred would get in because they don't have that many Inns of Court. But I was fortunate enough to get a work experience placement with one of the barristers who I shadowed for a week. And umm... the lady that I shadowed, she did commercial law so it was a part of law that I hadn't studied, the only part so I was quite lucky to have got her. And I realised that she was a strong female working as a barrister and she had done really well for herself and I was quite	ED-XTRA WE-LAW Work experience - law RMOD Rolemodel GEQ Gender & equality CAR-ASP Career aspirations	Work experience Importance of a female mentor Equality & diversity Notion that anyone can do well - aspirations to become a barrister.

<p>inspired by seeing that because of the equality thing, which is why I have drawn the scales with men and women in my journal - it's the equality that we have in this country that's really good - it's sort of like a boost to give you like the inspiration that you can do it also and be anything if you work hard. And I did diversity [in journal] because I thought in umm... the place that I worked in was full of like different coloured people, different types - like everyone was so different yet they got on so well. So I thought that was very important in umm... specially being like a Muslim Asian girl in this country we don't have to fear that maybe we're not good enough or we're never going to get there because I saw people there who are like probably - they came from a state school as well just like me and did quite well for themselves, so I did a little page on equality and diversity as that came out in this placement a lot to me. It made me think that I could be there too one day.</p>		
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Manpreet: Extracts from Interview 3

Transcript	Code	Narrative
Geeta: You seem to have travelled quite a bit. How has, if it has - how has travelling impacted on your understanding of culture and identity?		
Manpreet: Umm... I think firstly the fact	ID-TRA	Passion for

<p>that I've travelled abroad, like I get onto a plane and I actually go, that's affected me a lot because it's made me see the world as in its big way, yet it's small. Because there's so many places that you could go to across the globe, but yeah there's also – it's so easy to get to which makes it so much more smaller, you know, and also like my uncle lives in Australia – I could just ring him up any time and speak to him you know or visit him if I could.</p> <p>And because I'm interested in History and I like my English Literature and stuff...I read about places so it's made me become more understanding about everything and also not just affecting my own culture but understanding other peoples as well you know as I'm interested in all cultures – going to France and seeing the way French people live or like going to India and seeing what I don't normally see in London you know. Because I went to the Punjab area – I went to Delhi but I don't really remember that, but I went to Amritsar and stuff. But yeah, especially a trip to India it took me more back to my roots with the language and people and temples. I went to the Golden Temple and everything and you know, people speaking Punjabi around me and things like that, whereas here, you know, everyone's speaking English and I hardly ever go to the temple and</p>	<p>Identity development through travel</p> <p>CULT-GLO Global understanding of culture</p> <p>ID-LANG Identity in relation to languages</p>	<p>travel - global girl</p> <p>Explore cultures - interest in others India - roots</p> <p>Travel - adventure</p>
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things, you know, so it's definitely opened my view to so much more and also it's just made me – I think travelling has made me more adventurous, as in, you know, I want to go to like to so many more places, you know, and every time I go to one place I want to go somewhere else and somewhere else.		
Geeta: Sounds like you've got the travel bug?		
Manpreet: Yeah, it's a travel bug definitely. I remember when I was younger, I'd be like, when I've finished school, when I've finished university I'm going to go travel the world with my rucksack. My dad's like, no, first you're going to work hard, get good results, get a job, get some money, then you can travel the world. I was like thank you! But yeah - I've always wanted to just travel and see things and I want to go to America, I want to go to Australia you know, I want to go to South Africa now, you know, after the World Cup and everything, so there's loads of places I want to go to and learn about to get new experiences.	ASP-FUT Aspirations for the future ID-PAR Identity in relation to parents' views	Aspiration to travel in the future - seen as a valuable experience Work hard advice from father
Geeta: Do you ever keep a diary of your travels?		
Manpreet: No I don't but I've always kept a scrapbook of where I go but I haven't been keeping it recently. But my parents	ID-TRA ID-PAR	Scrapbook Lack of time

always encourage me and my brother to keep a scrapbook and pick up things along the way but I've kind of slowed down cos' there's no time anymore.		
Geeta: No time?		
Manpreet: Yeah exactly. Life's so busy now.		
Geeta: So all of these dimensions that you've discussed - how do you think they influence who you are?		
Manpreet: ...it helps me 'cos like - in the future one day I could even be living in another country, you know, that's not England. 'cos my dad's always saying, you know, go abroad, you know, if you find a nice place in Spain, just go and live there if you wanted to, so it's just broadening my horizons to the world I suppose.	CULT-GLO ASP-FUT	Open to living abroad one day
Move to another section re leadership		
Geeta: Talk to me about your involvement in the leadership team in the school as that's come up quite a bit.		
Manpreet: Umm...well - not many people know that I'm in the leadership team because it kind of gets more announced after the summer holidays, so like in a few weeks time more people will know who I am in it. But for me as a person – how has it impacted me – well I just feel like I've got a sense of - I've got an important role now to play within the	ED-L Developing educational skills through leadership AGEN-SCL VOI-SCL Agency and voice in the school	Leadership team - developing a sense of role - speaking for others Solve

<p>school. I'm not just a student, I've got more to do you know, and also, like I have, I have to do things for other people now, you know, I'm not just here for me – as a leader- you know, I also have to take into account that there's other people in the school that I'm now representing and listening to and that I'm going to have to do things for and if someone has a problem I'm going to have to, you know, be there to help them and solve it and assist them in any way I can you know. Like my brother who also goes to the same school as me- you know- now I suppose any of these problems like – I don't know – like the football club has been cancelled for the past year or something – I can raise that issue and do something about it, whereas before he might not have had that chance to really find someone who can raise that issue but because I'm in the leadership team I'm able to do those sort of things.</p> <p>So, you know, also it's made my family very proud as well, 'cos they're like, you know, I'm part of the leadership team you know, being a leader that is an important role and you know and I'll put it on my CV.</p>	<p>ED-EXTRA ID-P Identity development in relation to parents</p>	<p>problems for others Family pride Leadership- CV</p>
<p>Geeta: Do you feel that you're going to have a strong voice in it?</p>		
<p>Manpreet: Umm... I actually consider myself quite shy so in a way it's a bit</p>	<p>ED-L Developing</p>	<p>Shy - role will enable</p>

<p>weird for me to be a sort of person who has to like speak out – speak out for other people – but, you know, umm... which I think is the reason why I didn't go for – opt for Headgirl – because I was like, I wanted to be part of the leadership team but I didn't want to be the leader like the Headgirl - it's a lot of pressure that. I just wanted to be a leader, like a little leader from the side and assist with the main person. So, you know, I'm there at the forefront as a leader but I'm not all there you know, I'm like a slight step back but – and also 'cos I know that there's people who would made really good leaders, you know better than me - who will speak out more and stuff and won't shy away like I can do sometimes - they'll be better as the leader.</p>	<p>educational skills through leadership</p>	<p>her to move out of her comfort zone Leadership on the side - not Headgirl</p>
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Appendix 2: Research Information Pack (extracts)

Research Information Pack (selected extracts)

Contents

1. Cover Page (with contact details)
2. Introduction Letter **(included)**
3. My Profile and Career Background
4. Research question, Overview and Aims of the Study
5. Your Involvement - Step by Step Guidance **(included)**
6. Roles and Expectations **(included)**
7. Ethical Considerations **(included)**
8. Informed Consent Process
9. Your Rights
10. Queries and Questions
11. Complaints Procedure
12. Consent letter **(included)**
13. Consent Form **(included)**
14. Signed Consent Section
15. Thank you

2. Introduction Letter

Dear Participant, Headteacher, Parent/ Carer,

I have addressed this pack to all of you so that everybody receives the same message. I hope it provides you with all the relevant information for considering your participation in this PhD study. If you feel unsure about any of the sections that follow, please contact me for further clarification. I speak Hindi and Punjabi so if any translations are required for parents/ carers, I am very happy to do this in person.

At the introduction meeting, you will have already read this and therefore be familiar with its contents, ready to ask me any questions. There will be ample opportunity for participants (and parents/ carers/ teachers) to ask questions at the introduction meeting and afterwards.

My PhD is an exploratory study seeking to understand the cultural experiences of South-Asian girls studying in West London secondary education. In order to carry out the study

and gain really genuine insights, I would like to conduct research conversations (informal interviews) with a small sample of Asian girls aged between 16-18 years of age. These research conversations would be conducted on the school premises (if things need to change, you will be informed well in advance).

Ideally, as your child is a sixth-former, I will interview them during their free periods or lunch times (where their timetable provides space to do so). If this proves difficult, I can easily conduct the interviews straight after school and this may be the preferred option for some participants as they may feel more relaxed to talk then. I will work within the needs of the participants and school at all times. I appreciate how busy the secondary school timetable can be and I do not wish to interrupt any teaching or valuable lesson time. If any participants have personalised needs that require modification in terms of communication of the materials, I will happily address these.

Teachers, I politely request a quiet and private room within the school and this room should be somewhere that the participants feel comfortable and safe to talk in. Where possible, the participant could help to decide on a preferred location (depending on room availability and booking systems). The key being, the girls must feel happy to be interviewed in that space.

I appreciate your valuable time in reading this extensive information pack- my aim is to ensure that you are all as well-informed as possible and have the pack to refer to before, during and after the research process. You have it electronically and in hardcopy.

Kindest Regards,

Geeta Ludhra

5. Your Involvement- Step by Step Guidance

What would be required at each stage of this study?

Recording the Research Conversations using a Dictaphone

I have called the meetings 'research conversations' rather than 'interviews' as I will not be asking a string of formal questions as in the traditional interview. I would like it to be a relaxed conversation, and if it is not, please say so. I would like to record each meeting on my digital dictaphone (see example) to avoid any distractions and enable greater accuracy and speed in transcription. Your consent will be required for this as highlighted in the consent form later. Please do ask questions about this stage and how I keep your data secure and anonymous.

Pre-Commitment Stage

Participants must think carefully about the various parts of this study (the topic, time commitments, ethical considerations as outlined later, etc...), before giving informed consent. As a researcher, I want all participants to feel confident and fully informed of what is involved from the outset, so that participants can take an active and willing role if they decide to engage. If participants decide to take part, then parents/ carers and the Headteacher would need to consent in writing as indicated on the forms at the end of the

pack. I will only involve participants once all paperwork is complete. Participation is entirely voluntary and is not part of any school assessment procedure. I will not be offended if you decide it is not for you.

Research Conversation 1

Participants will engage with me in a 'research conversation' about how they view 'culture' and their identities across spaces of their lives. In sharing their opinions and examples, they will be doing most of the talking, and I will do most of the listening. I will at times ask for clarification or additional detail to help me fully understand any points that are unclear. It is important that I understand what is being said so that I can appreciate explanations from the participant's point of view. The conversation is very much directed by the participants.

Based on two previous, small-scale pilot studies, I anticipate each research conversation to take up to 1.5 hours max. (I will not run over this period). There will be three research meetings in total (as a suggestion), and in between meetings, there will be spaces for participants to log any reflections/ thoughts (this will be totally voluntary stage and I will discuss this at the meeting).

At the first meeting, I will begin by collecting some background information - e.g: age, religious group, time in current school, number of siblings, parental occupations, reason for wanting to take part etc....

At the end of each research meeting, we will set a date and time for the forthcoming meeting and briefly discuss how each participant felt about their research involvement up to that point. There will be reflection space built into every interview.



After the first research conversation and before meeting two

The first research conversation will be fully transcribed if you agree to this. I will e-mail participants this transcript by an agreed date that we will both set together. If participants would like a hardcopy, I can arrange this too in line with individual preference. I would like participants to read this first transcript carefully and make any comments/ notes around the transcript (this can be done electronically if easier using 'track changes'). For example, annotating and highlighting areas that require further explanation for clarity. If you wish to withdraw any information, you are of course welcome to at any stage. I will read the transcript before meeting two and note any open questions for further exploration.

Reflections

As highlighted earlier, I would like each participant to record some sort of interim reflections. These do not have to be in the written form (e.g.: notes or diary) as they could possibly include audio recordings of thoughts, visual images/ diagrams, photographic images/ representations, magazine collages etc...). I am keen to leave the choice of recording/ reflection to each participant as every individual has preferred ways

of reflecting. Should any resources be required to support this process (e.g.: note books, disposable camera, digital dictaphone (for loan), particular magazines etc...), I will happily provide them free of charge. Any reflective evidence will be shared and discussed in our meetings, and I will only include extracts in my thesis with your permission and consent. I stress that this stage is totally voluntary and dependant on your time.

Research Conversation 2

At this meeting, I will ask participants to share any reflections on transcript one (e.g.: Do you wish to talk about any extra information or add detail about an area raised in meeting one? Do you wish to raise a new point for discussion that you feel is significant to the topic of my study etc...?). I will also look at my notes on meeting one and ask about areas that I would like extra information/ clarity on (e.g.: Can you tell me a little bit more about this point that you raised? What did you mean by... in your transcript? Why was this point significant? etc...). If you do not wish to expand on points, that is absolutely fine. It is your choice as to what you share.

I will then ask participants to talk around any reflective thoughts that have been made. I would like to keep copies of these notes/ reflections to potentially include some supporting extracts in my final thesis, returning the originals to participants. At the end of meeting two, we will set a date and time for the final and third meeting (unless we decide on another meeting). Ideally, a two/three week gap will be suggested. Again, at each meeting, you will be asked to reflect on how you feel about your participation up to that point.

Research Conversation 3

I will ask participants to share their reflections on transcripts one and two and add extra information as desired. I will also look at my notes and ask about areas that require extra explanation and depth. I will then ask participants to talk around any reflective notes.

If participants have any further comments to add after this final meeting, or would welcome another meeting, we can discuss this. At the end of this final meeting, we will set a date for me to e-mail the final completed set of three transcripts. Again, we will conclude meeting three by discussing how participants feel after their full involvement in the study (e.g.: Did it raise any issues, what did it make them think about and why?).

Open Communication

At this stage, our one to one involvement for the purposes of this PhD study will end (if agreed). However, I am keen to leave channels of communication open in case you think of additional and relevant information. I am also keen to maintain links with all of my participants for later post-doctoral work (research conducted after a PhD). I would be keen to track your thoughts and views at later stages in your education and career. If and when this is possible, I would contact you to see if you were still keen to take part. If

you have any strong views on this, please feel free to discuss them at the end of the final meeting.

6. Roles and Expectations

It is important that I make my role and expectations clear at the start of this study. I am a part-time PhD research student and full-time lecturer- my aim is to collect narrative data to inform my PhD. As part of this process, your involvement is clearly invaluable and I fully appreciate all contributions made.

You have full choice and freedom in what you decide to discuss at each meeting and can therefore avoid commenting on any areas that could potentially make you feel uncomfortable. During the research stages, you may disclose information of a sensitive and personal nature. It is my role to keep this information confidential in line with the ethical guidelines of the university. Clearly if there are any issues of welfare, personal safety or well-being, I am obliged to bring this to the attention of appropriate professionals in the school.

I cannot offer you advice as I am not a qualified counsellor and this is by no means part of my research or academic role. I can however recommend specialist support groups or organisations if you need guidance on a particular matter. If I do not know of a supporting organisation, I will research possible areas from other experts and communicate appropriately with contact details.

At all times, you can expect professional conduct from me and if you have any concerns, please raise with staff or me directly. The university contact details are in this pack.

7. Ethical Considerations

All of the collected data (typed transcripts, digital audio recordings, reflective evidence) will be kept securely in a locked cupboard at the university where only I would be allowed to access it. The data collected will be stored at Brunel University for up to 5 years. All electronic data will be securely password locked and only I would have access to that through a password. Participant names will be changed for reasons of confidentiality and I will use fictional names for the school. All measures will be taken to ensure that there is no way of detecting any individual's identity.

The findings from all participants will eventually be published in my PhD thesis. Selective findings will also be presented in academic research journals and at relevant research conferences. Such academic presentations form part of my lecturing duties.

The Brunel University 'Research Ethics Committee' has carefully reviewed this study and its aims to ensure that it complies with their guidelines (e.g.: confidentiality, data protection, potential harm to participants etc...). All this is part of standard procedures to ensure that research is conducted ethically and safely with young people.

I have two PhD supervisors at the university and I am required to report my progress to them at regular intervals. Their names are Dr Deborah Jones (Reader in Education) and Professor Roy Evans (contact details included in this pack).

What if you change your mind about being involved?

You are free to change your mind about involvement in this study at any point and you will not be asked to give a reason for your decision to withdraw. If this happens, all of the data that you have contributed will be deleted and not used in the final thesis. Alternatively, you may choose to have certain parts of the data left out for a particular reason. If participants request this, the section that requires deletion must be clearly noted on the transcript and made clear to the researcher.

12. Consent Letter

Dear Participant,

cc: Parent/Guardian, Headteacher

Having read this information pack and discussed its contents with me as the researcher, you have decided that you wish to participate in this PhD doctoral study.

All of the details for this can be found in the 'Research Information Pack' which has been emailed to you. All interviews (research conversations) will take place on the school premises. In the event of any off site interviews, further consent will be sought from parents, the school and university in advance and you will be informed asap.

I am a qualified teacher and lecturer (with CRB clearance) and I will take every measure to ensure the safety and interests of these girls.

I have decided to obtain signed consent from all participants (the young girls, parents/carers and Headteacher). If you have any further queries or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me using any of the above contact details. If you would like to meet in person to discuss questions, I am very happy to do that.

Kindest regards,

Geeta Ludhra

Lecturer in Education/ PhD Research Student
Brunel University

13. Consent Form

Researcher: Geeta Ludhra

Thesis title: A narrative exploration into the cultural experiences of South-Asian girls in West London secondary education.

Consent Statements

Please tick (✓) and initial all statements as appropriate. Please date and sign where indicated at the end of this form.

A. I have read the information pack and discussed its contents. I feel clear about what is expected of me as I have been given the opportunity to ask questions. All questions have been answered to my full satisfaction

☐

B. I understand that my participation is totally voluntary. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time

☐

C. I understand that all collected data will be stored and reported with total anonymity to protect participant's identity

☐

D. I give my consent for the audio recording and transcribing of the research conversations and understand the reasons for this. I also understand that the data will be stored at Brunel University for up to 5 years

☐

E. I understand my role as a participant and the role of the researcher has been clearly explained to me

☐

F. I am aware that the data will be used in a PhD thesis and potential academic research articles and conferences

☐

G. I would like to read the final thesis and any published research articles that emerge from this research (yes/ no - delete as appropriate)

☐

H. I understand that this research has been reviewed and approved by two supervisors and the Brunel Research Ethics Committee

☐

I.I agree to take part in this study having discussed it with the researcher, my parents/ carer/ appropriate teacher/ Headteacher in line with my questions

Appendix 3: Conversation Map: Arti

Key:

- **Profile Chart 1: Green - Relates to the girl's discussion of 'culture'**
- **Profile Chart 2: Pink - Relates to the girl's discussion of education**
- **Profile Chart 3: Red- Relates to how the girl narrates her cultural identity**
- **Blue- Reflective dimensions (inc. conclusions, next steps, reflective journals)**

Useful biographical information: Headgirl, Valley High, Hindu religious background. **A levels:** English Literature, Biology, Psychology, German, Critical thinking (grade A predictions). **Degree:** English Literature at a Russell Group University. **Parental occupations:** Administration roles at the airport. Father from Fiji and mother born in the UK. **Siblings:** 1 younger sister

Conversation 1 (School)	Conversation 2 (School)	Conversation 3 extended interview (University)
Recap and discussion of introduction group meeting at school. Confirm signed request. Ask if there are any questions.	Recap on interview 1- comments on transcript - thoughts since last meeting	Holiday chit-chat about visit to Canada and experiences (concerts, university visits, different family values and Canadian culture) Feeling sad that it's the last meeting
Friendships: similarities, differences, groups formed within the school and criteria for	Journal entry explorations - an overview of entries made to date	Headgirl roles after holiday - expectations, workload, stress- juggling it all in final year,

classifications, boyfriends (seen as brothers), rules and expectations for Asians girls (not the stereotyped girl) Also red		daunting, high grades needed
Parental expectations and values: laid back attitude and give her space to explore educational ideas - love for literature and writing, languages, German Also red	The importance of family and developing personal interests independently Also red and pink	AS level results - disappointing - work harder - balancing roles
Girl groups (journal extracts) extensive discussion	Journal reflections - FB related Also red	Stress: organising friend's 18th- balancing social and academic elements - pleasing all and securing grades
Teaching as an aspiration and status of - love of English Also red	BMW poster discussed (journal) and inter-marriage Also blue	Language: German and its benefits at A level study - linked to country and its culture - beyond grammar
Marriage expectations, mixed heritage marriages 'BMW rule' (journal)- mother's values - 'modern' Discussed extensively	HG journey (Ref journal) Navigating a new identity/ role (journal) Also red and blue	Ref Journal- Asian girlpower image - Future and family- powerful women - strength
Life plans for the future - English degree Also red	School concert considerations - East and West dilemmas organisational dilemmas as HG Invitation	Role models: Gandhi, Lady Ga, Ga, grandad, dad, mother, cousin, headteacher - characteristics Also red

Gendered expectations - extensive discussion Also red	Head girl title and identity Friends- newfound confidence yet anxiety and stress of role - responsibilities, expectations, image, relationships with Headteacher, voicing student opinions, power, bossy, pressures of 'juggling' Also red	School concert discussion Reflections and summary on research involvement. Sadness on ending, having the space to talk, relationships built, interesting experience and learning about herself, feels more confident etc...
Impact of the Hindu religion on her life - minimal Also red	Mapping the future - aspirations Also red	Final thesis (very keen to read it and keep in touch for future research follow-up)
Head girl process - Also red	UCAS Personal Statement Also red	Current priorities: university grades, less extra-curricular activities for focus on grades
Headscarf and Muslim girls - notions of othering Also red	Aspirations for a high profile career, high grades- a lot of hard work - stress of 'juggling' but takes it in her stride Also red	Future: being myself, reducing stress levels. Describing self - unique, different, individual, not a typical Asian girl
Communication via technology - Facebook	Asian stereotypes	Family, friends and marriage views - fair skin, inter-cultural relationships
Part-time job - maths tutor Also red	Love for school and broad areas of learning	School: opportunities, life skills, confidence, strong voice at home and at school - needs to focus on high grades more
HG success - celebration - new identity and growing into the role (see journals) Also red	Girls' group poster overview (journal entry) Male friends Respectability Also red	Reflections on aspects of the study in relation to thinking about culture - changed from broad to individual level Also blue

FB identities and groups- messages, challenges and opportunities Also green and red	Impact on the self of writing the research journal	Self as a role model to others in school (legacy) Also red
Role models Also green and red	Asian girlpower image (journal) interpretations and significance of this discussed Also red	Reflection on study - space to be honest and talk freely
Reflections on the interview (before and at the end). Conclusion, next steps, dates and questions	Revisiting and reflecting on interview 1 points	Researcher's impact
	Headscarf perceptions and discussions about other girls groups and freedom etc... Also red	Methodology comments and suggestions for next steps (father's initial concerns about participation)
	Dual identity at home - less of a leader / school as significant leader Also pink	Potential impact of the study- suggestions for a future book and cover image (using her image)
	Facebook perceptions of presentation and use ('respectability') Also pink and green	Conclusions and thank you - keen to keep in touch and will update me through email/text
	Rolemodels and their characteristics Also red	
	Headgirl role- legacy, equality and freedom, role model to others, speeches etc... Also red	
	Reflections on Interview 2 (re university space)	
	Researcher influence discussed	
	Summary and next steps for interview 3	

Other correspondence included:

- Text messaging and email
- Thank you card at the end of the study
- Updates after the study to include: charity work at university, involvement in societies, graduation news and picture
- Group feedback session
- Reflection summary questions completed at the end of the study
- Headgirl speech
- Personal Statement for university
- Reflective Journal entries were extensive and included

Appendix 4: Reflective diary (extracts)

At the early stages of the study, I typed up my reflections in detail, and later started to hand-write into my journal as I found it more flexible. I have included some detailed extracts below which illustrate some of the organisation and emotional dimensions of the study at a particular time.

Ravi. 27th June 2010

She will be at a Summer School on July 12th at Imperial College so she couldn't see me then so will have to change the date. Green short dress, sleeveless, her nani brought the dress for her from Tesco's for her birthday - keen to tell me this. A blank page notebook was given for reflections and I went through other reflections options with her as in the general meeting as a group - e.g. visual mind maps, using a dictaphone etc. She seemed to like the idea of the notebook as all the other girls have so far. The dictaphone doesn't seem to be a popular choice though. Maybe I need to dissect that more, what is it about the dictaphone that they are not keen to reflect through it?

I conducted the interview in a mobile hut and it was very private, very quiet no passing trade, other than a few work vehicles, like trucks but weren't really being used - reminded me of my first teaching post as an NQT where I taught in a mobile hut. Really peaceful and I felt as if the confidentiality aspect was good in this space within the school. I was taken to the staff room for coffee at break - all looking at me - met a teacher who used to teach my oldest daughter years ago but she didn't recognise me and I decided not to approach her or say who I was.

After the tape went off, Ravi talked about very casual conversation stuff - about a school trip to Wales yesterday, the coach driver was delayed or rang in sick. This caused huge problems, the boys were very upset about missing the football match etc... small chit-chat about her day.

Before interviews (reception area)

When I entered the school I was there early (I hate being late for anything) and sat in reception for 15-20 minutes - this was useful as I saw lots of passing traffic from the children, there was a group of girls and one of the girls was very tall and wearing very short shorts. They were having a conversation with each

other, and one of the girls said “you can’t wear those” and as soon as she said that a male teacher walked past. She thought the other girls had told of her and made a face to signal disapproval. The teacher called her outside to talk to her about the shortness of her shorts and clearly disciplined her but in a calm and professional manner. She walked back in and was very public about her discussion about these shorts and said to the other girls “who does he think he is, I can wear what I want, how does my clothing affect my education”. The girl said ‘why does wearing short shorts impact on my learning or the way I think in class’. If it’s hot it’s hot and if it makes me feel comfortable to learn in why do they have a problem with it? It’s about rules, rules, rules she said, I can still learn in shorts. It so wrong of the teachers to tell us what to wear” (as I remember it based on my speed writing).

Staffroom- a quick coffee

I met the deputy and Headteacher who shook my hand. Clearly they had been briefed about my study and had signed the consent forms so were organised. They were most polite but conversation was very brief as they all seemed so busy in this school. They did show interest in the study, especially the HT who said her MA related to culture in parts.

General Points

UCAS and uniform

Early preparation for applications in this school - seem v organised. The school is going to be used by Ofsted as a case study school in terms of how well they prepare their sixth formers for UCAS and that did come out in interviews where they are already starting to draft their personal statements. What X did say in the staff room that day was how useful my study is, and as teachers they don’t have time to talk to the girls/ boys in much depth and how you can learn so much from children if you do just take the time to talk to them and find out about their lives. She said I’m so lucky to be able to do this - never saw it in such a privileged way as a teacher but they all seem so busy dashing around everywhere - when do they actually get tie to talk more openly with the pupils?

Something else I noted is the sixth form don’t wear uniform, it’s got to be smart dress but no uniform.

Space and jottings in the interview

I finished about 12.45 with Ravi in this hut which was secluded, and I said I was happy to sit in the hut alone as it was good time to write up my diary and make notes - I didn't want them running around me or seeing me as a burden. I found myself in today's interview writing down more specific words and phrases, which I hadn't done in the previous 2 or 3, and I felt this that was useful for me to track topics through the conversation [see Arti's conversation map where I followed this through - Appendix 3]. I felt like I was becoming a more skilled listener - this is because I had already analysed myself so much in the pilot interviews as I was making more interjections than actually necessary there, and the whole idea of using a narrative methodology was that I really give the girls space to talk. Having an interview transcribed so quickly has emphasised the importance of engaging with your data as you go along, and although it killed me as I stayed up till 2am going through and listening to the transcript, it has taught me so much.

I felt like I was unpicking the conversation as I was listening to the conversation as well - so analysing whilst listening. The girls seemed very comfortable from what I have seen so far, very much at ease. I think the narrative way is so much better. And I know that it has taken me longer and I could have used semi-structured interviews but I think the extra few months that I have spent unpicking this methodology and critiquing it will be worth it in the long-term.

Drop-out

I also realised today that one of the girls, X a Muslim girl, didn't want to take part in the study now. She changed her mind on that morning. She has had a think about it but she doesn't want to take part anymore. I have asked X to find out why if possible so that I understand the reason.

Facilitating teacher

At the end of interviewing Ravi, X came to the hut and asked if I wanted any lunch or anything, we just started talking about her MA and sociology, identity, rootedness etc... and I shared a few titles to her that I am reading, offering to loan any books if helpful (she was keen to borrow them). It was quite nice that the two of us could help each other- she was facilitating my research but I have

become interested in what she is researching as well. I agreed to bring the books in on my next visit (mainly methodology ones).

X text me just to check everything was ok as I had dismissed myself from school because I didn't really want to trouble her again. I told her to carry on with her teaching and other duties and I would sign out as I knew the system now. But that was nice of her to even drop me a text to ask if my day had gone alright. I emailed her as I do after every visit just to consolidate what I had done, what hasn't happened, and what I would identify as the next steps in terms of her facilitating my research.

Manpreet (28th June, pm).

Manpreet was wearing the whole Brazil dress, down to nails, headband, facepaint, everything. She was really excited about the Brazil match. Manpreet talked about sharing 2 houses with her grandmother who lives next door to them who has Alzheimers. This is quite a significant thing in her family (she really cared for her and wanted to have more time for her as she felt guilty).

She talked about why she felt it was good not to have to wear uniform in the sixth form in terms of developing your own identity. She talked about her AS sociology and how that had impacted her thinking about gender and equality roles in the home in particular and how men and women take on different roles etc. She discussed this in the context of her life. She talked about labels as well. Music was a huge part of her life- she clearly loves all sorts of music, R&B etc... but particularly Western music. She didn't really have an affinity with Indian music, Bhangra music. And she talked about this in relation to not understanding the language that fluently as she couldn't sing along with the words.

She talked about herself as a 'know-it-all girl' like a 'geek' - she said people probably see me as a know-it-all because you know this and you know that and you're going to apply to Oxford or Cambridge. When she said that I unpicked this label for girls so I asked her 'well you have called yourself, or you think other people see you as a know-it-all, how do you think other girls might be seen. You have used the phrase know-it-all, are there other labels? And you think there are, what sort of labels are used by girls? And she kind of sung this girl rap: 'I suppose there are rude girls, mean girls and know-it-all girls and the shy girls',

well I am very confident, although I am a know-it-all, and I can chat for England, I think I am very good at talking to shy girls as I'm good at getting them to talk to me [she contradicted this as called herself shy at one point too].

She talked about the Western influences on her life, and she saw herself as more British in terms of music and lots of things. And then about half way through the interview she moved her hand across the body, it was quite significant and quite sharp really. She gestured that's the Indian in me. I said do that again, and she asked 'what did I do'? I said you just moved your hand across your body, and you said "that's the Indian side in me" and I got her to dissect that.

Manpreet wasn't going to take part initially, I'd heard through X who had heard this through other girls. So I asked Manpreet to explain this to me in the interview if she could. She said her parents were a little bit worried about it when and asked her to find out more. She talked of sharing the Research Information Pack with them and how the teachers and Headteacher knew about it and came to see me etc.... this seemed to assure her parents and I'm so glad I addressed the pack to all. I anticipated that some parents may feel apprehensive. She said her parents thought it was just going to be about the educational side of school which they were fine about, but when they saw it was going to be about social and other aspects as well, and family would come into it they were a little bit worried about what she might say about the family. She walked me to the reception desk and insisted - she was very polite. She talked to me generally on the way down about her passion for English literature and language and all of that and how she was looking into Oxford but knew how hard it was to get in.

29th June 2010- I was in all day - room problems day

Reception Wait (am)

At school early, about 8.30am, and sat in reception for quite a while. Clearly a very busy day in school again, I think there was a critical thinking seminar or something going on. Lots and lots of outsiders and international guests were arriving at the school so a high profile event - the school seem really hot on developing the critical thinking curriculum. The deputy head greeted me and asked if yesterday went well, she said she was sorry she was so busy as she

had lots of training events going on. Anyway, I sat in reception for at least 40 minutes so I got to observe all the reception traffic again. About 9.20, I left a few missed calls for X because I thought she may have forgotten about me but then I thought she is far too polite to do that and was so enthusiastic about me doing this research.

The receptionist was getting a little worried as I had been sitting there for so long. A very polite boy came to collect me (from her class). He took me over to where X was teaching and on the way over there he was telling me about his lesson on forensic science and how much he enjoyed it etc.

Walk to interviewing hut (learning mentor's office)

He walked me over to a mobile hut and his teacher left the lesson. X walked me over a mobile hut which she had booked. The space was fine, it was a raised mobile hut so I wouldn't really be seen again as you would be looking down (reminded me of Bentham's Panopticon that I had read and our townhouse that overlooks the green). It was clearly double booked as I think one of the learning mentors was in there. I felt really guilty as I felt like I was invading their school space again. The teachers didn't look too happy and I apologised politely. But X stood her ground and said that she had already booked this room for me last week and how I had taken a day off etc..... Anyway, X left me in the room and the girl didn't turn up. So I was just sitting there and I started observing stuff in the room really - displays and stuff. On one of the whiteboards in the room there was some handwritten text and it said: 'Is there a way for me to change or am I just a victim of the things I have to maintain?' This stood out to me. There were some posters on the wall as well. There was one poster which stood out saying 'sexy or smart'? and there were images of girls like Kylie Minogue, Cheryl Cole, Jordon, a rap artist and others - they had obviously been exploring these kinds of 'girlpower' themes.

Tiredness and excitement

I don't know why I have even put this in my diary but I have because it's how I feel. I feel so tired and I don't think I can keep this up and it's only the start really. I am trying to juggle too many things at the moment, course leader, stuff on the English course, my PhD, external examining, emails, homelife stuff, worrying about mum etc... and I am sitting here thinking that this is all I want to

do - just this as I enjoy it - I feel kind of selfish for thinking it. And it's almost like I am starting to feel guilty about not putting my heart and soul and 100% into the other admin things that I am supposed to be doing as part of my job. Although I am doing them. For the first time, my research seems really exciting compared to the other parts of my job. I think I have started missing schools a bit too and the interaction with children - there's a buzz in schools that is so different to uni life.

No Sunaina (driving lesson)

Also on this day Sunaina who was scheduled for 9.10 had not turned up. She had not turned up as she said she didn't know about it, but her teacher said that she had emailed her. It was a job trying to find her in this huge school and X went out of her way for me again. She is so supportive.

No Arti as a presentation (2pm slot cancelled)

I decided to cancel this as the interview would have been broken- she has a presentation to do half-way through and it would break the flow.

'Stood up' so I listen to yesterday's audio

So at 9.55 am, I am sitting in this hut and I start listening to Ravi's interview from yesterday to get ahead of myself and use the time wisely. I also wondered whether or not it is feasible for me to ask for copies of the girls' UCAS forms in October time as I think some of the girls are going for medicine so the applications are in October. It would be really interesting to see what their UCAS forms reveal. As I was listening to the audio transcript (I carried my dictaphone around with me in my handbag), I split my page into a grid and I started to analyse different themes that emerged as I listened.

Interruption: Finding a room!

But then I got interrupted as I was doing this and I was on a real roll - I heard the door go and it was X with Sunaina who had been for a driving lesson. She said she didn't get the email from her teacher and her teacher said she had sent it - who knows! She was wearing shorts with tights underneath and a sleeveless blue t-shirt. She had come with a group of other girlfriends (apparently they were also keen to take part I later found out). Anyway, then myself, X and Sunaina walked around the school for about 20 mins trying to find a room in which to

conduct her interview- no joy because every room was booked out. There was one room found but it was going to be too noisy as X was teaching next door and it was going to be a practical psychology lesson. I have become hyper conscious of big glass panes in rooms, and confidentiality aspects. The pupils would have looked through to us too much and that concerned me - how would she feel? X is doing an MA and her supervisor was in that day to talk to her about her project. As we were walking out, she agreed that this room was unsuitable - I said I was not being awkward but I've had experiences like that in my pilot study and it's uncomfortable for the girls and me - she agreed and said I had told her that before but room space is so hard to book at times.

X introduced me to her MA supervisor and he asked me what topic I am researching - it was a brief conversation, but he seemed very interested. As we walked around the school, Sunaina engaged in some chit-chat with me about her driving experiences and how difficult she is finding it, and how hot it is and that's why she has to wear shorts and a sleeveless T-Shirt. It was eventually decided that Sunaina would take Arti's spot. X then said we should go for a coffee in the staffroom quickly and that she was going to be very busy after that so probably wouldn't see me.

Goldfish bowl room: feeling very exposed!

After coffee, X took me to the library where I was going to conduct two interviews for the remainder of that day. Now my assumption of an interview room in the library was going to be a secluded room, not a room which looks like a goldfish bowl where I am on show. Basically, I walked into the library, there was a reception desk and a room which was almost all glass (located as soon as you went in). Everyone would have to walk past this room so would naturally look in. Not only did I feel uncomfortable as a researcher having to sit in there, but I was worried at how the girls would feel. Anyway I paused, I just came out with it and said X I can't possibly interview in that room, I'm really really sorry, you have gone to so much effort to help me with this, but like I said in my pilot study that was one of the things which came out - it's about safe spaces to interview in and this really doesn't feel like a confidential and safe space for me to interview a girl on a topic which could potentially be sensitive - I was really apologetic and she was understanding. I suggested that we call it quits and not to worry. But then I had to wait for Fauzia to come as she had an appointment,

and I wanted to explain it all to her rather than it being conveyed to her and she feels let down [parts of this experience have been written about in Rogers and Ludhra, 2011].

So I sat waiting next to this goldfish bowl room, and I must say it did seem 90% sound-proof as I couldn't hear anything. When I was sitting on this sofa, I was sitting observing the people inside the goldfish bowl. I think she was a support teacher with a boy who had some specific learning difficulties as I could tell from the resources. I would not feel comfortable interviewing in that room at all as everyone would ask Fauzia why she was there etc...

I read some journals, looked at the books and just observed some of the children. It was a nice library. There were a range of academic journals in the library: geography, politics, economics, sociology, psychology, science etc, photography, design, computing, a range of videos and books, even some Bollywood movies that the children could loan out. So that was this goldfish bowl room scenario where I froze and it was the large windows that really troubled me because I reflected back on my semi-structured interview pilot study with a similar experience (Phase 1 study).

Fauzia's views on the interview room

I waited for Fauzia to come in and she was very punctual. When I told her that this is the room that we have got to do the interview in, her face just froze and I could tell how uncomfortable she felt - I assured her that I would not have gone ahead but wanted to talk to her in person so that we could re-schedule. We spoke about it and she said that she hadn't really told many people that she is involved in the study, other than the group who came to my preliminary chat, and they would all be asking lots of questions. She also said that some of her friends study in the library so she didn't want to be there. She was really apologetic: 'Geeta I know you've gone to a lot of trouble, you travel all this way, you have organised the diaries, and it's so complicated for you, so I don't sort of want to miss you about' etc... (as I remember the gist of the conversation). I then assured her that it's not about me and my inconvenience, and she should not feel guilty at all. We got our diaries out to reschedule another date.

Alternative room found- Bingo!

As we organised another room, X returned very excited and said that she had found an alternative space that I'd like. She walked us over to the sixth form block, where there were lots and lots of corridors and we walked through rooms - we got to the top floor and there was a really peaceful room, high up in the building away from noise. It was really private. I asked Fauzia if she approved and she smiled and said 'this is perfect'. I felt comfortable that she felt comfortable so we went ahead with the interview. With hindsight, I am so glad I did an extensive Phase 1 study as I learned so much from all the problems I had with rooms then. I wouldn't have reflected on spaces in so much depth otherwise and considered the ethics of all this. Things worked out well in the end!

Fauzia - general

Fauzia's first story struck me hard. The metaphor of using the rope, her preparation for this research conversation - she has given it so much thought. She had drawn the ladder with the rungs on it, she appreciated how simplistic the ladder was to represent her identity and how she wanted to represent it through an intermingled rope with fraying bits coming out of it. But she couldn't draw a rope and therefore had represented it as a ladder. She talked about that a bit, but when she started talking about the different rungs on the ladder, there clearly was a system and she recognised that system in talking through the different rungs of the ladder without realising it. She talked about education a lot and it was clearly very important to her. There were clearly challenges in her homelife but she seemed like a strong girl who is so hard-working.

After recording- personal tutor role

When the voice recorder went off, Fauzia talked about the key role of her personal tutor, who was inspirational. She said that personal tutors are so important in inspiring sixth formers and the choices they make. She discussed how he was Indian too (from Canada) and understood Indian kids in the schools- she said kids looked up to him and he always had time for her.

Brunel interview possibility?

I asked Fauzia how would she feel about coming to Brunel for a future interview as my timeline may slip for various reasons. She said that should be ok but her

dad would probably drop her off and pick her up, and wait in the car. He would be happy as it's at Brunel University. I stressed that I would pay her public transport costs or petrol costs to and from the university.

Overall - Fauzia

Reflecting on Fauzia's interview, there was a moment where I had to hold back my own tears and this is where I realised that evening the psychological impacts of this study on me as a person as well as a researcher - in my head I had tried to split the two but it wasn't going to be that easy. I think when I was drafting my ethics form or doing my research proposal, I thought of it very much in terms of the affects on the participant, not really how much it was going to change my life - the form focuses on participants. I am now realising the impact of the sociological-psychological in this PhD on me as a researcher, especially some areas are connected to my experiences. So like I say there was a moment when I wanted to cry really because I could visualise some of the stuff that she was saying so vividly, but I composed myself quite well. I was very moved by some of the challenges she highlighted in her story and the drive that she demonstrated which was really, really strong. It was like she was so determined to make her life successful despite what was happening at home.

Her determination to succeed was so high in relation to education, her career path to become a barrister and possibly go to Cambridge one day. The fact that she had initiated the ladder and the metaphor of the rope, showed me how keen she was to share her experiences. She talked about her poor drawing skills and how she was going to google images of a rope and try and work on that one for next time. She didn't want to represent her life in a jigsaw image (she had thought of that) because she said her life isn't all like separate little bits which fit neatly - it's more complex than that and interlinked and all the fraying bit on the rope - some bits are more important than others. And for her, she talked about education as a huge part of her identity in life and in terms of the limited levels of freedom. She discussed education in an empowering way. She talked about an image of representing identity, maybe using coloured dots, maybe a colour for each part of her life and using dots to do this, but she said she wanted to think about this more. And she said later on, as she moved through the research conversation, she would probably be in a better position later in life to prioritise different aspects of her identity through more experience. I thought this was

really mature. Because she has not only already thought about the different elements of her identity but also how important different things are to her at this moment in her life.

She talked about the reflective notebook, she was under the impression that the reflective notebook would be my property (I stressed that it was hers and I would only take copies of extracts if she agreed - she wanted to keep it as a record - like a diary). I reflected on how much you have to convey as a researcher for clarity - I thought I had been clear about the journal being their property but maybe not stressed enough.

School was clearly a significant part of her life and it gave her the space and freedom to speak out and be a 'leader' in her words, get heard, get respected, and get recognised. She was going to present her Headgirl presentation tomorrow and she talked about how much she wanted it and always aspired to this role - I was rooting for her as she was so, so keen and I knew she'd be hurt if she didn't get it. She was clearly academic, she has a status and recognition from her peers and teachers it seemed. She said she had been quietly preparing her presentation at home, but she never discussed this Headgirl application with her family at all as they wouldn't understand.

I really thought about the rope metaphor. When I went home that evening, I was having a discussion with my husband and just talking about the stereotypes that exist of girls that wear the headscarf, and how driven this girl was that I had met. She wore a black sparkly head scarf, plain black, lots of silver sparkly threads, black trousers, green shirt and a black waistcoat, full sleeve shirt - she said she liked to dress smartly and takes pride in her clothes - she also talked about her fun headscarves in multiple colours. She talked about how at home she is a quiet girl who is at 'the beck and call of three brothers and father'. She cooks, she cleans, she organises the house, as well as studying and aiming for these grade As to get into Cambridge to study law.

At home, she talked about how she doesn't ever raise questions explicitly with her family, she just gets on with it and she knows that she has certain chores to do so just does them. And that really struck me that she is going through doing her A-levels, such a tricky time and she has all of these household

responsibilities on top of that - how her brothers didn't engage with any household chores at all and they had the freedom to go to parties and other things. Yet she had never explicitly drawn this to the attention of her parents or discussed it with them. She said she didn't see the point in doing that. Yet at school, she was clearly really assertive and confident and would say what she thought. It made me think of how much support I give my daughters at exam time as I ask them to step back and just focus on their work.

X came to pick me up after the interview, and she talked about finding a more private room next time. She said I could use her office and have lunch and refreshments in there and help myself. She introduced me to one of the assistant heads. He already knew that I was going to be there for research in the capacity for research and was very enthusiastic about it. I just asked him if India was on the syllabus at all, and he talked about how the mogul empire was and that there is a module where you can compare the mogul empire with the Tudors. He talked about the importance of these optional modules, especially on India, especially in a school like this where there is a high population of Asian children - none of the girls mentioned this. He said 'It allows them to engage in a historical dialogue with their family' which he thought that was important.

More interview room problems after Fauzia - I left the school and emailed X that evening to thank her for her running around and to stress that these things are inevitable in busy secondary schools as it is a busy time of year.

I also realised that day that Fauzia worked as a lunchtime supervisor, they wear bright yellow coats and they get paid £10 a week for it. She was patrolling the field with a male peer.

As I was writing my diary, I started thinking about the emancipatory nature of the study, and how I hadn't gone into it as F-PAR research, feminist participatory action research, it almost seems to be an inevitable outcome, and that will be interesting to look at. At the end of the study, I must get the girls to reflect on how the study has shifted their thinking and get them to do some reflective work there I think.

I learnt a lot from the cancellations today and room dramas, and I think they were really useful because I had space to reflect on just one interview and the school environment more. As a researcher, sometimes you have to make important decisions, and not just be greedy for data. I did what was ethically right for the girls and me as the researcher.

Also it made me reflect on Maheera's interview in the other school and some of the similarities across these two girls. These two girls wear headscarves and they may be seen as 'passive victims of oppressive structures' but they have strong voices, especially within the school context. But there seems to be a ceiling at home and it's how far they can push that ceiling to get what they want. I'm interested in how they navigate the homespace.

Appendix 5: End of study summary reflections

Note: I have not corrected any typographic errors and just pasted the girls' reflections as emailed to me.

Preeti

I think my narratives probably paint a picture of a girl who is academically driven as I seem to mention education and the importance of education so much - maybe too much. I think the transcripts and my own reflections also illustrate the pressures in everyday life that I and other girls my age face, for example, the pressure to get high grades and the pressure to look good and conform to a certain idea of beauty that society promotes for us. I think some of these ideas may be heightened in Asian girls in comparison to non Asian girls, i.e, the notion that you have to do well in school and maybe enter a profession like medicine or dentistry, whereas some of the other pressures like looking good are more of an issue for all teenage girls from any culture in general.

After re-reading the transcripts I think I probably come across as a girl who can be judgemental a bit and who does have some stereotypical views when it comes to other teenage Asian girls, something that I actually found quite surprising as I didn't really think I held some of those stereotypes until I said them out loud. I think I also come across as a person who can be very self conscious and overly concerned of what other people think which maybe comes as a result of feeling pressured to look a certain way from images of young women projected by the media.

Some of the main things I have taken away from the study are perhaps my realisation of just how many different pressures there are for an Asian teenage girl and my realisation that trying to conform to a certain ideal isn't what I or any other teenage girl should be doing as that can be damaging. I wish I had more confidence to be myself really. I also think my transcripts reflect my views on a range of subjects, but also in a way they reflect the ideas and beliefs of those around me, as some of my ideas have probably been formed and influenced by my friends opinions and my parents opinions. That being said I feel like my answers are very honest and they do really reveal a lot about me, for example, I didn't really realise having a career and also being married and having kids was so important to me until I looked over the transcripts and saw that I had mentioned all that quite a lot.

And one last thing that I wanted to say! I have realised that I can be overly hard and judgemental on myself sometimes and that I definitely see myself in a negative light most of the time, so thanks to your study I will try to not dwell on the negative aspects too much and will start to focus on the things that I am good at and the positive parts of my identity

much more. Thanks a lot Geeta for letting me take part in your study! I really enjoyed it and wish you luck!

Arti

Being involved in this doctoral study has in fact opened my eyes to the differences between cultures and religions etc. Before I took part in this study, I always believed that culture was this collaborative, grouped way of living- but now, I actually feel as though culture is something that is more personal, individual and unique to us - definitely for me anyway. To put this into perspective- I used to think that my friends and I all followed the same sort of lifestyle and culture, the way our parents have raised us are similar, our work ethics and values are similar, our approach to life in general is similar- however, even though we live the same way, we all take different paths to get to that point. I guess it is hard to explain it but I now see the differences between cultures more, and the way we all live and how sometimes in society perhaps, the divide is more visible than I thought it was.

I feel as though this study has helped me see the 'reality' of the term culture, as I have been able to explore this term in greater detail through thinking and talking about my life which I have never really done or thought about before- it has encouraged me to look into culture from different perspectives. For example, in Interview 1 you asked me to expand about rules and expectations of people from different religions- you got me thinking and this was hard to explain at first, but on reflection, I realised that these ideas were just black and white, you either followed the religious rules or you didn't (in my case, my family doesn't so no problem!).

I think the research you have obtained as a result from this study, will be extremely useful in school lessons such as PSHE or Citizenship. I believe it would make an interesting discussion point for teachers in our school and talking about others attitudes to culture etc, perhaps through discussing it with people from other backgrounds more; it will encourage others to change their ways and break the stereotypes that some cultures/religions are fixed to.

I would also be intrigued to find out how Asian boys would react to what many of the girls in this study have revealed- it would be interesting for you to interview boys now and see whether they agree or disagree with our views in the thesis. We discuss topics such as 'expectations' and 'values' etc with our friends at school and although sometimes it may cause disagreements between us, it's an insightful way of learning about how the 'other half lives' and maybe we need to learn more about how boys think about us.

Thanks Geeta and it's kind of sad that it's all over now. I'll definitely keep in touch with you.

Sara

Before I took part in the study, I only thought that the interviews would help you, however I have realised just how much I have learnt about myself from them. The interviews with you were a great opportunity for me to share my thoughts, feelings and views about my religion, culture, background etc. I never thought I could talk so in-depth about those topics, and I'm glad I've learnt that I can. The study has definitely impacted my thinking, especially during the Ramadan month when you interviewed me. I used the journal a lot in that time – it allowed me to research into the true meaning of Ramadan and my beliefs in Islam. It helped me spiritually because I learnt so many new verses and hadiths that helped me practice Islam better. Our chat about culture vs religion was something I always used to think about, but had never discussed it in detail with anyone. I can see a clear line between Islam and 'asian' culture now through talking about it and this makes me cautious not to mix the two when I'm discussing it!

I liked my mini-project on Identity! I had to sit and really think about myself and how to express everything creatively – which was my favourite bit! You didn't ask me to create it but I just felt the urge to. The biggest impact was what you said to me once - there is more to you than the academic side. And I think it's something I shouldn't forget about myself. Right now, school and work are the main things on my mind. But I keep myself relaxed and calm by doing all the creative stuff I like, such as updating the scrapbook on a weekly basis, creating my identity project or decorating my new room. For people who don't know me well, they simply see me as someone who is academically bright. But I guess, you made me realise that I'm a lot more than that.

In terms of family, I enjoyed sharing my journal with them and what I learnt from the interviews with you as I told them. It also made me see how lucky I am to have them and how the 4 of us have such a close relationship! Next – friendship. With one year until we all go our separate ways, I know I have to make the most of it. My target is to make sure that schoolwork doesn't stop me from having a quality time with friends. Lately, I've been busy at break AND lunchtimes, and during lessons we don't have much time to talk. So I want to make sure that at least one a month we do something together! Overall, this study has really helped me to understand myself more. I have learnt a great deal about Islam as a result of asking myself more questions and researching them. I have been able to identify the important things in my life by telling you. So thank you so much!

I really believe that the findings from your PhD can help other readers, especially girls and their parents to understand their lives better. You set out to investigate culture and I hope along with that, you have gained a lot more information about me as a person. I am grateful to have been given this special chance to participate in your study, purely because it was enjoyable and I enjoyed talking to you! I am certain that once you publish

your findings, readers will be buying your books and able to draw links between culture and religion – just as I did. Also, it should give them a chance to think and question their lifestyles to make it better. I know that when I spoke about participating in the study to my cousins, they did exactly that and asked me lots of questions, and it was enjoyable having such conversations with them! Finally, I think that your research will inspire others to remember to keep their cultures and traditions intact and not forget them, as it is a vital aspect in our life!