

# **Social Networks of British-Bangladeshi Young Women**

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Philosophy

by  
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## **Abstract**

This research is about the Social Networks and Social Capital of British-Bangladeshi Young Women in relation to their identity, cultural context and social aspects. It is a qualitative study based on the lives of a small sample of Bangladeshi young women, who are second or third generation British-born Bangladeshis between the ages of 16 and 29, living in London. They are British citizens and were born or grew up in Britain. The main area that the research takes place in is the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Methods encompass in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

This research investigation has found that the social networks and social capital of Bangladeshi young women were impacted by their identity, ethnicity, social and cultural contexts, such as religious and gender identity, patriarchal practice within households and racism. Accordingly, for many women the construction of social networks was enabling; but for others, there were constraints in relation to their identity. On the other hand, the social networks through various places, especially places of study and work, significantly enabled the women to acquire their identity with regard to their social position, which has been helpful for agency and negotiation power. Consequently, their social networks were shaped based on their subjective experience, cultural expectations and social aspects. However, the women were active in order to create and maintain their social life, as well as to negotiate and develop their own 'strategies to manage' techniques to cope with the constraints.

In this study, my main argument aims to emphasise how social networks are formed and maintained by the Bangladeshi young women in relation to their identity, cultural context and social aspects. I contend that these women actively negotiate a multitude of personal, familial and structural concerns in developing their social networks. I also argue that agency and negotiation power positively contribute to mitigate cultural constraints and inequalities with regard to the social networks of these young women; however social structures and inequalities create significant boundary conditions for these women to acquire negotiation power.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to present an overview of the research entitled, ‘British Bangladeshi young women and their Social Networks’. These women are described as second or third generation British Bangladeshis aged between 16-29, among whom the core participants are aged between 16-23. They are British citizens and were born or grew up in Britain and reside in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. This study explores the social networks and social capital of these women in relation to their identity, cultural context and structural inequalities.

The chapter offers an elaboration of the background and rationale of conducting this study followed by the research aims. Later, the chapter discusses the conceptual basis and emergence of key research questions, and the significance of the study based on the review of current literature on social networks and social capital as well as identity, particularly with reference to Bangladeshi young people. The chapter also provides a short history of the immigration of Bangladeshis to the UK and their settlement, followed by the background of Bangladeshi families in the UK and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets with regard to their attitude to social networks. A brief overview of the methodology that is used for this study, and the conceptual basis are discussed as well. The chapter ends by highlighting the structure of the thesis.

### **1.2 Background**

Based on my work experience with Bangladeshi families through Sure Start and Children’s Centers<sup>1</sup> in the London Borough of Islington and throughout the London Borough of Tower Hamlets over more than six years, I had observed that many Bangladeshi young women seemed to have few social networks and appeared to be excluded from ‘mainstream’ society. Therefore, it was my concern that they might face difficulties in relation to their social networks and social capital, self-esteem, wellbeing, employment and civic participation.

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<sup>1</sup> Sure Start and Children’s centres worked with families who have child/children under five, the programme was run by the local authority.

A lack of social capital networks to help bridge between ethnic and social class groups has been identified as a barrier to accessing appropriate employment for ethnic minority groups (Bunglawala (2008: 45).

Social networks are commonly seen as individual connections and inter-personal communications that have benefits, as Robert Putnam (2000: 331) observed, 'social networks help you stay healthy'. Personal social networks are considered as 'structures of opportunity' (Phillipson at el 2004:1) which may help to get access to different kinds of resources. It has been contended that social networks can facilitate social inclusion and integration - in recent years the term has been treated as an important theme in academic research (Glennister et al., 1999) and government social policy (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). Social network is the key feature of social capital as it refers to social ties and relationships, which have the potential of developing social capital. Thus, one of the most significant current discussions in social and political science is social capital. The two concepts of social networks and social capital have been much discussed by researchers that have emerged since the 1980s. In recent years, the concepts have been important not only for individual education, employment and mental and physical wellbeing, but also significant in policy debates with regard to providing support: emotional and material, to increasing economic growth, to enhancing civic participation towards strengthening communities, to eliminating poverty, and improving education, welfare, and development (Field, 2008). On the other hand, social networks as opportunities can play an important role in the transition from adolescence to adulthood by providing knowledge, information, and social support, including facilitating the development of new identities and skills (O'Connor and Dorrer 2006). Strong social networks, civic participation, social inclusion, peer support and quality friendships during the transition are often associated positively with self-esteem, self confidence, and a lack of those associations can lead to depression (see, for example, O'Connor and Dorrer, 2006). However, DeFillippis (2001) argues that there is an assumption that social networks are win-win relationships and that an individual simply gains, however the concept can create confusion with the ability to generate and control capital.



This thesis investigates the social networks and social capital of Bangladeshi young women with regard to their identity - situational and acquired - which is often impacted by social and cultural contexts such as ethnicity, patriarchal ideology and practice within a household and structural inequalities. Situational identity is rooted in the family, faith and cultural practice, for example, these women are marked as Bangladeshi Muslim young women. On the other hand, people can acquire or produce their identity through social networks such as attending education, or working, which provide an identity with regard to social position, as Woodward (2004: 1) observed, 'our identities are shaped by social structures but we also participate in forming our own identities'.

### **1.3 Rationale**

A considerable amount of research on South Asian Muslim women, including Bangladeshis, indicates that religious identity has been an influential factor in shaping their lives, which may have a powerful effect on their social life (Pollen, 2002; Bhopal, 1997; Brah 1996; Parmar 1982). In addition to religious identity, gender identity may influence women's life in the public sphere, as their identity often involves boundaries and restrictions, because the gender role is linked with prestige and family honour/*izzat* (Ghuman, 2003; Shaw, 1988). Bhatti (1999) points out that gender identity has been prominent in cultural practice in the South Asian community in the UK, in which the role and ideology is reinforced by the family, especially the mother who can play a key role in shaping their daughters' social lives, including social networks (Afshar, 1989 in Samad and Eade 2003: 59). Thus family values are associated with the roles and constraints in women's lives, especially young women who are married and with children (Bhopal, 1997; Brah 1996). In addition, young South Asian women are often expected to be 'cultural transmitters', which they can find stressful (Kalra et al 2005), and this may impact upon creating and maintaining their social networks. Alongside this, other cultural practices based on ethnic, religious and gender ideology may influence the development and maintenance of social networks involving Bangladeshi young women, particularly with regard to power and inequalities, as power relations can be central to understanding processes and interaction within and between such groups (Brah, 1996). Several research studies (Hussain 2005; Bhopal, 1997; Brah 1996) show that the impact of patriarchal attitudes and practices upon the social life of South Asian

women is potentially negative. For example, Brah (1996) highlights that the cultural constraint of 'Purdha' - a series of exclusionary norms and practices - impacts upon women's participation in public life. A study by Bhopal (1997) discusses patriarchal practice within household and the public sphere, which she refers to as private patriarchy and public patriarchy. Hussain (2005) also admits that there is a link between the roles of culture, religion and community and the subordinate position of South Asian women. There has been increasing concern about gender identity and patriarchal practice in terms of the experience of South Asian Women, but social networks in relation to ethnic, gender and religious identity, as well as patriarchy, have been ignored in the current literature. In particular, none of the above mentioned studies investigate how the identity and cultural background of Bangladeshi young women impacts upon their social networks.

Nonetheless, several studies have revealed the experiences of South Asian women regarding ethnicized behaviour in the public sphere, in which they are seen as passive and subordinate by negative objectifications and 'stereotypical assumptions and common sense' (Brah 1996; Puar 1995; Parmar 1982). In particular, a number of studies reveal that Bangladeshis significantly experience racial inequalities (Putnam et al 2010; Tackey et al. 2006) in which young women often experience racial harassments, sexism and discrimination at work (Equal Opportunities Commission 2006; Garbin 2009). The existing social inequalities and racialized treatment may limit the development of social networks of Bangladeshi young women – this community are observed as the least 'integrated' and the most disadvantaged ethnic group in the UK. In this regard, the Muslim identity can often lead to experiencing forms of Islamophobia, which impacts upon the social contacts of these women, especially in relation to securing employment (Tackey et al. 2006). This can constrain the women from developing social capital and participation within mainstream society. It escalates their disadvantaged position in society and the family, as ethnic and gender identity affect the development of social capital and power (Van Buren and Hood, 2011).

There has been almost no work on social networks and social capital of young women particularly focused on identity, social and cultural contexts in which power and structural inequalities are situated. This lack of knowledge can lead to the strengthening of ethnicized stereotypical representations of Bangladeshi young women, further

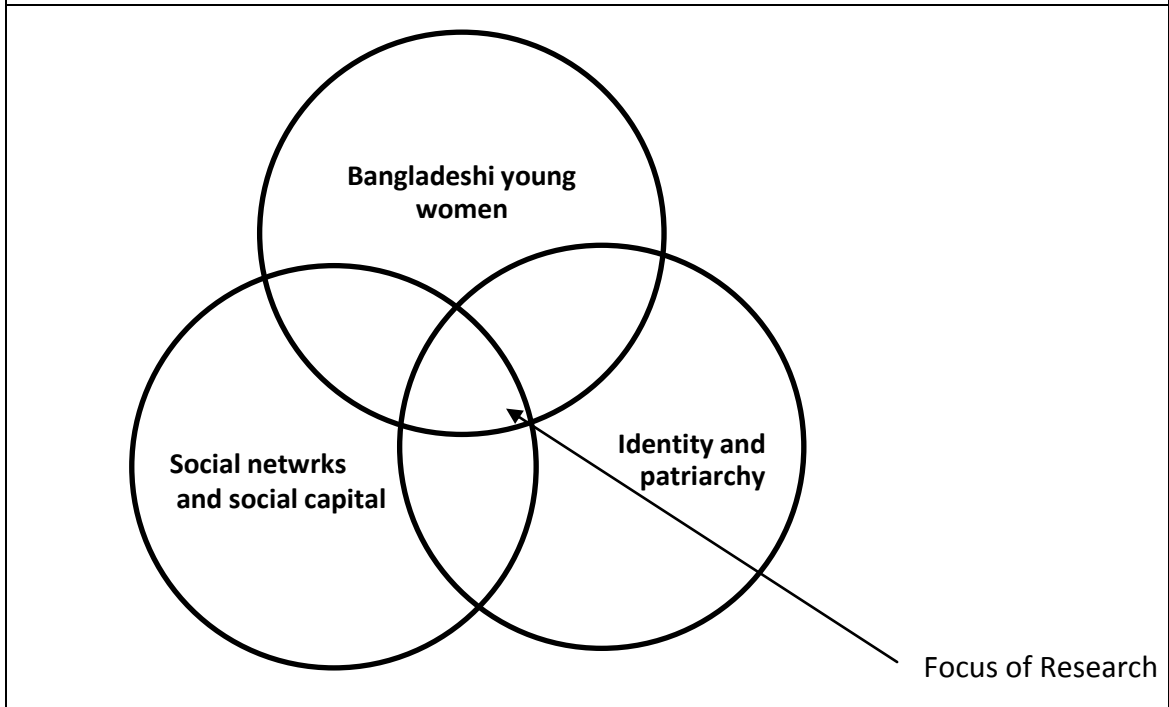
constraining their inclusion and integration into British society. Therefore I investigate social networks and social capital of Bangladeshi young women in relation to their identity – situated and acquired, and argue that ethnicity and cultural contexts need to be included within the concept of social capital. There is also a need for modification of the concept, based on a bottom-up approach in which young women are included as an active driving force in the construction of social capital through their social networks.

The key questions to be addressed in this research are:

- In what ways do young women engage with social networks?
- What aspects influence the construction and sustaining of social networks by Bangladeshi young women?
- How are social networks perceived, given meaning and evaluated by young women?

This thesis explores the phenomenon of social networks and social capital, including ethnic capital from various axes, such as identity, cultural practice and social constrains. In order to outline the research background, the next section elaborates the key concepts related to this study, as illustrated in figure 1.1. A detailed literature review of the concepts is provided in Chapter Two.

Figure 1.1 Scope of research



### 1.3.1 Research aims

- Explore the perceptions of British Bangladeshi young women with regard to social networks. The study investigates how these women understand their social networks, how important the social networks are in their everyday life, which positive and negative aspects social networks have in their life.
- Investigate the nature and experience of social networks with particular regard to social and cultural context. The study examines in which ways the women create and maintain their social networks and how their identity and ethnicity as Bangladeshi Muslim young women influence their social networks.
- The study evaluates their social networks according to social structures such as family and faith, as well as different interactive social sites such as places of study and work in which the women can acquire/produce their identity.
- . The study explores what are the enabling and constraining factors in relation to their social networks, especially concerning their identity, ethnicity, patriarchal practice and racism.

#### **1.4 Conceptual basis**

This thesis deploys concepts of ‘bonding and bridging social capital’ as well as ‘ethnic capital’ to examine the social networks of Bangladeshi young women. These concepts help to understand how the women create and maintain their social networks; and the perspective of ethnic capital especially helps to understand how ethnicity and identity is connected with the production of social networks.

The concepts of bridging and bonding are the main distinctions of social capital, and are outlined by Putnam (2002, 2007), where he introduced ‘bonding’ social capital as an exclusive force which refers to ‘ties to people who are like me in some important way’ (Putnam, 2007: 143). According to him bonding social capital is seen within familial relationships, close friendships and within a particular group of people with the same ‘race’, same gender and same generation. Bonding social capital is helpful for maintaining strong relationships within a particular group with trust, commitments and reinforcing specific identities, as it is ‘a kind of sociological superglue’. On the other hand ‘bridging’ social capital is inclusive, and reflects ‘ties to people who are unlike me in some important way’ (Putnam, 2007: 143) such as distant relationships which are often formal, for instance, colleagues, class-mates, or any other connections, particularly between different generations or ethnic groups or genders (Putnam 2007: 143). ‘Bridging’ social capital is useful to expand social networks towards external resources, and information, which can ‘generate broader identities and reciprocity’ (Putnam 2000: 22-23). However it is argued that ‘bonding social capital and bridging social capital’ can exist together.

In addition to the ideas of bonding and bridging, in the context of this research two key dimensions of ‘ethnic capital’ (Zohu, 2005; Modood, 2004), ‘intergenerational closure’ and ‘enforcement of norms and values’, appear potentially important as ways to explore the social networks of these women. ‘Ethnic capital’ originates within the ethnic community, particularly in families and within the community. Intergenerational closure involves familial relationships, especially relationships between parents and children as well as parents of the child’s friends within a particular ethnic community, and the reinforcement of norms and values are focused on encouragement of high aspirations and positive attitudes towards academic achievement as well as use of (ethnic)

community resources through ethnic networks (Modood et al., 2010). The elements ‘intergenerational closure’ and ‘enforcement of norms and values’ have significance in this study to examine social networks and social capital of these women. However, the concept of ethnic capital has been criticised for not paying attention to power relations within the ethnic community and households (Shah 2007). Moreover, the concept tends to ignore the influence of gender ideology and patriarchal practice within the familial relationships, which may impact upon the social networks of the young women.

#### **1.4.1 Social networks**

Social networks are defined as individual connections which have benefits, such as mutual support - emotional or material - and information. Social networks provide different types and levels of social support and resources (Hellermann 2006; Morgan, 1990); as Putnam demonstrates, ‘networks and the associated norms of reciprocity are generally good for those inside the network, giving as they do access to ‘social capital’ (2000: 21). Social networks provide something which can develop strong ties when it flows between the actors to those connections that generate social capital. The theme of social networks is especially related to the concept of ‘weak ties’, as according to Granovetter (1973) ‘weak ties’ play an important role in extending social contacts beyond a particular group. ‘Weak’ or ‘long’ ties may act as a ‘bridge’ in the sense that ‘they facilitate communication between different ...groups and across different strata’ (Werbner cited in Crow 2004: 8). However, one’s social networks vary according to gender, age, identity, geographical location, and social position, and the members of networks have common interests including shared culture and language as well as an informal agreement to follow the group rules which is often unwritten (Crow, 2004).

Many types of social networks exist which may be experienced by the Bangladeshi young women in different types of environments, including online. One of the key forms of social networks is face to face contact, which is constructed and processed in the physical environment, while another type of social network is developed on the Internet, in which people may not know each other but can share information, images and personal stories, feelings, get to know one another, make friendships with people who they do not see face to face. Internet based social networks are generally known as virtual social networking. However, this thesis does not study virtual social networking.

Although virtual social networking can facilitate creating social networks in the physical environment, on the other hand, social networks which are formed in the physical environment can be maintained by using social networking sites or messaging by their members. In the field of communications the development of technology such as the telephone, the internet, and more recently virtual social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter have made an impact on people's attitudes with regards to social networks and social relationships; as Wellman (1999) argues, to some extent technology has taken the place of neighbourhood social networks. Nonetheless, this study purposely focuses on social networks across the physical environment.

#### **1.4.2 Social capital**

Social ties and networks are consequences of social interaction (e.g., social exchange), and even the consequence of social capital or its concomitances (Jiang and Carroll, 2009: 57).

The concept social capital refers to membership, trust and social networks that have potential to facilitate coordination and cooperation to achieve a common goal. The concept social capital has become popular based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, James Samuel Coleman and Robert Putnam, the three key theorists in social capital theory. The work of Bourdieu is focused on power, inequalities and their reproduction, which he examines through social networks. For Coleman individuals and families are the key sources of social capital, which he terms 'resources', which can underpin achieving education and social mobility. Putnam investigates social capital in civic engagement, and argues that civic engagement can play a vital role for the development of socio-economic status and democratic institutions. Although they all work on the concept of social capital, and all agree that social capital is a form of resource, functionally their approaches are different. However, Portes (1998) argues that social capital literature tends to show the positive sides of strong networks and cooperative nature of some ethnic groups, but overlooks power relationships within the social structure and the ethnic group, which indicates that the relationship between social capital and ethnicity remains an underdeveloped area (Goulbourne & Solomos 2003). The consequences of this ignorance can be sustained stereotypical assumptions about ethnic groups, which may negatively affect their social inclusion and integration. The concept social capital

has also been criticised for ignoring the gender dimension (Van Buren and Hood, 2011; Siegmann and Thieme, 2010; Silvey and Elmhirst, 2003; Kilby 2002; Molyneux, 2001). For example, the concept overlooked the advantages and difficulties of women within household relationships. In addition, it paid little attention to power and structural inequalities in the context of a particular culture, organisation, community and state.

The concept social capital has so far been widely explored by Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000, and 2007), in which he introduces two key forms of social capital: bonding and bridging. Although his works are discussed well beyond academia, for example in policy and the media, at the same time his works have been significantly criticized, particularly for not paying attention to cultural contexts, ethnicity, gender, power and structural inequalities. According to Gidengil and O'Neill (2006: 2) 'there has been little sustained critical analysis of the social capital concept as it relates to women'. With regards to young women particularly he ignored gender dynamics, intra-household relationships, intergenerational relations, and issues around power and structural inequality (Kilby, 2002; Norton, 2001; and Silvey and Elmhirst, 2003). However, while in recent works (Putnam 2007; Putnam et al 2010) the authors claim that diversity inhibits social capital, which leads to disadvantages for ethnic groups, nonetheless issues of gender and social structures such as racial inequalities are not adequately examined in depth.

### **1.4.3 Identity and ethnicity**

Identity... includes people's notions of who they are, of what kind of people they are, and their relationships with others. It is therefore closely related to the groups - the social categories – that they see themselves as belonging to (Gove and Watt, cited in Woodward 2004: 47).

According to Woodward, 'identity provides a link between individuals and the world in which they live' ( 2004: 7). Identity is thus an important concept for understanding how people present themselves and how they experience everyday life within a particular social and cultural context in relation to social networks. Social networks involve



interactions with people in the physical or virtual environment. Identity thus matters in important ways, as it helps in understanding how people ‘position themselves and are positioned’ (Woodward 2004:39). Therefore, I suggest that there is a need to consider the identity of Bangladeshi young women in order to understand their social networks; and I argue that the current literature on identity tells us very little about Bangladeshi young women in the British context, specifically in relation to their social networks and social capital.

A few studies address the issue of identity of Bangladeshi young people in the British context (Gardener and Shukur 1994; Eade 1997, 2002; Garbin 2009; Alexander’s 2000) in which the authors find that the Bangladeshi young people’s identity is fluid and contextual, but the Muslim identity is often prominent in expression. However, none of these works accommodate the experience of young women with regard to social networks.

The aim of this research is not primarily to investigate the identity of Bangladeshi young women or their experience of patriarchy and social contexts such as racism, because the study is focused on the social networks of Bangladeshi young women. However, it examines how these social phenomena such as identity (situated and acquired), patriarchy and racism influence the construction and maintenance of social networks by the women. Situated identity is commonly rooted in the family, faith and culture of a particular group of people. For example, for these young women situational identity is marked as being Bangladeshi Muslim young women. This research examines how this situational identity influences the construction and maintenance of social networks. On the other hand people can acquire or produce their identity by interacting or attending education and work; for example, this study explores how the young women acquire their identity through their social networks and how their experiences are impacted by the acquired identity.

In this study, my main argument aims to highlight how the social networks of Bangladeshi young are shaped and maintained in relation to cultural and social structures, such as gender identity, patriarchy, negative assumptions by people from other cultures and racism. I contend that these women are active in negotiating a huge

number of personal, familial and structural concerns in forming their social networks. I also argue that the agency and negotiation power of these women positively contribute to mitigating cultural constraints and inequalities in relation to their social networks; however social structures and inequalities create significant constraints on these women's ability to acquire negotiation power.

## **1.5 Bangladeshi community**

This section briefly discusses the social, cultural and geographical background of Bangladeshi families who migrated from Bangladesh to the United Kingdom. The section is divided into two sub-sections: a) a short history of the settlement of Bangladeshi families; b) Bangladeshi families in Tower Hamlets and their social networks.

### **1.5.1 History of Bangladeshi settlement**

The migration of Bangladeshis into Britain began from the end of the eighteenth century, under the domination of the East India Trading Company and the British Empire as seamen or lascars on merchant ships. These seamen mostly came from the southeast of Bangladesh, particularly the Chittagong and Noakhali districts, on the coast of the Bay of Bengal. Chain migration began from the greater Sylhet district, the north east of Bangladesh; these migrants also joined the British merchant ships as seamen, cooks, cook-mates and cleaners (Siddiqui, 2004). Among the earliest arrivals, many Bangladeshi came in by the help of friends or relatives, and considered themselves as temporary workers rather than settlers, whose main aim was to search for high wages (Carey and Shukur, 1985, Gardner and Shukur, 1994). The vast majority of these migrants came from Sylhet, and most of them settled in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (Eade, 1989).

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets in the East End has been the area of great interest of extensive research in many respects (Young & Willmott, 1957; White, 1980). The Borough has a long history of immigration, which had been shaped by overseas settlers. For example, French Protestants came in during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Irish Catholics in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Polish and Russian Jews in the late 19<sup>th</sup>

Century, followed by Maltese, Cypriot, Somali and Bangladeshi arrivals (Samad and Eade, 200:15). Over 170,000 people of Bangladeshi origin are estimated to live in London and just under two fifths of these live in Tower Hamlets, in which a third of the population are Bangladeshi, of whom over a third are 15 years old or less (ONS 2001 population estimates).

By running small shops, cafes, restaurants, taxi companies and travel agencies in Tower Hamlets, Bangladeshis have created an ethnic enclave in the Borough (Samad and Eade, 2003). The famous Brick Lane in East London is still full of Bangladeshi restaurants, in which over 90% of the businesses are owned and run by Bangladeshis (Gardner and Shukur, 1994). The geographical location of Tower Hamlets is illustrated in figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Tower Hamlets within greater London



Tower Hamlets within Greater London

### 1.5.2 Bangladeshi family and social networks

The Bangladeshi community has been identified as the 'youngest and fastest growing of all the ethnic populations recorded in the 1991 Census of Great Britain' (Eade et al, 1996: 150), in which a third generation of Bangladeshis appears to be growing up. However, the community has been identified as the most economically disadvantaged group in the UK, as the highest rates of poverty are characteristic of 65% of Bangladeshi households (Platt 2007). According to Berhoud (1998), about 40% of Bangladeshi and Pakistani working families depend on state benefits such as Family

Credit and other 'in-work' benefits. A report by EOC (2006) revealed that the highest rate of unemployment exists among Bangladeshi women, along with Pakistani and African women. As such, the Bangladeshi community live in poor housing and suffer from the poorest health (Nandi et al., 2010). Large families are comparatively common within the group, with 60% of households containing five or more members, compared with less than 8% of total households of this size (Eade et al, 1996) and 'more than half of women in their late thirties having four or more children' (Phillipson et al., 2003: 3). Furthermore, Bangladeshi women play a vital role in providing informal care and support to younger and older members who live in the same household, which may entail deprivation, isolation and social exclusion (Kabeer, 2000).

Bangladeshis are now the largest minority ethnic population living in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (GLA, 2011), one of the most economically disadvantaged parts of the UK according to the indicators of employment rates, quality and availability of affordable housing, health inequalities, and relatively high-crime levels (Tower Hamlets Report, 2006). The Borough has one of the youngest populations nationally, who are mainly from minority ethnic backgrounds. This population profile presents particular issues in terms of crime, youth crime and antisocial behaviour (*cf.* Tower Hamlets' leaflet "Promoting Racial Equality: Feeling Safe"). In addition, the Borough has one of the highest rates of unemployment for those aged 16–24, representing over 30% of Job Seeker's allowance claimants (2,700 unemployed young people), with nearly 700 young people aged 16–18 not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Tower Helmets Report 2006). Furthermore, 36.4% of residents in Tower Hamlets classified themselves as Muslim (Tower Hamlets Report, 2006), and Muslim identity is pronounced among young Bangladeshis (Eade, 1997) in the Borough.

In contrast to the existing deprivation and hardship, there has been significant progress in the educational success of Bangladeshi pupils in secondary school in Tower Hamlets. In particular, Bangladeshi girls' performance is better than boys; for example, at GCSE in 2007, 64% of girls achieved at least 5 A\* to C grades compared to 52% of boys. Moreover, Bangladeshi girls in Tower Hamlets have high career aspirations (Smart and Rahman, 2009). However, an Ofsted report (2004) shows that Bangladeshi women are underrepresented in university admissions. In addition, a study by Bunglawala (2008)

on British Muslim women indicates that graduate qualifications do not directly translate into economic activity, especially for women.

Nevertheless, Bengali immigration history shows their strong social networks within the kin relationships. As such, most Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets live within close community networks. For example, most first generation Bangladeshi women maintain their social networks within family networks (Phillips on et al, 2003). Research by Pollen (2002:103) on Bangladeshi families also shows increased movement of first generation women outside the home in the Bethnal Green area (part of Tower Hamlets), such as visiting neighbours' houses, and shopping with other Bangladeshi women. According to Gardner and Shukur (1994), all Bangladeshis, especially those with Sylheti background gained their jobs through kin networks, which indicates that the group is closely connected to each other socially and economically. In addition, most of them live within an extended family network and 'extended family represents a form of social capital' (Putnam 2000: 21) as family represents an important source of care and support for people living in the same household.

## **1.6 Research methods: The qualitative study**

43 participants were interviewed for the study, who were second generation Bangladeshi of which 38 young women aged between 16 and 23 years were interviewed as the key participants; two young adult women were interviewed the age between 27-29; and three professionals were interviewed who work with young people. Most key participants were studying at different levels and in different settings such as attending university, college, single sex and unisex Sixth Form College. The research site was the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, as a majority of the population in this borough was from Bangladeshi origin. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling methods and via my professional networks, as I work with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions were deployed and semi- structured questionnaires were used for the data generation. The individual interviews and the focus group discussions took place in natural settings and the venues, date and time were chosen by the participants. The university's ethical procedure was followed throughout for the data gathering. The interviews were audio recorded and

transcribed by myself. The interview data was coded and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis technique.

The research deployed an ‘interpretivist’ approach, as epistemologically this approach offers an understanding of how the young women construct meaning and realize experience with regard to social networks within their situated realities. In order to visualize the networks’ nature the study also partially used a social network approach (SNA). SNA is useful to identify capital attached to the networks, which supports analyses of the gathered data in a qualitative manner. An interpretivist approach focuses on the human sense with the focus on understanding and interpretations of a particular social phenomenon (Boland 1985, 1991; Deetz 1996; Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). According to this approach, meanings and realities are shaped by social and cultural contexts through interaction with others and in conjunction with the norms and expectations that are experienced in everyday life. This interpretive focus upon interaction was thus particularly appropriate to investigate the impact of social networks of Bangladeshi young women.

## **1.7 Thesis structure**

Chapter One: the introduction chapter has presented an overview of the research, which includes motivation, purpose, research aims and objectives, background of Bangladeshi settlement, explanation of key terms and brief methodological process. The chapter is developed based on the analysis of theoretical debates and empirical study of social networks of Bangladeshi young women in connection to identity, cultural aspects and structural constraints.

Chapter Two: the literature review provides a multidisciplinary analytical review of theories and approaches on which this research is based, such as social networks and social capital, ethnic capital, identity and patriarchy. The concepts of social capital, ethnic capital and existing work related to the effects of identity on women in South Asia in relation to social networks and social capitals are discussed. In order to justify carrying out this research the discussion of this chapter highlights gaps and points out the scope of this study.

Chapter Three: the Research Methodology discusses the broad ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives that this research is based on. This is followed by elaboration of the research framework, including a justification of the research epistemology. The chapter also discusses and justifies data gathering techniques, including the approaches employed to sampling and recruitment, and data collection. The research techniques are also discussed in this chapter with regard to data triangulation, coding and data analysis.

Chapter Four: the chapter presents a brief discussion about the three concepts: bonding and bridging social capital, and ethnic capital, as these perspectives are employed for the data analysis of this study. This is followed by a visualization of the networks constructed by the women. The chapter then identifies and describes the nature of ties and different kinds of associated capital.

Chapter Five: the chapter outlines a narrative of the perceptions of social networks by the Bangladeshi young women. Using the concepts of bonding and bridging social networks and ethnic capital, the chapter analyses the social networks of the women in relation to family, faith, places of study, work and other interactive social places in the community.

Chapter Six: The chapter elaborates research findings in terms of constraints and inequalities experienced by the women in relation to bonding and bridging social networks and ethnic capital; the chapter then analyses the research findings. The chapter also highlights the overall argument emerging from the analysis.

Chapter Seven: The conclusion chapter discusses an overview of the findings of this research and the contribution of this study. The chapter also points out the limitations of this study and makes recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews conceptual and empirical literature in order to inform and analytically locate the substantive and theoretical focus of the research on the social inclusion and exclusion of young women of Bangladeshi origin or descent in the United Kingdom. The review is both exploratory and interrogative (driven by the broad aims of the planned research) and it is structured mainly according to the broad concerns of the initial research formulation. These themes centre upon (i) social inclusion/exclusion framed in terms of the ideas of ‘social networks’ and ‘social capital’ and (ii) identity, ethnicity, gender and racism as they relate to processes and experiences of social inclusion and exclusion on the part of Bangladeshi young women in the United Kingdom. It is observed that much of the relevant literature has either ignored or downplayed the relationships between gender, ethnicity, religion and patriarchy with regard to detailed study of the social networks of young women. Indeed, much of the literature on social networks and social capital focuses on education, health, economy and civil society (Field 2008). Robert Putnam (2000), for example - a key figure in debates on social capital - focuses upon community but ignores young people and the informal social networks that shape and inform their everyday life. More generally, Putnam’s approach to social capital has been criticised for a lack of empirical specificity; neglecting power in the ordering of relationships and interaction (Woolcock, 2001); overlooking cultural contexts such as religious faith and practice; evincing a gender blindness with regard to women and reflecting ethnocentric assumptions (Davies 2001) and eventually neglecting structural constraints and inequality around patriarchy and racism. Accordingly, my engagement with the literature centres upon social networks, ascribed and performed identities as they relate to ethnic and gendered processes of power and patriarchy.

In terms of structure, the review of literature moves from a general level of conceptual abstraction to a more applied and empirical focus on relevant contributions. Followed by an introduction in the first section, the second substantive section centres upon social networks and the third considers social capital. Attention then turns, in a fourth section, to how the ideas of social networks and social capital can be framed in such a way that they can inform and underpin the type of qualitative research upon which my study is



based. Against that analytical background it is seen that the literature on ‘ethnic capital’ (as a component or variant of social capital) requires more detailed examination in the fifth section of the chapter. At this stage the review begins to move towards a more ‘applied’ focus – the sixth section concentrates upon identity and social networks, as the ideas might relate to minority ethnic groups and women therein. The seventh part of the chapter focuses even more closely on research involving or touching upon Bangladeshi young people in the United Kingdom in general and Bangladeshi young women specifically. It is in this section that relevant contributions in the literature on patriarchy, racism and inequalities and inter-generational relationships are examined with regard to the social inclusion and exclusion of Bangladeshi women in the United Kingdom. The chapter concludes with a reiteration of the main analytical and substantive implications of the review of literature for the ensuing study in Tower Hamlets.

## **2.2 Social networks**

Social networks are important in all our lives, often for finding jobs, more often for finding a helping hand, companionship, or a shoulder to cry on’ (Fischer, cited in Putnam 2000: 20).

A social network involves a group of people who are connected to one another through social ties; and the strength of the relationship has the potential to contribute to each individual's well being. A number of authors use social network definitions in which the core concept is the 'ties' between social actors. For example, taking a social network as an individual's support network, Walker (1977:35) defines this as a ‘set of personal contacts through which the individual maintains his social identity and receives emotional support, material aid and services, information and new social contacts’. According to Mitchell (1969:2), a social network is a ‘specific set of linkages among a defined set of persons with the additional property that the characteristics of their linkage as a whole may be used to interpret the social behaviour of the persons involved’. For Phillipson et al. (2004:2) ‘the concept of social networks is both seductive and intuitively simple. The concept seems to link readily with the way in which individuals routinely live and understand their lives’. Putnam (1993) elaborates the concept: social networks consist of *informal networks*, such as friendship and familial networks and spatial networks (people known in the neighbourhood); *voluntary*

*networks*, which consist of activities such as involvement in sports, youth clubs, religious activities etc; and *formal community networks* linked to local government. The positive impact of social networks is thus based on support and a sense of affiliation – this can improve wellbeing, enhance a sense of feeling valued, counter isolation and foster self-esteem and self confidence (Cohen and Syme, 1985). As Cassidy, O’Connor and Dorrer (2006) describe, social networks and leisure activities are important for young people, especially in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, through providing social support and facilitating the development of new identities and self efficacy (Hays and Oxley, 1986; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Raymore et al, 1999; Way and Pahl, 2001). Indeed, strong social networks, high quality familial relationships, and friendships and participation in community activities during adolescence have been associated positively with self-esteem, self-confidence and social competence, and negatively with depression (Way and Chen, 2000; Way and Pahl, 2001). However, social networks can also centre upon antisocial activities, organised crime and gangs (Halpern, 1999).

Social networks based on one’s relationships and connections (such as friends, relatives, neighbours, workmates or acquaintances) are thus epiphenomenal in that they both encompass and exist beyond the individuals that constitute them. Social networks can thus be conceived as inherent to the idea of ‘social capital’, because one of the key elements of social capital is that it is generally understood as the property of a group.

The 'social network' is thus the key component of social capital which has been agreed by prominent theorists, especially Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, although their conceptualisations are slightly different - this will be discussed later. The common outlook about this phenomenon is that 'social ties or relations can make a difference' for both individual and group, in building trust and acquiring and exchanging resources. Networks, trust and reciprocity are the three features of social capital, but the notion of social ties is seen as the main strength of social capital. Hence, the social ties and social network approaches have been emphasised by a number of researchers, as these focus on trust and resources exchange within the relationships, which ultimately can contribute to general well being (Edwards and Foley 2001; Lin 2001; Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Likewise, the ‘core idea of social capital theory according to Putnam is that social networks have value ...social contacts affect the productivity of individuals

and groups' (Putnam 2000: 18-19). In addition, Field (2003:3) summed up social capital theory in two words - 'relationships matter'.

### **2.3 Social capital**

In terms of theoretical background, the concept of 'social capital' has been defined in many ways – this sometimes creates conceptual controversy, and uncertainty in understanding the term and its features, as a variety of phrases are applied to explain the concept. For example, the concept has often been associated with a range of terms including social connections, social resources, social bonding-bridging, friendship, formal and informal networks, shared norms and values, social trust, sharing information, social power, community spirit, civic virtue, community networks, social life, good neighbourliness and social glue (National Statistics Report 2001). As a result, this implied flexibility is reflected in the various definitions found in the literature: for example, Bourdieu (1986) argues that social capital is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986: 248). According to Coleman (1990:302), 'Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure'. Putnam (1995) defines social capital as 'features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam, 1995: 67).

According to Kearns (2004:7), there are three components of social capital which are most often cited, 'the social networks used by people; the social norms adhered to in people's behaviour, and in particular whether these norms are widely shared; and the levels of trust people have either in their neighbours, in people in general, or in the institutions of government'. More purposely, she defines social capital in relation to its components, outcomes and operation. The example, Figure 2.1 offers a mapping of social capital.

Components	Intermediate outcomes	Scales of operation
Social networks	Quality and Quantity of Social Interactions Shared Objectives	Bonding Capital
Social norms	Co-operative Action Reciprocity Civic Engagement	Bridging Capital
Levels of trust	Access to Resources and Opportunities	Linking Capital

Figure 2.1: Social Capital: Components, Outcomes and Operation (Source: Kearns (2004:7) <sup>2</sup>)

Clearly the definitions above illustrate the multi-dimensional nature of social capital which operates at different levels. However, each dimension contributes to understanding the meaning of social capital (Hean et al. 2003; Claridge 2004). For example, trust, rules and norms governing social action, types of social interaction; network resources and other network characteristics. Many authors aimed at understanding the dimensions of social capital from different points of view. For example, according to Liu and Besser (2003) there are four key dimensions of social capital - informal social ties, formal social ties, trust and norms of collective action. Narayan and Cassidy (2001) posit varied dimensions; Figure 2.2 shows the features of social capital.

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<sup>2</sup> Note: this table is not meant to be read horizontally, across the rows.

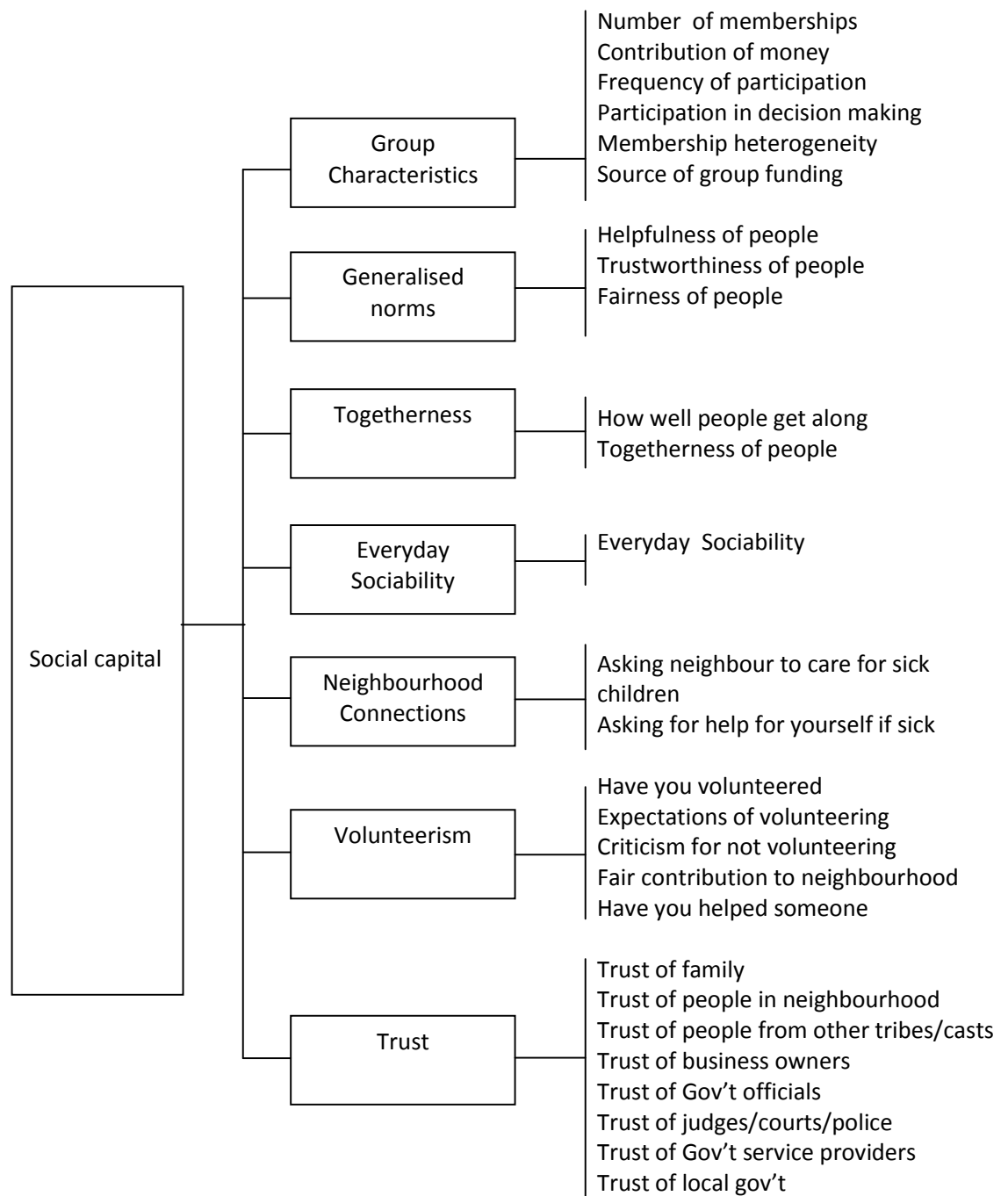


Figure 2.2 multi-dimensions of social capital. Source: Narayan and Cassidy (2001: 67)

The multi dimensional nature of social capital validates its presence at different levels. For instance, for a number of writers social capital is situated at the individual level, in the informal social group, in the formal organization, in the community, in the ethnic group, even in the state (Bankston and Zhou 2002; Coleman 1988; Portes 1998; Putnam

1995; Sampson et al. 1999). In particular, Putnam identified it at the community level, whereas the view of Coleman was that social capital is a trait of individuals with an aspect of social structure, depending upon context (Hogan and Owen 2000; Robinson 2000). In this respect, Fine (2001) argues that 'both the meaning and the distribution of social capital have been said to be context specific, whilst Foley and Edwards (1999) point out that *how* social capital is produced, its 'use value' and 'liquidity' or 'portability' depend upon the specifics of context' (in Kearns 2004: p, 11). However, Kilby (2002) added that the existence of social capital is about understanding and belonging to a family, community, profession, country, etc.. Adler and Kwon (2002) acknowledged that the source of social capital is situated in the social structure wherein one is positioned. Schuller et.al (2000:35) describe two key areas of social capital as “it shifts the focus of analysis from the behaviour of individual agents to the pattern of relations between agents, social units and institutions and it acts as a link between micro-, meso- and macro-levels of analysis, or between the actions of individuals and groups and social structural events ”. In this regard, the setting of social capital has been classified into three levels- as figure 2.3 shows,

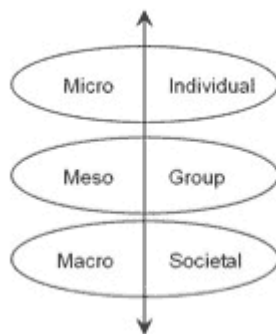


Figure 2.3 Classification of social capital; adopted from Claridge (2004)

Despite the debate and confusion around the concept it is regarded as a resource which has potential in obtaining positive benefits for people’s well being. According to Field (2003), social capital is a valuable asset that can be seen as a form of resource. A social network, one of the key features of social capital, helps people to make connections with one another, and if it continues over time, this interaction enables people to work together to achieve things that they either could not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty. People are connected through this network within their common values and share a common outlook with other members of these

networks, which helps to make them richer in social capital. For example, Kleinman's description seems appropriate in relation to my study as he emphasises,

it is now becoming clear that in obtaining [economic] outcomes, 'social' factors such as family structure and individual self-esteem, and personal characteristics such as punctuality, reliability and attitude are of equal or greater importance than 'economic' factors ... In other words, 'social capital' is as important to economic development as economic capital (1998:13).

Despite the strengths of the concept, there is much criticism of the social capital literature for often being weak on gender issues and ignoring cultural contexts especially ethnicity, such as women's access to, their role in, and their advantages or difficulties from the networks. Therefore, in the critical discourse by feminist writers, the concept of social capital is seen as having been gender-blind, and is challenged for paying little attention to the issues around power and structural inequalities, particularly in relation to women's and men's position and condition within family, community and state (see Van Buren and Hood, 2011; Siegmann and Thieme, 2010; Silvey and Elmhirst, 2003; Kilby 2002; Molyneux, 2001; Norton, 2001). For example, the researchers Norton (2001), Kilby (2002) and Silvey and Elmhirst (2003) argue that in order to get a broader image of social capital the concept needs to accommodate gender dimensions, especially with regard to intergenerational conflicts and issues around power and hierarchy within intra-household relationships. They point out that women are often excluded from the more powerful networks of trust and reciprocity that men enjoy. This difference may further weaken women's disadvantaged position and condition. Furthermore, Siegmann and Thieme (2010) also found power differences and inequalities within household relationships as they analysed empirical data on migration related social networks in diverse Asian contexts, such as Pakistan, Nepal, India and Kyrgyzstan. They demonstrate that 'social network dynamics in a wide range of cultural contexts can heighten women's vulnerabilities' (p, 715). As they mentioned more specifically,

The gender-differentiated unequal investment and incomplete fungibility, though, makes women not just 'associated members of the club' but mere objects contributing as 'symbolic currency' within social networks often without being able to capitalize on the very relations. This way, social capital becomes an instrument of masculine domination and heightens women's vulnerabilities, (Siegmann and Thieme, 2010: 731).

In the context of organisations, a study by Van Buren and Hood (2011) revealed the way social capital and social networking bring positive results for white men, such as opportunities for higher positions and financial benefits. However, the same outcomes may not be available to women and ethnic minorities.

Women and minorities do not have the same power within the organization because of their ascribed statuses, and existing structures serve to maintain the balance of power with White men (Van Buren and Hood 2011: 659-660).

These writers highlight that gender and ethnicity often have influence in shaping one's personal ability and aptitude, which is important for acquiring and using the benefits of social capital and power. They contend that for extant social inequalities based on gender and ethnicity, there has been inadequate attention in social capital theories, especially in the context of organisations. Social capital at institution level has not necessarily been beneficial for women and ethnic minorities because of existing structural obstacles. The researchers maintain that 'a focus on increasing the human capital of women and minorities without thinking about how their social capital might also be increased might be ineffectual at improving outcomes for both groups' (Van Buren and Hood, 2011:657).

Ann Bookman (2004) explores the realities and experiences of family and work life in which she highlighted that women's participation generates a kind of social capital. She asserts that women often make informal connections for help with family care, however this has not been recognised by many social capital theorists. She terms this a new form of 'social capital', as important as money, which is constructed among working families in both urban and suburban environments. She discusses how 'working families reach out to each other and to community-based programmes to address the issues they face -



especially around caring for children and relatives' (Bookman 2004: 25). She also emphasizes the impact of the 'stalled gender revolution' and points out the value of women's responsibilities for care, community commitment and domestic execution, which need to be included with social capital.

A number of researchers point out that the political context is also a source of social capital (Fine, 2001; Edwards, 1999; Maloney et al. 1999; 2000). As such, Molyneux (2002) argued that the valuable networks habitually function through males in groups; in other words men's and women's networks are considerably different, especially at the macro level, such as business, politics or in policy decisions, where women are usually excluded from the networks which provide economic empowerment. She expresses her concern about women and ethnic groups who disadvantaged may find themselves in positions as 'power relations within societies are reflected in and reproduced by social networks' (p,181) and 'indeed, social networks and associations have been noted as functioning to "exclude as much as to include" (Molyneux cited in Van Buren and Hood, 2011: 565). In this regard, Burt (1998) added, the social capital theory paid insufficient attention to thinking about the different meaning and relevance of social capital for women and men. As Lowndes observed,

'In local politics and community decision-making bodies, women tend to use their social capital to 'get by' whereas for men it is a means of 'getting on', extending their personal power and status (2004:134).

In addition, feminist scholars have also highlighted the inter-generational power relations present within ethnically diverse families and communities (Molyneaux 2001; Zontini 2007) pointing out that 'social capital helps to reinforce the unequal power relations that exist within ethnic groups' (Reynolds 2011: 6), which has not been addressed in social capital theory. The writers Fox and Gershman (2000), Molinas (1998), and Davies (2001) also expressed concern at not considering the importance of gender and ethnicity in the concept.

Furthermore, in relation to ethnicity, the views and experiences of young people about social capital have been paid little attention in the existing social capital literature. Studies on young people and social capital tend to present the young people as

recipients of benefits from social capital, instead of active agents; as Reynolds (2011:2) points out 'young people across ethnically and culturally diverse groups are typically recognized as passive beneficiaries or recipients of social capital'. In contrast, a growing number of studies have been conducted which show how young people create contextualise social capital (see Weller:2010; Dwyer et al. 2006; Parker and Song 2006; Reynolds 2006a, 2000b). For example, a study by Weller (2010) examines the complexity of young peoples' identity, which shapes their networks. Drawing on material from ongoing qualitative longitudinal research, the study focuses on the experience of three children. Based on the data from two phases - pre and post transfer of primary school, she identifies how strong attachment to their schools and neighbourhoods helps young people in interacting with peers and friends across ethnic diverse groups that develop social networks. She argues 'policy initiatives need to be sensitive to both context and complexity in order to understand which aspects of identity matter in the creation and development of social capital at different times and in different spaces' (Weller 2010: 885).

Nevertheless, just like any other form of capital, the utility of social capital can be ambiguous. Portes (1998) highlights the downsides of social capital, such as exclusion of outsiders, restrictions on individual freedom, and a potentially constricting uniformity of norms. For Portes, social capital comes to the fore as a mechanism of group solidarity in the face of adversity and in opposition to mainstream society. On the other hand, the strong 'bonding social capital' (Putnam 2000) of disadvantaged groups may present obstacles to advancement. As Kearns (2004:12) mentions, 'some groups which have both strong bonding social capital and are geographically concentrated, such as ethnic minorities in many cities, may become insular and disconnected both by desire and by default'. This, it would seem, is of direct relevance to the research on Bangladeshi young women in Tower Hamlets. So one key question to address in the study is: *How are social networks perceived, given meaning and evaluated by the young women?*

## **2.4 Social networks and social capital in empirical research: concepts and indicators?**

Major theorists with regard to social capital include Pierre Bourdieu, James Samuel Coleman and Robert Putnam. They emphasise different functions of social capital, but all frame the idea as a resource. Bourdieu investigates power, inequalities and their reproduction through social networks. Coleman defines social capital as resources by which individuals and families can achieve education and social mobility. Putnam refers to social capital as an endowment for civic engagement that can contribute to the development of socio-economic status and democratic institutions. There are however key points of difference among these scholars.

Bourdieu, for example, shares with Marxism a concern for the question of unequal access to resources and the maintenance of power. Coleman takes as his starting point the idea of individuals acting rationally in pursuit of their own interests. Putnam has inherited and developed the idea of association and civic activity as a basis of social integration and well being. Despite the differences, all three argue that social capital consists of personal connections and interpersonal interaction, together with the shared sets of values that are associated with these contacts (Field, 2008: 15-16).

In terms of applying the concept of social capital to empirical research, Bourdieu (1986) identifies three distinct forms of capital that may benefit individuals - economic, cultural and social. Economic capital refers to material assets and income; cultural capital refers to the symbolic assets that a person possesses (such as language, aesthetic performance and other symbolic expressions) and educational qualifications. Social capital is seen as power and resources which are acquired through group memberships and social networks that may enhance the capacities and social position of a person (Bourdieu, 1986).

However, Bourdieu is specifically 'interested in the persistence of social class and other entrenched forms of inequality' (Field 2008:16). Therefore in his work, inequality and power have been discussed extensively (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). His theoretical approach is more focused on the development of the concept of cultural capital as a part of social capital and how the uses of different kinds of capital, apart from economic capital, may help subordinate groups enhance their

socio-economic position (Bourdieu 1997). Accordingly, his work presents a theoretical framework which helps to create a link between the wider social structures, power and ideology (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu's work indicates that economic capital is central to creating other forms of capital. But cultural capital, such as educational qualifications and use of other capital - such as social networks and group membership - can be very important corollaries. He thus argues that 'economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital' (Bourdieu, 1986: 252), but that one's social capital depends on the number of connections and their outcomes in fields such as the cultural and economic (Bourdieu 1980:2; Bourdieu 1986:249). He adds that in order to create and maintain social networks one needs to invest effort, time and resources. Orienting social networks towards social capital thus depends on cultural capital. Cultural (family, ethnic and religious) norms and values may influence access to and membership of social networks. Bourdieu's framework, however, appears to downplay issues of ethnicity and gender and might not provide an analytical basis for my research on the social networks of Bangladeshi young women.

Coleman's work, based on empirical study of pupils from less-advantaged backgrounds in Catholic high schools in the USA (Coleman 1988, 1990), revealed a relationship between school attainment and educational success. According to Coleman's (1990) 'functionalist' approach, the key source of social capital is families. They can contribute to young people's cognitive development and social mobility. In other words, strong family and community relations generate social capital, which is a shared set of norms and values and the normative expectation of obligation and reciprocity. Coleman claims that social capital 'represents a resource because it involves the expectation of reciprocity, and goes beyond any given individual to involve wider networks whose relationships are governed by a high degree of trust and shared value' (Field 2008:23). Subsequently, Coleman provided his most extensive definition of social capital as part of his broader attempt to outline a general theory of rational choice sociology:

...the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person. These resources differ for different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital (Coleman 1994: 300).

Coleman's approach can, however, be criticised for portraying young people as passive in the production of social capital - they are seen to benefit, potentially, from the social capital of their parents, family and community. Further criticism of Coleman centres on a failure to consider the differences between 'strong' and 'weak' ties (Portes 1998:5) and on a generally conservative understanding of social capital that is based on notions of the 'traditional' family. Coleman's approach, like that linked to Bourdieu, thus does not speak immediately to the focus of the research on Bangladeshi young women in Tower Hamlets. As Morrow (2004) argues, the informal networks of children and young people - based on friendship - are central to their everyday life but often relate to ethnicity, gender and, in some cases, religion. Indeed, in this regard Bangladeshi culture is strongly oriented to the family and kinship networks – key domains in the reproduction of trust, norms and values.

Turning to Robert Putnam's (1993, 1995, 2000, 2007) work, it is often argued that he – along with Woolcock (2001) – have developed one of the most influential understandings of social capital. In Putnam's words:

I prefer a 'lean and mean' definition... the core insight of this approach is extremely simple: like tools (physical capital) and training (human capital), social networks have value. Networks have value, first, to people who are in the networks (Putnam 2007:137-138).

And while for Coleman and Bourdieu social capital is a resource for of individuals, Putnam considers social capital as an attribute of communities. 'By "social capital" I mean features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives' (Putnam 2000: 56). Putnam also dwells on the ideas of bridging, bonding and linking in relation to social capital. According to Putnam (2000) bonding social capital is good for 'getting by' and bridging is crucial for 'getting ahead'. Moreover, bonding social capital tends to reinforce exclusive identities and maintain homogeneity; bridging social capital tends to bring together people from diverse backgrounds - 'bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological super glue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD 40' (Putnam 2000:19). Each form of social capital is helpful in meeting different purposes.

Bonding social capital is good for ‘understanding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity’ while serving as ‘a kind of sociological superglue’ in maintaining strong in-group loyalty and reinforcing specific identities. On the other hand, bridging connections ‘are better for linkage to external assets for information diffusion’ ... that can ‘generate broader identities and reciprocity’ (Putnam 2000: 22-23). This kind of ‘linking’ social capital is associated with power, social status and wealth, and will often reflect or indeed help to perpetuate hierarchical and stratified relationships between individuals and groups (Cote and Healy, 2001:42).

More specifically, for Putnam (2000), examples of bonding social capital include ethnic organisations and church or faith based groups – domains that are often homogenous and, by definition, exclusive. Bridging social capital is more inclusive in that it can be extended to distant friends, associates and colleagues. Examples are ties developed through shared political or social activism and professional contacts. Usually these ties are weaker but more diverse and important for ‘getting ahead’ (Putnam 2000). Granovetter (1973) and Werbner (1988) add that these ‘weak’ ties act as a ‘bridge’ in the sense that ‘they facilitate communication between different groups and across different strata’ (Werbner, 1988: 178). Similar language is used by Putnam (2000) to describe different types of social capital. He makes the point that ‘bridging’ the gap between social groups can be just as important as the ‘bonding’ among members of well-established groups. In more recent work, Putnam reviews the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital, in which bonding refers to ‘ties to people who are like me in some important way’ such as the same gender, race and age, and bridging reflects the opposite ‘ties to people who are unlike me in some important way’ (Putnam, 2007: 143). However, he argues that,

... we assume that bridging social capital and bonding social capital are inversely correlated in a kind of zero sum relationship ... I believe that assumption is often false. In other words, high bonding might well be compatible with high bridging, and low bonding with low bridging (2007: 143–4).

I will also contend that these two terms ‘bonding and bridging’ can exist together. For example, existence of strong bonding social capital can lead towards bridging social

capital; on the other hand bridging social capital over a period of time can facilitate the development of bonding social capital within a particular group of people. In concrete terms, with reference to my research, Bangladeshi young women with strong social networks based on shared ethnicity and age (networks associated with trust and shared norms) might thus be able to move beyond these particular 'bonds' and 'bridge' to groups from other ethnic and religious backgrounds. The ideas of bridging and bonding social capital might be central to exploring and understanding the nature of the social networks of Bangladeshi young women. The concepts do not, however, engage directly with issues of identity, ethnic norms and values, gender, age and geographical context.

In order to reach a deeper understanding of the social networks and social capital of Bangladeshi young women, it is worth to focus on Putnam's recent works - '*E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century*' (2007), and 'The age of Obama' written by Putnam, Clark and Fieldhouse (2010). In the study Putnam (2007) presents the notion of 'constrict theory' which suggests that diversity and social capital are negatively correlated. In other word, diversity inhibits the development of social capital such as trust and participation in civic engagement, which severely affects particularly minority groups like Bangladeshis. He states 'diversity fosters out-group distrust and in-group solidarity...the more we are brought into physical proximity with people of another race or ethnic background, the more we stick to 'our own' and the less we trust the 'other'' (2007:142), implying that people living in ethnically diverse communities develop ethnic enclaves and have fewer inter-racial networks; as a result they have less bridging social capital. He also mentioned the 'possibility that diversity might actually reduce *both* in-group *and* out-group solidarity – that is, both bonding *and* bridging social capital' (2007:144). Based on empirical data gathered in America, focused on neighbourhoods, communities and local associations, Putnam explores the implications of immigration and ethnic diversity for social capital.

Subsequently, in the book called 'The age of Obama' (Putnam et al. 2010) the authors confirm that diversity has a negative consequence on social capital, which affects social cohesion in general in the USA and the UK; however, for ethnic minorities the strength of this effect depends upon other factors such as poverty, education and rate of population turnover. This comparative analysis of diversity is based on a large quantity of data, collected from these two countries in order to investigate what they call a

'diversity revolution'. The book contains some important findings about ethnic minorities in both countries, including Bangladeshis in the UK, with regards to social capital. For example, in a discussion on residential segregation and neighbourhood integration they observe that Bangladeshis are the least assimilated group in Britain. They also found pronounced racial inequalities in both countries; but in Britain Bangladeshis are the most disadvantaged ethnic group, mainly in terms of employment and their Muslim identity. As they observed,

British Muslims, particularly those with roots in Bangladesh and Pakistan, also face particular problems. While not quite ghettoised in the manner of African Americans, British Muslims are nonetheless highly segregated, and live blighted lives in terms of wealth, health and education (Putnam et al 2010: 140).

The writers point out that politicians and the 'racist media' often stir up anxiety about ethnic communities, as the anti-immigrant rhetoric does the most damage. In terms of minorities the media distort real events, which helps to create nationwide negative perceptions about the group, which could eventually contribute to widespread Islamophobia.

After 9/11 and London's own terrorist attacks in 2005, anti Muslim rhetoric became far more prominent and, increasingly, suspicions were raised that Muslims did not fit in. Indeed, it has recently been shown that racial threat is highest in neighbourhoods with large Bangladeshi or Pakistani populations - who of course, tend to be Muslim, (Putnam et al 2010: 110).

According to Reynolds (2011), the issues of xenophobia and class distinction often determine inequality in access to resources and capital between middle- and working-class people, which produces structural inequalities for ethnic minorities. Consequently, young people and adults suffer from the existing power relations, particularly in the context of families, education and employment opportunities. The issues of social structures such as racism and inequality and their impact upon Bangladeshi women will be further discussed later in this chapter. In the study by Putnam et al (2010), it appears that the authors mainly focus on cultural diversity, as they define the 'diversity' in terms of ethnicity, race and to some extent economics, where identity and social



position are significantly linked with social integration; in other words, generating social capital. For instance, as mentioned above, the authors are aware of existing racism towards Bangladeshis, which inhibits bridging with other ethnic groups, especially through employment. This may affect Bangladeshis' ability to mobilise bridging social capital. Therefore, I would say that Putnam et al. bypass the existing structural inequalities which lead to disadvantage, in other words inhibit social capital. The social structures such as poverty, employment and racism, which are constructed by the society or the state and may reduce social trust and ultimately affect social capital, have not been addressed by the writers, rather their accounts seem to blame the diversity for inhibiting social capital.

Moreover, the work is based on an analysis of community and neighbourhood in general which does not take into account individual or micro level experience of how social capital is generated. In addition, Putnam and his associates ignore the process in relation to identity, gender and ethnicity by which social capital is created and the outcomes- positive and negative. Despite their focus on diversity, they have not been able to show how social capital operates for different ethnic groups in terms of related context.

A number of suggestions are made by writers in order to integrate ethnic minorities and foster social capital. For example, to address 'the inequalities faced by certain minorities – through anti-discrimination laws and social welfare' (Putnam et al 2010: 143); to break down ethnic boundaries in order to make what they term a 'social salad bowl' by encouraging strong inter ethnic bonds with groups such as Chinese British neighbourhood groups, which could be a significant link to wider social bridging or developing bridging social capital. I would contend, however, that in order to achieve desired outcomes, especially for Bangladeshi young women, existing cultural inequalities within social structures - at micro-meso-macro level - need to be addressed. Moreover, the generalised recommendations made by the authors do not appear to consider the main sources of barriers, which may lie at micro level and be dissimilar for different ethnic groups, especially for young women like Bangladeshis. As Putnam et al (2010) rightly point out, identity has been an issue for Muslim Bangladeshis in relation to inequality; hence, I maintain, there is a need to look at how identity, such as being a young Muslim Bangladeshi woman, impacts upon creating and maintaining social

networks and social capital in relation to structural inequalities, such as cultural context and patriarchy, racism and discrimination.

Like other theorists, Putnam's work on social capital has paid almost no attention to household relationships in general, has neglected the influence of gender ideologies in the development and maintenance of social capital, and has ignored cultural and structural constraints. More specifically, Putnam has been criticised for his poor grasp of women's employment, in which he portrays the consequences of women's work outside the home as negative for their children and the community; in other words his account is mainly focused on the 'family structure effect'. As Maxine Molyneux points out:

[Putnam] often endorses 'the family' as a prime locus of social capital, to be worked with and strengthened. On the face of it few would disagree, but much depends on how this is interpreted and what is meant by 'the family'. In much of this literature the family is treated normatively as a unit in which little or no account is taken of the gendered divisions of labour and the power within it, (Molyneux, cited in Marrow 2006: 128).

Additionally, I maintain that family structure is an outcome of the characteristics of those within the structure, in which individual actors can possess social capital within the family. Therefore, families might be a complex set of power-laden relationships - both internally and externally among actors within the family and outside in various social places depending on context. Power differences and inequalities in social structures such as family and society, which may have influence in mobilizing social capital, and which may have an impact upon the social networks and social capital of Bangladeshi young women, have largely been ignored by Putnam.

Conceptual insights on the nature of social networks and social capital can nonetheless provide some utility for researching minority groups. The approaches, however, ignore or downplay the potential importance of gender and ethnicity in general. There is also a failure to address the complexity of experience, motivation and behaviour of young people (especially young women) with regard to their social networks. According to Morrow (2004), Putnam's understanding of formal community networks, 'did not seem

to have much relevance to young people's experience as informal networks around friendship are central to young people's everyday lives' (Morrow 2004:70). Moreover, much of the existing work has been based on secondary analysis of data rather than primary qualitative findings (Sixsmith et al. 2001). Putnam, along with Bourdieu and Coleman, has not addressed a particular group framed in terms of ethnicity, identity, norms and values. The ideas of bonding, bridging and linking with regards to social capital would thus, in the context of my research, require another element discussed in parts of the literature – 'ethnic capital'.

## **2.5 Ethnic capital**

According to Shah, 'the concept of ethnicity as social capital (Zhou 2005), [can be] defined as a set of resources, norms, obligations and expectations, information channels and cultural endowments that inheres in the structure of social relations within an ethnic community' (Shah 2007:29). Zhou (2005), drawing on a study of Vietnamese families in the USA, argues that familial relationships, community networks and the enforcement of shared norms and values of particular ethnic groups play an important role with regard to social capital. Using social capital theory, Zhou's research revealed how ethnicity worked as a resource in helping to foster outstanding academic success and upward social mobility among Vietnamese families in China Town (Bankston and Zhou 1998, 2002; Zhou 1992, 1997, 2005). Accordingly she claims that the 'ethnicity as social capital' is generated based on a particular group orientation such as ethnic group, organisational structure and ethnic involvement. The 'community, as an important source of social capital, not only makes resources available to parents and children, but serves to direct children's behaviour' (Zhou, 2005:34). According to her, two particular dimensions of social capital are seen as particularly important in this regard – 'intergenerational closure' and 'norms enforcement' (Bankston and Zhou, 2002: 287). Likewise, in the UK context, a study by Modood (2004) investigates the contribution of ethnic backgrounds towards British South Asian and Chinese migrant young people's educational aspirations and appropriate behaviour in respect to 'ethnicity as social capital' (Zhou, 2005) to which he gave the term 'ethnic capital' (p, 101).

Intergenerational closure is rooted in familial relationships, especially those between parents and children within particular ethnic families; according to Modood (2004: 99) 'intergenerational closure' is achieved where parents know the parents of their children's friends, so that the network of parents and the network of children involve many of the same families' in which the dense co-ethnic networks provide recourse to the young people for 'academic achievement through the enforcement of familial and community norms' (Modood et al., 2010: 112). In addition, the networks through community based ethnic organisations can contribute to 'intergenerational closure' by enforcing values on education and supporting the upward social mobility of young people (Zhou 2000). Hence, the reinforcement of norms and values centres upon the transmission of (high) aspirations, (positive) attitudes towards education and an instrumental use of networks related to ethnicity (Modood et al., 2010). Modood et al. (2010) draw on Zhou's work in a qualitative study of British Pakistani families in which they find specific norm and value orientations – as a form of ethnic capital - are linked to increased rates of participation in higher education by young British Pakistani men and women.

The ideas of intergenerational closure and enforcement of shared norms and values dimension are of significant relevance to my research. However, Shah (2007) argues that Zhou's concept of ethnicity as social capital overlooks power relations within the ethnic communities and households. Consequently, the concept tends to neglect the potential impact of gender and the enforcement of gender-related behaviour and parameters on the capacity and identity of participants in social networks. In this regard, I maintain that the enforcement of ethnic-cultural norms and values are used for positive benefits, however, this can lead to constraints in particular situations. Key questions to address in the research include: In what ways do young women engage with existing social networks?; What aspects enable or constrain in creating and maintaining social networks?

## **2.6 Identity and social networks**

We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept, theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life...It offers much more than an obvious, common-sense way of talking about individuality and community. Principally, identity provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed, (Gilroy 1997: 301).

Over the last two decades, 'identity' has been the subject of theoretical and empirical concern in the social sciences. There is considerable debate about its conceptualisation. According to Woodward,

Identities are formed through interaction between people. When people take up different identities there are different processes taking place as people position themselves, and are positioned, in the social world. These processes include a focus on the personal dimensions of the identity equation as well as an interrogation of how these connect to the society in which we live, (Woodward 2004:1).

For a deeper understanding of the social networks and social capital of Bangladeshi young women, it is important to examine the concept of identity, because it may enable us to realize how their experience is impacted, specifically how their experiences have been shaped within their purview and circumstances with regards to their identity. There is little attention paid to Bangladeshi young women in the UK context, in relation to their identity within their culture and circumstances, and more specifically how this impacts upon their social networks on an everyday basis. This can lead to strengthening ethnicized stereotypical representations and interpretations of Bangladeshi young women, which can constrain their integration in the UK. Social networks involve interactions with people and places; identity is thus an important concept, as it helps in understanding how people 'position themselves and are positioned' when 'coping with

change and uncertainty and the opportunities presented by diversity', (Woodward 2004:39).

With regards to one's position in any social milieu 'identity involves the internal and the subjective and the external and objective' (Woodward, 2004:39). For example, who 'I am' or 'who we are', sometimes depends on our own choices, but sometimes our identity is ascribed by others on bases such as gender, race, ethnicity and religion. Alongside this, identities can also be fluid and relational (Brah 1996; Hall and Du Gay 1996; Woodward 2004). Likewise, Bourne (1978a) argues, identity is not simply a 'structural and / or experimental entity but also a type of relationship, because, through this process, 'we are provided with external definitions of the self in terms of our relationship to and membership in certain groups in society' (p. 227). This is because 'our identities are shaped by social structures but we also participate in forming our own identities' (Woodward 2004:1).

Zahir-Bill (2009) elaborates the identity concept in a cultural context, and argues for 'identity as far more segmented, connected not through simplistic narratives but complex inter-lacings that are both evident and constantly changing with culture' (p. 21). Thus, one's identity is clearly relational, which is an ongoing process depending on time and circumstances: 'our sense of identity is constantly shifting and changing; from day to day, even minute to minute, always depending on the context within which we are framed' (Grossberg in Zahir-Bill 2009 :25). Consequently one's identity is always in process, never completed (Hall and Du Gay 1996) but people make temporary attachment with a particular context to present their identity. For instance Hall states:

'Identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken' (1996:5-6).

Hall (1995) examines identity from the perspective of globalisation and diaspora<sup>3</sup>. He claims that globalisation and diaspora break physical and geographical boundaries and reinforce fluidity in identity. Building on Hall's idea, Avtar Brah (1996) also emphasises that diasporic identities slash across and displace national boundaries, creating new forms of belonging and challenging the essentialising form of identities with relation to place. Kalra et al. (2005) also observe that diasporic experience provides a sense of 'difference' which is a basic aspect of self-identity. However, it was argued that the sense of difference such as 'ethnic or racial difference emerges against a dominant cultural force, which challenges the diasporic subject's sense of identity'. This leads to production and reproduction in forming identity through transformation and differences (Kalra 2005:30).

Erikson (1968) regards adolescence as the crucial period for identity formation – a period when the core maturity task is to reintegrate childhood identifications with basic drives, native endowment and opportunities offered in social roles. 'Young people may find it difficult to integrate the different expectations held by the dominant and subgroup cultures, particularly when competing claims from family and from society present conflicting or unclear messages about appropriate behaviour, values and attitudes' (Phinney and Rotheram, 1987:158). For example, the British Bangladeshi identity potentially reflects distinctively different cultures - a kind of hybrid form of identity in which young women are linked to ethnic and cultural roots such as religion and language by their parents who are first generation, and that is associated with their forebears' home country, but they also may negotiate with strong, distinct but very different cultural patterns of white British society that they come across by being born, growing up and going through different levels of education in the UK (Taylor and Hegarty 1985), which may influence and shape their identity.

With regards to diaspora, identity such as cultural or ethnic identity is fluid, produced and reproduced which often results in a 'hybrid' form of expression (Hussain, 2005). For example, Kalra et al. (2005:71) observe that 'hybridity is an evocative term for the formation of identity' by which ones identity might be hybrid in a natural way as the term fits with everything. It is therefore a reminder that the concept hybridity is against essentialism and simplification. More specifically,

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<sup>3</sup> Diaspora as sociological concept taken account of a 'homing desire' -that is, a need for belonging to an identity rooted in a geographical origin (Hussain Y 2005).

...the most conventional accounts assert hybridity as the process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture or 'hybrid identities'. Whether talk of such identities is coherent or not, hybridity is better conceived of as a process rather than a description, (Kalra et al 2005:71).

Hybridity has also been described as 'a term for a wide range of social and cultural phenomena involving 'mixing', (it) has become a key concept within cultural criticism and post-colonial theory' (Brah and Coombs 2000 in Kalra et al 2005:71). Hybridity is thus important in understanding the identity of Bangladeshi young people in the United Kingdom, as it helps to understand how these women acquire or produce their identity with regards to ethnicity and a particular context. According to Phinney (2005:188) 'an ethnic identity is formed on the basis of one's ancestral heritage and the accompanying values and attitudes of that heritage, in addition to position of the heritage group in the society'; as she explains, 'an ethnic identity, although dynamic and influenced by historical and social contexts, can provide for ethnic group members, to varying degrees, a stable "core" sense of belonging that is a central aspect of the self' (Phinney 2005:193).

However, in regards to ethnicity, Rattansi and Phoenix (2005) argue that 'the prevalence of conventional approaches to identity has frequently resulted either in the individualisation and de-contextualisation of young people's identities, has tended to omit their subjectivities, or has failed to grasp the multiplicity, fluidity and context-dependent operation of youth identities and identifications' ( p, 98). This suggests that the ethnic identity of young people is dynamic, complex, subjective and situated in a particular context.

In addition, research by Modood, Beishon and Virdee (1994) illustrates, in relation to identity, how young British people of Caribbean and Asian origin manage to maintain cultural practices learnt from their parents which root themselves in their communities of origin; at the same time they modify the cultural practice in the British context, which allows them to negotiate and balance the family and community expectations with the available opportunities that allow them to expand their freedom in local context. In terms of gender and ethnic minority, Archer argues that



...identity theorists have tended to operationalise notions of identity in such a way as to exclude the specificity of the identities of women and ethnic minorities. In particular, this glosses over the obvious contradiction between the naive assumption of control and choice in 'identity options' and the fact that, as is the case with women and ethnic minorities, some identities are more 'assigned' than others and thus not open to choice, (Archer cited, in Rattansi and Phoenix 2005:102).

This concept may be relevant to Bangladeshi young women in helping to understand associated processes of identity formation with regards to social networks. But social networks in relation to ethnic and religious identity are an under-explored area in current research, especially in relation to Bangladeshi young women. I argue there is a need to explore and examine, in relation to identities, how much agency the young women have in the construction and maintenance of social networks and how much control or constraint is exercised over them.

## **2.7 Identity and Bangladeshi young people**

As some of the literature discussed above implies, there has been little discussion about young Bangladeshi people, particularly young women, with regard to social networks and social capital. For example, a study by Gardener and Shukur (1994) demonstrated how Bangladeshi young people positioned themselves and fixed their identity as Muslim according to a particular context which was influenced by the dominant British culture. For example,

More and younger Bengalis now identify themselves first and foremost as Muslim rather than as Bengali or Bangladeshi. For them it is not Islam but rather their origins in Bengal, in Sylhet<sup>4</sup> or more likely in their localized Desh<sup>5</sup> through which they expressed their social and cultural identity. The adoption of a Muslim identity does not preclude some degree of allegiance to Bangladesh; rather it reinforces it, for it also implies rejection of Western culture, (Gardener and Shukur 1994:163).

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<sup>4</sup> Sylhet is a division of Bangladesh. Most Bangladeshi immigrants to UK are from this area.

<sup>5</sup> Desh is a Bengali word that means home country.

The fact that the young people construct their identity as Muslim does not indicate that they have full control in developing their identity, rather it is actually structured by the dominant culture in which they are not welcomed, as ‘they may be British, but they are aware of how unwilling the white natives are to accept them as such’, (Gardener and Shukur 1994:158). This is therefore a consequence of racism, as Gardener and Shukur also observed that ‘for many British Bengalis, their experience of white racism provides a central component of their self-definition’ (1994:160). This indicates that social structures such as ‘racism’<sup>6</sup> and ‘institutions such as the state play an important role in constructing identities’ (Woodward 2004:11). Through the Muslim identity the young people may find a kind of comfort; as Gardener and Shukur added,

More than other faiths, Islam is a world religion; hence a heightened commitment to Islam allows those involved both to express their frustrations with mainstream British society and to join a worldwide trend which links them politically and financially to the global Umma in other Muslim countries (1994:163).

However, the study of Gardener and Shukur (1994) appears to fail to describe the dynamic nature of the identity of these young people, which is simply not fixed as Muslim, while at the same time being prescribed due to racist practices. Moreover, the authors did not examine gender differences or the experiences of young women with regard to social networks.

On the other hand, Eade (1997, 2002) found that the idea of identity of Bangladeshi young adults was related strongly to religion and nationhood. His work on identity was based on structured interviews with second generation Bangladeshi young adults, university students. According to him (1997), second generation young Bangladeshis form new hybrid identities that build upon Bangladeshi, Muslim, Bengali, British and local solidarities. A number of other studies by Eade on identity and belonging also

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<sup>6</sup> The varied forms of racism that affect many different groups of people who are identified as belonging to ‘races’ not considered to be socially valuable. Racism can involve obvious practices of genocide and discrimination as well as more subtle denials of social rights or name-calling. (in Jennifer and Stuart in Woodward 2004, p. 121)

demonstrate the complexity of Bangladeshi young people's views concerning national, local and religious identity (1994). Developing Hall's (1995) ideas, Eade also emphasised that due to migration and globalisation identity is changing rather than fixed, as he described "...a world of compromise and incompleteness, where boundaries and identities change through active engagement with others" (2004: 26). However, Eade's research did not dwell upon gender differences or the experiences of women. And his work does not examine the potential connection between identity and social networks.

It was confirmed that the contextual social factors lead Bangladeshi young people to prioritise their identity. For instance, a study by Garbin (2009) on Identities and 'new ethnicities' among British Bangladeshi and mixed- heritage youth which was conducted in London South Camden, reveals that religious identity is stronger than ethnic identity, which in turn is stronger than British identity. However, none of the participants among the twelve (six girls and six boys) rejected their other forms of identification, especially Bangladeshi identity. The study found Bangladeshi young people perceived discrimination, which correlated/linked negatively with ethnic and religious identity, however, ethnic and religious identities correlated positively with self-esteem and life satisfaction, where the young people had low levels of identification with Englishness, and Englishness was often associated with whiteness. However, the sense of identity of Bangladeshi young people was fluid and contextually contingent, where the young people opposed being labelled as 'caught between two cultures', (2009:54-55). However, the study provides a limited representation of young Bangladeshis, in particular women - the number was only six who were aged between 11 and 16. Most importantly, the research did not address how the identities of these Bangladeshi young people impacted upon shaping their social networks and vice versa.

Alexander's (2000) work on the 'Asian Gang', based on a small group of Bangladeshi young men in South London, describes a youth sub culture in which she discusses issues around identity, specifically the process of peer group formation and community identities set against the background of national and local mythologies of Asian youth. Throughout the study, Alexander focuses upon fragmentation and solidarity, on boundaries imagined and re-imagined, on creativity and survival with regard to the identity of the young men. Her narrative presents the identity of Bangladeshi young

men in which she avoids essentialising by describing the complex interaction of race, age and gender, with further links to ethnicity and religion (Alexander 2000: 127). Using an ethnographic approach, Alexander's account also emphasises the contextual nature of these multiple elements of identity, showing that they may melt into insignificance or sharpen into importance depending on the circumstances. "Rather than a simple picture of identities forged in the intersection of multiple pathologies, what emerges in this arena is a more contextual and performative set of identifications in which there are no guarantees" (Hall, 1992, cited in Alexander 2000: 125). But Alexander instead shows the effects of a dominant media discourse about young Asian men, in relation to the very notion of the 'Asian Gang' and the effects of these racial and gendered accounts (Alexander 2000: 138). However, the study did not focus on the experience of young women.

None of the above mentioned studies examines how Bangladeshi young women present and negotiate their identities in a range of settings such as in the family, with friends at places of study, with colleagues at work, and within the community in general in relation to their social networks; or how these impact upon their social networks. Therefore, I suggest that there is a need to address the changing pattern of construction of ethnic identities of Bangladeshi young women in which they accept, modify and negotiate some traditions and build new cultural identities with regard to their social networks.

### **2.7.1 Religious identity and Bangladeshi young women**

Religious identity has often been a central focus of inquiry in research into South Asian youth (for example, Eade 1994, 1997; Gardner 2002; Samad 2003). According to Bhopal:

Religion has clearly been shown to be an influential factor in the lives of women; it helps to shape and structure their lives and may have a powerful effect upon their roles as women. It has been said that religions are the most important source for shaping and enforcing the image and role of women in culture and society (1997:18).

However, Brah's work on Asian women in Britain of all ages (1994, 1996a, 1996b) demonstrates in a different way, in terms of Muslim identity, that

...the lived cultures that young Muslim women inhabit are highly differentiated, varying according to such factors as country of origin, rural/urban background of households prior to migration, regional and linguistic background in the subcontinent, class position in the subcontinent as well as in Britain, and regional location in Britain (Brah, cited in Rattansi and Phoenix 2005:109).

In this regard, research by Rosenna Pollen (2002) on the family life of Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets shows that a resurgence in religiosity among Bengali women has encouraged them to be more self-confident as they elaborate their Islamic identity, often in contradistinction to specifically Bengali (conservative and masculine) Islamic practice. In this way, 'an ideological space has been opened up for them to consider new strategies and opportunities' (Kabeer, cited in Pollen 2002: 98). In this respect, Gavron (1997) illustrates that young Bangladeshis are more likely to use their Muslim identity to attend Islamic society meetings at school or college, where the young people study the Quran and listen to talks on political or historical themes. She argues that this is the way in which young Bangladeshis 'use Islam as a way of defining themselves as part of a world religion and world community' (p, 203). It has also been argued that Muslim women collude, seek comfort and even at times gain a sense of empowerment within the space allocated to them (Ali 1992; Foster 1992; Maitland 1992; Yuval-Davis 1992). This suggests that religious activities allow Muslim women to justify their participation in a public sphere which otherwise might be stopped up for them. For women of 'ethnic minorities, it can also provide the means by which to defend themselves as well as to defy a hegemonic racist culture' (Bhopal 1997:18).

In addition to 'Muslim' identity, other aspects of cultural practice (based on ethnic and religious identity and ideology) may influence the growth and nature of social networks involving Bangladeshi young women. In particular, according to Brah (1996), power relations can be central to understanding processes and interaction within and between such groups. So understanding power relations as they shape or are perpetuated within social networks could be central to research concerned with ethnicity, gender and social networks in a relatively deprived urban location. Specifically, how do these processes

and their impact on social networks shape or direct feelings of affiliation and commonality (identity) among those involved in social networks? Work in this regard appears to be quite limited. Eade's (1997) research on identity, for example, focuses upon Bangladeshi young people but does not address their social networks in depth. And as Brah (1996) infers, any research that focuses upon identity and social networks would, in relation to South Asian women, at least have to consider the impact of patriarchal attitudes and practices (a key factor, potentially, influencing women's engagement with facets of the public sphere). In more concrete terms, 'in discussion of Muslim women the 'cultural' constraint that is most frequently invoked is the institution of 'Purdah' – a series of norms and practices that limit women's participation in public life' (Brah 1996: 137). This could be understood as the enactment and enforcement of patriarchal ideologies and practices.

Gender ideology and patriarchal practice exist in South Asian communities including Bangladeshi. A study by Bhopal (1997) of South Asian women describes two forms of patriarchy – the private and the public. The private patriarchy includes the household domain; and the public patriarchy is related to paid work and other social engagement in the public sphere. However, this rather broad categorisation ignores the many variations of patriarchal ideology (El Sadawi 1980; Sharma 1980). In *Theorising Patriarchy*, Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (1990: 20). According to her, patriarchy is composed of different structures, one of which is patriarchal relations in cultural institutions, which may be relevant for my study investigating social networks of Bangladeshi young women. As she elaborates more abstractly,

Patriarchal cultural institutions completes the array of structures. These are significant for the generation of a variety of gender differentiated forms of subjectivity. This structure is composed of a set of institutions which create the representation of women within a patriarchal gaze in a variety of arenas, such as religion, education and the media (Walby 1990: 21).

Nonetheless, Hussain (2005) adopts a more subtle approach, and she concedes the role of culture, religion and community in relation to the often subordinate position of South Asian women. But she also draws attention to 'the economic, political and ideological

structures that also reproduce South Asian women as a particular category' in relation to power and self-determination (Hussain 2005: 23).

## **2.8 Patriarchy as structural barrier**

Gender is a key dimension of identity. Gender identity is influenced by individual and collective and social and biological factors...gender identities are often associated with stereotypically feminine and masculine traits. (Gove and Watt, in Woodward, 2004: 46)

In the UK among Bangladeshis and other South Asian groups, especially for young women, the rites of 'traditional' gender roles may often involve a very strong boundary between the public and private sphere (Ghuman, 2003; Shaw, 1988) and respecting the boundaries means *izzat* or honour for the community, in which 'the notions of tradition, status and prestige [are] linked to gender roles which can be interpreted or contested by the young women' (Jacobson; Samad and Eade in Garbin 2009: 8). Bhatti's (1999) research on a group of South Asian children found how young people are positioned at the intersection of ethnicity and a socially diverse culture simultaneously in schools and society in UK. She observes that in south Asian communities gender identity is pronounced in cultural practices, especially with regard to social intersections. As she stated, girls are typically brought up with less freedom than boys for which 'girls were therefore under a different, more subtle, kind of pressure - while conforming to parental wishes they had to extend delicately maintained boundaries of personal freedom and self-expression' (p,165). In South Asian communities the mothers appear to play a central role in socialising their daughters' behaviour so that it conforms to the desired pattern (Afshar in Samad and Eade: 2003:59) as family values are particularly significant in relation to the roles and constraints associated with women (Bhopal: 1997). It is often seen that familial expectations centre on the fulfilment of role obligations of women and by women; as Agarwal argues, 'gender relations are usually defined as social relations between men and women but also relate to gender hierarchies between individuals of the same sex' (Agarwal, cited in Samad and Eade:2003:59). Against this background, 'many Bengali parents are still uneasy at the prospect of their daughters working outside the home' (Gardner and Shukur 1994:160) although this is a far from uniform attitude (Dench, et al. 2006). And even the leisure and socialising

activities to which these young people (regardless of gender) do have access are more likely to be influenced by family and extended family (Heim et al., 2004; Alexander 2000). Often gender roles are obligatory because stereotypes may exist in the Bangladeshi community, as stereotypes have influence in construction of their gender identity and being identified. According to Gove and Watt,

Stereotypes do not just shape the way we perceive other people, they also shape the way we behave. People are active players in the development and construction of their own identities. People can, within limits, change themselves to fit their understanding and views of gender. As part of this, people often adopt gender-typical behaviour to form and fit with the identities they construct (2004: 53)<sup>7</sup>.

According to Cassidy et al (2006), ethnic and religious background and gender interact to inhibit or facilitate informal networks, such as those based on friendship, among many South Asian young women. Research by Gavnor (1998) shows that Bangladeshi girls and young women in Tower Hamlets socialise less than their male counterparts. She observes that after entering higher education young Bangladeshi women are able to become friendly with members of other ethnic groups, but until that stage, many of them experience very little first-hand contact with white friends and families. In this regard, Brah argued that 'lack of social 'contact' between them and white people was not due to 'cultural encapsulation'...but rather it was a consequence of racial divisions in society exacerbated by unemployment' (Brah 1996:61).

Furthermore, patriarchal family culture and family centric values are often maintained in the Bangladeshi community in the UK, in which women are expected to follow the religious obligation to marry and maintain a family life (Dench, et al 2006). The young women are often expected to help with household activities, which sometimes might be a 'double burden', especially for married young women who work outside the home. According to Brah, the pressures on South Asian young women are different as well as more acute, in which gender roles (especially motherhood) limit the social networks of women and this may lead to (self) exclusion. For instance, 'the burden of keeping the

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<sup>7</sup> A simplified and possibly exaggerated representation of the most common typical characteristics associated with a category. (Gove and Watt 2004: 53)



family together under dire financial circumstances bore especially hard on women in the family, particularly those who were married' (Brah 1996: 57). Other studies also indicate the pressures around the domestic context experienced by young South Asian women in the UK, as they are expected 'to perform this role of cultural transmitter', (Kalra et al 2005:57).

However, despite the 'double burden' of combining work outside the home with domestic duties', work has been important, as 'the workplace offers women the opportunity to socialise with a wide range of people' which provides social contact beyond family networks (Brah 1996: 59-60). Moreover, work outside the home means a direct relationship with the labour market, which provides a financial authority that can enable 'an increase in their powers of negotiation, an ability to make choices and increase their influence in the domestic domain' (Ramji 2003: 237-238), which can influence their social networks positively.

## **2.9 Structural barriers and inequalities**

Several research studies on the Bangladeshi community in East London revealed that earlier generations of Bangladeshis experienced negatively the racism and violence of white East Enders (Eade, 1994; Eade and Garbin, 2002; Kerchen, 2005). According to Brah (1996: 68),

Bangladeshi families in East London, who have been housed in poor quality council flats on estates where racial violence is a common feature of daily existence. Bangladeshi women on these estates lead a life of acute isolation and fear of racial attacks.

Gardner's (2008) study on British Bangladeshis, found that there was a feeling of suffering from unfair harassment and prejudice as Muslims. The study by Garbin (2009: 104-105) shows

... many British Bangladeshi young people pointed to a growing Islamophobia in the West, and in Britain in particular, after the 9/11 attacks in New York and the

7/7 bombings in London; consequently, many among them reported having been verbally abused in South Camden.

In addition, another study on 'Barriers to employment for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Britain' by Tackey et al. (2006) identified symptoms of increased Islamophobia across the UK, since the 11 September disaster in 2001. A report (1998) by the Runnymede Trust defined Islamophobia as dread, hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims, perpetuated by a series of 'closed views' that imply and attribute negative and derogatory stereotypes and beliefs to Muslims. This is expressed towards Muslims in a range of ways, including: negative or patronising images and references in the media, and in everyday conversations; attacks, abuse and violence on the streets, mosques and cemeteries; discrimination in employment; lack of provision, recognition and respect for Muslims in most public institutions (FAIR UK)<sup>8</sup>. For example, there is a fear among a sample of Asian mothers that Islamophobia 'has heightened worries about racism for many Asian women, particularly about bullying and discrimination in the work place' (Hall *et al.* cited in Tackey et al. 2006: 29). A report by the Home Office (2001) confirmed Islamophobia as a problem that exists in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, and is a cause of racial conflict,

For some young people [Islamophobia] was part of their daily experience.

They felt that they were being socially excluded because of their faith and that this was not being recognised or dealt with. (cited in Tackey et al., 2006: 29).

Research by Kalra *et al.* (1999) on Bangladeshi and Pakistani young people in Oldham also revealed that due to the existence and experience of racism the young people lacked motivation and were frustrated in entering the mainstream labour market (Kalra *et al.*, 1999). This clearly has a negative impact upon social networks, for instance, the Strategy Unit<sup>9</sup> has mentioned,

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<sup>8</sup> Forum Against Islamophobia & Racism (FAIR UK)

<sup>9</sup> The Strategy Unit provides a cross-departmental perspective on the major challenges facing the UK, works with departments in developing their key policies, and provides strategic advice and support to the Prime Minister/No 10.

‘an ethnic minority that is socially isolated will, almost by definition, lack ...bridging social capital and will therefore lack access to some employment opportunities’ (Strategy Unit, 2002:86).

This shows that the Islamophobia is clearly a structural barrier which has been one of the causes of disadvantage for ethnic Muslim people. For example, according to The Strategy Unit, racial discrimination still exists within some workplaces as ethnic minorities constantly face inequalities which block employment opportunities in the labour market in which first generation and even the British born second generation are victims. Minorities also pay an ‘ethnic penalty’ in the competition for jobs, wherein Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and women are most harshly affected by the penalty (Carmichael and Woods 2000; Heath *et al.*, 1999; Karn, 1997). In this respect, Bangladeshis may have a worse experience due to their Muslim identity, as Lindley (2002) observes from her analysis that 'non-White Muslims in Britain may be suffering double discrimination: for being from an ethnic minority group and for being Islamic'. Based on the analysis it was estimated that 'approximately half of the substantial disadvantage that Muslims experience, in terms of earnings and employment, relative to other non-White religions' (cited in Tackey *et al.*, 2006: 28), constituted what she terms a 'pure Islamic penalty'. She also indicates that religion has been an significant ground of economic activity amongst Britain's South Asian population for which 'Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims were shown to be the most disadvantaged in terms of unemployment of all the South Asian religious groups' (*Ibid.*),. The finding is supported by Blackaby *et al.* (1999) who show that 'Muslims experience greater ethnic penalties than any other religious group, irrespective of their ethnicity' (cited in Tackey *et al.*, 2006: 28).

A study by Ward and Spacey (2008) of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women shows that racism still features in many of these women's lives as they are ‘very worried’ about racist attacks<sup>10</sup>. This form of racism is expressed through harassment and violence against Muslims, with Muslim women wearing veils as one of the targets. A recent study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008) of Muslim communities concluded that racial and religious discriminations are key barriers to developing a

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<sup>10</sup> [www.equalities.gov.uk/publications/EthnicMinority Women.pdf](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/publications/EthnicMinority%20Women.pdf)

sense of belonging in Britain. The report also addresses common perceptions of economically inactive Muslim women as being isolated from wider society. The study indicates that there are low levels of women's participation in local organisations that intend to tackle local problems, because the women were feeling unwelcome, and negative attitudes within their community to women's participation in local organisations. This indicates the existence of structural barriers inside and outside. Moreover, an Equal Opportunities Commission (2006) study of ethnic minority women shows payment and conditions at work are deeply racialised. According to the report, racism, sexism and discrimination are part of the everyday experience of ethnic minority women – one in six ethnic minority women experiences racist or sexist comments at work and about one in five Pakistani and Bangladeshi women experiences negative attitudes because of religious dress.

For women, work outside the home has positive input for well-being, self-esteem and the development of social identities (Lloyd and Bowlby, 2000); it also provides independence and confidence (Dale *et al.*, 2002) and access to social networks beyond the family and kin (Brah, 1994). Nonetheless, racism, as a form of 'public patriarchy' such as discrimination in employment, education and involvement in the public arena (Bhopal 1997) may limit women's social mobility. As a number of studies point out, South Asian women have been racialized in the public sphere (see Brah 1996; Puar 1995; Parmar 1982). With relation to the labour market, in most cases South Asian Muslim women have been portrayed as submissive (Kabeer, 2000) and subjected to stereotypical assumptions (Brah, 1994; Dale, 2002; Ahmad *et al.* 2003). For instance Parmar (1982) elaborates the racialized assumptions about the women:

Women of Asian origin range from being seen as sexually exotic creatures, 'full of Eastern promise', to being seen as oppressive wives and mothers completely dominated by their menfolk, having little or no control in their families. The most familiar image of Asian women is one of a passive woman walking three steps behind her domineering and sometimes brutal 'lord and master'. This passivity is presented as both natural and cultural - the Asian woman is thought to have been socialised into learning appropriate ways of using her 'natural' attributes to please, serve and accommodate her future husband (p, 259).

There is a considerable body of evidence that points to the significance of racial discrimination in structuring the stereotypical assumptions and disadvantages faced by South Asian and Afro-Caribbean groups in the labour market (Brah and Shaw 1992; Dex 1983; Miles and Phizacklea 1980; Phizacklea 1983, 1988, 1990; Parmer 1982). These racialised assumptions have an impact upon South Asian family life and social life. For example Connolly (1998: 13) illustrates how the assumptions can affect both private and public spheres,

The popular stereotype is South Asians are regarded as obedient and hard-working but also culturally 'strange' and different... Similarly, the more that South Asian families are seen as culturally different, the more likely it is that other people will not want them to live next door. As a consequence, certain minority ethnic groups will therefore be more likely to be unemployed or to find work only in certain occupations; they may also be forced to confine their choice of home to certain areas, for fear of racial harassment and intimidation.

Consequently, employers often describe Asian women as 'hard-to-reach' (Cabinet Office, 2002: 83). A report (2006) by the Equal Opportunities Commission found that ethnic minority women are up to three times more likely to be asked about their plans for marriage, children and family at job interviews than white women. This is ironic, given that Pakistani and Bangladeshi young women may in fact challenge stereotyped expectations by expressing high aspirations and commitment to the labour market. In that regard, the report also revealed that from school some Muslim women have been discouraged in pursuing higher education or professional careers. For instance, according to the report,

A young Bangladeshi girl who wanted to become a doctor was told at school that girls from her community are likely to get married after 18 and hence she should not 'waste' her time in a degree but pursue a vocational qualification.

(Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006: 56).

Research by Connolly (1998) on pupils of primary school addresses how South Asian girls were represented, as she observed,

For South Asian girls, their particular construction as being passive, obedient and eager-to-please arguably transformed them into the epitome of femininity in the eyes of some teachers. Even more so than with their White peers, then, this quintessential femininity had relegated South Asian girls to the private sphere where their actions and behaviour were more likely to be overlooked. (Connolly 1998:169)

In this regard, Ahmed (2003) argues that South Asian Muslim women in Britain have been objectified and situated based on the notions of arranged marriages, Hijab and veiling, as a result 'their modes of resistance are not understood within the economic, political, social, and ideological structures that shape their lives within Britain', (Puar cited in Kalra 1995:54).

This indicates that Islamophobia and stereotypical assumptions increase the racism and inequality which are often faced by South Asian Muslim women in public places. These structural issues may exclude them from accessing resources, one of the key elements of social capital, which Putnam noticeably fails to address in his works.

## **2.10 Inter-generational relationships**

Inter-generational relationships may influence the creation and maintenance of social networks among Bangladeshi young women. The relationships between older and younger generations may shape social networks that are positive for or constrain the young women. Parental authority in relation to gendered division of labour and space may lead to tension between the parents and the daughter, as that might limit their socialisation outside the home, apart from the time they spend at places of study and work. For example, as in other South Asian communities, Bengali parents may try 'to replicate the way they were brought up. Somehow in the majority of the cases this anxiety was more intense where daughters were concerned. It was a question of maintaining family Izzat (honour), a predominantly female virtue in a patriarchal society' (Bhatti 1999:165). This can lead to an apparent 'clash' between the 'traditional' culture of their parents and the secular culture of the British mainstream (Gardner 2002). Therefore south Asian young people have often been described as a 'half-way-generation' (Taylor 1976), a generation suffering from a 'cultural clash' (Khan 1979,

Watson 1977) or youngsters who have the best or worst of two worlds (Ghuman 1991, 1994). Ghail et al. (2005) thus argue that 'second generation' and 'third generation' young Bangladeshi are most often positioned as being 'caught between two cultures'. Conversely, Brah rejects this simplistic notion, and argues that young people of minority ethnic backgrounds are not 'between two cultures', as she stated,

Their cultural identity was secure and firmly based in the lived experience of Asians in Britain' and ...they are actively setting their own agendas, challenging their specific oppressions in their own ways, ...and marking new cultural and political trajectories, Brah (1996:69).

Likewise, Gardener and Shukur (1994: 164) also argue that 'it is not that young Bengalis are, as Watson suggested, 'between two cultures'. Rather, they had constructed new and varied life styles of their own.

Furthermore, the Bangladeshi young people researched by Garbin (2009) rejected being described as 'between two cultures'; rather they claimed a 'combination' or 'mixed' culture, as mentioned earlier in discussion about identity, which represents a culture of hybridity in which especially girls negotiate their cultural backgrounds. According to Garbin, the family/parents of Bangladeshi young people were 'quite open', which enabled the young people (boys and girls) to go out freely, to 'hang out', as long as their parents knew where they were.

A study by Smart and Rahman (2009:54) on Bangladeshi girls in Tower Hamlets also indicates that inter-generational closure, the daughter and the parent relationships underpin the girl's education and career, which can be interpreted as social life, as places of study and work are part of the public sphere. The parents support and encourage their daughters' aspirations, in which the girls choose subjects and get career ideas from the parent through discussion and a process of negotiation. The study also illustrates that the parent's 'main priority was for their daughters to be academically successful, to gain a degree if they had the interest and ability, and to find a 'decent' job, which led to financial security and personal development' (Smart and Rahman 2009:54). A report by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) also highlighted that Bangladeshi parents support their children in attending education and

especially they value their daughters' education and expect them to earn academic qualifications (Aston et al, 2007; Basit, 1996, 1997; Abbas, 2003). This indicates positive relationships between two generations which has been helpful not only for the education, but can also be positive for their social networks.

In contrast to stereotyped and reductive dominant assumptions, South Asian Women including Bangladeshi women do have agency; the women have been able to negotiate their Muslim cultural norms and values, the lifestyles they subscribe to, within the context of demands of white British culture. There is a need to focus on the ways in which South Asian Muslim women, especially young women who are second or third generation, are negotiating their cultural backgrounds and developing their own life styles in Britain. In this respect, it is important that Bangladeshi young women need to be addressed separately, since South Asian women are not homogeneous and the current literature has often overlooked these differences. For instance, Ramji argues,

The category 'South Asian Women' is heterogeneous, and like the concept of the 'South Asian Diaspora', needs to be deconstructed. For instance, there are at least three major axes of differentiation amongst the south Asian population of Britain. The first centres on origin (region, language and religion); the second is structural (wealth, cast occupation and education) and the third is what might be called contingent geography (current residence, network clusters, economic enclaves), (2003: 229).

Moreover, much of the literature that is of relevance to the research in Tower Hamlets has not centred specifically on young women of Bangladeshi origin or descent. For example, Eade (1989, 1997, 2002) has covered the issues of community politics and relations plus issue of identity related to second generation Bangladeshi young adults at university. Gavron (1999) and Pollen (2002) have worked on family life and marriage, Gardner's work has researched transnational migration, notions of home and away, Islam and older people (1993, 1994, 1995, 2002). A study by Phillipson et al (2003) that focuses on middle-aged first generation Bangladeshi women in Tower Hamlets discusses the dilemmas and uncertainties that are reinforced by how these women experience their immediate environment; there is little material on identity. Ghail and



Haywood (2005) have conducted research on young Bangladeshis but addressed issues of identity, culture and ethnicity only at a general level.

### **2.11 Summary: the research agenda in light of the literature**

Social networks are considered as the key components and an important base of social capital. The above discussion illustrates that social networks and social capital can play an important role towards a positive change of peoples' lives in relation to education, economic growth, emotional wellbeing, employment and general upward mobility, which is significant for Bangladeshi young women. However, much of the literature on social networks and social capital fails to include women's experience and struggle across ethnic and cultural diversity.

Social network has been understood in many ways but the key features around this phenomenon are ties, relationship and mutual support which can mobilize social capital. To date, however, the concept social capital has been extensively examined by Putnam (2000, 2007, 2010) and may have influence in social policy. Putnam presents mainly two key forms of social capital, namely bonding social capital and bridging social capital, in which 'bonding' social capital is an exclusive force; on the other hand, 'bridging' social capital is inclusive and both forms of capital serve different purposes. However, Putnam's work has been criticised from a range of perspectives, such as for ignoring 'the ways in which power and structural inequalities are reproduced in social networks, including ethnic, gender and social-class inequalities' (Reynolds 2011:4). In addition, his work does not address the micro level, how individuals, especially young women, experience social capital through their social networks in terms of household relationships, education and social structures such as racism and inequality.

On the other hand, in the current literature Bangladeshi women have mostly been studied either under South Asian Women or Muslim women, in which these works cover their success, struggle, and oppression in terms of education, gender and patriarchal ideology, racism from various lenses, however, these works ignore the social networks of women, especially Bangladeshi young women. Consequently there appears to be no work (as far as I know) that has been conducted on how Bangladeshi young women create and maintain their social networks with regards to their identity, cultural

background and contextual social aspects of society. Therefore, I assert the need to look at the social networks of these young women, which is accordingly the issue to be addressed in this study.

Although gender and cultural context have not been referred to by Putnam, his key ideas such as bonding and bridging forms of social capital along with 'ethnic capital' (Zhou, 2005; Modood 2004) provide a theoretical basis for exploring the social capital of Bangladeshi young women. Accordingly, the study examines social networks of Bangladeshi young women in relation to their identity, patriarchy, cultural and social aspects. The three chapters 4, 5 and 6 discuss the issues in order to understand nature of the social networks of the young women; how they create and maintain the networks; and how identity, and the contextual experience of patriarchy, racism and inequalities impact upon their social networks. Prior to that, Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and justify the research approach used in this study – an investigation of the nature and impact of social networks and social capital in relation to British Bangladeshi young women. As a starting point, the chapter recalls the broad ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives that were considered as a prelude to the research design. This is followed by discussion and elucidation of the main research methods employed, approaches to sampling and recruitment, data collection and data coding and analysis.

### **3.2 Research paradigms**

A comprehensive belief, worldview or framework that guides a researcher's action is known as a paradigm, which provides a theoretical understanding of how key aspects of the social or natural world work, the nature of research participants and research phenomena and what constitutes knowledge in the context of research (Denzin, 2000; Willies (2007). A paradigm consists of three basic elements - ontology, epistemology and methodology. Guba and Lincoln (1994) categorise the main paradigms as positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism/interpretivism and this classification remains influential (Cupchik, 2001; Gephart, 1999; Greene, Benjamin, and Goodyear, 2001; Guba, 1990; Smith, 1989). However, all these paradigms can be used to structure and organize social science research. In terms of social network research, a relevant account is made by Kirke:

The theoretical belief underlying social network research is that the structure, or pattern, formed by the relational ties between individuals in social networks is central to our understanding of the social world (Wellman, 1988; Collins, 1988). The theoretical perspective, at its simplest, is that social structures affect individual actions ... The structures provide access to various resources, such as knowledge, influence, social support and social capital, for their members. Social network analysts believe, therefore, that individual action is best understood in the social context in which it is embedded and that social context

can be found in the social structures of relationships formed by the individuals concerned (2009: 24).

### **3.2.1 Selecting a research paradigm - Interpretivism**

The review of literature with regard to social networks and social capital in relation to identity, patriarchy and racism – against the background of a planned study concerned with the influence of culture and gendered relationships - suggested that positivist and post-positivist paradigms would not be suitable bases for the research. The positivist approach is mainly associated with quantitative research and it has been argued that the perspective is inappropriate to a great deal of social research. This is because positivism assumes an objective external reality upon which inquiry can focus (Hirschheim, 1992). And post-positivist approaches to social research are more flexible in this last regard but are still often wedded to the ‘scientific method’ (Creswell 2003: 6). This is premised upon empirical study and often, but not always, quantification of findings.

Conversely, critical theory is often employed in qualitative research but typically, this approach looks at the world through a political lens. Certain groups or phenomena – such as the rich, politicians, men and capitalism – exert power and influence over other groups. The goal of critical theory is thus often emancipation of the oppressed. This clearly has some initial resonance for research concerned with women who, for reasons of culture and gender, may experience marginality and exclusion. But, although the researcher, in the research described here, had an intimate awareness of such phenomena in the everyday world, the investigation was not conceived in purely political or emancipatory terms. The emphasis, instead, was upon discovery and nuanced analysis in the context of socially aware “academic” research.

The research described here aimed to investigate the perceptions, experiences and practices of social networks with particular regard to the meanings and emotions of British Bangladeshi young women. This chimed well with the interpretivist concern to understand the manner in which actors construct meaning and understand experience within their situated realities. As Willies emphasises:

Humans behave the way they do in part because of their environment...Humans are also influenced by their subjective perception of their environment—their subjective realities...if we are to fully understand the behaviour of an 18-year-old delinquent we must understand her view of the world around her. We must also understand the subjective perceptions of her by others in her social and cultural context. Thus, for interpretivists, what the world means to the person or group being studied is critically important to good research in the social sciences (2007: 6).

These meanings and realities, moreover, are inevitably shaped by social and cultural contexts - they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others and in conjunction with the norms and expectations that are experienced in everyday life. This interpretive focus upon interaction was thus particularly apposite to the concern in my research upon the impact of social networks on individual women. Essentially, the interpretivist inquiry has potential capacity to understand the experience of social networks and social capital of these young women within the context of their residing location, situated identity and social structures with regard to their own ethnic-culture-faith as well as societal aspects, such as how they are seen and treated by other ethnic groups - enabling and constraining aspects. Moreover, this paradigm was well suited to the qualitative data collection methods that, of necessity, would be required to effectively access and record these phenomena – methods that are described and, in the context of the investigation, justified in section 3.3 below.

In addition, visualizing the networks structure, which is often used in the discussion of social networks, has also been relevant in observing the nature of the networks of the young women within their social contexts - this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, including visual networks structures.

A relevant paradigm for studying social capital is the 'social networks approach', in which visual association has been the key to the relevant research. For example, the approach is most closely linked with the work of a number of researchers, such as Burt (1992, 2001, 2005); Portes (1995, 1997, 1998 ); and Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993), in which the conceptualisations of social capital have been constructed on the ideas of

social ties and network structure. The social network approach is also known as 'Social Network Analysis' (SNA). The SNA approach permits researchers to set up a visual diagram for analysis to combine both the composition and structure of the network, which can facilitate identifying the pattern of social ties among a set of actors. The approach is also used to determine individual advantages or access to resources within the networks.

The strengths of social network approach can, however, also be weaknesses, as the SNA approach often pays less attention to the process and mechanisms by which social systems govern. Alder and Kwon (2002) argue that SNA and its applications use an egocentric lens, by which it dominates social capital research. Besides, social ties are usually described relatively ambiguously by the approach. Most importantly, contextual issues such as ethnicity, cultural influences and relevant social aspects have not been considered by social capital researchers using an SNA approach. As Krishna and Shrader assert:

The shape of any network does not by itself indicate much about the nature of human relationships within that network...What sorts of norms are related to which type of networks cannot be assumed *a priori* but must be investigated independently for each separate context (1999: 6).

On the other hand, the interpretivism paradigm stresses agency, ideas, and change, which may enable empirically better exploration through qualitative means from the experience of the agent. Against this background, therefore, instead of exclusively adopting a SNA method, the visual identification of network structures combined with a qualitative strategy provides a greater possibility of exploring the experiences as well as the enabling and constraining aspects of social networks of Bangladeshi young women. As Krishna and Shrader (1999: 3) argue, 'neither an exclusively networks-based nor an entirely norms-dependent measure suffices' for understanding one's social capital.

### **3.2.2 The basis of qualitative research design**

The two terms, qualitative and quantitative strategies are commonly used by social science researchers to describe two different paradigms for research (Willies, 2007). As

mentioned earlier the interpretivist approach uses qualitative methods, while quantitative methods tend to be linked to positivism (Spicer, 2006). Table 3.1 lists the characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research strategies as described by Bryman (2001).

<b>Table 3.1: Quantitative and qualitative research strategies.</b>		
	Quantitative	Qualitative
Principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research	Deductive; testing of theory	Inductive; generation of theory
Epistemological orientation	Natural science model, in particular positivism	Interpretive
Ontological orientation	Objectivism	Constructionist

Quantitative research intends to see the world from an objective perspective, in which the approach typically focuses mainly on the statistical significance of the results, generated from empirical tests (Maykut and Morehouse, 1998). In addition, the research involves collecting and analysing the data from standardized survey questionnaires or from instruments in an experimental design (Creswell 1994). Quantitative approaches have been one of the main ways to investigate social capital and analyse social networks. Social networks as the key component of social capital have been emphasised in many research studies (Woolcock and Narayan 2000; Burt 2000; Stone. W et. at 2003). For example, Hall (1999) emphasises formal and informal networks of sociability, and on the norms of social trust which are widely linked with such networks. According to Krishna and Shrader:

Empirical studies of social capital differ among themselves in terms of the manner in which they have addressed these two issues. While some studies have assessed social capital solely in terms of network density, others have relied purely on a measure of trust. Yet other studies combine a measure of network density with some proxies for assessing the strength of the relevant norms (1999: 3).

The most common gauges of social capital study have been an actor's participations in public life such as, membership of voluntary organisations, churches or political parties (Schuller, 2001); in other words, *social networks* have been assessed with civic norms through actors' public involvement. For example, Putnam (1993; 2000) has generally deployed quantitative methods to examine different aspects of social capital, such as civic behaviour, trust and social networks, in which secondary survey data has typically been utilized. Putnam developed an index of the strength of civic community to measure attributes of social capital through people's involvement in public life. In his text *Bowling Alone* Putnam's 'measures are based on a composite index representing participation in a range of civic and political activities. The summary index is the average of the standardised scores of 14 component measures. These 14 indicators of formal and informal community networks and social trust are sufficiently interrelated to tap a single underlying dimension' (Elliot, 2001:28). In recent work, Putnam (2007) deployed a mixed method, but it remains more quantitative rather than qualitative. For example, a quantitative method was applied again with the use of surveys and statistical data analysis. He also acquired information from past national survey data. The data has been utilized for analysing the categorisation of Americans and measuring how they trust each other statistically, as his main focus was on trust as social capital. However, Putnam's approach to measuring social capital has been criticised on a few points, for example, trust has been measured as 'generalised trust'; and most importantly, gender, ethnicity and cultural aspects have been ignored in his investigation. The context of individual or micro levels has not been adequately examined through measuring, and nor has trust and reciprocity. Similarly, examining the process of social capital has also been excluded by deploying a quantitative approach.

The aim of my study is not to focus on measuring the social networks of young women, rather it emphasises the experiences of the women and the factors associated with this in relation to their ethnicity, identity and culture. In this regard, Woolcock et al. (2006: 5) argue that 'quantitative techniques are, in general, less effective in understanding context and process'. As such, quantitative techniques are not adequate to describe the complexity of many important characteristics of people and communities like Bangladeshi young women, such as identities, faith, cultural norms and social aspects within their context, which potentially impact upon the social networks of these young



women. These issues cannot be meaningfully reduced to numbers. Statistical data may well be applicable for measuring social capital in which it is seen mainly as properties but a qualitative approach may be more valuable in understanding the process, in particular with regard to identity and cultural-social aspects. In addition, focusing on the process is essential for understanding the influential factors, such as the enabling and constraining aspects of the social networks of these women. Against this background, qualitative methods can be particularly effective in investigating deeper into issues of process, as qualitative research informed by the interpretivist paradigm usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. Besides, a successful quantitative study is usually large-scale research which requires a substantial sample and generation of data which is unfeasible in terms of my limited time and resources.

Alternatively, qualitative research involves an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the approach offers several aspects that may be method types for data collection, analysis and report writing or overall design that includes all phases in the research processes (Creswell 1994). A qualitative interpretive approach was adopted in the design of this research in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, practices and experience that attended the social networks with which young Bangladeshi women came into contact. As Creswell observes:

For qualitative studies the research problem needs to be explored because little information exists on the topic. The variable is largely unknown and the researcher wants to focus on the context that may shape the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In many qualitative studies a theory base does not guide the study because those available are inadequate, incomplete or simply missing (1994: ?).

Understanding the precise experience of these young women requires an understanding of how they go through the process with regard to social networks. Therefore, a qualitative approach was appropriate to explore the phenomenon in the context of their identity, ethnicity and cultural expectations, as the method allows the researcher to highlight and conceptualise crucial experiences, for example, how the research

participants qualitatively experience being Muslim young women with regard to their social networks.

### **3.3 Selecting research methods**

#### **3.3.1 Qualitative interviews**

The qualitative interview is deployed in order to investigate the perception and experience of social networks of Bangladeshi young women with regard to their identity, patriarchy and cultural aspects. Generally, the term qualitative interview involves in-depth, loosely structured or semi-structured interviews, which have been referred to as 'conversation with a purpose' (Burgess, cited in Mason, 1996: 38).

Qualitative interviewing is:

...flexible and dynamic. ..By in depth qualitative interviewing we mean repeated face to face encounters between the researcher and informants directed towards understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words. The in depth interview is modelled after a conversation between equals, rather than a formal questioned-answer exchange. Far from being a robot like data collector, the interviewer, not an interview schedule or protocol, is the research tool. The role entails not merely obtaining answers, but learning what questions to ask and how to ask them. (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984: 77).

The approach of qualitative interview appeared well suited to my investigation as this is 'particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals' attitudes and values' (Byrne 2006: 182) – these complex issues that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a structured questionnaire. The technique supports open ended, flexible questions which provide better access to interviewees' views, interpretations of events, understanding, experiences and opinions. Besides, the method was appropriate because 'it is a flexible medium and, to a certain extent, allows interviewees to speak in their own voices and with their own languages' (Byrne 2006: 182). Thus, qualitative interviewing has often been used by feminists as this provides a way of 'giving voice' to women's experience. This approach thus seemed particularly suitable to gauging the

Bangladeshi young women's perception, values and experience. Accordingly, for my study, among the 43 research participants, 17 young women between the ages of 16 and 23 were interviewed individually as the key participants, and two young adults at the age of 27-29 were interviewed. In addition, three professional workers were also interviewed individually; one of them was male. The interviews of the adult young women and the workers were included to ensure triangulation of the data. All the interviews took place at the choice of convenient location of the participants, such as home, place of study, place of work and local community library.

All the participants were Muslim and most lived in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (two lived in neighbouring boroughs but worked or studied in Tower Hamlets). Most of the women were in formal full-time education; two combined part-time employment with study; five were in paid work and a few were in-between stages in their education. The colleges and school sixth forms that some participants attended were in Tower Hamlets - two of these settings were single sex institutions but all the settings were marked by a significant proportion of students of Bangladeshi origin or descent - 59.5% in 2006 (Eilbert et. al 2007). The universities some women attended were the University of East London, Greenwich University, London School of Economics, Middlesex University, City University and London Metropolitan University (four of these are located outside Tower Hamlets).

The research was conducted in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, in which one third of the resident population are of Bangladeshi origin (Tower Hamlets Report, 2008). The reason for choosing this geographical location was due to the large number of second and third generation Bangladeshis residing in the borough, as the borough was the arrival location for most first generation Bangladeshi immigrants (Saunders, 2010). Secondly, I have personally been living in the borough for a long time. Besides, I have been working with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. This has been an enabling factor for me to reach the participants within my time frame. My professional identity and being a resident of the borough was useful to present myself to the informants and the gatekeepers who were helpful for rapport building with the participants.

### 3.3.2 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were also used for studying the social networks of these young women; the approach is effective both as an independent method and in combination with other techniques of data gathering. According to Tonkiss (2006), a focus group is a small group discussion which is focused on a particular topic and facilitated by a researcher. Typically focus groups 'involve six to ten people - small enough to allow all the members to participate, but large enough to capture a variety of perspectives...' (Tonkiss, 2006: 194). More specifically:

The method is particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, frame and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary. Focus groups also enable researchers to examine peoples' different perspectives as they operate within a social network. Crucially, group work explores how accounts are articulated, censured, opposed and changed through social interaction and how this relates to peer communication and group norms.

(Barbour and Kitzinger 1999: 5)

In this latter regard, focus groups appeared to be an ideal means to further explore and contextualise shared perceptions, experiences and understanding with regard to the social networks and social capital of Bangladeshi young women, as the method confers a stronger methodological assertion, that group context is valuable to investigate knowledge and meanings in terms of participants' own understanding within their social and cultural context. Accordingly, a total of four focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with different groups of women. For example,

A) The first FGD - group 1 - was conducted with five women from various backgrounds in terms of their level of education and social status. For example, a couple of women were in full time work; a participant had just finished her degree and was volunteering with a single sex Sixth Form college; another participant went to a unisex Sixth Form college and another participant went to a single sex Sixth Form college. The FGD took place at the participants' preferred place, a local library and at their preferred time. One of my colleagues as gatekeeper arranged the discussion as they were her community

friends. The gatekeeper also participated in the discussion. The following participants participated in the discussion. move to appendix

B) The second FGD- group 2, which took place in a One Stop youth centre, was conducted with four participants. The participants were attached to the centre and a youth worker of the organisation acted as gatekeeper to arrange the event. Among the four participants, one was in full time work with the youth centre, one went to a unisex college, one went to a unisex Sixth Form College and another went to a single sex Sixth Form college.

C) The third FGD- group 3 took place in a community organisation called the Attlee Foundation<sup>11</sup>, which runs programmes for young people. A total of eight participants contributed to the discussion, all of whom were in some way attached to the organisation. Among them seven participants were from the same single sex Sixth Form College; and one participant, who was from another single sex Sixth Form college, worked part time with the organisation as well.

D) The fourth FGD- group 4 was conducted with a group of six women who were engaged in faith based activities; but the women came from different backgrounds, for example, two women went to a unisex college, and one participant went to a single sex Sixth Form college, both of which are based in Tower Hamlets; two participants went to a university based outside the borough, and another participant went to a college which was also based outside the borough. The discussion was arranged by Muslimaats<sup>12</sup>, a faith based organisation to which the women were attached, and was held at Muslimaats' premises.

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<sup>11</sup> Attlee Foundation is a local community organisation; it provides open access and inclusive facilities for children, young people and the local community regardless ethnicity and culture.

<sup>12</sup> Muslimaats UK is a community based women's' organization aiming to seek the pleasure of Allah through striving to bring about positive change in society for all. The organisation is based in the East London Mosque in Tower Hamlets which has been established by a small group of young Muslim women, with the aim to bring about an Islamic change in society by working with other Muslim women and the native women of Britain. Muslimaats UK is a member of Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and has close links with many national as well as international organisations such as Islamic Forum Europe (IFE) and Young Muslim Organisation (YMO UK). The organisation has a series of activities for women. Source: <http://www.muslimaats.org/>

## Advantages and limitations of selected research methods

Data collection types	Advantages	Limitations
Qualitative interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-this helped me to better in understanding participant's views on the researched issue as the interviews were face-to- face conversation. In addition, this helped us to clarify or ask follow on questions to carry on the discussions.</li> <li>- The interviews took place in the participants' choice of location, a relaxed setting in which the interviews were conversational in nature and most participants talked openly</li> <li>- Most of the time data recording was easy as we used a quiet place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All participants who were interviewed were not equally confident and articulate, as a result I could not gather quality data for a few cases.</li> <li>- I had an impression that a few women might not have talked openly while they were talking about cultural and religious constraints. This might be due to our similar cultural and religious backgrounds</li> </ul>
Focus Group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It helped me to gather breadth and depth of data from different opinions of participants within a short time</li> <li>- group perspectives helped participants to talk as we were talking about common issues such as identity, cultural and social aspects in which everyone had something to share. The interactive discussions provided rich data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sometimes participants talked at the same time, which was difficult to separate in transcription</li> <li>- Data recording was difficult, especially when more than one participant talked at the same time</li> <li>- It was time consuming and labour intensive to conduct</li> <li>- Sometimes it was expensive, as I provided refreshments to participants</li> </ul>

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Alternative methods in qualitative research include, for example, narrative research, phenomenology, and ethnography; in terms of my research, however, none of these approaches was appropriate. For example, narrative research refers to one or more individual life stories in which 'narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected' (Czarniawska, 2004: 17), which is usually deployed in the study of autobiography and oral history. However, in my study the approach is not directly narrative, because the focus is upon a purposive sample of Bangladeshi young women who were in similar situations with specific regard to wider social networks.

On the other hand, phenomenologists focus on describing what research participants have in common as they experience phenomena such as insomnia, exclusion, anger, grief and coronary artery bypass surgery (Moustakas, 1994). Understanding these common experiences is valuable for particular professionals (such as therapists, teachers, health personnel, and policymakers). My investigation, however, although concerned to some extent with the inner world of the research participants, did not make any assumptions about the inherent qualities of fixity of 'social networks'. Then again, as a strategy of inquiry, ethnographic approach 'involves extended observations of the group such as *participant observation*, in which the researcher is *immersed* in the day-to-day lives of the people and observes and interviews the group participants' (Creswell, 2006: 68). It was clear to me that the type of sustained participant observation in the field, although potentially productive in my investigation, was not logistically tenable in terms of access, time available and the required immersion in the lives of the young Bangladeshi women.

### **3.4 Sampling**

Sampling techniques have been developed to ensure proper representation of the research participants, in order to collect the most relevant, rich and varied information to answer the research question for a particular study. It is not feasible for a qualitative researcher to reach an entire population; therefore the researcher needs to rely on a

particular sample of participants to investigate a social phenomenon. The research location London Borough Tower Hamlets, has therefore been chosen carefully for data gathering: as mentioned earlier most Bangladeshis reside in the location. According to Krathwohl (1997: 163) sampling techniques are usually divided into two parts: probability and non-probability. Mainly the non probability sampling was used for my study, but to some extent the probability technique was also involved.

### **3.4.1 Convenience sampling**

Probability sampling 'involves random sampling of units from the population at some stage in the sampling process' Krathwohl (1997:163). The technique includes simple random, stratified, systematic, and cluster sampling methods, which enable a researcher to draw conclusions about the characteristic of a particular population. The probability technique produces a sample by a random process from an entire population, whereas 'Non-probability sampling methods are procedures that do not include random sampling at some stage in the process; because of their convenience, they are common' (Krathwohl, 1997: 171). The technique may include judgmental and purposive, quota, snowball, sequential, which are also called convenience sampling methods, while what Krathwohl (1997: 171) described as the '*grab* method, is *the most commonly used* non-probability technique, since it enables a researcher to select a required number of participants depending on participants' availability, which facilitates data collection.

The primary selection criteria were:

- young female
- aged between 16-25
- second generation Bangladeshi
- preferably living in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Within these criteria three main groups of young women were recruited for this study in order to ensure triangulation of the data. The three groups were,

1. Young people going to college/ Sixth Form
2. Young people going to university
3. Young people who were in work - paid, volunteer, full time or part time.



Accordingly, a viable purposive sample (n=43) was, however, eventually selected. 38 British-Bangladeshi young women, aged 16-23 were either interviewed for the study or included in four focus group discussions as the key participants; and two young adult women aged 27-29 years were interviewed. In addition, three professional workers were interviewed one-to-one; one of the workers was male.

For the individual interview, the recruitment was directly by me, so both sets of criteria had been followed through. However, participants' recruitment for the focus group discussions was not under my control, as I was unaware of what criteria the gatekeepers considered in selecting the participants. For example, the gatekeeper at the Atlee Foundation selected participants from their service users for one of my focus group discussions, in which she maintained the primary criteria; but that did not cover the 'three groups' of participants. Therefore, to some extent both non probability and probability techniques were used in the recruitment process. However, in order to ensure broad representation as far as possible the young women were selected in terms of their education (college, university) and social position (employment status). The backgrounds of the interviewees and focus group participants are summarised below in table 3.2:

Table 3.2: Backgrounds of participants	
Number of participants	Present status
8	Student, university
19	Student, college & Sixth Form
7	Employed
4	Studying and working
2	Young adult
3	Worker working with young people
<b>Total 43</b>	

### **3.5 Recruiting participants for the study**

The research participants were recruited through college, university student unions, community organisations, snowballing and my professional networks in Tower Hamlets. First of all a pre-research search was carried out to find out the name, contact person and contact address of appropriate institutions. The institutions were contacted mainly for organising focus group discussions, as these needed a number of participants together. Each of the institutions was contacted formally by email, including my research abstract and issues about confidentiality, in which I introduced myself and explained my plans and intentions to gatekeepers whose support I needed. I explained the importance of their support and gave them an opportunity to ask me about my research and my methods and goals. With many of them, the contact was through formal interaction, face to face meetings in which I presented my identification documents; and with a couple of organisations I had to submit my CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) document. Once relations had been established, according to primary criteria as discussed earlier, I asked the institutions to select participants from Bangladeshi young women and they were effectively gatekeepers in selection of participants. I asked each of the institutions to select 6-10 participants for the focus group discussions. I also asked the institutions to circulate my email within their networks to reach individuals for the interview. I contacted almost all Sixth Forms (post 16 study) in the Borough of Tower Hamlets. I contacted Tower Hamlets College and Queen Mary, University of London and East London University. Only a few of these responded, and only one participant was interviewed from those contacts. Initially that was quite frustrating; however, a better response was received from local youth services and community based organisations who work for young people. For example a number of focus group discussions and individual interviews were conducted through the One Stop Centre for young people, the Attlee Foundation and Muslimaat. In addition to those, a focus group discussion was conducted which was organised by a participant - she along with her friends participated in the discussion.

‘The researcher should not expect people to admire the work of researchers and should seldom lay out the request for access and permissions on the grounds that the study will

solve a problem or advance social well-being' (Stake 1995: 58). But once I had identified the potential research, participants' shared identity, cultural values and geography proved to be useful in this respect. Formal requests for cooperation, details about my background, assurances with regard to research ethics, email messages, telephone calls and informal discussions helped to lay the ground for the more formal interviews. But the voluntary nature of participation, perhaps not surprisingly, meant that some women either did not reply to initial requests for their time or declined.

Selecting participants was crucial, especially for individual interviews. I mainly used my own networks called 'snowballing'. As described by Alice (2006), in snowballing, respondents are obtained through referrals among people who share the same characteristics. There are limitations to snowballing. For example,

The main problem with snowballing techniques is that there is a possibility of interviewing people within one network which means that they might have similar experience and this will bias the survey findings. Also, more isolated members of a group will not be included in the survey. One way around this is to try to find multiple starting points for snowballing so that access to more than one network is obtained. (Bloch 2006: 177)

I had been able to overcome the limitations of snowballing by using my various networks such as personal and professional networks. For example, a number of participants were recruited through Bangladeshi parents who attended my Parenting course, in which I asked them for support me with the recruitment. Accordingly a number of parents helped me as gatekeepers in linking to their daughters or relatives. Similarly a few of my colleagues and child-minders helped me with the recruitment. Consequently, the multiple access points of snowballing helped me to reach participants with different backgrounds and experience. The following Figure: 3.1 shows the recruitment mapping:

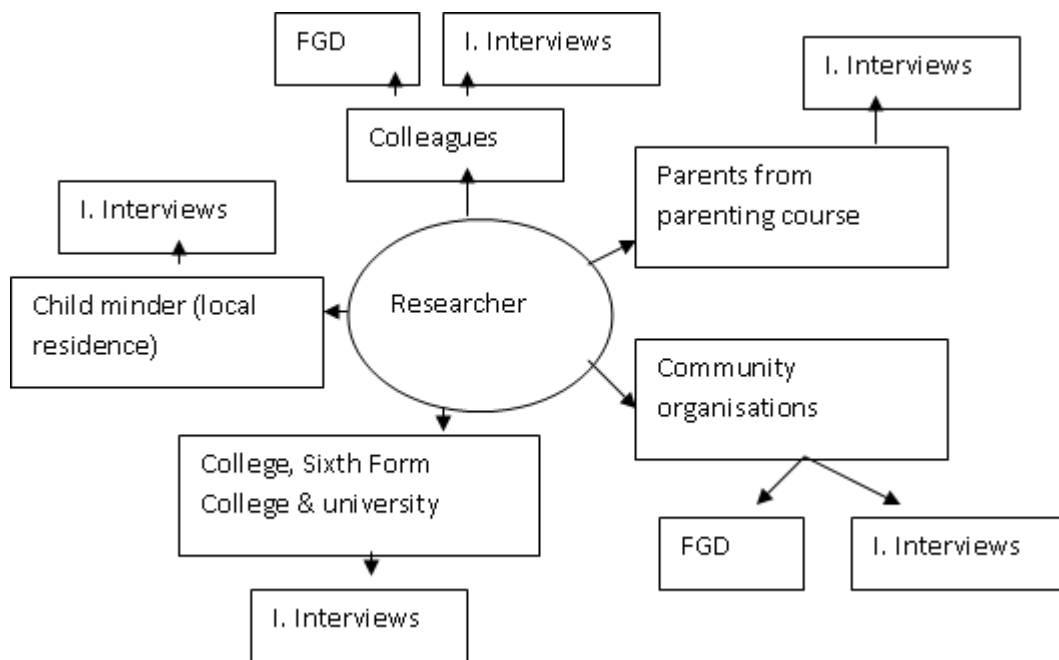


Figure: 3.1: Recruitment mapping.

FGD= Focus group Discussion

I. Interview = Individual interview

### 3.6 Research instruments and their thematic content

The focus group discussions and qualitative interviews were oriented to three broad issues:

1. Exploring how social networks are perceived, given meaning and evaluated by young women of Bangladeshi origin or descent.
2. In what ways do young women of Bangladeshi origin or descent engage with existing social networks?
3. What effects do social networks have upon young women of Bangladeshi origin or descent?

### **3.6.1 The interview guide and focus group cues**

As mentioned earlier, individual interviews and focus group discussions were deployed to gather qualitative data for this investigation. A one-to-one interview and a focus group discussion were carried out in order to test the interview schedule and focus group questions; a list of questions is provided in Appendix B. The key purpose was firstly to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the interview schedule, and secondly to find out the strengths and limitations of the interview process between me and the young woman, as there were some differences of age and cultural background. For example, I grew up in the Bangladeshi context, whereas the research participants were young and had been brought up in the British context. Although our roots were in Bangladesh, our cultural orientation and spoken accent were to some extent different, as culture differs in terms of socio-economical and geographical location (Brah 1996).

I reached my first participant through a parent who attended a parenting course which I delivered. The participant was the parent's youngest sister and went to university. In the first instance, I had a phone conversation with the young woman, in which I introduced myself, and explained in detail the purpose and procedure of the interview. Consequently she had invited me at a convenient time for her to their flat (the participant was living with her sister, the gatekeeper/parent) for the interview.

While I was at their house, I asked her for a quiet place. As a first step, in order to break the ice, I started the conversation in a very informal way; I also allowed her to ask me questions about my study. The ice breaking process helped me to get an initial idea about her outlook, which was important to conduct the interview. As a second step, once the relationship was established, I began formal procedures such as reminding her about ethical procedures, timing and recording; asking her to sign the consent form and making my recorder ready. The third step was to start the interview with asking for background information such as name, age, education etc. and then with a general open ended question such as 'usually how do you spend your leisure time?; What kinds of social networks do you have or practice?' The interview was more like a conversation because of its qualitative nature. She was spontaneous like most of the other

participants; and just a few times asked me for clarification. I asked her to ask me any relevant questions or add anything missing.

A focus group discussion was also conducted as a pilot test with three young women, although five or six women were supposed to participate. The discussion was with the members of a girls' youth group which was arranged by the Borough's youth service. The participants went to a mixed gender Sixth Form College. Before starting the group discussion I took part in the participants' arts & craft activities, to break the ice, which was about an hour in which we had very informal conversation about their study, college and the activities they do at the youth group. It was felt that the organisers were conscious of the discussion although the purpose was explained by email and again verbally at the meeting with the manager. However, in the discussion, which was carried out in presence of a staff member, only one participant was seriously attempting to contribute, and the other two participants were not particularly serious. A few times their discussion was overlapping, which was difficult to understand and transcribe. All formal procedures were explained beforehand, such as explaining the purpose of the study, issues about confidentiality, consent form and recording.

The testing phase, one-to-one interview and the focus group discussion helped me to re-organise the questions in order to get better responses and understand the context I was studying. Accordingly the interview schedule was modified for the rest of the interviews and focus group discussions. The interview process helped me to find out what worked best and what needed to be done differently; for example, more attention was given to recording, to avoid noise and overlapping conversations during focus groups. No gatekeeper was allowed during the remaining focus group discussions. The questionnaire is attached as appendix-3.1

With the experience acquired from the testing phase, the remaining individual interviews and focus groups discussions were conducted. A couple of general findings from the data gathering process were, on the issue of 'social networks', this study found that most of the women were aware of the term and often used it while they were talking on the issue. For example, *'I create my social networks by...'* and *'My social networks are ...'*. The direct cause may be the leading questions which contained the term. The researcher's questions were asked in the following manner: 'what kind of

social networks do you have and practice?’ or ‘how do you create and maintain your social networks?’ In addition, their awareness of the term may be explained by the popularity of virtual social networking sites among young people such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter; many of the women were on these networking sites. However, at the beginning a small number of women interviewed were unsure about the term ‘social networks’, but a little clarification, such as ‘your social connections or contacts’, helped to show them the way. A couple of responses were as follows,

*My social network is mainly with my friends, going to restaurants, cinemas sort of places, we can talk and socialize and like express ourselves. FBA (FG1-4, 17)*

*I usually use my college for my social networks because in college there are lots of people, so I just socialise there with mainly Muslim girls and outside college we have community programmes with the Mosque and that's how we keep on networks with events and something like that. And also I use Facebook and phone. TA (FG2-3, 17)*

Mostly the participants were spontaneous and supportive; sometimes the discussion even went beyond the topic, as if it was an opportunity to express themselves. Most of the participants contributed sincerely; as a participant commented - ‘it was a nice reflection’.

However, I had a feeling that many of the women may not have wanted to express views against Islam while they were talking about the constraints of constructing and maintaining social networks, especially about ‘mixing with the opposite gender’. As a researcher, being a Bangladeshi Muslim woman and living and working in the same borough was positive, as mentioned earlier, but it might have been a limitation as well. For example, they might have feared being judged in relation to their faith or an outlook which challenged the cultural constraints.

### **3.6.2 The fieldwork**

Data were collected over a period of twelve months (August 2009 to August 2010). Prospective interviewees were approached directly, but focus group participants were

contacted through gatekeepers. The individual interviews were conducted in natural settings chosen by the participants (such as homes and work-places). Each interview lasted approximately an hour, was tape-recorded and transcribed. Three of the four focus groups took place in organisational settings and the fourth in the “neutral” setting of a library. All the focus groups lasted for about two hours and, as with the interviews, were recorded and transcribed.

### **3.7 Methods of data analysis**

#### **3.7.1 Transcription**

Transcription is the process, in almost all qualitative research, of converting to writing audio recorded data which has been obtained from interviews and focus group discussions. The transcription phase is the first stage of data analysis. In order to facilitate thematic analysis, the verbal data has been transcribed into written form and the whole transcription was done by me. The process of transcription provided me with a thorough understanding of the gathered data; as Bird observed, the process was 'a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology' (2005:227). However, 'thematic analysis, does not require the same level of detail in the transcript as conversation, discourse or even narrative analysis. As there is no one way to conduct thematic analysis, there is no one set of guidelines to follow when producing a transcript' (Braun and Clarke 2006: 17). To ensure its accuracy, the transcription was printed off and checked again against the audio recording. The transcription guided the generation of an initial list of observations about the data which then facilitated the production of codes from the data. Although the transcription process was time consuming, at the same time it was a practical way to familiarise myself with the data (Riessman, 1993).

#### **3.7.2 Data analysis**

Thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes and patterns in data (Aronson, 1994) and is strongly associated with accounts produced by research participants in qualitative research (Mahrer, 1988; Spradley, 1979; Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns/themes within data, which helps to organise and describe data sets in detail. However, it also often goes further



than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). Seale (2006) has described thematic analysis as qualitative thematic analysis, alternatively interpretive content analysis; and he claimed 'Qualitative thematic analysis' has been used by many qualitative researchers and it often worked very well'. However, authors such as Boyatzis (1998), Ryan and Bernard (2000) opposed thematic analysis as a specific method, and rather considered the approach as a tool to use across different methods, one which can be used within major analytical traditions such as grounded theory. But Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis can work in its own right as an independent method.

In thematic analysis, the themes or patterns primarily work in two ways: in an inductive or bottom up way (e.g., see Frith and Gleeson, 2004), or in a theoretical or deductive or 'top down' way (e.g., see Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997). An inductive approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990) (as such, this form of thematic analysis bears some similarity to grounded theory), and not driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in the area or topic. Inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding the data *without* trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. In this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data driven. In contrast, a 'theoretical' thematic analysis would tend to be driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area, and is thus more explicitly analyst-driven. This form of thematic analysis tends to provide a less rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data. The 'theoretical thematic analysis' has been deployed for this research, in which a balance between two approaches have been maintained such as 'bonding and bridging' (Putnam, 1996, 2002) and ethnic capital (Zhou, 2004; Modood, 2005). Therefore the data analysis has been from both theoretical perspectives. In terms of the research epistemology this is a 'realist' orientated approach, which aimed to identify the motivations, experience, and perceptions of the women (cf. Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995).

Other approaches in the field of social science research, such as discourse analysis (Gill, 1996, Perakyla, 2005) or conversation analysis (Potter, 1996, Heritage, 2004), did not seem very relevant for this study. Discourse analysis involves investigation and construction of an oral description on a particular issue, such as an issue discussed by

more than one actor, and conversation analysis focuses on interactions of speech in order to find out the answers of the research questions. In contrast, this study focuses on a particular group of people - Bangladeshi young women and their everyday experience with regards to social networks.

Thematic analysis is the appropriate method to use for the following reasons. Firstly, the approach allows flexibility and makes it relatively easy to conduct a cogent analysis on qualitative data, even with limited skills in qualitative techniques. The approach can be applicable *across* a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches, which is compatible with interpretivist/constructionist paradigms within social science. Secondly, because of its theoretical freedom, the approach provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data. Finally thematic analysis is a relatively straight-forward form of qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke (2006).

The research epistemology guides what can be presented about the data, and informs how the meaning of the data would be theorised. From an interpretivist perspective, meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced, therefore, thematic analysis helps to understand and theorise about the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions (Braun and Clarke 2006) with regards to social networks of Bengali young women. The mapping of the data analysis phase is as follows- the Figure 3.2:

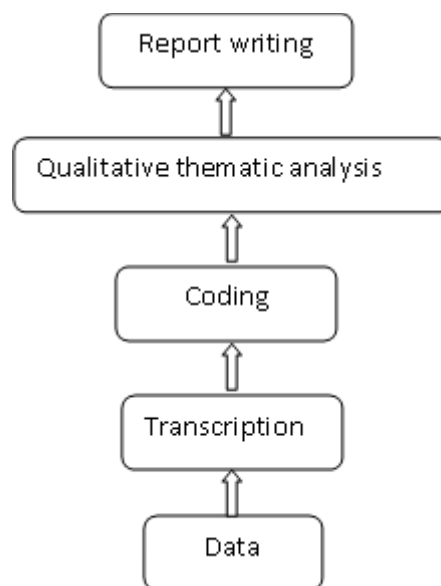


Figure 3.2: Data analysis mapping.

The theme development phase involves sorting the different data codes into potential themes and organising all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. Therefore, after transcribing the audio interviews and coding them, patterns of the women's experiences were listed, which came from their direct quotes or paraphrasing common ideas. For instance, the first pattern/theme of experience was 'educational attachments' which emerged from the experience of the women with regard to their social networks. In order to aid thematic analysis the entire data was categorized into 'family', 'faith', 'places of study', 'work', and 'social places'. This was further divided into two specific focused areas: a) features and characteristics of the networks and the capital associated with the ties in relation to family, faith, places of study, work, and social places ; b) the experience of the young women in relation to their identity, cultural background and social aspects. From the perspectives of 'bonding-bridging' capital and 'ethnic capital' the thematic analysis provided an opportunity to examine the experiences and perspectives of the participants, which ultimately sharpened the analysis.

### **3.7.3 Iterative coding**

Coding is the process of grouping different types of raw qualitative data, such as the form of words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs. The process of coding is part of analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994), in which the data is organised into meaningful groups or patterns (Tuckett 2005; Seale 2006). In terms of relevance, this involves detecting appropriate 'patterns' in the data and placing all similar things under the pattern, such as similar phrases, placing like with like so that patterns can be found easily.

In order to categorize qualitative data, the coding process is important; Payne and Payne emphasized the importance of coding-

Data collection, its coding and analysis often go on simultaneously. .. The text of each interview or observation is read (and annotated) as a whole to get an overall impression. This involves summarizing the text, making notes in the margin, adding reflexive accounts, and identifying significant words, phrases or passages

that might be used in more detailed analysis or for illustrative quotations (2005:37).

As Seale (2006: 306) argues, ‘coding is the first step towards data analysis... The quality of a coding scheme influences the eventual quality of data analysis... Coding schemes can be narrow, artificial devices that hinder thought, or they can contain the seeds of creative new insights’. In order to detect patterns in the data, first of all similar issues which were raised by the young women were identified and placed together, for example, ‘places of study’, which was repeatedly mentioned by the women as an enabling aspect of their social networks. All data on similar issues was placed together under the pattern ‘places of study’. In the same way other issues were coded under identified patterns.

The coding process allowed me to look further with thematic analysis of the themes, major ideas which derived from the coding phase. In addition, it was helpful for the consideration of all the factors prior to building up my own arguments in favour of the research. Lewins, Taylor and Gibbs (2005) provide a detailed description about how different kinds of things can be coded from descriptive raw data to explain the phenomena. The following Table 3.3 is an example which demonstrates the process of coding towards developing themes.

Table 3.3: The process of coding.			
Participant	Data	coding	Categories/Theme
(FG1-4, 17)	<i>My social network is mainly with my friends, going to restaurants, cinemas sort of places, we can talk and socialize and like express ourselves.</i>	Friend Restaurant Cinema Socialize expression	-Perception -social life
(FG2-3, 17)	<i>I usually use my college for my social networks because in college there are lots of people so I just socialise there with mainly Muslim</i>	College Mosque Muslim identity	Education Faith Identity Technology

	<i>girls and outside college we have community programmes with the Mosque and that's how we keep on networks with events and something like that. And also I use Face book and phone.</i>	Girls Face book Phone	Social life
AKN (Int 16, 19)	<i>I am actually very happy with my social networks, I am very close to my family and friends and I think that's why I feel like, even when I have a problem I feel like I can resolve it quit quickly.</i>	Family Friends Happiness Confidence	Family

### 3.7.4 Validation

Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research, and it is based on ‘determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account’ (Creswell and Miller in Creswell 2003: 195-196).

Commonly there are two dimensions of validity (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003): internal validity and external validity. Internal validity refers to the level of examination, what is examined and what is supposed to be examined (Robson, 2002). External validity, on the other hand, concerns applying the results to new settings, people or samples (Creswell 2009).

In order to ensure validity, the following strategies were employed:

Triangulation - The data was collected through multiple sources, including qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, which represented triangulation of data. The participants were selected carefully to ensure variation. Although the participants were homogeneous, within the criteria the data were gathered from three main groups of young women in relation to their education and employment. In addition, two young women and three professional workers were interviewed to ensure triangulation of the data.

Member checking – The participants were in contact throughout the analysis process to ensure the truth value of the data with regards to my interpretation.

Contact– staying a year in the field provided me with an in depth understanding of the research topic and the participants as ‘the more experience that a researcher has with participants in their actual settings, the more accurate or valid will be the findings’ (Creswell, 2009)

### **3.8 Research ethics**

Approval for the research – based upon a research protocol, data security and specification of procedures for obtaining informed consent and maintaining participant confidentiality – was obtained from the university. During data gathering through focus group discussion and individual interviews, the ethical and methodological issues involved in research with the young women were given significant attention, such as a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and power; these issues are particularly pertinent in such contexts (Barker and Weller 2003). For example, the CRB was submitted voluntarily to gate keepers (such as at Pupil Referral Unit-PRU) when negotiating the conducting of focus group discussions with women aged 16 to 18 years. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form and were assured again verbally that all the information provided would be used only for the purpose of the study. They were also informed that their personal information, such as their name, would be anonymous while being used in the thesis and would be treated in strictest confidence to prevent disclosure, directly or indirectly, to any other party apart from my supervisors and examiners; the information will be destroyed after the examination. The participants were informed prior to the interview/ focus group discussions and agreed that their experience could be captured by audio recording devices. However, they were free to decline to participate in my study, or to withdraw their consent to be recorded, even to decline to be recorded at any time, and no penalty or prejudice toward them would result. By signing the consent form they were agreeing to take part voluntarily in this study. All the participants were informed about the probable time for the discussion/interview. In terms of power relations, my conduct with the participants was straightforward, in which I treated them in an

equitable and non-judgemental manner. The intention was to create a non-hierarchical, trustworthy and comfortable atmosphere for the interactions to achieve the best. Although I have been living and working in the Borough and share almost the same cultural norms, there was a fine line between the young women and me, as I am first generation Bangladeshi here, whereas the research participants were second and/or third generation British Bangladeshi. In terms of age and social position there was sufficient difference for me to avoid personal involvement, as 'personal involvement is more than just dangerous bias' (Oakley 1981: 41). However, I tried to maintain non-hierarchical relationships by treating them as 'research participants' rather than 'young women' and positioned myself as 'researcher' rather 'Bangladeshi Muslim woman'. However, interaction is a two-way phenomenon, so how the participant viewed me is important for the findings.

In order to maintain anonymity the raw data (such as interview transcripts) were coded to preclude the direct identification of research participants. Data was secured in accordance with Brunel University regulations and data protection legislation. The consent form is provided in Appendix B

### **3.9 Summary**

The study adopted an 'Interpretivist' qualitative research approach, as epistemologically this supports an understanding of the perception and experience of social networks by the Bangladeshi young women. The approach also supported the interview method for data gathering. Hence, qualitative interviews with individual participants and focus group discussions were conducted for the data gathering. Thematic analysis was deployed in which both perspectives - 'bonding-bridging' capital and 'ethnic capital' were used; the two Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the data analysis, using the thematic analysis approach. Chapter 4 presents the nature and structure of social networks of the young women in my study.

There were two specific focused areas: a) features and characteristics of the networks and the capital associated with the ties in relation to family, faith, places of study, work, and social places ; b) the experience of the young women in relation to their

identity, cultural background and social aspects. From the perspectives of 'bonding-bridging' capital and 'ethnic capital' the thematic analysis provided an opportunity to examine the experiences and perspectives of the participants, which ultimately sharpened the analysis. However, the data gathering for analysis was not easy in terms of resource and labour as the entire exercise was done by myself. In addition, the qualitative method is not completely precise in researching human beings as they can be unpredictable (Byrne 2006), especially young women who mostly function emotionally (Marilyn 2000).



## **CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: STRUCTURE AND NATURE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The chapter introduces a group context that has been ignored in social networks and social capital studies, that is Bangladeshi young women. Hence, this chapter presents and discusses research findings from 19 in-depth interviews and 4 focus group discussions, 43 participants in total, pertaining to the social networks of British Bangladeshi young women in Tower Hamlets, London. The central aim of the research was to examine how these women perceived and evaluated their social networks in everyday life; how they experience being Bangladeshi Muslim young women with particular regard to feelings of constraint, empowerment, inclusion and exclusion. The central research questions organising this study are:

- How are social networks perceived, given meaning and evaluated by young women?
- In what ways do young women engage with existing social/community networks?
- What aspects influence the development of social networks by the women?

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and describe the social networks of these young women by presenting a visual mapping of the networks which have been constructed by these women through various social ties. The chapter also shows how the network structure enables the development of social capital in the forms of bonding, bridging and ethnic capital. The visual structuring of the social networks of these women provides a representation of the nature of their types of social ties such as 'strong bonding ties' and 'weak bridging ties'; as well as how ethnic capital operates across the networks. The image of the nature of the social networks will then underpin an exploration and analysis of the features and characteristics of these networks in the next two chapters. For example, how these women are socially connected within various relationships; how they create trust and shared norms within the networks; how the 'norm of reciprocity' (Putnam 2000) functions, in other words, how resources are

constituted through the ties and how the resources are shared. In addition, this will help to relate how the women experience creating and maintaining their social networks with the enabling and constraining aspects in relation to their identity, ethnicity and culture, which will be discussed in the next two Chapters: 5 and 6.

As the literature review indicated in Chapter 2, three broad concepts are useful in framing and locating the findings in terms of theoretical debates. These encompass bonding and bridging forms of social capital (Putnam, 1996; 2002), ethnic social capital (Zhou, 2005; Modood, 2004) and identity, as both a stimulus to and product of situational factors and broader, more fluid, social networks (Hall, 1985).

This chapter is organised into five sections. The first section begins with a introduction including the research methodology; the second section presents a brief reminder of how the three ideas bridging- bonding and ethnic capital can be understood in the context of the research reported here; followed by the third section which provides features of the social networks of the women. The fourth section then elaborates on the perceptions of social networks as understood by the Bangladeshi young women studied. The final section ends with a conclusion including signposting towards the next two chapters.

As mentioned earlier, 43 participants were interviewed for this study through individual interviews and focus group discussions, of which 38 British-Bangladeshi young women were interviewed as the key participants between the ages of 16 and 23, and two young adults at the age of 27-29; in addition, three professional workers were interviewed for the study. Among the participants 19 young women were interviewed individually. Four focus group discussions were conducted, which twenty three participants attended. The attendance in each session was: eight, six, five and four. The social characteristics of the participants (group members and individuals) were diverse as discussed in Methodology chapter. All women were from a Bangladeshi Muslim background; most of the women were in Hijab (headscarf), while a couple of women were in Niqab (the cloth for covering the face) as a symbol of Islam and a few women were in 'western' dress. The focus group participants were not interviewed individually, and vice versa. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed by myself. The presented results are from direct quotes of research participants.

## **4.2 Social capital and social networks**

The idea of social capital has been addressed from a number of angles by a plethora of authors (cf. Bourdieu, Coleman, 1994; Putnam, 1996, 2002). As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, definitions of social capital tend, however, to converge on the phenomenon as a ‘resource’ or a form of ‘capital’ realised and maintained through personal connections, interpersonal interaction and shared values. These links are cast both in positive terms (cooperation, mutual support and trust oriented towards the welfare of groups or communities) and negatively (for example, criminal and racist sub-cultures). More specifically, as previously highlighted, according to Putnam (2000), social capital can be realised through processes of bonding, bridging, and linking. Bonding reflects an ‘exclusive’, inward-looking network that tends to reinforce exclusive identities and to maintain homogeneity. Family members, close friends and faith based groups are typical locations of bonding social capital. Bridging social capital, however, is indicative of ‘inclusive’, open networks which are often important for ‘getting ahead’. Bridging tends to bring together notionally diverse groups. Associations and clubs with open membership, and professional or work based networks fall into this category. However, as raised in the literature chapter, gender and cultural aspects such as ethnicity have not been addressed in Putnam’s work. Therefore, this study considers the third regard in which Zhou (1992, 1997, 2005) argues that ethnicity as resources can be seen as an important variant of social capital, which Modood (2004: 101) called ‘ethnic capital’, in that it is rooted specifically in familial, ethnic and cultural milieux that, initially at least, are situational realities for those born into these environments. These realities inevitably take on a more fluid and non-determinist form, as they are expressed and realised with varying degrees of impact in the broader domains of education, work and community life.

## **4.3 The Social networks: bonding and bridging**

In order to understand the nature of the bonding and bridging social capital of these women this section describes the structure and quality of the social networks. The structure or social relations that are typified by norms of trust and reciprocity, implies

the quality. This section describes what kind of social networks were created and maintained by the women. The women created and maintained their social networks in a variety of ways, including informal locations and groups, such as households, neighbours, ethnic or faith based community organisations and close friends ( bonding social capital). Furthermore, to varying degrees, the women attended both informal and formal institutions, such as educational establishments, community organisations for multi-ethnic groups, work-places and other formal groups (bridging social capital). Figure: 1 illustrates the networks' features.

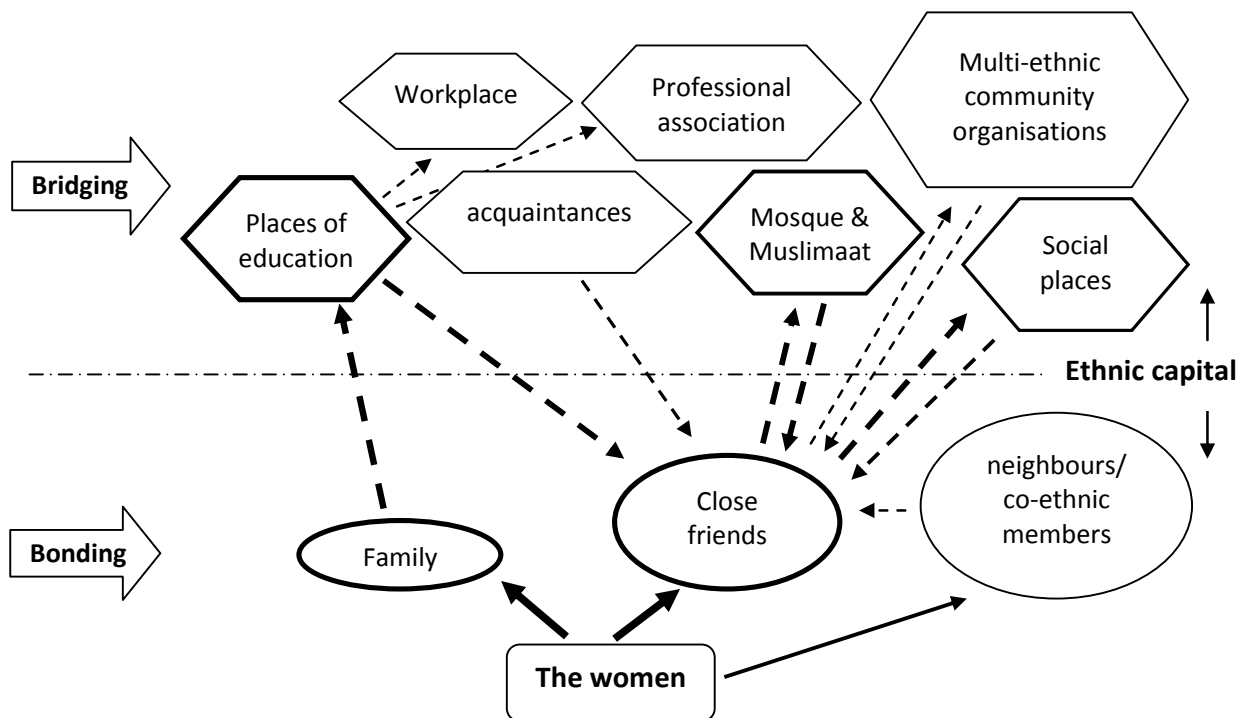


Figure 4.1: Bonding and bridging social capital.

The figure above is a generic description of the network structure of the women: the contacts enclosed by a circle produce bonding social capital; the interactions that are enclosed by an hexagon shape, build bridging social capital. The ethnic capital is found in both areas in which bridging and bonding capital appear. Since the phenomenon ethnic capital refers to familial relationships and co-ethnic ties in respect to transmission of ethnic values and norms for positive outcomes, such as education and social mobility (ref), the concept can convey constraints in particular situations. The presence of ethnic capital across networks will be explained later in terms of individual cases. The thickness of the lines indicates the different strengths of the ties.

The figure illustrates a general overview about the social networks of these women in which they were variably connected to one another through both material and non-tangible support. For example, the majority of the women lived with and were dependent on their parents for material and emotional support; they also had friends who provided support in ways such as spending time together, going out, homework, exam preparations etc. These relationships offered bonding social capital. Moreover, all the women had access to education, enabling also the possibility of bridging with formal institutions. Hence the benefits of bridging social capital allowed the women to gain confidence, skills and resources to participate in extensive networks which exceeded their familial periphery. This type of social capital helped them move forward and increased their opportunities to 'integrate' further into mainstream society. Each form of social capital is useful for meeting different purposes. Both positive and negative outcomes of social capital associated with bonding and bridging in terms of particular contexts will be discussed in the next two chapters.

The network structure also shows the diversity of social networks which are sometimes difficult to distinguish as bonding and bridging. For example interactions with acquaintances at the Mosque can be seen as bridging when the contact is between different ethnic groups, however if the contact continues on a regular basis, this can lead to the development of 'trust' because of the common faith, and eventually the acquaintance can become a close friend, forming a strong bond. Therefore a source can supply bonding social capital and bridging social capital simultaneously, in other words they can co-exist. As Putnam rightly stated, bonding and bridging social capital can support each other. However, the social capital of these women depends upon context, as Ronald Burt (2000:3) stresses:

social capital is contextual component to human capital. The social capital metaphor is that the people who do better are somehow better connected, certain people or certain groups are connected to certain others, trusting certain others, obligated to support certain others, dependent on exchange with certain others.

My thesis is a qualitative research study, therefore for determining the nature of social capital of these women the indicators such as their expressions, including attitudes and

actions and activities; their 'interpretations of how things happened or are expected to happen' (Cox and Caldwell in Claridge 2004) have been considered. Therefore, the elements of bonding, bridging and ethnic ties as indicators are used in order to identify different kinds of capital in the social networks of these women. More specifically, with bonding social capital: the women were bonded with family members, close friends and intra-ethnic associations which enabled them to maintain in-group loyalty, and exchange resources (immaterial and material). In other words, it was a reflection of relationships, trust and receptory in which the outcomes were positive or negative (strong ties). Bridging social capital was distinguished, as the women were socially tied with diverse groups of people through their educational establishments, work and other social settings, and were able to access information and resources for advancements (weak ties). Ethnic capital: the women were assisted by ethnic values and norms, which were enforced by parents and/or community based intra-ethnic organizations towards educational success and upward social mobility (Modood 2004; Zhou 2005). The ethnic capital by its nature can exist with the forms of bonding and bridging social capital, positively or negatively like bonding social capital. However, it is important to note that this study is not intended for measuring the social capital of these women, rather the key aim of this study to explore the experiences of the women and the factors associated with this in relation to their ethnicity, identity and culture.

The research participants were 'homogeneous', in that particular primary selection criteria were used: second or third generation British Bangladeshi females between the age of 16-23 as the key participants, preferably living in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Three main groups of young women were recruited: a) young women going to college/ Sixth Form; b) young women going to university and c) young women who were in work, paid, volunteer, full time or part time. Moreover, in this chapter three key participants have been selected from the three groups respectively, in order to identify and describe the features of their social networks. The three participants were:

SKN (Int 11, 21)<sup>13</sup> attended local school and college in the Borough but did her law degree at a university located in central London and connected with her friends as well other connections. She lives with her parents and brother in Tower Hamlets and is attached to her extended family members. She holds her religious faith which is Islam.

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<sup>13</sup> SKN = Initials of Participant; Int 11 = Interview no. 11; 21 = age

However, she does not display her Muslim identity symbols such as wearing a Hijab (headscarf).

JB (Int 17, 22) was employed with a paid job and was doing a level three professional course locally for career advancement, in which she was associated with her colleagues and course mates. She lives with her parents and siblings including a brother, in a family of which she is the youngest member. She attended local school and college and is attached with friends from these educational establishments. She is Muslim in faith and wore 'western' outfits.

KN (FG1- 8, 18) was attending a local single sex Sixth Form (Post-16 education) in the Borough of Tower Hamlets. She and a few of her friends shared their views in a focus group discussion, during which she was with her school uniform as well as a Hijab, which showed her Muslim identity. She lives with her parents in Tower Hamlets and is attached with her friends and linked with community organisations and local people around her.

A) SKN: The social networks of SKN, who had just completed her university degree and was trying to associate with a law firm to practice.

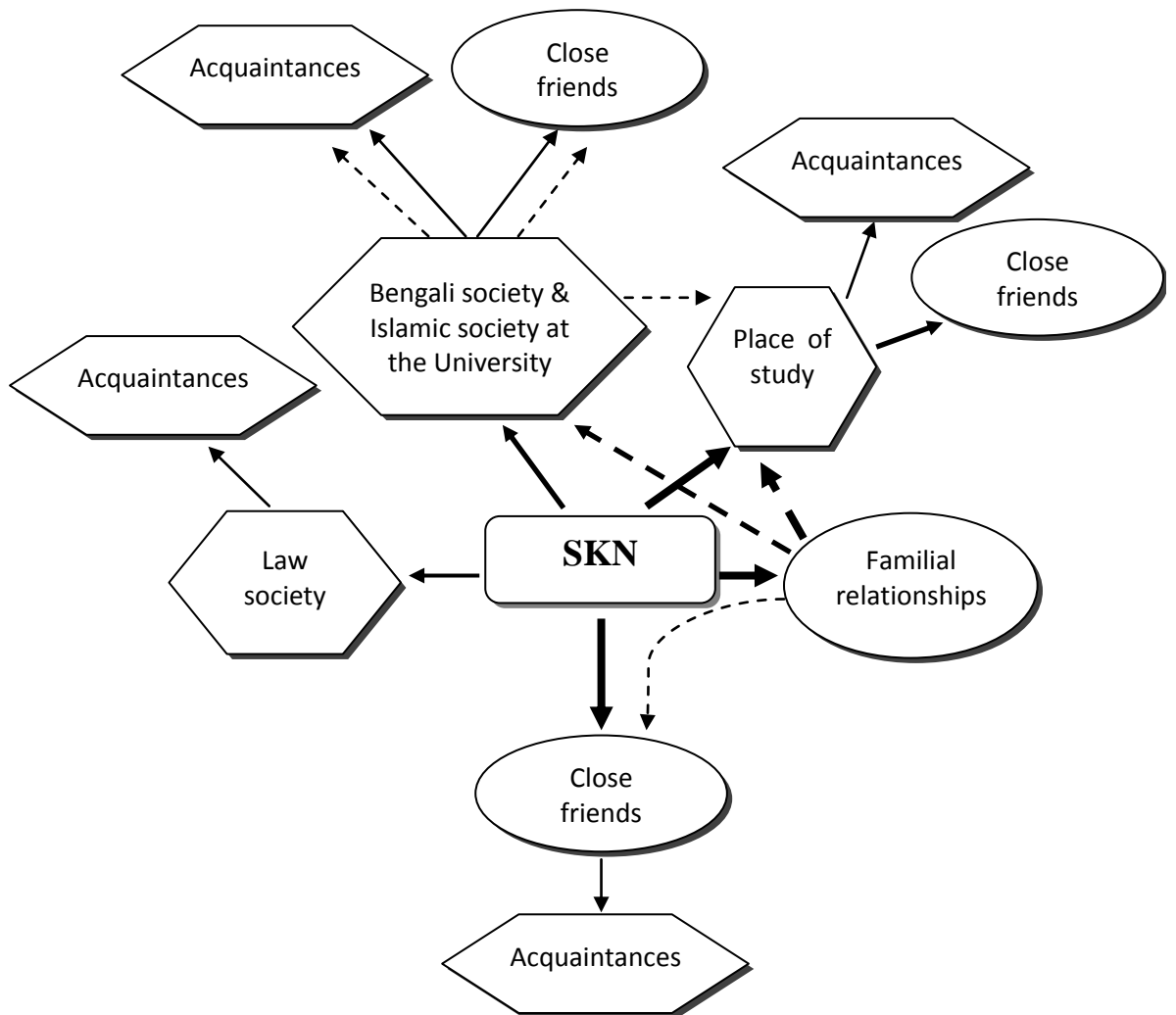


Figure 4.2<sup>14</sup>: the network structure of SKN; the lines indicate the different strengths of the ties.

SKN appears to have bonding and bridging social capital. As she was sharing,

I have three sets of friends like school friends, college friends, university friends ...and then I am part of the law society at my university...that of my formal kind of connection... My mom knows a lot of my friends, like she heard about them

<sup>14</sup> The 'Circles' are sites of bonding and the 'Hexagon' are sites of bridging social capital; and the 'Dashed lines' refer ethnic social capital.



and I like to talk to her about my friends ...she knows who I am talking to, everything like that...so when I go out to meet them...tell them [parents], that I am going out with...she [mum] is fine about that and she knows where I am and who I am with, yeah. SKN (Int 11, 21)

She is strongly bonded with her parents, especially her mother where clearly mutual trust exists, as she was able to inform her about her friends and her mother knew about her friendship activities, which implies her mother is indirectly linked with her friends, which confirms the presence of bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) and ethnic capital (Modood 2004) at the same time within the parent-daughter relationship. Moreover, she received family support to obtain her university degree (Smart and Rahman 2009), which means ethnic norms and values on education were enforced towards this achievement, implying the presence of ethnic capital. She is also well tied with her different sets of friends - school, college and university; this also shows her strong bonding social capital. This also indicates she had opportunity to spend time with friends and meet friends of friends - weak ties. In particular, she may have had access to various places and information through her university friends, as the university is a place of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, her connection with the law society, a professional group potentially provides access to career related information as well as contact with various people - bridging social capital. This shows she reached more people directly and indirectly and the diversity of her connections across the various groups implies that she had better access to resources. In addition, she had durable ethnic capital, for example, she mentioned,

[At university], the Bengali/Bangladeshi society, they organised a lot of like events, so it's like a social networking event, we can meet other Bengalis...they are from Bangladesh but they are not born here, lot of people are coming to do Masters and stuff. ...it was an opportunity to meet other Bengalis from other parts [Bangladesh]... like, kind of [knowing] your background. SKN (Int 11, 21)

The finding shows that she is tied with other Bangladeshis through the co-ethnic organisation. This indicates her link with her ethnic and cultural roots, which provide a strong relationship with her own culture- ethnic capital. However, her connection with people from Bangladesh could generate bonding social capital, based on similar

ethnicity and cultural background, or it could be the development of bridging social capital as she may not be like the students from Bangladesh because of the cultural difference in terms of social-geographical setting (Brah 1996). Consequently, the ethnic capital exists in both situations- bonding and bridging, and can operate across various sites. Another example, as she described her association with the professional group,

[At] university law society, we have events related to law and career which is quite useful to go to, because you can get advice from barristers, [for] future career and their working life, that's why I am interested in going in to... SKN (Int 11, 21)

SKN here associated with acquaintances in the professional group, a form of bridging social capital which would potentially assist her to know more people, meaning she had advantages in relation to information access and career advancement. Then again, her bond with her parents and the enforcement of values on education and upward advancement provided her with better self esteem and confidence to reach where she was. This also indicates her future progression confirming the involvement of ethnic capital within her relationship. As such, Figure 4.3 illustrates the composition which specifies the attributes of different kind of social capital attached with her ties,

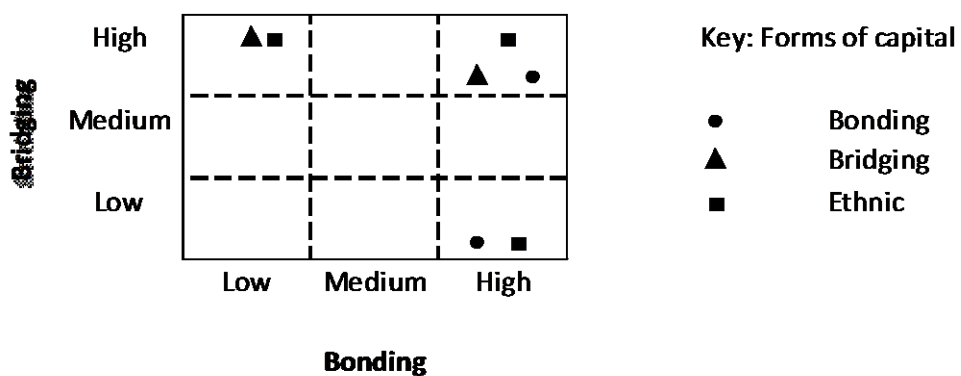


Figure 4.3: Social capital in the network of SKN.

B) JB: The social networks structure of JB, who was working full time and doing a course, is,

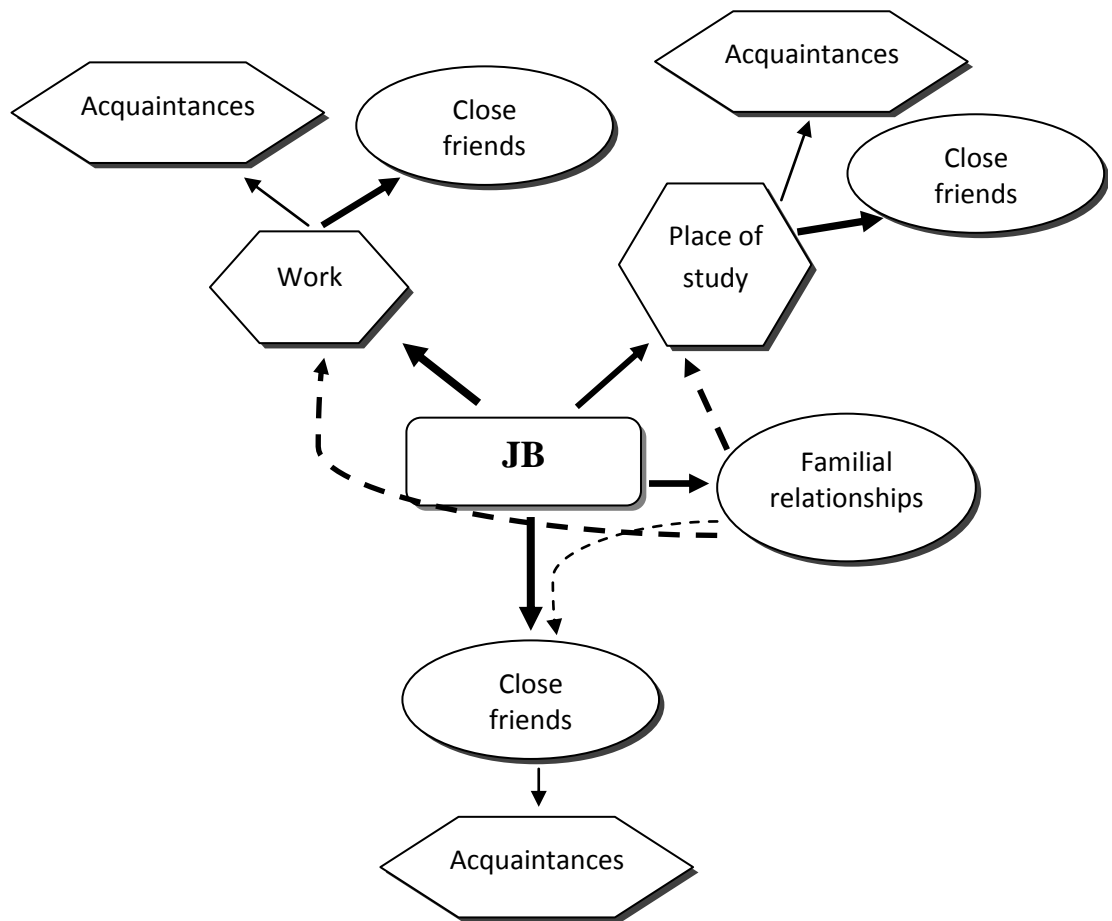


Figure 4.4: the network structure of JB.

For JB, it seems that she had bonding and bridging social capital as well as ethnic capital, but in a different way. As she shared,

I socialise with people on Facebook as well and I meet a lot of friends like my old friends who were in school and college and I haven't seen them...this is my way of socialising with them ...yeah, Facebook, phone... JB (Int 17, 22)

JB (Int 17, 22) was bonded with school and college friends as well as other friends, contacts which were maintained by using Facebook and phone. She also bonded with her family which demonstrates strong ties, as her opinion indicates,

...sometime they [parents] probably would mind because obviously we are still young and you know, I am the youngest in my family so I think my parents are protective and sometimes, specially my mum and dad, they are very protective...yeah, I do have a protective family. JB (Int 17, 22)

According to the network structure she had strong relationships with her close friends, but had less diversity among her contacts, as she had some degree of limitation from her family over her social life. Although she was bonded with her family, the relationship seems to have developed strong bonding social capital, which can lead to disconnections from outsiders (Kearns 2004). This shows the limitations placed on her social life by the family members, which may be a consequence of enforcement of ethnic and cultural values by the parents - ethnic capital. As such, the ethnic capital within her ties impacted negatively on leading her social life and bridging out. This may have led to her maintaining bonding with more friends beyond the family; this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. However, she was connected through her colleagues at work and course mates - bridging social capital.

...at the end of the day when I leave from work, I have got life outside of work, so I know I have got friends that I can look forward to meeting up with and having a chat. So if here was no social networks around, like Facebook and tweeter... I think it would be really, really boring yeah! JB (Int 17, 22)

In this regard, she may have experienced enforcement of values on career and social mobility linked with her profession, which implies that ethnic capital assisted her advancement. Then again, this shows that ethnic capital can be located across both sites in which bonding and bridging social capital appear.

Her Facebook based networks might be bonding if they were used in maintaining contact with her existing friends, but it might be bridging when she interacted with acquaintances. However, the Facebook and other virtual contacts are not included in the networks structure as this study is exclusively focused on social networks in the physical environment.

However, Figure 4.5 points out the value of different kinds of social capital attached with her contacts,

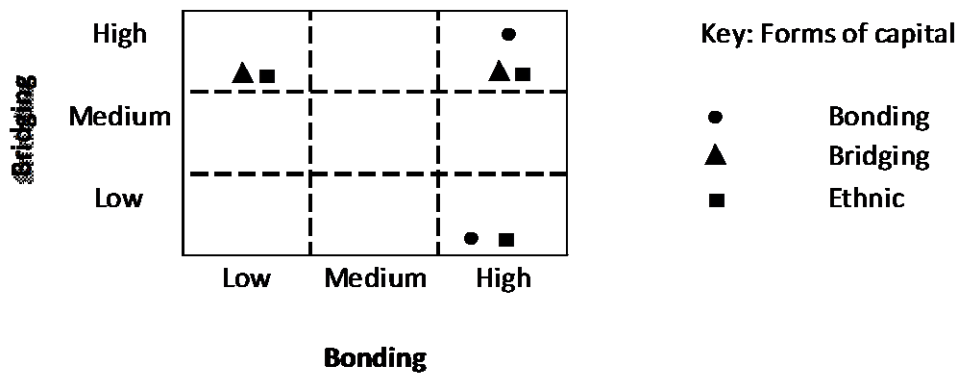


Figure 4.5: Social capital in the network of JB.

C) KN: KN was studying in a single sex Sixth Form. The features of her social network are shown as follows,

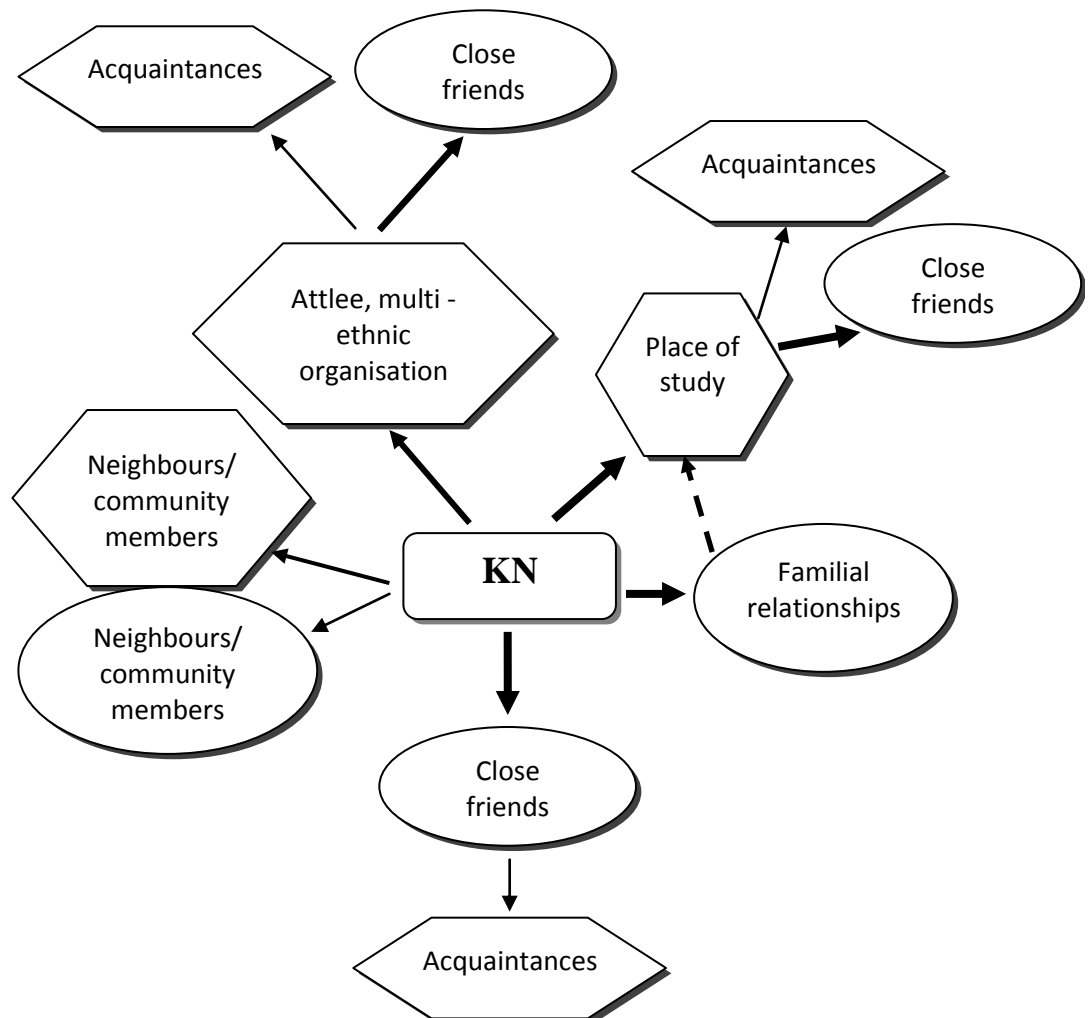


Figure 4.6: the network structure of KN.

KN (FG1- 8, 18) was sharing her experience in the group discussion at Attlee Foundation; such as,

I have Facebook, email; email is mainly for school and Facebook is for my friends. There is also face to face with at school, at Attlee and when I go out with my mates in the weekend, neighbours as well. Yeah, I socialise by going to school, communicate with my friends and teachers. By coming to Attlee, talking with the staff and sometimes doing something with younger children here. By going to the local shops... KN (FG1- 8, 18)

KN had formal and informal social networks in which she was connected through friends, teachers and community members, such as neighbours and local shoppers. The finding shows her bonding social capital, which was formed based on the interactions and activities with her friends. She was also associated with members in the multi-ethnic community organisation - Attlee, which implies bridging social capital. Facebook and email had also been part of her social networks.

KN was also bonded with her parents, as she also talked about family and cultural aspects with regard to her networks,

I agree with what everyone else saying, like, how the parents exaggerate with religion and culture and they mixed up. Yeah, [however] I can talk with boys or girls, my parents don't really mind. KN (FG1- 8, 18)

This indicates the presence of ethnic capital in the agreement between the parents-daughter relationships. For example, she had understanding and a kind of negotiation with her parents, as a result she was able to interact with boys, while other women had restrictions over their social contact as they were sharing at the discussion. Hence, various forms of social capital were attached to KN's networks.

Figure 4.7 shows the quality of the relationships.

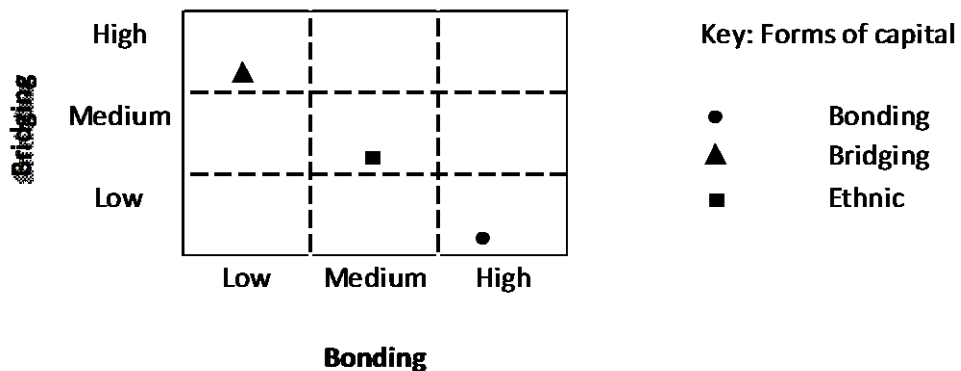


Figure 4.7: Social capital in the network of KN.

The nature of the social networks of these women is diverse; the phenomenon is formed and maintained for many reasons which is a complex process; in this regard, however, a particular context is important, as a social network is a relational concept, 'to flow between the parties to that relationship—whether information, expertise, power, or some other resource' (Van Buren and Hood, 2011: 652). Social ties, relationships and mutual supports can be understood as the key features of social networks which have potential to develop social capital that is seen as resources and can benefit peoples' well being. However, I have outlined the network structures of three selected women to understand the nature of the social networks of the women included in this study. The network maps show how the notions of bonding, bridging and ethnic capital together reflect the concepts of social networks and social capital; this also describes how these three ideas have been presented in relation to the social ties of these young women, Accordingly, the women construct bonding and bridging social capital through their social relationships; they also have ethnic capital which often lies across both locations of bonding and bridging. However, the density and value of the ties depends on particular contexts, as the experience is subjective. Moreover, different relations between bonding and bridging and their associated benefits are sometimes confusing which needs to be better distinguished (Kearns 2004). However, the later section offers an elaboration on the perceptions of social networks of the women which facilitates further understanding in this regard.

#### 4.4 Perception of ‘social networks’

All the participants interviewed for this study expressed strong views on the importance of having ‘social networks’ in their everyday life as a ‘*relationship matter*’ (John Field 2008:3); for Walker (1977:35) social networks are ‘*set of personal contacts*’. Putnam (2000: 56) illustrated networks along with norms and trust as ‘*features of social life*’ and he highlighted ‘social networks have values’ as this is a core idea of social capital. However, the women perceived the social networks in many ways, such as ‘socialising’, ‘communicating’ ‘meeting new people’, ‘sharing feeling’, ‘getting support’, ‘expressing yourself’, ‘talking or texting on phone’, Facebook or My space, ‘spending time with someone’ such as friends, classmates, family members/relatives, work colleagues, local people, and virtual friends. An example is,

*I think [social networks allow you to] expressing yourself; you can't actually hold everything in, you need to express it by talking to someone and technology as well. FBA (FG1-4, 17)<sup>15</sup>*

*another woman,*

*If you don't have friends you will go mad... you need somebody that has common values you know who shares the same interests and has the same mentality as you. SS (Int 5, 19)*

Another participant shared,

*As a person I think you need people around you because when a person is alone yeah they think more and they might fall into depression from loneliness something like that so psychologically I think you should have people around you as they keep you strong, I think people around you make you happy as well. TA (FG2-3, 17)*

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<sup>15</sup> FBA = Initials of Participant; FG1-4 = Focus Group One, Participant Four; 17 = age



It was highlighted that people need to express themselves by talking and socialising and today this could be face to face or virtual, as the female participants mentioned above. *‘I think we all, people need people that's the underline...we all need to each other,* said another participant NC (Int 15, 19). Thus the women emphasised having someone who they could share feelings with and trust. Social networks within close relationships, which are developed based on common interests, shared norms and values, mutual trust and support, represent ‘bonding social capital’ (Putnam, 2000, 2007). Thus the women were able to generate bonding social capital by creating and maintaining social networks with friends which had been beneficial for them. With regard to developing and maintaining social networks the women also mentioned places of study, Facebook, email and phone. This finding corroborates the ideas of Fischer (in Putnam 2000:20) and Walker (1977), who suggested that social networks are a set of personal contacts from which one can get support, company and in which one can share her feelings with trust.

The study found that the young women make their social networks in a variety of ways; but the interesting finding was that the women considered visiting or participating in various social places and events had also been part of their social networks as the places enabled them to socialise. The social places included restaurants, Shisa bars, Cinemas, Parks, Shopping malls, and gyms. Many women mentioned ‘socialisation’ with different kinds of people had been a part of their social networks. They thought socialisation was valuable in enhancing self confidence and social competence. For example, a couple of women who went to Sixth Form single sex college commented as follows,

*My social network is mainly with my friends, going to restaurants, cinemas sort of places, we can talk and socialize and like express ourselves.* FBA (FG1-4, 17)

Another participant said,

*I am touched with my friends, mostly college friends, University friends as well... in my university there is variety of mixed culture so I do socialise with everyone especially with my class mates, I am in touch with them as well.* SB (FG2-2, 19)

Spending time together such as eating out, going to the cinema, shopping; all these indicate a helpful relationship among the women, which was developed for the mutual benefits of the group. The activities represent their recreation as well as a way of social interaction, which can develop social capital. This finding from the first quotation shows that the women emphasised emotional support, for which they are mostly dependent on their close friends from the educational settings, work or community. These close contacts have been referred to as bonding social capital. This shows that the interactions were build based on shared norms and trust, which also represents bonding social capital. Although measuring social capital is difficult (ref/) their bonding seems dense and valuable, as all the women mentioned the importance of having friends and friendship as part of their social networks. For example, NB (Int8, 19) said, *I can't see myself without my friends, I mean specially my four close friends.* This indicates that close friendship and friends had been significantly important for understanding and providing support. The study also found that most of the women were active in expanding their social networks further, which involves bridging social capital. As a participants shared,

*I create my social networks by like calling my friends, texting them, go to school where I can meet my friends, go to youth clubs such as Arbour and Atlee where I can meet with different kinds of people of different age, make friends through face book... meeting different people by joining clubs such as Arabic language classes or gym... meeting different people those share same interests as you (me). SK (FG1-5, 17)*

Another participant reported,

*Social networks is important because it gives me very strong socialising skills; with other friends or family like, if my mom around me I feel very strong, like I can do anything. So with my friends as well, especially with the close ones I can do anything....feel very strong like... They (friends) help me, without them I will be very weak I think yeah. SB (FG2-2, 19)*

Through participating in similar activities with friends, such as going to educational clubs, or attending activities organised by local community organisations such as Attlee,

or Arban<sup>16</sup> as mentioned above, the women can extend their social networks, especially through 'bridging' which provides information for 'getting ahead' (Putnam 2000). This shows that based on trust and bonding the networks continue as well as extending from the places of study to community organisations, implying the development of bridging. In other words bonding and bridging social capital co-exist. For example, someone from a particular ethnicity and faith can fix her social networks within those from her own cultural background, as another participant commented,

*I usually use my college for my social networks because in college there are lots of people, so I just socialise there with mainly Muslim girls and outside college we have community programmes with the Mosque and that's how we keep on networks with events and something like that. And also I use Face book and phone. TA (FG2-3, 17)*

TA (FG2-3, 17) maintained her social networks with Muslim girls, which shows the presence of 'ethnic capital'; and ethnic and cultural norms may be enforced by her family because of her ethnic, cultural and gender identity. Nonetheless, the social networks had been important for a number of reasons; the women interviewed acknowledged that social networks provided them with a way of spending quality time with friends, which helped them to de-stress, give emotional support to one another, avoid being lonely, share a problem and ultimately lead a social life. For example the women commented as follows,

*the whole point of socialising is to get to know other people .. the less you socialise the more depressed person you are.. lonely person (you are)..more socialising you are, happier you are. HK (FG3-2, 23)*

Likewise, another participant expressed the *good aspect of social networks as,*

*Positive aspects of social networking are, it is a good way to keep yourself healthy because obviously to be a healthy person it's not just to keep healthy body but in mind as well. As in socialising, having friends it's a good way to*

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<sup>16</sup> The Arban is a organization that provides leisure and educational activities for women, young people and other members of the diverse community of Tower Hamlets.

*socialising because it keeps your mind occupied as well and its way to prevent being lonely, having someone there to talk to when you have problems especially, that's a positive aspect.* HB (FG1.1, 18)

Another participant shared,

*I am the type of person that I get board really very, very quickly so for me if I meet friends, it's really nice because then they might be interested in things that I do, so it's really so nice to have friends because it keeps me busy ...just have fun ...enjoy yourself, I think being young... you should probably just enjoy yourself and have fun....I do enjoy socialising a lot with my friends so that's me!* JB (Int 17, 22)

As mentioned in the literature review, social networks are helpful for all members within the network by enabling the participants to pursue common objectives. Putnam precisely described social networks as 'features of social life' that have value. This shows that for these women, companions and emotional support had been more important than support that is tangible. This also indicates the presence of high bonding social capital among the women. However, the emotional support helped to enhance their confidence, which may have enabled them to go further. The confidence enabled them to pursue shared objectives, such as going to the cinema, eating out etc, as mentioned earlier which they might not have been able to do alone. The togetherness also helped them in bridging with new people in various socially interactive places such as community organisations, which was valuable in enhancing confidence further.

In addition to the positive aspects many of the women interviewed pointed out the negative aspects, depending on who people were networking with and what they were engaging in. Some of the women said 'peer pressure' sometimes brings a negative impact upon their life. A number of participants shared their experience, for example:

*I think if you socialise too much you can't get your education done, stop studying, wasting time more, hanging up more.* NA (FG2- 6, 16)

*more people you socialise with, you do tend to have such a big group of friends where everyone asking for different things from you, it can sometime lead lot of peer pressure to do certain things which otherwise you won't be doing all. NC (Int 15, 19)*

*The friends I have could really lead to me wasting time when I could to do..be doing some more productive.....so as long as you strong in your personality then it shouldn't happen yeah...F (FG2-1,18)*

*Well, it (negative effect) depends if you got good friends they have a good influence on you. If you have bad friends like people who do use drugs and stuff that has a really bad effect on you because obviously you are gonna affect yourself, your family and the whole load of problems come with it...some people can take you away from the good road. INB (FG2- 5, 18)*

The women were well aware of the negative effects of social networks, as they can be anti-social (Halpern, 1999) in that 'social capital can produce desired outcomes, but also can be a danger for producing unwanted results' (Erickson 2002: 547); For example, a couple of women - RB (Int 9, 16) and SA (Int 10, 16), who had to go to the PRU-Pupil Referral Unit<sup>17</sup>, admitted their direct experience of the negative aspect of social networks. Especially for young women, paying excessive time to maintaining social capital could hamper their education. Peer pressure towards anti social activities such drugs and gangs may be experienced by some young people, when they are with the wrong crowd. However, this depends on particular circumstances and how one uses her social networks, the women supposed. Bonding social capital based on shared norms and values has significant positive effects on young people. However, the bonding social capital can be directed to anti social purposes, as Halpern (1999) observed. On the other hand, for these women high bonding social capital may or may not make them ethnocentric, as social capital is not always something good, but may have negative consequences (Portes, 1996).

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<sup>17</sup> Pupil with anti social behaviours is referred to PRU.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

The visualized structures of social networks provide an impression of the nature of social networks and different kinds of capital associated with the relationships which these women experienced. The perceptions of these women about their social networks extend understanding. This chapter has been outlined because the visual presentation including the narrative facilitates the attempt to explore and analyse the features and characteristics of the networks in the next two chapters, in order to understand the experience of these women in relation to their identity, ethnicity and cultural aspects. Chapter 5 will discuss the features and characteristics of the networks and the capital associated with the ties; Chapter 6 will examine the experience of the women in relation to their identity and cultural background.

## **CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter continues to discuss the social networks of Bangladeshi young women, which have been constructed and maintained in relation to loci of family, places of education, faith, workplace and other social settings. The previous chapter highlighted the nature of the social networks and social capital of these women in relation to the notion of bonding and bridging as well as ethnic capital, by presenting a visual mapping of the social networks of the women studied, followed by the composition of individual networks, based on the experience of three selected participants. Chapter 4, via the visual mapping is able to set things up for subsequent discussion, which identifies various kinds of ties and shows the nature of the networks which the women created and maintained. This also shows how the social relationships form different kinds of capital - bonding, bridging and ethnic capital - and how these three types of capital may exist alone, or jointly, or overlap, depending on context. In order to facilitate deeper understanding, the chapter explores and analyses the features and characteristics of the social networks of the women and the experience associated with this - which is covered in this chapter 5 and the following chapter 6.

In this respect, as mentioned in the previous chapter, bridging-bonding social capital and ethnic social capital were related to the experiences of the Bangladeshi young women (with particular reference to a sense of empowerment and constraint) in the analysis of the data in this research. The analytical starting point, building upon Zhou (2005) and Modood (2004), was first to analyse the findings with regard to the nature and impact of the situated identity markers of Bangladeshi ethnicity, culturally-influenced family dynamics, and Islamic faith, and the associated expectations and attitudes attached specifically to young women. These loci, it was posited, would begin to explain the processes of bonding and bridging through which immediate and more diffuse social networks were constructed and maintained - networks that might either empower or constrain the young women in question. Accordingly, the entire discussion is divided into two parts:

Chapter 5 discusses how the social networks are shaped, based on their subjective experience and structural aspects of how the notion of bonding and bridging work with regard to their situational identity as Bangladeshi Muslim young women and acquired identity and then how ethnic capital is attached to these two types of capital - enabling and constraining in both ways.

Chapter 6 focuses on the constraints and inequalities in relation to their identity, situational and acquired, gender, and cultural context; and how the situational identity impacts as a barrier on the process of social networks and how the women accept, manage or negotiate in order to sustain their social networks. The chapter also discusses how different forms of capital are associated with the process of social networks. Then the chapter points out strengths and limitations of the concepts in the analysis of the social networks and social capital of these young women.

Chapter 5 is organised in three main sections. With an introduction, the first section outlines the arrangement of the discussion and analysis of the gathered data. The exposition then turns to section two which offers a framework of analysis in relation to the research themes. Section three discusses in detail the social networks of these women, through which the bonding and bridging social capital were constructed with regard to family, faith, places of study, work and other social settings in the community; this also presents the impact of the social capital. The chapter ends with an overview in section four.

## **5.2 Bonding and Bridging**

This section illustrates how the process of ‘bonding and bridging’ and ‘ethnic social capital’ are associated with the construction and maintenance of social networks of Bangladeshi young women, especially in the loci of family, places of education, faith, workplace and other social settings. In addition, how precisely the social networks were realised and experienced by the young women.



A range of themes emerged from the analysis of the data, but two core categories – mediated by the ideas of bridging/bonding capital and ethnic capital - emerged as particularly significant: ‘family and faith’ in which the main ‘identity markers’ are situated that may influence the social networks of these women; the other category includes ‘education, work and community’ which can produce a broader ‘identity’ in relation to social networks. Usually identity markers such as language, dress, scarves, uniforms, faith, and culture offer symbols (Woodward 2004) which mark the identity of these women as Bangladeshi Muslim young women. On the other hand, education, work and interactions with diverse groups of people can generate identity by acquiring knowledge and information. However, identities- marker (situated) and producer (contextual) can be both fluid and relational (Brah 1996; Hall and Du Gay 1996; Woodward 2004), as has been discussed in detail in the literature chapter.

### **5.3 Family and ethnicity**

Most Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets live within extended family networks (Pollen 2002) – a characteristic that usually betokens a form of bonding social capital, according to Putnam (2000: 21). Then again, following Zhou (2005), ‘ethnic capital’ can express itself through processes of ‘intergenerational closure’ and the ‘enforcement of shared norms and values’ – a closure and enforcement that can have both positive and negative consequences. Thus a number of women interviewed in the study pointed out that family bonding, cultural and religious norms and values as elements of ‘ethnic capital’ had been supportive for their social networks. On the other hand, many of the women found that parental control in relation to enforcement of cultural and religious norms and values, constrained their autonomy and social life.

A few women were positive about the impact of family bonds with regard to the development of their social networks. NB, for example, who worked with Tower Hamlets College, enjoyed freedoms such as wearing “western” clothes and dancing:

*As my parents say...I mean, whatever you wanna do [related to social life], like, just go for it ok...if there's something you enjoy then go for it, don't let anyone stop you. But they also said, don't worry about [what] other people think, [at*

the] *end of the day this is your life, you lead your life the way you want to, obviously we don't want the 'wrong part'*. NB (Int 8, 19)

This confirms a strong tie between NB and her parents, in which she had encouragement and support to lead her social life; in other words, the presence of bonding social capital. However, she received advice from her parents about not going down the wrong path, which she termed as a 'wrong part'; in other words, not to cross the limit of acceptable behaviour as a Bangladeshi young women – this displays enforcement of family norms and values informed by religion and ethnicity - ethnic capital. The bonding social capital and the ethnic capital in this case had been largely positive with regard to the impact of wider social networks, which was an opportunity for her to bridge out and access more information. She was working, and appeared to have tangible resources and information, which provided a kind of authority over her own life. Therefore, bonding-bridging social capital and ethnic capital had been compatible in her case, as a balance of power and control was observed within the familial ties. As she added,

[Through dancing class] *I meet lot of new people. It makes my communication skills a lot better. ..I was not very confident before but since I started teaching dance, even they are young kids, it builds my confidence. I feel like, I can go in, I can teach. I am 19 but I can actually go into new class room and teach guys who are older than me. I would feel comfortable and confident now.* NB (Int 8, 19)

The dance class had been a platform for social networks, as well as a way to attain physical and emotional well-being, where NB highlighted being able to acquire confidence. Participation in interactive events like dance classes appears to develop forms of bridging with various people regardless of age, gender and cultural backgrounds; NB mentioned the 'opposite gender'. This also represented engagement with aesthetic activities, which strengthened NB's cultural capital (**Bourdieu, 1986**) as well as leading to enhancing her communication skills, confidence and self efficacy. It also enabled her to expand her social networks. Moreover, communication by dance as visual art or expression may form a kind of bridging for people with limited verbal interaction, as the contact involves 'weak ties'. For example, when people perform

dance, solo or in a group, their expression is mostly non-verbal, instead of which they interact by eye contact and body language. Besides, having feedback (verbal or non verbal) from co-dancers and audience during a show is a message, which is important for 'getting ahead', and indicates the development of bridging social capital. On the other hand, dancing in a group forms a kind of 'group solidarity' based on common interest and mutual trust among the co-performers, accordingly the actors share relevant norms, which promotes bonding social capital. In the context of performance this bonding seems strong in order to achieve a common goal - to present a dance show. This shows that social capital - bonding and bridging - can be constructed through expressions and non verbal interactions, especially for people with speech disability, giving a different dimension of social ties. It appears that different dimensions of social capital with regards to people's ability have been ignored in social capital research, indeed by Putnam (2000, 2007).

Similarly, another participant linked her familial relationships to the positive experience of social networks:

*I am actually very happy with my social networks, I am very close to my family and friends and I think that's why I feel like, even when I have a problem I feel like I can resolve it quite quickly. ....I am actually very, very happy because with the people I am surrounded by, because they help me so much that..they just make me feel happy all the time, so Alhamdulillah<sup>18</sup> ....it's good! AKN (Int 16, 19)*

The strong ties or bonding social capital existing between AKN and her family had been especially important for emotional support. The support was significant as it had enabled her to get by, promoting personal happiness and confidence, even facing a difficult situation. The familial networks had also been helpful to get a job, which provided her an entry into wider social networks. As she added,

*Without my networks I wouldn't be in this job, do you get it. For example if I did not keep in touch with family or friends, I wouldn't have this job I have now... So obviously that's my biggest benefit. ...I have got a job.. I gain a lot of skills, a lot of experience as well. AKN (Int 16, 19)*

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<sup>18</sup> An Arabic phrase meaning 'Praise to God'.

Bonding social capital from the social networks with AKN's family and friends had been supportive for her obtaining employment, and the workplace provided her with an opportunity to expand her networks. Thus, the extended social networks or bridging happened because of her bonding social capital and then the bridging enabled her to meet new people as well as to enhance her skills and experience - a kind of self efficacy. This shows that AKN has also been able to generate economic capital by earning money and experience, which has had a positive impact on her further social networks. This suggests work outside the home provides social networks, especially bridging, as well as a better position in the family and the community in terms of earning money and developing confidence.

Likewise, SKN found her bonding within familial relationships and support enabled her to bridge across ethnic and cultural boundaries. She had just obtained her degree from a reputable university and was in an educational break when I met her. She was looking for an opportunity to engage with a professional activity. Her strong bonding with family and relatives, and the encouragement and confidence from the bonding social capital had enabled her to attend the prestigious institution. The strong bonding framed by cultural and values and norms constituted ethnic capital; as a result, all together contributed in bridging out. As she shared,

*My mum's immediate family have always lived in central London... we are more in contact with my mum's side like my aunt, she works with Home Office ... education was important to her, she is in good job and she has ...kind of good luck, because she is working, she's been a kind of a role model for us....so lot of my relatives knew about L<sup>19</sup> and the university within central London ...family networks helped me as well choosing my university. SKN (Int 11, 21)*

She also expressed how family and cultural values linked with her social networks,

*I always keep like an honest relationship with my parents, I let them know where I am going so they are not worried, ... they know what I am doing and stuff. They are quite modern, I mean they still got their Bangladeshi culture and*

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<sup>19</sup> L = first letter of the university.

*religion (which) is very important but ...they understand that it's important for me to go out with my friends and everything like that. SKN (Int 11, 21)*

The first comment of SKN confirms her bonding social capital within familial relations which have been supportive in helping her to get ahead; as Edwards and Gillies (2005) also observed, working class families actively maintain strong networks with family and friends and they often have strong emotional bonds to each other, which indicates interdependency, responsibility and commitment to support; as noted, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets was a thriving working-class community (Tackey et al. 2006). Hence, for SKN, this shows that her parents encouraged family values on education and career advancements, which may have been rooted in culture and faith, such as discipline, respect and strong family relationships which also constitutes ethnic capital. Therefore, she found this was all about mutual understanding and negotiation in relation to the context. However, parental approval was crucial for SKN. It was therefore important to maintain an honest relationship with her parents and maintain a balance between family and friends. In such cases, the social networks of the women depended in part on parental understanding, their cultural capital, and a mutual adaptation of expectations, again showing presence of ethnic capital. Consequently she had strong bonding social capital which had been developed based on familial interaction, mutual support and shared norms, and at the same time ethnic capital with regard to ethnicity and family values, which was also formed in a similar way to bonding social capital in her case, by which she was able to generate her bridging social capital; in other words the bonding and ethnic capital had assisted her to develop bridging capital. This shows that ethnic capital can provide both forms of capital - bonding and bridging. For example, she was talking about her social ties to a diverse group of people,

*I went to school and college in Tower Hamlets whereas university is in central London; it was kind of a very new experience...I think it's matured me more because the people [I] found in university ... they [female friends] are from different ethnicity. I have some [friends] from Bangladeshi background; I have some from Pakistani background, some from Uganda, from Sri Lanka, and from China. So ...it's nice to get together and discuss, obviously [there are] differences between us because we come from different backgrounds, from*

*different religions. It's just nice to hear from other people's stuff, their culture and religion. SKN (Int 11, 21)*

By attending university out of Tower Hamlets SKN was able to bridge out beyond her ethnic group and made friends from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As such, her contextual identity and position as the same university student enabled her to cross the boundary towards bridging and making friendships. Socialising with people from different cultural backgrounds might have provided her with a kind of inclusion which was also a source of learning about other cultures that ultimately provided the confidence, which she mentioned as 'different experience' that made her 'matured'. Furthermore, attending the university enabled her to make connections to other groups such as the Law association, Bangladeshi association, and Islamic group, which gave her an opportunity for access to new people and more information (the relevant data was mentioned earlier in Chapter 4). As discussed above, enforcement of ethnic values on education facilitated her social mobility within the university atmosphere, which provided an opportunity to develop bridging social capital as well as ethnic capital through the professional group and the intra-ethnic groups at the university. The intra-ethnic groups can also be a source of bonding social capital based on shared norms and values with regards to ethnicity and faith. This implies that ethnic capital can coexist with bridging and bonding capital.

For some women, however, parental support was not always straightforward, as others' views in the community also mattered. PK, for example, related the parental understanding and worries linked to her initial situated identity markers such as Bangladeshi Muslim young woman: As she mentioned,

*My family are quite westernised, my parents are quite elderly and they let us do whatever we want to an extent. I have a lot of freedom compared to other stereotypical...Bangladeshi Muslim women that you hear about. ...So my family, they let us do whatever we can to an extent that does not affect our religion and where we live...in a Bangladeshi dominated society. So, me come [to] home late 10-11pm., I think my Mum would be more angry with me because what other people in the area gonna say... I think it would affect her more of what the*

*people in the area gonna say than it's gonna affect her, because I am out. PK*  
(FG4-4, 22)

PK had bonding social capital, as the parents valued her expectations, but at the same time was cautious about negative assumptions from other members in the community, which seems to result from ethnic and cultural norms of the Bangladeshi community. This also indicates the existence of bonding social capital, and at the same time ethnic capital, as the parents valued and were supportive of her education and career. But the parent was worried about her daughter's image in the community, which shows either a lack of 'trust' within the community (Putnam 2007; Putnam et al, 2010) or/and a patriarchal expectation of a young Muslim woman by the community. Although these may be cultural expectations (Hussain 2005; Kalra et al 2005), Brah (1996) implies that enforcement of cultural norms and values by the community or community based organisations, which generates ethnic capital, may cause restrictions in particular contexts - this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 . However, PK enjoyed her social networks and had extended her social ties beyond the familial relationships as she was a working woman; as a result she was able to overcome any negative assumptions. Nothing could inhibit the development of her social capital because of her access to education and employment which enabled her to generate bridging social capital that contributed in forming a new identity, a social position in the family and the community which provided negotiation power (Ramji 2003). This confirms that social structures such as employment can influence the situation positively (Ahmed 2003) in shaping the social networks and social capital of these women. This shows the ethnic capital can be traced in both bonding and bridging social capital.

It is important though to stress that not all participants accentuated the role of family with regard to bonding (negative or positive in consequence). This confirms the experience of NC, as she shared her experience of parental control because of their negative outlook on the community members that she phrased as 'bad influence', she mentioned:

*I never actually had family support in that sense...me and my little sister we tend to be very, very social. So I think my family would try and keep us not so social rather than encouraging us to socialise so much. I think it is because they are*

*afraid because in our society there are so many....like I say in East London so many bad influences that you can go under and I think they ...control what influence you are under...who, you have contact with. So probably in their mind less contact you have with certain people the more control they have over you.*

NC (Int 15, 19)

For NC, the parental control over her social networks may be a consequence of strong bonding within the relationships. A lack of proper parent-daughter interaction which is the basis for a tie, demonstrates less ethnic capital as these two forms can coexist. On the other hand, the restriction appears to be a symptom of lack of trust within the community, which may be a negative stereotypical outlook to a young Muslim women in relation to cultural expectations or may be a fear from negative gossips (Pollen 2002) around a sociable young women - apparently this supports the finding of Putnam (2007) that lack of trust inhibits social capital within a community; but this can also have effects at micro level, within a household. As seen, NC had comparatively strong bonding within the household relationships and weak ties- form of bridging capital, this confirms that strong bonding limits assimilation for some people like NC.

In contrast, for JB however, a strong bonding social capital within her family facilitated the development of broader, but apparently weaker, social networks that, in turn, enabled the creation of 'bridging' social capital:

*It is sometime kind of hard [to manage] because obviously my parents are really, really old and they have come from very old fashion background... it is hard for me to speak to them and tell them what I want to do so I think that's one of the barriers I have with my family because my mum and dad they don't really understand how, what this world is and all this kind of things how things are changing now. So there are only other people I can talk to is my brothers and sisters but then again they are also very protective so I can't really go and talk to them. So I have got friends that I can rely on or people who I work with. JB*

(Int 17, 22)



Another participant said,

*Our parents don't know about Facebook and stuff. ....if they find out about it they wouldn't be happy. It's hard to keep away from your parents... my parents they are born in back home and they came here but they share all like ...they are not modern so they don't understand you know what's happening now and what kind of social networks happening...yeah. ....I don't really tell them..I just tell them look I am gonna talk to my friends that's it. FB (FG1-7, 17)*

For these women there was relatively less ethnic capital within the household relationships as it appears they had limited interactions, sharing norms and non tangible resources. However, for JB that to some extent resulted in relying on her friendships outside of home, as well as in creating ties with colleagues as she was working. As a result she was well bonded with her friends and ties through work colleagues - a mode of bridging social capital. Similarly, FB extended her bonding with her friends and had no incentive to create social ties between diverse groups of people. However, JB had the access because of her social identity and negotiation power based on her economic power from the work, whereas FB lacked that. Accordingly they both had their own strategies to survive the situation, which were subjective as well as contextual. In terms of ethnic capital, a lack of 'intergenerational closure', shown by a lack of mutual understanding and exchanges, was linked to ethnic capital and an uncertain attitude on the part of JB and FB to their parents' norms and values. However, interestingly the other form of ethnic capital is observed in both cases, which was enforcement of ethnic norms and values on education; for JB there was even more constraint on her career. This seems to show that although ethnic capital assists in education and career related social activities, it may not be supportive of a wider social life, especially for these women; this will be analysed further in the next Chapter.

### **5.3.1 Education**

All of the young women interviewed described how educational attachments had been the key source of constructing and maintaining their social networks, as most of them were in education, such as College, Sixth Form (Post-16) and university and the remainder had access to a level of education. Attending education shows that all the

women had access to formal institutions, implying an opportunity to generate bridging social capital, and bridging out to different strata, as for Helliwell and Putnam (2007:1) 'education is one of the most important predictors—usually, in fact, the most important predictor—of many forms of political and social engagement'. Likewise, Holland (2009: 341) observed, 'education plays an important part as a potentially successful outcome of social capital practices of parents insofar as it produces human capital and desirable life chances for their children'. Moreover, education and career are viewed as a ladder of upward social mobility and prestige by South Asian Muslim girls, including Bangladeshis (Ahmed, 2001; Basit, 1996).

As mentioned, all participants in this study found their social networks were created mainly through their educational settings/attachments; one of the participants who was going to local college shared,

*[At college] when I started to hang out with female, it's like I came across a lot of different backgrounds, different ethnicity, everything. It's like I mean my five close friends are even not Bangladeshis....two of them are Somali, one is white ....and other one is Indian so interacting with them, it's like you learn lot of different stuff and it's really nice to be in a different environment because you are not in one particular environment. HB (FG4-2, 19)*

Places of study such as Sixth Form/Post 16 study, college and university are considered as formal settings, sources of bridging social capital. The educational settings had been an important starting place for the women, in which they had been able to meet new people and make friendships regardless of ethnicity or cultural backgrounds. In other words, the women developed bridging social capital by attending college and university. Thus, the settings as public places offered the woman an opportunity to socialise with people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, which enabled them to be familiar with the norms and values of other cultures. This shows that the process enabled them to 'bridge' out to a 'different environment', which broke the boundaries of 'one particular environment' which provided an opportunity in accessing resources and a high volume of information. This indicates that places of study facilitate development of bridging social capital through their social networks, which may give the women a feeling of social inclusion.

Apparently all the women had support in attending education, as Bangladeshi parents are positive in helping their children's education (DCSF, 2007) and especially they value their daughters' education and expect them to earn academic qualifications (Aston et al, 2007; Basit, 1996, 1997; Abbas, 2003). In this context bonding social capital and ethnic capital underpinned these women's ability to create social networks through their educational attendance and attainments, which led to generating 'bridging social capital'. For example, a couple of women who went to Sixth Form<sup>20</sup> talked about, *Mostly I meet new people in school and through classes and our subjects and stuff...*, said FB (FG1-7, 17). Another participant reported,

*... in school if there is any conferences we can participate in them and discuss things, meet new people ...if there are any after school activities, clubs.. if you go, participate in that there are new people come in, you can interact with them, make friendship with them.* RK (FG1-6, 18)

The women found interactive events such as conferences, after school activities, trips etc. were helpful in making further social networks and developing further bridging social capital. Networks and friendships through this process were important for them to support one another and spend time together. For example, at the focus group discussion with eight women, a couple of participants shared their experience, which was supported by others.

*Normally sometimes we don't plan what to do but we just, we start talking and you know how is just spend time with your friends but you don't actually plan ...we are going somewhere on specific day but sometimes just ...socialise by talking, sometimes spend hour just talking. We don't need actually do an activity to have fun or socialise. So that's how mostly I think we socialise yeah.* RK (FG1-6, 18)

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<sup>20</sup> The women at Sixth Form/ Post 16 education often mentioned School, the reason may be that the Sixth Form is an extension of the secondary school and is located in the same premises. For example, Mulberry School for Girls, which is a secondary school cum Sixth Form.

*we go cinemas, shopping, ice skating, go to restaurants, eat and just have fun...we study together as well like when comes nearly exam time and stuff.* FB (FG1-7, 17)

Carrying on certain activities together indicates that the women had ‘common interests’ and ‘trust’ among the members, which are vital elements facilitating the development of bonding social capital among these women, which enabled them to carry on those activities together for their emotional wellbeing, which they may not have done without these friendship ties. ‘Study together’, mentioned by the second participant (FB), also indicates mutual trust and support for one another, which Colman (1988) pointed out in ‘study circles’ while referring to South Korean students, which reflects a distinct stock of bonding social capital among the women. She (FB) also elaborated on the activities which she used to do together such as going to the cinema, shopping, ice skating, eating out or day out etc. which may help in developing further ‘bridging’ through accessing new places, activities and information. The activities, according to Putnam (2000:22), are considered as ‘informal networks’, which he described as a simple participation in meeting people irregularly, such as classmates, workmates, family-relatives, neighbours, local people for a football game or a drink. This confirms that bonding and bridging social capital co-exist in the process of their networks. Two main things have been highlighted by these women such as ‘spending time together’ and ‘having fun’, in other words emotional wellbeing, which was the core benefit of their social networks and socialisation. This is evidence that the bonding social capital in this context provides freedom and pleasure. An almost similar experience was shared by another participant,

*They [friends] support me in different ways, emotionally, also with education...especially my University friends. I mean we are doing the same course so we help to each other out with the assignments, with work and everything. Also if I am going through any problems or issues, anything like that... they give me emotional support as well.* SKN (Int 11, 21)

SKN had emotional bonds with her friends and the ties were built essentially in order to support one another; such as, emotional support with difficulties, with educational assignments and so on, in other words, understanding and exchanging resources.

Spending time together with friends for various reasons was important for the women. For example a participant reported,

*Obviously most of the time I am in college, so in that time I have been doing the college though, at the same time I do socialise with my friends when we have a long hour breaks or sometimes if I have like weekends, just catch up with friends or we either go to the park most of the time, our local mosque sometimes we go to those lecture or anything and that's it basically. HB (FG4-2, 19)*

The existence of mutual interests, trust and support within the group relationship indicate the presence of bonding social capital in this case. A such, for HB spending time together for mutual benefit, such as up to date information, which she mentioned as 'catch up', going to the park and attending lectures together at the Mosque; these had been considered as benefits of her social networks. This shows that a group solidarity or secure zone was created based on the bonding, in which the women felt comfortable to do their desired activities. Being a member of the network was important for a number of reasons; for example, enjoying each other's company and expressing themselves, which the women interpreted as their 'social life'; staying with female friends may help them to convince their family to allow them to stay outside after school, as being visible alone or with male in a public place is often seen as negative or 'disobedient' in the community, which could be a concern of family 'izzat' (Bhopal 1997: 65). Besides, staying in a group may help them to show off their collective strength to protect themselves from any outside harassment, as a considerable amount of research has emphasised bullying and racist name-calling and racial abuse of Asian girls in school (Wright 1992; Connolly 1998). Therefore the women may form the networks to avoid verbal racial attacks around the educational environment; as Brah and Minhas (1985) pointed out, Asian girls form groups among themselves as a method of protection from attack and abuse; the network may useful for security and empathy (Shain 2003) - the issue will go further into the next Chapter. Besides, visiting the Mosque for learning indicates an opportunity of bridging to new people, showing the development of bridging social capital.

It is felt that the women had some ‘commonality’ among them or common identity-markers such as being young women, at the same educational institution, apparently of the same age and same class, – due to these common identity markers these women had ties to those who were ‘like’ individuals ‘in some important ways’, which formed a kind of ‘bonding social capital’. This also demonstrates the trust and commitment to one other which also indicates ‘bonding’ social capital, as the women shared the same norms and values, holding the same ethnicity, culture and faith. Thus, for these women educational attachments helped to make ‘bridging social capital’, which over time turned into ‘bonding social capital’ and these two forms of social capital existed side by side, which was particularly seen among the associations, when the networks were connected by faith and its norms and values. There will be more discussion of this later in the faith section in this chapter. However, in another example, as discussed above familial bonding social capital supports the education of these young women, in which they meet other people regardless of race, age and gender, which shows a link from bonding to bridging; then again in a romantic relationship generally people choose the opposite gender:- initially that is bridging capital and over time the relationships develop bonding social capital, which shows a link from bridging to bonding. This suggests that the distinction between bonding and bridging is not straightforward, but that depending on context. This also shows that ethnic capital can be situated across both sites in which bridging and bonding capital appear.

However, the women who attended college and university outside Tower Hamlets had a different experience and better access to people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, because of the diversity with regards to environment and people. For example, SA (Int 14, 27) went to Leyton Sixth Form and she shared interesting experiences,

*... there I made lot of Pakistani friends, I made Gujarati friends, and I made two white friends and they're still with me today. It was such a mixed culture...I also met my first gay friend when I was in Leyton, although at that time I didn't know he was gay. It was a good fun. I met lot of people and we did a lot of stuff there. I don't think I could have done any of this if I was in Tower Hamlets. I know if I went to TH (college) I probably would've had a handful of friends who were Bengali. SA (Int 14, 27)*

RB (19) and HA (19) had similar experiences, they were cousins cum friends and were attending Greenwich University; they shared with cheerfulness in their voice at a group meeting,

*Actually uni was the first place where I mixed with non Bengalis because I dropped out in, because I went to primary school, secondary school and Tower Hamlets college which was more or less 100% Bengalis, more than 95 % Bengalis, all my friends were Bengalis. When I was doing uni my friends were not there. For the first time ever in uni actually I have more non Bengali friends and Bengali friends that never happened before... RB (Int 13, 19)*

*Ohh same here! I totally agree because I went to a all girls' schools for god sake and then I went to the same sixth form as well, so it was, I think that's why parents were happy, it was like Bengali girls all the time, there was no mixture in, in sex or different religion or racial aspects. So in minute you go to university, it's like ohh...you get bombarded with you know whites, blacks, Chinese, oh it's wicked actually, I like its better, you get a lot more variety I suppose... It is really interesting to know different values and varieties obviously. HA (Int12, 19)*

RA and HA were excited to share their university experience while talking about their social networks, as the university atmosphere enabled them to progress to new places as well as people with various nationalities and cultural backgrounds. Their expressions clearly showed their happiness and joy in freedom as consequences of being able to meet different people, making friendships and socialising with them. Thus attending university was an opportunity for these women to interact with diverse people regardless of their gender, religion, culture and value. The experience of these women contradicts the claim by Gavron (1997) on Bangladeshi families in Tower Hamlets, in which she commented about young women, 'their identities as Bangladeshis are bound up in their near exclusion from the outside world and this affects their relationship with the outside world and, especially, with the white population of Tower Hamlets' (p,194). But, in this case the women were positioned in relation to 'people and place' (Nayak, 2003), in that they were able to position themselves as university students; in other words produce their contextual identity as British students, which enabled them to

develop social ties with various people where their situated identity 'Bangladeshi Muslim female' was passive and 'British Bangladeshi Muslim' identity was prominent, as one's identity is relational (Brah 1996; Hall and Du Gay 1996; Woodward 2004:). This demonstrates that bridging social capital has a positive impact on constructing a new identity, leading towards social assimilation.

The place and people at the university had also been a source of further bridging or expanding social networks with more new people and information. For example, C<sup>21</sup> university student INB shared her excitement,

*In my university ...I get to meet different people who don't even do same course as me and we [have] kind of a formal link and it kind of keep me motivated ...get to meet like make many friends, many new friends ... so it is kind of creating a bigger social networks for me. INB (FG2- 5, 18)*

INB had more opportunity of creating and maintaining social networks with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. The networks were not limited to among classmates or year mates, but rather extended beyond them, for example university students generally have contact with various people through library, sports, cafe, office, subject related seminars etc.. Moreover, the college and university atmosphere facilitated crossing ethnic and cultural boundaries, and as a result her social networks were bigger and she was able to develop relationships with different people regardless of their gender, race and culture, which was an opportunity to exchange as well as learn other cultural values and norms.

In addition to university, doing a particular course was also important in creating and maintaining social networks. For instance a participant commented as follows,

*I went to Middlesex [university] doing my Textile degree and doing a Textile degree you don't get many Bengali people that do or Bengali young women at the time. When I was 16, I went to a fashion college and there was one Bengali girl in a different class and me, myself and that was it. Everybody else was [from] black and white and different nationalities. So my social group was just*

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<sup>21</sup> First letter of the university.



*instantly different ethnic minority of people. I suppose you don't see your friends as a different culture or religion, they are just your friends. You kind of talk to them and get along with them for who they are and that's how you kind of build social networking, then you meet other friends through them, through liking something, you go out together... RS (Int 7, 29)*

She also added,

*I have got a lot of English, Jamaican and Chinese friends and they are all guys, because of where I went to university, so that's why most of my male friends are from different cultures and probably I am really close to 5 or 6 guys that are from Bengali Background but rest are [from non Bengali]...and its same with my close friends [female], I think I kept in touch with 5 or 6 girls from school and rest of my friends (are) from university and college and they are all mixed, they are English, Swedish, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, Greek, so far those ones I got them...from university, work and college. RS (Int 7, 29)*

RS was able to make her social ties because of the lack of Bangladeshi students in her course. In other words, the presence of weak ties facilitated her development of bridging capital in which she was able to cross the cultural boundaries; as she mentioned 'they are just friends'. She had expanded social networks- bridging capital through her friends as one of the benefits of bridging capital is 'getting ahead'. She developed the further networks with people based on liking something but they were like people and had a kind of social ties. This shows that the element 'like' is equally functional in weak ties among people from other ethnic groups. Although, for RS, there were 'unlike' elements in terms of ethnicity, culture and gender, for her the like elements were important, which may be common interest or common personality in order to develop the bridging. This contrasts with Putnam's (2007) notion of bridging in which he outlined that bridging occurs between unlike people. This shows that she had bridging social capital in terms of 'unlike and like' as mentioned, but at the same time she was bonded within the same group of friends, as she mentioned 'close friendships' which indicates the existence of 'bonding social capital'. Once again this shows the side by side presence of bonding and bridging social capital; but in this context it subsists in a complex way which, however, has not been indicated by Putnam.

However, this shows that the women who attended college and university outside Tower Hamlets had better bridging social capital. The reasons may be various; for example, a few women described university as a ‘formal’ setting for social networks, as the atmosphere and the people also provided role models towards ‘getting above your station’ (Archer and Leathwood, 2003; Burgess et al., 2009; Reay et al., 2005), as more young south Asian women are attending higher education which reflects their higher aspirations and mobility, as well as better cultural capital (Dale et al., 2002; Hussain and Bagguley, 2007). The networks may help the women to acquire academic and employment related information, which can play a significant role to reach their aspirations, which is highlighted as one of the benefits of social network and bridging social capital. In addition, the university gives them a feeling of inclusion/belonging to mainstream society as ‘networks provide a basis for social cohesion’ (Field 2008: 14) as well as social ties through university providing an opportunity in constructing wider identity, which again facilitates the development of social capital, especially, bridging capital through employment. It seems the women enjoyed more freedom at university due to the distance between the university and the community, as there were less anxiety about ‘back chat or gossip’ (Bhatti 1999) from the community, and these women found university a ‘safer interactive place’ for their social life. Thus, the mode of ‘bridging’ through the university enabled the women to create wider networks, which may have helped them to gain a kind of ‘self efficacy’, which refers to observational learning, social experience and reciprocal determinism in the development of personality, which is a person’s belief in her ability to succeed in a particular situation (Bandura, 1986, 1997), as ‘key social influences on adolescents’ self-efficacy are friends and peer networks’ (Schunk and L. Meece, 2005).

However, a few women found it was hard to create social networks in the university atmosphere. For instance NC (19) reported her experience,

*..from my university I think I want my social group to expand, much more than I have now, because in college... because it was in East London so when I went to college I knew practically the whole college anyway. When I went to university I was nobody....nobody knew me... so in that sense it felt really strange, so I think at university I would like to socialise much more and get to know lot more*

*people.... but its again, it is hard to make friendship over formal situations. NC (Int 15, 19)*

NC (19) went to C University from Tower Hamlets which was a big change for her in terms of the area, setting and people. She found creating a bigger social network was hard at university in what she labelled a 'formal setting'. As some women mentioned earlier, university is full of mixed people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Hence, realistically most people such as her classmates, year mates, teachers and staff at the university were unlike to her with regards to ethnicity, age, and backgrounds, and therefore she may have found it hard to negotiate towards fitting in and making social networks. This may be for many reasons, for example, people around her might not be interested to make a social relationship with a 'Muslim young women' due to negative stereotypes (Brah 1996; Puar 1995) or it may be that her lack of human capital/ability (Burt, 1997), in particular her gender and ethnic identity, can create significant obstacles to her ability to make social ties and use resources (Van Buren and Hood). Therefore, other social and contextual aspects need to be taken into consideration for construction of social ties with people, especially people from other ethnic groups and backgrounds. For NC (19), other factors may have been in place which might be internal, from her side, or external social factors, therefore she found it was hard. More specifically, an internal factor could be her lack of social competence or her identity marker and the external factors could be cultural differences, misunderstanding or lack of interest by other people. For example, HB (18) was unsure of making networks with people from other cultures as she said,

*Sometimes it is easier to talk to people from the Bengali culture because they are more understanding and whereas people from other culture may not understand where you are coming from. HB (FG1-1, 18)*

HB was hesitant to interact with people from other cultures because of her subjective assumption about other cultures. This shows that one may prefer to develop social networks with people based on the presence of common elements, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, bridging can occur based on the components 'like', not only the 'unlike'. Other factors- internal and external need to be considered when evaluating one's social networks, especially bridging with people from

other cultures, as people may have different assumptions based on their subjective experience.

### 5.3.2 Faith

Most of the young women interviewed had a strong faith about their religion which was Islam and some of them found Muslim norms and values such as praying together, acquiring and spreading knowledge, helping people, had all been supportive in creating and keeping up social networks which led to generating social capital. It seems that their Muslim identity played a significant role in shaping their attitudes and values towards social networks. For instance, many women mentioned access to prayer rooms, engagement with Islamic groups/society and circles at school/college and university underpinned the expansion of their social networks. A group of six women who were active with a faith based organisation called *Muslimaat*<sup>22</sup>, shared their experience in a focus group discussion.

*When I joined college, initially I just went out to the prayer room and that way I met Islamic society sisters and then became a member of Islamic society and then Islamic society lead to circles on Sundays and the circles lead to me joining the organisation... So it's like a chain of social networks. FC (FG2-1, 18)*

*In my university there is a prayer room where I meet other girls. There is gonna be a charity event soon, so I am involved in that as well. I get to meet other girls there, mix, get to know them, make friends and yeah... SB (FG2-2, 19)*

This shows that faith and religious practice enabled the women to expand their social networks with other women who shared the same norms and values. It also helped them to engage with more faith based activities through faith groups and organisations such as *Muslimaat*, giving an opportunity of further bridging out. This shows the effect that

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<sup>22</sup> *Muslimaat* UK is a community based women's' organization aiming to seek the pleasure of Allah through striving to bring about positive change in society for all. The organisation is based in the East London Mosque in Tower Hamlets which has been established by a small group of young Muslim women, with the aim to bring about an Islamic change in society by working with other Muslim women and the native women of Britain. *Muslimaat* UK is a member of Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and has close links with many national as well as international organisations such as Islamic Forum Europe (IFE) and Young Muslim Organisation (YMO UK). The organisation has a series of activities for women. Source: <http://www.muslimaat.org/>

bonding social capital also had on the process and the connections. For example, the women had ties among them because of their common 'faith' along with a common identity as 'Muslim', 'young', and 'women', which are key criteria for the development of bonding social capital; in other words bonding social capital that connects like individuals. Hence, the activities such as 'praying together', meeting 'Islamic society sisters', participation in 'Islamic society or circle' show the existence of 'bonding social capital' based on their shared norms and values. However, according to Islamic norms Muslim people pray together in a Mosque, prayer room in work place or educational setting regardless of class, ethnicity, or age, which implies they might be like or unlike individuals. Moreover, it was not described as an Islamic society, group, circle and organisation only for 'Bangladeshis', so it is assumed that other Muslim women had access to the places and activities, from other ethnic groups or perhaps different generations who were different from the Bangladeshi young women. Thus, the women's engagement in faith based activities enabled them to develop bridging social capital as well, which over time led to mobilizing bonding social capital. On the other hand, the existence of bonding social capital leads towards bridging social capital as 'high bonding might well be compatible with high bridging' (Putnam 2007: 143). For example SB (FG2-2, 19) mentioned,

*My friend recommended this (Muslimaat) to me and then I got interested, I was used to go college prayer room as well, they used to always talk about this organisation how good it is and...she (the friend) brought me once and I really got interested, I liked it and started attending every Sundays. SB (FG2-2, 19)*

Another participant said,

*I am a part of the Islamic society in my college and basically we talk every week and we used to organise events, it is quite good because we can meet with other people, we invite people; teach them about religion as well. Basically through friends I have got Muslimatt which helps gaining knowledge and it's good to meet people... it's nice to talk to them..it makes you feel better with religion. SA (FG2-4, 18)*

This appears the presence of bonding social capital in the case of SB and SA, as their friends helped them to create ties with other people in the faith based organisation. Their friends not only recommended them, but also took them to the organisation, which indicates their close friendship and shows bonding social capital within the friendship. However, in the process of the networking bridging social capital and bonding social capital were noticeable. For example, for SB and SA bonding social capital facilitated the association with the faith based organisation. The members of the organisation are supposed to be diverse, such as Bangladeshi Muslims, Somali Muslims, English Muslims or Indian Muslims, they can even represent different generations, which indicates the connection of *unlike* people, the key characteristics of creating bridging social capital. However, the members were female, as the organisation was for Muslim women, and they shared Muslim norms and values, this commonness confirms the bond between *like* individuals. Thus the presence of bonding social capital is evident within the connection. This appears, these two forms of social capital existed together in the networks of SB and SA. This also indicates that the social relationship occurred because of the togetherness, trust and religious shared norms and values among the women regardless of *like* and *unlike* people.

This also shows the existence of ethnic capital within the process, as it was tending towards 'reinforcement of norms and values', which was Muslim norms and values among the women, which is very close to the concept 'ethnic capital' as discussed earlier. The ethnic capital that is rooted within an immigrant family (Zhou, 2005; Modood, 2004) and in general practicing faith by Bangladeshi children are encouraged as the parents provide religious education to their children (Pollen 2002). Thus the existence of ethnic capital also facilitated the continuing connection, which also contributed to strengthening the bonding and bridging social capital among the women. In this context ethnic capital has been supportive for the development of bonding and bridging social capital, in other words ethnic capital is located within the process of bonding and bridging capital. The acquired social capital might enable the women in 'linking' further to achieve a common goal, as linking is one of the elements of social capital (Putnam, 2000), although the social capital based on faith might be a cause of separation and segregation.

This indicated that ‘bonding social capital’ and ‘ethnic capital’ based on family (immigrant) relationships had been a source of support, which enabled the women to pursue their education; and educational settings as public places facilitated ‘bridging social capital’. For example the women made the link to other people, praying in prayer rooms at college and university and over time they became members of Islamic society in the same settings. Then through the Islamic society they were likely to attend Muslimaats, the faith based organisation, which might then become a motivation to attend more like minded organisations. This looks like micro-meso-macro level social networks, for example, individual level at the prayer room (micro)- group level, Islamic society (meso)- and community level, Muslimaats (macro)- ‘it’s like a chain of social networks’ FC (FG2-1, 18). Then again the women kept on their bonding with members who they were close to and at the same time created bridging to new members; As some of the women reported, the faith based activities and organisations had been important in bridging to new people who were from different backgrounds as well as in maintaining existing networks.

*...coming to Muslimaats, I get to create bigger social networks, not only with people that might come from my university but also I get to maintain my relationship with my college friends, meet other people from different colleges and universities and create a good relationship with them as well. Everyone together have the bond and we get to gain knowledge, take knowledge, talk about things, talk comfortably to each other yeah. It’s just creating a bigger social network and keeping a good contact with whole load of different people.*  
INB (FG2-5, 18)

*For me coming here (Muslimatt) is basically good way to maintain my relationship with my friends. Instead of talking about things outside of religion we talk about religion. So it's a way to maintain relationship as well as gain knowledge at the same time.* FC (FG2-1, 18)

The comment from INB indicates that the organisation Muslimaats has been a social space for the women regardless of ethnicity, in which they were able to spend leisure time with their friends, at the same time meeting new people. Once again, bonding and bridging social capital simultaneously exist in the ties between these women. For

example, 'talking comfortably' (INB) indicates bonding social capital exists within the group; whereas 'meeting other people from different educational settings' and 'gaining knowledge' show the existence of bridging social capital. One of the benefits of social networks is to acquire information, which means knowledge is a key benefit of bridging social capital. Other women also demonstrated that gaining knowledge and spreading knowledge was one of the purposes of creating the networks. For example,

*... as a Muslim you meant to spread your knowledge and also gain knowledge. If you in the right group of friends, practising Muslim group, you would be able to gain knowledge and stay firm in your religion. If you are with non Muslim you can give them knowledge and you can share experiences and you know ... have fun with both sets of friends. Also I think again, with maintaining social networks, it helps you (to be) psychologically happy because you need people around you, it is natural for human to want to talk to another person so yeah.*  
FC (FG2-1, 18)

Another participant stated,

*Social networks is important because obviously if you talk to other people you will gain more knowledge and learning new things and it is really important because like in Islam you maintain like learn new things and teach others so if you don't communicate with people, connect with people how you gonna spread your knowledge to other people. It's really important! If I don't have social contact I wouldn't learn anything, I will feel like you know.. yeah.. depressed!*  
SB (FG2-2, 19)

This shows the women had shared values about their religion and the quest to gain knowledge, which contributed to creating and maintaining their social network. For Putnam (1995, 1995, 2001) civic engagement and participation in faith based organisations like churches through formal and informal membership is very important in mobilizing social capital. Therefore, bonding and bridging social capital existed in this case, in addition ethnic capital was also noticeable. The strong belief in 'gaining and spreading knowledge' indicates self 'enforcement of norms and values', a key element of ethnic capital, which originates in the immigrant family with regards to their



ethnicity and culture. The women also believed ‘enhancing knowledge’ for themselves and spreading it to others was one of the key spiritual activities, as the Prophet Muhammad declared with great emphasis that ‘seeking knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim, man and woman’ (Bari, 2005: 131). For the women, engaging with the organisation is also important because it provides a ‘safer space’ in which the women can socialise ‘comfortably’ and express themselves, which had been positive for their emotional wellbeing. The attachment may help to develop their social skills through their acquiring knowledge, information and mixing with women from other backgrounds, which is necessary for the development of social capital, as faith organisations can play an important role in enhancing knowledge and skills, as well as encouraging qualities which are essential for civic engagement (Furbey and al, 2006). This is supported by Putnam as he stated involvement in a faith based organisation such as church or Mosque can facilitate in developing civic skills (2000: 94). However, the women may consider this as their participation in the public sphere and protect themselves, as this ‘allows women a legitimate place in a public sphere which otherwise might be blocked to them; for women of racial and ethnic minorities, it can also provide the means by which to defend themselves as well as to defy the hegemonic racist culture’ (Bhopal 1997: 18)<sup>23</sup>.

Another aspect of keeping the networks was that the women found this a strength of togetherness as it provides knowledge, fun, emotional well being, and a kind of bonding among the group members, as well as an opportunity for interactions with women from other settings and areas. It is noted that a couple of participants in the focus group discussion lived outside of Tower Hamlets but one of them went to a college in Tower Hamlets and another woman worked part time in Tower Hamlets. The women in the discussion thought their Muslim identity had been one of the key enabling factors in constructing and retaining social networks. A woman described how,

*I think it [my religion] improves my social networks relations because in my religion which is Islam, you meant to maintain good relation with everyone you meet so I think it helps when I meet non Muslims... and also because I am a Muslim I join to the Mosque community, I join to Muslimate etc. so my*

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<sup>2323</sup> Racism with regards to social networks of these women will be discussed later.

*social networks is bigger so that's why I think it's improves my networks. FC (FG2-1, 18)*

Building and maintaining social networks was part of their spiritual activities which enabled them to generate their social capital. This again shows the existence of bonding and bridging social capital as well as ethnic capital within the group, for example 'joining the Mosque community and Muslimate' is bonding social capital, 'meeting non Muslim' is bridging social capital, and 'using resources of faith based ethnic organisation' is ethnic capital as norms and values of Islam. This link between these women and the women from other faiths indicates that they were breaking away from segregation. Apart from the group, a woman found participation in religious events at her university was a way of social networking.

The comment is as follows,

*I had [contact], not so much now, with the Islamic society [at university] and they were very useful because with the Islamic society they have held a lot of like lectures; university and different religious speakers would come in and kind of.. speak to ..about different aspects of Islam. SKN (Int 11, 21)*

This also indicates bridging to external resources such as information about Islam. The event seems to provide an opportunity in meeting new people, in other words the development of bridging social capital from that connection.

The women acknowledged that the philosophy of Islam underpinned being 'connected' with brothers, sisters and everyone for strengthening 'bonding' and helping one another through knowledge sharing, and motivation. For the women the faith and the shared identity as 'Muslim', 'young', 'women' played a key role in enabling their social interactions and connections with other women, as well as leading to forming a kind of social capital. Thus the religious norms and values appeared as social capital or 'faith capital', which indicates that faith could be an essential element of social capital for some people. The faith based activities enabled the women's social mobility and human development through participating in events, organizing charity events, visiting the Mosque and faith based organizations. It also helped them in staying united, which the women may find helpful in enabling them to stand up for themselves. The women

‘therefore ‘use’ Islam as a way of defining themselves as part of a world religion and world community’ (Gavron, 1997: 201). This also facilitated form of ‘bridging’ with diverse people (non Bangladeshi), who appeared to have the same values and goals. This shows that the impact of ethnic capital is more than education and career, which Zhou and Modood (2004; 2005) stated. Firstly, the authors did not include faith in the concept of ethnic capital, although faith is very close to or part of ethnicity and culture and often has enormous influence on a South Asian's life (Brah 1996), especially Bangladeshis (Pollen, 2002). In addition, in certain contexts people can be bonded with others beyond family relations and close friends by the influence of ethnic capital, which has been overlooked; and most importantly the gender dimension has been ignored; this will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Muslim identity clearly has some influence in building and maintaining social networks by the Bangladeshi young women. Some women, who especially engaged directly with faith based activities, found it was positive as the activities enabled them to construct and maintain social networks, which then led to forming a kind of social capital. In this case the women may have had family support, as Bangladeshi parents encourage their children’s religious activities, therefore they may have found this as an opportunity for the development of connections to new people and places. However, there may be other reasons for using faith as a tool/vehicle for their social contacts; for example, the women may engage with faith based activities because otherwise they may be restricted in other activities in the public sphere; the women may feel the need of being united for defending against the emerging racism which developed based on the negative discourse around Islam. However, the social networks which are linked by faith may limit the opportunities for creating bridging across the faith boundary; this will be discussed more in the next section.

### **5.3.3 Place of work**

For some women, their workplace enabled them to build and maintain social networks and social capital through the interactions with colleagues and clients. Workplaces represent a space for ‘bridging’ social capital. Most of the women interviewed expressed their positive aspiration towards a career and emphasised the importance of work outside the home, regardless of whether paid, volunteer, full time or part time.

Bangladeshi parents expect their daughter to have a career, as this may enable them to have better prospects - a better position and condition in the family and the community (Aston et al, 2007). For the women who were in work, the workplace had been an important source of social networks, as it provided an opportunity to meet new people from diverse backgrounds, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, social class, or ideology, in which they were able to share common issues, make friends, exchange mutual support and mobilise social capital through the integrations. For example,

*I like work; I got pay slip today that's my fun shopping, activities... At my work I met a lot of my friends...like my work colleagues.. they are really nice people ...it's really fun.. lots of girls work there as well they are literally in my age.. actually they are all Bengali, one is Nepali but still Asian, one Indian Muslim the rest of them are Bengalis, I got two black friends.. they had got fired but I still see them..* RB (Int 13, 19),

RB, a University student, works part time and she was able to bridge out with various people by making friends at her workplace. The place of work enabled her to socialise with people from different races and religions. However, her contact was mainly with girls who were literally in her age which means they were 'like' individuals because of their common identities as working persons (contextual), and as females, Asians, Muslims (situated); the similarities worked here as a catalyst in developing the bridging. Work is also a key source of earning money, which indicates a kind of freedom, independence and negotiation power, as RB, mentioned her 'fun shopping'. The independence provided her with a better position in the family, which made it easy to maintain her social life further – a position for negotiation. For instance RB (Int 13, 19) and HA (Int 12, 19) were cousin sister cum friend to each other, they went to the same university; HA (Int 12, 19) was not in work. They mentioned the following,

*RB (Int 13, 19): my dad make me breakfast...I go to work, my mum doesn't want me to clean, she doesn't let me do cleaning or anything . I can clean if I want to, she doesn't force me...my mum trusts me a lot.*

HA (Int 12, 19) added: *she is lucky...she can be out as long she wants... her parents are very easy going. Whereas my family, they are very rigid, very strict..!*

This shows the dynamics of family bonding. RB's bridging social capital was valuable in a number of ways, for example the work enabled her to learn about other cultures through her networks with people at the work place, to earn money which provided her a space for negotiation at home in order to maintain her social networks. This shows that her parents value her career and education; and her ties with the parents indicate the existence of ethnic capital within the relationships. But HA's experience was the opposite, which might have been due to her position in terms of monetary power. In her case, it seems there was a control over her social life which she was not able to negotiate with her parents due to her having less power. In this regard, the links between identity (acquired as working woman), social capital and power, and control within the household is clearly evident, which has been over looked by Putnam. Likewise, a British- Bangladeshi Muslim male professional<sup>24</sup>, who worked for young people in the Borough, commented in this regard:

*If you work, somehow Bengali parents relax a little bit...I think when girls grow up, when they start going to university then it's a bit more relaxed, the parents... are not so controlling. In [sixth form] college and school they are little bit more controlling ...When they starting employment they ([parents]) are much more relaxed so that's why you can see...young girls, relatively young 25, 26, 27, then staying out little bit later, and that's also resulting in girls, young women having a group of friendships. TA (Int, 18, 39)*

According to TA, Bangladeshi parents are supportive of their daughters who work, which means earning money, prestige and social position and ultimately producing a broader identity. In other words, the daughter's bridging social capital, which is directly linked to generating economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), strengthens their familial bonding social capital. Thus bridging social capital, economic capital and familial bonding capital and a social identity can contribute to expanding social networks, especially the mode of bridging which is like a reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986).

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<sup>24</sup> He is one of the three professional workers who contribute to this study.

Other participants also expressed the importance of having bridging social capital through work outside the home, for instance,

*If there is no social networks around me, and if I had no friends, I would be very depressed. I would be very upset because I am the type of person that likes to meet people.... I come to work because I know I have got friends, and you know I look forward to coming to work because I know at the end of the day, I have got life outside of home... JB (Int 17, 22)*

JB was able to create networks, especially ties with her work colleagues, which was important for her emotional wellbeing. Having work outside the home was also significant for her, as going to work provided an opportunity to get out of the home by which she was able to create and maintain her social networks with her friends. This shows that her friends were close to her, as she had emotional support from them, and spending time with her friends was important for her when in distress. This indicates the existence of mutual trust within the friendship in order to support each other, and 'mutual trust', 'close friendship' appear to be a kind of 'bonding social capital'. Thus the place of work underpinned her development of bridging social capital among her work colleagues, and having a job has also been an opportunity to maintain her social life outside of work and home. This shows that for JB, her bridging social capital has been supportive to 'bonding social capital'.

A workplace can promote the development of trust and a support network among work colleagues, which can generate a distinct social capital that benefits all members of the network. In relation to work the women found social networks were beneficial in two ways: it helped them to get outside the home, which provided a degree of negotiation power; and the workplace then became a source of making further networks which were also valuable in many ways. For example,

*Work... the voluntary work I will be doing, going forward will be again to better my career and to give me a better prospect and where I go, in going forward in my career, so those are the advantages basically the formal, the*

*whole purpose of formal networking is to better set certain things in your life isn't it? HK (FG3-2, 23)*

HK rightly pointed out that connection with formal settings can bring career advantages as well as prospects in relation to social networks and social capital. In addition, AKN highlighted how she became part of other people's networks through her involvement in voluntary work. According to her, providing support to someone could be a way of developing social networks. She expressed satisfaction at this.

*We come across like for example, a mother who said, she feels like ..she has been brought up in this country. Because she has not been able to socialise, she has no one to go to and she has got only us to come to and where we are stranger to her isn't it? .. I feel more sorry for them and working with a person like this, helping them a little bit; it kind of makes you happy as well because you help someone. You feel like you are becoming their social network by talking to them ... it gives you a good feeling! AKN (Int 16, 19)*

AKN had social networks, especially association with her work colleagues, as well as with her clients, to whom she provided support as her job duty. This shows that social networks can bring positive benefits to some extent for all members who are within the networks, no matter what their position is. However, the dynamic of networks between her and her clients seems different. For example, from her side providing support through the networks was her job and gave personal satisfaction. This indicates that a social network is not always for 'getting benefits', although the 'good feeling' is one kind of benefit; so helping people without expecting any return may be part of social networks, as the helping person meets various people. In this respect, social networks are conceptualised mainly from the receiver's point of view, for example, if one has social networks which could help the person to get resources: materials, information or emotional support. The term social networks is also defined as 'mutual benefit', in which all members of the networks could be beneficiaries. However, the concept does not include only 'giving to' or 'helping' people as parts of one's social networks. Providing support to isolated people and becoming part of their social networks could be part of the provider's social networks.

Most working women interviewed emphasised acquiring work experience and skills through their social networks. For instance HB (FG 1.1, 18) worked as a volunteer with a local community organisation, *Attlee*, and she commented.

*I came to Attlee before anyone here and I found this because I need work experience from my course and this is when I found Attlee and then... I did two week work placement here and then...because I like it so much and I decided to stay and it taught me like a lot of new skills and giving me lot of experiences and I have learnt so much about Attlee like they give you so many opportunities, they give you lot of free trip to go to adult...they give you lots of opportunities like first aid training and stuff to help you gain skills. I just looked for myself because I wanna work experience...I got information about Attlee through school. HB (FG 1.1, 18)*

The workplace provides not only a space for expanding social networks, it also provides work experience, and work related skills, which HB found important for further career development. This shows her connection with the relevant person at her school enabled her to make further contact with the organisation *Attlee*, which provided her the work placement (volunteer). The work has been an opportunity for her to expand social networks mainly by contacting more people directly by attending training and trips. This shows she was tied with a diverse group of people, regardless of gender, age, religion and cultural backgrounds as she worked with a multi-ethnic community organisation. This shows work outside the home has been significant for earning money, as well as providing an opportunity to acquire experience and work related skills. Another participant who worked full time expressed the importance of work in her everyday life.

*My work place is very important for me. I wouldn't be where I am right now... some of the things I learnt in life (from) work place. I mean I start working...you start mature a lot more and I mean...it's just important to have this sort of connection with your work place...I think coming to work and stuff keeping me going...keeping me busy in life. NB (Int 8, 19)*



For NB, the place of work was important as she had ‘connections’ with her work colleagues, which she found important for keeping her active, learning and moving forward. Work outside the home was an opportunity to meet a wide range of people with different personalities and qualities, which she found useful in expanding networks as well as gaining experience. Most of the women who were in work thought socialisation was valuable in enhancing self confidence and social competence. For example, AK (19) worked as a volunteer with a well reputed community organisation based in Tower Hamlets. She felt her confidence had improved as a result of her social networks and socialisation. As she mentioned,

*Socialising with people, in a way it makes you...it helps you because you come across a range of people with different personalities, behaviours, attitudes...I think it helps you to deal with a better way, AK (Int16, 19)*

In addition to places of study many of the young women interviewed were voluntarily attached to community and youth organisations, such as the Attlee Foundation<sup>25</sup>, One stop centre for young people, Bangladeshi Women’s Leagues and Youth groups. The women acknowledged that the organisations enabled them to create and maintain their social networks. For instance,

*Attlee is also another type of way of communicating because the people you don't know before but you starting to know them. FB (FG1-7, 17)*

Another respondent expressed how contacts with community organisations have extensive long term benefits with regard to social networks. Therefore this has been a way of enhancing interpersonal skills, presenting oneself and integrating with society. The women considered the social networks led to better communication skills, with which they could gain better acceptance in society. FBA (FG1-4, 17) illustrated her view as follows,

*I think expressing yourself to a person and making them understand who you are,...sharing ideas with different people have positive aspects. I mean if you*

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<sup>25</sup> Attlee Foundation is a local community organisation; it provides open access and inclusive facilities for children, young people and the local community regardless ethnicity and culture

*keep your own judgement yourself and you belief, why you belief and not share with someone else, I think it could have really bad consequences...you wouldn't get accepted in society and the only way you will get accepted is by understanding people around you and talking to them, yeah communicating with them, otherwise there is no way you can go to society and work with people and yeah..... I met a lot of lovely people (at Attlee) because before it was really obviously hard, like communicating with people but coming to Attlee it was..full of friendly people and yeah different cultures, different backgrounds it is really fun! FBA (FG1-4, 17)*

Engaging with community organisations creates links to formal settings, which means mobilizing bridging social capital. Hence, the community organisations have been a space in which the women were given the opportunity to create social networks, especially allowing development of ties with people from ‘different cultures and different backgrounds’. The women also considered that engaging with community based organisations meant social networks with formal settings or ‘formal social networks’, as most of the organisations provide a structured youth focused programme to young people. As a result most of the women who engaged with these organisations acknowledged their influential value on networks as they felt their importance for self efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997), not just meeting people and friends. For the women the organisations have been a resource as an interactive place in which they were able to interact with a variety of people regardless of their cultural backgrounds - expressing and sharing views, which boosted their self efficacy; and all these aspects facilitated the development of bridging social networks. This also worked the other way round, in that the bridging social capital of these women enabled these things to develop. For many community organisations act to promote social interactions and inclusion, and also play a positive role in providing pleasure by organising activities like trips, sports etc., a way of developing cultural capital and self efficacy, which is useful to expand networks or further bridging. One participant emphasised the importance of bridging across with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and said that the lack of this can lead to segregation or exclusion. Her comment is as follows,

*[in terms of Bengali identity] it's difficult for them, because the difficulty is when you don't mix and you don't have an education and it's scary, you*

*almost feel like..you kind of just belong to one category and that's a category of being a Bengali, Muslim woman. I think it's hard for them to progress because they have not gone out and met people and haven't had a good social network and the only network they had was with the Bengali people, so it is difficult for them. RS (Int 7, 29)*

RS highlighted the importance of having social networks, especially relationships with people from other cultural backgrounds; and in this regard community organisations as resources provide positive support. The women also found community and youth organisations a safer interactive social place for spending time with friends and interacting with other people, as being Muslim the women were not allowed to access many mainstream social networking places such as 'pubs' or 'bars'. The organisations offer a variety of services for young people and some of them have separate sessions for women only: separate swimming and gym sessions, which the women also found positive. This shows that through these activities many of the organisations that especially provide culturally sensitive programmes, reinforce norms and values amongst the women. Consequently, this has been a way by which the women were able to mobilize a kind of 'ethnic capital' as the 'norm enforcement' by encouraging community involvement within a particular immigrant community, (Zhou 2000; Modood 2005). Thus the existence of ethnic capital at the community organisations enabled the women to expand their social networks in the public sphere, which was a source of information and advancement. This may help the women in shaping their social mobility, social competences and social integration. The women also thought their attachments with the community organisations would facilitate and fulfil their aspirations, as almost all women wanted to see themselves in a paid job in the future. This shows the women are active and wish to fit in more within British society as British Bangladeshis. This suggests that for the women, having the connections with community organisations as formal social networks is important, since this gives an opportunity of meeting people with different temperament, personality and competence, which helps to develop confidence and self efficacy. The organisations also play a significant role in promoting bridging social capital by offering paid jobs and volunteer opportunities. However, ethnic capital based on culturally sensitive programmes managed by community organisations may create ghettoisation, which can lead to

segregation for these women, an aspect which has been overlooked by the accounts of Zhou (2000) and (Modood 2005).

#### **5.3.4 Social settings**

In addition, visiting and socialising at various social places and events such as local shops, restaurants, Shisa bars, Cinemas, Parks, Shopping malls, and gyms - all these had been considered as part of social networks to most of the women. It seems that most of the time their presence at those places was in a group, in which the women socialised or maintained their social networks; as well as this, the places had been sources of meeting new people from different backgrounds, regardless of culture, gender, generation and so on, as many of the women mentioned 'socialisation' with different kinds of people. For example, TA (18) was a student of a single sex Sixth form college and she socialised with local people in her neighbourhood, like local shop owners and local customers. As she observed,

*Even [when] I go to local shops for buying something, I just socialising with the shop owner or someone who serving, even to local customers who I may see (me) like daily, smile to them, even saying hi to them on the streets. TA (FG1-2, 18)*

Here the spontaneous interactions with the people in her neighbourhood can be considered as an informal social network, which is also a kind of bridging. For example, they may or may not be from the same ethnicity and religious background, gender and generation. Logically there was no need to have trust or shared values in developing the network, but there was respect for each other. These informal social networks can also generate social capital by which both parties may not benefit directly, but the networks and socialisation can enable them to meet new people, and understand human behaviour and attitudes, which can provide social mobility, enhance interpersonal skills, and self confidence. The women may find this important, as social skills could be helpful to get a paid job or to reach a career goal. This shows that the women were aware of the benefits of socialisation; as NB said '*meeting new people and just be confident*' (Int 8, 19). Thus, the local shops were a space or vehicle in which people can meet other local people on a daily basis, interact and mobilise a

distinct social capital. This shows the women were active in creating social networks in a variety of ways –through formal and informal settings, which may be useful for them to go further. Keeping social networks and interpersonal communications with local people indicates the women were also active in developing a better neighbourhood, which can contribute to social integration and cohesion, as ‘networks provide a basis for social cohesion because they enable people to cooperate with one another’ (Field 2008, p. 14). Moreover, social ties with various people in the community can also facilitate the mitigation of negative assumptions about Muslim young women, leading to the development of trust within the community, which ultimately can assist in mobilising social capital.

A number of women mentioned other interactive places like gyms, dance classes, writing classes, language classes, and holiday trips, in which their attendance and/or participation facilitated building social networks. For instance a few women stated going to the gym was part of their social network.

*I socialise with friends, play with my brother and sisters and recently starting going to Gym. FC (FG2-1, 18)*

*Leisure centre, go swimming, go to the gym anything like that ....going to the gym, it's like, it makes me fit.. FA (Int 1, 19)*

The women considered gym and leisure centres as social/public places, and a space for expanding social networks beyond familial networks, which was mainly weak ties to other users. In other words these had been interactive places for maintaining their social networks and making new contacts. This also reflects that the women were health conscious, as usually young women have a high level of physical image consciousness. This may be due to support by the local authority towards a healthy life style. In addition, there were women only gyms run by private and faith based organisations. ‘Women only’, this label provides a degree of trust to the women and their family. They believed the facilities were pro cultural values that can generate other forms of social capital such as ‘ethnic capital’, as this is developed based on enforcement of norms and values within a particular community. For example, pro cultural activities can enable the women to strengthen co-ethnic relationships and information channels within the group,

which can also develop bonding social capital. However, there is a risk of developing a ghettoised manner which can lead to segregation from the mainstream society.

However, social capital may be generated without or with limited interactions with people at the above mentioned social places. One could benefit from a social place without interacting with others; the benefit could be physical or emotional or both. For example, when people walk alone through a park or attend gym activities, usually they do not interact with other people, but the visit can give them better feelings and emotional wellbeing. Besides, attending a gym or walking through a park can provide a kind of motivation towards a workout which can then lead to physical and emotional well being. Thus these activities can be considered as link to place and space with regards to social mobility, by which people can be benefited indirectly when stressed, or lacking motivation or confidence, by observing the people and places around them (Barton and Pretty, 2010). So, a social network is not always interactions with people; rather, without or with limited interaction social capital can be constructed, which could be by presenting oneself in a social or interactive place as every place has its own influence on people's feelings.

Furthermore, making holiday trips with friends was another way for a few women to create and maintain social networks.

*I have always gone away, on holiday stuff like that with my friends. I try to go on holiday every three/four months. I have been to Greece, Portugal, Morocco, Moscow...At first my mum was not too sure about it; being a girl, being young, being so young and going by myself she was not happy about that...NB (Int 8, 19)*

NB's social networks with her friends show the existence of common interests, shared trust and values within the friendship and she was able to mobilise a kind of bonding social capital through the friendships. Consequently she, along with her friends, was able to be assertive in making holiday trips in the country and abroad. This suggests that making holiday trips could develop a kind of connection in terms of a new place and its people, as a holiday can usually provide an opportunity to know new places as well as meeting new people from various cultural backgrounds depending on where the trips

take place. Thus for NB her bonding social capital facilitated expanding her social networks, especially mode of bridging to new places and people. Usually for Bangladeshi young women it is not common to make holiday trips with friends, so her mother was not happy with that, but due to her strong bonding social capital with friends she was helped to push the boundary towards the bridging social capital. On the other hand her bonding social capital with her parents (see Family section) has also been supportive in development of bridging social capital. This shows that for NB the bridging social capital and the bonding social capital support one another. But one can find it is hard to make networks in a new environment, as the experience faced by NC shows; she talked about her writing class,

*In my writing class I usually tend to be very, very like the odd one out in my writing classes and the only Asian female Muslim girl there everyone's age is at least six seven years older than me... It gets really hard to make friends with people who are in my writing class and I usually don't like socialising so much in formal settings. It gets really hard to actually build friendships over there. NC (Int 15, 19)*

NC found her Asian Muslim identity and being a younger member of the class had been an issue making it difficult to create social networks. This indicates access to an interactive place is not always enough in creating social networks. There was lack of commonality in important ways such as her situated identity – Muslim, Asian and young female. It indicates that in order to build social ties, other aspects need to be considered - internal and external. In this case there might be a lack of common interests to facilitate interaction with others, because of the ‘age gap’ or her ‘Asian and Muslim’ identity or possibly racialized assumptions (Brah 1996). NC found the place a ‘formal’ setting, in which it was also hard for her to fit with the environment. This could be because of her low confidence and inability to negotiate her expectations within the context; social networks help to enhance confidence as participants mentioned earlier, but usually to make social networks also needs confidence; as Van Buren and Hood (2011) argued, gender and ethnicity make significant boundary conditions on one's abilities to use social capital. NC also mentioned her lack of interest in socialising in such a formal setting, which indicates her personality. This appears that sometimes other aspects are also important such as personality, common interests etc for social

interactions. However, without or with limited verbal interaction only, attending the writing class or similar events might still be considered as creating the potential to develop social networks in terms of place in a particular context. For example, observing other people such as other members at the class or event, teachers and even people on the way to the class or event can provide social mobility, motivation, confidence and a kind of self efficacy which can facilitate verbal interaction and social networks.

Moreover, the dynamics of social networks can be changed due to a particular context. For example SA, married with two children, added another aspect,

*When I was in school, I was used to go to the morning club, the lunch club and the after school clubs, but when I went to college, I stopped going to these clubs, I stopped doing sports -I was very sporty when I was in secondary school but I stopped doing that in Leyton (college). As I got married I stopped doing that as well because I didn't have the time. I didn't see myself running around as good as a house wife and after my daughter was born, I went to mother's group and breast feeding groups but I didn't go to social groups or anything like that, anything that would be of interest for me, it was more about being a mum for me. I wanted to be a good mother and I needed to learn. SA (Int 14, 27)*

With regard to the context, SA's social networks had been changed, in which she mentioned a few issues, for example she stopped going to after school clubs after she got married, then after having children she made her networks for being a good mother and housewife. This shows that according to need people change their social networks and required social capital, as a social network can be dynamic, depending on particular context. 'Sharing and caring' social capital is often mobilised by women, although that is not registered by existing social capital theory (Bookman 2004). SA also cited time limitations, which indicates that the demands of certain contexts have an effect upon the social networks of particular groups of people like married women.

Thus, the picture tells that the women had 'social mobility' - bridging and bonding social capital within their boundaries, as the women were able to construct and maintain



their social networks by attending education, many women were in work, many of them engaged with community based organisations, many went to various interactive social places. Consequently, the social networks of these women were shaped by both individual attributes as well as structural aspects influencing the acquisition of different kinds of capital .

#### **5.4 Summary**

The Bangladeshi young women constructed their social networks in a variety of ways and in various places, among which the relationships with family members, faith, places of education and work, as well as other social settings played an important role. With regard to identity situational/production - ethnicity, family and faith as Bangladeshi, Muslim, young female - all these have significant influence upon the social networks of these women. In other words, the social networks of these women have been determined to by their own choices as well as parental/family expectations in relation to religion and culture. Friends and friendships were enormously important for most of the women for mutual support and to stay together. Friends have also been enabling for them to expand ties with people regardless of their cultural backgrounds. For many women family relationships strengthened their bonding and provided support for bridging out. However, many women indicated that the family and faith have implications in putting restrictions on their social networks - this will be discussed in the next chapter.

Places of study and work were important, as well as other social settings in which the women were enabled to create and maintain social networks through meeting new people. Attending or participating in these places provided opportunities to bridge across to people from diverse cultural backgrounds, providing a way to develop bridging social capital. In this regard the women who went to university or college outside the borough had extensive social networks and social capital. In contrast, most of the women who went to local college and sixth form College had social networks only within the co-ethnic group, especially Muslim females. The women with paid jobs had more developed bridging social capital, which enabled them to negotiate within the private sphere in order to maintain their social life, leading to further bridging and better prospects.

This showed that the women are active in creating and maintaining their social relationships, which strongly refutes the notion of 'passive' objectification, a label given by a number of studies about South Asian Women. This also showed that bonding and ethnic capital can contribute to developing bridging social capital, which contributes to better education and career advancement and through which the women can produce their social identity. The newly identified social activity has thus been supportive of agency and negotiation power, which can facilitate further social networks and mobilise social capital.

It was found that sometimes the bonding social capital underpinned the development of bridging social capital, on the other hand the bridging social capital over time turned into bonding social capital. Thus it was argued that the two forms of social capital can exist side by side, but sometimes that can be in complex ways. On the other hand in a particular context the bonding and bridging were not supportive to each other. Therefore the distinction between these two forms of social capital appears problematic, as the social contacts of particular groups of people in a particular cultural context can be different.

Ethnic social capital, in which two key elements are 'intergenerational closure' and 'enforcement of norms and values', in relation to the Bangladeshi ethnic group was supportive for the women who pursued their education and career, which ultimately enabled them to build social networks mainly through bridging social capital. For some women the 'shared norms and values' in connection with faith was the key for their networks which also provided 'ethnic capital'. Although ethnic capital is generally associated with family and ethnic organisations, it can include faith based organisations as well, especially the organisations run and supported mainly by members of the ethnic community. Moreover, 'reinforcement of norms and values' are generally based on culture, including the religion of a particular group like the Bangladeshi community. As Brah (1996) observed, in discussion of South Asian Muslim women it was assumed that the culture and religion are interconnected, which influences their participation in public life. Following on Zhou's idea of 'enforcement of norms and values', faith can be considered as part of 'ethnic capital' or it may be called 'faith capital', as some of the women interviewed found their faith based activities helped them towards social mobility (Zhou, 2005); for example, participation in faith based events and

organisations, in other words social networks. However in this regard, the faith based networks can lead to ethnic collectivism, as they are culturally homogenous and ignore power relations within the community (Shah 2007). Likewise, many women's descriptions showed that the concept sometimes led to inequalities with relation to gender ideology and patriarchal practice, which will also be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6. CONSTRAINTS AND INEQUALITIES**

### **6.1 Introduction:**

This chapter maintains the discussion of the social networks of Bangladeshi young women. In the previous chapter, it was found that the young women created and maintained their social networks in many ways, in which family, places of education, faith, workplace and other social settings were the mediating factors. In this regard, they shared the enabling aspects as well as the indicated constraints in relation to their situated identity as Bangladeshi Muslim young women, with the cultural expectations and social aspects that exist within the community. In particular, this includes the constraints and inequalities within household relationships and within social interactions in terms of gender, cultural context and those social aspects which are socially-culturally constructed. This chapter examines how these social structures such as gender identity, patriarchy, negative assumptions and racism impact upon the ability of the young women to create and maintain social relationships. Accordingly, from the perspective of bonding and bridging social capital, along with ethnic capital, this chapter analyses the experience of these women in terms of their social networks.

This chapter is organised with two main sections. The first section, including four sub-sections, elaborates on the constraining aspects which the women experienced in relation to patriarchy, culture and religion, social aspects, including private patriarchy, and a brief summary. The second section outlines a conclusion.

### **6.2 Patriarchy**

Strong bonding social capital around familial relationships played an important role in shaping the social networks of some of the women interviewed. In addition, ethnic capital, expressed through family norms and values, had also been supportive to some extent; but there was a limit, based in part on assumptions regarding appropriate behaviour for young Bangladeshi women. As SKN observed, these norms and values were most obviously evident in the different way that she and her brother were treated:

*I have to be home by certain time like some other friends, they can stay out later that kind of thing, whereas I do have a curfew. My mum and dad always say, you will be back at this time. That time you know, I keep to that because it is important to maintaining a good family relationship as well as a good relationship with friends. So in terms of, that's like a culture thing you know like you need safety kind of ( ), come home early and that kind of things. ....I don't really see as a barrier apart from like you know I am going with friends and I have to be home by certain time, whereas some other friends can stay later. ... But with my brother... he comes home later than me but I have not been jealous because I know growing in a world, its different for girls and boys. SKN (Int 11, 21)*

For SKN, the enforcement of the family and cultural norms had been accepted, in other words she adjusted to the parental expectations. The restrictions may be a result of strong bonding social capital within family relationships, which can be inward looking (Kearns, 2004). However, she had a degree of bonding capital within the family, as she was able to strengthen her bridging capital, and access opportunities. The bonding social capital, along with ethnic capital, which is the parental encouragement and necessary support for fulfilling higher aspirations, enabled her to bridge out, gain a university degree, and expand her social networks regardless of her ethnic and cultural background. Therefore the boundary of family and cultural norms, set up by the parents may seem limiting, but may not constitute a barrier to all kinds of bridging social capital, especially where the outcome is education. Apparently there was a negotiation for both parties' expectations, which implies that the development of bridging social capital depends on a particular context. But, as this participant and others revealed, cultural expectations around gender played a particularly important role in shaping the social networks of many of these women, in which the limitations often centred on the situated identity markers of being young women in Muslim families and the expectations and stipulations of parents and/or (mainly male) siblings. For example, in the case of RK these norms were evident in her relationship with her brother,

*Being a female especially in a society you are seen to be very vulnerable. Especially like if you have older brothers and social networks...They are protective to you if you have someone boyfriend like friends, boys in friend list.*

*Your brother may see... "why do I have so many boys" and say "no you can't do something like that"... He can restrict you going, like yeah, face to face communications.* RK (FG1- 6, 18)

Creating and maintaining RK's social networks was influenced by gender ideology, power relations and patriarchal practice within her household, which is not unusual within ethnic families like Bangladeshis, as gendered and generational power relations have been described by feminist writers (Molyneaux 2001; Zontini 2007) and these relationships also exist between young women and parents or dominant family members such as an older brother. (Schaefer-McDaniel 2004 ). However, arguably this has been overlooked in the social capital literature (Portes 1998).

Power and control in regard to gender ideology is noticeable in the relationships between parents and young daughters, which has an influence on the social networks of many of these women. For example, HK and HA perhaps most clearly reflected the impact of situated identities as Bangladeshi Muslim young women, and they described assorted coping strategies on the part of the young women:

*I think it [culture] has very, very, very.. big impact.. the elders, especially in cultural way... think about in Bangladesh, girls grows ...[when]she gets in certain age 16 and they stop her going out all together because, she is now age of marriage ...when she hits 18 they start looking [for a groom] ...when she starts developing in a sense...they put barrier on her and slowly all of the friends move away... that mentality comes over here although we are in western country, its 21st century as well. Lot of our elders...their mentality is so different even though very simple thing we do they don't allow us...so it [culture] does affect very badly.* HK (FG3-2, 23)

Another participant shared,

*My family, they are very rigid, very strict with [me], you know ... "don't speak to boys...don't touch other culture... put your face down and walk"... my mum, she hates when I go out with my friends ...she gives me guilt trips going out with them... she always protected me so she feels it's necessary to always keep an eye*

*on what I am doing ...and who I am talking to and if I am talking to anyone bad or you know..if they influence my life...it's, oh God... is a huge barrier. Because my mum really doesn't like mixing with other people...because she is strict on me I have to go sometimes break the rules because the rules are so strict (laugh). so obviously you can't always maintain them...because in order for me get happy, I have to break the rules for her but in order to for make her happy I have to follow ....I have to make myself unhappy basically. So I am sorry but I think it's necessary... for me break the rules at that times. HA (Int 12, 19)*

Parenthetically, the fact that, for HA, 'patriarchal' restrictions were policed by her mother was not surprising. Although gender relations are usually defined with reference to the social relations between men and women, gender hierarchies can – in an almost Foucauldian sense - be enforced by those whose interests and autonomy appear to be most constrained (Agarwal 1994). Indeed, Afshar (1989) argues that in South Asian communities mothers appear to play a central role in socialising their daughters' behaviour so that it conforms to the cultural norms. Indeed, almost all parents of the women in the study were first generation immigrants who - it appeared in most cases - still clung to so-called 'traditional' cultural values, especially with regard to gender ideology and patriarchy. For some of the young women, these initial barriers gave way to better mutual understanding, but for others, there was a clear lack of 'intergenerational closure' (Zhou, 2005), in other words a lack of better understanding between the parents and the daughter in relation to their social networks. But, as HA indicated, young women can sometimes deploy coping strategies. HA ignored the 'family' norms and values as rules, to develop alternative 'bonding and bridging social capital' within her friendship networks. In this regard it appears HA possessed a kind of agency from her link to formal institutions, as she went to university, which meant she had, to some extent, bridging social capital which her mother might not challenge. Therefore, particularly for this woman, generating social capital through social networks is all about 'agency and negotiation', in the first instance within household relationships as observed.

Both women mentioned 'enforcement of norms and values' by the family, values which are rooted in the Bangladeshi Muslim culture, termed 'ethnic social capital' (Zohu, 2005; Modood, 2004 ). It appears that for these women ethnic social capital had been

enabling for their education, but had not been supportive of their social networks, due to a lack of better understanding between parent and daughter, in other words a lack of interaction and bonds.

However, a couple of women thought it was also important to develop trust in their parents and understand their parents' point of view, which could help for better negotiation in order to avoid disappointment. For example the women commented,

*If my parents do not know who my friends are then they would defiantly stop me from going to places and socialising because at the end of the day they, as parents themselves they do have the right to know who my friends are, so who I am hanging out with. But it depends to tell the truth because at the end of the day if I come and meet the curfew they set up for me, then that's fine. Other than that they would stop me from not socialising with people so for just to meet my parents need's and then they are ok with me to socialise. [To] have that perspective of good image as a person who I am, basically and obviously as a Bangladeshi girl you know I have got to be a role model to the younger lots. HB (FG4-2, 19)*

*I don't really blame our parents for not letting us go because girls, women are vulnerable, especially at night, walking alone from work or wherever. They either get raped or sexually harassed and yeah I think female are vulnerable in society compared to men. FBA (FG1-4, 17)*

The parental desire to protect their daughters was not seen as negative by these women, as they realised their parents were concerned. Understanding the parents' views by the daughters shows strong bonding within the relationships. The parents may have had negative experiences which they did not want their daughters to experience; for Bangladeshi Muslim girls the occurrence of racial harassment is not unusual (Eade and Garbin, 2002; Kerchen, 200; Ward and Spacey, 2008). Moreover, gender identity and vulnerability has been a concern in discussion about social capital (Siegman and Thieme 2010). Hence, parental concern seems a symptom of structural constraints in two ways, for example, gender ideology; issues around safety and security which is often associated with a level of vulnerability for women (Marrow 2006); there may be



lack of societal trust, which reduces social capital and may affect the women further as the members of the community (Putnam 2007; Putnam et al. 2010).

Patriarchy as a social structure and practice is associated with the degree of inequality in relation to domination and oppression (Walby 1990) that the women experienced. As such, many of the women found the restriction was negative for their social networks; such restrictions, negotiation, and conflict were not confined to the 'private' sphere but were also reflected in the sphere of paid employment, personal relationships and apparently mundane activities such as holidays. For instance a number of women expressed their views in this regard,

*Because being a Bengali, Muslim person I am restricted doing certain jobs. But they (men) can do, they can apply for any job they want. I have to do certain jobs which is like ....the job that my parents would be happy for me, ... doing teaching because it's an environment where ...it's a comfortable environment like I am not exposed to many people. RK (FG1- 6, 18)*

*I think as Asian, as female we are restricted, we are not allowed to do certain things that men can do. for example, me personally if I want to go holiday...my mum and dad will ask me so many different questions... because I am a female and I may not able to look after myself on my own. . it is not fair! JB (Int 17, 22)*

Many South Asian women like RK and JB experience patriarchy with regard to their social life, which is rooted in culture and ethnicity (Bhatti 1999; Bhopal: 1997); they pointed to gender ideology and its practice within the familial relationships, which affected their social life. Most of the women interviewed were aware of it, either from their direct experience or being a witness, for instance a couple of participants shared their frustrations,

*My brother goes out and stays out late and my parents don't say really anything, but with me if I do, tend to stay out just a bit late they get worried because I am a girl why should I be hang around or stay out too late...being a Muslim and being a Bengali they think oh I shouldn't be out until late. This is something really bad. TK (FG1-2,18)*

*Within the Bengali culture the boys work outside and the girls work inside the house. It is not equal basically if the boy used to go out at 10 clock at night it would be fine but if girls go out at that time they would be like ...oh she is out for something, she is with boy, she is doing something really bad! Inequality that affects a lot of girls, it kind of destroys their social networks, destroys their networks with their parents. AKN (Int 16, 19)*

Moreover, enforcement of norms as ethnic capital which is connected with culture is not helpful in a particular context. This may be due to strong bonding within household relationships which leads to burdens and inequalities. HK added her experience as follows,

*Like FP said we are cooking; we have got lots of concern around what time you left the house, what time to come home. So most of us go out to work and afterward we generally would like to meet our friends and go for a quick munch before we go home. But then our concern is, if that was my brother and he had decided to finish work late, at 8 o'clock and decided to go out with his friends, come home at 12, there is no concern. He doesn't receive 50 missed calls or 50 calls from Mum and dad, say "where are you, where are you, where are you?"...but with the girls once it's passed, they start to wonder where you are. So there is more concern of where are we, who are we with, who are we actually networking with, who are our friends, and they take more interest in our friends ... HK (FG3-2, 23)*

She added,

*If you have more of a social life than they [parents] approve of, so say I saw my friends two nights in one week then I decided to go out on Saturday with them. Say that was the case, you would have your parents say to you, 'you are not a man' or 'beta boni gesoni' (have you turned into a man?) that affects your social life as well, because you are a girl but you are not allowed to live a man's world. Well, generally what the view they have is, a girl has, even if you have job or university, go there, come home and you do your house work, you sit with*

*Mummy and daddy and you watch Star Plus whatever. Your household basis and you chit chat about the family, you see your sister, it's all about the family basically. Once in a while you see your friends. Whereas, boy has very outgoing life, goes to work, goes with the friends, goes wherever he wants, he doesn't have to tell you where he is and just because once or twice a week you decide to have that life, you turned into a man! That is such a stereotype if you think about it where they think just because you want to have a more of a free life, you are living a man's life!... HK (FG3-2, 23)*

Evidently, issues around gender ideology and patriarchal practice by the parents had been barriers to maintaining social networks of these women. This also involves power relations, as usually Bangladeshi young people, especially women, live with their parents until they get married. During most of the time the parents are in power and they seem to control their young daughters in the name of discipline. Accordingly, for many parents the community outlook about their daughters including family prestige is important, as it has an impact upon in finding a marriage partner for the daughter. This shows there was 'excessive bonding' or 'a form of social control' which could have led to an abusive relationship. This shows that bonding social capital and ethnic capital co-exist, which can be positive but at the same time can be negative. The existence of a lack of trust and understanding between the women and their parents may be caused by parental education and the way they had been brought up back home. As a result, the women were unable to negotiate because of the existing 'stereotypes' about men's and women's roles in the family and society. This shows that in the name of cultural norms and values the stereotypes affect the women negatively in developing and maintaining social networks.

In addition, sometimes existing contextual social issues such as rumour and gossip confuse parents, which ultimately affects their daughter's social life, as mentioned by one of the participants, as follows:

*Rumour:... gossip plays a big part in our parent's roles. Because of gossip and rumours we are being challenged as well, like for example the internet things, everyone [all parents] got problems [with the internet], why would they know Internet such a bad thing is because they heard stuff, for example, ...every time I*

*am on the internet my mum thinks oh 'are you chatting to someone so are you gonna marry them soon?' So, I think gossip and rumour play a big part in, especially my mum doesn't come out. And you see a lots of elderly people coming to my house and telling my mum the gossip 'who is run away today' and 'who is getting married or who has got baby without being married' and that's why it's scares my mum a bit, give us a freedom than they really like put us..., it's like a string basically, they let you lose a bit and then they are still pulling it!*  
HB (FG3-1,22)

The rumours, in other words, the community outlook about young women might have an influence upon the social life of these women. As such, Bhopal (1997) also points out that most of the time the gossip takes place in terms of gender ideology and patriarchal values, as is prominent in South Asian, and especially in Muslim families. This also shows a lack of trust within parent-daughter relationships as well as within the community, which ultimately can influence parental understanding in relation to the social networks of the women. However, the social networks of these women were to some extent shaped, directly or indirectly, by parental expectations that – in turn – reflected the ‘situated’ cultural and religious values.

Moreover, stereotypes around gender identity can lead to further difficulties for young married women in building and maintaining social networks. For example,

*As a girl, there are so many restrictions because I got married young, so many things I couldn't do because I was a house wife and I was a daughter-in-law. There were so many things that were not seen as appropriate for me. When you go to college, everyone hangs around and goes to their friends' houses after college, but I was not allowed to do that stuff, because it didn't seem right. So after finishing college, I had to come home straight away. When I was doing my exam, it created such a problem in my mother-in-law's house- as exam timetables were very different to normal college timetables.* SA (Int 14, 27)

Because of her acquired identity as a married woman SA found it was more difficult to maintain social networks. It seems she had some degree of bonding social capital within the relationship with her in-laws that enabled her to attend education; but she was not

allowed to go further because of power-control relationships. Attending college enabled her to bridge to other people, but the excessive bonding in the household was a barrier to maintaining these social networks. As mothers or mothers-in-law have influence upon their daughters'/daughter-in-law's socialisation in South Asian communities, including Bangladeshi (Afshar, 1989; Agarwal 1994). in which 'women might be disempowered in the household' (Kalra 2005: 52). Thus patriarchal practice had been a barrier for social relationships beyond family. SA got married when she was only 16, but she decided to continue her study and she completed her college course. By that time she had become the mother of two children. However, that didn't stop her studying. She was working and studying at university when I met her. She also found that being a woman, especially married with two children, can add extra pressure in creating and maintaining social networks. As she observed,

*I have been working for three years and I feel like I can do anything I want to do because of my husband is not being very restrictive. However, I know that lots of time, women are not allowed to do things because they are married now, and they have children and things to do. When I first went to university, my mum didn't speak to me for the first semester because she felt that university was not a place for me, for a married woman; for a girl, it was fine but not for a married women who should've been happy with what they had. When I used to go university or work and I dropped my children off at my mum's house and picked them up again, she wouldn't say bye or hello. She would be fine the day after, but that day she just wouldn't talk to me. I mean for girl, other than people, my parents didn't understand. They were very 'son-loving'; they didn't believe in women having the same rights. SA (Int 14, 27)*

This shows that SA had social networks, and bonding and bridging social capital, which enabled her to 'get ahead'. However, she had a struggle, which was mainly due to the patriarchal ideology within her family - her own family as well as her in-laws' family. First of all, to some extent she had family support from bonding social capital and ethnic capital to attend college and university. The education underpinned her bridging with people in different strata, which enabled her to get the job. She was also able to expand her social networks, bridging out by attending university and work, by which she was able to obtain a social position, a new identity. Again her bonding social

capital from her familial networks was helpful for managing work, education, child care and family. However, her upward social mobility, attending university, initially was not easily accepted by her mother, but her confidence due to education and work facilitated overcoming the situation. Apparently, although it was challenging, she was able to negotiate her expectations with the demands of two families (parents and in-laws) and escape from the difficulty of being 'caught between two cultures' (ref) with her agency and assertive manner. Thus the key things were being married, being a mother, and being a Bangladeshi female; all these identities have some influence upon the social networks of young Bangladeshi women. However, one can overcome the situation with bridging social capital as this can generate value towards fulfilling aspirations with agency and negotiation power.

Most of the women realized that parental understanding was important, as their acceptance and approval supported the women in leading their social life - social ties to outside the home. As such, a few women emphasised the positive outlook of parents with regard to the western culture and their daughter's needs. They were discussing this at the focus group.

*Our parents, they have been here for long time, I think [they are] adapting [with] modern society and stuff, and they are letting us to do stuff, but sometimes our mothers like they want us like how they were, the traditional, stay home, work and stuff like that. But then they see that we won't have that much freedom and that's why they let us do more things and want to see us happy and stuff with our friends, going out and stuff... AB (FG3-3, 17)*

Another participant supplemented,

*I think parents are more adjusting to the whole situation, yeah adapting as well like, for example, when I was 16, I was not allowed a phone, it's like a no go zone in my house and my brothers and sisters they used to hide a phone, you know again they want to network. So when I was 17, I didn't choose to get the phone, my mum decided to give me a phone. But now my brother has got phone, when my brother was 13 and he got phone and he is like 6 years younger than*

*me but my mum so cool about it and it could be another thing because he is a boy!* HB (FG3-1,22)

She added,

*My mum was really strict with my older sister then she tried to be strict with second one but second one saw that the first one being strict, you know having less freedom, not going out , they used to do stuff without telling my mum and my mum realized that's not the best solution. So with my third sister my mum was fine. Mum was really typical back then...my mum's view was like if school wasn't compulsory then my mum wouldn't even given us to school. So now, I am the fifth girl in the house and my mum is so lenient, stuff that like, my sister was not allowed to go on trip, [but] I am allowed to go on trips. My sister was not allowed to be out for certain hours... I am allowed to go shopping even though my mum doesn't agree most of the time but she is alright.* HB (FG3-1,22)

Over time, the dynamic of HB's household situation was changed because of the power relations which were fluid and changeable (Van Buren and Hood, 2011), which indicates that her mother had to some extent been able to negotiate her expectations with the demands of HB and vice versa. Consequently, HB found fewer barriers for her social life and was able to enjoy the dynamic natures of social capital such as bonding within family and bridging capital through social interactions, especially at her workplace as 'time and space' is significant for social capital (Weller 2010). HB evidently was empowered, as she had education and a paid job that her elder sisters might not have had. Consequently, HB was able to establish a kind of equality within the household relationships through her agency and negotiation power towards social networks. Most importantly she was able to position herself as an active citizen of the British multicultural society by challenging cultural and religious barriers. This confirms that education and employment can potentially facilitate agency and negotiation, which may contribute to create an enabling atmosphere in which the parents and young daughters can negotiate positively about the whole situation. This may ease cultural constraints in order to build and maintain social networks for the women. As such, bridging social capital can dominate bonding and ethnic capital depending on context. On the other hand, the link between employment and

empowerment and the development of social capital may be equally applicable in the context of society and state. But Putnam (2007) and Putnam et. al (2010) overlooked these connections, rather blaming the diversity for inhibiting social capital.

Being Bengali and being a Muslim female are seen as two of the main barriers for most of the women's social networks. This shows that gender ideology and patriarchal practice exist in the community, which leads to gossip around the social life of the women on particular issues such as mixing with the opposite gender, staying outside the home etc., which was also indicated by Pollen (2002: 110), 'a daughters' irregular relationships will critically and detrimentally recast the status (izzat) of her family and the eligibility of her unmarried siblings'. This indicates, that 'ethnic capital' as enforcement of norms and values based on cultural expectations can construct inequalities within household relationships, which indeed do not support the women's social networks in certain contexts. Likewise, strong bonding social capital in the ethnic community obviously hinders to some extent in building bridging social capital. The majority of the women mentioned their gender and ethnic identity as Bangladeshi Muslim females had enormous impact upon their social networks. The barrier was mainly family/parental restrictions with regard to patriarchal ideology and practice in relation to Bangladeshi Muslim culture. From a feminist emancipatory perspective, this could even be described as excessive bonding within a particular ethnic community like the Bangladeshi one, in which the women can experience unwanted burdens (Zontini, 2002), as the bonding capital can lead to power relations and inequalities within the family (Portes 1998). However, it appears that many of the women in the study were active in developing their 'strategies to manage' for negotiating their expectations with the demands of parents/family.

This contests the notion of 'caught in an unfortunate position between two cultures - their parents' patriarchal ideology and values and British culture' as reported in other research (Gardner, 2002). This indicates that sometimes 'ethnic capital' and strong 'bonding social capital' might restrict the social and spatial mobility of young women and hinder the construction and maintenance of bridging social capital. It appears that 'control and pressure to conform to strict norms emerged as the flipside of family and ethnic solidarity' (Zontini 2009:826). The findings thus reinforce criticisms to the effect that Putnam and Coleman have underplayed the implications for social capital of



structurally and culturally enforced gender and social inequalities (Morrow 2001; Edwards and Gillies, 2005; Goulbourne 2006).

### 6.3 Culture and religion

Religion was another strong aspect of the women's social networks which can be either positive or negative in its consequences. Therefore, with regard to Muslim culture, some of the women had social networks among girls only, regardless of whether they attended local college, university, or outside university; as TA (17) commented '*I don't really socialise with them [boy]*'. HB (19), a student of TH College, expressed the same view, '*we meet up in library, sometimes go out for food ...I socialise only with female*' (FG4-2, 19).

The views of these women were similar and it seems they voluntarily choose to keep their networks among females. It seems that many women in this study had no friendships or ties with the opposite sex because of their cultural and religious norms and values. Although many of the women strongly acknowledged in the previous chapter that their religious norms and values had been an enabling aspect of social networks, at the same time they apparently accepted the Islamic values that do not allow building social networks with the opposite gender. The following are a couple of opinions:

*Being a female it does affect my social networks because as a Muslim I don't talk to boys but I wouldn't say that's necessarily a negative thing, I agree with the [whole point of] not talking to guys so in college because it mixed I don't talk to boys. FC (FG2-1, 18)*

*First of all, because my social life has kind of narrowed down to just the female, because I study to become more involve with my religion which I am really faithful to but yeah I have been interacting with lot of different [people], for example, white people, black people, Chinese people... telling the truth it's really nice to interact with them. because you[can] learn lot of different stuff and you can pick up good things, but then again obviously some certain extend I wouldn't be able to go out with them for example, white people they probably*

*go to pubs thing like that, so obviously I wouldn't be able to...but then again we do meet up. For example, if we just meeting up for study or something like that, so we meet up in library, we sometimes go out for food but it's [socialising] only with female ...social life is changed for me most of the time because of my religion but other than it's ok. HB (FG4-2, 19)*

The lack of social ties with the opposite sex, due to religious norms and values, and 'restrictions', was accepted by the women. This is because of their strong faith in religion, as cultural and religious rites of passage are 'adapted and transformed within Bangladeshi identities and between generations' (Gavron, 1997: 82), as many Bangladeshi young people probably attend 'Islamic society meetings at school or college where they study the Quran and listen to talks on political or historical themes' (Gavron, 1997: 201). Moreover, religion is significant in the lives of many Bangladeshis, especially women, as practising religious norms and values indicates being a good Muslim and potentially a good bride, 'while ambitious, they were likely to measure success not in individual terms but in terms of being a 'good Muslim' (Modood et al, 2010: 1122). Therefore, 'religions are the most important source for shaping and enforcing the image and role of women in culture and society', (Bhopal, 1997: 18) and Bangladeshi parents encourage their children, especially daughters, to take part in religious activities (Gavnor, 1997). This also shows the presence of ethnic capital as enforcement of cultural norms and values on education, at the same time on not mixing with the opposite gender. Thus, many of the women interviewed mentioned their networks among females only in order to maintain religious norms and values. Among them some women willingly choose to follow the rules due to their deep trust and conformity. This suggests that the women had incorporated the demands of Islamic religion within British culture. In other words, there was self 'enforcement of norms and values' as ethnic capital or faith capital, but that was not supportive in all aspects, especially interactions with the opposite gender. Thus the concept 'ethnic capital' appears to have limitations in particular contexts, which is problematic, as Shah (2007) is concerned about the risk of constraints around the notion. However, a majority of the women interviewed understood the restrictions but indicated it was problematic. For example, a few participants shared their views with some concern,

*I think having a religion like my, as Muslim it does restrict us to communicate with certain people; like girls, Muslim girls we can't communicate with guys but we have to do it in a certain way. So it can't be anything that is sexually over but yeah... I think we can communicate because we are living in a British and English society and communication is really important now a day. I think it's important to communicate with different kind of people, men or women and if not then it will be hard especially living in the UK and having a background of Muslim and Bengali. FBA (FG1-4, 17)*

*Being a Bengali and Muslim my parents, they send me to a girls school. My parents send me to a girls school so that I don't socialise with any boys, anything so in a way that become a barrier ....because in a way I don't find it really comfortable talking to boys and stuff, which is really affecting my socialising... so it's a barrier. TK (FG1-2, 18)*

Although the women accepted the religious rules, at the same time they realized its consequences for lack of contacts with the opposite gender. FBA felt this was a kind of segregation from diverse culture, which could create a barrier in fitting into a multicultural society like Britain. TK expressed her uncomfortable feelings with boys as a consequence of not socialising with the opposite gender, which she found as a barrier. Another participant mentioned a similar experience,

*I think there are lot of restrictions that we face, a more to do with culture not religion and I think some people get mixed up with that. As a female I feel like sometimes, if I communicate with male there is certain restrictions, certain things I wouldn't talk to them as I would prefer girl and also like as a female if ...if someone just comes up and talk to me and they were boys I would feel uncomfortable just because of like the judgement that people pass on ...that's it. HB (FG 1-1, 18)*

HB was anxious about the possible humiliation which might happen due to other people's negative judgement based on stereotypical assumptions about a Bangladeshi Muslim young woman. As a result she found it was uncomfortable to interact with the opposite gender and preferred to interact with females, as she thought females were

more understanding of her because they had common identity in important ways such as female identity. Thus her social networks had been limited to among females, by which she may have excluded herself or was excluded from socialising with the opposite gender. However, most of the women attending university seem to socialise with the opposite gender, by which they can position themselves as part of multicultural community. For example,

*In university obviously there are mixed people.. I do talk to boys but it's work related stuff, if they need help, I help them, and if I need help, they help me. Apart from that I don't really talk to boys, this is because of my religious restrictions...I don't mind and it really doesn't affect me anyway... I mostly hang around with girls anyway, if I wanna have fun the girls are always there to go out...INB (FG2-5, 18)*

The women went to university had social ties with 'boys', as she described 'inter personal communications'. However, for these women the gender identity had strong influence in making social networks with the opposite gender. As discussed above, it is felt that the women are guided by their family norms and values, which are rooted in the Muslim cultural practices within South Asian families (Bhatti 1999), as gender identity is well marked with regards to mobility outside the home, as well as interaction with the opposite gender. Therefore their lack of relationships with the opposite gender may be a consequence of family expectations and cultural influences. Besides, these women had weak ties with other women at their places of study and over time that turned into 'close friendships' within the contact. Therefore lack of interaction with the opposite gender may be a consequence of the strong co-gender social networks and the bonding social capital within those networks. It is argued that the presence of dense co-gender networks, obligations and expectations, and information channels can develop a level of 'bonding social capital', but this can exclude socialising with the opposite gender. However, there was one thing common to all the women, which was that they were well aware of keeping their 'decent image' for the family and the community and did not want to reject those values. This may be another reason for preferring to have social networks among females only. In order to build trust with parents/family and the community, the women may use the 'female networks' or maintain the norms as a strategy. This may help to manage parental rules and at the same time to create and

maintain social connections with the opposite gender - a strategy to develop family trust and a better community outlook. In this regard, a participant with a boyfriend shared her view which was quite interesting,

*as a Bengali, young Muslim women I am not allowed to be seen with a boy, in public (Lough) and that's the truth, if I was walking down the street with my boyfriend or if I go to a restaurant and I bump into other Bengali men or women that I may know or they are my relatives. I would just look the other way and pretend that I am all by myself, because of the effect of the society has on me, it's embarrassing, it's disrespectful if they see me walking with the opposite gender. PK (FG4-4, 22)*

With regard to social networks, family or community approval can be an issue when in a public place. For example SA (Int 14, 27) shared her experience,

*We went shopping in Whitechapel with my colleague, a white man, and an uncle saw us and he called my dad,' she was with the white man...'. I am 27 with two kids and husband [laughing]; he still phoned my dad and called him. So in a way, cultural experience is still there, it's always been in this area. SA (Int 14, 27)*

Other women reported,

*face to face communication ...Yes, for example if you are seen outside with a man but he is not your boyfriend or anything, he is just your work colleague and you are having lunch with him people might jump to conclusion and say "oh my god she is going out with a boy" and then spread rumours, she is actually having a professional lunch or may be discussing things so yeah, face to face communications specially with opposite gender can be seen very badly. RK (FG1-6, 18)*

SA had social networks which was ties with her male colleagues. However that was not easy to accept for her family members, because of the existing patriarchal ideology and

stereotypes in the community with regard to culture. However, some women make efforts to push the boundary towards socialising with the opposite gender, but they are aware of non-approval by the community; the constraint seems to be a cultural factor which is structured and exists within the community. This shows that if someone asserts themselves against certain restrictions, they need to be careful about the existing patriarchal outlook in the community in relation to negative stereotypes about males and females, which seem to be structural constraints. For example a couple of women described their views,

*As a female I think you have to be more careful because there are so many things that like going back to our religion...you have to dress in certain ways, we have to do certain things but we have to think about what we are not allowed to do, like I am sure like me and my friends we can not going out at night (laughing), we are not walking around but boys normally do that and we can't, we have to stay at home and help up my mum cook and clean but I think it's unfair. Yeah I think culture and religion come back to that being a female, being stuck at home, doing not the things that boys would do which is unfair. FBA (FG1-4, 17)*

*I think being a Muslim Bengali woman sometimes it can be difficult and sometimes it's not that bad...Sometimes you want to kind of go and explore the world, you want to go out there but you can't because you feel as a Muslim woman, you got the boundaries and restrictions...so it is always difficult for us to just kind of make our mind, pack our bags and go off, because that's not possible. I find it's sometimes hard, because sometimes in life you wanna do a lot of things but because of the restrictions you hold on and I am that type of person, I always think of my religion. RS (Int 7, 29)*

This shows that the women are expected to lead their social life in terms of their religion, in which patriarchy often works alongside. *FBA (FG1-4, 17)* argued about the men-women inequality which she found in the religious norms and values. As such, many women, including her, found the values and norms to be a barrier in creating their social networks, especially with the opposite gender, socialising in certain places and at certain times. In addition, being a female they were expected to do more household

activities than their male counterparts, which the women also found unequal treatment and obviously had an effect upon their social networks. However, most of the women interviewed were in favour of following the religious norms and values, as it had an effect on their life especially on finding a marriage partner, as many Bangladeshi young men prefer a partner who practices religious norms and values such as praying, wearing the Hijab and being good at household activities - again patriarchal and stereotypical views about women. Therefore, some women found keeping the norms and values were useful to present themselves as 'more decent' especially to potential partners and their family. For example PK (22) said,

*When I first wore the head scarf ..I thought people wouldn't socialise with me especially men ... but it was actually...I was quite shocked it was the opposite. ...you know men were more ...into me ...they were more interested in me because I was wearing a scarf, not because I wasn't.* PK (FG4-4, 22)

Although the women mentioned that the religious norms and values were a barrier, they had been supportive in extending their familial social networks by presenting themselves with these values, and in finding a marriage partner. However, the women with friendships with the opposite gender were under extra pressure and needed to apply tactics to deal with the situation. With friends of the opposite gender many of them were not accepted in the public sphere, because it would be a cause of damage firstly to their own reputation as well as their family honour, which could affect matters further, especially issues around a marriage partner (Afshar, 1994). Consequently, the women developed 'strategies to overcome' the situation, for maintaining contact with the opposite gender as well as to stay with the family and the community. It seems that in relation to gender ideology, structural stereotypes exist in South Asian families in which many women may face exploitation, 'in discussions of Muslim women the 'cultural' constraint that is most frequently invoked is the institution of 'Purdah' – a series of norms and practices which limit women's participation in public life but it can be different, even within the same social group' (Brah 1996: 137). A male professional who worked with young people in the borough expressed his view about the structural constraints,

*The issue of trying to protect your daughter (young women) from the opposite sex is common in all cultures and it's more common in Asian, Bangladeshi Muslim culture because of the religious aspect of that. So you (parents) don't want your daughter go to youth clubs when she 16/17 with the environment and activities are done mix with boys and girls. Some parents don't mind but lots of parents do still mind... you think that the girls and boys should be mix together and you run a service like that but if the community doesn't want that then it's not gonna happen... I am involve with youth organisation and we always had that situation...we have to reflect the community that we serve. T (Int, 18, 39)*

In addition, the male professional admitted that the stereotypes and patriarchal practice exist in the name of religion which has an impact upon women's social life, as he stated,

*Our people (Bangladeshi regardless gender) actually misunderstanding and misapplication and we may sometime justify religion because religion have needs to be something that people can't argue. So if you say your daughter it's against our religion, she is more likely to have accept it ...so I think sometimes we use religion as weapon against our own women, often. T (Int, 18, 39)*

In the name of Islam, religious power is used to control young women, in which the women may have little space to negotiate their own expectations; therefore this appears to be a structural constraint which produces inequalities. This may be one of the consequences of the segregation of Bangladeshis from others, as Putnam et al. (2010) point out; they propose a 'social salad bowl', meaning interactions between inter-ethnic groups, in order to reduce the segregation of minority groups. Is the notion of 'social salad bowl' workable for these women without addressing structural constraints? Putnam et. al overlooked the cultural and religious aspects that have negative effects on young women from minorities like Bangladeshis in relation to their social networks. I would argue that power relations and inequality need to be addressed in social capital theory, especially at an individual level with regard to ethnic, culture and religion, as this is more important for understanding how social capital is generated and its consequences, positive and negative, especially for young women. The existence of social capital at micro level may contribute to other levels such as meso and macro,



which ultimately may benefit all within the society. However, Islamic culture and its norms and values are not particularly negative if one is able to negotiate with western culture. For example one participant expressed her view,

*... as a Muslim woman you are not restricted in everything so as a woman and as a Muslim person you can do things but it's how you do it, how you have your fun, so you know, you can go and party but just make sure it's not out in a club, whatever it can be with a group of friends, you can do things and make sure that you do it the right ways, you take the right path and you don't do the wrong things. So I think it's almost a fifty-fifty so I think being a Muslim woman doesn't mean the opportunity is like dies for you. I think if you are strong and you are strong willed and you can do anything, being a Muslim woman it wouldn't stop you, it's how you do it, I think it's important! R (Int 7, 29)*

R (Int 7, 29) raised an important point, which is being 'strong willed', in other words having dedication and negotiation power, which is important for ethnic women like Bangladeshis to mobilise social capital; but typically 'gender and ethnicity also create significant boundary conditions in this regard' (Van Buren and Hood 2011: 658), which means that there are structural constraints beyond religion. Hence, within Islamic culture and values one can be able to negotiate her social networks and social life; but in this regard positive social structures which can ensure equality in all aspects and for all are essential. As observed earlier, a paid job can contribute positively towards agency and negotiation power which can result in equality. However, despite the restrictions, a number of women interviewed had friendships with the opposite gender, and were able to negotiate and develop their own life style for their own sake. As FA expressed her view confidently, '*my family, they are ok because every guy friend is not a boy friend. It could be just random friends*'. She said half of her friends were male. Other participants shared their strategy,

*I got phone, I am allowed to use Facebook and internet but talking to boys is not allowed..like socialising with boys is not allowed [from my home]... we do it [socialise with boys] but we don't tell our parents anything like that. (Int 9, 16)*

*We are not allowed to come out that much so we just book a day when everyone can get together and like we going together everywhere, we are literally only two girls and rest of our boys, that's it. (Int 3, 16)*

*Being a Muslim and female I think we have to like keep yourself intact with. Obviously you have to communicate and mix, mingle with the non female and boys and stuff. You have to keep in mind of your culture always. with me I don't really socialise with boys but when I am on the internet I do have some guy friends and I do talk to them.. [rest of the group made fun of her, giggled at her expense, saying what?...] yeah, I do talk to them but then I keep my like, I keep myself intact that I am a Muslim girl and I should always remember to keep my values and keep my respect for myself and you know, keep the conversation clean and try to benefit from them (in term of learning) and get their view points . I am a female and I don't know how male think and help me out with my situation. F (FG3-4, 17)*

These women had social networks and communication with the opposite gender, but they had to maintain their own strategies for that; and the women found it was beneficial with regard to meeting people, gaining new information, and learning about male thinking, thus generating bridging social capital. However, they all had concerns about religious and family approval, and therefore developed their own 'strategies to manage'. The majority of women mentioned religious rules as restrictions which were imposed, usually by parents, but the women challenged the rules and developed 'their own framework for struggling against it' (Parmar,1982: 269). This may be the consequence of strong bonding, which places restrictions in the name of culture and religion, but it depends on a particular context.

In relation to 'Muslim culture', there were also external factors, such as not being able to socialise in the mainstream social interactive places; as well as possible attitudes of people from other cultures. For instance the women expressed their concern and unhappiness as follows,

*because of our culture and religion there are barriers to certain communications....there are restrictions....there are certain places you [I]*

*wouldn't be able to socialise like if I had an English friend who want to go to the pub and then that would affect my social networks because I wouldn't be able to go there with her. So that's a barrier and things like that. HB (FG1-1, 18)*

*we have got lots of limit and boundaries, we don't do so, I have got white friends and they obviously go out for clubbing, they drink everything and obviously I don't do that kind of thing because in my religion, being a Muslim we are not allowed to do, that kind of things. It's against our religion. JB (Int17, 22)*

Although they expressed disapproval about the norms and values as limitations, it was not felt that most of these women thought of this as exclusion, as they were very much in support of their faith and culture. In terms of Muslim identity, norms and values RB and HA also found it was sometimes difficult to maintain social networks with university friends. For example, they were sharing in a group meeting:

*RB: yeah, X [friend], she invited me to her house [party] for a barbeque and then drinks; by that it actually meant a lot of drinks, I actually couldn't go, so I was excluded from that because I knew,... a lot of the friends will be there...whatever, they will be drinking a lot and I couldn't be around that...I would like to go to that but what I would have been doing there, so there's no point in going there. (Int 13, 19)*

*HA: ... that causes a barrier because they [university friend] find it... weird that we don't do, some of the stuff they do and that does kind of create a barrier because you know say they drinking and you are not.... they will be like why 'are you not drinking?' if they have bacon and pork and stuff like that and you say 'I can't eat that stuff' and they will be like 'why not, what's wrong with it?' they will think that you are not eating it because they touched it or something like that, it's not that, it's just you can't have it. (Int 12, 19)*

*RB: we know our right and wrong like in the sense that we wouldn't ever go into a club, we wouldn't drink alcohol, we wouldn't just start snogging a boy, you know whatever. My uni friends would do that stuff ..but I wouldn't do that. RB (Int 13, 19)*

HA: *K and J [friends]... they always invite me to sleep over, because they live on campus in [the] university, they always come up to me you know what 'you should come and spend a night ' (with us) and I am like yeah, you know that's a huge "no no" for me... HA (Int 12, 19)*

For RB & HA, they had social networks with people from other cultures but they maintained a boundary with regard to their cultural norms and values, which indicates a kind of negotiation. However, it appears their close friendship may have developed based on their acquired identity as students of the same university, gender and age group. But, in terms of their different ethnicity and cultural norms and values they are not 'like people', which would commonly facilitate the construction of bridging social capital. At the same time ethnic capital is located at the process in both sites (bonding and bridging). This strengthens the argument that the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital and their benefits can be complex, especially in a particular cultural context. However, it was hard to maintain the networks in a particular context, as RB excluded herself from the house party, and HA was not able to be positive in staying overnight on the university campus with her friends. This shows they had to some extent struggled 'to assimilate into white society' (Kalra : 56). As a result their social ties had been limited although 'university students in particular (especially those living away from home) have access to the widest networks' (Field 2008: 53). Thus, this had led to a kind of contextual exclusion, as their friends (from other cultural backgrounds) might have been unaware of their cultural background and the boundaries.

It was felt that some women 'sacrifice' their desires and some women 'compromise' because of the faith. As the participants shared,

*I wanna dress up, I wanna go out, I wanna drink because it seems fun but I can't do that because I do respect my religion and it protects me, my religion from going to destroy? going like if I did do partying and got drunk I probably end up with a man beside me in the morning ...(laughing) yeah...having a religion by myself I think it protects me even though I wanna more in life, I wanna do what I*

want, I think it's a good thing at the same time, having religion. FBA (FG1-4, 17)

Another participant had the same opinion,

*There is always so much I want to do but for certain reasons I can't, may be because I am Bangladeshi and I am Muslim. ...like most of my friends, oriental friends, they go clubbing and stuff like that I can't do...for socialising, yes I want to go but because I am a Muslim and I come from a Bangladeshi family I stop myself because I think it is not right for me actually go there but obviously I do want to go. So I mean they always go to the pubs, stuff like that and most of the time when we go out the only place I would go to which is ok- Shisha lounges..*  
NB (Int8, 19)

Here the women were confident to take part in western style leisure activities or bridging, but due to the religious restrictions and their faith they controlled themselves and a very few were able to push the boundary, so they still had a dilemma. For example,

*Being a dancer ... I spoken to few of my friends and they are religious, they maintain five daily prayer, they always at the Mosque and reading and stuff like that. Obviously I ask them what they would think of Muslim Bangladeshi being a dancer and they said it's a wrong thing..anything to do with dancing and singing is a sin (religiously). So since then I think it's wrong too but it's something that I really, really enjoy. ...I do feel guilty but at the same time I really enjoy it. You know when close friends say that to you especially about Islam, what's right, what's wrong...* NB (Int 8, 19)

NB was able to lead her social life as she had family support, as discussed in chapter 5. Through dancing she was able to develop bridging capital through ties with other members of the dance group as well as other people around. She had bonding social capital with her parents and 'close friends'. However, the bonding social capital from her family was supportive, whereas her bonding social capital with close friends had

been non-supportive, giving her guilty feelings, which confirms that bonding social capital can be ambiguous.

Cultural norms and values based on Bangladeshi Muslim culture have been indicated as constraints, but it appears that most of the time the norms had been used as weapons, which implies that patriarchal practice is exerted in a different way by the name of Muslim culture. However, the study shows that many women were able to develop a coping strategy to negotiate their expectations with the requirements of cultural norm and values. Ethnic capital, which lies with the enforcement of cultural norms, in this context is Muslim culture. Many women in this study found the enforcement of the norms and values restricted their social networks, which evidently means that ethnic capital has limitations for these young women, in other words the concept does not seem supportive of wider purposes.

#### **6.4 Social aspects and inequalities**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some women believed their religious faith was positive in creating and maintaining social networks, however it can be negative, as other women highlighted. Contextually other social factors may facilitate the negative consequences in relation to situated identity as Muslim young women. For example, a few women among those who went to the local College and Sixth Form found less opportunity to expand their networks with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly from other religions. For example, FC (18) and TA (17) went to Tower Hamlets College and they shared the same experience,

*In my college majority is Bengali so my friends are mainly Muslim Bengalis. I know one Kenyan girl and if I have to talk to non Muslim yeah... is kind of rare that's it. FC (FG2-1, 18)*

Another participant commented about the limited opportunities to create social networks with people from other cultural backgrounds,

*It' is a lack of opportunity! Because I go to a college where hardly (you find) any people from other cultures and that's why I don't think I come across these*

*people. In our college... the majority (of students) are Bengali and they (are) Muslim. In most of my lessons (there is) just Bengali, just one or two may be White ethnic origin but they (are) boys and in college I don't really talk to boys, I don't really socialise with them.* TA (FG2-3, 17)

The similarities of these two views reflect the fact that most pupils in the college are of Bangladeshi origin and there are few pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds; interactions and socialisation of these women occurred mainly among females and especially Muslim women. It is noted that 33% of the population of Tower Hamlets are of Bangladeshi origin (Hutchinson and Varlaam, 1985; Tomlinson, 1990); approx. 36.4% , the largest proportion of residents, are Muslim and the vast majority of the Muslim population is Bangladeshi (2001 census). As a result the social networks of these women had been limited to within the Bangladeshi and Muslim community. In particular, these women had little (or even no) ties to diverse people from other ethnicities, religions and the opposite gender, resulting in less bridging social capital . This shows geographical location had some impact upon creating and maintaining the social networks of these women. As Kearns (2004) argued, a geographically concentrated group with strong bonding social capital may become inward-looking and detached from outsiders, which can be either by desire or by default. In comparison, SKN (Int11, 21) shared her experience,

*I went to school and college in Tower Hamlets whereas university is in central London; In Tower Hamlets college, it's 99% of Bengalis, so most of my friends in college were Bengali whereas in University people from different countries, different races like that. So it's been a very interesting and good experience.*  
SKN (Int11, 21)

SKN had an opportunity of developing bridging capital through interacting with diverse groups of people, because of her educational institute which was outside Tower Hamlets; but until attending university she did not have that choice. This emphasises the importance of a particular location and its neighbourhood in the social networks of a particular group of people. The experience showed the differences between TH and more diverse areas, with regard to developing social networks, particularly forms of bridging. This indicates that the Bangladeshi young women who live in Tower Hamlets

but do not have access to higher education outside of the Borough for various reasons may have less or weak bridging social capital. This is especially likely since the Bangladeshi community are the most disadvantaged group (ref) and many families may not be able to afford higher education costs.

Moreover, since the Bangladeshis are the largest ethnic group in Tower Hamlets (Tackey et al. 2006), this indicates the existence of strong bonding within the group as an ethnic community, a typical example of bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), which might lead to constraints on bridging across to people from other ethnic groups. Moreover, people understandably prefer to stay and create networks within their own group, as they share more common interests, language, norms and values, which are fundamental elements of developing social networks (Putnam 2007). Therefore, the surroundings with more Bangladeshi and more Muslim pupils in the places of study at Tower Hamlets lead the women to develop their own zone, in which they may feel more comfortable; but this constrains them with regards to developing bridging social capital. Bonding social capital may also be associated with the concept of 'ethnic capital'. The women's social networks among Bangladeshi Muslim pupils show the development of ethnic capital. However, in this context the existence of excess bonding social capital and ethnic capital may limit 'bridging' to people of other cultures and religion, which may be a consequence of the dense Bangladeshi population in Tower Hamlets, particularly pupils in local educational settings. However, there is an argument that it is not a 'natural tendency' for minority ethnic communities like Bangladeshis to 'live together' in certain neighbourhoods, rather this is due to popular fear of racial harassment and intimidation (Connolly 1998: 12-13) by people from other ethnic groups. In other words, the Bangladeshis reside in Tower Hamlets as the largest ethnic group and the women keep their networks with other Bangladeshis and Muslims due to fear of potential racism; as Bangladeshis along with Pakistanis face the highest racial threat in their neighbourhoods (Bowyer, 2008 and 2009). In this regard a participant expressed her fear,

*In East London, I am quite ok with it (Muslim identity) but outside I am very aware, conscious that I get wear a head scarf. I think it's scary...because there is lot of negativity surrounding Muslims...there is also Burqa ban all that crap that going on. I suppose in London, we never leave London because we are quite*



*comfortable with it...when we went Norfolk with year 11, we are very conscious that we are wearing a scarf, in a negative way there is lot of people, all white and they were all looking!* RB (Int 13, 19)

RB was concerned about her identity and markers as well as fear of insecurity and racial harassments in a non Muslim area. This indicates that the women develop faith based bonding which might be a consequence of racial anxiety. Furthermore, the faith based networks and the friendship bonds among young Muslim women may have developed through seeking conformity among the group members and in that way it may restrict their social relationship, which can lead to deprivation and exclusion (Kearns, 2004), as Bangladeshi households are consistently worse off in socio-economic terms compared with other ethnic groups (Pollen 2002; Putnam et al 2010). In terms of group solidarity, the following is a comment from one of those women:

*From my religion point of view it's important to have social networks with everyone, your sister, brothers, so that you can... Islam can grow on, you can connect with everyone.....based on religion you can like gain knowledge, spread the knowledge, help each other out when need. It's just create nice bond between everybody, nice calm bond, peace bond then....there bit of fun as well so yeah just create a nice fun, good one!* INB (FG2-5, 18)

The women thought it was important to learn and disseminate the philosophy of Islam, not only among themselves, to non-Muslim friends, sisters and brothers; this may contribute to social inclusion. However, mobilizing social capital through engaging in faith based organisations may be a consequence of the 'Islamophobia' which has emerged since 9/11 and the London bombings in 7/7. These incidents brought harassment and violence against Muslims, especially Muslim women wearing veils (Modood, 1992), which may have motivated the women to become active citizens. Moreover, 'the Muslim identity always expects Muslims to be pro-active in their social contract as citizens of a country' (Bari, 2005: 124). According to Putnam (1993), civic participation facilitates the kinds of action that "make democracy work", in which get people together and achieve their collective goals, which otherwise cannot be achieved. However, it seems the main purpose of developing the faith based social capital was the women's individual benefits as 'private good' (Putnam, 2000) rather than to achieve a

particular ‘collective goal’. Although the women felt that their networks were important to maintain spiritual responsibilities, this was a kind of civic responsibility, as ‘many amongst Muslim youth are now getting more and more confident about their role in building a fair and just society in pluralist Britain’ (Bari, 2005: 131). However, faith based social networks mainly generate bonding social capital and often develop ghettoised segregation which constrains in building bridging social capital. This leads to high segregation between Muslims, including Bangladeshis, and other ethnic groups in the UK; consequently Muslims are in a worse position and condition in terms of wealth, health and education (Putnam et al, 2010), which is a symptom of social inequality. In other words, although Bangladeshi young women were more active in generating bonding and to some extent ethnic social capital for more emotional support, by which they might become more segregated, this is a result of existing social structures like racism and inequality. Another aspect is that faith associations can produce restrictions in terms of gender ideology, as ‘many faith communities fail to listen to women who usually do most work in the community, yet the further one moves from grassroots activity towards higher levels of decision-making, the less visible they become’ (Furbey et al, 2006: 10). Therefore, the women may be double victims since, for instance, being female they can suffer from structural patriarchal power and inequality for their networks inside and outside; and with Bangladeshi Muslim identity they can experience the structural inequalities that exist in the wider society. Although Putnam et. al (2010) indicate that Muslims are in an unequal position in the UK, the authors overlooked the implications of structural constraints, such as racism and inequalities in terms of social networks which impact negatively upon social capital.

Other external factors such as the views and attitudes of people from other cultural backgrounds may have influence on the social networks of Bangladeshi young women. For example, some women had concerns in accessing the ‘non Muslim western zone’ as a participant mentioned,

*Being a young Bangladeshi woman even non Muslims have an image of you. It's really difficult because we have so much to conduct, we have lots of responsibilities the way we carry ourselves...we have got very careful the way we carry ourselves because non Muslims they would make (negative) comments .. PK (FG4-4, 22)*

Being a Muslim woman PK avoided certain places and people, as she had a fear of negative comments about her faith, which could hurt her religious feelings. There could be verbal racist attacks, hence 'the vast majority of the young people eschew racism and racialized exclusions' (Lutz cited in Zahir and Samina 2009: 30). Thus the dominant western culture, its tolerance and motivation as well as stereotypical assumptions about Muslim girls may affect the women's social networks, especially bridging to certain places and people that can lead to a degree of exclusion such as 'barriers to advancement: e.g. status, power and self-esteem' (Kearns 2004:2). This is relevant to understanding the dynamics of the social networks of these women. One participant expressed a similar view, for example, NC (Int 15, 19) commented,

*so many things you can do, you can't do because of the fact you wear hijab and certain dress code things like... my work colleagues they all go clubbing, I would never go clubbing. Some people would say that why don't you just come along ...you won't drink or dance, you just come with us but because I wear Hijab I would stick out so badly... so I feel completely uncomfortable so we just tend to kind of stick to going out to restaurant, different restaurants and eating out, maybe cinemas, go over to each other's houses, sometimes few parties that's it really. NC (Int 15, 19)*

The key thing was the place of work enabled NC to acquire a social identity (acquired) as a worker which ultimately underpinned contacts with her work colleagues who were from different cultural backgrounds. However she was unable to socialise with them in certain contexts such as 'going clubbing' due to her identity (situated). Within her work environment she may not have found it a problem, but in wider public places she found it 'uncomfortable' being seen to 'stick out' by people around. However, she was able to find alternative places to socialise, such as restaurants, cinemas and visiting each other's houses, which indicates a kind of negotiation. This shows that Muslim identity and values, such as wearing the Hijab, have influence upon social networks in certain contexts for particular groups of people like these young women. For example, not only being seen to 'stick out', but also verbal abuse is a common racist attack that Muslim young women experience in the UK (Ward and Spacey (2008; Hall *et al.* 2004), especially in non Muslim areas. For example a participant expressed her worry about it,

*In university, in philosophy (her course) I am the only one wearing scarf so when I walk in, oh my god I have 100 eyes on me literally. X always asks me oh 'don't you feel like you got a barrier because you are wearing a scarf' and you know I..? 'why would I?' In terms of social networking, it doesn't really create that big of a barrier because they kind of accept you because at the end of the day you are who you are so why would you conform, why would we change your ways in order to fit others if they don't want to fit around you in the first place.*  
HA (Int 12, 19)

HA had social networks providing bridging capital through links with her course friends; but at the same time there were racialized assumptions by non-Muslim acquaintances about her Muslim identity. This shows that the assumptions were a kind of barrier for ties, although she found that not a 'big barrier' because of her confidence and strong faith in her culture. It was felt that she was quite assertive in this regard and believed that there should be equal effort from both sides in order to make social networks – interactions between people from different ethnicities and cultures. SS (Int 5, 19) applied another coping strategy in a similar environment, sharing as follows,

*I don't find that's necessary to say what faith you from, or what race you are because sometimes. it kind of effects the way people think about you and I find that ..like you know doing education and stuff. It does affect the way you are because you know the teachers and others students can treat you differently. Probably because of stereotypes and expectations but yeah, they treat it differently. Stereotypes [such as] Muslim girls or Bengali girls are very shy, they don't speak out so they are oppressed and exploited it's just this kind of extreme... you know they don't really know the truth. Obviously if you get to know somebody then you know the truth who they are. Based on their appearance or the colour of skin, it kind of affects what you think about the person.* SS (Int 5, 19)

SS was well aware of structural stereotypes about Muslim women like her and she intentionally avoided disclosing her faith and background. But her identity marker - wearing Hijab (while I met her twice) made her identity visible easily. This shows that

people from other cultures may not be willing to interact with a Muslim women because of the racialized assumptions such as 'shy', 'don't speak' and 'oppressed', as a result of which Bangladeshi young women found it difficult to socialise with people from other cultural backgrounds. SKN also found friendship with people from other cultures was sometimes difficult.

*There is a kind of indirect constraint like being a Bengali and a young Muslim, I mean... when you try to make new friends and stuff, ... I think people from your background are more forward to make friends with you whereas people from .?....like ethnic minorities, or people from white background , they are kind of more difficult to kind of breaking to make friends, like you have to kind of probably try a bit harder. But in terms of like religion, I haven't had that many, like problems and troubles, like can be said it's a barrier but not so much, like to me...It's just harder to make friends with them. But I think it depends on the person as well. SKN (Int 11, 21)*

SKN went to a university in which she also found it 'harder' and 'difficult' to create social networks, bridging with people from other cultural backgrounds. However, she mentioned that 'Bengali' and 'Muslim' identity markers made an 'indirect constraint' or 'barrier', although she had not 'many' problems and troubles with regard to her identity. This indicates a certain identity effect in forming and maintaining the social networks of these young women. This also suggests that there were certain 'invisible barriers' which may be lack of trust, interest, common values and norms that affected social contacts for SKN. Moreover, social networks are a two-way phenomenon, in which common interest is the key to forming the network. So it is felt that people from other cultures may be not interested in communicating with a Bangladeshi woman, or may lack a positive impression. This appears a consequence of structural racialized assumptions and 'common sense images' about South Asian Muslim women in the UK, as a number of studies have revealed, in which the young women are characterised as 'dirty, ugly, oily-haired, sexually licentious' (Brah 1996: p, 78&79; Parmar 1982: 259). In her case she had not had that experience of 'many' problems, which may be a result of her personality; as she mentioned it depends on 'the person'; this may also be because of her acquired identity as a university student, in which she might have been able to develop 'strategies to overcome'. But SKN applied her own strategy, which can

be called 'strategies to ignore' in coping with the situation of racialized assumptions. This may have led many of the women to develop their social networks among Muslim girls as discussed earlier; another relevant comment in this regard was,

*because I hang around many Muslim Bangladeshi girls I don't really have that criticism but sometime they [people from other cultures] do ask [me] 'why you wearing the scarf in summer as it's hot and why you wearing the Burqa things for it's really hot and stuff. SS (Int 5, 19)*

FP appears to have had similar experience, as she had interactions with people from diverse cultural backgrounds through her university and work. The ethnicity and culture of members of her networks or friends were different, but they had a clear understanding of and respect for each other's culture. Although FP was unable to socialise with her friends in certain places due to her cultural norms and values, it appears she was able to negotiate the demands of her culture with the culture of her friends.

*Say for my work and there is a work event going on... where you go out, restaurant and things like that. They will have alcohol or whatever; I wouldn't have that because that's effect of my ethnicity, and my culture saying NO. I wouldn't go to a pub they will be like 'let's go'. It's because I have been moulded like that because of my cultural background,...my culture does affect my networking,... because of my culture I wouldn't drink, I wouldn't go to clubs, I wouldn't like go to pubs, I wouldn't want to spend time there. Even though the people that I am gonna be socialising, say my work people, my uni people would go there and I would say, you know I don't feel the need for me to be, for me to be friends with you, I don't feel the need that I have to do those things and luckily enough my those friends, those colleagues respect that ...which is a really nice thing...So yeah, I mean in that sense what my behaviour, the limits to my behaviour is impacted by my ethnicity such as the clothes I wear, the things I drink , the places I go to, so that's a clear... FP (FG3- 5, 22)*

Likewise, a couple of women mentioned their limited access to public places due to holding Muslim identity and the faith.

*We do have a lot of restrictions for example, when I go for swimming I only go to the women session and obviously as being a Bengali, as being a Muslim I wouldn't mix with guys and swimming with them. So we do have limitation in terms of things like that we can't do, what other culture or other people are able to do. But whereas, there are for example leisure centre they are giving us the opportunity, they are providing us with extra time and we are able to take part as well. May be not in everything we would want to but we can at least with limited things. So yeah we have limited access to resources as being Bengali...religion as well, as we Muslim as well. Bengali is probably not as much as being Muslim, we are because we do have certain restrictions and certain boundaries we have to follow. ...me personally I wouldn't go swimming where there is guys, I wouldn't feel comfortable rather go with just with ladies.*  
FA (Int1, 19)

Another participant said,

*I think the Muslim identity is much more dominant than the Bengali one. ....because there are a lot of limitations; I am a quite sporty person, I like to rock climbing and motor biking stuff like this but when you got Hijab and .. you know there is lot of limitations to you can wear it, you can't wear [that]. So if you go to rock climbing you know the ..the dots and everything. it's just that not something I become comfortable with and again there is lots of limitation of that sense.* NC (Int 15, 19)

FA (Int1, 19) had limited access to community resources due to her Muslim identity, but she was able to make contacts in which she had the opportunity of meeting different people. Likewise, NC (Int 15, 19) found her Muslim identity – wearing the Hijab - was uncomfortable in doing certain activities like *rock climbing and motor biking* but she was able to cope with the situation, but had a struggle.

This shows that the women were to some extent concerned or aware about fear of racial harassment, which they found a barrier for their social networks to link to multi ethnic groups. They also experienced racial assumptions which were unaccommodating for the women. Lack of bridging social capital can lead to exclusion and inequalities which inhibit social capital; as the Strategy Unit reported, 'an ethnic minority that is socially isolated will, almost by definition, lack ...bridging social capital and will therefore lack access to some employment opportunities' (Strategy Unit, 2002: 86). Putnam and his colleagues rightly pointed out the disadvantaged position of Bangladeshis in the UK, which needs to be addressed to increase their social capital. However, what they overlooked were the structural inequalities led by racism and negative assumptions about Muslims. Particularly, Putnam's works have also been criticised for not focusing on the individual micro level, in which social capital is mostly generated.

In this last respect, ethnic capital, bridging and bonding were related to the experiences of the Bangladeshi young women (with particular reference to a sense of empowerment and constraint) in the analysis of the data in this research. The analytical starting point, building upon Zhou (1992, 1997, 2005) was first to interrogate the findings with regard to the nature and impact of the situated identity markers of Bangladeshi ethnicity, culturally-influenced family dynamics, Islamic faith and associated expectations and attitudes attached specifically to young women. The finding strengthens the criticism of the concept social capital, as Putnam's work completely failed to address the impact of cultural-religious norms and values in relation to the gender dimension which leads power-control relations. In addition, the concept ignored social structures such as racism, which construct inequalities that can heighten women's vulnerabilities in relation to social networks and social capital (Siegmann and Thieme 2010); in other words inequalities inhibit social capital.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This shows that many women highlighted constraining aspects which affected developing and maintaining the social networks of these young women. In first instance, the constraints were within familial relationships marked by gender dimensions and patriarchal practice with regard to cultural and religious norm and values, which lead to inequalities at individual/private level; secondly, the women faced



barriers raised by societal factors, such as negative assumptions around Muslim identity and racism, which construct inequalities in the public sphere resulting in 'public patriarchy' (Bhopal (1997:6). Consequently, power relations verses agency were observed in the networks process that the women experienced.

Social structures, such as patriarchy based on ethnic-cultural expectations and ethnocentric negative assumptions about Muslim women and racism, have been found to be key barriers for the social networks of these women, especially bridging across to different strata. Consequently, the social networks of these young women have been shaped by family-cultural expectations and also by social structural factors. However, the women have been active agents, many of them even assertive in forming and maintaining their social networks by developing their 'strategies to manage' techniques, in order to cope with the situation; thus most of the women have been able to negotiate a blend of their own culture with Western social life in their own ways, while showing strong belonging to their ethnicity and culture. Cultural constraints are in place, but the women have been able to cope with their agency and negotiation power, which vary depending on context and individual position and condition. In this regard, at the individual level the women develop their subjective strategies to cope with situations. However, there is a concern that these women might not be able to cope with the societal inequalities which exist in the labour market and work place. However, employment has been a key enabling factor for these women for social networks which can challenge cultural constraints.

It was found that the women who attended university and had employment appeared to have better social networks and social capital, which was bridging capital, giving the opportunity to socialise with people regardless of gender, culture and ethnic groups, which implies the women had an advantage in accessing more information and resources. This also confirms that diversity or diverse cultural settings contribute to better social capital. On the other hand, some women who went to local college and sixth form/ post sixteen education in Tower Hamlets had limited opportunities of constructing social networks with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, as most pupils in this setting were of Bangladeshi origin (Race Equality Scheme: 2009-2012), and so their social networks were narrowed to within the co-ethnic group, especially Muslim females. In this regard, as I have argued that diversity is rather enabling for

social capital, which challenges the idea of Putnam (2007), in which he claims that diversity, specifically ethnic groups that have a tendency to be inclusive, inhibit social capital. In addition, the findings showed that bridging social capital, especially from higher education and employment, can develop agency and negotiation power, which ultimately can mitigate constraints and inequalities within household relationships in relation to gender and cultural norms from negative stereotypes. In other words, higher education and employment can contribute more in generating social capital not only at individual level, but also at societal level. This shows that structural constraints from society and state are more powerful than cultural barrier, and these constraints can inhibit social capital in the community. However, Putnam and et. al (2010) ignore the key constraints which lie in social structures, such as racism and inequalities.

The study also revealed that the bonding social capital around familial relations, and for a few cases among friends, have positive as well as negative attributes which were often interlinked. This suggests that the notions of bonding and bridging have been over simplistic terms in understanding the social networks and social capital of a particular group of people such as these young women, as these concepts overlooked structural and cultural aspects which the women faced. On the other hand, enforcement of cultural-religious norms and values restricted the social and spatial mobility of the young women and constrained the construction and maintenance of bridging social capital. In other words, 'ethnic capital' and strong 'bonding social capital' were not enabling in this regard, as they placed limitations on the social networks.

## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION**

### **7.1 Summarising the content**

These women are described as second or third generation British Bangladeshis aged between 16-29, among whom the core participants are aged between 16-23. This thesis was undertaken in order to investigate the social networks and social capital of British-Bangladeshi young women in relation to their identity, cultural context and social aspects. The women were second or third generation citizens in Britain, aged between 16-29, born and/or brought up in this country, as the parents of these women had migrated from Bangladesh to the UK. These women were under-represented in the current literature; in particular the cultural aspects, such as the gender, ethnicity and faith of these women are ignored in existing studies of social networks and social capital. Much of the study on social capital has been criticised for ignoring power and structural constraints with reference to social and cultural contexts, such as gender, ethnicity and racism (Van Buren and Hood, 2011; Siegmann and Thieme, 2010; O'Neill and Gidengil, 2006; Silvey and Elmhirst 2003; Kilby 2002; Davies 2001; Fox and Gershman, 2000), especially with regard to young people (Holland, 2009; Marrow, 2004), particularly Bangladeshi young women. The notion of social networks, which is a key element of social capital theory, has therefore been heavily criticised for making the concept over simplistic. On the other hand, much of the relevant literature on identity, ethnicity and patriarchy has also failed to address issues around the social networks and social capital of Bangladeshi young women. This ignorance strengthens 'stereotypes and common sense' (Parmar, 1982) about these women which can lead to barriers for social inclusion and integration in the UK; the ignorance may also worsen their position and condition.

As this study has shown, the social networks of a particular group of people like Bangladeshi young women are subjective and contextual, in which their identity, cultural aspects, social factors and inequalities have a substantial influence. More specifically, these women constructed and maintained their social networks in a variety of complex ways, which had been impacted by their situated identity (marker) such as 'Bangladeshi Muslim young women' and the family and faith in which their situated

identity is mainly situated. The women had strong ties with familial relations and close friends. On the other hand, social networks, through various social interactive places such as places of study, or work, enabled the young women to acquire/produce identities with regard to social position. The women had access to various places and events in which they developed social ties to people from diverse cultural backgrounds (weak ties), interacted with them and positioned themselves depending on particular contexts such as attending university or paid work, which enabled them to acquire their identity as university student or professional. Eventually, this study has revealed that the social networks of these women were shaped by their subjective experience and parental-cultural expectations based on Bangladeshi Muslim culture and also by social structural factors.

## **7.2 Aims**

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the following,

- How social networks are perceived, given meaning and evaluated by the young women. More specifically, the perception about their social networks, its importance, positive and negative aspects of this phenomenon.
- In what ways the young women engage with existing social networks. For example, what kinds of social networks the young women have or practice and how they create and maintain the social networks.
- What aspects influence creating and practising social networks by the women, particularly what enabling and/or constraining factors, in relation to their identity, ethnicity, patriarchy and racism, influence their social networks.

The study presented here puts forward a programme of empirical studies in order to respond to the research questions that are posed around gaps in identifying the concerns raised. In particular, there has been a need to address cultural and social aspects with regard to their identities in the experience of these women in relation to their social networks. With this purpose, the research discussed major categories such as family, faith, places of study, work and social places in the community, as they emerged from the data analysis. Accordingly the study focused on two core areas in the discussion, namely the features and characteristics of the networks and the capital associated with

the ties; and the experience of the young women in relation to their identity, cultural background and social aspects. The findings were analysed from the perspective of 'bonding and bridging social capital' (Putnam 2000; 2007) and 'ethnic capital' (Zohu, 2005; Modood, 2004).

In order to address the research questions around the experience of the young women with relation to social networks and social capital, a qualitative approach was deployed. The approach enabled the researcher to investigate perceptions, experiences and values of which detail or understanding had previously been lacking. The research site, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, served as an appropriate location for data collection, as most Bangladeshi immigrants reside in the Borough, especially the second and the third generation, as the borough is the first arrival city for most of the first generation Bangladeshi immigrants (Saunders, 2010). The location also provided an opportunity to reach the research participants within a limited time, as I personally live and work in the borough. The strategy of data collection from three distinct groups of women enabled unique data capture for the study through individual interviews, focus group discussions and group meetings. The backgrounds and characteristics of these three groups of young women were: a) the women were in education- college/Sixth Form; b) the women were in education - university; and c) the women were in work- full time/ part time/paid/ unpaid. The key participants were aged between 16 to 23; a couple of young adult women were also interviewed for this investigation, who were aged between 27-29; in addition three professional workers were interviewed for the study, one of whom was male. All participants in this study were of Muslim background; all key participants were unmarried and lived with their family. Among the young adults, one was newly married and the other had married at the age of 16, and was a mother of two children at the time of the interview. The workers worked with Bangladeshi young people of both genders.

### **7.3 Summary of findings**

The study has found that the phenomenon of social networks was understood by the Bangladeshi young women in a variety of ways, which was wider than current understanding. For example, the women described their social networks as socialising and communicating with people, they also considered meeting new people, expressing

and sharing feelings with someone they could trust; getting support and spending time with someone such as friends, classmates, family members/relatives, work colleagues, local people, and virtual friends, while talking or texting on phone, email and Facebook or My Space were also part of their social networks.

In addition to interacting with people the research findings show that various interacting social places and events were considered by these women as part of their social networks. The social places include places of study, work, community organisations, faith based organisation, restaurant, Shisa bar, Cinema, Park, Shopping, gym, language class, writing class, dance class; all places in which the women were able to construct and maintain their social networks by meeting and interacting with people .

The investigation has also shown that social networks were very important in the everyday life of these women for mutual emotional support, spending time together, being part of a group for doing certain activities which they might not do individually, such as studying together, going to the cinema etc. More positive aspects, such as acquiring knowledge, enhancing interpersonal skills, self confidence and self efficacy were also illustrated by the women. Meeting new people regardless of cultural backgrounds and learning about other cultures was also important. The study has also shown that the women were aware of the disadvantages of social networks. For example, the women pointed out that excessive hanging around with friends or using virtual social networking sites such as Facebook could have a negative effect.

In addition, the study exploration revealed that the women construct and maintain their social networks in complex ways, depending on their physical access to various places and events. Consequently their experience was both enabling and constraining in relation to their identity- situated (markers) and acquired (producer) and social aspects. The study showed that the social networks of these women were influenced by their situated identity as being Bangladeshi Muslim young women. However, their social networks also enabled them to acquire identity with regard to their social position as working women or university students. Accordingly the research uncovered their subjective experience through the examination of social structures, such as family and faith, in which the identities of these women are situated; the investigation also occurred

through interactive places such as places of study, work and other social places in the community by which the women were able to acquire their social identity.

The study showed that family played an important role for these women in the construction and maintenance of social networks, which was sometimes enabling and very often constraining. The women who had better familial networks with parents and other family members also had better social networks outside these familial networks, because of their bonding social capital within the relationship. Family represents bonding social capital (cf. Putnam, 2000) which was enabling for many women in expanding their social networks beyond the familial networks. In addition, the bonding social capital enabled the women to develop bridging social capital through educational settings, work, faith based organisations, community and youth organisations, various classes outside formal education, such as dance classes, language classes, writing classes and other social interactive places such as cinemas, restaurants, gyms, holiday trips and so on. Moreover, some women who had paid work had better family support in constructing social networks, especially the form of bridging. These women were able to generate economic capital, which enabled them to strengthen bonding social capital within familial networks; and this strong bonding social capital supported them in creating and maintaining extended networks, offering access to information and resources -bridging social capital, as 'high bonding might well be compatible with high bridging' (Putnam 2007: 143). For some women, although familial bonding social capital was helpful for the development and maintenance of their social networks, they still had boundaries to follow, such as being back home by a certain time, and no sleeping over outside the home. The study also revealed that some women found parental expectations, based on gender ideology and Bangladeshi Muslim culture, were constraining in relation to their social networks, such as mixing with the opposite gender, the burden of domestic activities and acting as cultural norms and values transmitters (Kalra et al, 2005).

Similarly, the faith based on Islam, another influential social structure, enabled the women to some extent in creating and maintaining their social networks. The research showed that those attached to a faith based organisation were active in creating and maintaining their social networks, as these women thought 'gaining knowledge and spreading knowledge' through social network was part of religious duty for Muslim

people. The study also showed that these women found the network through the faith based organisation was important for a number of reasons, such as acquiring knowledge about religion which is Islam, mutual support, being emotionally healthy, charity etc. This study found that these women were able to generate more bonding social capital with the group that shared the same norms and values based on Islam. The women were also able to develop interaction with people from other ethnic groups, but this was limited to among females and mostly with Muslim women. Then again the research showed that most of the women in this study who were not attached to faith based organisations found the norms and values of religion restricted their social networks, especially bridging to certain places such as clubs and pubs, as well as mixing with the opposite gender.

As mentioned earlier this research has found that the young women construct and maintain social networks in a variety of places, such as places of study, work and other interactive social places in the community such as community organisations. Through interactions with people from diverse cultural backgrounds these women acquire/produce their contextual identity with regard to social position, and then this identity positively influences the development of further social networks, especially bridging social capital.

The study has shown that places of study such as Sixth Form (Post 16 education), College and University were most important for these women in creating and maintaining social networks, because through educational settings the women were able to meet different kinds of people, interact and generate bridging social capital. Mostly the women developed their social networks based on shared norms, identity (female, same class, same subject etc), trust and values, as most women created their social networks with females, especially Muslim women. The women who went to local settings made their social networks mostly among Bangladeshi young women; firstly due to common background, norms and values and secondly due to there being fewer people from other cultures in these educational settings, in other words due to there being more people with Bangladeshi background. Therefore the study found that the women first created their social networks by attending places of study and interacting with new people who were mostly of Bangladeshi background and female, but over time the social ties (weak) turned into bonding social capital based on their shared



norms, values and common interests. In contrast, the research revealed that the women who went to university had better social networks, especially contact with various people from diverse cultural backgrounds, because of the multicultural atmosphere at the universities and its advantages in accessing more information and resources. Moreover the greater freedom in the university atmosphere was also enabling for the women, in that they were able to develop agency and negotiation power. The study found that in the social networks bonding and bridging were both enormously important for them, as being a member of a group enabled them to do certain activities such as having a day out, eating out, going to the cinema, studying together during exam time. Moreover emotional support was also very important, in which they shared common issues, expressed themselves, and had fun.

Furthermore, the research showed that community based organisations and the Borough's Youth centres, such as the Attlee Foundation, were enabling in constructing and maintaining their social networks, especially the development of bridging social capital through which the women were able to meet new people, interact and make friends. Sometimes over time this bridging social capital turned to bonding social capital, depending on shared norms, values and interests. The places offered the women culturally sensitive activities and a safer atmosphere; as a result the places had been a social interactive place for the women or an alternative to mainstream pubs or clubs, which the women were not allowed to visit due to religious and cultural restrictions.

The study also found that through community organisations the women acquired information, knowledge, skills and self confidence, which provided them with self efficacy and social competence - all these were helpful to expand their social networks - forming bridging capital. The women considered the social networks - having connections with such structured organisations, and through the organisations relationships with people from different backgrounds - could underpin their upward social mobility, helping them acquire a social position or identity, for example employment. The research has shown that almost all women wanted to see themselves with a paid job and their own family.

The research has shown that places of work were another interactive place in which the women who had work constructed and maintained their social networks. The work provided them with opportunities to share views, become up-to-date and discuss problems with work colleagues. Furthermore, these women acquired their identity or social position, which enabled them to make further social networks, and generate economic capital, experience, self confidence and empowerment. Most women with paid jobs also mobilized strong bonding social capital within their household, as mentioned earlier, which enabled them to negotiate in a better way their expectations with parental expectations. On the other hand, this study has also shown that the parents of those women were more flexible about their daughters' expectations. The women with employment had more developed social networks not only through the work place, but also outside it, as many women found it was an opportunity to stay outside the home after work.

The study also found that other social places in the community enabled the women in creating and maintaining their social networks, for example, local shops, cinemas, restaurants, parks, Mosques, dance classes, language classes, writing classes, gyms, and holiday trips abroad. Through these social places the women were able to meet people from different cultural backgrounds, develop bridging social capital, acquire their contextual identity, and enhance communication skills, self confidence and social confidence.

However, the research revealed that the social networks of a majority of women were limited to within the same gender because of religious restrictions, and resultant parental expectations. In other words female identity was important in creating and maintaining social networks for those women. Among them many women willingly followed the rules, due to their deep faith in the religion that limits their social networks especially ties with the opposite gender; however, most of the women expressed their disappointment with the rules and restrictions. Furthermore, the study found that cultural expectations in terms of gender identity had a big influence on their social life, in other words patriarchal practice was pronounced in this regard. However, the study found that no one rebelled against the rules and restrictions; rather, they developed their own 'strategies to manage' technique to overcome the situation, in which the women were able to negotiate their wishes with the expectations of parents, based on cultural

and religious norms and values. Accordingly many women were able to widen their social contacts, including relationships with the opposite gender. One of the important findings was that the women with work and/or who went to university, had agency and negotiation power and as such had social interaction with the opposite gender and did not cite restrictions, whereas among the women who were studying at college level, not all but many of them mentioned parental and religious restrictions on social networks - especially relationships with the opposite gender. Besides, some women found their Muslim identity was not supportive to socialise in certain places such as pub and club.

In addition, some women reported social aspects such as negative views and non attention of people from other cultural backgrounds, which also influenced their social life. The women also indicated fear of racial harassments in certain places, which led them to stay within their secure zone, which implies a kind of exclusion. In a few cases racism or misunderstanding by people from other ethnic groups impacted upon the construction and maintenance of social networks with those people.

It has been shown that the constraints worked differently with different issues, such as patriarchy based on culture and religion, and 'public patriarchy' (Bhopal 1999) such as racism. The women also surmounted societal barriers such as negative assumptions by people from other cultures and issues around racism, which lead to inequalities. In this regard, at the individual level the women develop their subjective strategies to cope with the situations. However, there is a concern that these women might not be able to cope with institutional inequalities which exist in the labour market and work place.

However, employment has been a key enabling factor for these women in forming social networks which challenge cultural constraints. In this respect, structural constraints from society and state are more powerful than cultural constraints; and these constraints can inhibit social capital in the community. However, Putnam et. al (2010) ignore the key constraints which lie in social structures such as racism and inequalities.

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the social networks of these women are strongly influenced by their Muslim identity and cultural norms and values. The results of this investigation show that the social networks of these young women are dynamic, and are constructed based on complex, subjective experience, motivation, personality and structural constraints. The results also show that the social networks of

Bangladeshi young women are mainly for their emotional wellbeing, mutual support, enhancing knowledge and skills for career development, in which there was no sign of 'civic' engagement for community development, which is the key in Putnam's social capital concept.

In terms of the concept 'bridging and bonding social capital' this research has shown that in many cases bridging social capital and bonding social capital exist together. On some occasions it was found that strong bonding social capital enabled the development of bridging social capital, for example better familial relationships or familial bonding social capital enabled the women to achieve academic qualifications and a career, in other words bridging to people through the places of study. On the other hand it was shown that better bridging social capital facilitated an increase in bonding social capital; for example the women with paid jobs who have bridging social capital as well as economic capital and these two types of capital facilitate the generation of bonding social capital based on familial relationships. However, most importantly, the research revealed that excessive bonding or strong bonding social capital within the familial relationship did not always underpin the construction and maintenance of social networks among the women, especially for the development of bridging social capital. Rather it was shown that excessive bonding or strong social capital, in particular a social and cultural context like the Bangladeshi ethnic group, enforced gender and social inequalities, which has been ignored by the work of the three prominent theorists Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu (Morrow 2001; Edwards and Gillies, 2005; Goulbourne 2006). The important finding from this study was that the experience of these women with regard to restrictions and inequalities challenged the concept of bonding and bridging social capital, as these concepts downplay structural and cultural aspects, which made the concepts over simplistic in understanding the social networks and social capital of Bangladeshi young women. Another obvious finding was that the situated identity (situated) of these women as Bangladeshi Muslim young women has significant impact upon their social networks, especially the construction of bridging social capital.

This research found that the concept ethnic capital can be located in both sites in which bonding and bridging social capital appeared. The study has also shown that ethnic social capital as 'intergenerational closer' and 'enforcement of norms and values' was

positive in some ways for the social networks, for example all the women in this study had parental support and encouragement for education, and attending education enabled the women to construct and maintain their social networks. However, at the same time the concept had been a cause of inequalities with relation to the cultural expectations and patriarchal practice within the household, which was enforced by the parents. For example this study showed that enforcement of norms and values based on stereotypical gender ideology and patriarchy led to inequalities in the practice of social networks beyond places of study; in addition the lack of intergenerational closure or the lack of better parent–child relationships constrained in creating and maintaining social networks for many young women. However, most of the women in this study were active in negotiating and developing their own ‘strategies to manage’ techniques to overcome these situations.

#### **7.4 Significance of the findings**

The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature. First the study provides an understanding about Bangladeshi young women in the British context who were under-researched with regard to their social networks, social capital and their experience of identity, patriarchy and other social aspects. More specifically the findings increase awareness of the social life of the Bangladeshi young women, the norms and values associated with their social life based on the cultural context, the enabling factors and limitations in leading their life with regard to social networks, all of which has been overlooked in the current literature.

Secondly the research adds substantially to our understanding of the perceptions as well as experiences of these women in relation to their social networks and social capital. The perceptions and experience of these women with regard to their social networks show that these women are actively involved in creating social networks and generating social capital based on their need. This contributes to the current social networks and social capital literature, as much of the relevant literature takes a top-down approach in which the social capital of young people, especially young Bangladeshi women, is not included.

Most importantly this study enhances our understanding about social networks and social capital process, based on the experience of Bangladeshi young women, which is influenced by identity, gender, ethnicity and cultural context. The study provides information about the young women based on their family, faith and social life with regard to their social networks. More importantly their situated identity as Bangladeshi Muslim young women and their acquired identity is based on particular contexts and their impact upon their social life and social networks. The findings from this study provide us with an understanding of their identity in the British context, which is mainly constructed based on ethnicity, family, faith and external social aspects and acquired or produced through their social networks. The findings also provide information on how their identity impacts upon and is impacted by their social networks. The research enhances our understanding of social constructs such as the family and faith of these women and their strong influence in their everyday life, especially in relation to their social networks. The present study provides a detailed idea of the social mobility of this group of women to various places in which they position themselves and acquire their social identity, and it also provides an understanding of enabling and constraining aspects - internal and external - and how these women negotiate their expectations with the demands of family/parents based on Muslim culture as well as the dominant British culture. This will contribute to breaking down stereotypical assumptions about Bangladeshi young women.

This study also contributes to the current literature of ethnicity, gender, and patriarchy, as the findings of this research provide an insight into how gender ideology and patriarchal practice within households impact upon the social networks of these women. The study also gives an indication of social aspects such as racism which constrain the social life of these women especially limiting their integration within the wider British society.

Another important finding the research revealed was that social structures such as racism, negative views of Muslim women, and ethnocentric assumptions create constraints in creating bridging social capital, which leads to social inequalities. But the study also showed that the wider social networks of these women and their acquired bridging capital can mitigate the cultural constraints, promoting the development of social capital, which can benefit the women as well as society. This also showed that the

women who had access to university and work had extensive bridging capital, which means that diverse cultural settings, or diversity in general, facilitated more bridging capital for these women. This contrasts with the idea that diversity inhibits social capital, as claimed by Putnam et. al (2010).

The findings from this empirical study, however, make a noteworthy contribution to social networks and social capital literature in the British context, as many of the relevant studies are mainly based in North America. The methods of qualitative interviews and focus group discussions deployed for this research helped to gather data based on the experience, views, and values of these women with regard to their cultural context. This methodology may be useful for other relevant research in which experience in relation to cultural context needs to be considered.

This study will serve as a base for future studies in two main ways; firstly examining social networks and social capital from cultural perspectives, especially of Bangladeshi young women; secondly the concept of social networks and social capital put forward in this thesis to examine Bangladeshi young women in relation to their identity - situated and acquired.

## **7.5 Limitations**

A number of important limitations need consideration, for example, the current research was limited to the young people residing in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Most Bangladeshis living in the Borough are from a particular area of Bangladesh which is Sylhet, geographically located in the north-east area of Bangladesh. People from a particular area of a country usually do not represent the whole nation, because according to the territory their spoken language, culture, life style and values, especially religious values, differ from other parts of the country. Accordingly most Bangladeshi residents in Tower Hamlets do not represent Bangladeshi culture, rather Sylhety (people from Sylhet). For example among all the key participants (n=40), only one participant is rooted in another part of Bangladesh. Methodologically this might limit the representation of Bangladeshi young women.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, a researcher coming from the same community and cultural background has positive aspects, but this might also be negative because the women might not have expressed views that could go against their community, culture and most importantly religion. Some participants who were recruited through my personal networks might not have expressed their honest opinion regarding their family dynamic with regard to their social networks.

The current research was not specifically designed to investigate factors related to the young women's identity; rather the study examined the social networks which their identity impacted upon. This is not a limitation but a concern, as this could lead to confusion about this thesis.

## **7.6 Recommendations for further work**

It is recommended that further research needs to be undertaken in this area for better understanding of the social phenomenon social networks and social capital with regard to Bangladeshi young women. It would be interesting to compare experiences of Bangladeshi young women in different geographical areas, perhaps in Islington or Camden, in which Bangladeshi people are not a majority as in Tower Hamlets. It would be more interesting to include the views and opinions of young people (mixed gender) from diverse cultural backgrounds about the notion of social networks with Bangladeshi young women.

In terms of the concept of social networks and social capital, further research in this field regarding young women from other ethnic groups would be worthwhile. This would make the concept more significant towards its universal acceptance.

It is suggested that the association of factors such as identity, ethnicity, patriarchy and racial experiences needs to be investigated in future studies separately, which could provide a holistic picture about the group, more specifically how these social constructs impact upon their position and condition in the UK.

## **7.7 Implications/recommendations for practice and policy**

The findings from the research can be used to develop targeted interventions aimed at greater integration of Bangladeshi young women.



There may be scope to highlight that better family bonding or networks are important for young women, not only for social networks but also for the development of their career and integration in the British context with regard to their position, condition, self confidence and self efficacy.

There is a need to be open to the ways in which Bangladeshi young women are able to accept, negotiate and develop their own 'strategies to manage' to lead their social life particularly in relation to their social networks and identity and ethnicity. Otherwise stereotypical assumptions based on fixed notions of Bangladeshi culture and identity could be strengthened.

Social structures such as patriarchy and racism need to be addressed urgently in order to ensure greater integration of Bangladeshi young women in the British context, such as more employment, culturally sensitive community activities, proper and more representation in the media.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix: B1. A list of questions.

#### Research topic: Social Networks of British Bangladeshi Young Women

#### List of questions for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions

1. Usually what do you do in your leisure time, out of education?
2. How do you describe social networks or what do you think about Social Networks (SN)?
3. Please tell me about your social networks...
4. How do you create and maintain your SN?
5. How do you spend your time with friends, what do you do together?
6. Why is it important to have social networks, and keep maintaining contact with people?
7. How many friends do you have? How many female and how many male? How many from your own culture and how many from other culture (which culture)?
8. What kinds of group/organisations are you involved with-out of education? (youth clubs, Mosque, work place, community based organisations etc.)
  - a. How does ethnic identity as Bangladeshi affect upon SN?
  - b. How does Muslim identity affect upon SN?
  - c. How does Bangladeshi culture affect upon SN?
9. What are some positive benefits of having SN with community based organisations-formal institutions?
10. What are some positive benefits of having SN with friends, relatives-informal?
11. What are some negative effects of SN with formal and informal connections?
12. How do social aspects (internal & external) affect social networks in relation to identity (young female, Muslim, Bengali)? Positive & negative
13. What cultural and family aspects affect social networks?
14. What enabling and constraining factors are there those affect social networks?

## Appendix: B2. Consent form

School Of Social Sciences  
Brunel University

### **Semi-structured Interviews and focus group discussion: Informed Consent Form**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.

My name is, Sina Akter; Sina.Akter@brunel.ac.uk and I am a PhD research student in the School of Social Sciences, Brunel University. I am administering this interview and focus group discussion as part of my research project titled '**Social Networks and Exclusion/Isolation: A Study of British-Bangladeshi Young Women**'.

Before we begin I would like to emphasise that:

- 1) Your participation is entirely voluntary.
- 2) You are free to refuse to answer any question.
- 3) You are free to withdraw at any time.
- 4) The data will be treated in the strictest confidence. It will only be used for the purposes of writing up the project, and will only be available to my supervisors, Dr Timothy Milewa and Dr. Sanjay Sharma, and staff involved with the assessment of written work at the School of Social Sciences, Brunel University.
- 5) I will retain your signed consent form until the relevant project work has been formally examined by senior academics appointed by Brunel University, whereupon the form will be destroyed. Any data that might identify particular informants will not be included in the report itself or will be changed to ensure confidentiality.
- 6) Should you have any queries about the project at any stage you can contact my supervisor, Dr Sanjay Sharma, at the School of Social Sciences, Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 3PH, email Sanjay.Sharma@brunel.ac.uk.

Please sign this form to show that I have read the contents to you.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age (NOT date of birth): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return the signed copy to me and retain the unsigned copy for your records.**

**Appendix: B3. List of participants –anonymous**

<b>Research Participants</b>						
<b>Individual interview</b>						
<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Date interviewed</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1.	FAJ	19	University	Int 1,19	18/03/10	
2.	SA	16	student	Int 2,16	25/03/10	
3.	FK	16	student	Int 3, 16	25/03/10	
4.	TC	16	student	Int 4, 16	25/03/10	
5.	SS	19	University	Int 5, 19	26/05/10	
6.	RK	20	Single sex Sixth Form	Int 6, 20	17/06/10	
7.	RS	29	Working	Int 7, 29	17/06/10	
8.	NB	19	Working	Int 8, 19	15/07/10	
9.	RB	16	PRU	Int 9, 16	28/07/10	
10.	SYA	16	PRU	Int 10, 16	28/07/10	
11.	SKN	21	University graduate	Int 11, 21	28/07/10	
12.	HA	19	University	Int 12, 19	30/07/10	
13.	RB	19	University	Int 13, 19	30/07/10	
14.	SA	27	Working	Int 14, 27	27/09/10	
15.	NC	19	University	Int 15, 19	3/01/11	
16.	AKN	19	Volunteer	Int 16, 19	22/02/11	
17.	JB	22	working	Int 17, 22	23/2/11	
18.	TA	39		Int, 18, 39	1/06/10	Professional works with young people
19.	SA			Int 19,	21/05/10	Professional works with Bangladeshi young women
20	MR	37		Int 20, 37		Professional works with Muslim young women

### 1. Focus group discussions at Attlee Youth and Community Centre

Sl. no	Name	Age	Status	Code	date	
1.	HB	18	Student at Sixth form single sex	FG1.1, 18	4/02/11	At Attlee
2.	TA	18	Student at Sixth form single sex	FG1-2,18	4/02/11	
3.	RB	17	Student at Sixth form single sex	FG1-3, 17	4/02/11	
4.	FBA	17	Student at Sixth form single sex	FG1-4, 17	4/02/11	
5.	SK	17	Student at Sixth form single sex	FG1-5, 17	4/02/11	
6.	RK	18	Student at Sixth form single sex	FG1- 6, 18	4/02/11	
7.	FB	17	Student at Sixth form single sex	FG1- 7, 17	4/02/11	
8.	KN	18	student -Sixth form mixed	FG1- 8, 18	4/02/11	

### 2. Focus group discussion at Muslimaats Women's' Organisation

Sl. no	Name	Age	Status	Code	date	
1.	FC	18	student -College	FG2-1,18	6/02/11	At Muslimaats
2.	SB	19	University	FG2-2, 19		
3.	TA	17	student -college	FG2-3, 17		
4.	SA	18	student	FG2-4, 18		
5.	INB	18	student	FG2- 5, 18		
6.	NA	16	student	FG2- 6, 16		

### 3. Focus group discussion at Idea Store

Sl. no	Name	Age	Status	Code	date	
1.	HB	22	Working	FG3-1,22	25/09/10	At Idea Store
2.	HK	23	Working	FG3-2, 23		
3.	AB	17	student	FG3-3, 17		
4.	FB	17	student	FG3-4, 17		
5.	FP	22	University graduate	FG3- 5, 22		

#### 4. Focus group discussion at One Stop Youth Centre

Sl. no	Name	Age	Status	Code	Date	
1.	SH	18	student	FG4-1,18	13/10/10	At One Stop Centre
2.	HB	19	student	FG4-2, 19		
3.	JB	16	student	FG4-3, 16		
4.	PK	22	Working	FG4-4, 22		