Chapter 11: **What does it mean to be 'successful'?: Narratives of British South-Asian headteachers and headgirls**

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Abstract

In this chapter, the lived experiences of four academically and professionally 'successful' British South-Asian adolescent girls and women are explored - two headgirls in secondary education and two primary school headteachers. This newly merged study draws on narrative interview approaches and Black feminist thought to explore the lived experiences of these 'successful' girls and women within this cross-generational study. The chapter is framed around two key questions: What does it mean to be 'successful' in these roles? How is 'success' mediated across their lived experiences? Key markers of success, within the context of this study, include securing the role and title, leaving a legacy, enabling and nurturing others, juggling conflicting demands, and being a good role model. The chapter concludes that these girls and women experience additional layers of intersecting complexities across their personal, cultural and professional lives. These influence how, as 'cultural navigators' they perform their 'success' journeys as British South-Asian girls and women in highly skilled ways.

<mark>Key words:</mark>

Introduction

This chapter explores the narratives of four academically and professionally 'successful' British South-Asian girls and women originally from two studies. In this newly merged study, Ludhra draws upon two headgirls from her research with twelve academically successful British South-Asian adolescents (Ludhra, 2015) and Jones on two women from her research with twenty male and female headteachers (Jones, 2017). We focus on two key questions: 'What does it *mean* to be 'successful' in these roles?' Secondly, 'How is 'success' mediated across women's lived experiences?' As feminist researchers, we consider, in this merged study, 'behind the scenes' realities of becoming successful and how 'success' is performed.

Several studies of generations in relation to education have been undertaken, for example longitudinal studies of teachers' lives (Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006) teachers and work styles (Edge, 2014; Stone-Jonson, 2016) and more recently of headteachers (Johnson, 2017). This is the first cross-generational study of 'success' in relation to British South-Asian girls and women in differing educational contexts, across primary and secondary schools. Stone-Johnson (2016) notes that 'generations…. share important milestones that inform their understanding of how the world operates' (cited in Johnson, 2017, p844). In her commentary on Mannheim (1952), Johnson notes that the point at which individuals are born can 'lead to a distinctive consciousness and influence their specific life chances as well as their perspective on history' (p844). An aim of this chapter is to illuminate the differences or similarities that are evident across two generations of British South-Asian girls and women.

We move beyond listing characteristics of 'success', towards a narrative of what 'success' means and how it is manifested. Challenges experienced across home and school contexts are explored, together with the ways in which family and cultural commitments are played out. In this study, we create a third space to think about 'success' narratives for minority ethnic girls and women, across time and experiences (Bhabha, 1990).

The category 'Asian' is a contested and broad one. In this chapter, the term 'British South-Asian' is used to encompass diverse groups referring to girls and women whose parents or grandparents have migrated to the UK from the Indian sub-continent (Brown and Talbot, 2006) including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri-Lanka. These incorporate, East-African Asians

who came to the UK via Tanzania, Kenya or Uganda (Ghuman, 2011). Specifically, in this merged study of four participants, the girls and women were from Sikh and Muslim religious backgrounds.

Women and 'success'

The notion of 'success' is a contested one, being interpreted and experienced in various ways beyond academic and professional achievements. It can include practical intelligences, personality traits, a demanding work ethic, and may take account of ways in which family, culture, and emotional support, can facilitate 'success' journeys (Gladwell, 2008).

There is a small but growing literature on 'success' in relation to different groups, for example, girls and women (Ringrose, 2013; Harris, 2004, 2010), White middle-class families (Ball, 2003), White middle-class girls (Walkerdine et al, 2001), women in the Academy (Hoskins, 2012), minority ethnic pupils (Archer, 2012) and Muslim women (Ahmad, 2001). Research on success in relation to South-Asian girls and women has been largely narrated through mainstream feminist research (Pomerantz et al, 2013), rather than Black feminist studies on minority ethnic girls (Maylor and Williams, 2011; Marsh, 2013). As there is limited research which presents minority ethnic 'successful' women as active agents of change, there is a need to make South-Asian women the starting point for research (Bhopal, 2010). This paper contributes to the literature, from both minority ethnic and cross-generational perspectives.

Within third-wave feminist literature, 'success' is constituted within the neoliberal and meritocratic discourse of women can 'have it all', provided they work hard (Ringrose, 2013). Social media portrayals of 'girlpower' construct success as being achievable through hard work. Within the UK, 'managerialist regimes sideline equality issues and adopt… individualistic approaches that locate the responsibility for 'success' or 'failure' within the individuals' (Archer, 2009, p90). In 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). Consequently, girls and women may experience psychological feelings of failure, shame or stigma (Goffman, 1990) resulting in feelings of inadequacy whereby meritocracy becomes an illusion (Phillips, 2010; Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013; Mirza, Meetoo and Litster, 2011). Therefore neoliberalism focuses on girls' and women's agency, freedom, and 'choices' (Ringrose, 2013; Bauman, 2005).

Third-wave feminism is part of the 'gender equality illusion', whereby girls and women are constructed as 'entrepreneurs of their own lives' who 'engineer' their success journeys (Ringrose, 2013, p.3). Such third-wave discourses of 'Girlpower' fail to provide girls and women with tools to understand and challenge situations, where they experience sexism and other forms of oppression' (Taft, 2004, p73). Success discourses may trap girls and women 'between an idealized neoliberal girl subject' - one where she can 'run the world' and be anything that she wants to be – and the everyday realities of girls' and women's lives, which include experiences of inequality (Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik (2013, p.187) frequently compounded by the weight of intersectionalities (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The neoliberal notion of 'girlpower' fails to acknowledge the structural, social and cultural dimensions experience by women of colour (Crawford, 2017; Mirza, 2013).

Within the academic literature and media, cultural differences and supposed oppressions faced by British South-Asian women, alongside their perceived 'compliant' nature are highlighted (Ahmad,2001; Dale et al, 2002). Stereotypes fuel narrow depictions where South-Asian girls and women are typified and exoticised through superficial and aesthetic aspects of 'culture' (Zagumny and Richey, 2013). Other discourses may depict them as victims of cultural practices, where they have limited 'choices', and lack independence, or agency (challenged by Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2009). What it therefore means to be a 21st century, British South-Asian girl or woman, and academically or professionally 'successful', is layered and

'weighted' within a configuration of physical, psychosocial, cultural, religious, historical, economic and socio-political factors (Brah, 1996; Mirza, 2013).

In this merged study, 'success' (and perceptions of 'failure') refer to various dimensions of British South-Asian Asian women's lives, where academic and professional achievements, depict only part of their success journeys. Although there may appear a veneer of 'effortlessness', women may undertake a significant amount of 'invisible hard work' behind the scenes, as part of developing their holistic 'success' identities (Mendick and Francis, 2012; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2007). 'Success' journeys are viewed as complex, unfolding processes, whereby becoming, securing, performing and sustaining success, are all integral to undertaking a leadership role effectively.

Black Feminist Thought

We draw on Black feminist thought as it offers girls and women of colour, valuable space for their voices to be centred, rather than marginalised as in early first and second wave feminist movements. These were homogeneous and anglo-centric, focusing on the collective struggles of women (hooks, 1989; Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Ahmed, 2012). In prioritising the experiences of white, middle-class women, first wave feminists effectively excluded the voices of women from minority-ethnic background (Collins, 2000) first and second wave feminists tending to locate women's experiences within notions of patriarchy and capitalism (Beechey, 1979; Bhopal, 1997; Wilson, 1978).

We acknowledge that inequalities and power operations work in more complex, nuanced and intersecting ways for women of colour (Brah, 1996; Collins, 2000). This recognition underpins the emergence of Black feminism (Crenshaw, 1998; Davis, 1981; Mirza, 1997; Brah, 2012) which offers space to discuss Black women's lived experiences and narratives of struggle, from historical, religious, cultural and political perspectives, alongside other differences in experience relating to gender, class, religion, sexuality, caste and race for example. We also recognise psychological influences may further compound how social differences are experienced within daily life. (Brah, 1996; Phillips, 2010). So, for women of colour, everyday 'choices' are framed differently depending on how these lines of difference intersect.

Caution should be exercised however in relation to over-emphasising women's agency and the 'choices' available to them (Phillips, 2010; Narayan and Purkayastha, 2009). Third-wave feminist thinking may lead to complacency about structures of domination, where some girls and women perceive themselves as having more 'freedom' and 'choices' than in reality. Social and cultural processes that organise and regulate their lives may become so implicitly embedded, that these are taken for granted in hegemonic ways (Phillips, 2010; Collins, 2000). However, individuals are not simply positioned through discourses of language or social structures, but:

'...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...'. (Phillips, 2010:11)

Women's 'choices' (particularly girls and women of colour) are therefore mediated through dimensions and intersecting differences as highlighted above.

In this merged study, Black feminist thought offers a critical framework to acknowledge the psychosocial dimensions of women's success journeys (Mirza, 2013), provides space for minority ethnic voices, encourages researcher reflexivity and enables the centering of participants' voices. It enables an analysis of multiple dimensions of difference and the ways in which they can be seen as troubling and constraining in some spaces, but positive in others (Mirza and Meetoo, 2018). For example, culture and religion may offer safety and confidence in the home context yet be constraining within the school. Intersectionality facilitates a discussion of the realities of British South-Asian women's lived experiences, and their

perceived strength, power and survival abilities, grounded within historical narratives (Brah, 2007).

The Study

This cross-generational study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist epistemology. A narrative approach was used (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) and three in-depth, unstructured interviews of up to ninety minutes, were undertaken with each participant. Akin to 'research conversations' (Marsh, 2013) these allowed us to gain rich insights. Within each interaction, complex psychological factors emerged, moving beyond the interview encounter (Walkerdine et al, 2001). Each interview was 'situated and accomplished with audience in mind' (Riessman, 2008, p.106).

Analysis was undertaken using repeated thematic, inductive coding. Requiring multiple readings of the data, major and minor themes emerged through a process of 'constant comparison' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Line by line coding was used to focus on the data itself and to safeguard against imposing inappropriate theories (Charmaz, 2008) sensitising concepts whilst forming starting points for analysis. Data was segmented and colour coded in relation to themes, ensuring participant responses remained complete and centring individual women's voices. This enabled segments to be read within the context of the whole narrative in order to avoid misinterpretation. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines (2011) were adhered to throughout, where pseudonyms were used, and an ethics-as-process approach was followed (Liamputtong, 2010) where every research interaction included a reminder of the participant's rights in relation to their data (Rogers and Ludhra, 2011).

Positionality

As researchers, we come from different cultural, religious and classed backgrounds. As a British South-Asian woman and White British woman, we acknowledge the concept of cultural 'outsiders and 'insiders' (Laimputtong, 2010), whilst recognising the complexities of such binary terms. Our research conversations often involving challenge and discomfort, over time, led us to view our different backgrounds as adding a rich dimension to our analysis. We reject the notion that 'a single dimension of identity… is a barrier to cross-cultural research' (Crawford, 2017, p27) and adopt critically reflexive and interpretative positions in this study (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Hollway, 2012).

Participants

In this merged study, two headteachers and two headgirls have been selected because of their shared ethnicity, leadership characteristics, and success journeys.

Headgirl 1- Arti

Arti is 17, has one younger sister, and parents who work in administration roles. She belongs to a Sikh family but maintains a loose relationship with religion through parents and grandparents. She speaks Punjabi and German, and studies English literature, biology and German in a state funded, non-selective school. She will be the first in her family to attend university and begin teacher training.

Headgirl 2- Sara

Sara is from a Muslim family, and speaks Tamil, Sinhalese and Arabic. She is 17 and has one younger brother. Her father works in a hotel and her mother in a caring role. Sara narrates a strong religious Muslim identity and studies chemistry, biology and psychology at a state funded selective entry school. She will be the first in her family to attend university and study medicine.

Headteacher 1- Simran

Simran's Indian born parents came to the UK as young adults where she and her two siblings were born. Her parents were factory workers and she was the first in her family to attend university. A Hindi speaker, she is a practising Sikh and married with two sons. Simran is head of an infant-nursery school with 350 4-7-year-old children on roll. Aged 43 and a graduate, she has undertaken this role for 6 years.

Headteacher 2- Rani

Born in Kenya to Indian parents, Rani, a Punjabi speaker, came to the UK as a one-year old with 2 elder siblings. First to attend university, her father was a civil servant and mother a factory worker. Married with 3 children, she identifies as 'spiritual but not particularly religious'. Rani is headteacher of a school for children aged 7-11 years with 600 children on roll. She is a graduate, aged 47 and has been a head for 9 years.

The Evidence

Our participants' narratives illuminated what it *meant* for the girls and women to be 'successful' and how this was mediated across their lived experiences. Key markers of success included:

- securing the role- gaining respect;
- leaving a legacy;
- enabling and nurturing others;
- juggling demands;
- being a role model.

Securing the role - gaining respect

The roles of headgirl and headteacher are synonymous with success. Tough journeys, 'grafting' en route and a range of drivers, were discernible across all narratives. The girls and women had been inspired by their herstories, and a key impetus was to make their families and communities proud:

'[His] aspirations - that relentless blueprint from my father has made me- as the daughter of an immigrant- want to succeed and help others.'(Simran)

Fathers functioned as role models for all women and girls who actively worked to emulate their practices.

Additionally, these girls and women were driven by a sense of fulfilling their own aspirations, linking to self-esteem and respect. They all described highly competitive selection processes, and aspired to the roles from early ages, making heavy sacrifices to secure their positions as headgirl and headteacher. Rani for example, describes working throughout the night to gain her headship qualification- 'sometimes not giving enough time to my family- success has come at a cost.' This 'cost' was construed in terms of women offering less emotional and practical support to family members than they felt necessary.

The issue of identities being subsumed within the role became common to all four of our participants - Arti commenting: 'people now call me headgirl, not my actual name…it does not mean that I am a different person'. She acknowledged how the role of headgirl created a new formality and distance between her and her girlfriends. Similarly, Rani, stated: 'I am the school', revealing how her identity had become heavily subsumed by her role, indicating a fusion of the personal and professional. This 'embodiment' of the role, brought with it, status, power and personal fulfilment, along with a strong sense of social purpose.

The girls and women invested heavily in their professional identities from emotional, moral and professional perspectives (Mirza, 2013). Securing these roles, made them conscious of prospective failure, increasing their vulnerability to shame and stigma within professional and community contexts: 'I feel I'm representing women- particularly women in my community. There are only three Asian heads out of 69- so if I mess up- people will think we're all like this.' (Rani). Due in part to their heightened visibility as minority ethnic leaders within their spaces, their sense of fulfilment and success in securing the role, is paralleled by a fear of losing the role, and in turn, self-respect.

Leaving a legacy

A key marker of 'success' was leaving a legacy and making a positive difference to the school environment. Their appointments made a significant impact on the communities they inhabited, which had high expectations of the differences that these girls and women could make. They were aware of the benefits of the legacy to the school community, but also to themselves in the furtherance of their continued education and careers. Although the meaning of 'legacy' was nuanced, key focal points included celebrating diversity and promoting mutual respect. Headgirls initiated whole-school projects and coordinated ethnically diverse student events as part of their vision. This was linked to that of the headteacher's from whom they received guidance and a sense of security. Headteachers did not experience this same sense of security from other individuals and so, for them, the weight was greater. Arti perceived herself to be a role model to other pupils in the school, wanting to 'make a mark in the school'. Her assembly speeches encouraged peers to emulate her success:

'Universities are looking for students who have pushed themselves to the maximum… Nominate yourself to become form rep, work with the school council, lead a book club… challenge yourself to be the best!'

Similarly, headteachers worked to create utopian microcosms, whereby the ethnic mix of staff reflected that of the children, and where there was respect for all cultures:

'Over time- I want the best people but I've tried to replicate the community… by making sure that my staff reflect the community, I'm on the way to making sure that the interface between home and school is amazing.' (Simran)

Changing the face of the school according to their different spheres and power, was a shared goal for all, demanding high levels of emotional intelligence and integrity, yet reflecting both altruism and self-promotion.

The headgirls invested their time and efforts in leaving a legacy that would support the headteacher's vision, and other students, as well as enhancing their own CV in preparation for university. Whereas for the headteachers, their legacy was in part framed within accountability structures and school Governance targets. Their vision was however much wider than this, as it extended to impacting the local community, accompanied by a strong sense of wanting to 'give back'.

Enabling and nurturing others

Success involved coaching and nurturing success in others, through encouragement and practical support. For example, the two headgirls offered other pupils counselling style services, advising pupils on the completion of university application forms and revision techniques. Sara was sacrificial in supporting other students applying for medical school, despite her own heavy workload. She saw a key part of her role as supporting others, and she did this very well. Her assembly speeches were motivational:

"Try to grab all …opportunities…and don't just sit back! Not only will it help you develop skills for school, but also for the future and your careers!"

Sara encouraged other pupils to embrace a 'can do' positive mentality, where there were no perceived barriers to 'success' in line with the neoliberal discourse that success is determined by individual motivation and efforts. However, the reality of this is very different, and the headteachers' narratives as older women revealed an alternative picture through their professional and family lives.

Similarly, headteachers supported their staff (and pupils) with career progression advice, and counselled parent communities. The impact of their background was a key motivating factor in this:

'Part of my thing is empowering women- staff and parents. I'm sure my White counterparts do this… but I think of how things that have happened in my life…… all of us are coloured by our background- we can either reinvent ourselves or we can use it- I'm using it' (Rani)

Rani was aware of the struggle experienced by herself, her mother and other British South-Asian women during her formative years. She describes a lack of privilege, support networks and access to people who can 'get things done'. Consequently she determines to provide support, for example, drop-in sessions for mothers of her schoolchildren, involving advice on many aspects of their lives. She understood the complexities of their cultural and gendered contexts which made her empathetic, approachable and able to provide guidance.

These were altruistic women, all of whom cited their historical family narratives of struggle as a driver for success. All communicated a desire to help others, linking it to notions of class, gender and ethnicity:

'I owe my drive to my father he's been pushy and demanding- it was non- negotiable that you'd have a degree. If he could do that for me- I can do that- I can help those in my community.'(Simran)

The impact of their family- specifically older generations- on their impetus to enable others- was highly significant. They admired the hard work and qualities inherent within their fathers in particular, who had earned and sacrificed in order to send them to university. They acknowledged their own success was built on that of their fathers and so the need to 'pay back' informed the ways in which they operated. Appreciative of their positions of relative power they now saw it as their privilege to help others achieve success.

Juggling competing demands

The four participants desired to be successful in all aspects of their lives. They had high expectations of themselves and were organisationally strategic through the 'choices' they made, and how they invested their time. They articulated their lives as a constant 'juggling' act managing to maintain a certain level of success across a variety domains. They all juggled school and home commitments, expressing the need to be successful as wives, daughters, friends, sisters and mothers. Each participant had significant demands placed upon them, by immediate and extended family members. They were skilled at 'operating in different worlds':

'I step into my house (I might change into an Indian suit)… I adopt a different persona… I'm speaking a different language, cooking different food, picking up different issues- no one cares I'm a headteacher… because I'm their mum or their daughter in law or I'm someone's wife…. it means I understand what the children in school are going through.' (Simran)

Juggling had been developed within the extended family and cultural networks. All participants highlighted how skills of codeswitching and using different social registers, translated to their professional and home lives. The family could be both a source of support, and stress. Living with in-laws was described by Rani as 'the worst four years' of her life, because of the expectations that she would spend long hours cooking, undertaking domestic chores and submitting to the authority of her elders on a range of issues. Nevertheless, she notes: 'I don't

feel I could have been successful without the support of my extended family'. This was largely due to help with childcare.

The intense 'juggling' act of headgirl leadership (McClellan, 2012) was managed alongside the girls' priorities to achieve academic excellence in their A level examinations. Arti discussed multiple juggling stresses, such as meeting her university application deadline, revision for exams, leading school societies, voluntary and paid work, headgirl speeches, etc. Although not running her own home, like the headteachers, her roles took up significant amounts of time and to accomplish them successfully, she worked long hours. She invested heavily in the 'educational extras' (Ludhra, 2015) - those areas beyond exam grades, which added extra weight to a young person's developing Curriculum Vitae.

Being a good role model

Although the need for good role models is embedded within the public discourse, what exactly constitutes being a 'good' role model lacks transparency. Reflecting on the lack of minority ethnic role models for themselves, the headteachers determined to be effective role models for younger women:

'I hadn't got any role models from the Asian community who were heads- because that would have made a difference. If it was someone you knew, you'd think- yes- she did it with her family and her complex home life, you know, I can do it' (Rani)

Both headteachers visited different schools to 'talk to the girls', acknowledging the need to become role models for British South-Asian girls in particular. They cited the importance of empathy, borne out of an understanding of the girls' cultural contexts as key to making a positive impact and noted a 'real connection and bonding' with these young women.

Both headteachers recognised that whereas they had suffered from a lack of British South-Asian role models for most of their lives, there had been occasions they had selected White role models over Asian later on in their careers, emphasising it was insufficient for Asian women to inhabit authority roles- they also needed to demonstrate excellence in them. The headteachers had high expectations of themselves but also of others.

The two headgirls saw themselves as role models to their peers and younger children within the school and their families, but also articulated a real need for Asian academic role models. 'X' as researcher, had a clear impact here:

I've never met an Asian woman get to the stage that you're at …. you've got this thirst…to succeed, …you carried on studying after marriage and children. I was really inspired by you - I thought… I want to be like her one day, I want to do a PhD too'.

The headgirls, discussed school careers talks and noted how invited speakers were usually White women with whom they could not connect. They wanted to see women who were from similar backgrounds and had 'made it' through struggles, without middle-class financial advantages, and cultural privileges. As a result of in-school experiences, they perceived themselves as minority ethnic role models for both younger students, and girls in their extended families. The effect of role models- or the lack of them - could not be underestimated.

Discussion

Narratives of the four participants have provided insights into what 'success' means across dimensions of their lives and have illustrated their various 'success journeys'. The two headgirls were building their 'success' journeys in relation to achieving top examination grades to secure universities places, developing profiles as holistic citizens undertaking voluntary and community work, and leadership activities in school and beyond. In this way, 'success' meant significantly more than achieving straight grades As. The two headteachers viewed themselves as successful not only in achieving the position of headteacher, but by making a

difference in the community, supporting and nurturing upcoming staff, enabling minority ethnic parents in terms of language and general parenting and appointing staff to reflect the ethnic mix of their schools. In this way, the headteachers acted as cultural brokers between communities, adding further weight to their roles. Grounded in the historical experiences of their parents. these ways of operating were borne out of a sense of responsibility and duty of care towards the community and were integral to their perceptions of success.

Across the generations

There were similarities in the ways 'success' was experienced for all participants, as highlighted in the key markers in this chapter: securing the role- gaining respect; leaving a legacy; enabling and nurturing others; juggling demands and being a role model.

Each narrative revealed a drive towards perfection in all areas, but in reality, sustaining success in every dimension was an impossibility. A key difference between the headteachers and headgirls was that the girls narrated a wholly positive take on their aspirational futures, in relation to 'becoming successful' in their careers, degrees, partners and material possessions for example. They did not appear to recognise the potential challenges that they may face in relation to ethnicity and workplace discrimination, and narrated the gender equality illusion (Ringrose, 2013) together with notions of meritocracy (Gonick, 2007; Mendick and Francis, 2012: Khoja-Moolji, 2014).

By contrast, the headteachers had experienced inequalities and therefore recognised that meritocracy was a myth. They articulated the pressure of aiming for perfection and a 'regrettable relief' accompanying the realisation they were unable to achieve success in all areas of life. Simran reflects:

'My ethnicity comes into my plate spinning challenge of trying to be- [but] I'm not trying any more- the perfect daughter, wife… daughter-in-law… sister- everyone has roles for us whatever ethnic group we're from… mine are defined in a certain way… we all carry so much guilt…'

This element of regret, or realism, did not appear in either of the younger women's narratives suggesting life experience is accompanied by a greater understanding of structure and agency.

Success: cages and keys

For all four participants in this merged study, becoming 'successful' offered keys for entry to new spaces - for example, for the headgirls, high A level grades and excellent CVs, provided the key to a good university. Headteachers narrated how their position offered them status and respect within the educational community, and this brought with it power to affect change. For them, the role itself acted as the key for access to particular elite groups. Their respective leadership roles afforded them power, authority and respect.

However, the journey towards becoming 'successful' could also be viewed as a 'cage' where a sense of entrapment is felt, and a fear of failure is experienced. On occasions, the same difference could present as both a key (to unlock or enable) or a cage (to restrict or paralyse) depending on the particular context and intersection. For example, the dimension of culture and religion in the home space, may promote the furthering of a woman's education. At the same time, these, together with additional expectations, may promote the carrying out of typically gendered domestic chores (Coleman, 2002; Jones, 2017) and emotional support of the family, and these may hinder successful progression, whilst adding heavy psychological burdens.

In many ways a catalyst for high aspirations and supportive of academic and professional success, all four fathers (and in this sample, mothers to a lesser degree) had instilled in their daughters the need for hard work and 'to be better than' their White counterparts (Gladwell,

2008; Mendick and Francis, 2012) displaying values rooted in early migration experiences of struggle (Watson, 1977; Anwar, 1979; Brah, 1993). Parents' and grandparents' histories acted as a spur to 'move up' and 'out' of their current classed positions (Tinkler and Jackson, 2014; Reay et al 2011). This functioned as a driver for success in achieving 'the whole package plus'- the constant, strategic striving to make themselves stand out, for example, in leading high-status projects. Success was not wholly a result of parental influence however. All girls and women in this study conveyed high expectations regarding being successful across all areas of their lives due to self-motivation (Kehily and Nayak, 2009). Unable to draw upon the 'hot knowledge' of middle-class families (Archer, 2012), these girls and women were largely self-regulators of their success (Foucault, 1984; Rose, 1999).

Similar to their White counterparts, the headteachers had greater domestic responsibilities (Coleman, 2002; Jones, 2017) and competing personal and work-related expectations resulting in relentless 'juggling', which on occasions caused anxiety, neglect of the self and an erosion of social life. All participants demonstrated high levels of self-regulation, but this came at a personal cost. Presenting an image of effortless success, all acknowledged private cages-stresses- kept hidden to maintain the successful 'superwoman role' which they embodied (Jackson 2010).

Participant displayed a strong ethic of care within their families and communities, developing this alongside individual visions of success. Although potentially resulting in a suppression of their own wellbeing (Baumann, 2001) the need to support others in and outside of the home, remained an integral part of the holistic success they deemed important. They acted as bridges between schools and communities 'enacting values focused leadership and serving as role models' for both British South-Asians and other community members (Johnson, 2017, p 857).

They experienced the pressure to be with more British South-Asian people versus the pressure to connect with more White people:

'When I first came, people in the Education Authority would say -you'll really get on with 'X' Asian head and 'Y' Asian head- we're all lumped together but I wouldn't ring them if I had a problem- they're not my kind of people. It was done with good intent- but it's a bit racist really' (Simran).

This illustrates how British South-Asian women may experience attempts to 'push them back' into a cage. Constrained by the prejudices or racism of others, women were aware of marginalisation despite gaining high-status roles. Yet both headteachers discussed their active pursuit of mentoring and the formation of networks with White women. Within these relationships, they found emotional support and strategic help, recognising the importance of 'White sanction' (Miller, 2016) in their drive for success.

In describing the power she has in certain areas, Rani notes the same self-presentation may result in authority or a lack of it within different contexts:

'[If] I've worn a sari- some of my White parents have given me a look and I think if I wore this every day- would you come & talk to me? So… I don't wear it as much because of how I'd be perceived- because its happened in other fields- the way I'm spoken to is very different than if I'm wearing western clothes'… My own children don't want me to look like a 'Freshie' but my Muslim parents love it.

Opportunities granted by high-status roles may provide keys to greater respect from certain groups through identification but may equally inhibit acceptance and communication with other groups.

All were in ethnically diverse contexts offering them relatively 'safe spaces' in which to operate. They articulated preferences for remaining within their own communities where they believed they could make the greatest difference as change agents. However there is

complexity in this. All expressed a reticence to move into predominantly White spaces for fear of being 'cultural outsiders' (Liamputtong, 2010). Ironically the safe space which enabled success to flourish could also function as a cage potentially limiting higher levels of success.

Culture and agency need to be rethought beyond the binary model of women being 'caught between the poles of oppressive patriarchal structures of subordination' and 'the promise afforded by feminism of liberation' (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2009, p115). A more nuanced analysis is required. Far from experiencing a lack of agency, alongside a respect for cultural values, women used small micrologies of power (Plummer, 2010) directing their own success in ways not known to their families. For all women education and qualifications provided negotiating power enabling them to achieve success in their work. Headgirls noted that staff would facilitate their projects and headteachers recognised the power of the role to effect change in community groups and Local Authority working parties. Foundational to this was their 'psychological capital, resilience and ability to code switch across audiences and spaces, accommodating multiple ways of 'being a woman' (Marsh, 2013).

Notions of cultural hybridity (Ballard, 1994) link to those of South-Asian women as 'cultural navigators'. Because of their marginalised position they become skilled at navigating between different classed, gendered and ethnic worlds. In exercising control over their circumstances, they formed bridges between past family traditions and contemporary British society (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016). In so doing they 'reflexively 'select, suppress and supplement family traditions' (Archer, 2007, p48, cited in Bagguley and Hussein, 2016, p 47). Women displayed 'meta-reflexivity,' challenging and working within structural constraints where they 'actively scrutinise their own aspirations, opportunities and community to make a way forward for themselves' (ibid, p53). Fuelled by a commitment to their values, this process, which may involve conflict, is integral to how the participants in this study achieved success.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed what notions of 'success' look like for our four participants, who are leaders in their own right in primary and secondary schools. The headgirls and headteachers, although from different generations, displayed similar characteristics, attitudes and values, through their success journeys. The differences were apparent in relation to their ages and differing lived experiences, headteachers having encountered university, career, marriage, raising children, and cultural commitments. These differences impacted on the ways the women and girls viewed the world and the achievement of success.

All four participants were from working-class backgrounds and the first in their families to attend university. In our particular study, these factors did not hinder their progress, but, along with other differences, they added additional weight to their navigation of success. The headgirls were not necessarily aware of potential barriers due to their, as yet, limited life experience. None of the four were privileged to have 'hot knowledge' (Archer, 2009) derived from their parents' education and professional careers or networks, however they drew upon on their own psychological desires to drive their success stories, grounded in and inspired by, the narratives of struggle from parents and grandparents (Mirza, 2013). Our participants performed their agency to navigate markers of difference across their lives, and their personal strength and resilience was manifest in their survival abilities and desire to persevere to achieve success, at a personal cost (hooks, 1989). For the minority ethnic girls and women in this study, this involved little social life or personal care, long hours of work, the prioritisation of others over themselves, surveillance, and the fear of public failure within extended families and their own ethnic community. In this way the weight of surveillance and public failure was magnified for them, over their White counterparts. They had 'more' to prove as they were 'the first' British South-Asian girls and women to occupy these roles, and as such, the drive to succeed and bring esteem to their own ethnic group was paramount in their thinking.

Although on the surface, our participants performed success in a seemingly effortless way, the reality was far from this. They employed discipline and drew on sophisticated mechanisms

to cope with stress, in order to maintain the 'Superwoman' status that they embodied and performed (Jackson, 2010; Machin and Thornborrow, 2006). Acknowledging that parents were limited in the help they could offer, the women and girls were strategic in networking, rigorous in planning and independent in the ways they aimed for success – 'I'm different because I make and find my own way- I don't look at barriers- I look at the positive to make it work.'

Based on this research, several recommendations can be made. A strategic approach to support is required. First, 'identity-safe spaces' (Showunmi et al, 2016) could be created for British South- Asian girls and women to explore and discuss how multiple intersections impact their success journeys. For example, the ways in which religion, culture and gender impact educational and professional progression. Although there is merit in exclusive 'safe spaces', equally there is a strong need for uncomfortable conversations to take place, where women across age groups and backgrounds develop mentoring and support mechanisms, which take account of privileged positions to enable and facilitate success in progression.

Whilst we recognise that there are several mentoring programmes nationally, some of which the headteachers in this study had participated in, these women did not narrate a sense of having positive British South-Asian role models with whom they could wholly identify (Maylor, 2009). We advocate a more sophisticated approach towards the matching of girls and women within mentoring schemes which takes account of various intersections including ethnicity. The establishment of intergenerational fora and mentoring systems, whereby British Asian and White professionals could work both together and separately across various educational contexts to mentor and be mentored, could facilitate a growth in knowledge, understanding and confidence so impacting on career progression.

Further, critical, open dialogue and CPD involving schools with differing ethnic compositions, could promote intercultural communication and mobility, exploring ways in which White privilege and notions of 'colour blindness' (Lander, 2014) may play out in nuanced ways. In this study, gender, race and meritocracy illusions have been explored, highlighting the need for critical feminist education to be on the school curriculum and addressed within a range of contexts for educational professionals. There is also a necessity to develop understandings around the constructs of race and ethnicity and how 'Whiteness' may be perpetuated to marginalise, exclude and prevent or hinder success in various spheres of life (Lander, 2014, Gilborn, 2008).

To move forward there needs to be a willingness to take risks through uncomfortable conversations where women across differing backgrounds, together engage in dialogue, developing understandings of how women and girls who have experienced particular intersectionalities may be marginalised or hindered in their journeys to success and equally how they have succeeded despite these barriers.

Success is complex as women move in and out of comfort zones. For a successful British South-Asian headteacher or headgirl, being 'in the minority' brings visibility, weight of responsibility and a sense that failure will impact on their entire community. 'Holistic' success is difficult if not impossible to achieve but though psychological resilience and moral commitment the girls and women in this study were nevertheless, resolute in striving for it.

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