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## **Explaining Educational Achievement and Career Aspirations among Young British Pakistanis: Mobilizing 'Ethnic Capital'?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article offers an explanation for recent trends that indicate higher numbers of young British Pakistani men and women pursue higher education compared to their white peers. Our qualitative research provides evidence for shared norms and values amongst British Pakistani families, what we term 'ethnic capital'. However, our findings also highlight differences between families. The Bourdieuan notion of 'cultural capital' explains educational success among middle-class British Pakistani families. We argue, however, that insufficient attention has been given to the relation between education and ethnicity, and particularly the role of 'ethnic capital' in ameliorating social class disadvantage. Our research also recognizes the limitations of 'ethnic capital' and traces the interplay of ethnicity with gender and religion that produces differences between, and within, working-class British Pakistani families. We also emphasize how structural constraints, selective school systems and racialized labour markets, influence the effectiveness of 'ethnic capital' in promoting educational achievement and social mobility.

### **KEY WORDS**

British Pakistanis / cultural capital / education / ethnic capital / gender / religion / social capital

## Introduction

The educational achievements and aspirations of children from ethnic minority groups remain a significant cause of concern for academics (Archer and Francis, 2006; Burgess et al., 2009; Crozier and Davies, 2006; Dale et al., 2002; Francis and Archer, 2005; Platt, 2005) and policy makers (Cabinet Office, 2008). Recent studies acknowledge the variations, first identified by Modood et al. (1997), in the educational achievements of *different* ethnic minority groups. While South Asians as a group had the highest rates of participation in post-compulsory education for the 16–24 age range, Indian and African-Asian men were the most likely to possess degrees and Pakistani and Bangladeshi men were the least likely. However, if young Pakistani men do less well than some of their South Asian peers, both young Pakistani men and women are more likely to go to university than their white peers (Connor et al., 2004).<sup>1</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, young Pakistani boys continued to do worse than most other groups at GCSE.<sup>2</sup> How might these unexpected patterns of high academic attainment and aspiration be explained? Dominant explanations for the educational outcomes of ethnic minorities draw on Bourdieu and emphasize the importance of social class origins in limiting social mobility. However, insufficient attention has been given to the relationship between educational achievement and ethnicity, and to whether ethnicity may act as a resource (cf. Wallman, 1979; Werbner, 1990) – what Modood (2004) terms ‘ethnic capital’ – to ameliorate or augment social class disadvantage.

Research on the relationship between ethnicity and social capital remains underdeveloped (Goulbourne and Solomos, 2003). In the US, Zhou (2000, 2005) has utilized Coleman’s concepts of social capital to explain the high academic achievement of Asian Americans, notably those from Vietnamese and Chinese immigrant backgrounds. In Britain, Archer and Francis (2006) suggest that ‘family capital’, drawing on Bourdieu, might explain the educational success of British Chinese pupils. Our qualitative research finds some intersections with both these theoretical approaches for British Pakistanis. In this article we explore the evidence for forms of ‘ethnic social capital’ (Zhou, 2005) drawing on Zhou’s ideas about familial or ethnic shared norms and values as contributing to educational achievement among immigrant groups. Our research also recognizes the limitations of this approach, emphasizing the variations between and within families in terms of how norms and values are operationalized and enforced. Some of these variations are explained through an understanding of how social class positions intersect with ethnicity. We also argue that social inequalities, the allocation of socially valued resources and life chances, are shaped for young British Pakistanis by the interplay of ethnicity, class, gender, and religion within specific space/time dimensions (Anthias, 2001). Recognizing the mutual constitution of social categories offers a more nuanced understanding of ethnic social capital in the dynamics of educational achievement and aspirations among British Pakistanis. Our findings also highlight structural constraints, such as selective school systems and racialized labour markets, in

shaping opportunity and further influencing the effectiveness of ethnic social capital in promoting educational achievement and social mobility.

## Theorizing 'Capitals'

The sociology of education has been strongly influenced by Bourdieuian concepts to analyse how cultural reproduction enables the social reproduction of hierarchies and inequalities between classes in relation to compulsory and post-compulsory education (see Archer and Francis, 2006; Lareau and Horvat, 1999; Reay et al., 2005). A central point in *Reproduction* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) is the concept of 'capital'. In addition to economic capital, Bourdieu identifies social capital or resources acquired through the operation of social networks or group membership, and cultural capital or the possession of the nuances of language, the aesthetic preferences and cultural goods, and other symbolic expressions and behavioural dispositions which allow parents to become insiders in a society's educational and cultural institutions. Not only can such parents support their children's education, but Bourdieu's particular claim is that success requires ease with the life style of those who have high status (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Bourdieu's work is important in emphasizing the importance of familial norms and transmission of cultural capital in the reproduction of socio-economic advantages and disadvantages. However, following Skeggs (2004) who asserts that class is made and given value through culture, we suggest that Bourdieu's argument can be extended to some British Pakistani families who lack economic capital but may be able to use other capitals to achieve their educational aims and goals. We argue that individuals whose parents come from more prosperous or educated backgrounds in Pakistan (particularly those coming from urban areas) will hold orientations and outlooks which might be defined as 'middle class' even though they might be categorized as 'working class' on economic measures in the UK (see later for a discussion of respondents' classed locations). These parents can deploy transnational cultural capital (Ball et al., 2003) – forms of knowledge, dispositions and values that have efficacy in the UK education sector – because they have been accumulated through an educational experience in Pakistan influenced by colonial and post-colonial relations. A degree of dominant cultural capital might also be developed by second-generation parents who have been educated in the UK and who mobilize it to aid their children's educational progress even if they lack economic capital.

Bourdieu's work also offers a theoretical framework for making links between the wider social structure, power and ideology. However, ethnicity has no place in his theory of culture (Li Puma, 1993). We argue that ethnicity is not just part of the cultural and symbolic schema of groups but has material impact. In particular, ethnic social relations and ethnic institutions can be conduits of cultural and social capital and therefore become constitutive of class positioning. We draw on recent scholarship by sociologists in the US who analyse the varied

educational outcomes of children of post-1965 immigrants (Zhou, 2000, 2005; Zhou and Bankston, 1994). This literature derives from Coleman's (1988) findings, which suggest that economic disadvantage can be compensated by social capital in the form of family norms, values and networks, as well as a broader set of community values and networks which promote particular educational goals.

Zhou (2000, 2005) and Zhou and Bankston (1994) seek to understand the high academic achievements of Vietnamese and Chinese immigrant communities, regardless of socio-economic backgrounds. They argue that the presence of dense co-ethnic networks, including cultural endowments, obligations and expectations, information channels and enforcement of social norms, can serve as a distinct form of social capital. Two dimensions of social capital are particularly relevant to immigrant families: 'intergenerational closure' and 'norms enforcement'. The presence of dense co-ethnic networks in immigrant communities forms a closed structure and creates a protective barrier for second-generation youth in inner-city neighbourhoods. Tightly knit co-ethnic networks prevent the young from assimilating into the underclass, provide resources that facilitate access to good schools and promote academic achievement through the enforcement of familial and community norms. Zhou (2000) also identifies ethnic community organizations as contributing to intergenerational closure by reinforcing values on education and assisting with upward social mobility for working-class Asian Americans. Such organizations can potentially allow cross-class co-ethnic relationship, thus enhancing information channels, job opportunities and models of academic and economic success. Thus, ethnicity as social capital collapses the Bourdieuan distinction between cultural capital, acquired through the family, and social capital as benefits mediated through social networks and group membership and highlights the broad roles that ethnicity can play through 'ethnic capital' (Modood, 2004).

This notion of ethnic capital identifies important and sometimes hidden mechanisms. In particular, it suggests a triad of factors – familial adult-child relationships, transmission of aspirations, and attitudes and norms enforcement – that can facilitate educational achievement and social mobility among those with limited economic capital (Modood, 2004). This is not to say that such forms of ethnic capital can neutralize all the effects of class advantages and disadvantages. Indeed Portes and Landolt (1996) assert that 'equating social capital with the resources gained through it could obscure the important structural constraints on utilizing the assets gained from social and familial ties'. Moreover, as Shah has argued elsewhere (2007), there is a risk that Zhou's concept of ethnicity as social capital constructs ethnic collectivities as culturally homogenous and ignores power relations within ethnic communities and family units. While Zhou (2005: 133) does acknowledge the pressures on young people emanating from intense parental and community expectation and scrutiny, which raises questions about the effectiveness of ethnicity as social capital, this is not developed empirically. In addition, the notion of ethnicity as social capital adopts a top-down view of the effects of parents and the ethnic community on educational outcomes and social mobility (cf. Morrow, 1999),

ignoring the possibility that young people can also generate positive forms of social capital (Shah, 2007).

Finally, we do not advocate reification of ethnicity, but emphasize the interplay of ethnicity with class, gender and religion. As Kao (2004: 175) discusses in relation to social capital, we also suggest that there is a need to distinguish among potential ethnic capital (either positive or negative) that families and/or peers offer, the intensity of ties between families and/or peers with children, and the actualized level of ethnic capital. We argue that gendered relations affect the influence of ethnic capital on educational aspirations and negotiation of life chances among British Pakistani men and women in significant and different ways. The interplay of ethnicity, gender and religion can sometimes act to bolster the influence of ethnic capital and aid social mobility – for example, among some working-class British Pakistani men who have sought an active practice of their faith. However, this is not true for other young men where gender and ethnicity can interrelate to produce strongly negative influences. The scholarship cited earlier has little to say about the influence of gender ideologies in the creation, maintenance or activation of 'capitals' despite evidence of differences in educational attainment and attitudes across gender. Thus, while we find the concept of ethnic capital useful in understanding patterns of educational achievement among working-class British Pakistanis, we also argue that differences in achievement among young British Pakistanis cannot only be explained by the presence or absence of such capital in families and communities. The impact of social capital must also be contextualized within particular social contexts and structural constraints that shape socio-economic opportunities for specific groups (Edwards et al., 2003).

## Methodology

This article draws on a two-year qualitative study (2004–2006) of the relationship between educational attainment and ethnicity among British Pakistanis.<sup>3</sup> In 2005 we conducted interviews with 33 young men and 31 young women aged 16–26 in Slough. We recruited a comparative sample of pupils with varied educational and employment trajectories. Our sample included those who were at school studying 'A' levels, college and university students at a range of higher education institutions, professional and manual workers and those who were unemployed. We compared equal numbers of those who had left school at 16 (even if they had subsequently returned to education) with those who had stayed on to gain further qualifications. This sample was recruited at a range of locations: youth and community centres, other groups involving youth, a job skills training centre, the local university and universities around London, participants in Slough Borough Council's Modern Apprenticeship Programme and through snowball techniques.<sup>4</sup> We also interviewed 14 parents, four fathers and 10 mothers, recruited through community agencies and through snowball techniques. All interviews were taped, transcribed and analysed with the aid of

*Atlas.ti* software using a grounded theory approach. We also conducted background interviews with a range of institutional stakeholders in Slough including teachers, the local educational authority and community organizations.<sup>5</sup>

In this analysis of the social relations and processes that shape the education trajectories of young British Pakistanis it is important to delineate how we have understood respondents' classed locations and orientations. Among our sample of young British Pakistanis, 50 described their fathers' occupation and only 21 described their mothers' occupation. Thus we have taken their descriptions of father's occupation to develop four categories for class allocation based on the ONS-SEC (2001) classifications. Six fathers occupied the managerial/professional group that reflect Classes One and Two and can be designated as 'middle class' on the basis of their qualifications, status, pay and conditions. Twenty-six fathers occupied the intermediate category but mainly fell into Class 4 of small employers and own account workers. The majority of these fathers were self-employed taxi drivers, with a small number owning restaurants in Slough. This group of fathers were difficult to assign a class designation as their current occupations reflected their experiences in racialized labour markets and the impact of economic restructuring in Slough. While being self-employed or small employers accorded some status and responsibility, these occupations entailed arduous and precarious working conditions. However, based on interviews with their children, who mentioned their fathers' educational backgrounds and transnational family ties, we would describe these fathers as having a 'middle-class orientation'. Sixteen fathers were in routine manual occupations and two were unemployed; Classes 7 and 8 respectively. We designated these fathers as 'working class' based on their occupational status and working conditions.

Among the parents whom we interviewed, five occupied managerial and professional occupations and two fell into the intermediate category. We assigned these parents as 'middle class' and having 'middle-class orientations' for the reasons discussed above. Four parents were in routine or manual occupations, and three had never worked. These parents were designated as 'working class'.

### **Ethnic Capital at Work? Evidence for Shared Beliefs and Values**

There is considerable evidence for a set of shared beliefs and values about the importance of education. All the young Pakistanis we interviewed believed education was very important to succeed in life, and stated that their parents emphasized the value of education. All parents interviewed, irrespective of their own education or background, were acutely aware of the respect and status higher education and professional qualifications would confer on the family. Noor, a working-class single mother, emphasized to her children that 'you get a lot of respect if you've got a good job'. And she noted that she too would gain respect. Similarly, Yasmin, a student at Brunel and from a working-class family,

noted that it did not matter which university she attended as long as she went to university because 'I think it's a kind of status that comes with it'.

A competitive spirit also drives parents to encourage their children to pursue a university degree (Archer and Francis, 2006). Respondents mentioned that when their parents get together with other Pakistani parents from their locality they share stories about their children's educational progress. As Rana noted:

When they meet up with their friends or whatever, he [Dad] will say to them 'my daughter done this degree', they all talk about their children, 'what did your children do?'

Some parents highlighted both the instrumental and intrinsic value of education. Thus Aziz, a taxi driver who was also Chair of the Slough Pakistan Welfare Association, said:

Education is not just to get a good job, education makes you a good citizen, a good person, part of the society, if you're educated ... you always try to do the better things, you communicate better, you speak better, this is good for society.

However, for many parents the views that they had about their children's educational aspirations were more directly embedded in their own labour market experiences: they saw education, and particularly higher education, as a means to achieve social mobility. Twenty-two-year-old Lubna recounted that her father, from a village in Pakistan and without an education, had worked in the cotton mills. He believed that education was important and did not want his children to experience the deprivation and manual labour that he had endured. Eighteen-year-old Zainab's father used his own life history to encourage his children. He believed that he 'would be somewhere high now' rather than working in a factory had he pursued further education in his youth. Parents were also aware of the changes in the labour market and the decreasing number of jobs available for those with few qualifications. Zeenat encouraged her children to pursue higher education because:

It is very important actually, they should have an education now because if you're educated you get a job, ... before it used to be factories and stuff and you didn't have a choice, you used to get a job in a factory, but now without education you wouldn't find a job anywhere, like computers especially, you need education to be able to use them.

While some parents simply wished their children to pursue higher education, without being directional about what they should study, other parents hoped that their children would become doctors, lawyers or accountants, all prestigious occupations with the potential to earn high incomes. An emphasis on qualifications and credentials tends to reflect dominant conceptions of achieving social mobility (Archer et al., 2003) and also parallels views of other working-class groups from immigrant backgrounds (Francis and Archer, 2005).

Aspirations for high educational achievement were true of all Pakistani-heritage parents regardless of their own educational or income backgrounds.

Such normative orientations among working-class Pakistani parents might be contrasted to those of white working-class parents who may be less ambitious for their children or may see aspirations for social mobility as 'getting above your station' (Archer and Leathwood, 2003; Burgess et al., 2009; Reay et al., 2005). As the first stage of our argument, then, the aspirations identified by our data could be interpreted as examples of ethnicity at work or 'ethnic capital' (Modood, 2004; cf. Zhou, 2000). However, our research also reveals that Pakistani parents differed in their abilities to actualize such 'ethnic capital' to assist their children in enabling these aspirations.

### **Mobilizing Capitals – Variations between Families**

Ball et al. (1995) point out that the new 'market' in education has created differentiated circuits of schooling requiring the interplay between social class, cultural capital and choice. Slough's competitive grammar school system required parents to invest in strategies to access the best schools. Almost all families in our sample mobilized some level of economic capital such as extra tuition and purchasing computers to support their children's education. However, our findings highlight that those parents who we identified as being middle class, or as having 'middle-class' orientations, possessed cultural capital in the Bourdieuan sense and were best able to navigate the 'market' in education. Typically these parents were more likely to have come from an urban or educated background in Pakistan and to hold a managerial or professional job in the UK or were in Class Four occupations. This set of parents exercised such cultural capital to create a home environment where education was the priority. For example, Maya's parents implemented a strict rule that she had to complete homework before watching television or socializing. In addition to setting rules and expectations, such parents were also actively involved in their children's education. Shireen and her husband emphasized reading, did extra work with their children and purchased computers and books. In addition, they spent time discussing GCSE, 'A' level and university degree course choices. Shireen also imposed strict rules and boundaries on her sons and was concerned to prevent the influence of what she perceived as negative peer street culture in Slough on her sons.

Cultural capital among middle-class and similarly oriented Pakistani parents was bolstered by their social capital. They had extended family members and co-ethnic friends who had professional or business success, as well as broader social networks which crossed ethnic and class boundaries. These social networks are important for gaining information about the educational system and the changing demands of contemporary labour markets. They also provided role models for their children. For example, Maya, studying for her 'A' levels when interviewed, had chosen to pursue dentistry at university and had already spent time volunteering at the dental practice of a family friend. Such parents were also active in creating cross-ethnic networks. Three mothers

and one father were on the board of governors of local primary schools, one mother had been involved in the parent teacher association at her children's school, and one father was active in facilitating discussions between Slough Local Education Authority and the Pakistan Welfare Association on strategies to address educational underachievement among British Pakistani children in Slough.

Second-generation working-class mothers, while they remained in households with low incomes, also held middle-class orientations and mobilized a level of cultural capital. Many of these mothers had left full-time education at age 16 to get married, and so did not possess what Bourdieu (1997) identified as institutional forms of cultural capital such as academic qualifications. At the time of the study they were active as volunteers in their children's schools, or working for Slough Borough Council or in local corporations. These educational, work and volunteer experiences had allowed them to acquire some degree of dominant cultural capital. Razia met with her son's teachers frequently to track his progress and had decided to send him to a better-resourced middle school in nearby Windsor in an attempt to boost his academic opportunities. This required both knowledge of how to negotiate the education market and resources to transport her child. Like other middle-class parents, Razia was also concerned about shielding her son from negative peer influences and kept a watchful eye on him:

If they are playing a football match in a park opposite then I can see him ... I don't like him just wandering around which I think is wrong, because if you are wandering around you're getting up to mischief aren't you?

Parents with middle-class orientations were thus able to actualize their 'ethnic capital' by also mobilizing their economic and cultural capital to actively influence their children's educational aspirations and achievements. Moreover, their family roles and household organization were constructed to accommodate the demands of school and enhancing educational performance (Ball et al., 1995). In contrast, while education was also of importance to working-class parents and they mobilized their economic capital, they themselves lacked the cultural capital to support their children's education. Many were not proactive about setting rules for study and leisure time, or strategically evaluating secondary school choices. A number of the young people from working-class families had gone to the same lower-performing secondary schools as their siblings, cousins and friends. Having failed the divisive 11+ in operation in Buckinghamshire, their options were limited to local secondary schools often depicted as 'failing' or having low expectations by both parents and young British Pakistanis we interviewed. These choices reflected pragmatic, locally bounded choices that 'fitted' into the constraints of family and household organization (Ball et al., 1995). Moreover, parents' social networks predominantly consisted of working-class co-ethnics in the locality who were the source of information about schools and specific career options, serving to limit the 'horizons of possibility' (Crozier and Davies, 2006: 688).

Nonetheless some working-class families were able to actualize their norms and values related to education by mobilizing other aspects of 'ethnic capital', particularly the extended familial adult-child relationships which were important in transmission of aspirations and enforcement of norms. For example, older siblings provided help with homework and attended parent-teacher meetings, an intergenerational resource also identified by Crozier and Davies (2006). Iram noted that her parents:

... tried their best, they came to all our parents' evenings, read our reports, did all that [but] because they didn't go to school properly, they were in and out of school when they were young, it was difficult for them to kind of keep up with what we were doing at the time.

Iram's parents learnt from her experiences and Iram was able to 'explain the system and how it works'. Later on, as Iram's sister and brothers approached their GCSEs, her parents were more involved in the decision-making. Thus in Pakistani families older siblings generated cultural capital suggesting that children are active participants in generating social capital for themselves, their parents and siblings (Morrow, 1999; Shah, 2007).

In other examples extended family members acted as what Crozier and Davies (2006: 685) call 'high status role models'. Sonia, a law student at Kingston University, was inspired by her relatives, who have become opticians, doctors, accountants, to pursue higher education. In other cases, family members used themselves as negative examples to encourage siblings to aspire to higher education. For example, Yasmin's aunt had 'always regretted not going to uni', and she encouraged Yasmin to continue with higher education: 'even if you don't like it, don't drop out'. These relations between extended family members were based on a high degree of trust and resemble the 'bonded solidarity' (Portes, 1998) in which actors support each other's initiatives rather than simply utilize their social and cultural capital for individual personal gain.

Beyond the family, nascent ethnic organizations have begun to address educational underachievement among British Pakistani students in Slough. The Slough Community School, established in 2001 and which had 180 children attending at the time of the research, and a homework club run in the Pakistani Welfare Association's offices since 2005, of which 10 children were taking advantage, are examples of what Zhou (2005) calls an 'ethnic system of support'. Such community organizations not only enforce norms of educational achievement, but also provide an important source of cultural capital (Archer and Francis, 2006). Both the Slough Community School and the homework club were started by middle-class professional parents, and staffed by volunteers including university and secondary school students. The Community School's Director explained that it was set up to provide children with supplementary education and to provide working-class children with some of the extra educational tuition which more middle-class parents 'buy'.

In recent years, Slough's Pakistan Welfare Association (PWA) has held several information evenings for parents in conjunction with the Slough Local

Education Authority to address underachievement among British Pakistani children. As Aziz, Chair of the PWA, noted, their goal is 'to get the community together and make the people realize that this is time you get together and do something about your children'. In addition to mobilizing working-class parents this particular initiative is generating linking capital with local power centres. These community initiatives serve to reinforce shared norms and values related to education. They provide working-class Pakistani parents with opportunities to access the cultural capital that Bourdieu highlights through cross-class networks with more middle-class Pakistani parents. Such parents provide information on and strategies to negotiate primary and secondary school levels and entry into higher education, as well as information on the range of career options that are available. While their relative recency means that their role and effectiveness in influencing educational achievement among British Pakistanis in Slough is yet to be proven, they are important as examples of ethnic institutions that represent a strategic attempt to provide support for minority ethnic children in Slough.

In summary, better-off or better-educated Pakistani parents were able to mobilize both economic resources and cultural capital to translate their norms and aspirations into support for their children's education. These 'middle-class' orientations were not limited to families with income or education; generation also played a part in the accumulation of dominant cultural capital. However, among working-class families, while parents mobilized a degree of economic capital, class intersects with ethnicity to produce variations in children's educational achievement. Limited economic capital and lack of cultural capital do not relegate all children from working-class families to underachievement. Those families able to mobilize other aspects of 'ethnic capital' – the cohesive family and community ties and provision of community educational resources – all of which reinforce norms and values regarding education, can support their children's education (Modood, 2004). However, while we found that all pupils from 'middle-class' families or those having 'middle-class orientations' tended to do well we found that, particularly within working-class families, ethnicity interacted with gender and religion to produce varying beliefs, values and norms in relation to educational performance and career or job choices among young British Pakistanis.

### **Norms Enforcement: Intersections of Ethnicity with Gender and Religion**

While dominant models of social capital theory do not address gender, our findings suggest that for young working-class British Pakistanis gender identities, constructed in relation to family expectations and peer influences, were a key factor in influencing their orientation towards education and career. Literature on educational opportunities for young British Muslim women (Brah, 1993; Haw, 1998; Shain, 2002) emphasizes the gendered influences of parents and

teachers on aspirations among this group. Recent studies (Dale et al., 2002; Hussain and Bagguley, 2007) also recognize a significant shift in numbers of young women attending higher education and working outside the home. These shifts reflect changing cultural norms and economic pressures as well as the aspirations of young women themselves. As we argue elsewhere (Dwyer and Shah, 2009), girls had higher aspirations and outperformed boys in our sample. As Huma explained:

I think girls take education more seriously than boys, because boys know that when they're finished, they can just go and do this, they don't care, and girls know we don't want to work in retail, we want to go and do something.

For many young women their parents' values were consistent with their own high aspirations. Farah stated that 'my parents have taught me from the beginning – if you want to get anywhere in life, think about education first'. Unlike some of the young men, as we discuss below, none of the young women identified barriers, such as racism or cultural constructions, to achieving social mobility through education. However, most women emphasized the instrumental value of education. They saw gaining qualifications as a means by which they could have good employment prospects. For Huma, gaining qualifications through the Modern Apprentice Scheme gave her the opportunity to do office work which she saw as a higher status job than working in retail. Higher education was also a means to achieve social mobility in their generation, as Sultana explained:

... [to get a qualification] is very important, especially when I looked at people in Pakistan who are not educated and are having such tough lives, all they can do is cleaning, servants, so it built me up to think that education is important ... My mum said, 'look at your dad, working in the Mars factory, if he had studied more, it would have been easier for him'.

These aspirations, norms and values among the young women were bolstered by parental encouragement. We found evidence of changing gender ideologies as the combination of increasing divorce rates in the British Pakistani community and economic constraints lead parents to support education and employment for their daughters. Alia described her mother's views:

... as the divorce rates are so high, that they know if something like that happened to me, I've always got my degree to fall back on.

Many parents believed that higher education qualifications will allow their daughters to support themselves financially if the need arises. This sentiment was particularly strong among single mothers who had themselves experienced divorce. In summary, our findings suggest many girls have high aspirations for education and employment motivated by individual ambition and supported by changing norms and values in the wider community (Dwyer and Shah, 2009).

In contrast, we found that gender identity was a more complex factor influencing the aspirations, values and orientation of young men (Dwyer et al., 2008). Young men exhibited a range of different masculinities which were linked to varying dispositions towards education and work. Two factors were particularly

significant in shaping the attitudes of young men. First, a key influence was their peer group culture. While for young women their gendered peer culture seemed to support and encourage study in most cases, for young men the dominant masculine peer culture was not orientated towards conforming or working at school (cf. Archer, 2003). For some young men, this peer culture tended to lead to weak ties with family values and norms regarding educational achievement, and to the construction of dense ties with peer networks that undermined the linkages between education and achieving social mobility. This sub-culture was particularly influential for young men from working-class families whose parents were unable to assert much influence over them. Eshal, whose 21-year-old son dropped out of education after the first year of his 'A' level course, expressed fear and frustration over her lack of authority over her son:

... it's really frightening ... The 21-year-old, all of his friends, his group, network, not one of them has turned out good ... we've told him time and time again to stay away from these people, but on the whole, all of that sort of age group out of the boys, not one of them has turned out well. All they do is smoke and take drugs and take cars and sit around doing nothing. No education, their hearts are not in it.

These findings highlight the role of peer groups in creating forms of social capital that work against academic achievement. Some young men pointed to extended family members who were self-employed and successful, as reasons not to pursue further education. For example, Shiraz, who himself was studying mathematics at university, observed that 'the majority of Asians/Indians that I know, they want to start their own businesses; they don't see education as the only way to having a better life.' These aspirations and career goals must be understood within the context of racialized discourses and practice which structure labour markets (Brah, 1993; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007). In our study some of the young men believed that barriers existed in accessing local labour markets and this influenced their decisions about pursuing higher education. Many of the young men pointed to friends who had gone to university and still could not find jobs. Slough and the surrounding Thames Valley area has a fairly dynamic labour market; however, one of our parent interviewees, Akhtar, a senior employee at Slough Borough Council, pointed out that Pakistanis remain concentrated in the lower rungs of local corporations. Bowlby et al. (2004) also argue that negative attitudes of employers in Slough shape youth markets for those from minority ethnic groups.

Education trajectories and career aspirations among young men from working-class backgrounds were also shaped by gender ideologies and 'community norms' that men were expected to work and to assume the role of the main breadwinner (see also Ramji, 2007). However, we found differences in the routes that they followed to fulfill these expectations. Some young men were enrolled at university because they felt parental pressure, but they were often attending less prestigious universities, pursuing less demanding courses or not fulfilling the study requirements. These findings shed light on the figures concerning ethnic access to higher education (Connor et al., 2004) which we discussed at the outset.

For some young men with few qualifications, the illegal economy offered the most attractive route for earning enough money to maintain their status as a breadwinner. Yet there was a small group of young men who had also left full-time education at 16 with few GCSEs but who had found legitimate careers in the public and voluntary sector. They had generated their own social capital through involvement in youth and community programmes. These networks were the source of information and resources to gain qualifications through other avenues and acquire jobs with some status, and positive working conditions.

Another key finding of the research, which highlights the interplay of multiple social relations, is the role of religion in shaping educational and career aspirations for working-class men who displayed a strongly observant religious identity. While all of the young men we interviewed expressed a religious identification, some prioritized their Muslim identity, exhibited in terms of Muslim dress code, fasting and regular mosque attendance. These young men had some of the highest levels of education.

Islam had come to shape their attitudes and values, orienting them strongly towards normative patterns of study and work (cf. Lauglo, 2000). Nineteen-year-old Bashir, studying accountancy at Thames Valley University in Slough, explained his career choice as a means to finding a better job than his parents and fulfilling familial expectations and obligations. Despite the identifiers of their faith, such as wearing a beard, these young men expected to be successful in accessing the job market. As Tayyas, a 24-year-old Junior Business Analyst, said:

... I don't think there's any way where for example my religion has hindered me to be working in any environment. For example, if I had to pray, it takes longer to smoke a cigarette than for me to say my prayer, so there are no compromises at all.

Their social activities were concentrated in religious spaces such as the mosque but were not necessarily confined to Pakistani social spaces. Such cross-ethnic networks generated social capital and the enforcement of norms and values related to education. While dominant discourses might see Islam negatively and position young Muslim men as deviant, one parent observed:

There's a growing sense within the community that it's actually those that are not engaged in Islam, so who have become quite westernized, who are actually doing the [wrong] sorts of things.

For this group of religiously observant young men, Islam provided not only a barrier to negative masculine peer culture, but also a driver for educational achievement. While ambitious, they were likely to measure success not in individual terms but in terms of being a 'good Muslim'.

## Conclusion

How can we explain why young British Pakistanis predominantly from working-class families do better than their white working-class peers in entering higher

education? We have compared the norms and values related to education and careers in British Pakistani families across class, as well as attitudes towards education and achievement among young people in these families. Across class, British Pakistani parents emphasized higher education and had high career aspirations for their children, what Modood (2004) describes as ethnic capital. These attitudes did not necessarily refer to pre-migration culture but to an ethnicity formed in a British context – the wider accessibility to education in Britain and the belief among parents that higher educational achievement and qualifications will lead to social mobility for their children. In this article we have argued that, while class location, which is often identified as the key determinant of educational success, continues to play a significant role in explaining differences among British Pakistani families, there is evidence of the operation of 'ethnic capital'. Following Zhou (2005), we agree that components of 'ethnic capital' (such as the familial adult-child relationships, transmission of values and aspirations related to education, and enforcement of norms and sanctions) are important in explaining why many working-class Pakistani students enter higher education.

Cohesive co-ethnic ties characterized by common values related to education and a high degree of trust lead to enforcement of norms and values. Ethnic community organizations also play a positive role in this regard, acting as spaces where cross-class co-ethnic ties enable working-class parents to access cultural capital. However, the distinction between potential and actualized ethnic capital (cf. Kao, 2004) can help explain why siblings in a single household can have different educational outcomes. Our findings suggest that not only gender (hierarchies, ideologies and identities) and religion (identities and practices) but also structural disadvantages (such as experiences and perceptions of racialized gendered labour markets) influence the level of ethnic capital that is actualized, and contributes to our understanding of variations in achievement and aspirations within working-class British Pakistani families. Our findings also suggest that Islam can influence outcomes for its adherents desired by the wider society, contributing to debates on disadvantage and social cohesion. Thus, following critiques of social capital (Anthias, 2007; Edwards et al., 2003), we also argue that assessments of the utility of ethnic capital in achieving social mobility must be placed within wider debates about the social locations of individuals and groups, and social divisions in society.

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## Notes

- 1 Conner et al. (2004) record a Higher Education Initial Participation (HEIP) Rate of 54 percent for Pakistani males, compared to 34 percent for young white

men. The gap is much smaller for Pakistani females with an HEIP rate of 44 percent compared with 41 percent for young white women.

- 2 For male pupils obtaining five or more grades A\*-C at GCSE in 2004 (HFCE Statistics, 2005), Pakistani boys scored below the average for all pupils (46.8%) at 38.8 percent, with Indian pupils at 49.4 percent and white boys at 47.4 percent.
- 3 The project, Gender, Social Capital and Differential Outcomes, is part of the Bristol-UCL Leverhulme Programme on Migration and Ethnicity funded by the Leverhulme Trust. In addition to the authors the other researchers involved in the project were Gurchathen Sanghera and Suruchi Thapar-Björkert. Further details are available at <http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Sociology/Leverhulme>
- 4 We used institutional and community gate-keepers to gain access to a wide sample of young people. All young people were given a briefing explaining the research and provided with appropriate means to consent to participate. All names used here are pseudonyms. The research was conducted by a female researcher who shared some ethnic characteristics with participants although was not from the same religious or local backgrounds. The research raised questions of positionality and access, which are explored in greater detail in Shah, 2007b. Wider reflections on methodological issues raised in the larger project of which this case study was a part are discussed in Dwyer et al., forthcoming.
- 5 We do not draw directly on the interviews with teachers in this article. While we acknowledge the role of institutional contexts, such as schools, as being another factor in shaping young minority ethnic children's achievements, this is not the explicit focus of the article.

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