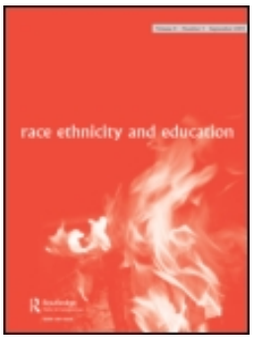

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'. . .But that's just the stereotype': gender and ethnicity in transition to adulthood

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This article examines the role of gender and ethnicity in young minority ethnic British citizens' transition to adulthood. As part of a larger study using a mixed methods approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 young men and women aged 14–24 at different stages of education, employment and non-employment. By employing Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the article shows how young people's transition to adulthood is affected by gender and ethnic considerations. It is argued that for some, the interplay of gender and ethnicity with religion is a crucial aspect of their transition which causes them to make choices to live their lives in a certain way, whereas for others it is more subtle and nuanced. Further, researchers and policymakers need to be cognisant of the similarities and differences of gendered experiences within various minority ethnic groups and the similarities between these groups and the majority ethnic group.

Keywords: ethnicity; gender; transition to adulthood

Introduction

Transition to adulthood is a significant milestone in the life of a young person, though it is a process rather than an event. Young people's transition to adulthood has been viewed as unpredictable, fragmented and prolonged (Jones 1995; Roberts 1995; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; MacDonald 2005). Citizens of the same country have different experiences of growing up due to a variety of factors (Basit 2009). While class is one of them, ethnicity and gender are other significant features. Class, gender and race/ethnicity powerfully mediate young people's lives (Bradford and Hey 2007).

In Western democracies, the women's movement has challenged the automatic right of men to power in public life and the assignation of women to private spheres, thus challenging conventional notions of masculinity and femininity. In the twenty-first century, women are likely to assert their right to full political and economic power, and may no longer be content to service the economy, the state and men. They may also seek incentives to

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become wives, mothers, nurses and teachers of new generations of young people (Arnot 2002). This means that women seek the enfranchisement to have education, a family and a career. They may also wish to choose which aspect takes precedence at different stages of their lives. Further, as Arnot (2009, 213) maintains, 'gender identity is conceptualised now as individualised embodiments of social, cultural, and historical constructions.'

Attaining educational credentials facilitates young people's transition to adulthood to become useful citizens by participating in the national economy through careers. In educational policy and popular discourse, girls are still generally represented as unproblematic and somewhat unspectacular pupils (Francis and Skelton 2005). Osler and Vincent (2003) argue that in general girls are not a priority with regard to issues such as behaviour management and school exclusion, and even when girls' problems are recognised, professionals may be reluctant to refer girls to alternative programmes and schemes for a variety of reasons. The girls that they interviewed for their study mentioned differences in teacher expectations and treatment of different groups of girls because of their ethnicity, and the professionals whom they interviewed referred to the differences in the ways in which boys and girls were disciplined. Archer, Halsall, and Hollingworth (2007) observe how gender inequalities are produced through the differential expectations for young women to look after themselves and take care of their own interests. On the other hand, policies in the West favour young men and are concerned with raising their achievement in education. Intervention strategies in global social justice are concerned with enrolling girls in school, but have not viewed it as ethically appropriate or institutionally desirable to address wider questions about gendered processes of learning or wider social conditions of gender inequality in nation states (Unterhalter 2007).

Similar attitudes regarding gender have been noted by researchers with regard to careers. Traditionally girls were protected from the labour market, whereas boys were not so protected; boys were also more committed to traditional beliefs of male and female roles in the family (Arnot, David, and Weiner 1999). The significant contribution that women make within the home as homemakers, wives, and mothers is ignored. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, 174) contend that the role that women play within the household and outside of it is devalued, if not dismissed. The biological difference between the sexes appears as the natural justification of the socially constructed difference between the genders, and in particular the social division of labour (Bourdieu 2001). Mirza (2009) highlights the recurring public discourse about the innate gender differences, and how job choices are believed to be a reflection of these intrinsic gender abilities, despite conflicting evidence. Nevertheless, Tinklin et al. (2005) draw attention to the second half of the twentieth century which brought significant changes in the roles and expectations of women through feminism, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, and Equal Opportunity policies.

Despite the changes in gender expectations, high educational attainment is by and large still the key to a smooth transition to adulthood for both young men and women and the improvement of their life chances. Yet, research shows that low attainment has a more profound effect on young women. Howieson and Iannelli (2008) in their study on the outcomes of low attainment for young people at age 22–23 in Scotland observed that while a higher proportion of young men than young women fell into the low attaining group, low attainment had a more severe effect on young women. These women were less likely to be employed full time, and when employed earned considerably less than their low attaining male counterparts. The women were also less likely to be engaged with education and training and the labour market than the males. The study did not identify the ethnic origin of the participants so it was not clear whether any minority ethnic groups were involved in the research project.

Croll (2008), in his British Household Panel Survey, found that structural factors such as gender and socioeconomic background of the young people were strongly related to educational and occupational outcomes. The majority of young people had realistic ambitions as they chose regular rather than fantasy jobs, which were attainable in principle, though not necessarily accessible to that specific young person. The evidence regarding gender was mixed with strong gender stereotyping in educational and occupational choices, with some similar choices made by male and female young people. Thus while the survey showed a continued pattern of gender differences, it also confirmed the changes in recent years. The majority of young people had educational attainments matching their career aspirations, but a substantial minority represented a discrepancy between their education and career. This was mainly due to lack of planning or attaining the education required for the job sought, but also included young people who were better qualified than the requirements of the career they aspired to. Most young people believed in personal agency and thought that their own endeavours would influence outcomes for them. The survey did not identify the different ethnic groups in the analysis.

However, we need to be cognisant of the fact that gender identities are not homogeneous and intertwine with other identities, notably ethnic considerations, which may ultimately motivate young men and women to make choices which are different from their peers in other ethnic groups. Ethnicity is an intricate construct which encompasses people's ethnic origin, culture, religion, and way of life, and none of these is straightforward. Ethnic origin is perennially attached to people even if they have been born and brought up in another country, lived there all their lives, and have never even visited the country of their 'ethnic heritage,' as we know from the way ethnic monitoring is undertaken in Britain and some other developed countries. Culture is even more complex. Despite the fact that culture is fluid and people adopt and adapt to various cultures that they encounter during their lifetime, it is viewed as

static and ascribed to various ethnic groups who are perceived as subscribing to just one particular culture. People asserting various religious affiliations are not homogeneous either. Though they may follow the fundamental tenets of a religion, they practise it in different ways to a greater or lesser extent while still claiming allegiance to that religion. What makes it even more complicated is that the entire way of life of individuals is not only determined by the above three factors, but also by their day to day interaction with significant 'others' whom they come across. This means that in seemingly similar groups, each individual may have his/her own unique habitus.

The concept of habitus is forwarded by Bourdieu (1990) as an individual's disposition based on his/her perceptions, thoughts, beliefs and actions. According to Bourdieu:

> Habitus is both a system of schemata of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices. And in both of these dimensions, its operation expresses the social position in which it was elaborated. Consequently, habitus produces practices and representations which are available for classification, which are objectively differentiated; however, they are immediately perceived as such only by those agents who possess the code, the classificatory schemes necessary to understand their social meaning. (1990, 131)

While Bourdieu views habitus as the product of all biographical experience, he draws attention to the diversity of habitus within members of the same social and cultural groups, and notes that 'just as no two individual histories are identical, so no two individual habitus are identical, although there are classes of experiences and therefore classes of habitus' (Bourdieu 1993, 46). The study reported here considers these notions of habitus and its influence on the growing up experiences of young minority ethnic citizens.

Previous research on different ethnic groups has examined the experiences of young British people and has expressed concerns about their education (see for example, Mirza 1992; Basit 1997a, 2009; Bhatti 1999; Abbas 2003; Shain 2003). Research argues for more support for young minority ethnic people from educational institutions and government policies. DfEE and Ofsted commissioned research a decade ago (see Gillborn and Mirza 2000; Pathak 2000) which pointed to the low performance of children from specific minority ethnic groups. Not much has changed in recent years. Tomlinson (2008) contends that though in the last half century, some young people of Asian, African Caribbean, and other minority ethnic heritage, succeeded in getting educational credentials, many felt that they had been miseducated and ill-equipped to compete in a global economy. Those who did succeed in gaining qualifications were able to do so with tremendous support from their parents (Basit 1997a). It is rarely the case that schools alone are able to overcome the ethnic, gender and class barriers that obstruct young people's transition to adulthood to compete in a contemporary and global economy and society.

Connolly (2006) in his secondary analysis of the Youth Cohort Study argues that while gender does tend to exert an influence on GCSE attainment, such that boys in general tend to achieve less than girls, these differences are relatively minor and tend to be overshadowed by the effects of social class and ethnicity. He, nevertheless, points out that though gender differences remain small when compared with ethnic and social class differences, they do appear to be relatively stable and constant across all social class and ethnic groups. Thus, the effects of gender appear to be independent of those of social class and ethnicity. Further, he suggests that the combined effects of gender, social class and ethnicity account for only 10% of the variation, and we need to be circumspect about working with general categories, as each specific group will have considerable variation within it.

The study

This article examines young British minority ethnic citizens' transition to adulthood. The empirical study was undertaken in a city in the East Midlands region of England in Britain where the proportion of minority ethnic population is above the national average. The sample comprised five groups of young people aged 14–24 years, at different stages of education, employment and non-employment. Equal numbers of young men and women were chosen for the study. These included those at the final stages of compulsory schooling in Years 10–11 of secondary school education (SE); in further education (FE); in higher education (HE); in employment (employed); and those who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). The participants were of African Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, or dual heritage.

A mixed methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies was undertaken. A survey was followed by in-depth interviews with a stratified sample of 20 young men and women in the five groups. This included equal numbers of young men and young women from the five aforementioned groups. Along with a number of other themes, the young people were asked about their perceptions of the role of gender and ethnicity in their transition to adulthood, and this article will be confined to the qualitative aspect of the research. Citations from interviews with the young people are followed by their pseudonyms, gender, ethnic origin, and phase of life. As in any qualitative study, these views are neither typical, nor generalisable. The intention is to portray the perceptions of a group of young minority ethnic citizens at different phases of life to explicate the part that gender and ethnicity play in their transition to adulthood.

The data were collected by six researchers, some of whom were closer in age to the young people while the others were nearer in age to the young people's parents. The researchers were all of a minority ethnic origin, though the interviewer and the interviewee were not always of the same ethnic background. However, the researchers were matched with the

participants according to their experience of working with young people at a particular phase of life, for example, in higher education, or NEET. It is difficult to surmise whether the age and ethnicity of the researcher had an influence on the data that were collected. Nevertheless, as researchers we exercised reflexivity, were aware of our own values and biases, and employed strategies to minimise them during the process of the research (Hopkins 2008; Basit 2010).

Gender specific roles

Henderson et al. (2007, 30) contend that young people encounter competing notions of adulthood. On the one hand are independence, autonomy and pleasure; and on the other are relationship, interdependence and care. These choices are shaped by gender, locality, ethnicity and social class. The young people in the five groups in the present study were asked to reflect on their experiences from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood. It was believed that there were different expectations from male and female young people as one young woman stated:

> Girls are more mature but then boys are expected to do other things... more education like...girls are expected to be like mums. (Denise, female, African-Caribbean, SE)

This was mainly the consequence of societal attitudes to gender and traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity. Young women were required to be trained for their future roles as homemakers and mothers:

> People always expect that a girl at a certain age should be doing this.... Family members and people in the community say, 'you're going to need to learn this because when you get married...,' whether it's cooking, cleaning, looking after a child. (Kavita, female, Indian, employed)

Such expectations would not be unreasonable if young men were also brought up to share some of these roles, and if young women were not inhibited by such views. In reality, it seemed that it led to different opportunities for them as a consequence of stereotypical gender role expectations, as one young man pointed out:

> As a male, you'd find it easier to get jobs because employers look at you and they think, oh yes, he can do this; whereas if you're female they think, when she gets pregnant she's going to be off for like a year, then they would have to get a replacement. (Zahid, male, Pakistani, SE)

Similar findings have been reported by Tinklin et al. (2005) in their Scottish study. Young men in the present research appeared to be aware of differential expectations for boys and girls:

> It's really tough for the girls, I think, especially Asian girls, because it's an environment where they're expected to study to a certain degree, but then I guess, the culture is like, they get married off and they go away from home. But I don't particularly agree with that. Women have a lot of rights and they should be allowed to do whatever they want. (Faraz, male, Pakistani, employed)

Some young women highlighted the fact that families of different ethnic origins and social backgrounds had specific expectations of their young people: 'A lot of the time, it depends on what culture you're from, what background, what's expected of you' (Nasima, female, Bangladeshi, NEET). In the present research, this was very much the case and most young people, even if they were currently in the NEET group, sought social mobility and status through education and careers with the encouragement of their families. Those from educated backgrounds in particular had families who believed in social justice, and had the same expectations of, and provided similar opportunities to, young men and women in their families, as can be seen from the comment below:

> I always knew that I had to study further. It wasn't like I'll do my GCSEs and that was it, that's all I'll ever be able to do; there was never that choice. It was actually something that I *wanted* to do, probably because all my brothers and sisters had done it; and my parents, their brothers and sisters. It's always been in my family to go on and study further. (Nusrat, female, Pakistani, HE)

Such attitudes have been reported by other research studies too. In her research on young British Muslim women in higher education, Ahmad (2001) found that the degree status was thought to confer certain personal and social advantages. Parents in her study were keen to maximise their daughters,' and their own, social prestige by encouraging them to succeed academically. Parents and daughters shared a number of goals; and higher education, status, social mobility and a career were not perceived as inimical to cultural or religious ideals (see also Basit 1997a).

Restriction versus protection

There is a widely held belief in the developed world that young women from minority ethnic groups are over-protected to the extent that they lead restricted lives. This theme was addressed in the present research, and some female participants linked it to parental concerns about the safety of young women: 'Females sometimes find it harder because parents tend to be over-protective of females' (Vanessa, female, dual-heritage African-Caribbean/White, employed). Previous research on minority ethnic young women has discussed the issue of parental concern and protection. For example, Basit (1997b) points to a process of nurturing and enculturation which is the result of the parents' belief that young women need support in making rational decisions about important issues, and in becoming effective members of

British society without losing their Muslim identity. The parents tend to achieve this through a subtle combination of freedom and control. It does not mean that young men do not need, or are not provided with, such support, but parents appear to be more concerned about the safety of their daughters, as young women are viewed as more vulnerable.

Some young women in the present study related it to their own experience comparing it with girls in other ethnic groups: 'It was different for me because like, people of different ethnic groups, they used to go out a lot more than me' (Bushra, female, Pakistani, FE).

And with young men of similar backgrounds as themselves:

> As a young Muslim girl, I was quite restricted in terms of my freedom to do what I wanted. My parents were quite open minded; quite modern in a sense that they said, 'go and have an education, go and socialise with your friends', but at the same time, if I was a boy, I would have had a lot more freedom.... Boys just say, 'I'm going out and I'll see you later'; but when I wanted to go out, it was, 'who are you going with', 'where are you going', and 'what time can we expect you back'? Just questions really; probably more protective! (Nusrat, female, Pakistani, HE)

This is congruent with previous research (see for example, Basit 1997b) on British Muslim young women, which highlights a complex process of freedom and control, with negotiation as its constant and significant feature. As a result of this, these young women were able to win more freedom in certain areas, such as attaining education, by behaving in accordance with parental wishes in other ways, for instance by not going out with boys. While they felt relaxed and secure within their families, they recognised the extent of negotiation, and were able to achieve a balance between freedom and control with finesse. This by no means was a straightforward process and showed intellectual maturity which was the consequence of their multiple identities and the ability to choose and reject aspects of their Asian heritage and their British ethos.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, 172) contend that different sets of impositions are imposed upon men and women with regard to the social games that are held crucial to society, and this was evident in the gendered socialisation of minority ethnic young men and women in the present research. Nevertheless, though some young men concurred with the views of the two young women quoted above, yet they distinguished between different parental attitudes and the heterogeneity of approaches:

> The Asian family might be overprotective of girls or more lenient towards the boys, so they let [the boys] do what they want and make the girls stay at home, but that's just the stereotype. You see Asian girls stuck at home, not allowed anywhere; then you see the ones that do go out and stay out.... It just depends on the parents really, what they want their kids to do; what they want their kids to see. (Rashid, male, Pakistani, HE)

Equality of opportunity

Equality of opportunity leads to social justice. Social justice is a central concept in many academic discussions of education policy, but it tends to suffer from the charge of utopianism or idealism, and accusations of vagueness and oversimplification (Thrupp and Tomlinson 2005). Educational and occupational discourse, policy and practice over the last few decades show that there has been considerable improvement in Britain in its provision of equality of opportunity. Yet, some young people in the present study felt that social justice was still an unattainable goal. Social justice in education, at the very minimum, stipulates that children and young people in disadvantaged areas have access to the same educational processes and the same quality of education as their more socially privileged peers (Lupton 2005). In order for social justice to prevail, gender and ethnic equality in education and employment are essential too. As noted above, there was a perception that young women were discriminated against by employers when they applied for jobs. By the same token, some young women believed that such prejudice reduced women's chances of progression and promotion in their careers:

> I think it's harder for females to get high positions in jobs, because like obviously there's a certain time in your life when you want to have kids, so you don't get promoted. . .. [The employer] would have to pay for the maternity leave and if the child is sick then the mother normally takes the day off. . .. I think it's unfair. (Shahida, female, Pakistani, SE)

Shahida, whose own mother was unable to attain educational credentials or have a career, and had no female role models in her immediate family, may have based her views on what she saw or read in the media or heard from her majority ethnic friends. Nevertheless, there is some truth in what she says as the dual role of career woman and mother places significant strain on women wanting to excel at both. Still, others believed that there were similarities in the way young men and women were treated: 'I think we live in a country that treats [both genders] equally; provides [them with] equal opportunities, so I think there isn't much difference' (Imran, male, Pakistani, FE); and 'I suppose there would be no difference in the way [young people of both genders] would get a job, save their money, and leave home – that kind of thing' (Vanessa, female, dual-heritage African-Caribbean/White, employed). This shows that the current generation of young people is more cognisant of the changing gender roles and the similarity of aspirations and experiences of young men and women. Arnot et al. (1999) argue that new generations of young people, disconnected with traditional notions of men's and women's roles, have had to start finding new understandings of themselves, with the consequences of these individualisation processes producing some contradictions. There was much evidence of seeking such understandings and producing contradiction in the process by the young people in the present study as noted above.

Nevertheless, Tinklin et al. (2005), in their Scottish study of 190 young 14–16 year olds, found a striking unanimity in young males' and females' views, and little differences in attitudes, beliefs and aspirations. In particular, young people's belief in equality of opportunity for both genders with respect to work and family life is noted, though these young people recognised the inequality existing in work contexts and in their own families. However, some young people in the present study felt their ethnicity and social class might reduce their life chances and lead to fewer opportunities:

> I'd like to think, compared to maybe a white female of the same age doing the same thing, we'd have a fair chance of whatever it is that we were trying to achieve. But sometimes you think that maybe not, because I am Asian or because I am brown, that they might have a better chance, coming from a middle class family. (Chitra, female, Indian, HE)

These young women wanted social justice in all spheres of life regardless of their gender and ethnicity:

> I expect to be able to go about my business freely without being subject to any kind of sexism, racism, whether it is institutionalised or otherwise. . .to be able to do well in all things regardless of the fact I am female or because of my ethnic background. (Vanessa, female, dual-heritage African-Caribbean/ White, employed)

The young minority ethnic women quoted above are clearly aware of the kind of prejudice they might face in social and occupational milieux. Yet, they believe in social justice and expect similar opportunities and treatment as young men, and other young women from the majority ethnic group. Evidently, they subscribe to the meritocratic ideal whereby people are rewarded according to their ability and not their ethnicity, gender or social class.

Ethnic heritage

For some inexplicable reason, ethnicity as a construct only comes to the fore when minority ethnic groups are being considered; it is seldom invoked when the majority ethnic or the dominant group is discussed. Fenton (2010) contends that ethnic groups are not merely groups of people who share a culture and ancestry, but ideas of descent and culture are mobilised, used and drawn upon to get a sense of community and shared destiny. Young minority ethnic people in the present study appear to embrace an ethnic and cultural habitus that they are proud of, yet they are also aware of the distinct characteristics of their habitus which differentiates them from the majority ethnic population. This is congruent with Bourdieu's (1990, 131) argument that habitus implies a 'sense of one's place,' but also a 'sense of the place of others.'

Accordingly, some felt that they were treated differently by the population at large because of their ethnicity:

> You kind of notice; people act differently. They talk in a different tone to different minority groups, for example, talk to them like they don't know anything. (Kavita, female, Indian, employed)

In addition to ethnicity, it was exacerbated because of conceptions of social class:

> People look at you differently and, if you're not middle class and white, people expect you to be like thicker or poorer, and they just don't treat you fairly. (Denise, female, African-Caribbean, SE)

Some young people and their families endured prejudice and abuse which were clearly related to ethnicity and social class. Notwithstanding the obvious hurt and harm caused by such offensive behaviour, it gave them the strength to develop coping mechanisms to deal with such negative attitudes and still realise their aspirations, as this young man in higher education states:

> My mum spoke no English, and when she walked down the street, she'd be racially abused, spat at, stones thrown at her.... I wouldn't expect to go home one day normally, even on the way from primary school, with my sister. You get thrown around, but it makes you stronger. In that sense, we grew up, because we had to grow up to survive. (Anish, male, Indian, HE)

The comment above shows that racial harassment and abuse is not gender specific, nor age-related, and minority ethnic people can face abuse because of their ethnicity and social class. It is therefore not uncommon to find large family households and regular interaction with the extended family in minority ethnic communities, perhaps as a tactic to evade racism. Ethnicity also influences crucial decisions associated with transition to adulthood, such as moving out of the parental home:

> White people's kids tend to leave home a lot earlier than in black families or Asian families. And it has a lot to do with ethnicity. (Vanessa, female, dual-heritage African-Caribbean/White, employed)

As noted by this young woman, many young people of Asian and African Caribbean heritage live with their parents until they are married, and sometimes even after they are married or in a relationship. Such cultural mores are a significant aspect of their ethnicity. It is not uncommon to have three generational family compositions, and staying in closer contact with the extended family:

> A few people from university – they talk about their cousins, stuff like that. Some of them will say things like, 'Oh, I haven't seen my cousin in years,' and others will go, 'I have just seen my cousin yesterday; he stayed at our house.' So there is a great link between the family in Asians, and the black culture as well. (Rashid, male, Pakistani, HE)

For some, their ethnicity dictated the norms of behaviour:

> When I was in school, for example, most of my friends were Asian because I was living in an Asian community. And everyone knew if you hang around with girls, it's not acceptable, so all the Asian guys used to hang around together, and didn't mix with girls.... We try to keep the sexes separated; drinking, smoking, those kind of things aren't tolerated. (Faraz, male, Pakistani, employed)

Bourdieu (1984, 172) argues that 'lifestyles are the systematic products of habitus, which perceived in their mutual relations through the schemes of the habitus, become sign systems that are socially qualified (as 'distinguished', 'vulgar' etc.).' The comment from the young man above shows a self-imposed separatism to create a space in which these young people can assert their ethnic distinctiveness and a lifestyle that is commensurate with group expectations. This has also been noted by Crozier and Davies (2008) who argue that it provides a space of collectivity, giving succour and expression to these young people's identities, with mutual support of group members as a strength without which they would be rendered invisible.

Religion as a code of conduct

Most human beings of both genders adhere to a code of conduct which is initially the result of the way they have been socialised from a young age, and then crucially the social milieu in which they grow up and interact with others as adolescents and adults. All the young men and women in the present research appeared to follow a code of conduct which shaped the way they lived their lives. Though ethnic and cultural mores were viewed as important, religion was clearly a determining factor in the choices that many young men and women made, as this young woman states:

> If you are a Muslim or of any religion, you have your limits and what's right and wrong. I think I'm allowed to be myself and have a good time within the boundaries of my religion. That would be different for every other religion, based on what it is. (Nusrat, female, Pakistani, HE)

Despite moral obligations imposed on women (and men), Islam places a high value on education and nowhere in the Quran or the Hadith[1] are Muslim women forbidden from pursuing education and careers. Those who prevent female members of their family from seeking education and careers do

so because of illiteracy and the inability to interpret the teachings of their religion. Such misapprehension of religious prescriptions regarding women's role in society, gender equality, relations with other religious groups, and so forth has caused misunderstandings between Muslim minorities and the non-Muslim majority in multicultural nations in the developed world, and has led to Islamophobia.

Attaining education does not mean going against the teachings of one's religion. Basit (1997b) notes that young Muslim women are cognisant of the concept of family honour which is deeply embedded in Islamic ideology. They are socialised from a young age to sustain this honour by refraining from actions that could jeopardise it. They want some freedom, but not as much as their contemporaries from the ethnic majority group, indicating intellectual maturity, whereby they are able to weigh the pros and cons of excessive freedom in light of prejudice and violence against women and ethnic minorities. In the present research too, religious prescriptions were rationalised in pragmatic terms, as noted by this young man:

> People say to you, 'you are not drinking,' and I say, 'no, I don't drink.' 'Why'? 'I don't know; because I don't drink; not only because of my religion, but I don't want to end up running around the way you lot do when you are drunk; and I don't want to get a splitting headache every morning in the lectures.' (Rashid, male, Pakistani, HE)

Thus, following a moral code of conduct was not gender specific. Similar views were expressed by another young man, who viewed respect for parents as a religious and moral duty, signifying emotional intelligence:

> When we went to university, no one could believe how mature we were for our age. Even when we go out, we don't drink to excess so that we're coming home, collapsing, abusing drugs.... Some kids believe it's good to use drugs, but we were taught at a young age [not to take drugs]. If we had a drink at the pub, we wouldn't go home until we were sober and we'd make sure our parents didn't think any worse of us.... [It's] respect; they slaved hard to give us our future. I remember my Dad used to go to work at seven in the morning and come home by the time I was in bed; slaving. (Anish, male, Indian, HE)

As the two comments above indicate, young people of minority ethnic heritage adopt certain mores and norms which are the result of religious beliefs and/or upbringing. However, following such a code of conduct sometimes restricted contact and friendships with young people with beliefs different from their own:

> When you walk into a pub, and I don't drink, so I'd order a soft drink, and someone in the group might make a racial reference to religion. (Nusrat, female, Pakistani, HE)

Such attitudes were also noted by another young woman:

> They kind of make assumptions and judgements, for example, 'you're a Hindu, you must be doing this,' or 'I bet you believe in this.' And then, their actions will be different. A lot of the time the minority groups feel left out. They end up sitting by themselves; they don't get asked. (Kavita, female, Indian, employed)

The remarks above show that minority ethnic young people feel isolated and marginalised because of their ethnic origin or religious practices. Further, they are judged according to the preconceived notions held about them by the majority ethnic group. Crozier and Davies (2008) in their research on young people of South Asian heritage found that boys were viewed by teachers as antagonistic and even aggressive, and girls were seen as devious, but also invisible. They further note that these young people were expected to integrate into the majority culture, but the integration was not about sharing cultures and values, but about conformity and control and knowing their place. However, in the present research, some young people had friends from different ethnic and religious groups:

> I hang around with friends that are like, some have no religion, some have different faiths and stuff. No-one chooses friends because, 'oh, I'm not going to be your friend because you're Muslim.' Some people don't even know I'm a Muslim. So I don't think religion affects friendship. (Shahida, female, Pakistani, SE)

It appears that some younger women who are still at school are able to enjoy the friendship of young people of other ethnicities and religions, but these friendships seem to be confined to the school, as there was no evidence that they socialised with these friends after school. Nevertheless, the fact that some young people do have inter-ethnic and inter-religious friendship groups cautions against generalising from this study.

Discussion and conclusion

In their longitudinal study, Henderson et al. (2007) note that one of the challenges of studying young people is that researchers need to be mindful that they cannot explicate how and why young people's lives evolve in particular ways. They also highlight the provisional nature of the analysis offered by such studies, as despite having a sense of opportunities available to young people, it is impossible to predict how their future will unfold. I conclude this article with a similar sentiment, as unanticipated opportunities and hurdles can easily alter the trajectory of a young person's life.

A range of ethnic and gendered experiences are manifest in the present research. There is still some evidence of traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, though the vast majority of young people believe in social

justice with similar roles, responsibilities and opportunities for men and women. Arnot et al. (1999) note the variety of shifts in consciousness and aspiration for the new generation of young men and women. They point to the variation evident because of social class membership and the school attended – whether private, grammar or comprehensive, and the difference these factors make to the life chances of young people. They do not suggest whether ethnicity makes a difference in the same way as class and schooling. In the present research, we detect both similarities and differences of perceptions between young men and women of different ethnic groups, which cautions against stereotyping gender-related beliefs and experiences of such groups. So while it may be 'really tough for the girls' in some cases, 'that is just the stereotype,' since social justice prevails for the majority of them, either because of the girls' agency or the parents' positive attitudes towards education, careers and the desire for their children's social mobility.

Bourdieu (1984, 107–8) maintains that there are as many ways of realising femininity as there are classes and class fractions, and the division of labour between the genders takes quite different forms, both in practices and in representations, in the different social classes. The present research shows that gender and ethnicity have a significant impact on young people's transition to adulthood, with social class as an additional concern. The experiences of many in different ethnic minority groups are more similar than different, with the perceptions of young people of different Asian backgrounds corresponding with those of African Caribbean heritage. However, for some young people, such as Muslims, the interplay of ethnicity and gender with religion is a crucial and obvious aspect of their transition which causes them to make choices to live their lives in a certain way. Religion is probably just as important to young people in other religious and ethnic groups, though for them, its impact is more subtle and nuanced whereas for Muslims it is a way of life and is likely to make them conspicuous. While, young people of all minority ethnic groups appear to face the same kind of prejudice regardless of their ethnic origin and gender, there is considerably more paranoia regarding Muslims who may make themselves more visible through overt manifestations of their religiosity, for example, by refusing alcoholic drinks, or wearing the hijab (head covering) or niqab (face covering). Such identifiers which make them appear different from the mainstream Britons, may make them look threatening and consequently lead to Islamophobia.

Reay (2004) highlights the importance of expanding the notion of habitus to include race and gender differences in smaller research contexts. She argues in favour of using habitus as a conceptual tool which will ensure that the research focus is always broader than the particular focus under study. Accordingly, the present study identifies a cultural habitus signifying the way young minority ethnic citizens make critical decisions about their pres-

ent and future lives, which is partly dependent on the way they have been socialised from an early age and the perceived and expected life trajectories they wish to follow. Notwithstanding some instances of gendered expectations, and ethnic and religious prejudice, this cultural habitus draws on their ethnic, religious and national habitus to situate the young people in a milieu where they are totally relaxed and have the agency to live their lives the way they want as British citizens. Rather than being constrained by the way they have been socialised, young minority ethnic people are clearly willing to adopt and adapt, constantly looking at various features of their ethnic, religious and national habitus, adopting what they like and rejecting what they dislike, thus creating multiple and individualised identities in the process which are dynamic, helical and contextualised (Basit 1997b). Thus their distinct habitus and identities are closely linked and reciprocally influence each other.

Fenton (2010) argues that ethnic group, race and nation are three concepts that share a single core, with some important differences at the fringes. He suggests that the idea of descent, ancestry and shared culture are common to all three. However, this argument does not take into account the fact that while diasporic communities in developed nations may share their ethnicity and race with particular groups in their country of origin, and with one or more minority ethnic groups in their adopted homeland, they also constitute the nation that they have chosen to embrace in the nation-state in which they now live. Further, we need to recognise the fluidity of the notion of culture, which signifies that minority ethnic groups do not just have cultural affiliations to their culture of origin, but deftly adopt aspects of the culture of their current homeland to develop a cultural habitus that is compatible with their identities and aspirations. Also, as the present research shows, gender may have a discernible influence on the way this cultural habitus is utilised and practised. However, the study also indicates that there is a need to re-examine the concepts of masculinity and femininity. Debates on gender policies and practices ought to be cognisant that while childbearing is women's responsibility, there is a blurring and overlapping of many other traditional masculine and feminine roles including childrearing, housekeeping and having a high-flying career. It will therefore be helpful to listen carefully to gendered voices to discern the congruence as well as the dissonance in their expectations, perceptions and experiences.

Nevertheless, regardless of their gender and despite being born and/or brought up in Britain, many young men and women of minority ethnic heritage are still viewed as 'other' because of their background and the way they choose to live their lives. In multiethnic Britain, we need to highlight the similarities, rather than the differences, between the practices of the majority and minority ethnic groups, and this should be reflected in the curriculum, pedagogy, and popular images in the media. Discourses and debates on the education and careers of young people also need to take into

account the ethnic, gender, social class and religious disparity between young people from diverse minority ethnic heritages and the heterogeneity of their experiences when devising policies that impinge on the lives of young people, as this has implications for social justice. Gillborn (2005) points to the rhetoric of standards for all, but also to the way education policy in Britain defends, legitimises and extends white supremacy. He argues that such policies and practices are shaped by established structures of racial domination indicating a degree of intentionality. These policies and practices undoubtedly alienate minority ethnic groups, and do not see them as part of the nation state. It will therefore be helpful to devise a new definition of 'nation' as a construct, which incorporates men and women from minority ethnic groups and recognises them as part of the nation in which they want to build a life for themselves and their future generations through education and careers regardless of their gender.

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Note

1. Sayings, teachings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad, revered by Muslims and viewed by them as a benchmark of Islamic ideology, next to the Quran.

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