

Volume One

**Muslim Girls' Aspirations: An Exploration of Teacher and Pupil Discourses**

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## **Muslim Girls' Aspirations: An Exploration of Teacher and Pupil Discourses**

### **Abstract**

Research suggests that discourses around Muslim girls position them as having 'wasted potential' (Archer, 2002) and being oppressed by parental expectations around marriage (Bisit, 1995/1996). In contrast, when talking about their aspirations Muslim girls themselves draw on discourses around personal choice within the bounds of parental expectations (Archer, 2002; Ahmad, 2001). This study explores the discourses used by teachers and Muslim girls, how Muslim girls are positioned within these discourses, and the implications for Muslim girls' experiences in school. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (as described by Willig, 2008) is used to analyse semi-structured interview data from five teachers and focus group data from five Muslim girls in year 9. Discussions around race in relation to the practice of Educational Psychologists are rare, and so the usefulness of a discursive approach to the practice of Educational Psychologists in relation to race is also discussed.

To Nathan for your endless patience and understanding and for believing that I can  
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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

This volume constitutes the first part of a two-part thesis that forms the written requirement for the Doctorate in Applied Child and Educational Psychology at the University of Birmingham. Volume one consists of a small-scale research study and literature review.

### **1.1 My dual role as a trainee educational psychologist and researcher**

Whilst undertaking the research project I was working on placement as a trainee educational psychologist within a small metropolitan borough council, as well as fulfilling the requirements of being a researcher undertaking doctoral research at the University of Birmingham. This influenced my choice of research topic as I was keen to carry out research that would reflect my commitment to anti-oppressive practice, giving young people 'a voice' and seeking to reframe negative discourses around particular groups of young people.

I was introduced to social constructionism as an epistemology when I first undertook training in research methods at the start of my doctoral research. I became interested in the implications of taking this perspective for research, in particular how the emphasis on language allows language itself to be the focus of research (e.g. Gergen, 1999). My doctoral research allowed me to explore social constructionism in more depth and I became interested in how it could be applied in the area of inequality in education, specifically the different experiences of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. My previous experience as a secondary school teacher had suggested that the ways in which teachers talk about different groups often includes

a range of assumptions that emphasises homogeneity and minimises difference. My current role as a trainee educational psychologist influenced my choice of methodology and reflected my belief that discourse has real effects for pupils at school and that introducing more positive discourses can improve pupils' experiences of school.

## **1.2 The aims and rationale of the research**

The aim of the research was to investigate teacher and pupil discourses around Muslim girls' aspirations, through the use of Foucauldian discourse analysis as described in Willig (2008), specifically gaps in the literature around the implications of particular discourses for the girls' experiences and the contradictory nature of discourses around the group. Foucauldian discourse analysis was chosen specifically because it allows links between identified discourses and the experiences of pupils to be explored. My interest in Muslim girls is two-fold; firstly previous research has positioned Muslim girls as passive and oppressed, without the ability to make decisions about their own lives. I feel that this will have significant implications for their experiences in education and therefore has implications for educational professionals working with Muslim girls, given that one of the purposes of education should be to help young people to make decisions about their future. Secondly, this group seem to have been somewhat neglected in previous research, with a greater focus on ethnic minority boys and black girls.

The research questions were as follows;

- How are Muslim girls' aspirations constructed by teachers and by the girls themselves?
- What do teachers and Muslim girls gain from these constructions?
- How are Muslim girls positioned by teachers when talking about their aspirations and how do they position themselves?
- How do these constructions open up or close down opportunities for action for Muslim girls?
- What are the consequences of these constructions for the subjective experiences of Muslim girls?

### **1.3 The research context**

The research took place in a coeducational secondary school with around 900 pupils on role. Two thirds of the pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds (forty percent of whom were from a Pakistani background) and around fifty percent are identified as having English as an Additional Language. Over a third of the pupils are entitled to free school meals (a measure of socio-economic deprivation). The local authority in which the study took place has a population of 253,499, around a quarter of whom are children according to the most recent census. Around 21% of the population of children and young people in the authority are identified as being from ethnic minority backgrounds. Around a third of children in the authority are identified as living in poverty.

## **1.4 The structure of volume one**

### **Chapter two – Literature review**

This chapter provides a historical perspective on inequality in education for children from ethnic minority backgrounds in terms of formal inequality, equality of opportunity and equality of outcome (Saunders, 1989). It also provides a critical review of previous research investigating Muslim girls in education, with a particular focus the way Muslim girls' aspirations have been portrayed. Research is selected that took a discursive approach and so is relevant to the present study. Social constructionism is introduced and social constructionist perspectives on race and gender are discussed. Finally, discourse analysis is introduced as an approach and its relevance to educational psychology is briefly considered.

### **Chapter three – methodology**

This chapter presents the present research study that was designed to address identified gaps in the literature. The procedure for carrying out five teacher interviews and one pupil focus group is described, as well as procedures for analysing and writing up the findings. Ethical considerations are also discussed and the methods are evaluated.

### **Chapter four and five – findings and discussion**

In this chapter the findings and discussion are presented in two parts, one describing and discussing the findings from the teacher interviews and the other the findings from the pupil focus group. Relevant quotes from the transcripts are presented to

exemplify the identified discourses and the implications are discussed in terms of what is gained; how Muslim girls are positioned; the opportunities that are either opened up or closed down; and the girls' subjective experiences. Contradictions between the different discourses are also explored and links to previous research are identified.

## **Chapter six – conclusions and implications**

In this chapter conclusions are drawn about the study as a whole and the implications for practice are considered. The study is evaluated in terms of its overall strengths and limitations and suggestions for future research are made.



## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Inequality in Education**

#### **2.1.1 Introduction**

Gillborn (1990) makes the following point in relation to inequality and education;

“Alone, the education system cannot provide all the answers, yet it does have the opportunity and obligation to make a contribution towards the creation of a more just society” (p.1)

Gillborn’s suggestion here is that education is not only very well placed to reduce inequality, being a system through which the vast majority of us pass through early on in our lives, but also that it has an ethical obligation to do so.

The following discussion around inequality in education makes reference to racial categories that have been used in policy and legislation and referred to in previous research, however, the intention was not to suggest that race and the use of these categories is unproblematic. Race is a contested, but for the purposes of the present study the view is taken that;

- That racism is not disappearing it is merely transforming (Leonardo, 2005) and it is now coded in attacks on refugees, asylum seekers and Muslim fundamentalists (Warmington, 2009)

Saunders (1989) identified three different types of equality, all of which are relevant to a discussion of inequality in education. These are as follows;

- formal equality, which Saunders defines as equality under the law (e.g. the existence of legislation which may disadvantage certain groups of pupils).
- equality of opportunity, which Saunders defines as being able to reach one's potential by developing one's particular talents.
- equality of outcome, which Saunders compares to a race where each runner is weighted to give them the same degree of handicap, so that none are unfairly disadvantaged because of their degree of handicap. It can be assumed that this relates to inequality in education because certain young people suffer some degree of handicap due to discrimination towards certain groups in schools, whereas others do not.

These three types of equality will be used below to structure a discussion around inequality in education.

The focus of the discussion will be the experiences of ethnic minority children in education. Whilst it is acknowledged that not all Muslim children come from ethnic minority backgrounds, in Britain the term 'Asian' seems to have become inextricably linked with 'Muslim' (Archer, 2003). Previous research around Muslim young people taking a discursive approach seems to support this claim (e.g. Basit, 1995/6; Keddie, 2001) with participants referring to Asian culture and Muslim religious beliefs almost interchangeably. The following review will therefore focus on the experiences of ethnic minority young people in schools in general, assuming that most of the young people who are the subjects of discourses around Muslim young people will be from ethnic minority backgrounds.

### **2.1.2 An historical perspective on inequality in schools**

#### **1) Formal equality**

The introduction of comprehensive schooling in the 1960s led to improved outcomes for many young people, in terms of greater examination success and increased numbers of young people going on to higher education (Verma, 1999). The exception, however, were children from ethnic minorities who were still underachieving in relation to their white peers (*ibid*). Around the same time, the Inner London Education Authority came under heavy criticism from black community representatives who felt that black children were being let down by the education system and too many were attending low status, segregated special schools (Cline, 1999). The Rampton Report (1981) 'West Indian Children in Our Schools', an interim report from the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups, suggested urgent action was needed to tackle poor performance by ethnic minority children in UK schools. It suggested that whilst explicit racist views were rare, attitudes of teachers toward ethnic minority pupils were negative and the curriculum was inappropriate for these children. The final report from this committee, The Swann Report (1985) 'Education for All' agreed, suggesting that it would be necessary to change both attitudes and behaviour to solve the problem of ethnic minority underachievement. However, neither of these reports led to substantial changes in policy and legislation. Eventually, the Race Relations Act (amended) in 2000 included a statutory duty for public bodies to promote race equality. This act was replaced by the Equality Act in 2010 with the expectations remaining the same. Gillborn (2010) has criticised these acts, making the point that they seem to assume

that race automatically generates inequality, rather public bodies such as schools generating inequality.

## 2) Equality of opportunity

We can assume that, if equality of opportunity were achieved, it would be as easy for ethnic minority children to succeed at school as it is for white children. There are a number of different factors influencing ethnic minority children's experiences of school that suggest that this will not be the case. For example, Verma (1999) suggests that the national curriculum for history is designed with white children in mind, in that it presents a world picture that is very much from the perspective of white people. She suggests that this may give ethnic minority children a sense of not-belonging and may make them feel inferior to their white peers. In addition, Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1999) suggest that teachers use race as a frame of reference and are influenced by misconceptions such as myths around African-Caribbean child-rearing practices. They suggest that this is more of an issue for non-white pupils as white immigrant pupils lose their 'ethnic minority' label soon after settling in the UK, whereas non-white students do not.

However, others suggest that the concept of 'myths' and 'stereotypes' in relation to ethnic minority pupils is overly simplistic and the influences on ethnic minority young people's experiences in school are more subtle. For example, Archer (2008) suggests that, in dominant educational discourses in the UK, ethnic minority pupils are excluded from a position of having achieved authentic 'success'. She suggests that, even if ethnic minority pupils achieve highly in education, they are seen as

having 'gone about it the wrong way' (i.e. in the case of British Chinese pupils, through being too passive and conformist).

In addition Reay et al (2001) suggest that these kinds of discourses also influence decisions about higher education for ethnic minority pupils. They suggest that these pupils do not choose the same universities as their white, middle class peers. For example, when considering attending universities where there are few young people from ethnic minority or socioeconomically deprived backgrounds, ethnic minority young people may ask 'what's a person like me going to do at a place like that?' and may be more inclined to apply to a university where they feel they will meet 'people like them'.

### 3) Equality of outcome

In 2005 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published 'Ethnicity and Education: The evidence on minority ethnic pupils', an update on a topic paper detailing the latest DFES research and statistics on minority ethnic pupils attainment published earlier that year. One of the main findings was that young people identified as Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Black Other consistently performed below what would be expected for the average child on every scale of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). In addition Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people achieved consistently lower levels across all key stages. However, the point was made that Bangladeshi pupils have higher 'value-added' scores (i.e. they score more highly than we would expect based on previous performance). A later publication entitled 'Minority Ethnic pupils in the longitudinal study of young people in

England (LSYPE) (DfSCF, 2007) based on the findings of interviews with 15,000 young people in year 9 and their parents across England, stated that Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Black African young people score around 3.0 points fewer on national tests at the end of key stage three than white young people. Again, Bangladeshi and Indian pupils were found to score more highly than expected, this time based on their relative 'disadvantage' (e.g. having a lone parent, poverty, parental unemployment etc.). The idea of ethnic minority 'overachievement' (or 'value-added') is an interesting one. Gillborn (2010) warns against the use of statistics to investigate ethnic minority achievement or 'overachievement', pointing out that things like social class and prior attainment are also affected by race/racism. Archer (2008) goes so far as to suggest that overachievement as a concept is only possible for girls and ethnic minority pupils because expectations for these pupils are low.

In summary, there is evidence to suggest that ethnic minority pupils continue to underperform in comparison to their white peers, that the education system is unfairly weighted against them and that negative attitudes towards ethnic minority pupils continue to effect their experiences in school.

### **2.1.3 The role of educational psychologists (EPs) in tackling inequality in schools**

In 1967 UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) charged social scientists with tackling racism at its source through investigating the social and economic factors. It stated;

“In order to undermine racism it is not sufficient that biologists should expose its fallaciousness. It is also necessary that psychologists and sociologists should demonstrate its causes” (p.2)

Meaning that in order to challenge racism it is not enough to prove that there is no biological basis for the existence of different ‘races’.

In a 1999 edition of Educational and Child Psychology that focused on Educational Psychology and inequality, a number of contributors question whether Educational Psychologists (EPs) are helping to achieve this aim. Much of the focus of their criticism is the use of psychometric tests which they suggest are unsuitable for use with ethnic minority young people due to the fact they were designed for use with a white populations (Cline, 1999). There is also some discussion in this edition around EPs perpetuating the ‘racial biases’ passed on to them by other professionals, where race is used as a frame of reference, and also not challenging the assumptions of others about different child rearing practices (e.g. Afro-caribbean children are allowed too much freedom, South Asian children are oppressed etc.) (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1999).

There are a range of suggestions about how these issues could be overcome. Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1999) suggest that EPs need to reflect on where their knowledge about ethnic minority groups comes from to avoid accepting myths and stereotypes. They suggest that EPs need to be ‘agents of change’ (p.17) rather than

'guardians of the establishment' (p.17). Rollack (1999) goes a step further suggesting that EPs need to ensure they receive ongoing training to support their self-development in their understanding of cultural diversity and equal opportunity. In addition, she suggests that EPs need to ensure that they address the cultural beliefs of the child and family in assessment, and wherever possible take into account the beliefs of the teacher. Usmani (1999) focuses particularly on work with bilingual children suggesting that it is important for EPs to be sensitive to the stress experienced by these children in school, as well as encouraging and empowering their parents (rather than using their language difficulties as an excuse not to fully involve them). Finally, M'gadzah, Saraon and Shah (1999) recommend the use of black and Asian consultants to support work with ethnic minority young people and families. However, whilst it is clearly important to be sensitive to the needs of young people from ethnic minority groups, it could be argued that a focusing exclusively on promoting understanding of culture does not go far enough to challenge existing power relations and inequalities (Archer, 2003).

Other than the edition of Educational and Child Psychology, race in relation to the practice of Educational Psychology seems to have been somewhat neglected. For example, in the twenty-five years that the journal Educational Psychology in Practice has been published, only two articles directly relating to race have been featured. The first focusing on working with Asian parents (Rehal, 1989), and the second on the exclusion of black pupils (Grant and Brooks, 1998). There are a number of possible reasons for this neglect. It may be that Educational Psychologists (EPs) see race as socially constructed and are therefore adopting a post-racial position which



has led to the discussion of race being marginalised by the profession (Warmington, 2009). Alternatively, it may be that EPs are confident that as reflective practitioners they are able to avoid potentially discriminatory practice. There is some suggestion that Educational Psychologists may lack confidence in their ability to challenge racism. For example, Bolton and M'gadzah (1999) found that one third of trainee educational psychologists felt ill prepared to tackle inequality and racism. Nevertheless, it is difficult to establish definitively the reasons for the absence of a discussion of race and educational psychology in the literature.

In terms of current practice, whilst ensuring that bilingual assessment takes place, that assessment tools standardised with ethnic minority populations are used and that EPs have an understanding of different cultures are all a necessary part of ensuring that practice is anti-oppressive, the discussions described above still seem limited in that they do not acknowledge the more subtle ways in which EPs may be unintentionally perpetuating dominant discourses around ethnic minority groups through consultation with teachers, parents and other professionals. Bozic, Leadbetter and Stringer (1998) argue that the study of discourse (discourse analysis) has particular relevance to EPs due to the fact that language is so central to the work that we do (through consultation, reports, meetings etc.) It will be argued throughout the discussion that follows that nowhere is this focus on discourse more relevant than in relation to work with pupils and families from ethnic minorities, for whom the dominant discourses can often be negative. A more detailed discussion of the relevance of a discursive approach to educational psychologists tackling inequality will be included later.

## **2.2 Social constructionist views of race and gender and their relevance to educational psychology**

### **2.2.1 Introduction**

Social constructionism is a term used almost exclusively by psychologists (Burr, 2003). It includes a number of key assumptions;

- that language does not directly reflect thoughts
- that our interests bias our description of the world
- that language has a performative function, that is, it allows us to accomplish things in the interpersonal world

As a consequence social constructionist research is not interested in looking for the 'truth behind the words' but rather what forms of life are favoured by that way of talking (Gergen, 1999). Whilst this 'turn to language' in psychology can be traced back to the 1970s (Willig, 2008), Potter and Wetherell's (1987) book *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* played a particularly important part. Potter and Wetherell argue strongly against cognitivism (the study of mental operations) in psychology, arguing that social texts do not reflect or mirror reality but rather actively construct it and therefore psychologists need to investigate how different readings of phenomena are produced. They argue that accounts will vary according to their function, leading to a variety of different possible readings of the same phenomena. Edwards and Potter (1992) developed the approach further and gave it the label 'discursive psychology'. They suggested that different versions of events will bolster certain causal stories and undermine others, and so psychologists

should consider what alternative version of events readings are trying to counter rather than consider the inherent 'truth' of an account.

Moore (2005) related social constructionism more specifically to the practice of Educational Psychologists (EPs), concluding that taking this perspective suggests a need for EPs to be reflexive, to consider the importance of interpersonal relationships, and to be aware of the crucial value of interchange and dialogue in relationships.

### **2.2.2 Social constructionist perspectives on gender and their relevance to educational psychology**

Archer (2003) makes the point that the axes of race and gender cannot be easily separated as they give meaning to each other. Whilst I am in agreement with this assumption, for the purposes of an initial discussion around social constructionist views of race and gender the two will be considered separately.

Traditional psychology has been criticised for being dominated by men and therefore only reflecting men's interests and concerns (Burr, 1998). In addition to this, it has been suggested that traditionally the focus of psychology has been the 'normal' individual and subsequent 'deviations' from the norm (Bird, 1999). Billington (1999) suggests that the narrative of difference constructed by psychology can contribute to the oppression of various groups within the population. Thus, if male experience is seen as the norm, then women stand to be pathologised and marginalised by mainstream psychology (Burr, 1998). Bohan (1993) suggests that even when

research aims to look specifically at the experiences of women there are a number of important issues to consider. Firstly, when researchers say 'women', which women are they talking about? Are they including some women but excluding others? For example, research into the experiences of mothers may neglect those women in less traditional families such as lesbian mothers. Secondly, are the qualities being investigated the result of gender or are they in fact the result of the oppression experienced by women? For example, if women are found to be less directive in conversations, is this because women are less directive or is it because they have become used to adopting a more submissive role? Finally, if researchers start to suggest that certain ways-of-being are women's, then are they excluding women from other ways-of-being associated with men?

The social constructionist view of gender is that;

"gender is not a trait of individuals at all, but simply a construct that identifies particular transactions that are understood to be appropriate to one sex" (Bohan, 1993 p.7)

Taking this perspective suggests that rather than identities arising due to stable, internal traits, they are constructed in ways that are deemed appropriate for girls and boys (Francis and Skelton, 2005). Consequently, seemingly trivial gender differences (such as body language) are transformed into differences in constructing the self that tell us something significant about appropriate masculinity and femininity (Burr, 1998). This perspective on gender has interesting implications for EPs talking to

teachers and parents about boys and girls, in terms of encouraging reflection around the different kinds of things that are considered 'unacceptable' or a 'problem' for boys and girls within acceptable constructs of masculinity and femininity.

Feminism and feminist psychology views gender inequalities as being produced by the social environment. Kitzinger (1999) defines feminist psychology as a psychology that;

- a) assumes that women are worthy of study in their own right and;
- b) assumes that social change is needed to improve women's social position

She discusses the relevance of feminist psychology specifically to the role of the EP through interviews with fifteen practicing EPs, all of whom either identify themselves as feminists or as being sympathetic to feminist ideas. A key issue with current practice that was identified, and that is relevant to the present study, is that that EPs spend far more time working on boys' problems than girls' (with significantly more referrals to EP services being for boys than girls). Concerns were also raised about issues related to testing, labelling and diagnosis, and the dangers of taking an individual focus. It is important to note that these interviews took place with psychologists who had already committed to a greater or lesser extent to the principles of feminist psychology and so it was inevitable that they would defend this approach as being highly relevant to the role of the EP. However, the impression that higher numbers of boys are referred to educational psychology services does seem

to be correct. In a study in one service, Vardill and Calvert (2000), found that the ratio of male to female referrals was 3:1.

In summary, there is a bias in referrals to educational psychology services towards boys, but social constructionist views of gender make some suggestions about why teachers may be more likely to identify boys as having 'problems'. This suggests that EPs need to be aware of the different ways in which appropriate masculinity and femininity are constructed in schools and the influence this may have on expected behaviour for boys and girls.

### **2.2.3 Social constructionist views of race and racism and their relevance to educational psychology**

Social constructionist views on race and racism focus on the importance of language and power in perpetuating inequality. The focus on language in social constructionism gives a different perspective on racism. For example, Augoustinos and Every (2007) make the point that now the social taboos against openly expressing racist sentiments are increasing, discursive strategies are developing that both allow people to present negative views of outgroups as being reasonable and justified, and protect them from accusations of prejudice. Leonardo (2005) agrees, suggesting that racism is changing rather than disappearing and now has a 'human face'. This is potentially important for EPs working to challenge inequality in schools in terms of listening to and challenging the language used to describe children from ethnic minority groups.

Warmington (2009) warns against what he sees as one of the potential pitfalls of taking a social constructionist view of race and racism, which is adopting a post-racial position whereby race is no longer seen as real and so is no longer seen as relevant. He suggests that the use of racial categories make race real and the effects of race real. He claims that adopting a post-racial position is premature, suggesting instead that, whilst we have moved beyond pseudo-genetic conceptions of race, racial thinking continues to influence social practices and people continue to live in ways that are informed by racial categories. Gunaratnam (2003) extends this idea by suggesting that researchers themselves should be cautious when using racial categories as part of their research, as they risk reinforcing and reproducing racial thinking. Gillborn (1998) agrees, suggesting that research involving particular groups of ethnic minority young people risk positioning them as the 'other'. This is another interesting reflection for EPs in that it suggests by talking to teachers about, for example, cultural differences between pupils, we may be reproducing racial thinking in schools. If this was the case, then research around particular groups, such as the present study would be seen as inadvisable. However, I would argue that without knowing what the existing discourses around race in schools are, we will not be able to ensure that we present alternative, more positive, discourses. I would also argue that these discourses will not disappear if EPs avoid using the categories, but rather they will not be challenged.

#### **2.2.4 Criticisms from black feminists**

Black feminists have made the point that feminism needs to be aware of the affects of racism. They have warned that the 'empowerment' of women through feminism

may in fact just lead to the empowerment of white, middle-class women (Burr, 1998). Hooks (2000) goes so far as to suggest that white feminists do not realise that, in order for feminism to be successful, it will be necessary to overcome the barriers between women from different ethnicities. So, whilst gender and race have been discussed separately above, these points serve as another reminder that the two are inextricably linked and that it is crucially important to take into account the different experiences of women from different ethnic groups.

### **2.2.5 My own views of gender and race**

Firstly, it is important to say that like Archer, I see race and gender as giving meaning to one another. I also believe that what seem like trivial uses of language in relation to women and minority ethnic groups in reality has a profound impact on the ways of being available to these groups. Like Warmington (2009) I see the differences between different groups as socially constructed but nevertheless having real effects. In addition, I believe that female and ethnic minority voices are marginalised due to the fact that the majority of positions of power in society and in education, are held by white men. In this way, social structures also influence the ways in which women and ethnic minorities are marginalised.

I am aware that as a white, middle-class researcher it is important to acknowledge that my concerns may be different to the concerns of women from other ethnic groups. I am also aware that it is important to pay close attention to whose voices are being heard through research and whose are being excluded.



## **2.3 Muslim girls in education**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

Archer (2003) suggests that following the Fatwa issued against the author of the *Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie, the riots in Oldham and Bradford (1995 and 2001) and 9/11 there has been a growing discourse of Islamophobia in the UK. She suggests that this has particularly affected Muslim boys, but also more broadly, has ignited a desire to uncover fundamentalism amongst British Muslims and a fear that Islam poses a threat to the 'British way of life'. Time will tell if recent reports of the establishment of an 'extremism taskforce' in response to the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich (BBC, 2013) contribute to this discourse, but the reported increase in Anti-Muslim incidents (such as comments on social media) (BBC, 2013) suggest that this may be the case. Interestingly, Keddie (2001) whilst agreeing with Archer's assessment of the change in discourses around Muslim young people suggests that this has had some positive effects. She suggests that this new wave of suspicion towards Muslim young people has increased the sense of solidarity between a generation of Muslim young people. However, it is difficult to see what this may ultimately achieve for these young people. It could be argued that what this ultimately leads to is the 'othering' of these young people and increasing isolation from their non-Muslim peers. There is very little research looking specifically at teacher discourse in relation to Muslim girls, although there is a growing body of research on Muslim girls and identity.

### **2.3.2 Muslim girls in schools**

Two large-scale ethnographic studies conducted in the early 1990's in multi-ethnic schools (Gillborn, 1990 and Wright, 1992) discuss Afro-Caribbean pupils in great amounts of depth but pay less attention to South Asian pupils. Even more neglected are South Asian girls, which seems ironic given that the conclusion of both studies is that these girls are also neglected in the classroom by their teachers. Nevertheless, there is some discussion of discourses related to these pupils, both in relation to their white and Afro-Caribbean peers and male Muslim pupils.

Wright's (1992) study took place in a multi-ethnic primary school. Generally she suggests that boys were favoured over girls and received more attention from their teachers. She found that South Asian pupils were assumed to speak English less well than their peers. However, Wright also found that South Asian pupils were considered to be the most highly motivated, which appears to be the reason given for the lack of attention paid to them. Teachers did express some concern that 'quiet' students were 'swallowed up' in the rest of the class, and that the quieter students tended to be girls.

Gillborn (1990) also found that South Asian pupils were referred to as being better behaved and achieving more highly than their Afro-Caribbean peers (but not necessarily their white peers). However, this was seen as being the result of supportive but 'overly strict' and sometimes even 'destructive' traditions in their communities. This seems similar to Archer's (2008) comment that over-achievement is only possible for female and ethnic minority pupils and that this achievement is

sometimes seen as taking place in an ‘unnatural’ way. Gillborn found that generally South Asian pupils said they had more positive experiences with their teachers than Afro-Caribbean pupils and Gillborn noted that they seemed to experience patterns of differentiation that were similar to their white peers.

Both Wright and Gillborn suggest that teachers unconsciously compare all pupils to an imaginary “ideal”, with Gillborn suggesting that for white teachers their expectations of pupils are rooted in their white experience and culture. Archer (2008) goes further and suggests that for most teachers this “ideal” is white, male and middle-class. She also suggests that ethnic minority families are viewed negatively in schools and are generally associated with educational failure.

Archer (2002) suggests that the current common discourse around young Muslim women is that of “wasted potential” as they are “forced” into arranged marriages. Archer (2003) also identifies that Muslim girls are also seen as being caught between two cultures (a restrictive Muslim culture and a liberating Western culture) and that this conflict is seen as being likely to cause psychological problems for these young women.

### **2.3.3 Muslim girls and aspirations**

Research investigating Muslim girls’ aspirations and decision-making is limited, and research investigating teacher discourses/perceptions/attitudes towards Muslim girls’ aspirations is rarer still. Nevertheless, some research has taken place around post-16 choices and decision-making. For example, Archer (2002) looked specifically at

Muslim girls' choices post-16 by talking to Muslim girls and boys. She found that the boys positioned the girls as being fairly passive when it comes to decision-making, whereas the girls emphasised their ability to make personal decisions within the bounds of their parents' expectations of them. Ahmad (2001) interviewed Muslim young women in higher education about their aspirations and decision-making. These women talked extensively about parental expectations and the importance of being well-educated for social status. However, they also talked about the potential danger of becoming "too-educated" and "putting off" suitable prospective husbands.

Keddie (2011) looked more specifically at teacher discourses with a particular focus on the different discourses used by a white Muslim teacher and two South Asian Muslim teachers. She found that the white Muslim teacher tended to defend Islam whilst blaming South Asian culture for restricting young Muslim women, who she positioned as being passive when it comes to making decisions about their own lives. In contrast the South Asian Muslim teachers position Muslim girls as being far more active, and emphasised their ability to make personal decisions. Keddie suggests that these discourses have the power to either 'open up' or 'close down' opportunities for action for Muslim girls. Keddie's research focuses on an unusual individual participant, that is to say, a white British Muslim woman working with Muslim girls. Whilst her findings are interesting it is not clear why she chose to focus on this individual and how this individual positioned herself in relation to the girls she was working with. In addition it is not clear whether she is suggesting that white women who are not Muslim would share the same discourses or how the findings may be relevant to non-Muslim white British women working in similar circumstances.

Basit (1995/1996) interviewed Muslim girls and their parents and teachers about career aspirations in three schools in the East of England. She found that teachers were influenced by a number of different assumptions about Muslim girls. One of the most significant Basit refers to as “the myth of unrealistic expectations”, whereby teachers talk about pupils being overly ambitious and refer to their role in “channeling” the girls into more “realistic” careers (for example, teachers talked about a lot of girls and their parents wishing for them to study medicine). Even when girls were seen as having high, but realistic expectations teachers talked about girls being oppressed at home, with marriage and a career being mutually exclusive. They also referred to girls wishing to go into higher education but being prevented by family expectations. In contrast, the parents and the girls themselves expressed a firm belief in social mobility through education and the majority of parents expressed the view that the girls can do whatever they like in terms of career so long as it does not involve activity that is against their religion. Overall, the girls themselves had high career aspirations, expressing a desire to pursue a wide range of high status careers. Nevertheless, they too expressed a desire to pursue careers that were compatible with their culture and religion. Interestingly, where the girls identified potential barriers to achieving their goals, they seemed to have developed a plan to overcome them. For example, a girl whose parents did not approve of her career choice said she would wait until after she was married to pursue a career, and a girl who was told she would find completing three A levels in two years challenging, had planned to allow a year to complete re-sits if necessary.

Basit refers to themes 'emerging from the data' (p.228) rather than being constructed through her analysis. She does not therefore include a consideration of the influence of her own identity and assumptions on her findings, presenting them as 'truth' and not acknowledging that alternative readings may be possible suggesting that the 'use of triangulation ensured the reliability of the data' (p.228).

In summary, Muslim girls describe a range of difference factors that they say influence their aspirations and in turn talk about having a diverse range of aspirations for the future. Parental expectations are talked about as being particularly important. The Basit (1995/1996) study suggests that teachers draw on a range of discourses when talking about Muslim girls' aspirations, some negative (in terms of oppression from home) and some positive (in terms of the girls being ambitious and motivated). However, the potential implications of these discourses and the contradictions between them have not been considered.

## **2.4 Discourse analysis and educational psychology**

### **2.4.1 What is discourse analysis?**

Burr (2003) defines a discourse as;

“a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on which produce a particular version of events” (p.64)

She suggests that discourse has implications for what we can do and what we should do and also offers people a framework for people to interpret their own experience and behaviour and that of other people.

Discourse analysis investigates which discourses are shared across texts and what constructions of the world they seem to be advocating (Coyle, 2006). Parker (2005) describes what he believes to be the four key ideas of discourse analysis. These are as follows;

- 1) Multivoicedness and the idea that people may contradict themselves when they draw on different discourses.
- 2) Semiotics and the idea that the way we put language together is not always under our control and so may have unintentional consequences.
- 3) Resistance and the idea that language does not just describe the world but also achieves things.
- 4) The idea that discourses can present oppressive versions of the world.

As a social constructionist methodology discourse analysis is not interested in essentialist concepts of personality or attitudes (Burr, 2003) and therefore does not aim to 'put words in peoples' mouths' (Coyle, 2006) or to report 'what really happened' (Wetherell and Potter, 1987). As Wetherell and Potter (1995) state in relation to their 1992 research investigating racist language in New Zealand;

"the aim of DA is not to classify people but... to reveal the discursive practices through which race categories are constructed and exploitation legitimated" (p.88)

Burr (2003) suggests that social constructionism can be divided into two approaches that have implications for the type of discourse analysis that is undertaken. Macro social constructionism views language as related to material or social structures and suggests that the forms of language available set limits on what we can think, do and say and what we can have done to us. In contrast, micro social constructionism is interested in the construction of accounts within personal interactions. If a macro social constructionist approach is taken then either critical discursive psychology or Foucauldian discourse analysis are appropriate methodologies. If a micro social constructionist approach is taken then either conversational analysis or discursive psychology are appropriate methodologies. The main differences between these two methodologies are that:

- in conversational analysis the focus is on the rules which govern speech (Potter and Wetherell, 1987)
- in discursive psychology the focus is still on the rules of speech but the speaker is thought to be an active agent who chooses which discourses to draw on in order to manage stake (Willig, 2008)
- in critical discursive psychology the functions of language are still a focus but also the influence of social structures (Coyle, 2006)
- finally, in Foucauldian discourse analysis the discourse constructs the subject and subjects are constrained by the ways they are positioned (e.g. a medical discourse may position someone as 'the patient') rather than being active as in discursive psychology (Willig, 2008)



However, Wetherell (1998) suggests that it is necessary to combine both a macro- and micro social constructionist approach where we look at both situated use of language and the wider social context.

#### **2.4.2 The relationship between discourse analysis and applied psychology**

A criticism of discourse analysis is that its focus on language can seem divorced from real life. However, Willig (1999) suggests that;

“discourse analysis is an alternative research tool for critical psychologists because it allows us to question and challenge dominant constructions of psychologically relevant concepts” p.2

She discusses limitations of traditional applied psychology, which she suggests assumes a straightforward and unidirectional flow of knowledge from research (usually laboratory experiments) into the ‘real world’. She identifies some of the dangers of this approach, namely that the research may not serve the interests of those it intends to help, that it does not encourage a focus on the influence of social processes (such as unemployment) and that it may lead to ‘locking’ certain marginalised groups in different restrictive discourses. In contrast she suggests that discourse analysis can be used by critical psychologists in the following ways;

- 1) as a social critique – exposing how language legitimates and perpetuates unequal power relations through publication
- 2) as empowerment – by identifying counter discourses which can be used to resist oppressive dominant discourses

- 3) as a guide to reform – by making recommendations for changes in existing institutions (such as schools)

#### **2.4.3 Discourse analysis and educational psychology**

A number of papers have discussed the relevance of a discursive approach to the practice of Educational Psychologists (EPs) and others have used a discursive approach to investigate EP practice directly. Bozic, Leadbetter and Stringer (1998) make the point that;

“almost all of our work involves us in the creation, use and manipulation of discourse”  
(p.65)

They suggest that this not only when we are talking to young people, parents, teachers or other professionals, but also either when we are analysing texts that already exist (such as information in young peoples’ files) or producing texts ourselves (such as letters and reports). In addition they suggest that discourse analysis provides EPs with a coherent way of understanding issues that have occupied us for many years (such as the labeling of young people and the avoidance of practice which is sexist or racist) by challenging and clarifying discursive positioning and making the power of language explicit. Billington (2002) uses the principles of Foucauldian discourse analysis to consider the importance of language within EP practice. He suggests that EPs should be aware that our language achieves things, for example, it may sometimes act as the authoritative truth (e.g. when we use psychometric testing). This has important implications for EPs seeking

to ensure that practice is anti-oppressive and does not perpetuate negative dominant discourses around particular groups.

#### **2.4.4 My own views of discourse**

My own views of discourse are as follows; firstly, there are limits on the discourses that individuals are able to draw on and these are limited by their culture, the history of that culture and the social structures within that culture. This also means that certain discourses will seem to make more 'sense' to individuals than others. Secondly, there is an element of choice in the discourses people choose to draw on, depending on what they are trying to achieve. Thirdly, as well as facilitating and limiting what can be said, discourses determine what kinds of action are possible for whom, where and when.

Adopting this perspective has implications for the way in which the object of the research is referred to. Whilst the object of the present study is referred to as 'Muslim girls' aspirations', within a social constructionist framework the use of this terminology does not indicate an assumption that either Muslim girls or their aspirations are something which exist as a fixed entity beyond discourse. Instead, when the phrases 'Muslim girls' or 'Muslim girls' aspirations' are used they are intended to reflect the discursive object that is the focus of the research.

#### **2.5 Summary**

The aim of this chapter was to provide a brief overview of issues relating to inequality in education (including relevant legislation), to introduce social constructionism and

feminist psychology in terms of their understanding of race and gender and to review research relating to Muslim girls in education. Due to the focus on discourse in the present study, research has been selected which investigates examples of real life talk in schools, or interviews with teachers, parents or pupils. In addition to the inequality experienced by all ethnic minority young people in UK schools, previous research indicates that discourses around Muslim girls position them as being 'oppressed' and lacking the freedom to make their own decisions.

The second aim of this chapter was to consider the relevance of all of the above topics to the practice of educational psychologists. It was argued that educational psychologists are ideally positioned to tackle inequality in schools and have an ethical duty to do so. It was also argued that social constructionism and feminist psychology provide useful frameworks for EPs who wish to challenge inequality.

Finally, the third aim of this chapter was to introduce discourse analysis as a methodology and discuss its relevance to educational psychology. It was argued that, given that educational psychologists often work through consultation with teachers and parents, that the approach has much to offer the profession.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research was to investigate teacher and pupil discourses around Muslim girls' aspirations. The research had a qualitative design and used Foucauldian discourse analysis as described by Willig (2008) as its methodology. Data was gathered through a focus group of five Muslim girls in year nine at a coeducational comprehensive school and semi-structured interviews with five teachers from the same school. The research questions are;

- How are Muslim girls' aspirations constructed by teachers and by the girls themselves?
- What do teachers and Muslim girls gain from these constructions?
- How are Muslim girls positioned by teachers when talking about their aspirations, and how do they position themselves?
- How do these constructions open up or close down opportunities for action?
- What are the consequences of these constructions for the subjective experiences of Muslim girls?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the epistemological and ontological issues relevant to the research (section 3.2), followed by a discussion around the research design, the selection of the school for the research and the methods used (sections 3.3 and 3.4). Finally the process of analysis is described and discussed, as is the process of writing-up the research (sections 3.5 and 3.6).

### **3.2. Overview of research orientation**

This research took a social constructionist perspective, which has already been described in a previous chapter in terms of its implications for understanding race and gender. Now, the implications for the methodology used will be considered. Firstly, it is important to position social constructionism in relation to its ontological positions (i.e. beliefs about the nature of reality). At one end of the scale, realist ontology subscribes to the view that our representations of the world are underpinned by reality (whilst not necessarily being accurate representations of it) (Burr, 2003). At the other end of the scale, a relativist ontology claims that even if reality does exist, it is inaccessible to us and the only things available to us are our various representations of the world (*ibid*). Broadly speaking, taking on a social constructionist epistemology involves taking a relativist ontological position. However, those who take a social constructionist epistemology differ in terms of how far they are willing to adopt an entirely relativist position. Indeed, Burr (1998) raises some serious questions for those adopting a relativist position, in terms of how they are able to justify their own position as being the 'correct' one, how they can claim to be seeking to 'improve' things and how they are able identify which groups are unfairly marginalised. On the other hand, Willig (1998) makes the point that adopting a realist position does not offer us a vision of possible social change, whereas the power of adopting a more relativist position is that it shows us how things could be constructed differently.

Below is an overview of the various forms of social constructionism and a discussion of whereabouts the present research ‘fits’ in terms of its approach.

**Types of social constructionism (Based on Burr [2003])**

<b>Type of social constructionism</b>	<b>Principles</b>
Constructivism (e.g. Personal construct psychology, narrative psychology)	Assumes that each person sees the world differently and creates their own meanings from events
Discursive psychology	Denies that language is a representation of internal mental states (whilst not denying they exist)
Deconstructionism/Foucauldian discourse analysis	Assumes that the way we talk about things (e.g. sexuality) has implications for what action is possible for different groups of people depending on the situation they are in
Critical psychology/Critical social psychology	Takes a political stance and focuses on power and inequality

**Table 1**

Therefore, in terms of ontology, constructivism and discursive psychology do not make any comments about the nature of what exists but instead claim that all that is accessible to us are our representations. Deconstructionism, whilst making very few assumptions about the nature of the world, does suggest that discourse has ‘real’ effects and is influenced by the material conditions within which experiences take place (Willig, 2001). Critical psychology also focuses on the relationship between language and social structures, arguing that changes in language can lead to ‘real’ social change (Fairclough, 1992).

The present research is influenced by a Foucauldian (deconstructionist) approach to discourse, in that it takes the view that the discourses around Muslim girls have real effects in terms of what is possible for these girls when, where and with whom, and in terms of their subjective experiences. Foucault suggested that discourse is related to social institutions and practices (such as education) in a two-way relationship, whereby the existing structures support and validate discourses, whilst the discourses legitimate and reinforce existing social structures (Willig, 2001). This suggests that discourses around Muslim girls are both supported by the structures that exist in schools and help to legitimate the very existence of these structures. In this way Foucault is suggesting that dominant discourses privilege versions of reality which accord with particular social structures (Coyle, 2006). Foucault was also interested in power, although his views of power are unconventional. He suggested that power is not something that is held by particular groups (e.g. teachers) but instead is a 'strategy' that can be used by anyone (Smart, 2002). He suggested therefore, that attention should be given to the procedures of power and how it functions, as this will indicate what discourses were more advantageous to adopt by whom, and at what point (*ibid*). Foucault was also interested in the development of discourses over time.

As has also been discussed in the previous chapter, this research has also been influenced by feminist psychology as described by Kitzinger (1999), in that it assumes that Muslim girls are worthy of study as a group separate from Muslim boys, and that it assumes that change is necessary to improve the position of girls in our schools. However, this may be seen as being in conflict with a Foucauldian



approach, given that Foucault paid very little attention to gender in his work (clearly not viewing women as worthy of study in their own right), and that Foucault's view of power is very different to the view of feminist psychologists. Foucault recognised domination but did not see it as benefitting any particular group, which is clearly not in line with the feminist conception of the 'truth' of patriarchy (Ramazanoglu, 1993). Foucault also did not focus on political struggle, instead suggesting that it is enough to make people think, rather than tell them what to do (*ibid*). However, Grimshaw (1993) suggests that;

"Foucault sometimes saw his writing as a 'toolbox' from which tools might be bent or distorted in ways not envisaged by their creator" (p.52)

She suggests that whether or not the tools are useful to feminists depends on whether the tasks that feminists see as important are the same as the tasks that Foucault saw as important. This is the view taken in the present research, where it is assumed that discourse has important real life implications for Muslim girls in school. Therefore a Foucauldian approach allows for not only the identification of these discourses (which alternative discursive approaches would also achieve) but also for the implications to be considered. This is not to say that all of Foucault's ideas will be adopted wholeheartedly. Clearly, if the intention of the research is to encourage Educational Psychologists (EPs) to reflect on and challenge the discourses used by teachers when talking about Muslim girls, there is an assumption that power is held by the teachers (and the EPs), rather than the girls.

### **3.3. Research design**

The research design is influenced by social constructionist ideas in that it is not only interested in what is 'taken-for-granted' about language (Gergen, 1999) but also what the implications of this are for the girls' subjective experience. There has been very little research investigating teacher discourses around this group so part of the aim of the study was to identify the discourses used by teachers and consider the implications for the girls' experiences of education. However, it was felt that, given that there is also a lack of research discussing aspirations with Muslim girls themselves, it was important to give the girls a 'voice' in the research through the focus group.

A discourse analytic approach was selected. Table 2 below shows the range of approaches that could have been taken;

#### **Discourse analytic approaches**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Principles</b>
Conversational analysis	Studies everyday conversation and the conversational sequences within everyday speech e.g. the rules which govern the changeover of speakers (Potter and Wetherell, 1987)
Discursive psychology	Interested in the functions of discourse and how it is used to manage stake and accountability (Edwards and Potter, 1992)
Critical discursive psychology	Takes into account both the functions of language for individuals and the influence of social structures (Coyle, 2006)
Foucauldian discourse analysis	Focuses on what kind of subjects and objects are constructed and what

	kinds of ways-of-being these constructions make available (Willig, 2001)
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**Table 2**

This figure could be taken as a continuum whereby approaches near the top of the table focus more exclusively on language, whereas items towards the bottom begin to focus more on non-discursive domains. The present study is interested not only in the discourses around Muslim girls but most importantly the implications of these discourses for Muslim girls in education. Conversational analysis focuses on the devices used by speakers in everyday conversation but does not look at the implications beyond the current context. Discursive psychology looks at what is achieved when teachers draw on particular discourses at a given time but again does not consider the implications for ways of being or subjective experiences. Critical discursive psychology goes further and considers the influence of social structures but also does not consider the implication for ways of being and subjective experience. Foucauldian discourse analysis was therefore selected as the methodology as it allows the potential implications of discourses to be explored.

### **3.4 Methods**

#### **3.4.1 Selecting and gaining access to the school**

The school in which the research took place is coeducational and has around 900 pupils on role. The schools' OFSTED report indicates that around two thirds of the pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds, although it is not clear from the report which pupils OfSTED include in this number (e.g. whether white European young people are included), and fifty percent of pupils have English as an Additional

Language. Over a third of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school was selected on the basis that it has a high number of South Asian pupils on roll, with 40% of its pupils being of Pakistani origin (OfSTED report, 2012). It was thought that this would ensure that the majority of teachers would have ample experience of working with Muslim girls and that there would be many girls who could potentially take part in the focus group. In addition I already had a relationship with the school having worked there as a trainee educational psychologist for 6 months prior to the research. This personal contact was invaluable in that it enabled me to approach a senior member of staff with whom I had worked extensively who was then able to approach the rest of the school's leadership team on my behalf.

An initial request was put to the deputy head of the school who was also the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), she agreed in principal but requested a written outline of what the project would involve for the school in the form of an email. She then sought permission from the head teacher for the project to take place. Once he had approved the project, further arrangements could take place.

### **3.4.2 Piloting**

A pilot interview took place with a secondary school class teacher who worked elsewhere in the borough and is known to me personally. She had some experience of working with Muslim girls at both her present and previous schools. She gave verbal feedback on the style of the questions, reporting that she found the questions easy to understand and answer. In terms of my own reflections I found that talking about specific examples were considerably easier for her and so planned to use this

type of specific question in the interviews themselves. She also talked about her experiences with Muslim parents, but it was decided that this would not be added as a question to the final interview guidelines as it may lead to a focus on parents rather than the girls themselves.

A pilot focus group was agreed through a trainee educational psychologist colleague working in another school also with a high proportion of Muslim girls on roll. My colleague approached the head teacher of the school initially and then after gaining his consent, approached the head of year nine who agreed for me to contact her. She arranged for me to meet a group of five Muslim girls in year nine to talk to them about the research. I was keen to meet the girls prior to asking for parental consent partly to ensure that the girls themselves did not feel coerced to take part by prior parental consent, but also because I hoped they would be able to give further explanation of the research to their parents upon giving them the consent letter. I met with the girls and gave them a consent letter for their parents. However, a week before the pilot group was due to take place I was contacted by the head of year to say that only one parent had given their consent. She reported that one of the girls had told her that her parents were unable to read the letter. Whilst it was not clear whether this was the case for all of the parents this was taken as a point for consideration for the final focus group. Ultimately it was felt that it would be unethical to contact parents again given that the reasons for the refusal of consent were not clear. I offered to meet the student whose parents had given consent on her own to discuss the questions with her and use her feedback but this offer was not taken up by the school.

Therefore, it was decided to carry out a pilot study in the school in which the main project was taking place but with a different population. Given that the main purpose of the pilot study was to ensure that the questions in the focus group could be easily understood by the girls, it was not thought to be essential to carry out the pilot with a group of Muslim girls. This time parental consent was sought via a letter given to students initially. Ultimately three girls' parents gave consent (see Appendix 1), and two took part (due to the illness of the third girl). They were given written information about the group and asked to give feedback on whether it was easy to understand. They were then asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 2). The group was observed by a Muslim colleague who had agreed to help to facilitate the final group. She identified two possible changes to the group, firstly the girls were given post-it notes to write down their responses, and she felt that this should be made optional in case girls felt uncomfortable doing this. Secondly, she suggested that the words 'dreams' or 'goals' were used instead of 'ambitions' or 'aspirations' as it seemed the girls found these words difficult to understand. The girls themselves were also asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix 3) about their experience of the group. They indicated the consent form, information sheet and activities easy to understand, that they felt comfortable and that they had enough opportunities to speak. Therefore the only changes that were made were those suggested by the other facilitator.

### **3.5 The focus group**

#### **3.5.1 Selecting participants**

It was decided that girls would be selected from year nine as this is the year where pupils choose their GCSE options and so will be beginning to think about what they would like to do in the future, but is early enough in their school career that they will not feel too restricted in terms of the different possibilities open to them. The girls were selected with the help of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). For reasons of confidentiality I was not given access to pupil records at school. There were thirty girls whose parents had identified them as Muslim in year 9 and so every third girl was selected by the SENCO. She was asked to use her professional judgment to identify any girls who may not be able to take part. The example that was discussed with her to help her to make these decisions was a girl who was new to the country with English as an additional language who may not be able to access the language in the group. After the ten girls had been selected they were invited to a meeting where the purposes of the project were explained to them and they were also given written information that they could take away with them (appendix 4). They were then asked if they thought they might be interested in taking part and if they said yes they were given a letter and consent form for their parents (appendix 5) and asked to return it to the SENCO by a given date. Five girls returned the consent forms to school and so took part in the final group.

### **3.5.2 Ethical considerations**

The study aimed to privilege the girls' self-selection by seeking their informal consent prior to seeking parental consent (BPS Ethical Guidelines, 2009 1.4[i]; David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001). The project was presented to the girls who had been identified as possible participants at a meeting at school. In the meeting (which took place in a classroom), they were provided with verbal and written information about the project (Appendix 5) and given the opportunity to ask questions (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 10, 11 and 16). Several of the girls asked questions, mainly relating to who would have access to the information they provided in the focus group. Consent was then gained formally through a written consent form (Appendix 6) at the beginning of the focus group.

The SENCO indicated that the home language for the girls taking part was Punjabi. Whilst it was thought preferable to offer a translated letter (given the difficulties encountered in the pilot study) a translation service was not available either through the university or the local authority. Therefore a family member of the Muslim facilitator involved in the focus groups was approached and agreed to translate a sentence indicating that if parents wished to talk to someone in either Urdu or Miripuri about the project they could contact the school. A member of staff was approached by the SENCO and agreed to translate for me if parents requested further discussion about the project. The girls were also asked to indicate when the letters (Appendix 5) were handed out whether they felt their parents may have difficulty reading it, but none felt that they would. This may have been due to a reluctance to identify their



parents has having difficulty with reading English but it was hoped that if parents felt uncomfortable with the nature of the project they would feel able to either ask for more information or not give their consent.

The consent forms and the recording were stored in a locked filing cabinet, and following transcription the recordings were stored on a password-protected computer (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 28; BPS Ethical Guidelines, 2009, 1.2[i]). The girls were asked to give their names on the recording for the purposes of identification but names were not used in the transcripts (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 25; BPS Ethical Guidelines, 2009, 1.2[i]). The limits of confidentiality were discussed with the girls at the initial meeting and the beginning of the focus group (verbally and in writing) and it was explained to the girls that the SENCO (who was also the named person for child protection within the school) would need to be told if I felt that they or anyone else may be at risk of harm, and this may involve disclosing what was discussed in the group (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 29; BPS Ethical Guidelines, 2009, 1.2[v]).

The focus group was carried out in a meeting room away from classrooms to reduce the likelihood of the girls' contributions being overheard by staff or other students (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 25). The girls were told that only I would listen to the recording and that the findings would be reported to the teachers who had been interviewed, the head teacher and the SENCO as well as the educational psychology service, but that they would not be identifiable as individuals (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 11, 25 and 26). It was explained that the SENCO would know who

took part (having facilitated the setting up of the group), but that she would not know who had said what (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 25 and 26).

The girls were informed of their right to withdraw without giving a reason at any point before or during the group at the initial meeting (verbally and in writing) (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 15; BPS Ethical Guidelines, 2009, 1.4 [ii]). They were also informed that their contribution to the focus group could be removed so long as I was aware that they wished for it to be removed within two weeks of the project taking place (i.e. the end of the school year). They were asked to inform the SENCO of this so that she could let me know, they were asked to give their names on the recording to allow their voices to be identified. It was explained that it would not be possible to remove their voices from the recording after the group had taken place.

The focus group was designed to respect the knowledge, insight, experience and expertise of the girls taking part (BPS Ethical Guidelines, 2009, 1.1[i]). Questions focused on clarifying what girls had said or asking for more detail to ensure that girls were able to explain themselves clearly. A female, Muslim facilitator attended the focus group to ensure the girls felt comfortable talking about cultural differences (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 20). Archer (2002) suggests that Muslim girls prefer to be able to speak with a Muslim woman during interviews or focus groups because of their shared knowledge and experience.

The girls who took part were sent a letter giving them an overview of the key findings from the focus group (Appendix 7) (BERA Ethical Guidelines 2011, 31; BPS Ethical

Guidelines, 2009, 3.4 [i]). Care was taken when reporting the findings to ensure that girls were clear that this was an interpretation of the discourses they were drawing on (BPS Ethical Guidelines 2009, 3.4 [ii]). The outcomes of the teacher interviews were not reported to the girls, whilst it was thought to be important that the teachers reflected on the differences between the discourses in the interviews and the focus group it was not thought to be useful to share with the girls the discourses constructed from the teacher interviews. Discussions in the focus group suggested that the girls were already aware of these negative discourses.

### **3.5.3 The design of the focus group**

It was decided that a focus group would be a more appropriate for talking to the girls as it was felt that focus groups are less hierarchical than interviews (Wilkinson, 1999) and so the power imbalance between the girls and the facilitators would not be so great. In addition it was thought that, whilst it was easy enough for the teachers to speak from the perspective of a teacher in school, it would be easier for the girls to speak with their own voices if they were able to share in a discussion with their peers (*ibid.*). Previous experience of working with young people in interview situations also suggested that it may take the girls longer to feel comfortable talking with a familiar adult and that taking a more active and interactive approach may lead to richer data (Vaughan et al, 1996).

An overview of the activities is included in appendix 8. The group started with an introduction, setting of ground rules (e.g. to refrain from speaking when others are

speaking) and a warm-up activity as suggested by Vaughan et al (1996). The group lasted for an hour, including the warm-up activity.

#### **3.5.4 The facilitator's role**

The aim of the focus group was for the girls to be able to talk as 'naturally' as possible. It was clear initially that the girls regarded me and my colleague as honorary teachers (calling us 'miss'), which led to me leading the discussion through asking questions of the group and ensuring that each girl was given an opportunity to contribute. However, following personal disclosures by myself and my colleague who took the role of co-facilitator, the group became considerably more relaxed and the girls took more of a leading role in the discussion. Indeed, towards the end of the group the discussion took place primarily between the girls themselves with myself and my colleague contributing very little other than occasionally asking for clarification.

It was decided to invite a female Muslim colleague to jointly facilitate the focus group. Whilst it was not thought that the contributions made by the girls would be any less 'truthful' if the group was conducted solely by a white researcher, Archer (2002) reports that in her own research girls commented that they preferred to talk to an Asian researcher because she shared knowledge and experiences with them. Indeed, in the present study, when asked, the girls commented that they appreciated my colleagues' presence as they felt that some of her experiences were similar to theirs.

### **3.5.5 Reflections on the focus group**

Overall, it seemed that the girls felt relaxed in the focus group and understood that their views would not be attributable to them as individuals when they were reported. They were openly critical of some of their teachers and the school, suggesting that they did not see us as being part of the school system. It was difficult to ensure that all of the girls took part, with two girls taking 'leading roles', two who contributed (but to a lesser extent) and one girl who contributed very little to the discussion. We tried questioning the girls who contributed less (e.g. 'what do you think?', 'do you agree?' etc.) with some success. It was interesting that the girls who took more of a leading role also tried to include the other girls by asking them questions.

The factor that seemed to make the most significant contribution to the success of the focus group was the use of self-disclosure by myself and the other facilitator. This came about as a result of direct questioning by the girls about our own experiences in education and the choices we made. The girls used our disclosures to draw comparisons with their own, contrasting my experiences as a white teenager with theirs, and both comparing and contrasting the experiences of my colleague as a Muslim teenager with their own. They were particularly interested in the aspects of my colleague's background that they felt were less typical (for example, that she had been allowed to return to university to complete a doctorate, that she was unmarried and that she had previously had a non-Muslim boyfriend). However, it seemed that discovering that she also had many experiences in common with them led to a turning point in the group, where they took a more active role in shaping the focus of the discussion. Archer (2002) found that the Muslim girls interviewed as part of her

study behaved similarly, both trying to work out what they had in common (in terms of being female) and what differences there were. She suggests that it was harder for the girls to talk about race in front of her as a white, non-Muslim woman because they may have thought that she was expecting certain answers based on her stereotypes of Muslim young women. This was one of the reasons a Muslim co-facilitator was included in this study. However, Archer also makes the point that the values held by the Muslim facilitator and the girls may still have been different, potentially leading to conflict. It is true that whilst the girls who took the lead were interested in the experiences of the Muslim facilitator, other girls may have felt less able to share their aspirations if they differed from the experiences shared.

### **3.6 The semi-structured teacher interviews**

#### **3.6.1 Selecting participants**

I gained permission from the SENCO to attend a whole staff briefing where I was introduced to the staff as the school's educational psychologist. This meeting was very short so I briefly explained that I was researching Muslim girls' aspirations and was interested in interviewing teachers about their experiences of working with Muslim girls. Following this meeting I was approached by one member of staff and we arranged a time for an interview. An information sheet was placed in staff pigeonholes giving more details about the study and asking them to approach the SENCO initially if they were interested in being interviewed. In practice the remaining four staff either mentioned to the first interviewee that they would like to take part or were approached by the SENCO because she felt they may be interested. This was not ideal as it would have been preferable for staff to identify themselves but this is

clearly difficult given the many demands facing secondary school teachers. It was hoped that, given that it was made clear that this was part of my university research and not a project for the school, staff would have felt able to say that they did not wish to take part.

### **3.6.2 Ethical considerations**

Prior to the interview teachers were given written information about the project (Appendix 9) before being asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 10) (BPS Ethical Guidelines 2009, 1.3).

The information sheet informed the teachers of their right to withdraw from the project at any time (BPS Ethical Guidelines 2009, 1.4). They were also told that they could request for their interview not to be transcribed so long as they did so within two weeks of the interview taking place (the final date was given on the information sheet). In addition they were told that they could request to see the transcript after it had been written and ask to have part or all of their contribution not included in the analysis.

The transcripts did not include the names of the teachers or any pupils that were mentioned by name (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 25; BPS Ethical Guidelines, 2009, 1.2[i]). The transcripts and recordings were stored on a password-protected computer and the consent forms in a locked filing cabinet (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 28; BPS Ethical Guidelines, 2009, 1.2[i]). The interviews took place in an office in the school to reduce the likelihood of the interviews being overheard (BERA

Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 25). It was explained to the teachers that the recording would only be listened to by myself and the findings would be reported to the head teacher, the SENCO, the other teachers who took part and the educational psychology service but that individuals would not be identifiable (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 11, 25 and 26). They were reminded that the SENCO would know who had taken part but again that she would not be able to identify individuals from the findings (BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011, 11, 25 and 26).

The teachers who took part were sent a copy of the written report for the school giving them an overview of the key findings from the interviews and focus group (Appendix 11) (BERA Ethical Guidelines 2011, 31; BPS Ethical Guidelines, 2009, 3.4 [i]). Care was taken when reporting the findings to ensure that teachers were clear that this was an interpretation of the discourses they were drawing on (BPS Ethical Guidelines 2009, 3.4 [ii]).

### **3.6.3 The design of the interviews**

Guidance from 'The Active Interview' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) was followed when designing the interviews. Active interviewing assumes that the interviewee has a stock of knowledge that they can draw on depending on the role they take in the interview. This aligns with Foucauldian discourse analysis, which assumes people have a range of discourses they can draw on. Therefore, an interview schedule was designed that was flexible enough to allow interesting themes to be pursued. A number of different question types were used to allow this to happen. These are presented in the table below;



### **Questions from interview schedule**

Introducing	Can you tell me about your experiences of working in schools? Do pupils talk to you about their aspirations? What are your experiences of working with Muslim girls?
Specifying	In your experience what aspirations do Muslim girls have for their time in education? In your experience what aspirations do you think Muslim girls have for the rest of their lives? Are these different to other girls? What were you expectations of Muslim girls before teaching? How have your expectations changed? What factors do you think influences the girls' aspirations? Have you experienced this yourself? What has your experience been with a particular girl in mind?
Probing	Can you think of an occasions when this has happened? What do you mean by that? Can you give me an example?
Interpreting	Do you mean that...?

**Table 3**

Often the exact wording of the questions in the schedule was not used with individual participants, rather the answers they gave to the introducing questions influenced which questions were asked.

#### **3.6.4 The interviewer's role**

The interviews were based on the assumption that interviews are interactional events, with both parties (the interviewer and the interviewee) being active (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). The interviewee was not seen as a 'vessel' of answers that need to be unlocked by asking the right questions, instead the interviewer set the

parameters and questions were used as framing devices that pointed in promising directions (*ibid*).

### **3.6.5 Reflections on the interviews**

During the interviews the teachers seemed comfortable talking about the topic and there were not long periods of silence. There were times when the teachers did seem self-conscious which is perhaps not surprising given that race can be a sensitive subject in schools (BBC, 2012). As an interviewer it was difficult not to challenge the negative views of Muslim parents in particular, as I was aware that in trying to remain neutral (using ‘um’, ‘yeah’ and ‘right’) teachers may have felt that I was agreeing with them. However, the purpose of the interviews was for teachers to talk as naturally as possible without being challenged and I felt that this was achieved.

### **3.7 Analysis**

The data was analysed using the approach described by Willig (2008). It is important to note that this approach is not full Foucauldian discourse analysis in that it does not explore the evolution of discourses over time. However, in terms of the present study it enables all of the research questions to be addressed. Willig describes a six stage process, detailed below;

#### **Willig’s (2008) Six stages of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Key questions/tasks</b>
Discursive constructions	How are the discursive objects being constructed? Take into account all references, including those that are implicit.
Discourses	What are the differences between the constructions? Locate the various constructions

	within wider discourses.
Action orientation	What is gained from constructing the object this way? How does this construction relate to other constructions in the text?
Positionings	How is the subject positioned?
Practice	How do the constructions and subject positions open up or close down opportunities for action?
Subjectivity	What are the consequences of taking up subject positions for subjective experience? (behaviour, thoughts, feelings)

**Table 4**

Both the five interviews and the focus group were transcribed in full. Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that the level of detail given in the transcript depends on the approach that is taken, for example, if a conversational analysis approach is taken then a more detailed transcript would be required, which took into account aspects such as pauses. This principle was taken into account when transcribing the interviews and focus group whilst pauses were recorded, they were simply identified as either brief or longer pauses. The interviews and focus group were listened to in full twice. During the first listen-through gaps were left where speech was missed. It was decided that it would be preferable to re-listen to the whole interview/focus group again rather than just the unclear sections as speech was easier to understand in context. Appendices 12 and 13 give details of the process of analysis, with a full teacher transcript and initial discourses and quotes for the teacher interviews as an example of the process (which was repeated with the focus group transcript). In addition, Appendices 14 and 15 detail how the discourses that were constructed changed as they were reviewed. Stages two to six are by their very nature more

tentative and so my thoughts based on the data are described in full as part of the findings and discussion chapters.

### **3.8 Writing-up**

Traditionally psychological research is written up with the results and discussion in separate sections. However, given that it is necessary when taking a Foucauldian discourse analytic approach to relate the discourses to wider discourses already identified in the literature, it was thought to be preferable to combine the results and discussion into one

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION – TEACHER INTERVIEWS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This section presents the findings from the teacher interviews and discusses them.

Each research question is addressed in turn using Willig's (2008) six stages of

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. The research questions were as follows;

- How are Muslim girls' aspirations constructed by teachers?
- What is gained from these constructions?
- How do teachers position Muslim girls?
- How do these constructions open-up or close-down opportunities for action?
- What are the consequences of these constructions for Muslim girls' subjective experiences?

Subsection 4.2 addresses identifies the different ways that the girls aspirations are constructed by the teachers and describes these discursive constructions (stage one) and then identifies any contrasting discursive constructions and locates them within wider discourses (stage two). Subsection 4.3 addresses research question two by considering what teachers gain from drawing on these discursive constructions (stage three). Subsection 4.4 addresses research question three by considering how Muslim girls are positioned within these discursive constructions (stage four).

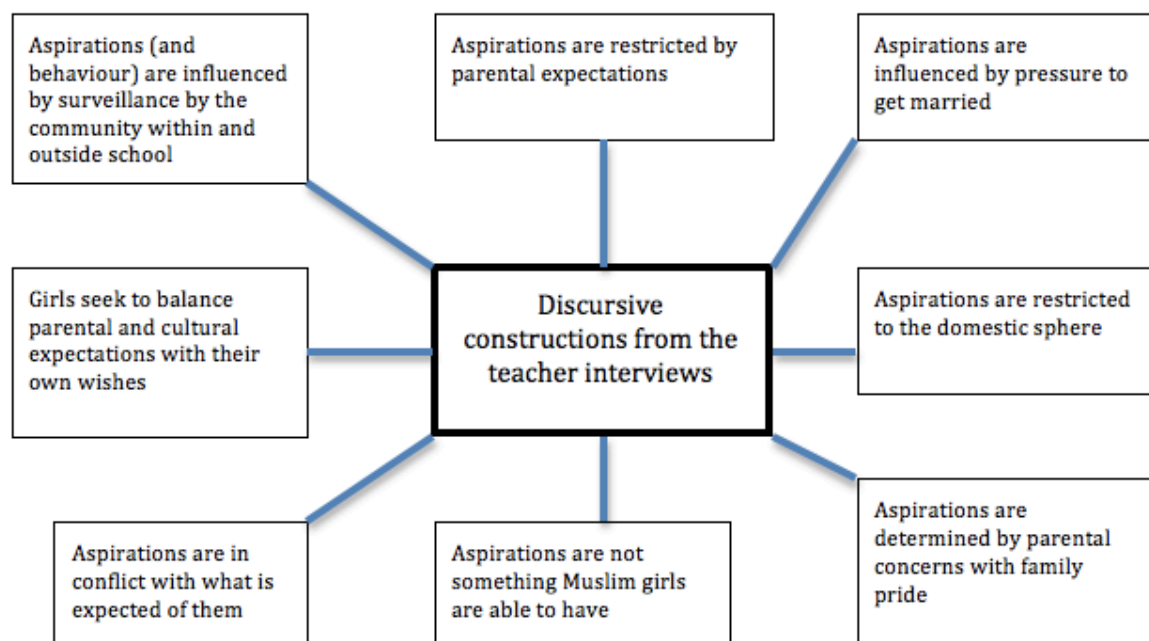
Subsection 4.5 addresses research question 4 by considering how these discursive constructions open up or close down opportunities for action for the Muslim girls and for the teachers themselves (stage five). Finally, subsection 4.6 addresses the fifth

research question by considering the influence of these discursive constructions on Muslim girls' subjective experiences, i.e. what they may think, feel and experience.

#### **4.2 How are Muslim girls' aspirations constructed by teachers?**

To address this research question a number of different discursive constructions were identified. An overview of these discursive constructions is provided below;

##### **An overview of the discursive constructions from the teacher interviews**



**Figure 1**

The discursive constructions are described and illustrated with quotes from the transcripts below, and the relationships to wider discourses are discussed. This relates to stage two of Willig's (2008) Foucauldian Discourse Analysis where differences between the discursive constructions and links to wider discourses are identified.

#### 4.2.1 Aspirations (and behaviour) are influenced by surveillance by the community within and outside school

Quote A	they want to be able to go out when they want, with who, without feeling that their whole community might be watching them
Quote B	T - you know a lot of cousins that attend the same school so I mean if they do certain things it will go back to their parents R – right, yeah, yeah T – and a lot of the boys you know, will do that, th- th- even if they're not related they live um, in a community R – yeah T - and everyone knows each other in the community so regardless of if you're- if you're related or not word always gets back about the behaviour of the girls erm, which is really sad and I think they feel very pressured to behave in a certain way erm, even at school they feel that their parents know what's going on.
Quote C	they [other young people] didn't like the match so they were qui- they were quite nasty about it, calling her a slag. Erm, telling her younger brother 'your sister's a slag'

**Table 5**

Several teachers referred to surveillance of the girls by the Muslim community both within and outside of school. This discursive construction is exemplified in the quotes presented above. One participant referred directly to girls being 'watched' by members of their community (quote A). Muslim boys were portrayed as the main source of this surveillance (quote B) and also potentially the recipients of negative comments about their female relatives (quote C). Extreme case formulations were used, for example, 'their whole community is watching them', 'everyone knows each other in the community' to emphasise the extent of this surveillance.

This surveillance discursive construction relates to a broader discourse around Muslim girls and sexuality whereby this is tightly controlled by the Muslim community with parents, family and other community members having the power to express

disapproval if the girl is seen to be in an undesirable relationship with a boy (quote C). Dwyer (2000) suggests that women are seen as being responsible for Muslim cultural and religious integrity leading to a focus on their behaviour and a particular focus on maintaining their 'sexual purity'. This discursive construction also relates to a broader negative discourse around British Muslim culture 'oppressing' Muslim women. Archer (2002) suggests that recent panics around the impact of fundamentalist Islam have contributed to this discourse.

#### **4.2.2 Aspirations are restricted by parental expectations**

Quote A	there's more chance of the Asian girls having more pressure on them to- to perhaps not go to university or to leave education at a younger age and for their parents not necessarily to encourage them- and certainly not to encourage them to move away to go to university
Quote B	and the parents don't care. And we thought- it's because we've made our own assumption- it's because they don't want them to be in education in the first place
Quote C	a lot of them [the Muslim girls I teach] perhaps have got the most liberal of the parents because it's like, 'ok yes, do A levels, go to university'
Quote D	when the parents are educated themselves, I think they're happy for their children to follow their education and where the parents are not educated themselves or- it's a lot of parents where at least one parent has come from abroad... those are the parents that tend to have issues

**Table 6**

All teachers referred to the influence of parental expectations on the aspirations of Muslim girls. Two different discursive constructions around Muslim parents were drawn on in the interviews. The first portrays Muslim parents as not valuing education and not wishing for their daughters to pursue their education beyond school (quote A and B). The Muslim boys in Archer's (2002) study drew on similar discursive constructions, suggesting that girls make choices about post-16 options based on



parental pressure. The teachers in Basit's (1995/6) also drew on this discursive construction. In the present study teachers also identified a second type of Muslim parent who is more 'liberal' and 'educated' and therefore more willing for their daughters to pursue their education. One teacher suggested that this difference is related to whether the parent was born in this country or abroad (quote D).

Nevertheless, in both of these discursive constructions the implication is that the parents are in control of the decisions made by the girls whether they are 'allowing' further study or not.

A common discursive construction identified in previous literature is the Muslim parent who is almost oppressively ambitious when it comes to their child's education (Basit, 1995, Archer, 2008). This construction was absent from these interviews with the 'liberal' and 'educated' Muslim parent being presented as the exception rather than the rule. This may relate to the school setting in which the interview took place as it is in an area of relative socio-economic deprivation. Reay and Ball (1997) suggest that working class parents are seen as a liability by schools because they are thought to make poor, uniformed choices about education or leave decisions up to their children.

#### **4.2.3 Aspirations are influenced by pressure to get married**

Quote A	I think a lot of it's to do with marriage, I mean it's really forced on- on the Muslim girls'
Quote B	they're like 'well lot's more of it [forced marriage] goes on than you think', and I'm like 'ooh, what do you mean?' and they said 'well, it's not really forced, but you don't have a choice'
Quote C	T – erm, they talk about arranged marriages as if it is something they consent to and accept R – yeah

	T – and even desire R – yeah T – er, I think they perceive us white members of staff as being quite closed towards it R – yeah, so they're aware T – yeah R – of how you feel about it T – yeah
--	---

**Table 7**

All teachers referred to pressure to get married. The source of this pressure was not referred to explicitly but the implication was that it is expected by parents and by the community. 'Forced' was a term that was used frequently and it was implied that an arranged marriage is commonplace for Muslim girls and is accepted by them as inevitable. Several teachers referred to individual cases of girls who they believed had been forced to get married. One teacher explicitly positioned themselves and other white members of staff (quote D) as being anti-arranged marriage and the girls as being pro-arranged marriage. Implicitly this creates two worlds, the mainstream westernised world of school and the "foreign" culture of the Muslim girls. Dwyer (2000) suggests that a focus on arranged and forced marriage is part of the pathology of the Asian family within Western Culture.

One teacher expressed their surprise at the views of the girls in relation to arranged marriage in quote C, stating they talk about it "as if" it is something they consent to (expressing disbelief) and it is "even" something they desire. This is linked to the previous discursive construction where parents are very much in control of the girls decision making, Basit (1996) found that teachers assumed that only "bright" Muslim girls were interested in careers with the rest being focused on marriage.

#### **4.2.4 Aspirations are restricted to the domestic sphere**

Quote A	yeah, definitely there's that expectation on them I
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	think to be very rooted in the home and the community, even if they are going to go to university, it's something that they do in the day and then they go back home and play that kind of fairly domesticated role in the family
Quote B	um, a lot of the girls, not a lot, but of the girls I've got some understanding of, they tend to have a lot of responsibilities within the home
Quote C	because for most of our girls, when they go home, they go home, and that's their life. They don't have the opportunity to go out and socialise unless it's a family situation or a wedding

**Table 8**

Where aspirations were referred to directly by teachers they were described as being limited to what was available to the girls at home, in fact they weren't described so much as being aspirations but rather a continuation of what the girls were already experiencing (quote b). "Home" within this discursive construction is presented as a place where the girls have a particular role and particular responsibilities. Again, this is related to Archer's (2002) discourse around Muslim girls as being caught between two competing cultures, one more restricting than the other.

This relates to previously discussed discursive constructions around parents and the community. The use of words such as "responsibilities" suggest that the desire to remain in the home is influenced by others rather than being what the girls would wish for for themselves.

#### **4.2.5 Aspirations are determined by parental concerns with family pride**

Quote A	<p>T - they [parents] want them to be good daughters.. they want them to behave, they want them to be respectful, they want them to achieve</p> <p>R - yeah</p> <p>T - because I- I- again this is just my views I'm putting on them, I don't know if it's true, because that reflects well on them if their daughters have achieved at school</p> <p>R – yeah, yeah</p>
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	<p>T – but they don't want them to achieve to further their education [pause]</p> <p>R – they want them to achieve just to..?’</p> <p>T – as a badge of honour really’</p>
Quote B	<p>it will influence their- some of their dating and things cos they have to think, when they have to bring that person home to their parents, their parents are going to look at that boy and think ‘what caste is he?’</p>
Quote C	<p>I think it's a lot to do with the fact that the girl might get involved with boys or she might bring shame on the family</p>
Quote D	<p>T – I think the reasons for the girls [to choose particular subjects] would be to make sure [pause] and this is just my own understanding</p> <p>R – yeah</p> <p>T - I get the impression it's more so to make them well educated</p> <p>R – yep</p> <p>T – but not so educated that they may become a threat to a male potential spouse</p>

**Table 9**

This discursive construction provides something of a contrast to the previous discursive construction in that it suggests that parents and families have high expectations for their daughters. However, this is presented as being in terms of how the girls appear to the rest of the community and a desire for family to be viewed positively rather than in terms of achieving highly in order to pursue a career or for further study.

There are explicit references again to the expectations around relationships with the discourse around ‘sexual purity’ (Dwyer, 2000) emerging again (quote C) but also the idea that Muslim girls do not want to be more educated than a potential spouse.

Ahmad (2001) also found that Muslim young women referred to the importance of education for social status whilst still not being ‘too educated’ for a potential husband. However, in Ahmad's study the young women seemed to be actively balancing their desire for an education against the expectations of their families. Whereas, in the

present study, the girls themselves are very passive in this discursive construction, with their decisions based entirely on the expectations of others.

#### 4.2.6 Aspirations are not something Muslim girls are able to have

Quote A	they don't- they don't tend to project too far, because they know what the outcomes going to be, so there's no point having these dreams and aspirations
Quote B	my experience is that they [pause] ahh, feel that they're very, erm, they're held back, erm, I feel that they feel that they're not allowed to sort of have ambitions, erm, because of their culture
Quote C	T – and I almost felt like some students couldn't be bothered then, in their subjects because.. R - oh right T - .. they felt that, 'well, what's the point?' you know, 'I'm not going to be allowed to do anything with it'

**Table 10**

This discursive construction assumes that to be 'aspirational' is not something that is compatible with being a Muslim girl. Again, Islam is held up as being oppressive to girls and there is an implication that the girls don't think about their futures because they have been decided for them already. The boys in Archer's (2002) study also identified that whilst they could make choices about what they do with their lives, the girls were not allowed to do so. The use of the phrase 'not allowed' implies that the girls are in a position of needing 'permission' to do and think what they like.

#### 4.2.7 Aspirations are in conflict with what is expected of them

Quote A	T – erm, I think it was, her trying to persuade her parents, that look.. R – yeah T – you know, I'm good at something and I want to carry on with it, please give me the opportunity, I won't let you down, you know
Quote B	T – I think the differences are, the family aren't preventing the white girls going [to university], the aspirations are preventing them, whereas I think for the Muslim girls, the culture and the community prevent them from going rather than the aspiration. Does that make sense?
Quote C	but then there are some girls who are completely

	different... who are Muslim, who are saying 'well, my parents don't care but I do'
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**Table 11**

This discursive construction provides a contrast to previously discussed constructions in that it implies the girls are active in having ambitions and aspirations. However, the idea of oppression is still present here, and there is an implied conflict between what the girls want and what their parents and the community want for them. This implies again that the girls are trapped between two different cultures, a Western culture that would have them do whatever they want, and a restrictive Muslim culture. This view is epitomised by Hutnik and Coran Street (2010) who interviewed Muslim young women in Birmingham about their identity and suggested that because of the differences between them and their 'mainstream counterparts' (because of their 'racial features') forming an identity is more difficult. By 'mainstream counterparts' the researchers are referring to white young people in school. They suggest that Muslim pupils differ from other pupils due to the number of different identities they have. The female Muslim youth workers in Keddie's (2011) study also referred to the girls 'clashing' with their parents and saw their role as supporting them to overcome these tensions.

#### **4.2.8 Girls seek to balance parental and cultural expectations with their own wishes**

Quote A	I think it's a safe bet working with children.. working in nurseries, you know, they feel they can get a job close to home, they don't have to go to university to get qualifications, that's what I think it is.. I think if- if- if those girls knew that their parents were happy for them to go to college or university, they may have other ambitions or other ideas
Quote B	R – yeah, so why do you think that sort of subject is more popular, textiles, business, that sort of thing? T - um, textiles, again I'm being dead stereotypical, b- because they can R – yeah

	T – you know, and it's ok to do the sewing at home so if they take their work home to do, that's ok
Quote C	<p>T – they talk more- I guess in some ways it's about limit- needing to remain respectful of the cultural expectations</p> <p>R – yeah</p> <p>T – and the family expectations and just wanting them to find a way to marry the two</p> <p>R – yeah</p> <p>T – so that they can have their own individuality but at the same time remaining respectful</p> <p>R – yeah</p> <p>T – cos a lot of them are very respectful themselves</p> <p>R – yeah</p> <p>T – of their own you know, religion, background, faith etc.</p>

**Table 12**

This discursive construction is related to the construction above but goes one step further, suggesting that not only do the girls have wishes and desires that are not what is expected of them but that they actively pursue these ambitions despite pressure to do otherwise. Nevertheless, the girls are still not positioned as being entirely free from the restrictions of their culture. It is implied that the most they can ever hope to achieve is a balance between what is expected of them, and the restricted choices that that offers, and what they really want. The range of choices available to the girls is seen as extremely limited and, as with the previous discourse around the girls position in the home, restricted to subjects which develop skills which may be useful in the home (such as sewing and childcare).

#### **4.2.9 Summary**

Overall, the discursive constructions of the teachers vary very little in terms of the broader discourses that underpin them, which are that the girls are oppressed by their culture and community and have no agency when it comes to making choices. Whilst there is some degree of acceptance that there are girls who choose to go their

own way, there is an assumption that this is difficult and these girls experience conflict with their families and community as a result of these decisions. Even where parents are constructed as being 'liberal' they are still positioned as 'allowing' the girls to make certain choices. In this way, even where there are some slight contradictions between the discursive constructions, the broader discourses they relate to remain the same.

#### **4.3 What do teachers gain from these constructions?**

This discussion is linked to stage three of Willig's (2008) stages of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis where the action orientation of the constructions is considered, along with the links between the different constructions.

Discursive constructions which suggest that Muslim girls aspirations are influenced by community and parental expectations, expectations/desire to marry, domestic roles and family pride limit the influence of school and the teacher and instead place responsibility for encouraging aspirations in Muslim girls firmly outside school. Indeed the discursive construction suggesting that it is impossible for Muslim girls to have genuine aspirations due to cultural expectations implies that there is no point encouraging these girls to aspire at all. This allows teachers to place responsibility for the whether the girls achieve their goals outside of the classroom and school, and suggests that those who achieve, do so as a result of 'liberal' and 'educated' parents, whereas those who do not were not 'allowed' to have these goals in the first place. The implication is that whilst teachers would like the girls to have the opportunity to continue their education, they do not encourage this as it would go against the



wishes of parents and the community. Indeed, it is implied that even when the girls do have aspirations, these should be regarded with caution as they may not be what they genuinely hope for but rather a compromise based on the options available to them. This relieves the school of its responsibility for their achievement or underachievement.

The construction of Muslim girls in this way is linked to both the construction of Muslim boys and Muslim parents. Muslim boys are portrayed as being involved in the surveillance of the girls and as seeking to ensure that the expectations of their parents and the community are met. Muslim parents were most commonly portrayed as having high expectations when it comes to behaviour and responsibilities for the girls, but low expectations for their educational achievement. However, both Muslim parents and Muslim boys are portrayed as being influenced by an even more significant force, that of the Muslim community, which is positioned as being the source of expectations around marriage and appropriate behaviour. The result of these related constructions is that the Muslim girls are almost obscured completely by the weight of expectations placed upon them. Indeed, it was interesting how little the girls were referred to directly in the interviews, and how often references were made to Muslim boys, Muslim parents and the Muslim community. Again, this allows teachers to position themselves as powerless to influence the Muslim girls in the face of the burden of these expectations for the girls.

#### **4.4 How do teachers position Muslim girls when talking about their aspirations?**

This discussion is linked to the fourth stage of Willig's (2008) stages of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. The way Muslim girls were positioned by the teachers has been touched on a number of times above but will be summarised here. Overall the girls were positioned as being extremely passive, at most able to seek some degree of compromise between their own wishes and the wishes of their families. They were positioned as being unhappy with this and at times were positioned as being caught between two different 'worlds'. This positions the girls as being the victim of a variety of different influences without giving much idea about how they might be thinking or feeling or what they might be doing. In this way the view of the girls presented is extremely simplistic and whilst there was some suggestions that there might be girls who do not fit this view, overall Muslim girls were portrayed as an overwhelmingly homogenous group. Keddie (2011) reported similar findings, suggesting that the white Muslim woman she interviewed lacked an appreciation of the complexities of Asian culture and ignored positive discourses associated with Muslim women. Keddie suggests that this is particularly dangerous for those working with Muslim young women as it "closes down" opportunities to support them more effectively. In Dwyer (2000) the young Muslim women she interviewed expressed frustration that people assume "we are all the same".

#### **4.5 How do these constructions close down or open up opportunities for action?**

This discussion links to the fifth stage of Willig's stages of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis whereby the influence of the discursive constructions on what can be done by teachers and Muslim girls is considered. These discourses potentially close down opportunities for action for both teachers and the girls themselves. For teachers they suggest that they can have very little influence on the girls they teach due to the overwhelming pressure that girls are subject to from outside school, that the girls are positioned as being powerless to overcome. Some teachers may feel that they are still able to encourage the girls within school, but that this is limited to the time they are allowed to spend in education. In fact references to this were made in the interviews, where teachers commented that 'everything stops' when the girls reach the age where they are about to leave school.

For the girls, the dominance of these discursive constructions close down opportunities for them in terms of choosing subjects that are not related to domestic skills and of having ambitions beyond school. These constructions do not allow for a Muslim girl who is ambitious for her own reasons and may mean that they would not feel able to talk to teachers in school about their future. These constructions may allow Muslim girls to be ambitious but never without an assumed degree of conflict.

#### **4.6 What are the consequences of these constructions for the subjective experiences of Muslim girls in school?**

Willig (2008) makes the point that this final stage of the analysis is always the most tentative in that it is only possible to infer what Muslim girls may be thinking, feeling and experiencing based on what has been constructed from the findings so far.

I would suggest that as a result of these discursive constructions girls may be thinking that teachers are not going to support them in their ambitions, as they are not expected to have ambitions. They may therefore think that if they need support with pursuing their ambitions this should be sought from alternative sources (for example, family, friends and their own actions). Indeed, the findings from the focus group go some way to supporting this suggestion.

I would suggest that these constructions may lead to feelings of isolation for Muslim girls within school, where they are not viewed as actively engaging in their own education and do not feel that their ambitions are acknowledged and supported. They may even feel embarrassed or self-conscious about aspirations that do not fit with the dominant discourses or they may feel frustrated that they are not recognised. Finally, given the constructions around the oppressiveness of the Muslim family and community, they may feel protective of their family and culture which may lead to girls seeking to defend their culture or avoid talking about it all together. Finally, and more positively, they may feel a desire to prove themselves – something that was also identified in the focus group.

I would suggest that those girls who do talk about their aspirations may experience sympathy from teachers given that the dominant discourses suggest that aspirations are something which it is hard for Muslim girls to have. More generally however, they may experience receiving less attention from their teachers, given that the dominant discourses position them as being passive.

#### **4.7 Summary**

Overall, the teachers drew on simplistic discourses of Muslim girls and their aspirations. Muslim parents, the community and Muslim boys within the school were presented as having high expectations for the girls' behaviour. Parents were presented as being concerned with the views and perceptions of the community in terms of their daughters' behaviour and choices, and as having control over their daughters' aspirations. The girls themselves were therefore presented as being under the influence of a variety of different pressures including; pressure from parents, boys and the community, expectations around marriage, responsibilities within the home, a need to meet cultural expectations and to maintain family pride. They were therefore positioned either as passive when it comes to making decisions about their own futures or suffering conflicted relationships with their parents and their own culture in order to follow their own desires, with the majority of girls experiencing the former. Whilst the discourses around the girls themselves were not negative, the discourses around Muslim parents, Muslim families and the Muslim community were.

It was argued that this has implications for the girls' experiences in school. Firstly, it was suggested that these discourses may result in teachers not feeling that they can be responsible for the achievement of Muslim girls in school given what is assumed about the pressures they are subject to outside school. Secondly, it may restrict the choices that the girls feel able to make in school and they may be inadvertently encouraged into making particular choices (such as choosing traditionally feminine subjects such as child development and textiles). Thirdly, it was suggested that girls who are ambitious may find appropriate support is not available to them or may feel unable to seek support and guidance. Finally, it was suggested that whilst Muslim girls may experience sympathy in school they may also feel isolated, ignored and frustrated.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION – PUPIL FOCUS GROUP**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This section presents the findings from the pupil focus group and discusses them.

Each research question is addressed in turn using Willig's (2008) six stages of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. The research questions were as follows;

- How do Muslim girls construct their aspirations?
- What is gained from these constructions?
- How do Muslim girls position themselves?
- How do these constructions open-up or close-down opportunities for action?
- What are the consequences of these constructions for Muslim girls' subjective experiences?

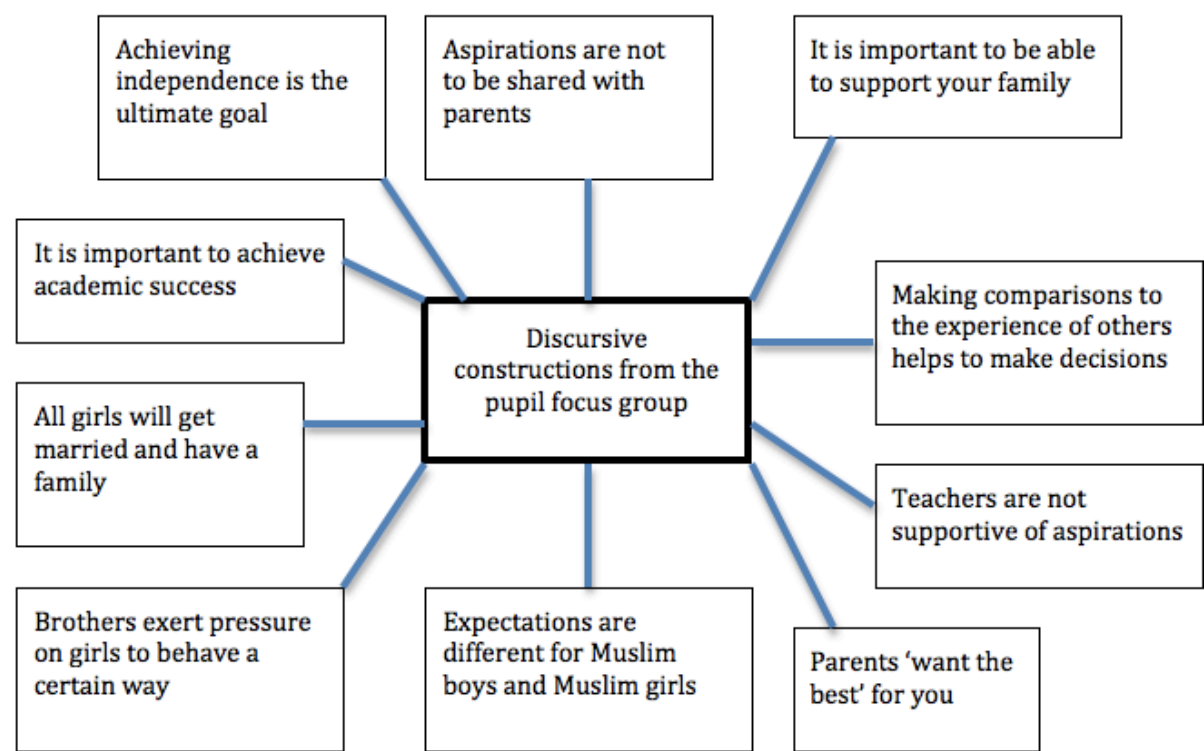
Subsection 5.2 addresses identifies the different ways that the girls aspirations are constructed and describes these discursive constructions (stage one) and then identifies any contrasting discursive constructions and locates them within wider discourses (stage two). Subsection 5.3 addresses research question two by considering what Muslim girls gain from drawing on these discursive constructions (stage three). Subsection 5.4 addresses research question three by considering how Muslim girls position themselves within these discursive constructions (stage four). Subsection 5.5 addresses research question 4 by considering how these discursive constructions open up or close down opportunities for action for the Muslim girls (stage five). Finally, subsection 5.6 addresses the fifth research question by

considering the influence of these discursive constructions on Muslim girls’ subjective experiences, i.e. what they may think, feel and experience.

**5.2 How do Muslim girls construct their aspirations?**

To address this question a number of different discursive constructions were identified. They are summarised in the diagram below;

**Overview of discursive constructions from pupil focus group**



**Figure 2**

**5.2.1 The importance of academic success**

Quote A	R – What would be a good result? Do you think? Girl 1 – A* Girl 2 – yeah A’s, A*’s yeah
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	Girl 1 – I had a dream that I has A*s [girls laugh] Girl 1 – I was so happy
Quote B	Girl 1 – when I'm sixteen I'll actually be in school R – yeah, yeah Girl 1 – in this- not very good- school and I'll just be focusing on my work really R – mm Girl 1 – yeah on my subjects and everything, just trying to get Girl 2 – good grades
Quote C	Girl 1 – oh, I would wanna go Girl 2 – I would wanna go to university Girl 1 – yeah, get a degree R – mm, mm Girl 1 – and get a better job R – mm Girl 1 – more money

**Table 13**

When talking explicitly about their aspirations the girls referred particularly to a desire to achieve high grades in their A levels. They seemed to talk about achieving these grades for their own sake or because it would make them happy rather than to support any other ambitions, although in quote c there are brief references to getting a 'better job' and 'more money' as a result of having qualifications. This suggests the girls are buying into the discourse around achieving the highest possible grades in examinations being a 'gold standard' in education (Archer, 2008), and the idea that aiming to go to university is 'the thing to do' (Ahmad, 2001).

### **5.2.2 Achieving independence is the ultimate goal**

Quote A	Girl 3 – well, I want my own job first Girl 5 – A just wants a boyfriend Girl 1 – A's just gonna be Girl 3 – and my own apartment, yeah, that's it
Quote B	Girl 2 – no, I would wanna be working, have my own house, my own car and just having my own life like S – mm Girl 1 – I should run away from my parents

	S – so being independent, that's quite important to you by the sounds of it? Girl 2 – yeah, yeah
Quote C	Girl 2 – I- I- would like- cos you've like, done your A levels and got a job and if you have your own money and everything I don't see why I shouldn't be allowed to go with my friends
Quote D	Girl 1 – I will actually be R – when you're twenty-five? Girl 1 – married, I'll have kids and I'll be Girl 4 – working Girl 1 – I will be working even if my husband says I'm not allowed to work, I'll work

**Table 14**

Throughout the focus group frequent references were made to the importance of independence and being able to make your own decisions. The girls used the phrase 'my own' and 'your own' frequently, suggesting that they do not wish to be reliant on others for money or accommodation. There is some suggestion within this discursive construction that there may be opposition to this desire for independence, quotes b and c suggests that there may be parental opposition and quote d suggests that potential husbands may not wish for their wives to work. This is in contrast to the discursive construction described later which emphasises the importance of being able to support your family and positions the girls as being responsible for this.

### **5.2.3 Aspirations are not to be shared with parents**

Quote A	Girl 1 – Sometimes, sometimes I'm too embarrassed Girl 2 – yeah Girl 4 – it depends who talks to you Girl 1 – I don't open up to my parents S – what's embarrassing? What kind of things- you know you said you- Girl 1 – I don't know, I just don't feel they really care Girl 2 – oh no, yeah, they're like 'ok, bye', they don't take much notice
Quote B	Girl 1 – obviously all Muslim girls, you can date actually like- someone will always have a boyfriend or whatever, but you can't really tell your parents Girl 2 – yeah, it would have to be under cover cos you

	<p>don't want-</p> <p>Girl 3 – yeah</p> <p>Girl 2 - -your parents to find out because if they do find out then their- they wouldn't like that, they wouldn't let you</p>
Quote C	<p>Girl 2 – I think that's how it is with most girls, I don't like talk to my mum and dad much cos it always ends in lectures like 'oh, you can't do this, and you can do this' so it's better off if you like, you do your thing and you keep yourself to yourself</p>

**Table 15**

The girls referred to not sharing their aspirations with their parents, either because they felt they would not be interested or because they felt they would not approve. This relates to the discursive construction around a lack of support from teachers, who the girls felt were also not interested in their aspirations. When it comes to relationships there seems to be a perceived barrier to sharing with parents, with the girls using the word 'can't' implying that it is impossible to talk to their parents about this. Whereas when it comes to other aspects the girls imply that there is a choice, saying that they 'don't' talk to their parents, which implies that they could if they wanted to.

#### **5.2.4 Aspirations are influenced by the importance of supporting family**

Quote A	<p>Girl 1 - Yeah, I'd want a job, I'd help my mum and my dad, get them a house</p>
Quote B	<p>Girl 1 – about what- you have to think about what sacrifices you can make for your family, like you can't be out all the time working, you have to be at home cos like-</p> <p>Girl 3 – help your parents out</p>

**Table 16**

The girls talked about the importance of supporting family and making decisions not just based on their own needs but on the needs of their parents. There are references particularly to 'helping' your parents and the implication seems to be that this help should be financial. Quote b refers specifically to achieving a balance between work and home life, and again the word 'can't' is used, implying a barrier to

behaving differently. This is in contrast to the previous construction around achieving independence from your family being the ultimate goal.

### 5.2.5 All girls will get married and have a family

Quote A	Girl 1 – I don't think like that, I think if you- if you get married early, like not like proper early- like eighteen, nineteen, if you get married when you're in like your twenties like, that's when your life has started and you can share it with your- your new family. And then when you have kids then obviously you're not gonna be so old that you can't really do anything with them
Quote B	R – so can you remind me what you said? Girl 5 – married and pregnant R – ok Girl 2 – when you're twenty-five? Girl 5 – yeah Girl 1 – yeah, I think that's old for getting married Girl 4 – you'll have two kids already at twenty-five Girl 5 – no, I want to get married at twenty-one, same age as when my sister got married

**Table 17**

Marriage was discussed in great detail in the focus group, particularly in terms of the age that the girls wish to get married (as exemplified in quote b). Despite some disagreement about age, all the girls talked about wanting to get married and have children and expressed surprise that neither of the interviewers were married. There was discussion around the marriages of different relatives (see quote b) and overall there seemed to be an acceptance that getting married was an inevitable part of their future.

### 5.2.6 Expectations are different for Muslim boys and Muslim girls

Quote A	R – what kind of things do they expect from the girls? Girl 2 – not going out with boys, like erm, not smoking Girl 3 and 5 – cooking and cleaning Girl 2 – eh? Girl 3 – cooking and cleaning Girl 2 – yeah, cooking and cleaning and like, not smoking or anything, doing nothing like, it's all about respecting like- yeah
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Quote B	<p>Girl 2 – no-one cares about the boys' reputation though like</p> <p>Girl 1 – boys can be effed up as much as they like</p> <p>Girl 2 – they could smoke, they could go out with the girls, do what they wanna do like- like you know, most Asian boys drink and all that</p>
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**Table 18**

As with the teacher interviews, in the focus group the girls spent some time talking about Muslim boys. The boys were positioned as having fewer restrictions on their behaviour and choices than the girls, although this is in contrast to previous discourses that suggest the girls will be able to achieve independence. There were references to girls being held responsible for their 'reputation' and that of their family, and having more responsibilities within the home.

### **5.2.7 Teachers are not supportive of aspirations**

Quote A	<p>Girl 1 – that's how we react to anything, like I said but now we are talking to you on a level and I can actually talk to you about stuff but them it's just- I can't really, I can't really open up to teachers really</p> <p>Girl 2 – yeah</p> <p>R – mm</p> <p>S – mm</p> <p>Girl 2 – they don't even wanna know- they're like 'yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever'</p>
Quote B	<p>Girl 2 – I've spoke to- you know- my form tutor Miss X- I've spoke to her like I wanna become a police officer yeah, and then she was just like 'yeah, but like, most of you Asian girls get locked up behind the doors' and all this yeah</p>
Quote C	<p>R – so what do you think they [teachers] would expect you to say? Cos they know what I'm going to ask you</p> <p>Girl 1 – they would think- they would expect us-</p> <p>Girl 2 – they would</p> <p>Girl 1 – they would expect us to say 'oh yeah. We're gonna go and do drugs'</p> <p>[laughter]</p>

**Table 19**

The girls positioned teachers as being uninterested in their aspirations and having low expectations of them. Again the word 'can't' was used, implying that talking

honestly to teachers about their aspirations is an impossibility. The girls referred to teacher expectations of them as individuals (see quote c) and also their expectations of Muslim girls, suggesting they see them as being restricted in the choices they are able to make. Quote B is startlingly similar to a quote from a black girl in the Archer (2008) study, who commented;

‘I said to Mr W [teacher] before like, because- you know when we had to go down to the library and do all the Connexions? And he goes ‘oh Marilyn, so what do you want to do when you grow up? And I said I wanted to be a lawyer and he just laughed and he goes ‘you?’ And I went ‘yes’ and he goes “I don’t think so’ (p.98)

Again the teacher is questioning the pupils’ aspirations, which Archer suggests can have the effect of pushing them into gendered and classed career pathways. This discursive construction around a lack of support from teachers relates to the discourse around parents that also positioned parents as uninterested in the girls’ aspirations.

#### **5.2.8 Making comparisons to the experiences of others helps to make decisions**

Quote A	R – yeah, how might they help do you think? Girl 1 – they can help us by telling us- Girl 2 – they can help by- Girl 1 – what they’ve been through- R – yep Girl 1 – and like what- how they got to where they are now, like your parents and stuff and then you could- see if you wanna like go- go through the same path and whatever
Quote B	Girl 2 – talk to your family about it because some of your families are like- people S – mm

	<p>Girl 1 – yeah, like my auntie she’s twenty-four and she works in South Korea as an English teacher</p> <p>R – wow</p> <p>Girl 1 – and she’s- and that- she- she’s like you- she’s not married and she wants to travel the world. My other auntie, her sister, she’s thirty and she isn’t married and she said “I wanna live my life first’. She’s been to Italy and Barcelona as well</p>
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**Table 20**

The girls referred specifically to the lives and careers of family members during the interview. These were not presented as role models necessarily but more as examples that led them to reflect on their own aspirations. They were clear in some cases that they had no intention of following in the footsteps of these family members (for example, a girl whose father was a taxi driver) but still felt they could learn from them.

### **5.2.9 Brothers exert pressure on girls to behave a certain way**

Quote A	<p>Girl 1 – like, if boys- if we do something and then your brothers tell you off, ‘oh, are you trying to ruin my reputation?’ blah, blah, blah. It’s like ‘no’.</p>
Quote B	<p>Girl 1 – it’s like when you’re talking to your brother about like, school, and then you say something about a boy and he’s like-</p> <p>Girl 2 – yeah, ‘what did you say?’</p> <p>Girl 1 – ‘where does he live? Where does he live?’</p> <p>Girl 2 – yeah, yeah ‘what’s going on?’</p> <p>[laughter]</p> <p>Girl 2 – you go home late from school and they’ll be like, ‘where was ya?’</p>
Quote C	<p>Girl 2 – my brother found out though</p> <p>Girl 1 – yo, when your brother finds out</p> <p>Girl 3 – you’re dead</p> <p>Girl 1 – you have to hide!</p> <p>Girl 2 – yeah, you can’t face him</p> <p>Girl 1 – I had to hide in the bathroom for four hours when my brother found out</p>

**Table 21**

In Archer (2002) it was identified that far more conflict existed between Muslim girls and boys in terms of the decisions they made than between girls and their parents.

This also seemed to be the case here except that in this case the discursive construction was specifically around the influence of brothers. The girls' brothers were positioned as having a keen interest in their behaviour and as being in the position to question them about it. In one particular quote (quote C) brothers were positioned as being someone to fear if your behaviour had been in some way unacceptable. It should be noted that during this discussion one girl was at pains to point out 'my brother's not like that' (p.42) and 'my brother's not strict, it's my sister' (p.52).

#### **5.2.10 Parents 'want the best' for you**

Quote A	<p>Girl 1 – yeah, but sometimes like parents want you to get married to the same caste so they know you're safe- they like-</p> <p>S – mm</p> <p>Girl 1 – they know the people</p>
Quote B	<p>Girl 1 – my mum and dad want me to get- to go to university get my degrees and like- they want the best for me</p>
Quote C	<p>Girl 1 – I'd like to be like- like doing other stuff outside of school and everything but sometimes your parents want to- want you to have the best grades so then you'll have to stay at home</p>

**Table 22**

This discursive construction positions parents slightly differently to previous discourses, suggesting that their desire to influence their daughters' decision-making comes from their desire for them to have 'the best', whether this be in terms of a potential partner or in terms of their achievement. Again this positions parents as having high expectations for their daughters academically. One quote refers specifically to parents wishing to ensure their daughters safety by encouraging them to marry into a family they know. However, it is implied that their parents' wishes are not always what they would wish for themselves, exemplified in quote C.



### **5.2.11 Summary**

Overall, the discursive constructions drawn on by the girls are varied and contradictory and as such are underpinned by a range of broader discourses. For example, constructions around the importance of academic success relate to broader discourses around the 'ideal pupil' and academic success representing a 'gold standard' for young people (Archer, 2008). In addition, discourses around the importance of family, marriage and having children relate to broader discourses around accepted roles for women and what represents success for women. This is in contrast to constructions around independence, using others as an example and the lack of support from teachers that relate to an individualistic discourse where the girls are responsible for their own choices. Finally, certain constructions do relate to an oppressive discourse, particularly those describing the expectations for girls compared to boys and the pressure from brothers to behave a certain way.

### **5.3 What do the girls gain from these constructions?**

The following relates to stage three of Willig (2008). The constructions around teachers being unsupportive of girls' aspirations and aspirations not being something you discuss with parents, may actually allow the girls to avoid potential discouragement from following the path they would like to take. They talked about feeling embarrassed about talking to their parents and one girl recounted a conversation with her teacher where it was suggested that her ambitions were unrealistic. By drawing on discursive constructions which position teachers and parents are uninterested in the girls' aspirations, this allows them to continue to

pursue their ambitions without sharing them with significant adults who may not approve or agree with them, or may feel they are not possible.

Drawing on a dominant discourse of high academic achievement as being the 'gold standard' (Archer, 2002) in education the girls are positioning themselves within the discourse of the 'ideal pupil' (Archer, 2002). This may be a useful discursive construction for them to draw on during discussions with interviewers who they may have viewed as part of the school system (despite attempts to encourage them to view us as acting outside of the school system). In addition, the discursive construction around girls getting married and having a family also allowed the girls to position themselves within the dominant discourses of what is expected from women i.e. that women should wish to have children.

The discursive constructions around supporting your family and gaining independence allowed the girls to position themselves as capable but also potentially as important figures within their family. The construction around parents 'wanting the best' for them, allowed the girls to defend their parents' actions which they seemed to be aware may be viewed negatively by those outside of their family and community.

Finally, discursive constructions around the difference in expectations for girls and boys and the pressure from their brothers around their behaviour may serve to explain or excuse any decisions they make which they may be aware would be viewed negatively by those outside their family and community e.g. in terms of dress, where they go and who they spend time with.

Overall, the range of different constructions used by the girls in different parts of the focus group allowed them to explain and justify a range of different decisions and to balance and reframe the different aspects of their life (relationships, family and school) differently depending on the situation being discussed.

#### **5.4 How do the girls position themselves in these constructions?**

The following relates to stage four of Willig (2008).

The girls position themselves as actively making decisions and being responsible for their own choices. They position themselves as being of central importance within their families in terms of their achievement, behaviour and their potential role within the family. At the same time they seem to position themselves partly outside of their family with their parents not being fully aware of their thoughts and aspirations, something that may be common in young people their age who are becoming more independent.

Interestingly the girls contrasted their own position with family members born in Pakistan;

‘it’s harder to interact with pe- like boys from Pakistan’ (p.59)

And their parents who were born in Pakistan;

‘ ‘cos my mom’s come here when she was proper young like, but she was born in Pakistan, but she was here when she was proper young, but she still doesn’t understand’ (p.55)

In this way they appear to be positioning themselves as British more so than Pakistani.

Finally the girls position themselves as virtually invisible to teachers in terms of their aspirations, suggesting that teachers are not interested in their aspirations and do not believe that they have aspirations of any value ‘they would expect us to say ‘oh yeah, we’re gonna go and do drugs’ (p. 28).

### **5.5 How do these constructions close down or open up opportunities for action?**

The following relates to stage five of Willig (2008).

These constructions potentially close down opportunities for the girls to seek advice and support from adults at school as teachers are positioned as uninterested in the girls’ aspirations and as believing that Muslim girls are limited in terms of the choices they are able to make. This means that, even when valuable advice and support is available in school, the girls may not seek it out. In addition these constructions make certain choices less available to the girls, for example, the choice not to have a family and not to get married and the choice to make decisions that may benefit them more than their family. They also potentially close down opportunities for the girls to seek

advice from their parents, because although they are positioned as supportive, they are also not presented as someone who the girls can discuss their aspirations with.

These constructions may also discourage the girls to look beyond the dominant discourses around expectations to marry, have children and achieve highly at school and consider alternative constructions of 'success', for example little reference is made to different types of jobs or careers.

However, these constructions also potentially open up opportunities for the girls to achieve highly, to balance different expectations and enjoy and to achieve independence.

### **5.6 What is the influence of these constructions on the girls' subjective experience?**

The following relates to stage six of Willig (2008).

These constructions may lead the girls to think that school is not a source of support for them and that certain choices (identified above) are not available to them as girls and specifically as Muslim girls. They may also think that making certain choices makes them more successful in life, for example, the choice to marry and have children and the choice to focus on working hard in school.

These constructions suggest that it is necessary to achieve very specific things, such as independence, the ability to support your family, a husband and children,

academic success and a job you enjoy. This specificity may lead girls to feel pressure to achieve all of these things and a sense of failure if they do not feel this is possible. Discursive constructions around support from family may make them feel more confident, whereas constructions around a lack of support from teachers and the relative freedom afforded to boys may make them feel pessimistic about the future.

The girls may experience a sense of isolation as a result of some of these constructions if they feel their ambitions are not taken seriously. They may also experience this if their own aspirations do not include those that have been identified in these constructions. However, the range of discourses available to the girls suggests that they are able to justify a range of different decisions depending on the constructions they use.

## **5.7 Summary**

The discursive constructions drawn on by the girls are complex and sometimes contradictory. On the one hand they talk about the importance of independence, academic success and actively using the examples of others to make informed decisions. On the other, they refer to pressure from family members (specifically brothers) to make certain choices; parents who want the best for them (which may be in conflict with what they want); a need to support their family through their job; expectations around behaviour that are specific to them as girls; and a lack of support from teachers. Marriage was discussed in depth with the girls either asserting that they would like to get married and have children when they are very

young in order to enjoy time with their families or that they would prefer to wait and enjoy their independence whilst they are able to. This gives a sense that the girls are actively trying to negotiate their choices and how they are viewed, and possibly challenge the way they feel they are viewed by others at present.

They positioned themselves either as independent and capable, 'good students' who are crucially important within their family and community, whilst at the same time being virtually invisible in school in terms of their aspirations.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of the study was in no way to seek to identify who is telling the “truth” about Muslim girls and their aspirations or to identify the stereotypical or even potentially racist “attitudes” of the teachers who were interviewed. Indeed, the social constructionist approach that was taken challenges the idea that it is possible to access the views and attitudes of those who were interviewed (even if these attitudes exist as independent entities). Instead the purpose was to investigate the different constructions of the teachers and the girls, the way in which contrasting constructions may be drawn on at different times and the unintentional consequences this may have. The view was taken that constructions perform actions (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992) and so the purpose was also to identify constructions that may be more or less helpful to Muslim girls as they make their way through school and to challenge the homogeneity of the dominant discourses around this group.

It should also be acknowledged that it would be impossible for me to view the data from outside of my own position as a white, female, middle-class researcher and that the discursive constructions have been identified by me from this position. It is assumed that a researcher with a background different from my own may have constructed the data differently.



## **6.2 Conclusions and contribution of the study**

In general the findings from the teacher interviews supported the findings of the studies by Basit (1995/1997) which looked at teacher discourses around Muslim girls career aspirations, in that the teachers in Basit's studies also referred to Muslim girls being subject to oppression which restricts their choices. This is interesting given that Basit's research is now around fifteen years old, but the constructions the teachers are drew on when talking about Muslim girls were very similar. The constructions that the teachers drew on in the present study were also similar to those expressed by the Muslim boys in Archer's (2002) study where the boys referred to girls having limited choices and little freedom to make their own decisions.

However, I would suggest that there are some subtle differences in the constructions that nevertheless say something significant about broader discourses around Muslim parents and the community. The parents in Basit's study were positioned as restricting their daughters' life choices but also as being very ambitious for them and viewing education as an important source of social mobility. Whereas, in the present study, the majority of Muslim parents were positioned as being uninterested in education other than as a means to preserve their family reputation. In addition, in the Basit studies the teachers did not refer to the influence of the broader Muslim community whereas in this study the community was referred to frequently as a source of oppression through surveillance. Archer (2003) suggests that following a number of key events including the riots in Bradford (1995) and in Oldham and Bradford (2001) and 9/11, there has been a growing discourse of Islamaphobia in

Britain. This may in part account for some of the differences, although it is also possible that discourses around working class parents may also play a part.

A more concerning construction from the data in this study that has not been referred to in previous studies is the idea that aspirations are something that Muslim girls simply cannot have. In both Basit's and Archer's studies the teachers and Muslim boys respectively both implied that the girls certainly had aspirations, even if they were being tightly controlled. There was a contrasting construction in the teacher interviews where there was a suggestion that girls are unhappy with the restrictions placed upon them but this construction was less dominant.

As in the research of Archer (2002) the girls in the focus group emphasised their agency in decision-making. They also identified that their parents are supportive of them, although in the present study it was identified that girls do not always share their aspirations with their parents and that what parents want for their daughters may not always be what the girls want for themselves. The girls in Archer's focus group identified that they had more choice than their brothers (who were 'pushed harder'), but this was not the case in the present study, where boys were positioned as having more freedom than girls and the girls were positioned as being more responsible for family reputation than their brothers.

As in Ahmad's (2001) study, the girls in the focus group referred to the importance of being independent, although in Ahmad's study this was seen more as protection against possible racial discrimination or loss of family support rather than just for a sense of well-being. As in Ahmad's study, not to strive for higher qualifications was

inconceivable, although in the present study the idea of not getting married and having children was equally inconceivable. The girls in the focus group did not talk about education in relation to a potential marriage partner (as in Ahmad's study) but rather as a potential means of supporting themselves and a family. The girls in the present study also drew on less simplistic ideas about family 'role models', instead suggesting that different peoples' experiences can be used to help make decisions, rather than followed as an example.

The girls also referenced a lack of support or interest from teachers in their aspirations. This reflects the findings of Gillborn (1990) and Wright (1992) who found that South Asian girls received less attention from teachers than other pupils.

In summary, constructions identified in the teacher interviews in this study which did not appear in previous studies are around the following; the role of the community in observing and restricting girls choices and behaviour; the role of girls achievement and behaviour in preserving family pride; and the idea that Muslim girls are not able to have aspirations. However, the positioning of the girls as oppressed by culture and having restricted choices remained a feature. The constructions from the focus group which did not appear in previous studies are as follows; that teachers in school do not support the girls' aspirations; the importance of being able to support your family; the idea that a range of different peoples' experiences can be used to help to make decisions; and the idea that Muslim boys have more freedom, although the importance of education remained a feature.

### **6.3 The relevance of the study to the role of the EP**

I would suggest that discourse is central to almost every aspect of the EP role and EPs work within discourses every day, whether consulting with teachers, parents or pupils, reading letters or reports or writing letters, reports or records (Bozic, Leadbetter and Stringer, 1998). The way that the pupil or the 'problem' is constructed within these texts is crucial to the way the pupil is viewed and how the school chooses to move forward. I would argue that it is essential that we are able to actively listen/read to identify these discourses to establish;

- how the problem is being constructed and the implications of this
- how this may relate to wider discourses (around the groups the pupil belongs to for example)
- how the pupil is positioned
- what the teacher is gaining from drawing on these discourses
- what we think the implications may be for that pupils subjective experience
- whether there are more helpful alternative discourses which may help to make things better

and that by doing this it is possible for us to change things for the better through our use of language.

The focus on Muslim girls is relevant because of the need to be aware that there are specific groups where the discourses are particularly negative and damaging in the context of education. Previous studies (as well as this one) suggest that Muslim girls may be one of these groups. We need to be particularly wary of inadvertently supporting these constructions and ensuring that they remain 'taken-for-granted'

assumptions about Muslim girls. Previous studies by EPs using discourse analysis have investigated consultations around individual cases (e.g. Bozic and Leadbetter, 1999; Lewis and Miller, 2011), the present study has a broader focus and suggests that the awareness the EP has before going into a consultation of the potential discourses they may encounter is as important as what they do during the consultation.

Willig (1999) suggested that discourse analysis can be used by applied psychologists in three different ways;

- as empowerment – by identifying counter discourses which can be used to resist oppressive dominant discourses
- as a guide to reform – by making recommendations for changes in existing institutions
- as social critique – by exposing how language legitimates and perpetuates unequal power relations through publication

I would suggest that the position of the EP would allow us to potentially be involved in all three of these activities. Whilst the scope of the EP role may be somewhat smaller than Willig was anticipating, the EP should be able to introduce counter discourses through our consultative work with schools. We may also have opportunities through development work with schools to influence the extent to which they practice anti-oppressive practice. Finally, it may be possible for research using discourse analysis to be published in EP journals.

#### **6.4 Strengths and limitations**

Traditionally in psychology the quality of the research is evaluated in terms of its validity (whether the findings are actually about what they claim to be about, Robson 1992) and its reliability (whether the study would yield the same findings conducted on a different day with different participants). However, in qualitative research the focus is somewhat different, given that qualitative research does not assume that there is any one definitive answer to any question (Willig, 2008). Instead, the aim is to provide a clear presentation of analyses, grounded in the data, whilst being aware of the contextual and theoretical specificity of the research and the limitations this imposes on its relevance and applicability (*Ibid*).

Construct validity can be defined as whether your study “measures what you think it measures” (Robson, 1992, p.68). For example, at a basic level, research may be said to have face validity, that is, that the measures used seem reasonable to answer the research questions. Given that the interview and focus group provided relevant data that allowed me to address my research questions the research would appear to have good face validity.

Robson (1992) defines content validity as the ability of the study to provide a well-balanced sample of the content domain to be measured. A strength of the present study was that both teachers and Muslim girls were included as part of the sample, and the focus group data in particular was rich and detailed and allowed for the construction of a number of contrasting discourses. The presence of a female Muslim co-researcher in the focus group sought to overcome the difficulties associated with a

white, middle-class researcher conducting research with South Asian, working class girls. It was thought that without the presence of the co-researcher the girls may have felt unable to discuss their experiences freely with someone who they felt may have stereotypical views of them. Comments from the girls following the focus group suggest that this was the case. They commented that she had 'experienced' the same things as they had, that she would 'understand' and this made them more 'comfortable'. Aside from the ethical implications of ensuring that the girls did not feel uncomfortable in the focus group, this also suggests that the presence of the co-interviewer opened up the discussion into avenues that may not have been included otherwise.

Nevertheless, certain aspects of the research design and the sampling reduced the content validity of the study. For example, the initial sampling of the girls was purposive in that they were selected on the basis that they were Muslim and in year nine at secondary school, however, following this they were asked to volunteer for the study. This led to what appeared to be a group of friends taking part in the study, which may have restricted the discourses that were drawn on by the girls. The nature of a focus group may also have restricted the discursive constructions as there were clearly members of the group who were more dominant and led the discussion. A more diverse sample may have enabled richer data. In addition, following analysis, it was noted that Muslim parents, boys and the community were referred to frequently, therefore in order to investigate the constructions around Muslim girls' aspirations it would have been beneficial to include parents, boys and members of the community within the sample.

Whilst it was decided to interview the teachers individually to overcome the potential issue of some participants dominating the discussion, on reflection completing a focus group with the teachers may have led to richer data. One teacher who was interviewed who had less experience than other participants with Muslim girls, having recently moved to the school, drew on constructions that were different to the other participants. A focus group may have led to further discussion around these particular discourses and richer data. Again, volunteer sampling was used with the teacher sample, where purposive sampling may have led to a more diverse sample and therefore richer data.

Comparisons were made between the discursive constructions from the teacher and pupil data, however, it is important to note that the data were collected using different methods and so the different constructions that were identified may in part be due to the different methods used to elicit the data.

Ecological validity is the extent to which the findings reflect the setting where the research took place (Willig, 2008). An issue arises here with the fact that the language that was analysed did not occur naturally and so may not have been a reflection of naturally occurring talk. This difficulty could have been overcome by the use of an ethnographic approach, but time did not allow for this.

A potential difficulty with research of this kind, which involves focusing specifically on a particular group is that this group may become more marginalised and



problematised as a result of the research. This was a particular concern given that the accepted role of the EP in schools is of someone who supports pupils who are experiencing problems or difficulties. However, it seemed more important to expose potentially negative constructions through this method, rather than ignoring their existence, as it is impossible to challenge what we don't know exists. The study also sought to identify alternative, more positive constructions by ensuring that the Muslim girls themselves were given a voice within the research. It was also thought that taking a discursive approach sought to ensure that it was the constructions and not the girls who were problematised.

Dissemination of research using a discursive approach can prove challenging given that it can be difficult for participants to understand and see the value of the approach. However, it was thought to be important that the complexity of the findings was presented to the participants, and in the feedback it was emphasised that other interpretations of the data were possible. It was hoped that the presentation of the findings would encourage reflection but it was not the purpose of the research to actively challenge negative constructions within the school. It was not thought helpful to ask for the participants' feedback on the findings, as it was assumed that the findings were constructed from what took place during the interview and were not intended to reflect the stable views of the participants. Therefore it was assumed that the participants would say something different in response to the questions if they were interviewed on a different day in a different context.

### **6.5 Implications for practice and suggestions for future research**

I would suggest that the core implication for EP practice that has emerged as a result of this research is the importance of being aware of unhelpful discourses around Muslim girls' and their aspirations. Broadly, that it is essential that EPs are able to enrich their understanding of the complex social contexts in which they work, in order to identify and challenge potentially negative discourses. It is also crucial for EPs to take the role in schools of introducing more helpful alternative constructions to avoid restricting what can be experienced and done by Muslim girls in school. The focus group indicates that Muslim girls themselves draw on a range of interacting and contrasting constructions when talking about their aspirations that may be a useful source of alternative discourses to introduce to teachers. The contrast between the findings from the interviews and focus group also emphasises the importance of actively seeking the voice of the child in EP work as a way of identifying alternative discursive constructions.

The negative constructions that were identified around Muslim families and the community suggest that links between the family, community and school need to be improved if these negative discourses are not to remain unchallenged. Again, ensuring parents are actively involved in EP work (and that translators are available to support this if necessary) could help to support this aim, as well as systemic work to ensure parents are empowered to engage with school on a regular basis.

Given the focus on aspiration this research also suggests a role for EPs specifically around key transition points. A person-centered approach to year 9 transition has

been introduced in the authority in which the present study took place for young people with statements. A similar approach could be taken within all pupils to ensure their aspirations are acknowledged and they are supported to achieve them.

Future research should focus more specifically on the discourses used by Muslim parents when talking about their daughter's aspirations. The negative discourses around Muslim parents and the community suggests that research that investigates Muslim parent, boys and community members discourses around school and education in general may also be of value.

Similar research carried out in different settings may help to identify alternative constructions. For example, where fewer Muslim pupils are on roll, or at a school where Muslim pupils are achieving very highly. This may help to unpick constructions around Muslim parents and constructions around Muslim working class parents.

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## **Appendix 1: Pilot study letter to parents**

Dear Parent/Carer,

### ***Who am I, and what is my role in school?***

My name is Ruth Hewett and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist working at X School as part of X Educational Psychology Service. I am also completing my doctoral training at the University of Birmingham. Educational Psychologists work with schools and parents to try to improve outcomes for young people.

### ***Why am I writing to you?***

As part of my training I need to complete a project. For my project I am interested in investigating Muslim girls' aspirations (or future hopes and ambitions). As part of this project I am conducting a focus group of Muslim girls in year 9 at X School. I will be asking the girls about their aspirations and what they think will help them to achieve these aspirations. I will also be interviewing teachers to talk about their views on the aspirations of Muslim girls. The aims of the research is to find out about how teachers and Muslim girls talk about Muslim girls as a group and the unintentional consequences this may have for their experiences in secondary school.

Before carrying out my project I need to do a practice of my focus group (known as a pilot study) to check that the activities are easy for the girls to understand. I am going to ask your daughter if she would like to take part in this practice focus group but before I do this I need your consent. Your daughter has been identified by Miss W (deputy head) to take part. I have not been given access to confidential pupil records held at school.

### ***What will the focus group involve?***

I will be conducting the focus group with my colleague SA (Trainee Educational Psychologist) and audio recording it. I will be the only person who will listen to the tape so that the findings will be confidential. The only time that the girls' views will not be kept confidential is if we feel that a child may be in danger. In this case this will be reported to the schools child protection officer and information may need to be shared with outside agencies.

If your daughter later changes her mind about taking part she will be able to leave the group, although once she have contributed to the discussion it will not be possible to remove their contributions from the recording. The tape will be stored in a locked filing cabinet which only I will have access to in accordance with X Children's Services confidential file policy. It will be stored for ten years and then wiped. The findings will not be shared with staff at X School.

### ***What will my daughter be asked about?***

Your daughter will be asked to talk about what she would like to achieve in the future and what may help her to do this and what things may hinder her in achieving these goals. She will also be asked to give her feedback on the activities in the focus group and whether they were easy to understand.

If you have any questions about the focus group please do not hesitate to contact me either by telephone on \*\*\*\*\* or by email at [\\*\\*\\*\\*\\*](mailto:*****).

Please complete the attached consent form and return it to Miss W at school by Monday 18<sup>th</sup> June.

Yours truly,

Ruth Hewett  
**Trainee Educational Psychologist**

## **Appendix 2: Pilot consent form**

My name is .....

I would like to participate in the focus group that is being held on X to discuss my aspirations.

I have read the information sheet and understand that:

If I decide to, I can leave the focus group at any point	Yes/No
My views will be kept confidential unless I say anything that suggests I or someone else is at risk of harm	
I will be able to withdraw my views from the focus group for up to two weeks after the focus group has taken place (by Monday 2 <sup>nd</sup> July)	
My views will be recorded and kept in locked filing cabinet that only Ruth Hewett has access to.	

Signed .....

**Appendix 3: Pilot focus group questionnaire**

**Focus Group Feedback**

I found the consent form easy to understand

Strongly agree   Agree                      Don't know           Disagree                      Strongly disagree

*If it was difficult to understand how could we change it?*

.....

.....

.....

I found the information sheet easy to understand

*If it was difficult to understand how could we change it?*

.....

.....

.....

I felt comfortable doing the activities

Strongly agree   Agree                      Don't know           Disagree                      Strongly disagree

*If the activities made you feel a bit uncomfortable what do you think made you feel this way?*

*Could we do things differently to make you feel more comfortable?*

.....

.....

.....

The activities were easy to understand

Strongly agree   Agree                      Don't know           Disagree                      Strongly disagree

*If they were difficult to understand how could we change them?*

.....

.....

.....

I felt that I had enough opportunities to speak during the focus group

Strongly agree   Agree                      Don't know           Disagree                      Strongly disagree

*If you felt you didn't have enough opportunities to speak how do you think we could make this better?*

.....

.....

.....

Is there anything else we could change to make the focus group better?

.....

.....

.....

*Thank you for taking part!*

## **Appendix 4: Information for pupils**

### **Information Sheet**

Hello,

Our names are Ruth Hewett and SA. We are both Trainee Educational Psychologists. An Educational Psychologist is someone who works with schools and young people to try to improve outcomes for young people who are experiencing difficulties.

Ruth is conducting a research project looking at how teachers talk about Muslim girls' aspirations. Aspirations are your hopes and dreams for the future. As part of this project she felt it was important to also ask a group of Muslim girls about their aspirations. One of the reasons we are interested in Muslim girls as a group is that there have not been many other studies that have tried to find out about them.

To do this she decided to do a focus group. A focus group is a discussion between a group of people about a particular topic. The focus group for this study will involve doing some activities, hopefully these will be fun! SA will be supporting the activities during the focus group. It will last for around an hour and a half and will be recorded on a dictaphone. Only Ruth will have access to this recording and when she types up the results she will not be using any names so that no-one will be able to tell who said what. The only time when we would pass on information from the focus group to someone at school is if anyone said anything that suggested that they or someone else might be at risk of harm. We will be asking you not to discuss anything you hear in the focus group outside of the group. If anything you hear in the group worries you, then you can talk to Miss W.

We will be sharing the things you say with the teachers who are interviewed and Mr H and Miss W, they will not know who said what. We will also be sharing the things you say with the other Educational Psychologists who work in authority X. They will know that the focus group took place in your school but will not know who took part in the focus group.

Your parent or guardian will need to agree that you can take part in the focus group if you want. If you think you might be interested in taking part in this focus group then you will need to sign up and complete a consent form. If you decide after completing the form that you don't want to take part then you can say so and you will not be included. If you decide you want to leave halfway through the focus group this is fine too but we will not be able to remove your voice from the tape after the start of the group.

Places are limited in the focus group so it may not be possible for everyone to participate. This sheet is for you to keep but if you have any other questions please ask.

Ruth and SA

## **Appendix 5: Letter for parents**

29<sup>th</sup> May 2012

Dear Parent/Carer,

### ***Who am I, and what is my role in school?***

My name is Ruth Hewett and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist working at School X as part of X Educational Psychology Service. I am also completing my doctoral training at the University of Birmingham. Educational Psychologists work with schools and parents to try to improve outcomes for young people.

### ***Why am I writing to you?***

As part of my training I need to complete a project. For my project I am interested in investigating Muslim girls' aspirations (or future hopes and ambitions). As part of this project I am conducting a focus group of Muslim girls in year 9 at School X. I will be asking the girls about their aspirations and what they think will help them to achieve these aspirations. I will also be interviewing teachers to talk about their views on the aspirations of Muslim girls. The aims of the research is to find out about how teachers and Muslim girls talk about Muslim girls as a group and the unintentional consequences this may have for their experiences in secondary school. It is hoped that the findings will help Educational Psychologists when they are working with Muslim girls or talking to teachers about Muslim girls.

Your daughter has been identified by Miss W (deputy head) to take part. I have not been given access to confidential pupil records held at school. I have spoken to your daughter about the project and she has said she would like to take part but I need your consent in order for this to happen.

### ***What will the focus group involve?***

I will be conducting the focus group with my colleague SA (Trainee Educational Psychologist) and audio recording it. I will be the only person who will listen to the tape and the data will be stored on a password protected computer (in accordance with X Children's Services acceptable use of ICT policy) so that the data will be confidential. The only time that the girls' views will not be kept confidential is if we feel that a child may be at risk of any harm. In this case this will be reported to the school's child protection officer and information may need to be shared with outside agencies.

If your daughter later changes her mind about taking part she will be able to leave the group, although once she has contributed to the discussion it will not be possible to remove her contributions from the recording. The recording will be stored for ten years and then wiped. The findings will be shared with Miss W and Mr H and the teachers who take part in the interview but they will not know what individual girls have said. The findings will also be shared with X Educational Psychology Service who will also not know what individual girls have said or who took part.

***What will my daughter be asked about?***

Your daughter will be asked to talk about what she would like to achieve in the future and what may help her or hinder her in achieving these goals. She will also be asked to give her feedback on the activities in the focus group and whether they were easy to understand.

If you have any questions about the focus group please do not hesitate to contact me either by telephone on \*\*\*\*\* or by email at [\\*\\*\\*\\*\\*](mailto:*****). Alternatively you may wish to speak to Miss W at school.

Please complete the attached consent form and return it to Miss W at school by Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> June.

وہ مے تہ چا کرنا بات می اردو کو مہ من صوب اس تم اگر  
\*\*\*\*\*

Yours truly,

Ruth Hewett  
**Trainee Educational Psychologist**

.....

I ..... (name) give permission for my daughter

..... (name) to take part in the focus group on

**Friday 6<sup>th</sup> July.**

Signed ..... Date .....



## **Appendix 6: Consent for pupils**

My name is .....

I would like to participate in the focus group that is being held on X to discuss my aspirations.

I have read the information sheet and understand that:

If I decide to, I can leave the focus group at any point	Yes/No
My views will be kept confidential unless I say anything that suggests I or someone else is at risk of harm	
I will be able to ask that my contributions are not included in the transcript so long as I do so by ..... It will not be possible to remove my voice from the recording.	
My views will be recorded and kept in locked filing cabinet that only Ruth Hewett has access to.	
My views will be shared with Mr H, Miss W, the teachers who are interviewed and educational psychologists working in authority X	

Signed .....

## **Appendix 7: Feedback to girls**

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2013

Dear x,

I wanted to thank you again for taking part in the focus group last summer about your ambitions and your hopes for the future. I have spent a long time looking at the things you said and thinking about what this means and why it is important. Below is an overview of what I have decided. It is important to remember that this is just my ideas about what you said, and other people might have thought something different.

These are the things I thought about what you said about your ambitions;

- Achieving independence is very important
- Being successful at school in your exams is very important
- All girls will get married and have a family but this might be at different ages
- Your brothers have high expectations for the way you behave
- People expect different things from Muslim boys and Muslim girls
- Your parents want what is best for you
- Teachers are not supportive of your ambitions
- Looking at other peoples' experiences can help you to make decisions
- It is important to be able to support your family
- Ambitions are not always something you will talk to your parents about

I thought that overall you see yourselves as being responsible for your own choices but I thought you might not always feel you are able to ask for help with following your dreams at school. I also thought that there are lots of different things that you will be thinking about when you are making decisions, including what you want and what other people would like you to do.

I hope that this is interesting. If you have any questions about the findings from the focus group please speak to Ms W and I will come into school and try to answer your questions.

Best of luck for the future.

Ruth Hewett  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

## **Appendix 8**

### **Focus group plan**

#### **Warm-up activity**

What three things would they take with them as 'luxury' items if they were stranded on a desert Island? Facilitators to model

#### **Ground rules**

- One person speaks at a time and the others listen
- Confidentiality – we do not discuss what we talk about in this room with anyone else
- What if someone says something about something that may cause harm to them or others? Then this will have to be passed onto someone at school.
- Respect people's contributions – can disagree but not argue or laugh at what people say
- Can leave if you want but your contribution will still be recorded

#### **Activity**

- Ideal self at 16, 18 and 25 – post-its with ideas - discuss
- Real self in 16, 18 and 25 – post-its with ideas – discuss

#### **Prompts for discussion**

- What/who has influenced you in deciding what you want to achieve?
- What/who will help you to achieve this?
- What/who might be a barrier to you achieving this?
- What do you think your teachers would say if we asked them about your aspirations?
- Did SA being here make a difference to what you said or would you have said the same things if I was here on my own?

## **Appendix 9: teacher information sheet**

### **Information sheet**

- The interview will last for 30-45 minutes.
- During the interview you will be asked about;
  - Your experiences of working in schools
  - Your experiences of working with Muslim girlsThe interview will be unstructured and so the specific questions asked will depend on your particular experiences.
- The interview will be recorded using a Dictaphone, written notes may also be made. If you would like access to the transcript or any of the notes that have been taken you can contact me on the email address or telephone number below.
- Your name will not be included in the transcript, instead you will be identified by a code. Any pupil names given during the interview will not be recorded.
- You are welcome to withdraw from the interview at any time. You may also request to not have your data included in the final report as long as you do so within two weeks of the interview.
- The recording and notes will be kept in a locked cabinet that only I have access to. When the transcript has been written the tape will be wiped and the notes will be shredded. The transcript will be stored on the local authority network which is password protected.
- Following analysis you will be given an opportunity to see the findings from your interview and discuss them if you wish.
- In addition to talking to teachers and pupils about Muslim girls aspirations another aim of this study is to investigate whether a particular way of analysing data from interviews and focus groups is useful for work in schools. This method is called 'discourse analysis'. It involves looking very closely at the language people use and the unintentional consequences which using that language may have.
- The findings from this study will be reported and to the educational psychology team ..
  - The educational psychology team will be aware which school the study took place in but they will not know which teachers were interviewed.
  - The findings of the interviews will be reported back to Mr H and Miss W with whom the project has been agreed. Again, findings will not be attributed to individuals but will be reported back as a whole.

#### **Contact details:**

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Appendix 10: Teacher consent form**

I agree to taking part in the interview discussing Muslim girls' aspirations.

I give my consent for the data from the interview to be recorded and for a transcript to be written.

I understand that I will not be identified by name in the transcript.

Signed .....

Date .....

## **Appendix 11: Feedback to school**

### **Muslim Girls' Aspirations: Teacher and Pupil Discourses**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to investigate teacher and pupil discourses around Muslim girl's aspirations. A discourse is;

"a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on which produce a particular version of events" (Burr, 2003 p.64)

This means that the aim of the study was not to collate teacher or pupil attitudes as it was assumed that teachers and pupils say different things about Muslim girls' aspirations depending on the context (e.g. who they are talking to, the questions asked etc.). This means that sometimes people will say things that are contradictory but this is not viewed as a problem. Instead the focus was on what kinds of things teachers and pupils said on the day they were interviewed and the potential unintentional consequences that this may have for Muslim girls' experiences in school.

It is also important to note that the findings were constructed by the researcher and therefore are her ideas about what was said and should not be taken as 'truth'. Other interpretations of the data are possible.

#### **Focus group findings**

The discourses used by the girls were as follows;

- Becoming independent is the ultimate goal
- Making comparisons to the experiences of others helps to make decisions
- It is important to achieve academic success
- Parents 'want the best' for you
- It is important to be able to support your family
- Expectations are different for boys and girls
- Aspirations are not something that are shared with parents

- All girls will get married and have a family
- Brothers exert pressure on girls to behave a certain way
- Teachers are not supportive of aspirations

Possible implications:

- By positioning teachers and parents as uninterested the girls were able to justify not sharing their aspirations with them – this may help them to avoid potential discouragement.
- The girls may have been seeking to defend their parents from negative views of them by stating that they ‘want the best’ for them. Pressure from brothers may be used to justify decisions they make about dress and who they spend time with.
- The girls positioned themselves as being important figures within their family who are valued.
- The girls position themselves as being both central to their family and partly outside their family, but ultimately responsible for their own decisions.
- They contrasted themselves with parents and peers born in Pakistan, emphasising the differences in their behaviour and views.
- I thought that the implication of some of these discourses might be that the girls were reluctant to seek help and guidance at school, even when it is available.
- They also make certain choices less available to the girls (e.g. the choice not to get married, to pursue vocational courses) and imply that certain choices will make them more successful in life. They suggest that it is necessary to achieve very specific things. Girls who want something different may therefore feel quite isolated.

### **Teacher interviews**

The discourses used by the teachers were as follows;

- Aspirations (and behaviour) are influenced by surveillance by the community within and outside school
- Aspirations are restricted by parental expectations

- Aspirations are influenced by pressure to get married
- Aspirations are restricted to the domestic sphere
- Aspirations are determined by parental concerns with family pride
- Aspirations are not something Muslim girls are able to have
- Aspirations are in conflict with what is expected of them
- Girls seek to balance parental and cultural expectations with their own wishes

Possible implications:

- Muslim boys are positioned as being involved in the surveillance of the girls.
- Most Muslim parents are also positioned as having high expectations for behaviour but low expectations for academic achievement. However, these parents are contrasted with other (less common) parents who are more 'liberal' and more ambitious.
- Muslim girls were positioned as being very passive when it comes to decision-making, at most being able to compromise between their own wishes and the expectations for them. Some teachers positioned the girls as being unhappy with this and being 'caught between' the two different worlds of home and school. They were portrayed as a largely homogenous group.
- Teachers may feel limited in their ability to offer help and advice to Muslim girls – assuming that the influence of parents and the community is overwhelming for the girls. Their success may be seen as due to these factors rather than factors in school.
- Girls may feel less able to choose certain subjects and to express a desire to continue education beyond school. They may feel that school is unlikely to acknowledge their aspirations or support them in achieving their goals. They may experience receiving less attention from their teachers. More positively they may feel a desire to prove themselves.

### **Summary and conclusions**

One of the main differences between the findings from the focus group and the interviews was that the teachers positioned the girls as being very passive in terms of their aspirations, whereas the girls positioned themselves as actively seeking to



balance the different expectations on them but ultimately being in control of their own decisions. The girls drew on a greater range of different discourses in their talk and the discourses were more contradictory, whereas the teachers presented a more homogenous view of the girls as a group. The findings from the teachers' interviews reflect previous findings from previous research.

There are broader implications for the relationship between Muslim families and school and the way this is managed. There are also implications for the way Muslim girls are supported through key decision points, a person-centred approach (currently used with statemented pupils in year 9 throughout the authority) may be helpful to achieve this.

Overall it emphasises the importance of being aware of discourse, the potential implications of different discourses around Muslim girls and the need to consider whether alternative discourses may be a more helpful way of viewing this particular group.

## **Appendix 12: Example highlighted transcript**

### **Stage one of analysis:**

Transcripts were read and any references to Muslim girl's aspirations (implicit or explicit) were highlighted. Below is an example transcript.

#### **Transcript 1: Teacher A**

R – Ok, so as it said there, erm, we're going to start off quite general and get more specific and it might depend what you say what I ask next

TA – ok

R – so it should be quite natural, fingers crossed!

TA – ok [laughs]

R – so the first thing I would like to ask you is just could you tell me about your experiences of working in schools

TA – yeah erm..

R – very generally..

TA – I've been teaching for five years now, this is my second year teaching in schools I used to work in FE colleges erm, and it's, yeah, so this is my first school and I've been working here for two years

R – right

TA – yeah, um in terms of experience and the difference between FE and schools, it's obviously very enclosed so you get to kind of speak to your students ah, more on a personal level erm, compared to with FE where you've got like a 150 students to teach

R – yeah, yeah

TA - and I've only got 40 here so you get to know your students basically on a one-to-one. Erm being like um, head of year as well its er, we're getting like a lot of issues erm, ranging from erm, domestic violence, you know, arranged marriages er, you know, kids running away and stuff and its just been happening pretty much this year cos last year it was a different head of sixth form erm, and it was just, I think anybody was afraid to bring up their issues

R – oh right

TA – this year, it's been- there's been a lot of change, where, I don't know if we've opened a can of worms as to say, but it's, you know we've- we've- we've come across a lot of issues that we've had to deal with...

R – people are starting to raise them

TA – and you feel like a counselor rather than a teacher [laughs]

R – [laughs]

TA – at some points..

R – right, ok, well that might be interesting to pick up on later on..

TA – yeah

R – um, so, do pupils talk to you about their kind of hopes and dreams and aspirations for the future at all? Is that something they talk to you about?

TA – erm, I don't think they bring it up themselves it's more if we ask them. And because we are going through the UCAS process now, I think more so than ever um, but not umph, I mean they don't really bring it up themselves, I've never really come across- unless it's a keen student erm, in your own subject, that's you know, talked about you know, 'oh, I want to..', I mean I teach psychology, so 'yeah, I want to do psychology at university, I want to become a psychologist' and so on and you know, we have some aspirations there but... not really no

R – oh right, ok, interesting

TA – yeah, unless we ask

R – yeah, so you bring it up, and then they are happy to talk to you, but ..

TA – yeah, to a certain extent, I know with like, if we are going to refer to the Muslim girls, they would like to do certain things but certain cons- well, situations obviously home life kind of, prevent them from that so they almost kind of believe that its not possible

R – right

TA – and they just stop thinking that it's possible

R – oh right

TA - and they probably just don't, you know, aspire any further.. which is really sad

R – so what kind of things do you think make that happen for them?

TA – erm, that prevents them from..?

R – yeah

TA – erm, I think, I think a lot of it's to do with marriage, I mean it's really forced on- on the Muslim girls especially that they you know, should .. some of them shouldn't even be- apparently some Muslim girls were saying, that they shouldn't even be at school right now in sixth form

R – oh right

TA – erm, but some of them who do come to sixth form are seen as quite lucky but then there are some girls who won't go on to do university because that's the end for them and the- the- they're supposed to get married after they leave school. That's the marriage age, they've reached a certain age and so they shouldn't be going to university but we've got some, you know, other Muslim girls, who their parents are all into education and say 'right, you've got to go to university' and you see them applying for UCAS and stuff, so um yeah, we've had a couple of cases where er, one of my tutees actually, she left all of sudden, she was in year 13 last year of sixth form and she just left. We had no idea where she went..

R – oh gosh

TA – erm, which was really worrying and stuff and um, then we heard rumours that she'd gone to Pakistan.

R – right

TA – um, on holiday as such first, to attend somebody else's wedding , then we heard she actually got married herself

R – right

TA – and then she came back erm, she came to visit us actually she was all happy and we asked her 'are you sure you're happy?' and she was like 'yeah'. She goes- she goes 'I don't mind getting married, but I only had like, what, sixth months left of all my final year, and I really wanted to finish it', she goes 'I knew that I wouldn't get to university' but she goes 'if I had my A levels, I'd have a better chance in terms of a career or maybe a job or you know, something like that where I can support my husband because obviously he's not here' he's from Pakistan so obviously she has to bring him over here.

R – right

TA – but her parents were adamant that she got married then and there, because the opportunity was there

R – right

TA – because she was already attending somebody else's..

R – ok

TA - ..wedding. Which was quite sad.

R – yeah, so did she come back and finish at all..?

TA – sh- she- the school wouldn't allow her to finish because she had missed um, six months of education which was quite a lot

[interruption by member of staff, unclear whispering]

yeah, um just um yeah, so sh- sh- she did actually say that she wanted to finish because her husband was still in Pakistan so she still had time. Unfortunately, you know, the school, kind of, tried to understand her situation but because she had missed six months...

R – it's such a long time..

TA – there was no way unless she retook the year and she wasn't willing to do that so we kind of got her in contact with conexions and tried to if she- if we

R – oh right

TA - ..we could get her into college or something,

R – yeah

TA - that somewhere that would allow her and stuff so she can try and complete a year of education before her husband could come back. Erm, we haven't heard from her since and stuff, her cousin goes to this school and sometimes we ask she says 'yeah, she's fine' and stuff. So ...

R – see what happens..

TA – we don't know, yeah

R – mm, so what sort of things do they talk about wanting to do in an ideal situation? Do they ever say?

TA – um, a lot, it's kind of, it's varied at the moment, I mean if we are going back to specific students now because we are doing the UCAS, erm, a couple of the girls er, want to go into special educational needs cos her two sisters are actually erm, disabled erm, so she wants into that at university. We've got midwifery, we've got all the kind of.. and I don't know how to put it, this is not in a sexist way.. but a girly kind of job to do..

R – sort of caring, caring professions, yeah

TA – caring jobs, and I think that's only because maybe parents would only allow a certain extent, and that's an assumption, I don't know but

R – yeah but it might be..

TA – I've just- I've just come up with the fact that they're all trying to apply for caring kind of jobs

R – so you've noticed yeah

TA – like nursing. Yeah, um, there's a couple of girls who want to go into business and economics erm, again, Muslim girls, I mean the school – I mean the sixth form itself as I said I think there's about two or three Indian girls erm, and then you've got the rest being Muslim girls and then you've got obviously some white British girls as well. Um, but yeah predominantly, like the majority you know, are Muslim and..

R – yeah

TA – I would say fifty percent have got true aspirations because parents have backed them up to go to university. Whereas fifty percent I don't know

R – yeah

TA - they're still thinking of it and if they are allowed to go to university I think most of them are not allowed to go out of Birmingham

R – oh right, so they have to stay at home

TA – they have to stay at home, I think that's what we've found. I mean there's only been one or two who are looking for out of Birmingham and I don't know if that's with their parents consent, in a way like, or is it just that they are trying to get away from..

R – yeah

TA – .. home, so I don't know

R – yeah, you don't know

TA - .. I haven't spoken to them personally yet

R –mm, so we've talked a lot about parents, do you think that's where the pressure comes from?

TA – definitely

R – yeah

TA - I think, I don't think it's just parents as well I really do think it's the Muslim boys in our sixth form..

R – oh right

TA – who kind of put pressure of the girls the way they should behave, the way they should dress erm

R – yeah

TA - you know, for example we had a sixth form Christmas er, social, er at the hotel and um, some of the boys were putting some of the girls off by saying you know 'Muslim girls shouldn't be at the- at a hotel' um, even though we're not staying at the hotel, we just had it as a function room

R – yeah

TA - but yeah, they- they I think there's a lot of actually Muslim girls who are quite modern in a sense and then actually started dating a Muslim boy from the sixth form

R – right

TA – this is just an example, erm, she the next day headscarf and everything, she wasn't wearing a headscarf first and I was a bit concerned and I said to her you know, you know 'how come you're wearing a headscarf?' she goes 'oh miss, you know I've been thinking about it for ages and I think this is the time for me to do it'. She goes 'when we reach a certain age, you know, once we make that commitment we've got to stick to it'

R – yeah

TA – but I- I- I- saw another couple exactly the same situation, as soon as they got together, she started wearing a headscarf.

R – right

TA – so to be honest I think it's a combination of parents and I think it's- family because there's a lot of family in the sixth form

R – yeah

TA - you know a lot of cousins that attend the same school so I mean if they do certain things it will go back to their parents

R – right, yeah, yeah

TA – and a lot of the boys you know, will do that, th- th- th- even if they're not related they live um, in a community

R – yeah

TA - and everyone knows each other in the community so regardless of if you're- if you're related or not word always gets back about the behaviour of the girls erm, which is really sad and I think they feel very pressured to behave in a certain way erm, even at school they feel that their parents know what's going on.

R – yeah, yeah

TA – yeah, so I think it's a combination of parents and the community.

R – right, how do you think the girls feel about that or..? Are you aware how they might feel?

TA – er, I mean some of the girls [pause] it's really weird because, when I- I did ask the girl about the headscarf and the fact that she'd changed I said 'did you do it because of, you know, your boyfriend' and she was just like 'yeah, in a way' and I said 'well, how do you feel about that?' and she goes 'well, I don't mind because I was going to wear one anyway and it's just come quicker'. Now, I don't know if she's entirely telling the truth because you know, she wants to, you know er, support her boyfriend

R – yeah

TA - or doesn't want her boyfriend to look bad erm, and also with some of the girls they just, I don't know. It's a good question I mean I haven't really looked into it much really, I haven't really- I've asked them on a number of occasions, especially when it was the sixth form Christmas social. We asked them you know, what can we do to help? And they said 'can you write a letter home..'

R – oh right

TA – can you, can you r- r- ing up personally

R – yeah

TA - and say you know, members of staff are gonna be there, you know, there's not gonna be any alcohol, you know, you know, just to assure our parents, because the girls really wanted to go

R – yeah

TA – they're not allowed to go out anywhere you know



R – yeah

TA – um, it's really difficult for them to step out of the house and socialize

R – yeah

TA - so this was the first time really they could socialize, out of school, with their friends. So you know, a lot of students, especially the girls, were telling us to ring up and we did it quite happily, you know, we understand their situation. But again some of the girls were saying 'well, we don't want to go because you know, um, thingys gonna be there and blah-de-blahs gonna be there' in terms of their cousins

R – oh right

TA – male cousins

R – yeah

TA – or male, you know, students from the school. Cos they just they wouldn't have a good time, they wouldn't want to dance

R – oh right

TA - they even asked for a screen at one point

R – oh gosh

TA – [?] and obviously we couldn't provide that, it was getting a bit too much and we had to think about obviously our non-Muslim students as well

R - yeah, yeah

TA – so it was just really difficult but we got there in the end and a lot actually did turn up and it was quite successful. Only because we had to ring home and just make sure, but there were some Muslim parents, and they wouldn't tell us straight away, the students would just say 'oh, it's because of our parents' and they would make up so many excuses at first they'd go 'oh, I've got a family event this day' oh no, but I've got this, I've got this, and then make excuses. But you can hear them with their friends and saying, 'I can't go, I can't go because my mum won't let me go'

R – yeah

TA – and it was really sad that they had to make so many excuses

R – yeah

TA - but obviously, you know, I know it's Muslim orientated but there are other students who are not Muslim

R – yeah

TA - so for them, they felt, well, you know, we are going to be looked at in a different light if we can't go because our parents say we can't go.

R – right

TA – so

R – so this was the situation where what they really wanted and what was actually going to happen were quite...

TA – different yeah

R - ..different. There was kind of a conflict

TA – yeah, definitely, yeah

R – a little bit. Erm [pause] so [pause] I wonder if your expectations of what working with girls, with Muslim girls, would have been like, before you came into teaching, whether what actually happened was different? Or whether it was what you expected?

TA – when I- when I came into this school erm, I wasn't told it was- I don't really know this area very well

R - mm, mm

TA – um, I didn't know it was Muslim orientated and I never had- I knew from when I was at university myself, I had a couple of Muslim friends but they'd got to uni so I'd always thought right, you know, 'they're here at uni'

R – yeah

TA – don't think anything of it.

R – yeah

TA - I mean, I've got my own kind of, stereotypical view about certain Muslim girls that you hear in the community and things like that, that they're not allowed to do certain things erm, but in terms of education I never thought it to be a big conflict that they've got to deal with

R – yeah

TA - on an everyday basis. Um, like I said I had friends who were Muslim and went to university, and were fine in terms of education and just socializing

R – yeah

TA – and being independent. When I came here whoah, my eyes opened! [laughs]  
Seriously, I was just..

R [laughs]

TA – Oh my god, I- I actually thought I'd been transported back like, a hundred years

R – oh goodness

TA - I really thought that- that their community hadn't moved with everybody else in time. I thought they were really, um you know, really back with the times.

R – yeah

TA - And it was just really difficult to comprehend, because at the beginning it was quite emotional for me to think 'oh god, they can't do this, they can't do this'

R – yeah, yeah

TA – and I almost felt like some students couldn't be bothered then, in their subjects because

R – oh right

TA – they felt that, 'well, what's the point?' you know, 'I'm not going to be allowed to do anything with it'

R – yeah

TA - I'm going to get married off, I might not be allowed to work

R – yeah

TA - I might not be able to go to university, what's the point?'

R – yeah

TA – and we've had some students not directly say 'what's the point' but I mean

R – yeah

TA - through their behaviour and effort and because of you know, the lack of support at home, it it- came through- through their studies and stuff

R – oh right

TA – yeah, I think there's been, what my expectations were and what actually happened in reality were two completely different things, yes.

R – wow, yes

TA – um, you had some- some idea that some Muslim girls might not be able to do certain things but it- it just seems to be the majority in this school

R – mm, mm

TA - I mean in the sixth form, I don't teach lower years but obviously you know, they've got siblings in lower years and they're all Muslim orientated again

R – yeah

TA - so it's- it's completely different, I've never- I've never taught – I've always taught in a- in a mixed

R – yeah

TA – um, environment

R – yeah

TA – so there was never any other issues

R – yeah

TA – that arose when I was working in FE.

R – yeah

TA - Where, coming straight to work here

R – yeah

TA – it's a- it's an everyday thing. We've got- I don't know, it's a really horrible way of saying it but we've got used to it, we've got used to erm, certain expectations from the Muslim girls

R – yeah

TA - and you know, their parents and stuff. You know, we've had a couple of parents come in, and you know, a couple of girls who are just literally off the rails in terms of you know, attendance, punctuality, handing work in late, can't be bothered, you know, rude to members of staff and the parents have come in

R – mm

TA – and it was really weird! And you think right, they just can't be bothered

R – right, they just..

TA – and the- the parents don't care. And we thought it's because we've made our own assumption, it's because they don't want them to be in education in the first place.

R – right

TA - You know, they're getting the vibe off their parents that if- if the parents don't care then why should they care

R – yeah

TA – but then we've got some girls who are completely different

R – yeah

TA - who are Muslim, who are saying 'well, my parents don't care but I do'

R – oh right

TA – 'and I- and I- and I- wanna be different from my parents and stuff

R – yeah

TA - and I wanna have an education, I don't wanna be like my parents'

R – yeah

TA – ah [laughs] but those are very few, few Muslims

TA - few Muslims

R – what do you think makes the difference for those girls? Have you got any ideas what it might be?

TA – erm [pause] I don't know, I mean it could be down to personality

R – yeah

TA - I mean it could be the way they have been raised. That, you know, their parents haven't been directly telling them that they can't do education.

R – yeah

TA - But through their body language and the way that they just aren't interested in their education, because they might have other plans for them.

R – yeah

TA -Erm, I don't actually know, I think that's really interesting I mean, I would like to kind of find out that for myself actually

R – yeah

TA – it would be really interesting to know, you know, why is it some students Muslim girls, are- you know, have these certain aspirations

R – yeah

TA - and why others don't. and I really do think it's to do with family life

R – yeah

TA - and I think it's to do with parents

R – yeah

TA - erm, I don't know, because then we've got some girls who don't wear headscarfs and some girls that do and I always want to know, is it a personal choice

R – yeah

TA – is it that your family has insisted that you should do now

R – yeah

TA - and I think all these things just- just obviously lead- lead to the effort that they make in their education

R - yeah, yeah

TA – I really do think so but erm, but, I don't know, I don't actually know

R – yeah, it's a difficult one

TA – yeah

R – so do you notice, did you notice any difference, cos did you work with Muslim girls in FE as well?

TA – erm, I did come across one Muslim girl that sticks to mind er, erm

R – yeah

TA - and I found it very difficult to deal with because it was the first er, issue in terms of child protection that I'd had to deal with

R – oh right

TA – um and it happened to be a Muslim girl. Er, and it was about how she was dating this lad and her cousin had found out, male cousin, erm, and he was threatening her and her boyfriend er, to a certain point where he would wait outside of college

R – oh right

TA -and we had to get the police involved

R – oh gosh

TA- and I had to take her down. Er, unfortunately she disappeared..

R – oh right

TA – yeah, we didn't know where she went, they'd been searching and you know, a lot of rumours say that she went to Pakistan. So, even her dad and her uncle were threatening her and I think she might have just been even, it's horrible to say, kidnapped or maybe taken quietly to Pakistan.

R – oh right

TA - so we never heard from her then.

R – yeah

TA –But that was an extreme issue where we just put it to the side as it's a rare case, and that's it. I never really associated it with like all Muslim girls

R – no

TA - would have to go through this

R – no

TA – I did- I did know about obviously forced marriages, I do know about arranged marriages, I know about you know, how certain Muslim girls are not allowed to do certain things, but her case was very extreme for me to kind of really generalize..

R – yeah, yeah

TA – all Muslim girls to be that way. But that was my only prior experience before I attended this school

R - yeah, yeah

TA – yeah

R – ok, erm, ley me think [pause] so how do you think they might compare to other girls from other- other ethnicities or other religions? That kind of thing..

TA – yeah

R – who are a similar age and in a similar situation

TA – yeah. Erm, well, I myself um, I'm Indian, British Indian, I've never been brought up that way erm, and I've got er- we've got a couple of er, British Indian girls here as well. One's, both of them are Sikh, very modern girls, [laughs] wear short skirts, whatever, just like no comparison to say like white British girls

R – yeah

TA - quite independent

R – yeah

TA - you know, don't have to answer to parents. Erm, can meet boys, go to parties

R – yeah

TA - not a problem. Erm, in terms of educationally again a huge difference, we've got one student who is definitely moving away from Birmingham

R – yeah

TA - with her parents support, want her to move out 'go, go, go!

R – yeah

TA - Experience the world!'. Erm, and you know, completely different and I know we've got one Sikh girl who I don't if she- because she lives around this area in terms of community erm, she in a way is very modern to a certain extent erm, you know, is really quite- she was dating a Muslim boy

R - oh right

TA – and her parents, well, she told her parents and we advised her not to tell her parents unless it was serious or if she was in danger or anything like that because I



think we took on a role as from her mothers point of view and her fathers point of view not being the same religion and we just thought your parents are not going to accept that – you might actually put yourself in danger you know, your dad might actually attack this young lad or whatever you know, we just thought this is too- its just going to blow up and we advised her not to tell but she did anyway. Her parents stopped speaking to her completely, they didn't disown her, they didn't kick her out of the house or anything but they stopped speaking to her erm, and they said they never, never, never will accept it erm, she tried to commit suicide in school

R – mm

TA – [sigh] and then we had to take her to hospital, um, not myself but another member of staff had to go and she had to come back and she had to have social care and the like

R – so this was a Sikh girl and a Muslim boy

TA – a Sikh girl and a Muslim boy

R – right

TA – and er, she erm, she's told her parents she is not with him and stuff. Her parents are, it's a weird relationship she says now, its not the same, they do speak to me but as the same as it was before. Er, but she's still dating this Muslim boy you know, she she- hides in the school room and stuff. She's started to actually truant her lessons now which is becoming a major concern, we haven't got long left but he is in year 11, she's in year 12 but he is coming into sixth form

R – right

TA – so we're gonna be- I mean she is 16 we can't do anything if she wants to date this boy she's gonna- you know, she's gonna do her own thing and we can't obviously just ring- pick up the phone and say look you know, cos she's not in any danger

R – yeah

TA – you know, the boy is a lovely boy, you know

R – yeah

TA - he actually cares for her and stuff, she's young, um, she'll get over it and you know

R – yeah

TA - go to university and we all think that way but in her eyes it's like

R – yeah

TA - 'no, he's the love of my life, I want to be with him, I don't really care, when it comes to my parents, I'll deal with it'. So she's done that. So, but she lives in this area, but then I think that's making another generalization the other Sikh girl who's very independent and allowed to do what she wants again lives in this area as well

R – right

TA – so it's- there's not many Indian girls, and in terms of white girls you know, they are just independent, allowed to do what they want, um not an issue-have, um, bigger aspirations for university because you know, they are allowed to go

R – yeah

TA - to university, and they're allowed to go off, out of Birmingham and stuff.

R – yeah

TA - Saying that, there's quite a few who are actually willing- who just want to stay at home

R - well yeah

TA – and I think they've just been put up, you know, wrapped around in cotton wool and they want to stay with their mum and dad which is fine

R – yeah

TA - but um, but I don't think it's to do with any- any religious or cultural

R – yeah, yes, it's just what they want..

TA – yeah, I think it's just an individual thing but yeah, most of them are more aspirational. We've got one girl actually, she's from Pakistan but she's Christian

R – oh right

TA – very modern girl. And because we've come to the conclusion, me and another colleague, is that because she is Christian erm, she is a different religion, she's not Muslim, she's independent. It's because of the fact that she's actually- she is from Pakistan um, but she's a Christian but people say it's culture, not religion

R – yeah

TA - erm, but then her case is different cos she's- she's from the same culture

R – yeah

TA - but she is a different religion

R – yeah

TA - and she's very modern, she goes on all these trips that we organise, she's very asp- she's a very intelligent student, and she went to Poland recently on a school trip but some Muslim girls wouldn't be allowed to go abroad on holiday, I mean, on trips and stuff. So..

R – do you think- do you think they want to? Do you think, are you aware?

TA – definitely, yeah

R – yeah

TA - definitely, they would like to. And I can see it in their eyes, I can see it in their face, you know, they really want to do, they get excited and then they get kicked back down again. Because they know that they can't

R – yeah

TA - and some of them won't even ask because they know the answer to it. So in a way they know what's coming, so there's no point in them putting themselves

R – yeah

TA- into a difficult position with their parents

R – yeah

TA - which is really, really sad, and I do feel for them. I do sometimes think, you know, we always have to change things for them, in a way

R – yeah

TA – like I feel like ok, we'll do a trip to London or something

R – yeah

TA -instead of abroad because most of the class is Muslim

R – yeah, so you want to be able to..

TA – but then you've students who are like 'oh no, no, we wanna go abroad' and stuff so you're kind of stuck in the middle

R – yeah

TA – in a way, because you wanna please everyone and you can't

R – yeah, yeah

TA – but it is- is it is sad sometimes when you want to do certain things, for example, erm, we've got a trip to drayton manor.. sorry, my hayfever [laughs]

R [laughs]

TA – we've got a trip to drayton manor and it falls near Ramadhan

R – oh right

TA – so the problem is, we, a couple of weeks ago we had an issue whereby they didn't know the dates for Ramadhan and apparently it changes from one Mus- sorry, one mosque to another

R – oh right

TA - depending on where they live in the area. Some of them were saying it was before the nineteenth, some of them were saying after. Erm, we got a bit confused as to what shall we do, cos we'd already booked it for the nineteenth. We're not allowed to take students away on a trip especially if they are, you know, fasting.

R – yeah

TA – you know, obviously, it might be quite warm, no water

R – yeah

TA - but also it would just be a hazard to do so we just decided not to take anyone who is fasting. Well, they are not sure when the date is, so it's all up in the air at the moment and the girls really wanna go, they really wanna go. Um, so we got a couple of the boys to ring up the mosques and find out because we were hearing it like hearsay, people were telling each other

R - different days, yeah

TA - different things and we were hearing different rumours and gossip, we didn't know. So, we got them to ring up and it actually fell between the twentieth and twenty-second

R – right

TA - so we actually managed to get away with that one

R – oh right

TA – and take them and stuff but again it was- it was like, you know, the girls were really um, really, really just wanted to go and they were running around going, 'what's the date? What's the date?' they were really excited, they just really wanted to go.

R – yeah

TA - And it was really like, oh no, not again

R – yeah

TA - there's something, another issue, that's going to prevent them from doing what they want to do but in the end we- it was a good result because we were like, right ok, that is the date we are going to stick by it. If you are coming [laughs] then just make sure you are not fasting that day.

R – yeah

TA – but yeah

R - yeah

TA- that was hard work

R – yeah

TA – cos we'd booked, that was the only day we could do, we couldn't even shift it because the last day is the activity week, it's the last week is the activity week and that's the only week we could do it. On the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth I'm away personally on a trip um

R – yeah

TA - to Aberystwyth

R – yeah

TA - with twenty kids from here. Which again, oh, the girls just wanna go, they want to go but some of them won't go because some of the boys are going that they know in the family

R – oh right

TA – and it was really strange because, the girls that wear their headscarfs when they to- go away, when I took them last year actually they took their headscarfs off

R – oh right, was that when there were no boys?

TA – no, some of the boys were present.

R – oh right

TA - But it depended which boys went

R – who- who it was

TA – if they knew the boys and they knew their families, they wouldn't do.

R – right

TA - If it was people that, you know, people not living in their community they would do this

R – they would be ok

TA – then I thought, why- obviously they've been, in a way, pressurised to wear this scarf then

R – mm, mm

TA- because if they're- they're taking it off in front of another male

R – yeah

TA – because it's supposed to be in front of any male that they're not suppose-

R - yeah

TA – so I don't know, I just thought oh wow, ok. I never really questioned them actually

R – mm

TA – about it, but yeah, that was quite interesting

R – yeah, so you were sort of a bit concerned about why they were wearing them in the first place

TA – yeah, and then I kind of just, I mean I don't- it would be interesting, it would be quite interesting to speak to um, another member of staff that's Muslim themselves

R – yeah

TA – a female member of staff

R – yeah

TA – and find out why it is. But I think it really is down to each family

R - yeah, yeah

TA – I really think it is

R – yeah

TA – because if it was purely a religious thing where, every, say each Muslim was religious in this community then all girls would wear the headscarfs, regardless, so I really do just think it's down to individual families and the way they've been brought up I suppose.

R – yeah, yeah

TA – I haven't had any girls- I know when I used to work in FE there was one girl that stood out, she was Muslim and she used to er, she used to wear a headscarf [laughs] and then when she used to get into college she used to take it off

R – oh right, another case like that, that's interesting

TA – yeah, I've never had anything like that here

R – yeah

TA - I genuinely think that, they have no way of getting away with it

R – yeah

TA - because of the people

R – again

TA - that are at college

R – yeah

TA – especially the Muslim boys. That word would get back, and everyone knows each other. And it's actually quite sad, because there was a couple, there's two couples, that roam around er, the school, they're a sixth form couple, Muslims. And you had some really strict Muslim girls saying 'oh, they shouldn't do that' and you now, you know, was really being quite judgmental. She would come up and say to us 'oh, they're roaming around' and I said 'well what's wrong with that?' she was almost looking for us to turn around and tell them off.

R - yeah

TA – and it was just like, well, they're not doing anything wrong in our eyes, they're not in any danger

R – yeah

TA - [laughs] they're boyfriend and girlfriend. But in her eyes, no, Muslims are not allowed to do that

R - yeah, so relationships are a common issue

TA - yeah

R – with Muslim girls?

TA – relationships are not obvious at first, even though they think it's not obvious, it's so obvious . um, but they wouldn't class- if I said 'oh, are you guys dating?' 'no, no'

R – [laughs]

TA – but they obviously are and it's very, very obvious, but they don't realize they are making it so obvious. There are quite a few Muslim relationships

R – oh right

TA – but very, very, er, as soon as they are outside the school

R – yeah

TA - they don't walk together or anything or-

R – so do they see it as a long term relationship do you think or is it..?

TA – yeah, more so than a temporary thing I think, if they get into something, they always think that they should get married to each other.

R – right, yeah, yeah

TA – I don't think they- the-the- doing it- I mean at first it's infatuation and they're attracted to each other

R – yeah, yeah

TA – and they get together and stuff and then I almost think that they get serious very quickly as well

R – right, yeah



TA – almost to the point where, yeah, we're going to be together after this you know, they start planning um, their future together in terms of which university

R – yeah

TA - if they are going to university and such, erm, but yeah, definitely

R – yeah

TA - I would say so, they get very serious quickly. It's not kind of, you know, a bit of a fling or you know, or a temporary thing

R – like in contrast to maybe other students?

TA – yeah, definitely, I mean like, we've- um, we've got a couple of relationships in the sixth form and they've been together for ages so we can't really compare, I don't think there's any relationships that may have started. I know one about in year 13, again, white British lad, white British girl going out together, didn't work out, [laughs] and they can't stand each other

R – [laughs]

TA – and they don't- they just- well actually they are both coming on the trip but they don't know that both sides are-

R – oh gosh, so that's going to be interesting

TA – and we were like oh, should we tell them, should we tell them? Nah, leave it

R – yeah, just see what happens!

TA – yeah, so, it's all a laugh with them, it's almost like er- they'll get over it, it's what normally happens, but for Muslim girls and boys it always feels like if you ever get in a relationship it's going to be something serious, almost to the point where, you know, I've gotta make sure you're the right one because I'm going to take you home to my parents

R – yeah

TA - and we're going to get married

R – yeah

TA – yeah, so I don't think- and they're very possessive the boys, Muslim boys are

R – oh right

TA- and I think to a certain extent that's why the girls wear the headscarfs where they didn't used to. I think that the Muslim boys have instructed them to

R - right

TA – even then they turn round and say 'no, no, no, no, no' it's their choice. You just don't know what's said do you?

R - no

TA – you don't know what's said behind closed doors so

R – no, no

TA – so you just make up these assumptions

R – no, yeah. Ok, right

END

## **Appendix 13: Analysis identifying discourses**

### **Stage two of analysis for teacher interviews**

After highlighting the references to Muslim girls aspirations, discourses in these sections were identified. Quotes relevant to these discourses were identified and the discourses were briefly described.

#### 1) Restricted by community pressure

‘the word would get back’ (TA)

‘everybody knows each other’ (TA)

‘the community put pressure on the family’ (TC)

‘the older generation.. they spy on people and talk about people. It’s the same thing but using tech- other means, isn’t it?’ (TE)

‘they [other kids] didn’t like the match so they were qui- they were quite nasty about it, calling her a slag. Erm, telling her younger brother ‘your sister’s a slag’ (TE)

‘and you had some really strict Muslim girls saying ‘oh, they shouldn’t do that’’ (TA)

‘they want to be able to go out when they want, with who, without feeling that their whole community might be watching them’ (TE)

- Pressure from wider family, community and other young people at school (particularly boys).
- The idea of ‘surveillance’ of their behaviour
- Particularly around relationships

#### 2) Restricted by parental pressure and expectations

‘there’s more chance of the Asian girls having more pressure on them to- to perhaps not go to university or to leave education at a younger age and for their parents not necessarily to encourage them- and certainly not to encourage them to move away to go to university’ (TE)

‘a lot of them [the Muslim girls I teach] perhaps have got the most liberal of the parents because it’s like, ‘ok yes, do A levels, go to university’ (TE)

‘I would say fifty percent have got true aspirations because parents have backed them up to go to university... and if they are allowed to go to university I think most of them are not allowed to go out of Birmingham’ (TA)

'I have a lot of girls who talk to me about the fact that their parents won't allow them to pursue their education, or the fact that their parents won't allow them to have, you know, a relationship' (TB)

'but I've another girl who has been, who- whose parents found out that she was seeing somebody in school, erm and they threatened to take her back home and get her married' (TB)

'and the parents don't care. And we thought- it's because we've made our own assumption- it's because they don't want them to be in education in the first place' (TA)

'when the parents are educated themselves, I think they're happy for their children to follow their education and where the parents are not educated themselves or- it's a lot of parents where at least one parent has come from abroad... those are the parents that tend to have issues' (TB)

'I really do think it's to do with family life.. and I think it's to do with parents' (TB)

'I think it was in April her parents stopped her from coming to school' (TB)

'a lot of girls have told me that their parents won't allow them to go to college so they have to finish their education at school and then, that's it, soon after that, you know, the parents will look for somebody to get married- to get them married to, which is obviously quite sad' (TB)

'but then there are some girls who are completely different... who are Muslim, who are saying 'well, my parents don't care but I do' (TA)

- Parents not allowing girls to pursue education/not valuing education
- Difference between traditional and more 'liberal' parents
- Parental preoccupation with marriage
- Parents wishing for girls to remain at home
- Control over relationships

### 3) Limited to professions deemed 'suitable' by family and community

'I think it's a safe bet working with children.. working in nurseries, you know, they feel they can get a job close to home, they don't have to go to university to get qualifications, that's what I think it is.. I think if- if- if those girls knew that their parents were happy for them to go to college or university, they may have other ambitions or other ideas' (TC)

'...caring jobs, and I think that's only because maybe parents would only allow a certain extent, and that's an assumption I know but..' (TA)

'um, textiles, again I'm being dead stereotypical, b- because they can .. you know, and it's ok to do the sewing at home so if they take their work home to do it's ok' (TC)

- 'caring' jobs identified as acceptable or jobs which may provide useful domestic skills

#### 4) Controlled by expectations around marriage

'expectations for them to marry, and marry well' (TD)

'there are some girls who won't go on to university because that's the end for them and the- the- they're supposed to get married after they leave school' (TA)

'I think a lot of it's to do with marriage, I mean it's really forced on- on the Muslim girls' (TA)

'they're like 'well lot's more of it [forced marriage] goes on than you think, and I'm like 'ooh, what do you mean?' and they said 'well, it's not really forced, but you don't have a choice' (TC)

'It [a letter written to a teacher] was kind of like, you know, 'I'm fat and ugly and I'm going to end up married to someone who doesn't love me'' (TE)

'but her parents were adamant that she got married then and there, because the opportunity was there' (TA)

'TD – I think the reasons for the girls [to choose particular subjects] would be to make sure [pause] and this is just my own understanding

R – yeah

TD - I get the impression it's more so to make them well educated

R – yep

TD – but not so educated that they may become a threat to a male potential spouse'

- Girls are expected to marry by community and parents

#### 5) Confined to the domestic sphere

'they are home doing the cooking so things that we take for granted would be a luxury for many of the girls' (TC)

'um, a lot of the girls, not a lot but of the girls I've got some understanding of, they tend to have a lot if responsibilities within the home' (TD)

'because for most of our girls, when they go home, they go home, and that's their life. They don't have the opportunity to go out and socialise unless it's a family situation or a wedding' (TC)

'yeah, definitely there's that expectation on them I think to be very rooted in the home and the community, even if they are going to go to university, it's something that they

do in the day and then they go back home and play that kind of fairly domesticated role in the family' (TE)

'I would argue that they are more likely to- to be raised with ideas about what is traditional or stereotypically what a woman does, they are- you know they are nurtured to believe 'well, this is what a woman's role in a family is', you know, 'we do the domestic chores and duties' (TE)

'and giving them that role. This is- this is what you'll do, you know, you'll care' (TE)

- Girls have and will continue to have responsibilities within the home

#### 6) Linked to family pride

TC - they [parents] want them to be good daughters.. they want them to behave, they want them to be respectful, they want them to achieve

R - yeah

TC - because I- I- again this is just my views I'm putting on them, I don't know if it's true, because that reflects well on them if their daughter's have achieved at school'

R - yeah, yeah

TC - but they don't want them to achieve to further their education [pause]

R - they want them to achieve just to..?'

TC - as a badge of honour really'

'it will influence their- some of their dating and things cos they have to think, when they have to bring that person home to their parents, their parents are going to look at that boy and think 'what caste is he?' (TE)

'so you don't want the kid who's letting your family down in your community' (TC)

'I think it's a lot to do with the fact that the girl might get involved with boys or she might bring shame on the family' (TB)

- Decisions are made based on protecting family pride
- Achievement is important in so far as it reflects well on the family

#### 7) Are a personal choice but from a limited range of options

'they don't always see it as necessarily entirely realistic but they do want them and they do hope for some of these things' (TE)

'yes, I think the girls are more limited in their choices and that's what they are trying to explore' (TB)

'I think for the girls it might be that they can still have a career but only types of-' (TD)

'they talk more- I guess in some ways it's about limit- needing to remain respectful of the cultural expectations' (TD)

- Choices are limited

#### 8) Not something Muslim girls can have

'they- they pretty much know that if they are allowed to finish sixth form, and that's an if, nine times out of ten they're allowed to do year twelve and normally then, if they wear a scarf- but they know, if they manage to get to the end of year thirteen the chances of further study are really remote' (TC)

'they don't- they don't tend to project too far, because they know what the outcomes going to be so there's no point having these dreams and aspirations' (TC)

'my experience is that they [pause] ahh, feel that they're very, erm, they're held back, erm, I feel that they feel that they're not allowed to sort of have ambitions, erm, because of their culture' (TB)

"I feel they're not ambitious and that they feel held back' (TB)

'I think the differences are, the family aren't preventing the white girls going, the aspirations are preventing them, whereas I think for the Muslim girls, the culture and the community prevent them from going rather than the aspiration' (TC)

'TA – and I almost felt like some students couldn't be bothered then, in their subjects because..

R- oh right

TA - .. they felt that, 'well, what's the point?' you know, 'I'm not going to be allowed to do anything with it'

'R – yeah, so do you think they want to fit in in terms of [pause] what they want to achieve in school and after school as well, or do you think that's not something they think about?

TC – I don't think it's something that they consciously acknowledge, because I think they know where the boundary is

R - right, yeah

TC – so they can go along with the norm at school and the norm in- in school life

R – yep

TC – but beyond that what is there?'

'if we are going to refer to the Muslim girls, they would like to do certain things but certain cons- well, situations obviously, home life kind of, prevent them from that, so they almost kind of believe it's not possible' (TA)

- Beyond school their lives are very limited and so they don't have aspirations for the future

*In conflict with what is expected of them*

'TA – I would say fifty percent have got true aspirations because parents have backed them up to go to university. Whereas fifty percent I don't know

R – yeah

TA - they're still thinking of it and if they are allowed to go to university I think most of them are not allowed to go out of Birmingham

R – oh right, so they have to stay at home

TA – they have to stay at home, I think that's what we've found. I mean there's only been one or two who are looking for out of Birmingham and I don't know if that's with their parents consent, in a way like, or is it just that they are trying to get away from..' (TA)

'and er, she erm, she's told her parents she is not with him and stuff. Her parents are, it's a weird relationship she says now, 'its not the same, they do speak to me but as the same as it was before'. Er, but she's still dating this Muslim boy you know, she she- hides in the school room and stuff.' (TA)

'TB - and you know, I feel quite sad in some respects erm, because I don't feel that a lot of the girls should be held back but they are.

R – mmm, do they talk to you about what they would like to do ideally? If they weren't 'held back', as you put it?

T.B. – yes, and it's the kind of ideas that they have are sort of mainly pursue- being able to pursue their education and go to college erm, a lot of girls have told me that their parents won't allow them to go to college so they have to finish their education at school'

'T.B. – erm, I think it was, her trying to persuade her parents, that look..

R – yeah

T.B. – you know, I'm good at something and I want to carry on with it, please give me the opportunity, I won't let you down, you know'

'TC – I think the differences are, the family aren't preventing the white girls going, the aspirations are preventing them, whereas I think for the Muslim girls, the culture and the community prevent them from going rather than the aspiration. Does that make sense?'

'TE – I think they'd rather be [pause] I think they'd enjoy more freedom, I think they want what they see that their brothers and their white peers have, they want to be able to go out when they want with who, without feeling that their whole community might be watching them



R – yeah

TE – or telling their parents or family members who they are out with and you know, labelling them this, that and the other

R – yeah

TE – yeah, I think ultimately they would be happier and they want more freedoms I think'

## **Appendix 14: Analysis - checking and reviewing discourses**

### **Stage three of analysis for teacher interviews**

Following the initial identification of the discourses, they were checked against the identified quotes and through re-reading of the transcripts. This led to some discourses being removed, changed or added to the list.

Stage two discourses:

Aspirations are;

- Restricted by community pressure
- Restricted by parental pressure and expectations
- Limited to professions deemed 'suitable' by family and the community
- Controlled by expectations around marriage
- Confined to the domestic sphere
- Linked to family pride
- A personal choice but from a limited range of options
- Not something Muslim girls can have

Stage three discourses:

Discourses that remained;

- Restricted by parental pressure and expectations
- Confined to the domestic sphere
- Linked to family pride
- Not something Muslim girls can have

Discourses that remained but with a changed focus;

- Aspirations (and behaviour) are influenced by surveillance by the community within and outside school – it was noted that what was being referred to was girls being 'watched' rather than directed to do something by the community
- Aspirations are influenced by pressure to get married – it was noted that more than simply being expected to marry, teachers referred to immense pressure on girls to get married

New discourses identified in this stage;

- Girls seek to balance parental and cultural expectations with their own wishes – it was decided that references to particular jobs or careers were referring to girls seeking to make choices that were in line with expectations
- Aspirations are in conflict with what is expected of them – upon re-reading the transcripts it was noted that reference was made to girls having aspirations but that these aspirations are in conflict with what is expected of them

## **Appendix 15: Analysis - checking and reviewing discourses**

### **Stage three of analysis for focus group**

Stage two discourses constructed;

Aspirations are;

- Focused on academic success
- Due to personal endeavour rather than support from school
- Focused around achieving independence
- Surrounded by uncertainty
- Based on investigation of the different options
- Around supporting family and respecting their wishes
- Restricted by parental expectations
- Restricted in comparison to boys
- Influenced by pressure to get married

Stage three discourses

Discourses that remained;

- Focused on academic success
- Focused around achieving independence

Discourses that remained with a changed focus;

- To support your family
- Remaining respectful of your parents wishes
- Supported by family
- Lack of support from teachers

New discourses constructed at this stage;


- Focused on career
- Desire to get married and have a family
- Not shared with parents
- Focused on getting a job that you like
- Influenced by a desire to get married and have a family
- Different to what boys are allowed to do

Due to the complex nature of the data from the focus group another re-reading of the transcript was felt to be necessary. Following this reading the final list of discourses was as follows;

- It is important to achieve academic success
- Achieving independence is the ultimate goal
- Aspirations are to be not shared with parents
- Aspirations are influenced by the need to support your family
- Aspirations are supported by parents
- It is important to do a job you enjoy
- Aspirations are influenced by making comparisons to the experience of others

- Teachers are not supportive of aspirations
- Expectations are different for Muslim boys and Muslim girls
- Behaviour is influenced by pressure from brothers to behave a certain way
- Aspirations are influenced by a desire to get married and have a family

## **Appendix 16: Presentation of findings to Educational Psychology Service**



# Muslim Girls' Aspirations: A Exploration of Teacher and Pupil Discourses



Ruth Hewett

# Rationale for study

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- ▶ Suggestion in research that discourses around Muslim young people have changed post 9/11 – previous similar study was in 1996
- ▶ Little previous research around Muslim girls
- ▶ Suggestion that they are oppressed by culture – focus on aspirations/choice
- ▶ Belief that in schools we can challenge dominant discourses



# Literature review

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## **Part one – inequality in education**

- ▶ Historical perspective
  - Formal inequality
  - Equality of opportunity
  - Equality of outcome

(Saunders, 1989)

- ▶ The role of the EP in challenging inequality





# Literature review

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## **Part two – Social constructionist views of race and gender**

- ▶ Gender (feminist views of gender)

“gender is not a trait of individuals at all, but simply a construct that identifies particular transactions that are understood to be appropriate to one sex” (Bohan, 1993 p.7)

- ▶ Race

- ▶ Criticisms from black feminists

- ▶ My own views



# Literature review

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## **Part three – Muslim girls in education**

- ▶ 1990's ethnographic studies
- ▶ Keddie (2011)
- ▶ Archer (2002)
- ▶ Ahmad (2001)
- ▶ Basit (1995/1996)



# Literature review

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## **Part four – discourse analysis and educational psychology**

- ▶ What is discourse analysis?
- ▶ The relationship between discourse analysis and applied psychology
- ▶ Discourse analysis its relevance to educational psychology



## Gap in the knowledge base

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- ▶ Consideration of the potential impact of discourses around Muslim girls on their experiences in school.
- ▶ An exploration of the discourses taking into account a range of different discourses and the contradictions between them



# Research Questions

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- ① How are Muslim girls' aspirations constructed by teachers and by the girls themselves?
- ② What do teachers and Muslim girls gain from these constructions?
- ③ How are Muslim girls positioned by teachers when talking about their aspirations, and how do they position themselves?
- ④ How do these constructions open up or close down opportunities for action for Muslim girls?
- ⑤ What are the consequences of these constructions for the subjective experiences of Muslim girls?



# Context

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- ▶ 5 teachers and 5 Muslim girls in year 9 at the same secondary school



# Factors influencing design, epistemology and methodology

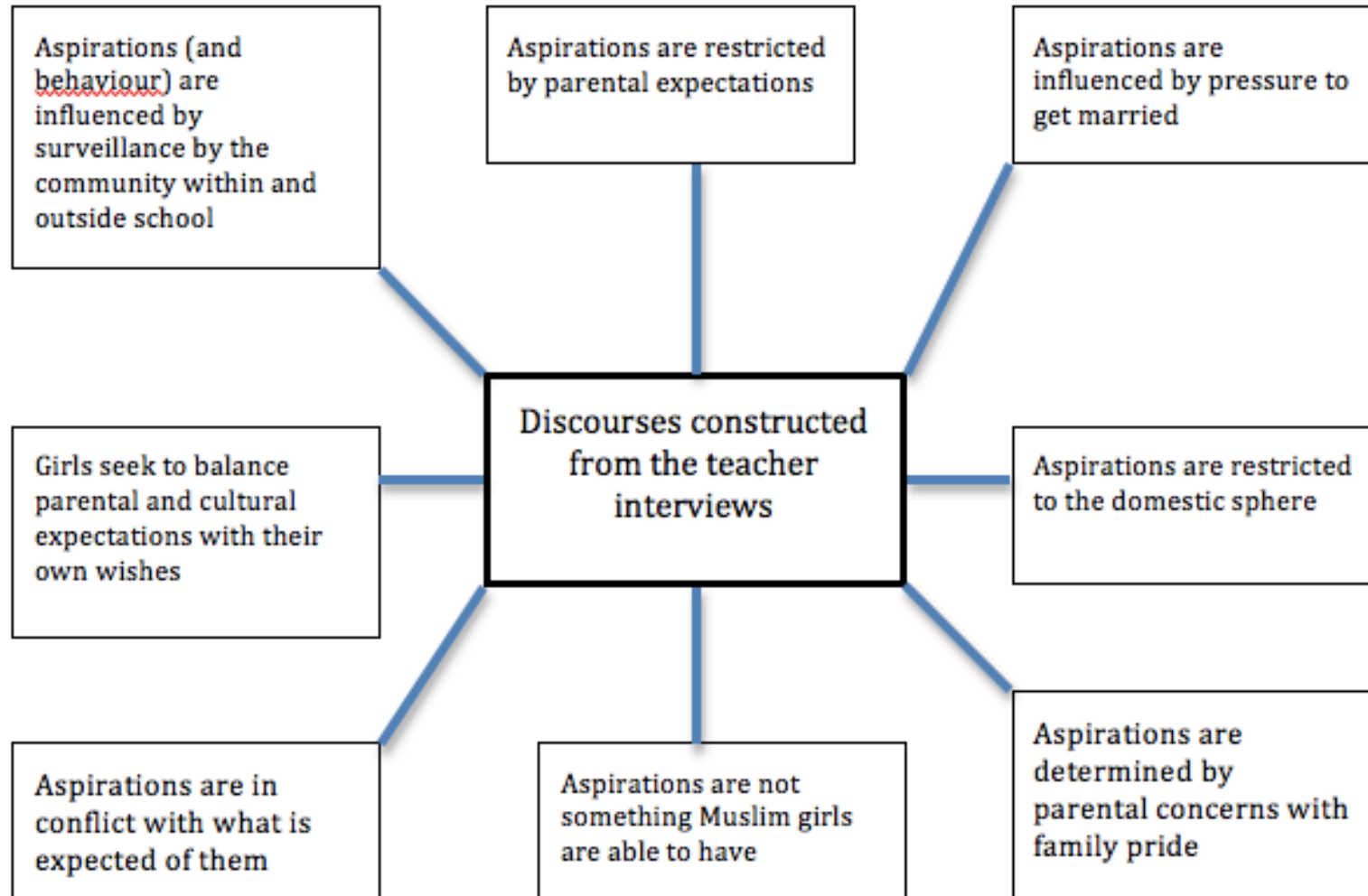
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- ▶ I do not believe that talk is a reflection of stable attitudes and beliefs – not about exposing racist attitudes of teachers – therefore a social constructionist perspective was taken.
- ▶ However, I do believe that discourse has an impact in real life – therefore Foucauldian discourse analysis allowed me to explore this.
- ▶ I was keen for the Muslim girls to have a voice within the research, and thought that talking to them could be a way of accessing alternative discourses – therefore a focus group of girls was carried out as well as the interviews.
- ▶ Year 9 was chosen as it is a key point for pupils in terms of decision-making, but at this point they have not committed to one particular path.
- ▶ A focus group was chosen for the girls as experience suggested that the girls feel more comfortable talking as a group
- ▶ A Muslim co-researcher supported with facilitating the focus group – it was thought this may also make the girls feel more comfortable



# Findings from teacher interviews

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# Possible implications

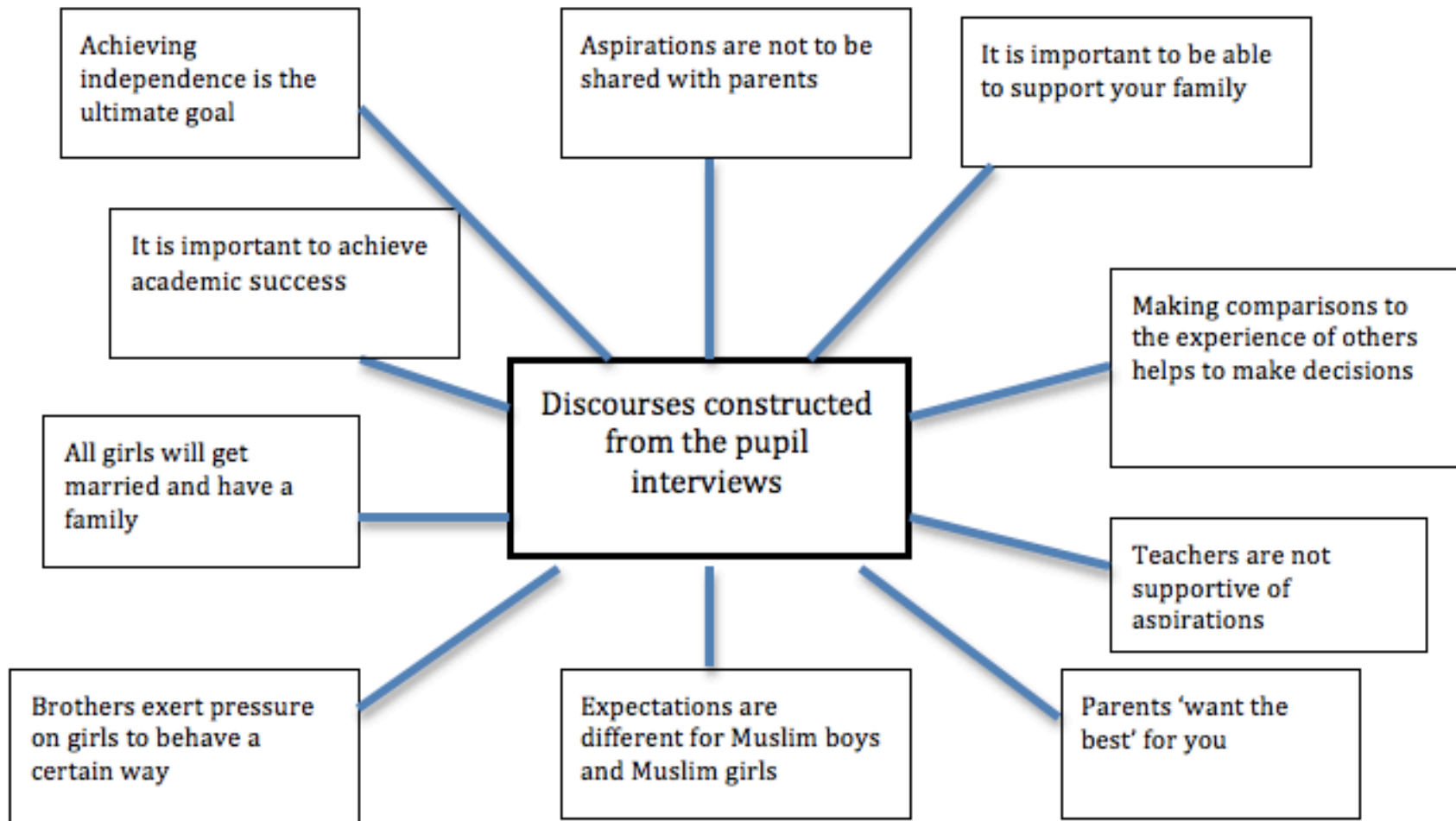
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- ▶ Muslim girls' achievement positioned outside school, responsibility is positioned in the home and community – girls are passive in this
- ▶ Parents, boys and the community positioned as restricting Muslim girls – girls not offered support
- ▶ Closes down opportunities to seek support in school
- ▶ Girls may feel self-conscious about, or unable to pursue certain subjects or careers
- ▶ May feel frustrated or defensive
- ▶ May experience sympathy from teachers



# Findings from pupil focus group

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# Possible implications

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- ▶ Muslim girls feeling isolated and unsupported in school or avoiding sharing aspirations with adults who they feel won't support them
- ▶ Muslim girls may use different discourses to justify different choices they make
- ▶ May feel certain choices are not open to them
- ▶ May feel pressurised to achieve particular things (e.g. good grades, marriage, children etc.)



# Critique

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- ▶ Parents, boys and community members were not interviewed – discourses around parents were very negative
- ▶ Sampling
- ▶ Use of focus group
- ▶ ‘Problematizing’ Muslim girls
- ▶ Not actively challenging discourses – school would need to take next steps – difficult for school to understand what a discursive approach offers



# Original contribution of study

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- ▶ Consideration of the implications for experiences of schooling and what could change
- ▶ Muslim community was portrayed as a source of surveillance and oppression for girls in school
- ▶ Discourses the girls drew on were more complex and more contradictory than the teachers
- ▶ Discourses which do not feature in previous studies (from focus group); teachers are unsupportive of aspirations; boys have more freedom; the experiences of others can help to make decisions; that it is important to be able to support your family
- ▶ Discourses which do not feature in previous studies (from interview); Muslim girls can't have aspirations



# Implications for EPs

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- ▶ Importance of enriching our understanding of the complex social contexts we work in
- ▶ Need to know about negative discourses in order to challenge them
- ▶ We are in an ideal position to do this through our work with teachers, parents and pupils, and schools as whole systems



## Further questions raised by research

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- ▶ Further exploration of discourses around Muslim parents, boys and the community and Muslim girls' aspirations
- ▶ Other settings e.g. schools with few Muslim pupils on roll, schools where pupils are achieving highly – unpick discourses around Muslim parents and discourses around working class parents

